
Quality Mark Standard

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDANCE FOR

TELEPHONE SERVICES

*Community
Legal Service*



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Version 2

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1 Introduction

1.1 This booklet sets out new guidance relating to the Quality Mark. This guidance is specifically for information, advice and legal services provided by telephone. This booklet should be read in conjunction with the Quality Mark standard and workbooks published in April 2000 by the Legal Services Commission (LSC); copies are available from the LSC or on the website www.legalservices.gov.uk .

1.2 From April 2002 any organisation that provides, by telephone, legal information, advice or services as a part or all of its work will be audited against these requirements. This may include national, regional or local telephone helplines, as well as advice providers who offer some telephone provision in addition to running a face-to-face service. Prior to this date, any service may choose to apply for the Telephone Services Quality Mark. Those organisations that provide a service solely by telephone will find this standard relevant to their work, and will be able to apply immediately using this guidance.

1.3 The Quality Mark applies to any organisation that, wholly or in part, provides information and/or advice on an individual's rights and the law. The first Quality Mark standard concentrated mainly on services delivered face to face, but it was always recognised that there were additional issues that needed to be considered for services provided by other means.

1.4 The guidance was developed by a working group consisting of individual telephone service providers from the voluntary and public sectors, including the Advice Services Alliance, LSC, Lord Chancellor's Department, National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, Shelter, Telephone Helplines Association and West Yorkshire Trading Standards. A written consultation and two focus groups provided extra suggestions for guidance and minor changes in requirements.

2 The Main Differences from the Existing Quality Mark

2.1 It is generally agreed that the Quality Mark is applicable to a wide range of organisations, and therefore there is no need for any substantial change to the Quality Mark standard itself. However, there is a need for additional requirements and guidance for services delivered by telephone, particularly in the areas of access to service and confidentiality. In addition, the evidence for certain aspects of service will be different from that required for face-to-face services.

2.2 The guidance will be incorporated into the existing Quality Mark standard and workbook during 2001. In the meantime, this booklet gives guidance on how to interpret the Quality Mark standards for organisations delivering a service by telephone.

2.3 The additional requirements and guidance have been developed to provide an equivalent level of quality assurance for telephone services to that which exists for face-to-face services. In the future, developments such as measuring the technical quality of advice and identifying

competencies will be undertaken as part of a review of the entire Quality Mark family of standards.

3 The Levels of Quality Mark

3.1 Self-Help Information

3.1.1 The Self-Help Information level is not available for telephone services at present. Whilst it is conceivable that people may be able to access legal information via a telephone menu system, there were concerns throughout the consultation that where such a service stood alone, i.e. was not part of an organisation that provided information or advice through an operator, it would be unwieldy and therefore potentially expensive, and would not be able to signpost clients effectively to relevant providers within the Community Legal Service (CLS). A standard would also need to ensure that the information given was accurate, comprehensive and up to date, and could be accessed within a reasonable time-scale. As such, a telephone services self-help standard would need to substantially exceed the requirements of the existing self-help Quality Mark.

3.1.2 In addition, one of the main requirements of the Quality Mark is access to the CLS Directory, and it is unlikely that any other organisation would find it advantageous to duplicate this service. Organisations that have a menu-driven system as part of a service that includes a staffed telephone line, i.e. at the Information, General Help or Specialist Help levels, will have the menu-driven service audited under those levels.

3.1.3 The non-availability of a self-help Quality Mark will be kept under review, and anyone who is interested in providing a self-help information only telephone service should contact the Supplier Development Group of the LSC by e-mail on qualitymark@legalservices.gov.uk.

3.2 Assisted Information

3.2.1 This level is for organisations that have a dedicated information service, although this does not have to be the sole purpose of the organisation. There should be staff who are able to help clients to access information, to identify where a client needs further information or advice and to help clients select an appropriate service where they can go if they need advice. This service will *not* provide advice.

3.2.2 For telephone service providers, the additional requirements and guidance should be read in conjunction with the Assisted Information Level Quality Mark.

3.3 General Help

3.3.1 The Quality Mark defines general help services as services that:

- Diagnose clients' problems.
- Give information and explain options.
- Identify further action that the client can take.
- Give basic assistance, e.g. filling in basic forms, contacting third parties to seek information.

These activities will generally be performed in one interview although there may be some follow-up work. The client then retains responsibility for further action.

3.3.2 For telephone service providers, the additional requirements and guidance should be read in conjunction with the General Help and General Help with Casework Quality Marks.

3.4 General Help with Casework

3.4.1 The service may also be providing a casework service, i.e. taking action on behalf of clients in order to move the case on. This may include negotiation and advocacy on the client's behalf to third parties on the telephone, by letter or face to face. By definition, most cases will involve follow-up work, with the service provider retaining responsibility for this.

3.4.2 For telephone service providers, the additional requirements and guidance should be read in conjunction with the General Help and General Help with Casework Quality Marks.

3.5 Specialist Help

3.5.1 There is a major project underway to rewrite the Specialist Help Quality Mark standard to incorporate provisions expressly relevant to telephone service providers. The revised standard will be based on the present Legal Aid Franchise Quality Assurance Standard (LAFQAS). Until the revised specialist standard is published in spring 2001, telephone service providers can apply for certification using LAFQAS, and they will be required to meet the additional requirements for telephone services at the General Help standard.

3.5.2 Telephone services that apply for a specialist contract as part of the extended Methods of Delivery pilot will be required to comply with the guidance at the General Help level in this document in addition to LAFQAS, pending the introduction of the Specialist Help Quality Mark.

3.5.3 The Specialist Help Quality Mark will be available from spring 2001.

4 Applications and Deadlines

4.1 Telephone service providers who wish to have their service advertised in the CLS Directory after the October 2001 edition will have to formally commit to apply for the Quality Mark by **1st August 2001**.

4.2 Those organisations that provide telephone services and make a commitment to apply by 1st August 2001 will be required to apply for the Quality Mark by 2nd April 2002 in order to remain in the Directory.

4.3 The audit process for telephone services will be the same as that for relevant level of the Quality Mark standard.

4.4 Organisations that wish to apply immediately may do so; the deadlines indicated above relate to Directory entries only. Applications are welcome at any time.

5 How to Use this Guidance

- 5.1 Read the requirements in the Quality Mark standard for the different levels.
- 5.2 Decide which level it is appropriate for your organisation to apply for.
- 5.3 Check the guidance at the chosen level to see if there are any amendments that relate specifically to telephone services.

6 Example

6.1 An organisation provides face-to-face legal advice to the public five days a week and offers a telephone advice service three days a week. The General or Specialist Help levels of the Quality Mark are appropriate for organisations that give advice, and in this example the General Help level is applied for¹.

6.2 Pages 34 to 60 of the Quality Mark standard contain the requirements for General Help, which should be consulted in addition to pages 18 to 30 of this guidance. The telephone workbook² that has been developed as part of the application process for telephone services includes the requirements from both documents.

6.3 More specifically, Section A of the original Quality Mark standard requires a plan/strategy to describe the future of the advice service. A telephone service must consider the additional points on pages 19 to 20 of this guidance when drawing up or reviewing the plan.

7 Logos and Badging

Telephone services will receive a badge as either an “information point” or a “help point” according to the level applied for. The badge will not contain a reference to the telephone service, but this information will be contained in the CLS Directory and on any publicity the organisation itself produces.

8 Further Help

If you want any further help or information, please contact Clare Powell-Evans, Supplier Development Group, on 020 7759 0397 or e-mail qualitymark@legalservices.gov.uk.

¹ Organisations that give advice cannot apply for the Information level of the Quality Mark.

² The application form and workbook for telephone services will be available from the regional offices of the LSC by the end of March 2001, or on the LSC website.

Quality Mark
ASSISTED INFORMATION

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement A1	The service should be appropriate to the needs of the local / target community
A1.2	<p>To make the standard more applicable to a telephone service, the service plan should include details of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A call-handling system • Any backup system for information and communications technology (ICT) failure. • The structure of the call centre or organisation; this can be shown in a “family tree”. • Arrangements to ensure equality of access for the target group, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing or whose first language is not English, and consideration of evening and weekend opening.

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE - GUIDANCE

A1.2 Access arrangements to telephone services may be less obvious to clients than for a face-to-face service, so it is important to know how a telephone service is structured to facilitate access. There are other access issues that are relevant to telephone services, e.g. are there text-messaging facilities for people who are deaf or hard of hearing? Is there an interpretation service for people whose first language is not English?

Providers should show that they are aware of the needs of their client group and consider what provisions are necessary according to these needs. For example, textphones and/or Typetalk may be appropriate. It may be appropriate to recruit staff with language skills where the service is provided for communities in which languages other than English are commonly spoken, or subscribe to a service such as Language Line. Advisers should be given training so that they are aware of the expectations of them where communication is difficult.

Where the organisation is unable to provide a service to people because of communication difficulties, they must be actively 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 (CLS) partnerships (CLSPs) on reasonable request.

The organisation's postal address should be included on stationery and on publicity material.

The call-handling system should explain the initial and ongoing access arrangements for the client. You may wish to consider the following points: Is there an answerphone message? Is there any out-of-hours information? Can a client leave a message and will they be called back? Is there an automated response?

The details of the call-handling system will depend upon issues such as the size of the organisation, the number 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. However the service is structured, it is important that the system for accessing the service and dealing with calls is clear to clients and to workers.

Details of any backup system for ICT failure could include maintenance agreements with reasonable callout times for telephone or computer systems, and paper-based information and record-keeping systems for times when computer-based systems are unavailable. Organisations will not be expected to demonstrate that they are providing the same volume or type of service in the event of ICT failure, but they must show that they have contingency plans.

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE	
Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement A2	The community should be made aware of the service that is being offered
A2.1	<p>Information about the service should be given to relevant national, regional and local services.</p> <p>An answerphone message, if there is one, should include further information about the service for people who call out of hours.</p>
A2.2	Following certification, the CLS logo should be displayed, where possible.

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE - GUIDANCE	
A2.1	Organisations that are part of the CLS will find out about the service through the CLS Directory. However there are other types of organisation that provide services to people, which 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.
A2.2	It is not possible to “display” a logo over the telephone, but you are expected to use the logo on any stationery and publicity material. 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. However, we recognise that answerphones may already contain a lot of information for the client to take in, and there may be a limit to the length of message ; therefore this is not compulsory.

B. SEAMLESS SERVICE Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement B2	Active signposting should be undertaken, having regard to the local Community Legal Service partnerships
B2.1	Active signposting should be undertaken to local, regional or national services as relevant.

SEAMLESS SERVICE - GUIDANCE	
<p>B2.1 There are many telephone and other services that work at a national or regional level, rather than a local level, without corresponding CLSPs. Active signposting should therefore be undertaken to local, regional or national services as relevant. The organisation may wish to consider having emergency numbers on their out-of-hours answer message if relevant for the client group, e.g. the Samaritans or Women’s Aid.</p>	

C. RUNNING THE ORGANISATION Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement C2	Legal service providers ensure availability of resources to provide the service when and where needed
C2.1	The call-handling system must be monitored and considered in the review of service.

C. RUNNING THE ORGANISATION - GUIDANCE	
<p>C2.1 You will see from the guidance for requirement A1 that telephone services should include the way they handle calls in their initial service plan. Services will need to monitor the effectiveness of this call-handling system, as the demand for the service is not so immediately apparent as for face-to-face services where there may be long queues in a waiting room.</p> <p>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 asking how easy or difficult it was to make telephone contact.</p> <p>The review of service required by C2 should include the results of any such call monitoring. This may result, for example, in a restructuring of opening hours or a change in the use of telephone technology such as answerphones. The information may also be used to demonstrate demand for the service to CLSPs and to other funding bodies.</p>	

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement D2	Training and development are provided for all staff who work within the service
D2.1	Services must show how individual training and development plans have addressed telephone advice skills.

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT - GUIDANCE	
<p>D2.1 There are different skills needed to elicit information and give help over the telephone than when working face to face. Training should be appropriate for the needs of the organisation.</p> <p>Some of the issues that training could cover include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Supervising other staff (for supervisors). <p>Training may be provided internally or externally.</p>	

E. RUNNING THE SERVICE	Members of the Community Legal Service must have processes and procedures that ensure an effective and efficient service to their clients.
Requirements for E	None for the Information standard

F. MEETING CLIENTS' NEEDS Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement F1	Clients receive information relevant to their needs
F1.5	<p>The effects of telephone technology on confidentiality need to be considered, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Callers' numbers must not be identified where the service is provided on an anonymous basis. • The service must obtain agreement for returning clients' calls. • The service must consider blocking its number in outgoing calls; where it does not block the outgoing number, the service will need to provide reasons why not. • 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 they can opt out of the process or choose whether or not to continue with the call. <p>Telephone services need to have systems to ensure that confidential information on client records is only discussed after establishing the identity of the caller.</p>

F. MEETING CLIENTS' NEEDS - GUIDANCE

F1.5 If the service has a mechanism for identifying callers' numbers, providers will need to demonstrate that it is only revealed to advisers on a "need to know" basis. Where the number is used to link the call to the client's records on a computer database, advisers should ensure that they have established the caller's identity before revealing confidential information. 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 consider giving callers a reference number so that their records can be accessed if they call again.

A common sense 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. Organisations should also check with clients as to whether they can reveal who they are to anyone else who answers the telephone when calling a client, and whether they can leave a message on the client's answerphone.

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 provider has called the client. However, for some services, this may not be relevant.

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 response could be used. Some services inform clients of this possibility only when the call is actually listened in to.

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.

Assisted Information Standard

Requirement F2.1	Costing structures must be transparent and explained at the outset
F2.1	<p>Services are required to inform clients where premium rates apply.</p> <p>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 in any audio promotional material.</p> <p>Clients must also be informed where the service is available elsewhere from a service that does not use premium rates.</p> <p>Premium rate services must also comply with the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS) Code of Practice.</p>

F. MEETING CLIENTS' NEEDS - GUIDANCE

F2.1 Further details of the ICSTIS Code of Practice are available on their website (www.icstis.org.uk).

G. COMMITMENT TO QUALITY Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement G1	A complaints process in operation
G1.1	Complaints information should be given on client care letters and relevant publicity materials and leaflets.

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY - GUIDANCE	
<p>G1.1 During telephone conversations, it is sufficient to tell clients about the organisation's complaints procedure if they are clearly unhappy with the service, rather than during every call. It is important, therefore, to have a clear definition of a complaint, and to give training to staff so that they know when to give details of the complaints procedure.</p> <p>However, details of the complaints procedure should be given on client care letters as well as relevant publicity materials and leaflets.</p>	

Quality Mark
GENERAL HELP
GENERAL HELP WITH CASEWORK

General Standard (& General With Casework)

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE	
Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement A1	The service should be appropriate to the needs of the local / target community
A1.2	<p>To make the standard more appropriate to a telephone service, the service plan should include details of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A call-handling system• Any backup system for information and communications technology (ICT) failure.• The structure of the call centre or organisation; this can be provided in a family tree.• Arrangements to ensure equality of access for the target group, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing or whose first language is not English, and consideration of evening and weekend opening.

General Standard (& General With Casework)

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE - GUIDANCE

A1.2 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. There are other access issues that are relevant to telephone services, e.g. are there text-messaging facilities for people who are deaf or hard of hearing? Is there an interpretation service for people whose first language is not English?

Providers should show that they are aware of the needs of their client group and consider what provisions are necessary according to these needs. For example, textphones and/or Typetalk may be appropriate. It may be appropriate to recruit staff with particular language skills where the service is provided for communities in which languages other than English are commonly spoken, or subscribe to a service such as Language Line. Advisers should be given training so they are aware of the expectations of them where communication is difficult.

Where the organisation is unable to provide a service to people because of communication difficulties, they must be actively 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 (CLS) partnerships (CLSPs) on reasonable request.

The organisation's postal address should be included on stationery and on publicity material.

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The details of the call-handling system will depend upon issues such as the size of the organisation, the number 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. However the service is structured, it is important that the system for accessing the service and dealing with calls is clear to clients and to workers.

Details of any backup system for ICT failure could include maintenance agreements with reasonable callout times for telephone or computer systems, and paper-based information and record-keeping systems for times when computer-based systems are unavailable. Organisations will not be expected to demonstrate that they are providing the same volume or type of service in the event of ICT failure, but they must show that they have contingency plans.

General Standard (& General With Casework)

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE	
Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement A2	The community should be made aware of the service that is being offered
A2.1	Information about the service should be given to relevant national, regional and local services. An answerphone message, if there is one, should include further information about the service for people who call out of hours.
A2.2	Following certification, the CLS logo should be displayed, where possible.

A. ACCESS TO SERVICE - GUIDANCE	
A2.1	Organisations that are part of the CLS will find out about the service through the CLS Directory. However there are other types of organisation that provide services to people, which 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.
A2.2	It is not possible to “display” a logo over the telephone, but you are expected to use the logo on any stationery and publicity material. 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. However, we recognise that answerphones may already contain a lot of information for the client to take in, and there may be a limit to the length of message ; therefore this is not compulsory.

General Standard (& General With Casework)

B. SEAMLESS SERVICE Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement B1	Clients should receive timely service from an appropriate source either by active signposting or referral
B1.8	<p>Telephone services should discuss with clients the cost implications of actively signposting or referring them to other services, and give confirmation of costs in writing.</p> <p>Services should demonstrate that they assess whether a face-to-face service may be more appropriate for clients.</p>
Requirement B2	Active signposting should be undertaken having regard to the local Community Legal Service partnerships
B2.1	Active signposting should be undertaken to local, regional or national services as relevant.

B. SEAMLESS SERVICE - GUIDANCE	
B1.8	<p>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, clients <i>must</i> have the cost implications confirmed in writing. This includes cases where the referral is to a premium rate service.</p> <p>To demonstrate that an assessment is made of whether a client needs face-to-face advice, a requirement for such an assessment could be included in the organisation's active signposting and referrals policy; it should be ensured that all advisers are aware of this requirement.</p>
B2.1	<p>There are many telephone and other services that work at a national or regional level rather than at a local level, without corresponding CLSPs. Active signposting should therefore be undertaken to local, regional or national services as relevant. The organisation may wish to consider having emergency numbers on their out-of-hours answer message if relevant for the client group, e.g. the Samaritans or Women's Aid.</p>

General Standard (& General With Casework)

C. RUNNING THE ORGANISATION Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement C2	Legal service providers ensure availability of resources to provide the service when and where needed
C2.1	The call-handling system must be monitored and considered in the review of service.

C. RUNNING THE ORGANISATION - GUIDANCE	
C2.1	<p>You will see from the guidance for requirement A1 that telephone services should include the way they handle calls in their initial service plan. Services will need to monitor the effectiveness of this call-handling system, as the demand for the service is not so immediately apparent as for face-to-face services where there may be long queues in a waiting room.</p> <p>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 asking how easy or difficult it was to make telephone contact.</p> <p>The review of service required by C2 should include the results of any such call monitoring. This may result, for example, in a restructuring of opening hours, or a change in the use of telephone technology such as answerphones. The information may also be used to demonstrate demand for the service to CLSPs and to other funding bodies.</p>

General Standard (& General With Casework)

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement D2	Training and development are provided for all staff who work within the service
D2.3	Services must show how individual training and development plans have addressed telephone advice skills.
Requirement D4	Procedures to ensure clients get advice from the most appropriate source taking account of the knowledge and skills of staff
D4.1	The accessibility of a supervisor is particularly relevant to telephone services.
D4.3	The system of allocating work to advisers must include procedures to avoid burn-out.
Requirement D5	Cases are dealt with by competent staff
D5.1 and D5.2	These requirements apply <i>in full</i> to those organisations providing a casework service by telephone.

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT – GUIDANCE
<p>D2.3 Different skills are needed to elicit information and give help over the telephone than when working face to face. Training should be appropriate for the needs of the organisation.</p> <p>Some of the issues that training could cover include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Supervising other staff (for supervisors). <p>Training may be provided internally or externally.</p>

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT – GUIDANCE

D4.1 Availability of supervision at all times that advice (and casework, if applicable) is undertaken is a key requirement of the Quality Mark at the General Help level and above.

Regular supervision meetings should be held as appropriate to the experience of the adviser. If the supervisor is not physically present, they must be contactable, e.g. by telephone. If the supervisor is not based at the same site as the adviser/caseworker, formal contact should be made weekly with each adviser. This may include the monitoring of calls and/or records of calls, or discussion of the work the adviser has undertaken. There must be a face-to-face supervision meeting at least monthly. Supervisors should demonstrate how they undertake supervisory tasks such as becoming familiar with advisers' capabilities and ensuring the advisers do not take on work beyond their capacity.

It is important that supervisors are aware of the practical difficulties of providing support when the adviser is at a different location from the supervisor. Supervisors should ensure that advisers feel able to contact them. This should be raised as a point of concern in supervision where advisers are not making contact regularly.

A deputy, ideally with the same knowledge and experience of the advice subject, should be appointed for any period that the supervisor is absent or not contactable, e.g. due to a holiday or when working different hours to the adviser. This is particularly relevant when a telephone service operates for 24 hours. If the deputy does not have equivalent knowledge and experience to the supervisor, this must be reflected in the level of service that is offered during the supervisor's unavailability. As a minimum, the deputy should have at least two years' ongoing experience of the advice (and casework, if applicable) that the organisation offers.

For longer absences, e.g. holidays and sickness, the use of a deputy should not exceed four weeks, nor be a continually repeated occurrence. Following a period of absence, the casework supervisor should demonstrate that they have received feedback from the deputy and that they have undertaken a review of advisers' casework. Where the casework supervisor is part time, formal contact must be made at least once a week between the casework supervisor and any advisers undertaking casework, including the checking of cases. The casework supervisor will need to demonstrate they have received feedback from the deputy in the above situations.

Effective supervision arrangements are particularly important in the case of a virtual call centre, i.e. where advisers are based at many different sites linked by a common telephone system, giving the appearance to the client of being at one site. Auditors will seek evidence to ensure that advisers and caseworkers have access to the knowledge, experience and support of a supervisor or suitable deputy at all times.

General Standard (& General With Casework)

D. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT – GUIDANCE

D4.3 Supervisors need to ensure that there is sufficient time between calls for completing necessary paperwork, particularly a record of advice. Advice records should be completed as soon as possible after the call to ensure that they are accurate. Advisers should 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 time lapse between taking the call and writing up.

Burn-out

Defined as “physical or emotional exhaustion, especially caused by stress” – *Oxford Reference Dictionary*.

Systems to avoid burn-out should be developed. The culture of an organisation is important in allowing advisers control over taking a break and asking for support where they have had a particularly long or difficult call. Staffing levels and opening hours should be considered accordingly (e.g. having more than one adviser able to take calls at any time, and managing the length of shifts). Organisations should also be aware of health and safety requirements, e.g. those relating to workspace and VDUs etc.

D5 Casework over the telephone is, perhaps, relatively new, but is being undertaken by some services and is likely to increase. In addition to the requirements of D5 (from the standard General Help workbook), 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.

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E. RUNNING THE SERVICE Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement E1	Client information and case files are well organised
E1.6	Supervisors should give advisers time in between calls to allow records to be maintained.

E. RUNNING THE SERVICE - GUIDANCE	
Requirement E1	Client information and case files are well organised
E1.6 Organisations must record information and advice given on client records. Relating to D4, supervisors should give advisers time in between calls to allow records to be kept. Record keeping is vital for telephone services. 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 advice where this supporting information is easily available and kept on file.	

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F. MEETING CLIENTS' NEEDS Amendments to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement F2.3	Costing structures must be transparent and explained at the outset
F2.3	<p>Services should inform clients where premium rates apply.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Clients must also be informed where the service is available elsewhere from a service that does not use premium rates.</p> <p>Premium rate services must also comply with the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS) Code of Practice.</p>
Requirement F3	Clients are entitled to confidentiality, privacy and fair treatment
F3.2	<p>The effects of telephone technology on confidentiality need to be considered, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Callers' numbers must not be identified where the service is provided on an anonymous basis. • The service must obtain agreement for returning clients' calls. • The service must consider blocking its number in outgoing calls; where it does not block the outgoing number, they will need to provide reasons why not. • 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 they can opt out of the process or choose whether or not to continue with the call. <p>Telephone services need to have systems to ensure that confidential information held on client records is only discussed after establishing the identity of the caller.</p> <p>The service must be provided in confidential surroundings. This also applies to retrieving messages from an answerphone.</p>

F. MEETING CLIENTS' NEEDS - GUIDANCE

F2.3 Further details of the ICSTIS Code of Practice are available on their website (www.icstis.org.uk).

F3.2 If the service has a mechanism for identifying callers' numbers, providers will need to demonstrate that it is only revealed to advisers on a "need to know" basis. Where the number is used to link the call to client's records on a computer database, advisers should ensure they have established the caller's identity before revealing any information. 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.

A common sense 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. Organisations should also check with clients as to whether they can reveal who they are to anyone else who answers the telephone when calling a client, and whether they can leave a message on the client's answerphone.

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 provider has called the client. However, for some services, this may not be relevant.

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.

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.

The organisation must ensure that calls cannot be overheard by members of the public or other visitors, without the client's consent.

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G. COMMITMENT TO QUALITY Amendment to the Quality Mark requirements, applicable to telephone services	
Requirement G1	A clear complaints process in operation
G1.1	Complaints information should be given on client care letters and relevant publicity materials and leaflets.
Requirement G3	There is a facility for clients to participate in the development of the service provided
G3.1, G3.2 and G3.3	The requirements for feedback are applicable to telephone services.

G. COMMITMENT TO QUALITY - GUIDANCE
<p>G1.1 During telephone conversations, it is sufficient to tell clients about the organisation’s complaints procedure only if they are clearly unhappy with the service, rather than during every call. It is important, therefore, to have a clear definition of a complaint and to give training to staff so that they know when to give details of the complaints procedure.</p> <p>However, details of the complaints procedure should be given on client care letters as well as relevant publicity materials and leaflets.</p> <p>G3.1, G3.2 and G3.3 Because of their nature, telephone services may not always have names and addresses of clients. However, feedback may be given 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 can 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. Where the service sends information out to a client, a feedback form could also be included.</p>

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Annex 1

Summary of Changes

This Annex contains a summary of the changes that have been made to the requirements and guidance contained in the *Quality Mark Standard: Additional Requirements and Guidance for Telephone Services*, December 2000.

A2.2, page 21, previously read, “The requirement to display the logo raises different issues for telephone services.”

References to General level and General with Casework level have been replaced with General Help and General Help with Casework as appropriate throughout.