



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Housing Benefit Quality Assurance Process

## Good Practice Guide

---

V0.1 13 January 2017

V0.2 06 March 2017

V0.3 16 March 2017

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
The role and purpose of Quality Assurance.....	4
Types and Classification of error.....	6
Examples of error types.....	6
Summary.....	7

# Housing Benefit Quality Assurance process

## Introduction

1. The accurate and secure administration of Housing Benefit (HB) should be a key priority for every local authority (LA). To support this, LAs should have a robust and thorough Quality Assurance (QA) process in place.
2. An effective HB Service must be collectively and consistently committed to the principle of paying the right benefit, to the right person, every time. The aim should be to deliver prompt, accurate, secure payments and advice to customers, providing them with an efficient and informed Benefits Service.
3. For the LA, providing customer satisfaction, by getting it right first time, reduces time and effort spent on correcting errors, dealing with complaints, appeals and reconsiderations and losses in subsidy. Nationally it also helps in the DWP's Fraud and Error challenge, which has seen a range of measures introduced to assist LAs in reducing the overall HB bill.
4. An effective quality checking regime helps prevent error entering and affecting the HB caseload, providing assurance on the following:
  - integrity and security of benefit processes
  - quality of work
  - requirement for staff training and development
  - identification of process weaknesses.

## The role and purpose of Quality Assurance

5. The role should aim to support and inform the strategic plans of the service, helping to ensure that it achieves or exceeds its goals and objectives and that good quality information is provided to drive service improvements.
6. The key objective is to ensure that all processes are carried out in accordance with current legislation, regulations and LA policy, with particular emphasis on customer care and data protection. Feedback should be provided on issues identified which relate to:
  - training requirements
  - service development
  - HB IT system use and improvement.
7. Ideally, a random selection of work processed should be checked and the outcomes recorded on a daily basis. This will allow for the monitoring of trends, hotspots and types of errors with the aim of encouraging continuous improvement.
8. The percentage of work checked should be at a level intended to provide a statistical measure across both an individual's work throughput and overall level of accuracy within the HB service. The production of regular management information reports will assist in the measurement of the:
  - number of QA checks achieved in each period
  - level of error in total assessments
  - types of errors
  - errors identified by individual staff member.
9. A robust recording process will document an individual's performance, identifying errors made and subsequently informing potential training and development needs through an agreed structured approach.
10. LAs should consider using QA checklists to ensure a consistency of approach amongst those conducting quality checks.

11. It is necessary that accuracy checks cover a full range of HB assessment work and are not just targeted at specific claim types such as new claims or change in circumstances.
12. Quality checking procedures should be designed to be fair, transparent and be a considered evaluation of an individual's performance against legislative and other requirements. When identified, appropriate training and management support will enable staff to consistently achieve a high level of accuracy.
13. Recommendations to be considered include:
  - reviewing existing policies and procedures in light of quality checks
  - reporting performance to senior management in order to sustain accountability for performance in accordance with predetermined delivery and targets
  - include findings from HB Reviews and Appeals records to view the quality of work holistically
  - targeting quality checks at particular areas of concern, for example following audit reports
  - maintaining a record of all errors identified, which can be used to inform:
    - working practices
    - the appraisal cycle and employee performance discussions
    - training provision both individually and collectively.
14. The checks can also be focused on areas of particular risk, with higher levels of checking for:
  - the work of inexperienced staff
  - complex cases, for example, self-employed, persons from abroad etc.
  - high value payments (pre-award).
15. HB IT system reports can be used to identify a variety of areas, such as claims that have taken a long time to process or to target claims following changes in legislation (such as the backdating rule).

## Types and Classification of error

16. A number of potential errors can be identified through the QA process. It is important that a systematic approach is adopted when checking claims to ensure that:

- procedures are correctly followed by all assessment staff
- effective dates are correct such as start date, backdate indicator, date all information received
- details have been entered correctly such as personal details, household details, rental costs, income amounts
- when backdating is applied the reason for this decision is clear and the necessary evidence has been provided
- all required evidence has been provided to support the claim, such as identity, details of wages
- input sheets/case notes are completed, detailed and clear
- the correct overpayment classification is made: LA error, claimant error, administrative delay
- diary dates have been set for expected future changes.

All errors which have been identified should be recorded as either financial or procedural.

## Examples of error types

Financial errors are:

- the claim is incorrect and has caused the benefit to be overpaid, that is, earnings have been input as monthly instead of weekly, a non-dependent has been incorrectly input as a dependent
- the claim is incorrect and has caused the benefit to be underpaid, for example, a disability indicator/premium has been missed, the wrong Local Housing Allowance rate has been applied; shared room instead of 1 bed
- subsidy classification is incorrect and would therefore impact on subsidy
- incorrect performance dates resulting in an incorrect amount paid to the customer due to incorrect start or end dates.

Procedural errors are:

- incorrect performance dates which would not change the amount paid to the customer but would affect the LAs processing performance data
- an entitlement or backdate decision letter not being issued therefore customer has not been given any appeal rights
- case notes are not detailed enough or fail to show how the assessment decision has been reached.

## Summary

17. LAs have a duty to protect public funds and should strive for high levels of accuracy in the processing of HB claims. The absence of a robust, consistent and appropriate checking regime results in caseload error, such as overpayments, which not only adversely affect the HB customer, but may lead to a significant reduction of funding through subsidy loss.

18. The importance to the HB service in achieving continuous improvement in the quality and accuracy of assessments cannot be over emphasised. Benefit professionals are expected to deliver prompt and accurate benefit determinations on behalf of customers, many of whom are vulnerable and reliant upon financial assistance towards their housing costs.