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## GUIDANCE

# Information and advice quality framework (IAQF): standard owners guidance

Guidance to support standard owners achieve IAQF approved accrediting body status.

**First published:** 6 December 2022

**Last updated:** 6 December 2022

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# **Introduction**

## **Overview**

This document has been produced to provide guidance on the Welsh Government's requirements for standard owners seeking to become an IAQF Wales approved accrediting body. The requirements are drawn from the updated main framework document "The Information and Advice Quality Framework for Wales (IAQF Wales). Third Edition, April 2022".

The Welsh Government is committed to working with standard owners to support them as they seek IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status.

## **A dynamic framework**

IAQF Wales was originally designed to provide a dynamic framework which would be subject to periodic review and improvements. The third edition captures learning from the operation of the Framework since its publication in 2018 and the Welsh Government continues to welcome comments from standard owners on the operation of this scheme and ways in which it can be improved.

## **Scope of the framework**

Following the review of IAQF Wales the scope of the scheme has been expanded to include a new category of "Associated Service" which is designed to provide a quality assurance framework for smaller organisations and services which are engaged in some aspects of information, advice or guidance but are

not primarily focused on this area.

IAQF's regulation and improvement service will collaborate with potential standard owners in this area to bring forward schemes that support such services on their quality improvement journeys.

From June 2022 standard owners will need to identify which of the following categories of IAQF accreditation they are seeking. The choices are:

- IAQF core service: this replaces the former category of "IAQF Accredited (without Peer Review)"
- IAQF core service plus: this replaces the former category of "IAQF Accredited (with Peer Review)"
- IAQF associated service: this is a new category with amended requirements for quality assurance standards being reframed to be more proportionate and appropriate to the service provided

Following the review of IAQF Wales the scope of the scheme has been expanded to include a new category of "Associated Service" which is designed to provide a quality assurance framework for smaller organisations and services which are engaged in some aspects of information, advice or guidance but are not primarily focused on this area. The definition of "Associated Services" draws upon the distinction between money advice and money guidance developed by the money and pensions service.

## **Advice**

An advice service is likely to recommend a course of action for you to take based upon the information you have provided and your circumstances. It will be provided by a qualified and regulated individual or by a regulated organisation. Providers of advice are responsible and liable for the accuracy, quality and suitability of any recommendation they make and you are protected by law.

## **Associated services**

Associated services are more likely to provide you with information and guidance that can help you narrow your options but will not make a recommendation on what course of action you should take. Providers of these services are responsible for the accuracy and quality of the information they provide but not for any decision that you make that is based on this information. It may suggest what you might do but it will not recommend any course of action.

We appreciate that the difference between advice, information and guidance can be a grey area. IAQF's regulation and improvement service will collaborate with standard owners to identify which category of IAQF best reflects the services that they wish to assure.

IAQF's assessment process has been updated to reflect learning from the operation of quality assurance schemes by standard owners during Covid lockdowns. The requirement for on-site inspections has been removed. IAQF's regulation and improvement service will examine the methodology of standard owners in relation to remote, on-site or mixed media approaches as part of the assessment of standard owners applications.

## **IAQF content**

For core service and core service plus, there have been some minor changes to the requirements in a number of quality areas and there are significant changes to the arrangements in relation to Quality Area 7: outcomes. For standard owners that have already obtained "Approved Accrediting Body Status" the IAQF Regulation and Improvement Service will provide targeted briefings.

For associated services, there are a new set of requirements.

# The accreditation model

## Overview

IAQF Wales is owned by the Welsh Government and both the content of the IAQF Wales and the associated assurance processes will continue to be reviewed by Welsh Government periodically. The approach to quality assurance in Wales not only seeks to ensure that all information, advice, guidance and associated services meet minimum standards in relation to safety, responsiveness and effectiveness, but also seeks to embed a culture of continuous improvement within individual providers and across the sector as whole.

IAQF Wales builds upon the range of existing quality assurance schemes used by some information and/or advice providers in Wales. It does not establish a new set of standards but requires existing standards to address and meet the quality criteria within each quality area. Similarly, IAQF Wales does not establish a separate assurance process for individual providers but works with existing assurance processes undertaken by standard owners where these are compliant with the requirements of IAQF Wales.

Standard owners delivering quality assurance schemes to individual service providers in Wales seeking approved accrediting body status will have their schemes assessed against the requirements of IAQF and may be required to make adaptations to secure this authorisation. The opportunity to develop standards and assurance processes compliant with the IAQF Wales and seek IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status is open to any organisation.

IAQF Wales works with other frameworks, such as the Money and Pension Service Debt Advice Quality framework and other regulatory requirements to

align requirements and reduce the burden on service providers.

IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies should note that if the service being accredited is part of a local authority providing an information, advice and assistance (IAA) service, as required by the social services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, there will be specific duties and requirements under the Act, Regulations, codes of practice and guidance relating to aspects which are included in this framework. Examples include needs assessments (quality criteria 2.2), safeguarding (3.6), the awareness framework (including safeguarding training, 5.1) and case requirements for IAA (4.3). Should the legal requirements relating to IAA services differ from the requirements of the IAQF Wales the legal requirements will take precedence.

## **The assurance process**

IAQF Wales not only seeks to ensure that all service providers meet minimum standards in relation to safety, responsiveness and effectiveness, but also seeks to embed a culture of continuous improvement within individual providers and across the sector as a whole. To embed this culture the IAQF Wales comprises 6 key stages.

1. Self-assessment by the service provider against the standards of their preferred IAQF Wales approved accrediting body (standard owner)
2. External desk-top process assessment by the standard owner examines and assures the evidence in the service provider's self-assessment
3. Qualitative assessment by the standard owner. For IAQF core service plus providers this stage will include peer review of the quality of advice provided by the service
4. Report, an assessment or audit report will be completed by the standard owner.
5. This report to the service provider should include observations or recommendations for the service provider to address areas of weakness or

transform areas of good practice into outstanding practice. It is expected that service provider would use this to develop an improvement plan. There is no requirement on standard owners to review, approve or otherwise engage with the improvement plan

6. Interim validation service providers are expected to undertake self-assessment against their chosen quality standard at the mid-point of their accreditation. They should report any substantial variations from the standard to their standard owner to determine whether any remedial action needs to be undertaken to maintain their accreditation. The threshold for such reporting will be determined by the standard owner and this will be reviewed as part of their application to be an IAQF approved accrediting body

## **The assurance timescale**

Services accredited against IAQF Wales are required to undertake a full audit programme every 3 years (or more frequently if required by their standard owner). IAQF Wales accreditation issued by standard owners will therefore cover a period of 3 years from the issuing of their audit report (or less than 3 years where more frequent audits are required by the standard owner). In exceptional circumstances this period of accreditation may be extended but such extensions are at the discretion of the Welsh Government.

## **Self-assessment**

Standard owners seeking IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status will be required to provide assurance that their process includes robust self-assessment by the service against the requirements of IAQF Wales prior to audit. This should include an assessment of compliance, areas for improvement and the service's view of any areas of outstanding performance.



## External assessment

To comply with the requirements of the IAQF Wales, standard owners will need to provide assurance that their process includes robust external assessment against the requirements of IAQF Wales. This process should include an assessment of compliance, areas for improvement and any areas of outstanding performance. For all standard owners the process must include:

- external desk top process assessment of written evidence submitted by the service as part of self-assessment and the standard owners application or quality assurance renewal process
- qualitative assessment of the service including examination of the resources available to the service, application of policies and procedures, managers understanding of the application of the IAQF Wales and staff awareness of the quality requirements by their standard owner
- for IAQF core service plus providers this stage will include peer review of the quality of information and/or advice provided by the service

The Welsh Government is keen to ensure that current and potential service users are involved in the external assessment of IAQF Wales accredited services. As a minimum standard owners will be required to provide assurance that their process includes consideration of the views of service users. This may include examination of service user surveys or other evidence collated by the provider.

In undertaking external assessment standard owners will need to provide assurance that auditors are appropriately skilled to undertake their work and subject to regular supervision and support to ensure the consistency and objectivity of audit staff. Evidence to support compliance with this requirement will include:

- the competence requirements of audit staff (awareness, knowledge, skills)

- induction arrangements for audit staff
- ongoing training arrangements for audit staff
- supervision and appraisal arrangements for audit staff
- any qualification or certification schemes available or required of audit staff

## **Core service plus requirements**

Standard owners seeking core service plus authorised accrediting body status will be required to include external peer review in their assessment of provider services. This may be undertaken by the standard owner or by another IAQF Wales approved accrediting body (including MaPS's debt advice peer review service where applicable).

Peer review should include:

- For type 1, 2 and 3 services examination of case records/monitoring systems, information resources available to the service's information and/or advice workers, training undertaken by the service's information and/or advice workers, arrangements for supervision of paid and unpaid staff.
- For type 4 and 5 services examination of the above and in addition reviews of a random sample of case files that reflect the range of advice activity undertaken by that service. The sample size should reflect no less than 1% of that service's activity in relation to type 4 and 5 cases. Scrutiny of case files should include an assessment of quality against the 6 criteria comprising IAQF Wales's definition of Good information and advice.

For those standard owners delivering core service plus (peer review) will need to demonstrate that their peer reviewers meet the above requirements and in addition can demonstrate:

- appropriate levels of knowledge in the advice topics relevant to the service undergoing audit

- appropriate levels of skills for the type of information or advice work relevant to the service undertaking audit.

## **Report and improvement plan**

Central to IAQF Wales is the aspiration that the framework not only seeks to ensure that all service providers meet minimum standards in relation to safety, responsiveness and effectiveness, but also that IAQF Wales embeds a culture of continuous improvement within individual providers and across the sector as a whole.

For this reason the Welsh Government requires standard owners to not only provide a binary pass/fail compliance non-compliance assessment but a report which also identifies areas where the service, although compliant, may seek to make improvements and where there are areas of good or outstanding practice that could be of use to other information and/or advice providers or the sector more generally.

The accrediting body's report should include observations or recommendations whereby the service provider could address areas of weakness or transform areas of good practice into outstanding practice. It is expected that service provider would use this to develop an improvement plan. Please note, there is no requirement on the accrediting body to review, approve or otherwise engage with the improvement plan.

## **Interim validation**

IAQF Wales accreditation issued by standard owners will cover a maximum period of 3 years. Continued maintenance of accreditation will be dependent upon "Interim Validation" where accredited services must undertake an internal self-assessment indicating continued compliance at the mid-point of that

service's accreditation. Standard owners will determine the threshold for reporting any areas of non-compliance identified by self-assessment or major changes in relation to turnover, staffing changes etc. that they expect the service to report to their standard owner to protect the integrity of their scheme.

We suggest that major changes may include some or all of the following:

- significant changes to financial turnover (for example either substantial funding increases or substantial funding decreases)
- excessive turnover or paid or unpaid staff (for example turnover exceeds more than 35%)
- significant changes in senior leadership (for example where both the service manager and her/his deputy have changed or where the service director and organisation's chair have changed)
- significant changes to the methods of information and/or advice delivery (for example moving from face-to-face service delivery to telephone advice)
- significant changes to types of advice delivered (for example complete loss of a benefits advice department)
- merger or acquisition

Standard owners seeking IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status will need to identify both the ground and the arrangements for the suspension or removal of accreditation from services where they have awarded IAQF accreditation.

## **Appeals and complaints**

Standard owners seeking IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status will need to demonstrate that they have a robust appeal process for decisions relating to suspending or removing accreditation and for withholding the award of accreditation or conditional award of accreditation to a service.

Similarly, standard owners seeking IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status should have arrangements to deal with complaints about the services they deliver from and a means of reporting these to the Welsh Government.

## **The requirements on standard owners**

### **Overview**

The section above provides details of the requirements upon IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies in relation to the process requirements for quality assuring individual information and/or advice providers against the IAQF Wales. The next section details how each standard owner seeking IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status will need to demonstrate that the content of their standards is aligned with the quality area and quality criteria requirements of the IAQF Wales. In this section we detail the additional requirements on IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies to remain part of the IAQF Wales.

### **Duration of IAQF approved accrediting body status**

IAQF approved accrediting body status is awarded for 3 years.

### **Continued compliance with the IAQF Wales**

Once a standard owner has secured IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status they will be required to provide notice to the Welsh Government of any proposed changes to the content or operation of their scheme. The Welsh Government may require that IAQF Wales approved accrediting body to be

reassessed for IAQF Wales compliance.

Standard owners may be included as an IAQF Wales approved accrediting body subject to undertaking a number of changes to their scheme. Should this be the case, Standard owners may be required to report on progress to full compliance against a time-tabled action plan.

IAQF Wales approved accrediting body status may be removed by the Welsh Government where the content of that body's scheme, the assurance processes undertaken by that scheme or the operation of their scheme is deemed to undermine the integrity of the IAQF Wales.

IAQF Wales will be subject to review and possible amendment. In the event of such amendments the Welsh Government will determine whether IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies require to be reassessed for continuing compliance with the IAQF.

## **Strategic contribution to IAQF Wales development**

IAQF Wales is designed to be dynamic. IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies play an important role in driving improvement to the IAQF and the ways in which it is implemented. For this reason, IAQF Wales approved accrediting body will be expected to:

- participate in at least 1 meeting per year with the Welsh Government focussing on consistency between schemes and identification of best practice
- submit an annual report on their operation of the scheme including:
  - a quantitative report on the number of audits, the total number of services covered by the IAQF Wales, the numbers of new services and the number of removed services
  - a qualitative report including areas of challenge faced by services and

- areas of good or outstanding practice for consideration as part of the guidance and good practice document
- other observations relevant to the further development of the IAQF Wales
- make publicly available fees chargeable for full or partial audits

IAQF Wales will require IAQF Wales approved accrediting bodies to ensure compliance by IAQF Wales accredited services with the following actions:

- submit full details of their service to the Welsh Government's directory of information and advice providers
- update full details of their service to the Welsh Government's directory of information and advice providers within one month of any change to their service
- confirm their data entry on the Welsh Government's directory of information and advice providers every 6 months
- prominently display the IAQF Wales accreditation logo in premises and other materials in line with any published guidance by the Welsh Government
- Remove any IAQF Wales accreditation marks within seven days of the suspension, withdrawal or removal of IAQF Wales accreditation

## **The application process**

Welsh Government have established the IAQF regulation and improvement service to provide standard owners meeting the requirements with of IAQF Wales with approved accrediting body status subject to application and assessment.

The IAQF regulation and improvement service is designed to support standard owners both through the application process and with ongoing compliance with

the requirements of IAQF.

Standard owners seeking IAQF approved accrediting body status for their standard should accreditation against for:

## **Stage 1: pre-application**

Standard owners seeking IAQF approved accrediting body status should make contact with the IAQF regulation and improvement service to discuss their application. At the first meeting the standard owner will agree with regulation and improvement.

- The category of IAQF most appropriate to their Standard (for example core service, core service plus, associated service).
- An initial indication of areas where the standard owner may require support from regulation and improvement.
- An outline timetable for the work.

## **Stage 2: draft application**

The standard owner will submit a draft application to regulation and improvement and will participate in a meeting to discuss and modifications that may be required prior to submitting their formal application. Further support may be provided to the standard owner by regulation and improvement at this stage if appropriate.

Separate application forms are available for each category of IAQF. These will be provided to potential applicants in MS Word or MS Excel formats to applicants.



## **Stage 3: formal application**

The standard owner will make a formal application at this stage including any amendments agreed between the standard owner and regulation and improvement following the draft application.

## **Stage 4: post application**

Should the application be successful but require some remedial actions the standard owner will agree with regulation and improvement a timetabled action plan for delivery.

All successful applicants (whether there are remedial actions or not will be contacted by the Welsh Government in relation to communications of the award, use of logo etc).

Should the application be unsuccessful regulation and improvement will work with the applicant to agree a course of remedial actions to support a future application.

## **Application forms**

There are 3 separate application forms which are available from IAQF regulation and improvement service:

- IAQF core service: this replaces the former category of “IAQF accredited (without peer review)”
- IAQF core service plus: this replaces the former category of “IAQF

accredited (with peer review)”

- IAQF associated service: this is a new category with amended requirements for quality assurance standards being reframed to be more proportionate and appropriate to the service provided

If you wish to make an application please contact IAQF regulation and improvement and they will discuss with you the most appropriate category of IAQF for your standard and provide you with the application form and a programme of pre-application support.

The delivery of IAQF regulation and improvement is contracted by Welsh Government to MBARC. Please contact MBARC by emailing [iain.easdon@mbarc.co.uk](mailto:iain.easdon@mbarc.co.uk) (<mailto:iain.easdon@mbarc.co.uk>).

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