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1 Introduction

1. This document contains requirements, definitions and guidance for legal advice provided within a telephone service. It is intended for suppliers that are operating a telephone service at specialist level, and should be read in conjunction with the Specialist Quality Mark (SQM) Standard (published in April 2002) and available through all Legal Services Commission (LSC) offices or on the website www.legalservices.gov.uk.
2. The Quality Mark, which is relevant to any organisation that wholly or partly provides information, advice and/or representation on an individual's rights and the law, originally concentrated on services delivered face to face at a main site. To ensure that telephone services are of a comparable quality, a number of additional issues relevant to this method of service delivery were identified. Therefore this document should be read with reference to the SQM definitions and guidance, as these provide information regarding all service-delivery methods, including telephone services. Organisations wishing for their telephone service to be quality marked at the specialist level must meet the SQM as well as the additional requirements and definitions provided here.
3. The additional requirements and definitions relate to the differing nature of a telephone service as compared to a face-to-face service. Organisations should be aware that the requirements within the SQM will need to be addressed in relation to the telephone service. For example, if an adviser is to undertake work over the telephone, their induction should cover this (please see D2.1).
4. This document is designed so that the SQM requirement is followed by the definition relating to the telephone service. All new requirements are in normal font, where a new definition has been added to an original requirement, this requirement appears in *italics*. Any new guidance appears underneath the definition.
5. As stated earlier, this document relates to the SQM. A separate document for the Assisted Information and General Help (and General Help with Casework) Quality Marks is also available.

2 The Application Process

6. Organisations who already have the Specialist Quality Mark for their face-to-face service but would like their telephone service to be quality marked at specialist level should contact their Legal Services Commission Account Manager.
7. Telephone Services that wish to apply for the SQM for the first time must follow the application process given in section 4 of the Specialist Quality Mark Standard.
8. All services with the Specialist Quality Mark will appear in the Community Legal Service Directory. www.justask.org.uk

**Specialist Quality Mark Standard
Additional Requirements and Definitions
for Telephone Services**

A1: Business Planning

Requirements:

A1.1 Your business plan

A1.1 *A current business plan is available that sets out, in detail for the current year, and in outline for the following two years, the key objectives of the organisation.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you (see also the separate Guidance document) and is not mandatory.

A1.1 Your business plan

- The plan (which may be a number of related documents or a single plan) **must** have been developed with regard to the following information:
 - Details of opening hours and access arrangements – i.e. how you deliver services and whether you offer facilities to aid access (e.g. hospital or home visits, and access arrangements for people with disabilities). *Note* that access arrangements to telephone services may be less obvious to clients than for a face-to-face service, so it is appropriate to know how a telephone service is structured to facilitate access.

Guidance to A1.1:

- When determining whether there are adequate staff to deal with telephone calls organisations should consider that advisers’ skills, competence and capacity can be tested by the demands of a telephone service. The culture of an organisation is important in allowing advisers to decide when to take a break and encouraging advisers to ask for support where they have had a particularly long or difficult call. Staffing levels and opening hours should be structured with reference to health and safety requirements (e.g. having more than one adviser able to take calls at any one time, managing the length of shifts, and considering issues relating to workspace and VDUs etc). This should ensure that advisers are not asked to work beyond their capacity. *Note* that F1.1 within the SQM should also be consulted in regard to allowing advisers sufficient time between calls to make a record of the advice given.

A1: Business Planning

Requirements:

A1.2 Reviewing your business plan

A1.2 *The current business plan is reviewed, at least every six months, and a record of that review is kept until the next audit, as a minimum.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

A1.2 Reviewing your business plan

- *Note* that you may find it appropriate to include a review of your call handling procedure in the business plan review (See C3.2).

A2: Promoting your Service

Requirements:

A2.1 Providing service information

A2.1 Information about the service is given to relevant national, regional and local services.

An answerphone message includes further information about the service for people who call out of hours.

A2.2 Logo guidance on advertising and promotion

A2.2 *Following certification, the relevant Quality Mark logo (CLS) is displayed (where possible) following the guidance in Appendix 1 of the SQM and other related guidelines.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

A2.1 Providing service information

- *Note* that organisations that are part of the Community Legal Service (CLS) will find out about the service through the CLS Directory. However there are other types of organisation that provide services to people that may wish to refer their clients for legal advice, e.g. statutory providers such as health services or social services, or other not-for-profit organisations such as those which provide housing, day centres or counselling.
- The answerphone message must inform the caller of the service opening times.
- *Note* a welcome or answerphone message could contain the information that you are part of the CLS and have a Quality Mark. This may help the client feel confident about using your service.
- It is not a requirement of the Quality Mark for answerphones to have the facility to leave messages, however organisations that do allow messages to be left, **must** state the response time aimed. This **must** not be more than three working days.

A2.2 Logo guidance on advertising and promotion

- The organisation’s contact details **must** be included on stationery and on publicity material.

A3: Equality of Access

Requirements:

A3.1 Non-discrimination in the provision of services

A3.1 *A written non-discrimination policy is in place and available to all staff covering the provision of services to clients, which precludes discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origins, sex, marital status or sexual orientation, disability, age, or religion and belief.*

A3.2 Targeting a specific client group

A3.1 *Where organisational principals or charter provide for the service to be offered only to a specific client group, this is detailed in the business plan (A1.1) and reflected in your signposting and referral procedures (B1.2)*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

A3.1 Non-discrimination in the provision of services

- This policy should address issues of communication over the telephone (e.g. language difficulties, and people who are deaf or hard of hearing). It should include what the issues may be, and how staff are expected to overcome them or assist.

Guidance to A3.1

- Text phones and/or Typetalk may be appropriate (to help people who are deaf or hard of hearing). It may also be appropriate to recruit staff that speak particular languages where the service is provided for communities in which languages other than English are commonly spoken, or to subscribe to a service such as Language Line.

A3.2 Targeting a specific client group

- The method of service delivery may be excluding to some people who would otherwise fall into the client group and therefore organisations should consider equality-of-access issues for the target group, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or whose first language is not English.

B1: Signposting and Referral

Requirements:

B1.1 Staff knowledge about when to use signposting and referral

B1.1 *Members of staff know when to use signposting and referral.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

B1.1 Staff knowledge about when to use signposting and referral

- For telephone services this includes a consideration of when a face-to-face service may be more appropriate.
- Staff in telephone services **must** be able to demonstrate how they assess whether a face-to-face service may be more appropriate for clients than a telephone service, and signpost or refer appropriately.
- *Note* that if the organisation has both a telephone and a face-to-face service, the signpost may be internal. That is, a referral may be made from the organisation’s telephone service to their face-to-face service.

Guidance to B1.1

Clients not Suitable for Telephone Advice

- Telephone advice is not suitable for all clients. Unsuitable clients can be split into two groups: those unable to fully understand the advice that is given over the telephone; and those with an issue so complex that it is very difficult to discern the facts of the case and take proper instructions over the telephone – usually this would be due to the amount of paperwork involved.
- The former group includes people with learning difficulties, very severe language issues or even mental health problems. Such clients need a level of support and assistance that may be very difficult to offer over the phone at a long distance. However, a number of clients with such problems have been advised over the telephone with the support of other professionals such as social workers, residential care staff or other, local advice workers. With such support, it is possible for these types of client to be advised over the phone.
- Where a client has an extremely complex case, suppliers may decide that it is more appropriate for the client to see someone face to face, who can work through the paperwork with them and get clear instructions. It can often be difficult for clients to describe the documents they have been sent, or to explain their exact circumstances, and it may be impractical for a very large quantity of documents to be sent to the adviser by post. In some cases, advisers may feel that a client is not telling them the full facts of the case, and in these circumstances advisers may rather have a face-to-face meeting to ask further questions and see the client’s reactions.

B1: Signposting and Referral

Requirements:

B1.2 A procedure for conducting signposting and referral

B1.2 *A procedure and process(es) for conducting signposting and referral exist and are in effective operation.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

B1.2 A procedure for conducting signposting and referral

- It is probably rare for a telephone service to take responsibility for contacting the other service on behalf of a client, i.e. a making referral, but where this happens costs information **must** be discussed with the client and noted on file. This includes cases where the referral is to a telephone service that charges clients above the rate for a national call (see F1.4 within this document).
- *Note* situations where you may not be able to assist would include those where telephone communication was not appropriate given the nature of the client or their case.
- Where the organisation is unable to provide a service to people because of communication difficulties, those people **must** be signposted to another service. Where there is no suitable alternative service, records **must** be kept and made available to the Legal Services Commission and Community Legal Service Partnerships on reasonable request (see B1.3 of the SQM).
- *Note* the organisation may wish to consider having emergency numbers on their out-of-hours answerphone message if relevant for the client group, e.g. the Samaritans or Women’s Aid.

Guidance to B1.2 Representation and Referral

- If an adviser becomes aware that a case will require representation, there will be a need to refer to a face-to-face adviser who can offer this service. Suppliers should work on the principle that where representation is necessary referral is made as early on as possible to avoid the wasteful situation where a telephone service works on the case, and then after referral the new adviser must acquaint themselves with the case and take further instructions from the client. This is not a good service from the client’s point of view.
- Occasionally, it may prove impossible to make a referral, and in such situations telephone advice services will need to work to support clients as much as possible within the remit of the service. For example, where a client must attend a hearing related to housing or debt, services will try as much as possible to equip the client to attend the hearing alone. This may involve advising on the completion of court forms, drafting statements and helping the client understand what will happen at the hearing and what information they must provide.

B2: Community Legal Service Partnership Protocols

Requirements:

B2.1 Awareness and incorporation of Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) protocols

B2.1 *Where a protocol has been produced by your local CLSP, you know what it contains, and are able to show how it has (or give reasons why it has not) been incorporated into your own procedures and processes.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

B2.1 Awareness and incorporation of Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) protocols

- *Note* that some telephone services may not fall within current partnership arrangements (e.g. where the service is provided on a regional or national basis). In these circumstances you will still need to show that you are aware of any local CLSP protocol (or protocols) or that you have established contact with the Regional Legal Services Committee (RLSC) or Regional Planning and Partnership Manager (RPPM) so that your service can be included in regional plans.

C1: Staff and Management Structures, Organisational Standards, Status Enquiries and Independence

Requirements:

C1.1 Your staff structure

C1.1 *A document is available to all members of staff that identifies them, their current jobs and lines of responsibility.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

C1.1 Your staff structure

- The structure must identify who operates and has responsibilities for the telephone service.

C3: Call-Handling Procedure and Backup System for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Failure

Requirements:

C3.1 Call-handling procedure

C3.1 A procedure and process for call-handling exists and is in effective operation.

C3.2 Monitoring and reviewing your call-handling procedure

C3.2 The effectiveness of the call-handling process is monitored and reviewed every six months as a minimum.

C3.3 Backup system for information and communications technology (ICT) failure

C3.3 Contingency plans in the event of ICT failure.

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

C3.1 Call-handling procedure

- The call-handling procedure must set out the process for handling initial calls and ongoing access arrangements for the client.
- *Note* that you may wish to consider the following points: Is there any out-of-hours information on the answerphone? Can a client leave a message and will they be called back? Is there an automated response? Is the telephone line checked regularly to ensure the public can still access the service?
- *Note* that the details of the call-handling system will depend upon issues such as the size of the organisation, the numbers of advisers providing the service, the client group, and the telephone and/or computer technology used by the service. For a small organisation, there may be only one telephone line and answerphone. The standard does not require complicated systems and expensive technology.

C3.2 Monitoring and reviewing your call-handling procedure

- *Note* that although the requirement is for monitoring and review every six months, this is a minimum. Due to the direct effect a review of the call-handling system can have on a telephone service, best practice suggests conducting a review at least every three months.
- *Note* that as monitoring and reviewing your call-handling system may result, for example, in a restructuring of opening hours, or a change in the use of telephone technology such as answerphones you may find it appropriate to include the review in your business plan (see A1.2). The information may also be used to demonstrate demand for the service to CLSPs and to other funding bodies.
- *Note* that where a service is provided by telephone, it may not be apparent how many people are having difficulties getting through or are unable to access the service at all. Where the technology is available, information collected could include the number of calls received, handled or lost. For other services, this information could be collected on a periodic basis by including questions in the user satisfaction questionnaire about how easy or difficult it was to make telephone contact.

C3.3 Backup system for information and communications technology (ICT) failure

- *Note* organisations will not be expected to demonstrate that they are providing the same volume or type of service in the event of ICT failure.
- *Note* details of the backup system for ICT failure could include maintenance agreements for telephone or computer systems with reasonable callout times, and paper-based information and record-keeping systems for times when computer-based systems are unavailable.

D2: Induction, Appraisal and Training

Requirements:

D2.1 Induction

D2.1 *An induction process exists for people who join the organisation.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

D2.1 Induction

- Induction **must** begin within two months of joining (unless justifiable reasons have been recorded), and the process **must** cover all of the areas listed below:
 - The organisation’s aims.
 - The management/staff structure and where the new post fits into it.
 - The recruit’s role and the work of their department or team.
 - The organisation’s policies on non-discrimination, quality, customer care and complaints.
 - The office procedures manual and/or other work instructions/processes relevant to the post.
 - Terms and conditions of employment, and welfare and safety matters.
 - Telephone skills training. This **must** include:
 - Communicating on the telephone, including listening and responding.
 - Understanding the nature of dealing with enquiries on the telephone.
 - Beginning and ending calls.
 - Structuring a telephone interview.
 - Handling difficult calls, such as silent calls, distressed callers or abusive calls.
- *Note* for new staff that have recent experience of telephone advice their induction should include an assessment of their telephone skills. The assessment **must** cover each of the elements above and the subsequent training should be tailored to the individuals needs.
- *Note* an organisation **must** have a policy on dealing with communication difficulties (e.g. language difficulties, and people with disabilities).
- *Note* training may be provided internally or externally.
- Records confirming induction (content and date(s)) for each individual **must** be kept (see guidance in SQM).
- *Note* that these records may be kept on individuals’ personal files (i.e. not necessarily in a central file).

D2: Induction, Appraisal and Training

Requirements:

D2.3 Individual training and development plans

D2.3 *Individual training and development plans are produced, and are reviewed at least annually, and the review is recorded.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

D2.3 Individual training and development plans

- Different skills are needed to elicit information and give help over the telephone than when working face to face. Training **must** be appropriate for the needs of the organisation and **must** specifically cover telephone skills.
- *Note* training should build upon the telephone skills given at induction. Some of the issues that training could cover in depth include:
 - Communicating on the telephone, including listening and responding.
 - Understanding the nature of dealing with enquiries on the telephone.
 - Beginning and ending calls.
 - Structuring a telephone interview.
 - Handling difficult calls, such as silent calls, distressed callers or abusive calls.
 - Considering issues relating to the organisation’s policies such as the call-handling system, confidentiality, signposting and referrals, complaints and user feedback, and use of information resources that are particularly relevant because of the method of service delivery.
 - Methods of supervising other staff (for supervisors).
- *Note* training may be provided internally or externally.
- *Note* that advisers should be given training so they are aware of the expectations of them when communication is difficult (e.g. dealing with people with language difficulties, and people with disabilities).

D3: Supervisors

Requirements:

D3.1 Named category supervisor

D3.1 *A named category supervisor is available to supervise caseworkers in each Quality Mark category of work.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

D3.1 Named category supervisors

- *Note* temporary supervisory cover or the use of a deputy supervisor may be particularly relevant depending how the telephone service is run and organised (e.g. a 24 hour service).

D3: Supervisors

Requirements:

D3.3 Supervisory skills

D3.3 Each supervisor (including sole practitioners) meets *either* a, b or c and d of the following supervisory skills standards:

- (a) Assessed as working at Level 3 or higher (within the NVQ framework) in relevant elements of the national standards (see Guidance).

Or

- (b) Training covering key supervisory skills (see Guidance) completed in the 12 months immediately preceding the Quality Mark application.

Or

- (c) Able to demonstrate experience as an effective supervisor (covering supervision of *all* of the work being done in the department) of at least one full-time member of staff (or equivalent) for at least one year in the last five years.

And

- (d) Undertaken training in giving assistance and advice over the telephone.

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help and is not mandatory.

D3.3 Supervisory skills

- *Note* that supervisors may select which of the three routes (D3.3 (a) (b) or (c)) is most suitable for them.

D4: Operation of the Supervisory Role

Requirements:

D4.1 Case allocation

D4.1 *Processes ensure that staff are allocated cases according to the role they are required to fulfil and on the basis of their skills, competence and capacity.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

D4.1 Case allocation

- Supervisors **must** be able to demonstrate that staff are allocated only work that is appropriate for their role (see individual job profiles at D1.1 of the SQM), and that it falls within their limits in terms of skills, experience and available time.
- *Note* that F1.1 within the SQM should also be consulted in regard to allowing advisers sufficient time between calls to make a record of the advice given.

Guidance to D4.1

- Advisers’ skills, competence and capacity can be tested by the demands of a telephone service. The culture of an organisation is important in allowing advisers to decide when to take a break and encouraging advisers to ask for support where they have had a particularly long or difficult call. Staffing levels and opening hours **must** be structured with reference to health and safety requirements (e.g. having more than one adviser able to take calls at any one time, managing the length of shifts, and considering issues relating to workspace and VDUs etc). This should ensure that advisers are not asked to work beyond their capacity.

F1: Individual Cases – At the Outset

Requirements:

F1.1 Recording and offering confirmation of basic information

F1.1 *Work practices show that in all cases of one-off advice the caseworker records and, unless one of the specified exemptions applies, offers written confirmation of:*

- (a) The requirements or instructions of the client.*
- (b) The advice given and, where appropriate, action to be taken by the organisation.*
- (c) The name and status of the person dealing with the matter and who to approach should the client be dissatisfied with the service provided.*
- (d) Information given and received about methods of case payment and/or case funding.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears.

Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help and is not mandatory.

F1.1 Recording and offering confirmation of basic information

- F1.1 (b) Services will need to consider how they obtain authorisation from clients to act on their behalf. For example, telephone technology allows three-way calls, so the adviser can negotiate with a third party and involve the client in the telephone call.
- At F1.1 (d) - For all telephone services the client must be advised at the outset where the client will be charged above the rate for a national call, including premium rate services. Premium rate services are those numbers that have ‘090’ dialling codes; they will normally be shown on a telephone bill as ‘premium rate call’ or ‘high premium rate service’. Where this is the case:
 - Information about the cost per minute and, where possible, the likely length of the call must be given at the beginning of the call and be displayed prominently on any publicity material and given clearly on audio promotional material.
 - Clients **must** be informed where the advice is available elsewhere from a service that does not charge above the rate for a national call.
 - Premium rate services **must** also comply with the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS) Code of Practice.
- *Note* that further details of the ICSTIS Code of Practice are available on the ICSTIS website (www.icstis.org.uk).

F1: Individual Cases – At the Outset

Requirements:

F1.3 Allowing time for maintaining client records

F1.3 Sufficient time is given in between calls to enable advisers to create, update and maintain client records.

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

F1.3 Allowing time for maintaining client records

- Advice records **must** be completed as soon as possible after the call to ensure that they are accurate. Advisers **must** complete records at the end of a shift, as a minimum, and **must** demonstrate how they recall details of the enquiry if there is a gap between taking the call and writing up the details (this also relates to D4.1).
- *Note* the advice given is more likely to rely upon a client’s description or interpretation of their situation (e.g. a determination letter from the Benefits Agency, a stamp in a passport) rather than the adviser being able to see supporting documents for confirmation. For this reason, notes may need to be more comprehensive than for face-to-face services where this supporting information is easily available and kept on file.

F4: Client Confidentiality

Requirements:

F4.1 A confidentiality procedure

F4.1 A confidentiality procedure covers all information given to the organisation about the client and their case.

The effects of telephone technology on confidentiality need to be considered in developing your confidentiality policy.

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

F4.1 A confidentiality procedure

- The following effects of telephone technology on confidentiality **must** be considered, and your approach outlined in your confidentiality procedure:
 - Callers’ numbers must not be identified where the service is provided on an anonymous basis.
 - The service must obtain agreement for returning clients’ calls (this must then be noted on the client’s file).
 - You **must** check with clients as to whether you can reveal who you are to anyone else who answers the telephone when calling a client back, and whether you can leave a message on the client’s answerphone.
 - *Note* that a commonsense view should be taken regarding obtaining a client’s agreement before returning a call. For example, where a client has left a number on an answerphone or included it in a letter requesting information, this will be taken as agreement for the call to be returned. Once advisers have checked that they can call clients, this permission will be considered to be ongoing unless the client states otherwise.
 - The service **must** block its number in outgoing calls or provide reasons for not doing so (e.g. not relevant for call types).
 - *Note* that many clients use telephone services for their anonymity. It is good practice for the service to block its own number in outgoing calls, particularly where the provider is dealing with sensitive issues and/or vulnerable client groups. The reason for this is to prevent other people from dialling 1471 and discovering that the client has called the provider. However, for some services, this may not be relevant.
 - Clients **must** be made aware when there is the possibility of “listening in” or the recording of conversations for the purposes of supervision or training, so that clients can have the opportunity to opt out of the process or choose not to continue with the call.
 - *Note* that some services use “listening in” or the recording of conversations for supervision or training purposes. To make clients aware when this is a possibility an automated message could be used. Some services inform clients of this possibility only when the call is actually listened in to.
 - Telephone services **must** have systems to ensure that confidential information held on client records is only discussed after establishing the identity of the caller.
 - If the service has a mechanism for identifying callers’ numbers, you **must** demonstrate that it is only revealed to advisers on a “need to know” basis. Where the number is used to link the call to a client’s records on a computer database, you **must** ensure they have established the caller’s identity before revealing any information.

Continued over

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- *Note* that for the purposes of monitoring where calls are coming from, only the first part of the telephone number needs to be identified. Where the caller does not wish to give their name, services may wish to consider giving callers a reference number so that their records can be accessed if they call again.
- *Note* that it is important to recognise that callers may not always be able to discuss their enquiry fully because of their situation, and it may be more appropriate for them to call back or for the service to return their call at a different time.

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F4: Client Confidentiality

Requirements:

F4.3 Privacy

F4.3 *Arrangements are in place to ensure privacy in meetings with clients.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

F4.3 Privacy

- For telephone services ‘meetings’ includes all interactions with the client, including the retrieval of messages from an answerphone.

G1: Complaints

Requirements:

G1.1 Informing clients about how and to whom they should complain

G1.1 *Work practices show that clients have information about what to do if they have a problem with the service provided.*

G1.2 Complaints procedure

G1.2 *There is a procedure for identifying and dealing with complaints.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

G1.1 Informing clients about how and to whom they should complain

- Wherever a file has been opened (see F1.2 of the SQM for the definition of when a file is opened), you **must** provide details of how and to whom the client should complain, in writing (e.g. by post or fax), at the outset of the case. This **must** be met for all services, including telephone providers.
- *Note* that some clients may ask not to receive written correspondence, where this is the case (other than where the service is anonymous) you should refer to ‘exceptional circumstances’ in F1.2 of the SQM definition.
- *Note* that for one-off advice given by telephone, where the caller declines the offer of written confirmation, verbal or written complaints information need only be provided where the caller expresses dissatisfaction or, for some other reason, you consider that they may not be happy with the service provided (for further information, please see the SQM Guidance).

G1.2 Complaints procedure

- This needs to include services provided by telephone.

G2: Client Satisfaction Feedback

Requirements:

G2.1 Client feedback procedure

G2.1 *A client satisfaction feedback procedure is in place that includes all of the following:*

- (a) A comprehensive feedback mechanism.*
- (b) Details on how and when the client gives feedback.*
- (c) The frequency and methodology of analysis of submitted feedback.*

Definitions:

The definitions below qualify the requirement and are mandatory where the word “must” appears. Where the sentence or paragraph begins with the word “Note”, it contains information to help you and is not mandatory.

G2.1 Client feedback procedure

- You **must** have a written procedure that encourages clients to provide feedback about the quality of service that they have received. *Note* that obtaining feedback in one-off advice may need to be specifically addressed, particularly where one-off advice is commonplace.

Guidance to G2.1

- Feedback may be sought at the end of a call, either by the adviser asking a number of questions or, for more impartial feedback, by passing the caller on to a supervisor or researcher. For organisations with the technology, an automated feedback service could be provided. Clients could also be asked for their telephone numbers and permission to call on a separate occasion for feedback, or for their address for surveys.

Quality Concerns and Observations

Observations

Examples of **observations** include: (1) File review is in effective operation but on audit it is identified that small proportions of corrective action have not been closed out; (2) Only 90% of file reviews are undertaken correctly but there is evidence that the procedure is working under normal circumstances; (3) A procedure or plan, required to be updated every six months, was updated only after eight months.

Classification of Quality Concerns, by requirement

Where an auditor has not been able to identify sufficient evidence to satisfy the requirements, this will lead to a Quality Concern being recorded. The requirements have been classified as “**Critical**” and “**General**” in the same way as the requirements within the SQM.

The following table is based on the assumption that documented plans/procedures were submitted with the Quality Mark application. Where any required documented plans/procedures are not submitted with the application, and are therefore not available during the desktop audit, the recommendation will be to refuse the application.

Additional Specialist Telephone Requirement	Preliminary Audit	Pre and Post QM Audit	Written Procedures
A1.1	General	General	Business Plan
A1.2	General	General	
A2.1	General	General	
A2.2	General	General	
A3.1	Critical	Critical	Non-discrimination policy
B1.1	General	General	
B1.2	General	General	Signposting and referral procedure
B2.1	General	General	
C1.1	General	General	
C3.1	General	General	Call-handling procedure
C3.2	General	General	
C3.3	General	General	
D2.1	General	General	
D2.3	General	Critical	
D3.1	Critical	Critical	
D3.3	Critical	Critical	
D4.1	Critical	Critical	
D4.2	Critical	Critical	
F1.1	Critical	Critical	
F1.3	Critical	Critical	
F1.4	Critical	Critical	
F4.1	General	General	Confidentiality procedure
F4.3	General	General	
G1.1	Critical	Critical	
G1.2	Critical	Critical	Complaints procedure
G2.1	General	General	Client feedback procedure