



# HQAI self-assessment Manual

GUI125 - HQAI self-assessment Manual - 2019-10-07

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
<b>I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. Scope</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III. References</b>	<b>3</b>
1. About HQAI self-assessment	4
1.1. Objective of the initial self-assessment	4
1.2. HQAI initial self-assessment tool	4
2. Scope of the initial self-assessment	5
3. Summary of the self-assessment process	5
3.1 The team	5
3.2 Information required	5
3.3 Timeline	6
3.3 Work with Partners section of the tool	6
3.4 Scoring	7
4. Summary of the key steps	7
A. Collect evidence	7
B. Report	8
C. Submit the self-assessment	8

# Self-assessment manual

## Introduction

### I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI)

HQAI's objective is to improve the Quality and Accountability of organisations working with people in need through the provision and promotion of independent quality assurance. Its services are intended to build capacity in the sector and provide consistent and measurable data in the delivery of quality action, thus supporting more principled accountable and efficient provision of aid to vulnerable and at-risk populations.

HQAI is an accountable, open and trustworthy partner to all its stakeholders and applies the internationally recognised ground rules of auditing: impartiality, competence, responsibility, openness, confidentiality and responsiveness to complaints. Our policies, procedures and tools for independent quality assurance follow the relevant ISO standards requirements.

HQAI has developed robust tools to efficiently measure the position of organisations in relation to the [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\) on Quality and Accountability](#). Tools related to other standards may be developed in the future.

### II. Scope

This manual is a short overview for organisations undertaking an initial self-assessment against the CHS, as part of a HQAI independent third-party quality assurance process; that is, benchmarking, independent verification or certification.

It describes how to use HQAI's self-assessment tool and offers guidance on how to undertake and report evidence and findings for the self-assessment; it covers the following issues:

- the scope of an initial self-assessment
- how to collect and analyse evidence
- the minimum information that needs to be presented in the self-assessment report.

### III. References

This manual should be read together with the following documents:

- HQAI GUI103 - Manual for organisations
- HQAI GUI126 - Information Management Guidelines
- HQAI STD014 - Initial self-assessment tool

## 1. About HQAI self-assessment

### 1.1. Objective of the initial self-assessment

The *Initial self-assessment tool*, or (**STD014**) is used as a first step in an initial audit for each third-party process; it is designed to support the collection of information at Head Office and policy levels, this includes:

- General information about the organisation;
- Evidence on the level of application of the 9 CHS commitments at systems and policy levels;
- Evidence on internal quality assurance mechanisms, i.e. how the organisation ensures the application of its policies and procedures as relevant to the CHS;
- Details on the organisation's partnership approach and its work with partners.

The information and evidence gathered during the self-assessment stage will be used again as part of the evidence for the initial audit (document review). The self-assessment provides a useful overview for the auditor and is the first step of an audit process, it also helps in preparations for the work of auditors.

### 1.2. HQAI initial self-assessment tool

Some organisations may have already completed a CHS Alliance self-assessment as part of their membership responsibilities. The self-assessment processes for the CHS Alliance and for HQAI are broadly similar but have somewhat different purposes. For the CHS Alliance it is a stand-alone process, while for HQAI, the self-assessment is a specific step in the third-party auditing process.

HQAI's initial self-assessment tool is an adapted and shortened version of the CHS Alliance tool, it also has a few additional sections designed to ensure that the focus of the HQAI self-assessment is on information and evidence that is specifically required at this stage of the audit process.

**Please note** that if your organisation has conducted a self-assessment using the CHS Alliance tool you can submit this to HQAI in place of the HQAI self-assessment, providing it was completed **within the past 12 months**. No additional work is required.

For those organisations adopting the HQAI self-assessment process, the tools include:

1. STD014 - *Self-assessment tool*, composed of the following sections:

- General information
- Work with partners
- Governance of programmes and projects
- Internal quality assurance processes
- Application of the CHS.

2. ADM143 - *Audit map of documents*; a separate excel tool used to build your list of documents submitted as evidence for the initial self-assessment in STD014. This tool will subsequently be

used for any further documentation submitted during the period of the audit itself, this helps to ensure continuity, coherence and consistency during the whole audit cycle.

## 2. Scope of the initial self-assessment

Organisations involved in one of the three third-party quality assurance processes with HQAI, benchmarking, independent verification or certification, must undertake a self-assessment before the initial audit.

**The HQAI initial self-assessment is primarily a document review at Head Office and policy levels;** this means there is no requirement to travel to the country programme level to collect information. Evidence and analysis are based on information available at the Head Office (HO), this is mainly in the form of documentation; if required it may also include evidence based on discussions with key Head Office staff.

The self-assessment enables auditors to gain a perspective on how the organisation assesses itself in terms of its application of the requirements of the CHS and the extent to which policies, processes and systems deliver on its requirements.

Further, in mapping the organisation's core policies, processes and systems through the **self-assessment, at this preliminary stage will help ensure the audit itself is more efficient.** The self-assessment is both a useful organisational learning experience and can contribute to time and cost savings.

## 3. Summary of the self-assessment process

### 3.1 The team

Your organisation may decide to carry out the self-assessment internally, using your own staff, or through the use of external support, such as a consultant. Regardless of how you choose to do the self-assessment you should be confident that the process is as objective as possible and carried out in way that ensures good cross-organisational engagement; this will help ensure a comprehensive perspective on organisational performance against the standard.

One person should be appointed to lead the self-assessment process. They should be supported by a small team that represents different areas of the organisation's work which can help ensure information and evidence is gathered from all parts of the organisation.

### 3.2 Information required

Evidence is considered to be any information that demonstrates compliance with a requirement of the standard. You are most likely to find evidence to demonstrate the degree to which your organisation reflects the CHS **Organisational Responsibilities** in your organisation's policies, manuals, guidelines and procedures. To evidence organisational practice regarding the CHS **Key Actions** it is likely that you will have a wide range of sources that capture this information, e.g., reports, project proposals, evaluations, visual materials, minutes of meetings, monitoring reports, assessment, etc.

Before starting the self-assessment, you should refer to HQAI **GUI126 - Information Management Guidelines**. This document provides orientation on how to collect the relevant information. The focus in the self-assessment is mainly on evidence at the systems and policy levels. The self-assessment process does not review information from specific country programmes, this information will be reviewed at the audit stage.

It is worth noting that one piece of evidence, e.g. a policy document, often provides evidence for multiple requirements of the CHS. Creating the list of key documents using **ADM143 - Audit Map of Documents** is helpful in keeping track of your evidence and of the requirements to which each document relates, it also helps to avoid unnecessary duplication of documents. As each document is given a unique number this will facilitate cross-referencing in your report.

### 3.3 Timeline

The initial self-assessment must be submitted, at a minimum, one month before the start of Stage 1 of the initial audit, i.e. the desk-based document review and interviews with Head Office staff.

Stage 1 of the initial audit starts upon receipt of the *Initial Self-assessment* and the accompanying documentary evidence. **The initial audit cannot begin until the self-assessment and accompanying documents are submitted.**

### 3.3 Work with Partners section of the tool

#### 3.3.1 What is the CHS requirement on partnerships?

The CHS is clear on the issue of partnership: *“Organisations working in partnerships should explain their commitment to the CHS, seek understanding of how their partners approach the Nine Commitments and do whatever they can to work with them to implement the CHS commitments.”*

You should consider the following questions:

- i. how does your organisation share its commitment to the CHS with the partners?
- ii. how does your organisation understand how partners approach the 9 commitments and what are the mechanisms to do so?
- iii. how does your organisation help partners correct identified weaknesses?

When collecting information for this section you should keep in mind that it is your organisation that is being **assessed not** the partner. If your organisation is committed to the CHS, it has the responsibility to make sure it has put in place adequate mechanisms to ensure that the CHS commitments are delivered to communities, even when working through partners.

The mechanisms in place should allow your organisation to identify and address risks of non-compliance, or failure to deliver on the nine commitments to communities. Policies and actions designed to minimise risks or to address identified weaknesses are a good way to demonstrate that the mechanisms work.

#### 3.3.2 How to complete the Work with Partners questions of the tool?

You should describe the due diligence processes and mechanisms used by your organisation when working in partnership, for example:

- how it assesses the capacities of the partner to deliver each CHS commitment;
- how it assesses the extent to which the CHS requirements are delivered to communities;
- how it identifies potential gaps and what happens when weaknesses are identified.

In general, organisations have specific mechanisms in place that are used as a basis to select and work with partners, monitor their work and have oversight of what is happening at project level; these may include partnership agreements, monitoring systems, joint decision-making processes, feedback systems for partners and communities involved in programmes, training plans for partners, etc. These are the kind of systems that should be described in the section on 'Work with partners' and to assess whether these are:

- robust
- cover all the requirements of the CHS
- are applied consistently.

You should ensure you have submitted adequate documentary evidence to demonstrate the robustness of these systems.

### 3.4 Scoring

For each indicator of the standard you should provide a score based on your evidence in accordance with the HQAI scoring grid:

- Score 0:** Your organisation currently doesn't work towards applying this requirement, either formally or informally. It's a major weakness that prevents your organisation from meeting the overall commitment.
- Score 1:** Your organisation has made some efforts towards applying this requirement, but these efforts have not been systematic.
- Score 2:** Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying this requirement, but certain key points are still not addressed.
- Score 3:** Your organisation conforms to this requirement, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time – the requirement is fulfilled
- Score 4:** Your organisation's work goes beyond the intent of this requirement and demonstrates innovation. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.

## 4. Summary of the key steps

### A. Collect evidence

To collect evidence for an initial self-assessment, you should focus on the following elements:

- Internal policies and procedures of the organisation relevant to the CHS 9 commitments.

This level of evaluation is the first step and can lead to informative data on the management system of your organisation.

II. Internal mechanisms for compliance and quality control.

Whether systems are effectively implemented and have the capacity to control and/or improve practice is largely dependent on the quality of internal controls and quality assurance mechanisms. For most organisations information on internal systems can be provided by policies and procedures on governance, human resources, monitoring and evaluation, risk analysis, internal audit, programme design frameworks, etc.

## B. Report

The indicators for STD014, are derived from the CHS Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities, they are combined for the self-assessment to facilitate the reporting process.

Compile the findings of the document review and summarise the findings and evidence in STD014, don't forget to provide a score for the different indicators, based on the scoring grid. You should **always provide evidence to support your findings.**

## C. Submit the self-assessment

After completing the self-assessment, review the information provided, **and submit to HQAI. If the self-assessment and accompanying document map are not received within the agreed timeframe, the audit may be delayed or even cancelled; this could have cost implications for your organisation.**