



Code of Conduct

Standards of behaviour and performance.

POL-001 - Code of Conduct - 2020-06-26

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Be sure to have the latest version!

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.

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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 should 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".

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.

- POL020 - Safety and Security Policy
- POL110 - Conflicts of interest policy
- PRO104 - Communication procedure
- ADM021 - Confidentiality agreement
- ADM022 - Conflict of interest agreement for auditors
- ADM023 - Conflict of interest agreement

Key Principles

1. Integrity and commitment

1.1 Staff performance and behaviour

The work and international reputation of HQAI depends on the performance and behaviour of its staff. HQAI staff are recruited on the basis of their competence, integrity and commitment to the mission and mandate of HQAI. HQAI expects its staff, wherever they are located, to:

- a. respect, implement, and promote the principles and commitments enshrined in the CHS;
- b. conduct all duties with integrity and strive towards attaining a high standard of professional responsibility and achievement;
- c. maintain an unimpeachable standard of integrity in all business relationships both inside and outside HQAI;
- d. optimise the use of resources for which the staff member is responsible;
- e. minimise negative impact on the environment;
- f. foster the highest standards of professional competence among those for whom the staff member is responsible;
- g. respect all people, taking into account the sensitivities of their customs, habits, and religious beliefs;
- h. recognise the richness of a diverse workplace and value the unique skills and perspectives of every individual, including those of different cultural and educational backgrounds;

- i. contribute to removing barriers to gender equality and ensure that HQAI activities take the gender dimension into account;
- j. positively represent HQAI in all work areas;
- k. declare any potential conflict of interest or bias;
- l. adhere to the responsibilities and obligations set out in any contractual agreements they have entered into with HQAI or on behalf of HQAI; and
- m. adhere to this code.

1.2 Disciplinary procedure

Where disregard for these expectations has a negative impact on HQAI mission or staff, disciplinary action may be sought. For all minor breaches, informal discussions will take place between the employee and his/her line manager. If this has no effect, or in case of gross misconduct (see below), a formal disciplinary procedure may be initiated where the employee will be informed in writing that such procedure is engaged and where the Board of HQAI (or a panel established by the Board) will hear the allegations and the employee to make a decision. Penalties may include the dismissal of the employee.

Allegation of misconducts should be made to the Executive Director who will pass it to the Board if necessary. In cases where the allegation concerns the Executive Director, any employee can contact the President of the Board directly. The identity of a person alleging of misconduct is confidential.

2. Individual and collective responsibilities

Staff of HQAI are personally and collectively responsible for upholding and promoting the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. All HQAI staff should therefore, at all times and in all circumstances, during and outside working hours refrain from acts of misconduct, and respect the organisation's standards and the dignity of to whom HQAI pledges assistance and with whom they have contact.

2.1 Individual staff responsibilities

Staff are expected to:

- a. adhere to the terms and conditions of employment as outlined in their Contract of Employment or any other relevant contractual document;
- b. follow all organisation policies and procedures in force;
- c. perform to a satisfactory standard the duties and responsibilities of their job as outlined in their job description or by an appropriate manager, and ensure that all procedures relating to their area of responsibility are adhered to at all times;
- d. carry out any reasonable instructions given in relation to the performance of their job by an appropriate manager;
- e. adhere to the pattern of daily working hours as agreed under their contract and with their manager;
- f. deal with others with respect and courtesy at all times;
- g. be responsible and accountable for their words and actions at all times;

- h. have appropriate authority to act or commit HQAI in what they write, say or e-mail to others;
- i. express themselves appropriately and carefully in all your interactions;
- j. listen to others respectfully and actively and deal with disagreements professionally;
- k. value and welcome diversity;
- l. pay due respect to customs, habits or religious beliefs of the country in which they are based and/or deployed;
- m. use language appropriately and not behave in a way which may offend, alienate or patronise others;
- n. not be in possession of any kind of weapon or ammunition whilst at work.

2.2 Responsibilities towards colleagues

Staff are expected to:

- a. support colleagues in achieving organisation standards and targets;
- b. listen to feedback and be prepared to discuss it;
- c. take an active part in all team or work related meetings;
- d. refrain from any acts of misconduct;
- e. not engage in bullying or harassing behaviour towards any colleagues
- f. contribute towards the creation and maintenance of an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse, and fraud and corruption
- g. declare any potential conflict of interest or bias, including but not limited to, current or former relationships with client organisations or potential member organisations;
- h. follow all security regulations;
- i. not abuse or misuse their position, power or influence for personal benefit or to benefit another person, or cause harm to another person.

2.3 Relationships with other staff, external partners and other stakeholders

- a. Staff must maintain open and professional relationships with each other.
- b. Differences in culture, religion and politics shall be respected and relationships between staff members must not interfere with organisational objectives.
- c. Staff must know and understand HQAI's policy on the protection of affected populations from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by aid workers as outlined in this Code (3.5).

2.4 Grievance procedure

HQAI recognises that a staff member may have a grievance arising from his/her employment.

Grievances should be handled in first instance through an informal procedure and, if not successful through a formal process. Any grievance should be addressed to the line management directly above the person against whom the grievance is addressed. In case of issues arising with the Executive Director, the matter should be raised informally with the President of the Board.

If the informal approach does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, or if the issue is considered too serious to be handled informally first, it should be brought in writing to the President of the Board, indicating:

- a. the nature of the grievance;
- b. justification; and
- c. a description of the steps taken to try to resolve the issue informally, as relevant.

This shall lead to a hearing, organised as soon as possible by the President of the Board or a grievance panel specifically designed for this purpose. This hearing may be held face to face or via electronic means where all participants can be heard by and hear all the other participants. Aggrieved employees have the right to be represented by a colleague or a Trade Union Representative to this hearing.

Within five days of the hearing, the President or panel shall render a decision. Appeal against this decision shall be handled according to the Swiss labour laws.

3. Prevention of abuse of power, fraud, corruption, and sexual exploitation and abuse

3.1 Misconduct of any kind

All staff shall refrain from any and all acts of misconduct and especially those noted in this Code. The sections below set out the general categories of prohibited acts and include examples of specific acts which HQAI considers as misconduct or gross misconduct depending on the severity of the act.

HQAI expects all staff to abide by national and international laws and HQAI standards and procedures.

Staff have a responsibility to bring any matters of concern to the immediate attention of their manager, or the Executive Director, in alignment with HQAI's grievance procedure (see 2.4. above).

HQAI shall guarantee that whatever staff report will be treated with confidentiality as far as is practicable within the line management structure. 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 gross misconduct (see 1.2 above).

3.2 Whistleblowing

Whenever a staff member witnesses misconduct by another staff member s/he should draw the attention of the person in question about it. 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. The Executive Director will pass it to the Board if necessary. In cases where the allegation concerns the Executive Director, any staff member can contact the President of the Board directly. Handling the case shall follow the steps indicated in 3.1.

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.

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 gross misconduct (see 1.2 above).

3.3 Abuse of power

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.

Acts that shall be considered abuse of power include:

- a. favouritism¹, nepotism², cronyism³, corruption⁴;
- b. any act which could be considered harassment, mobbing, bullying, discriminatory, racist or an illegitimate use of authority;
- c. use of position to commit HQAI legally, financially or morally without authorisation;
- d. stealing or misappropriation of funds, property or human resources from HQAI;
- e. all forms of exploitation and abuse⁵;

Generally any abuse of power will be considered gross misconduct.

3.4 Anti-fraud and corruption policy

HQAI is committed to promoting and maintaining the highest level of ethical standards in relation to all of its business activities. Its reputation for maintaining lawful business practices is of paramount importance.

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

Negligent treatment of HQAI property and theft of any kind is a serious disciplinary issue.

3.4.1 Conflict of interest and gifts

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

Corrupt business practices are prohibited, including failure to disclose or show full transparency of any potential conflict of interest with a supplier, any service provider or business partners (including close family relations, shareholder arrangements and the like).

All staff shall sign ADM021 - Confidentiality agreement and ADM023 - Conflict of interest agreement.

To avoid conflicts of interest, staff should 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.

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

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

3 Preference given to friends and associates irrespective of their qualifications and without due process.

4 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.

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

Where a small gift is offered this can be tactfully accepted provided the value is no more than a maximum of CHF 300.-⁶ or the local equivalent. 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, in line with the procedure below. In any case staff are expected to use their good judgement and avoid the creation of any real or perceived conflict of interest by accepting gifts.

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.

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.

Infringement of the above policy will result in the instigation of HQAI's disciplinary procedure. Serious abuse of any guidance may result in summary dismissal. 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.

3.5 Sexual exploitation and abuse⁷

Sexual behavioural norms vary across the world. Sensitivity to the local cultural context on these issues is essential. Staff must 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 and/or based.

HQAI will take all appropriate measures to prevent sexual exploitation or abuse of anyone by any of its staff and especially to protect people and communities vulnerable to risk and affected by disaster, conflict or poverty. For these purposes and regardless of local laws or lack of such laws, HQAI staff shall while on and off duty:

- a. understand that sexual exploitation and abuse by staff constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment;
- 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. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence;
- c. given the increased vulnerability of populations in situations of natural disasters or conflict, staff are prohibited from engaging in sexual relationships with members of crisis-affected populations since such relationships are based on inherently unequal power dynamics and undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work;
- d. never accept, solicit or engage in the "buying" of or profiting from sexual services;
- e. never exploit the vulnerability of any target group in the context of development and humanitarian work, especially women and children, or allow any person/s to be put into compromising situations;
- f. know that the exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.

⁶ Aligned to the rule in vigour in the Swiss parliament

⁷ This section draws from the UN Secretary General' Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)

- g. when working with children, never act in ways that may place a child at risk of abuse.

Where an employee develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow member of staff, he/she must report such concerns to his/her line manager, or to the President of the Board if it concerns the Executive Director.

All staff should create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of the Code of Conduct.

Any allegation regarding sexual exploitation and abuse will be systematically investigated and if substantiated, will result in disciplinary action. In addition the management reserves the right to take legal action for non-compliance with this section of the Code of Conduct.

3.6 Bullying and harassment

HQAI is committed to creating a work environment free of harassment and bullying, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

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.

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. If an informal approach does not resolve the issue, the staff member shall report the situation to the Executive Director, of the President of the Board, if the offending person is the Executive Director. HQAI shall ensure the confidentiality of the procedures and take all measures to avoid retaliation.

All allegations of bullying and harassment will be investigated and, where appropriate, disciplinary action will be taken. HQAI shall also not tolerate victimisation of a person for making allegations of bullying or harassment in good faith, or supporting someone to make such a complaint. Victimisation is a disciplinary offence.

3.7 Additional acts of gross misconduct

- a. Fighting or physical assault on staff members, volunteers or members of the public, whether on or outside HQAI business.
- b. Serious negligence which causes HQAI unacceptable loss, damage or injury.
- c. Serious acts of insubordination.
- d. Racial, sexual or disability discrimination.
- e. Theft of HQAI's or a staff member property.
- f. Conduct likely to bring HQAI into disrepute.

4. Drugs and alcohol in the workplace

HQAI has a duty to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for all its staff. Staff also have a duty to be competent and to take care during working time.

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

If staff are attending conferences and evening events on HQAI business and 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.

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.

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.

Staff should let their managers know if prescribed drugs have side-effects which may impact on their work.

Non-compliance with the policy above will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

5. Security breaches

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) The following actions are considered serious breaches of security and are prohibited:

- a. Failure to follow HQAI security regulations, or those of a nominated security host in a country that is being visited.
- b. Using or possessing weapons or ammunition of any kind while on duty.
- c. Driving a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drug (legal or not) while on duty.

6. Communication and representation

It is the responsibility of all staff of HQAI to ensure that publications and communications bearing HQAI name should not contain material that is inaccurate or detrimental to the good reputation of HQAI. 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 this Code of Conduct. It is important to note that disclaimers are not effective in absolving an organisation of responsibility or in protecting its reputation.

6.1 Spokespersons

- a. In general, all staff are welcome to inform internal and external parties about HQAI. They are invited to use and consult official HQAI sources to validate the messages.
- b. In the event of a crisis, only the Executive Director and, if necessary, the President of the Board are considered as authorised spokespersons of HQAI.

6.2 Images and messages

Visual and editorial content should reflect the principles of confidentiality, accuracy and respect. Choices of images and messages will be made based on the paramount principles of:

- a. respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- b. belief in the equality of all people;
- c. acceptance of the need to prompt fairness, solidarity and justice.

6.3 Prohibited representational actions

- a. Making any public statement relating to political or military situations, including voluntarily providing evidence or information which may be known to staff by reason of their position, in any type of legal proceedings or to prosecuting authorities without prior authorisation of the Executive Director.
- b. Improper use of HQAI trademarks and logos.
- c. Any acts or omissions that could discredit HQAI.
- d. Bringing disrepute to HQAI by failure to pay due respect to customs, habits or religious beliefs and to dress in an appropriate manner.
- e. Accepting or exercising any public appointment or outside employment that may conflict with the role at HQAI without the prior agreement of the Executive Director.
- f. Any intentional false and malicious statements, misrepresentation or false accusation of another staff member or third party, which may be considered as serious disciplinary offence.

7. Confidentiality and use of information technology

It is prohibited to divulge any confidential information acquired while carrying out duties with HQAI. A confidentiality agreement shall be signed by all staff (ADM021).

The use of HQAI IT is governed by POLxxx - Information technology policy. [in development]

8. Staff-on-loan, interns, and other representatives

In the case of substantiated claims against a staff-on-loan or any other representatives of HQAI who are not employees, HQAI may, after consultation with the individual and employer, immediately terminate the individual's loan or secondment to HQAI and provide a full report to the individual's employer.

9. Civil or penal responsibility

Any action taken under these disciplinary procedures does not preclude further administrative, civil or penal responsibility or action.

10. Implementation of this Code of Conduct

10.1 Signature

All staff shall sign HQAI's Code of Conduct.

10.2 Awareness raising

All staff have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct, its purpose and the mechanisms of reporting non-compliance of it. The Code of Conduct will be an element of induction and covered in other relevant training and briefings.

10.3 Overall responsibility

All persons to whom this Code applies are obliged to ensure and maintain an environment that prevents power abuse and promotes the implementation of these standards of behaviour. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.

This document automatically forms part of all contracts of employment or contractual conditions of service.



11. 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.

