



## Code of Conduct

Standards of behaviour and  
performance.

POL001 - Code of Conduct - 2021-09-23

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HQAI is constantly developing and improving its tools and procedures. Depending on feedback and learning from experience, these may change. Please make sure you're using the latest version.

How to give feedback or contribute to the process?

If you would like to provide comments on this, document or any aspect of our work, please send your feedback to: [contact@hqai.org](mailto:contact@hqai.org).

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POL001 - Code of Conduct - 2021-09-23		
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# Code of conduct

## Introduction

### I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative

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

To all its stakeholders, HQAI is an accountable, open and trustworthy partner, which applies the internationally recognised ground rules of auditing that are impartiality, competence, responsibility, openness, confidentiality and responsiveness to complaints. Our policies, procedures and tools for independent quality assurance follow relevant ISO standards requirements. HQAI's CHS certification scheme is accredited against ISO/IEC 17065:2012.

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

HQAI is committed to the nine fundamental principles of the CHS and implements them as far as they are applicable to its own activities. These are:

- delivery of services that respond to the needs of users
- timely delivery of these services
- avoidance of negative effects
- transparency and participation in decision-making
- provision of safe complaint mechanisms
- avoidance of duplication
- well management of staff, including non discrimination
- responsible use of resources

The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative's Code of Conduct has been developed to ensure that HQAI staff are clear about the general standards of behaviour and performance required.

The Code of Conduct is designed to improve the working environment, encourage staff retention, protect staff from exploitation and abuse or physical injury or harm, safeguard HQAI's reputation and ensure the smooth day to day running of the organisation. The Code of Conduct provides a set of minimum standards which forms part of our commitment and responsibility to the welfare and personal security of everyone and aims to protect staff and those we work with from potential risks at work.

All staff are responsible for ensuring that they themselves, and those they line manage, comply with this Code of Conduct. Staff have to be aware of the mechanisms to report any breach of the Code of conduct.

## II. Scope

This Code applies to all employees, volunteers, consultants, interns, and any other individuals working for or representing HQAI, including as relevant the members of HQAI's governing bodies, hereinafter referred to as "staff", in line with the definition of the CHS. Specific policies and/or procedures can complement it for certain categories of staff, e.g. employees.

## III. References

The following referenced documents can usefully complement this document. For dated references, only the specific edition applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

- POL014 - HR policy
- POL020 - Safety and Security Policy
- POL110 - Conflicts of interest policy
- POLXXX - Privacy policy
- PRO023 - Data management procedure
- PRO104 - Communication procedure
- ADM021 - Confidentiality agreement
- ADM022 - Conflict of interest agreement for auditors
- ADM023 - Conflict of interest agreement

## Key Principles

### 1. Staff performance and behaviour

- 1.1 The work and international reputation of HQAI depends on the performance and behaviour of its staff.
- 1.2 HQAI staff are recruited on the basis of their competence, integrity and commitment to the mission and mandate of HQAI.
- 1.3 HQAI expects its staff, wherever they are located, to:
  - 1.2.1 respect, implement, and promote the principles and commitments enshrined in the CHS;
  - 1.2.2 conduct all duties with integrity and strive towards attaining a high standard of professionalism;
  - 1.2.3 maintain an unimpeachable standard of integrity in all business relationships both inside and outside HQAI;
  - 1.2.4 optimise the use of resources for which the staff member is responsible;
  - 1.2.5 foster the highest standards of professional competence among those for whom the staff member is responsible;
  - 1.2.6 respect all people, taking into account the sensitivities of their customs, habits, and religious beliefs;

- 1.2.7 recognise the richness of a diverse professional environment and value the unique skills and perspectives of every individual, including those of different cultural and educational backgrounds;
- 1.2.8 contribute to removing barriers to gender equality and ensure that HQAI activities take the gender dimension into account;
- 1.2.9 positively represent HQAI in all work areas;
- 1.2.10 declare any potential conflict of interest or bias;
- 1.2.11 adhere to the responsibilities and obligations set out in any contractual agreements they have entered into with HQAI or on behalf of HQAI;
- 1.2.12 adopt an environmentally responsible behaviour limiting the personal and organisational impact on the environment; and
- 1.2.13 adhere to this code.

## **2. Individual and collective responsibilities**

- 2.1 Staff of HQAI are personally and collectively responsible for upholding and promoting the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct.
- 2.2 All HQAI staff shall therefore, at all times and in all circumstances, during and outside their time spent for HQAI, refrain from acts of misconduct, and respect the organisation's standards and the dignity of all of whom they have contact with.
- 2.3 As part of their responsibilities towards HQAI, staff are expected to:
  - 2.3.1 adhere to the terms of reference ruling their engagement with HQAI;
  - 2.3.2 follow all organisation policies and procedures applicable to their function;
  - 2.3.3 ensure that all procedures relating to their area of responsibility are adhered to at all times;
  - 2.3.4 contribute towards the creation and maintenance of an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption, and discrimination;
  - 2.3.5 declare any potential conflict of interest or bias, including but not limited to, current or former relationships with audited organisations;
  - 2.3.6 take an active part in all team or work related meetings;
  - 2.3.7 have appropriate authority to act or commit HQAI in what they write, say or e-mail to others;
  - 2.3.8 be responsible and accountable for their words and actions at all times and express themselves appropriately and carefully in all interactions;
  - 2.3.9 not be in possession of any kind of weapon or ammunition whilst on service for HQAI;
  - 2.3.10 respect differences in culture, religion and politics and avoid that relationships between staff members interfere with organisational objectives.

- 2.4 As part of their responsibilities towards colleagues and external parties, staff are expected to:
- 2.4.1 support colleagues in achieving organisational standards and targets;
  - 2.4.2 maintain open and professional relationships with each other.
  - 2.4.3 deal with others with respect and courtesy at all times;
  - 2.4.4 use language appropriately and not behave in a way which may offend, alienate or patronise others;
  - 2.4.5 listen to others respectfully and actively and deal with disagreements professionally;
  - 2.4.6 listen to feedback and be prepared to discuss it;
  - 2.4.7 value and welcome diversity;
  - 2.4.8 not abuse or misuse their position, power or influence for personal benefit or to benefit another person, or cause harm to another person;
  - 2.4.9 not engage in bullying or harassing behaviour towards any colleagues;
  - 2.4.10 follow all security regulations;
  - 2.4.11 know, understand and implement HQAI's policy on the protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment as outlined in this Code (4.6).
  - 2.4.12 pay due respect to customs, habits or religious beliefs of the country in which they operate;

### **3. Grievance**

- 3.1 HQAI recognises that a staff member may have a grievance arising from his/her service for HQAI.
- 3.2 HQAI guarantees that whatever staff report will be treated with confidentiality as far as is practicable within the line management structure.
- 3.3 However, a grievance made in bad faith may constitute a gross misconduct.

### **4. Acts of misconduct**

- 4.1 HQAI expects all staff to abide by the national legislation where they are on service for HQAI and international applicable laws, HQAI standards and procedures and not to provide any form of support to individuals having any connection with criminal activities.

#### **4.2 Abuse of power**

- 4.2.1 Abuse of power is defined as the abuse or misuse of position or influence or failure to use proper discretion for personal benefit or to benefit another person.

- 4.2.2 Acts that shall be considered abuse of power include:
- favouritism<sup>1</sup>, nepotism<sup>2</sup>, cronyism<sup>3</sup>, corruption<sup>4</sup>;
  - any act which could be considered harassment, mobbing, bullying, discriminatory, racist or an illegitimate use of authority;
  - use of position to commit HQAI legally, financially or morally without authorisation;
  - stealing or misappropriation of funds, property or human resources from HQAI;
  - all forms of exploitation and abuse<sup>5</sup>;

4.2.3 Any abuse of power is considered gross misconduct.

#### 4.3 Fraud and corruption

4.3.2 HQAI reputation for maintaining lawful business practices is of paramount importance.

4.3.1 HQAI is committed to promoting and maintaining the highest level of ethical standards in relation to all of its business activities.

4.3.2 HQAI practices a zero tolerance policy towards fraud and corruption, considered acts of gross misconduct, recognising that fraud is contrary to fundamental values of integrity, transparency and accountability that are key to the activities of HQAI.

#### 4.4 Conflict of interest and gifts

4.4.1 Business interests, directorships, board membership and other employment or voluntary work shall not conflict with HQAI interests.

4.4.2 HQAI reserves the right to call for the staff member's resignation of any outside offices or employment, if it believes that continuation of employment/membership is against the best interests of HQAI or the individual involved.

4.4.3 Staff shall disclose and show full transparency of any potential conflict of interest.

4.4.5 All staff shall sign and apply POL110 - Conflict of interest Policy.

4.4.6 To avoid conflicts of interest, staff shall not accept any gift or favour or promise any gift or favour in connection with their work that could be construed as being inappropriate or an attempt to influence either their own or the recipient's judgement.

4.4.7 Where a small gift is offered this can be tactfully accepted provided the value is no more than a maximum of CHF 300.-<sup>6</sup> or the local equivalent.

Note: Depending on where and to whom the gift is made, CHF 300.- or equivalent can be a significant amount of money, in which case it should be politely refused. Staff are expected to use their good judgement and avoid the creation of any real or perceived conflict of interest by accepting gifts.

4.4.8 When, however, the gift is to the value of more than CHF 300.- acceptance must be deferred until it has been checked with the line manager.

<sup>1</sup> Highly biased distribution of common resources, no matter how these resources have been accumulated in the first place.

<sup>2</sup> Preference given to one's own family members, irrespective of their qualifications and without due process.

<sup>3</sup> Preference given to friends and associates irrespective of their qualifications and without due process.

<sup>4</sup> Use of organisational, public or private power to steal from those who have less power, complex concept that includes bribes, embezzlement, fraud, extortion or kickbacks.

<sup>5</sup> As defined in the UN Secretary General' Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)

<sup>6</sup> Aligned to the rule in vigour in the Swiss parliament

- 4.4.9 Any gift received from an organisation certified by HQAI or seeking to be certified shall be declared in writing by the staff member who has received it and shall disqualify the person in question from any decision or recommendation regarding a certification of the organisation in question.
- 4.4.10 In case of doubt, for example over the offer or receipt of a token seasonal gift, the staff member shall seek the advice of his/her manager before accepting.
- 4.4.11 Any allegation regarding Fraud and Corruption will be systematically investigated and if substantiated the management reserves the right to refer to the police and take legal action.

#### 4.5 Bullying and harassment

- 4.5.1 HQAI is committed to creating a work environment free of harassment and bullying, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.
- 4.5.2 HQAI does not tolerate any form of workplace violation such as bullying or harassment (including sexual, gender and racial harassment) or discrimination, any unwelcome comment or behaviour that is offensive, demeaning, humiliating, derogatory, or any other inappropriate behaviour that fails to respect the dignity of an individual.
- 4.5.3 Staff members who feel they are victim of bullying or harassment should bring this to the attention of the offending person as this person may not know that his/her behaviour is unwelcome or upsetting.
- 4.5.4 If an informal approach does not resolve the issue, the staff member shall report the situation to the Executive Director, or the President of the Board, if the offending person is the Executive Director.  
*Note:* if the President is the offending person, the situation should be reported to the Vice-President of the Board of Directors.
- 4.5.5 HQAI shall ensure the confidentiality of the procedures and take all measures to avoid retaliation.
- 4.5.6 HQAI shall not tolerate the victimisation of a person for making allegations of bullying or harassment in good faith, or supporting someone to make such a complaint.
- 4.5.7 HQAI shall investigate systematically any allegation regarding bullying or harassment.
- 4.5.8 Substantiated allegations of bullying, harassment or victimisation shall result in immediate disciplinary action.

#### 4.6 Sexual exploitation abuse and harassment (SEAH)

- 4.6.1 HQAI has a zero tolerance for SEAH.
- 4.6.2 Staff shall behave according to accepted international human rights standards and laws with regard to sexual conduct. Furthermore, staff must also comply with Swiss law and local laws and prohibitions in the country in which they are travelling.
- 4.6.3 In consequence and regardless of local laws or lack of such laws, HQAI staff shall while on and off duty:
  - a. understand that SEAH constitutes acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for immediate termination of the relationship with HQAI;



- b. never engage in any sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.  
Note: Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.
- c. not engage in sexual relationships with staff of audited partners or their own partners, and members of crisis-affected populations;
- d. never accept, solicit or engage in the "buying" of, or profiting from sexual services, be it through the exchange of money, employment, goods or services;
- e. never exploit the vulnerability of any group especially women and children, or allow any person/s to be put into compromising situations;
- f. when working with children, never act in ways that may place a child at risk of abuse.

4.6.4 Where a staff member develops concerns or suspicions regarding SEAH by a fellow member of staff, he/she must report such concerns to his/her line manager, or to the President of the Board of Directors if it concerns the Executive Director or one of the Directors.

Note: in case the suspicion concerns the President, it should be reported to the Vice-President of the Board of Directors.

4.6.5 All staff shall create and maintain an environment that prevents SEAH and promotes the implementation of this Code of Conduct.

4.6.6 HQAI shall investigate systematically any allegation regarding SEAH.

4.6.7 Substantiated cases of SEAH will result in immediate disciplinary and legal action, as relevant.

### **3.7 Non exclusive list of additional acts of gross misconduct**

3.7.1 Fighting or physical assault on staff members, volunteers or members of the public, whether on or outside HQAI business.

3.7.2 Serious negligence which causes HQAI unacceptable loss, damage or injury.

3.7.3 Negligent treatment of HQAI property and theft of any kind.

3.7.4 Serious acts of insubordination.

3.7.5 Racial, sexual or disability discrimination.

3.7.6 Theft of HQAI's or a staff member property.

3.7.7 Conduct likely to bring HQAI into disrepute.

## **4. Drugs and alcohol in the workplace**

4.1 HQAI and its staff have a reciprocal duty to ensure a safe and healthy working environment where all are competent and take care during work time.

4.2 All staff are expected not to be under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol while at work, or on HQAI business.

4.3 If someone is found or suspected to be under the influence of illegal drugs or drunk at work, colleagues are expected to report this immediately to the staff member's line manager or if they are not available to the Executive Director.

- 4.3 Staff are required not to possess illegal drugs at work. If they are found to be in possession, the management reserves the right to formally report them to the police.
- 4.4 If staff are attending conferences and evening events on HQAI business and/or representing HQAI at the event, they are expected to be able to behave professionally and to network, represent or liaise during the whole of the event.
- 4.6 Staff should let their managers know if prescribed drugs have side-effects which may impact on their work.
- 4.7 Non-compliance with the policy above will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

## 5. Security breaches

- 5.1 HQAI takes the safety and security of its staff and its partners or other stakeholders very seriously (see details of our commitments in POL020 - Safety and Security Policy) and thus requires its staff:
  - 5.1.1 to follow precisely HQAI security regulations, or those of a nominated security host in a country that is being visited;  
*Note:* the security host will most likely be the organisations that are visited - in case of an audit, the audited organisation.
  - 5.1.2 not to use or possess weapons or ammunition of any kind while on duty;
  - 5.1.3 not to drive a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drug (legal or not) while on duty.

## 6. Whistleblowing

- 6.1 Whenever a staff member witnesses minor misconduct by another staff member s/he should draw the attention of the person in question about it.
- 6.2 If inappropriate for any reason - at the appreciation of the person who has witness the misconduct - or when the misconduct is serious, staff have a responsibility to bring the matter of concern to the immediate attention of the Executive Director or if inappropriate, the President of the Board of Directors .
- 6.3 The identity of a person alleging misconduct is confidential and the handling of the allegation shall be undertaken in such a way that no retaliation can happen against the whistleblower.
- 6.4 However, if any disclosure is made in bad faith, or concerns information which staff do not substantially believe is true, or if the disclosure is made for personal gain, then such a disclosure may constitute a gross misconduct.

## 7. Communication and representation

- 7.1 It is the responsibility of all staff of HQAI to ensure that publications and communications bearing HQAI name do not contain material that is inaccurate or detrimental to the good reputation of HQAI and check that the procedure for sign off.

- 7.2 When producing publications or communications on behalf of HQAI, it is the responsibility of staff to check that the procedure for 'sign-off' is consistent with HQAI procedure 104 on communication.

Note: Disclaimers are not effective in absolving an organisation of responsibility or in protecting its reputation when wrong communication has been sent out..

## 8. Confidentiality

- 8.1 Confidentiality is at the core of HQAI activities and bounds all its staff members.  
8.2 Therefore all staff members shall sign HQAI Confidentiality Agreement (ADM021-022-023, depending on the specific situation of the staff member).

Note: further information on confidentiality handling, in particular of personal information can be found in POLXXX - Privacy policy, PRO023 - Data management.

## 9. Use of Information Technology

- 9.1 HQAI uses IT to collect, store and manage data, in particular as part of the audit process.  
9.2 HQAI takes all reasonable care to protect its systems and access to data.  
9.3 It is however also the personal responsibility of each staff member that uses HQAI's IT to take all measures to protect it's own equipment from non-authorized access.  
9.4 Details on handling HQAI's IT infrastructure can be found in PROXXX - IT procedure (in development)

## 10. Disciplinary procedure

- 10.1 Any alleged act of gross misconduct shall be investigated and if substantiated, lead to disciplinary and legal actions, as relevant  
10.2 Where disregard for this Code has a negative impact on HQAI mission or staff, disciplinary action may be sought.  
10.3 These vary according to the specific relationship of the person in question with HQAI (e.g. employees, member of corporate bodies, consultants) and are clarified in the specific policies, procedures and/or administrative documents that rule this relationship.  
10.4 Disciplinary actions do not preclude further administrative, civil or penal responsibility or action, depending on the nature of the misconduct.

## 11. Implementation of this Code of Conduct

- 11.1 All staff shall sign this Code of Conduct.  
11.2 Serious infringements of art. 5 of this Code of Conduct may result in immediate dismissal.  
11.3 HQAI shall raise the awareness of the staff about this code as part of inductions or other relevant trainings or briefings.

- 11.4 All staff have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct, its purpose and the mechanisms of reporting non-compliance of it.
- 11.5 All persons to whom this Code applies shall ensure and maintain an environment that prevents power abuse and promotes the implementation of these standards of behaviour.
- 11.6 Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.
- 11.7 This document forms part of all contracts of employment or contractual conditions of service.

## Statement of receipt

I \_\_\_\_\_, declare that I have received, read and understood the Code of Conduct for all staff of HQAI and all policies noted in the Code. I understand that this Code forms an integral part of my employment contract or conditions of service with HQAI and agree to abide by its terms and conditions.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this page signed to the designated Human Resource focal point.