



Disclosure &
Barring Service

Overview Document 1

(Incorporating Method Product MP1)

Overview of the Quality Assurance Framework

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Please note

It should be noted that QAF does not govern the returning of cases via the CRM system (the completion and closure of cases using the CRM ‘Response Buttons’).

The use of the ‘Response Buttons’ (*Conflict; No Trace Found; Not Relevant; Relevant No Info Disclosed* etc.) is covered by separate guidance that is owned and maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), which may be changed or updated at any time.

Introduction

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is the prescribed decision-making framework for the processing, consideration and disclosure of police information for Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks. QAF was developed following the Bichard Enquiry (Recommendation 20) and reflects Part V of the Police Act 1997 (and as amended) and the direction of the courts following consideration of challenges to disclosure.

The monitoring of compliance with QAF process is undertaken by the Standards and Compliance Unit (SCU). SCU falls under the joint governance of ACPO and the DBS. The remit of the SCU is to maintain and develop QAF; to provide QAF support and guidance to forces and to provide assurance to ACPO, DBS and the Home Office on the safe use of QAF, by the means of compliance and support activity.

The objective of QAF is to deliver a standard, to which all Disclosure Units will operate, with regard to decision-making, risk assessment, relevance considerations, audit provision and quality assurance.

This document provides an overview of the Audit Trail documents, Method Products and related supporting Guidance Documents that, together, form QAF.

In summary, QAF serves to;

- Document the search criteria used by Disclosure Units when searching their local intelligence systems and the circumstances under which they are to be used
- Standardise the process used to determine whether or not information is relevant and ought to be disclosed
- Provide guidance in reaching a decision to disclose or not disclose and to document the rationale used in reaching this decision within a reasonable audit trail
- Promote a minimum standard for a quality assurance regime to be in place at each Disclosure Unit, to promote the monitoring/improvement/maintenance of quality standards
- Ensure that the results of these quality assurance checks are documented and that the appropriate corrective action is taken and recorded

OV1 – QAF Overview Product

This document, the OV1, should be the 'first port of call' for anybody who is new to QAF as it gives an overview of the objectives of QAF, together with an overview of how it is structured, and how each piece of the QAF product set is designed to be used. It also gives an example of the QAF process for a 'generic' Enhanced Application.

Document Structure

This document contains the following sections in the order listed;

- An overview of QAF Audit Trail Document set
- An overview of QAF Method Product set
- A description of the flow of work through a 'generic' Disclosure Application

Product Set Overview

QAF consists of a number of products that will assist Disclosure Unit staff in processing Local Information Search Requests received for Enhanced applications. Other than this Overview Product, these products fall into four distinct categories:

- 'AT' Audit Trail Products (AT1, AT2, AT3)
- 'MP' Method Products (MP2, MP3, MP4, MP6, MP7a, MP7b, MP8)
- Quality Assurance Products (Author's Note: to be revised)
- 'GD' Guidance Documents (GD1, GD2, GD3, GD4, GD5*)

**GD5 is in corporate into the GD2*

Reference documents that will provide further assistance and guidance are also signposted throughout QAF. These documents are held and made available as resource material through our website [page](#).

The Audit Trail documents (ATs)

The three Audit Trail documents have three separate functions:

- **AT1** – a record of all local police intelligence databases, detailing when and how each should be searched (this is specific to each and every Disclosure Unit).
Each AT1 is unique - it is specific to your Disclosure Unit and records:
 - The information sources (databases; physical files etc.) that are to be searched
 - When these information sources are to be searched
 - The search criteria to be used during searching
 - Force-specific policies
- **AT2** – used to record all intelligence records ('Hits') that pass the MP Filtering stage, after being found by following the processes detailed in the AT1
- **AT3** – used to record the thought process (the *rationales*) and decisions made when evaluating information; if disclosure is to be made, it also records the wording of the disclosure

The Method Products (MPs)

There are eight MPs, seven of which are step-by-step flow charts, accompanied by associated guidance. The seven each covers a different aspect of the assessment and decision-making process.

The eighth Method Product is MP8 which provides guidance to the Chief Officer.

The Method Products are split into information **filtering** and information **assessment**.

Filtering Stage

The first stage of the process; some information will be thrown out at this stage as it is not of interest. The AT2 (see above) records the outcomes from this filtering stage:

- **MP1** – used only for illustrative purposes within this document
- **MP2** – used when attempting to match the applicant with the information held
- **MP3** – used when considering relevance of non-conviction information
- **MP4** – used when considering 3rd Party* access to the vulnerable
- ****MP5** – this MP was retired when QAF was revised in 2009**
- **MP6** - used when considering relevance of information which is background to a conviction recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC)

**3rd Party – an individual with a relationship to the applicant or the applicant's home address*

Assessment Stage

Information which does not pass the required tests at MP7 will be thrown out here and the AT3 (see above) records the outcomes from this stage:

- **MP7a** – considerations of Relevance, Substantiation and Proportionality
- **MP7b** – considerations of the safety aspects of disclosing information

QAF Method Products MP2, MP3, MP4 and MP6 are used to help determine potential relevancy and instruct the person undertaking the search when to record information within the audit trail. The AT2 is then used to record potentially relevant information (where no potentially relevant information is identified, an AT2 audit document will not be generated).

Where an AT2 has been generated, the potentially relevant information then moves on to the AT3 stage of the process, using MP7a, MP7b and MP8 (unless the information meets the Single Incident criteria – please see the AT2 itself).

The AT3 records your assessments, considerations and conclusions. Once completed, the AT3 should provide a robust, cogent, defensible rationale for why (and in what manner) information was disclosed (or why it was not disclosed).

Where the recommendation/decision is to disclose, the AT3 is also used to record the text that is to be disclosed.

The format of the AT2 and AT3 products can be tailored to suit the working practices of the Disclosure Unit with the proviso that all of the individual questions and sections are retained and remain unaltered.

QAF Process Flow

The images of the QAF Method Products are for illustrative purposes only

This header area shows which audit trail document is appropriate for each stage

AT2 – consideration of potential Hit relevance (begin at the most appropriate Method Product)

AT3 – considerations of whether the information presented is relevant and ought to be disclosed

AT3 – considerations of the most appropriate method for disclosure for information escalated from MP7a

Function

Searching of Data Systems as per AT1

MP2 Identity Verification

MP3 Relevance of local information

MP4 Third Party Access

MP6 Relevance of PNC information

MP7a Disclosure Rationale Consideration

MP7b Disclosure Method Consideration

MP7c Disclosure Method Consideration

Guidance Documents (GD1 to GD4)

The Guidance Documents (GDs) provide further guidance for aspects of the QAF process.

GD1 – Close Matching Considerations

The GD1 provides guidance on the close matching rules for Name, Date of Birth and Place of Birth.

GD2 – Disclosure Text Good Practice Guidance

The GD2 provides guidance on the construction of good disclosure text for non-conviction information, PNC Modus Operandi and Third Party information. This guidance has been informed by comments made by the courts during judicial review of challenges to Approved Information disclosures made under Part V of the Police Act (as amended). GD5 is incorporated into this document.

This document includes a copy of the Recommendation 6c Template as an appendix (see below)

GD3 – Mental Health Disclosure Guidance

The GD3 provides guidance on the consideration of mental health-related information held by police. This guidance was written with the help and input of qualified individuals at the mental health charity MIND. Prior to inclusion in QAF and distribution to Disclosure Units, this guidance was reviewed and approved by MIND.

GD4 – Representations

The GD4 provides guidance on the subject of representations. It has been heavily informed by two judicial review cases: 'L' v 'Commissioner of police of the Metropolis, Supreme Court 2009; 'B' v Chief Constable of Derbyshire Constabulary, 2011.

The SCU, together with ACPO (via the Disclosure Strategic Board) and Disclosure Units (via the National Disclosure Forum) worked together to establish a standard process for representations across all forces.

GD5 – 6c Disclosure Template

The need for police to include the reasons for their decision to disclose information on the face of an Enhanced Certificate was recognised by Sunita Mason in her report following her review of the criminal records regime in England and Wales [*A Common Sense Approach*].

Recommendation 6c: *"I recommend the development and use of a common template to ensure that a consistent level of information is disclosed to the individual with clearly set out reasons for that decision."*

This guidance supports the aims of this recommendation and the template helps deliver consistency.

The flow of work of a 'Generic' QAF Application

Context

There exists no single standard organisational structure across all Disclosure Units (in terms of job roles, functions, IT etc.). This presents difficulties when attempting to describe the workflow in a way that is easily understood by all Disclosure Units. We have attempted to overcome this here by describing the flow of work of a 'generic' Application, describing QAF as a number of independent QAF Functions, and allowing the user to map the job roles in each Disclosure Unit onto these QAF Functions.

This section describes the flow of work through a 'generic' Disclosure Unit, and states which QAF Functions are undertaken at each point in the workflow.

This section should be read in conjunction with the *MP1 QAF Process Flow* on Page 6 which illustrates the Method Product flow of work through the 'generic' Disclosure Unit.

QAF does not encompass all activities carried out by a Disclosure Unit. It is expected that local procedures will be developed to underpin QAF wherever appropriate.

AT1

Your AT1 is specific to your Disclosure Unit (DU) - you created it and you are responsible for its accuracy and maintenance. When the application is received, perform local searches as set out in your AT1. The MP2, MP3, MP4 and MP6 will be used to confirm identification, information relevance, third party access and information additive to a PNC record.

AT2

Any local intelligence hits found via the AT1 search criteria will be entered onto the AT2. **Please note, the method products do not have to be followed in numerical order e.g. If the offence/incident/allegation is not relevant, you can go straight to the MP3 to discard without having to first establish Identity using the MP2.**

AT3

All relevant information logged onto the AT2 will be considered using the MP7a and MP7b. The decision to discard/not discard relevant information must be documented on an AT3. The process requires that a rationale is provided that satisfies the questions asked in the MP7a and MP7b boxes and demonstrates (records for audit) that all of the necessary points have been appropriately considered.

If the decision is to disclose some or all of the information, the proposed disclosure text will be recorded on the AT3. The Chief Officer/Delegate will review the decision prior the release of information. The Chief Officer/Delegate must also consider the human rights of all parties affected by disclosure of the information. This rationale supporting the decision arising from this consideration must also be documented (recorded for audit) on the AT3.

GLOSSARY

AT – Audit Trail: Abbreviation for the documents used to provide an audit trail for Disclosure Unit vetting activity (AT1, AT2, AT3). Recording: search criteria, local intelligence hits, disclosure decisions and their supporting rationale.

ACPO – Association of Chief Police Officers: ACPO leads and coordinates the direction and development of the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

CRB – Criminal Records Bureau: Formerly an Executive Agency of the Home Office set-up to help organisations make safer recruitment decisions (see DBS).

DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service: The DBS is the organisation formed by the merging of the CRB and the Independent Safeguarding Authority – the DBS commences operations from December 1st 2012.

DM – Decision Maker: A member of staff at a DU that has responsibility for determining whether to recommend disclosure/non-disclosure of information following EDBS application.

DU – Disclosure Unit: Department within a Police Force or other relevant Law Enforcement Agency that conducts local intelligence searches for Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks.

DUA – Disclosure Unit Agent: Individual employed within a DU.

DUM – Disclosure Unit Manager: Manager/Head of an individual Disclosure Unit.

ECRC – Enhanced Criminal Records Check

EDBS – Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Check (Formerly ECRC)

GD – Guidance Documents: Abbreviation for the documents that provide further QAF guidance for Disclosure Unit staff processing ECRC applications through QAF (GD1, GD2 etc).

ISA – Formerly the Independent Safeguarding Authority (see DBS).

LPF – Local Police Force: Generic term for the geographical Police Constabularies and Forces.

LEA – Law Enforcement Agency: Any government department or non-geographical policing agency who search offence data on behalf of the Disclosure and Barring Service, including the States of Jersey Police Force; the salaried police force of the Island of Guernsey; the Isle of Man Constabulary; British Transport Police; Service Police; Ministry of Defence Police and others.

MP – Method Product: Abbreviation for QAF flow charts used when processing and considering information within QAF (MP2, MP3 etc.).

MO – Modus Operandi: The specific circumstances of the crime committed – victim profile; level of violence; weapons used etc. - the background details to a PNC record.

RB – Registered Body: Employer or organisation registered to validate and submit applications for Standard or Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (includes Umbrella Body, UB).

OV – Overview Document: A general overview document covering the end-to-end QAF process.

RD – Reference Document: Abbreviation for the documents not produced for QAF but relevant to disclosure considerations, such as stated cases (Judicial Review) and Home Office papers (RD1 etc.)

SCU – Standards and Compliance Unit: Team responsible for the further development of QAF, providing support and guidance to DU's and assessing their compliance with QAF.