

Quality Assurance Framework

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Document History

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Parole Board (the 'Board') is an independent body that carries out risk assessments on prisoners to determine whether they can be safely released into the community. The Board make these difficult risk assessment decisions in a fair and balance way.

This Quality Assurance Framework sets out the Board's approach to quality assurance, to produce decision-making to the highest standard. It can be seen as a set of processes that are put in place with one goal, to produce quality decisions to protect the public, which is our number one priority.

1.2 Our vision

The Parole Board is committed to keeping the public safe by only releasing someone when it is safe to do so and where we are satisfied that effective plans are in place to manage their risk.

In order to achieve this we have three strategic aims:

- 1) We make independent, impartial and quality decisions
- 2) We work efficiently and effectively and provide value for money
- 3) We are as open and transparent as possible.

The backbone of all decisions are our panel members, appointed to carry out the parole risk assessment. Therefore, it is imperative that panel members are sufficiently supported in their role to complete this complex function.

Our secretariat's primary purpose and priority is to support panel members carry out their role, by providing high quality case management, implementing and overseeing quality controls, and developing legal and practice guidance and policy.

Quality is a priority for everyone and the best way to deliver high quality is to continually assess the way in which we make decisions and how we are operating as an organisation.

1.3 Main aims of the Quality Assurance Framework

As an organisation, the Parole Board is committed to reviewing our practices to replicate high quality and identify where improvements can be made. The quality assessment practices and controls that we implement are designed to test standards in operational procedures and member decision-making.

Therefore, this framework is a whole system approach, where standards are set, monitored and communicated collaboratively to make sure quality is delivered.

Quality Assurance Framework Aims

Member Support	Quality Culture	Continuous Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide members with regular feedback on quality, on an individual and collective level.• Create formal structures to escalate quality issues impacting member decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support a culture of high standards, by providing structures and tools for quality analysis.• Effectively communicate data for the promotion of good practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement procedures to continually review quality controls and practices.• Provide forums to challenge and assess quality.• Provide procedures to act on quality issues and manage risk.

We are committed to taking clear action where quality is not meeting standards throughout the system.

1.4 Key principles of the Quality Assurance Framework

The key principles of the quality assurance framework reflect an approach that is intelligent, supportive and proportionate. The principles endeavour to promote a culture of high standards, continuous improvement and sharing best practice.

The framework principles are:

- A whole system approach to ensure our supportive functions operate efficiently to aide in the delivery of member decision-making.
- Quality assessment processes are proportionate, consistent and supportive.
- Quality standards reflect legal and policy frameworks, and benchmark best practice.
- Quality monitoring is inclusive and transparent.
- Quality monitoring output is reviewed consistently to assist continuous improvement.

- Governance and accountability arrangements are in place to ensure the Board is discharging its duties to an acceptable standard.

1.5 Scope of the Quality Assurance Framework

The Parole Board's core function is to carry out risk assessment to determine whether a person can be safely released from prison and managed in the community.

Therefore, this framework will apply to appointed Members who carry out the risk assessment and the secretariat who support the members in their role.

2. Quality Standards

2.1 Standard Setting

The Board aims to increase public confidence in our work as an independent public body by achieving our strategic aims. To this end the Board has a responsibility to ensure that our members adhere to the highest standards of practice and conduct by setting clear expectations, and that our supporting functions operate to the highest standards.

2.1.1 Member Standards and Benchmarks

Members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice. Members are public appointees and have no employee status.

The baseline for member standards is set out in the following policies, that members are required to adhere to in the discharge of their statutory duties.

- Member Code of Conduct
- Member Administrative Policies and Processes
- Maintaining Member Standards Policy and Procedure

The foundation of member quality assurance is the member's core competency framework, which establishes expectations concerning member knowledge, values and behaviours.

Member Core Competency Framework

1. Knowledge and Values	•To ensure a suitable level of knowledge of the jurisdiction, law and procedure of the Board and an understanding of the appropriate principles and standards
2. Communication	•To ensure effective communication between chairs, members, parties and members of staff and that all written communication is clearly drafted
3. Conduct of Cases	•To ensure fair and timely disposal of all cases
4. Evidence	•To ensure that all relevant issues are addressed by eliciting and managing evidence
5. Decision-Making	•To ensure effective deliberation, structured decision-making and disposal of the case

2.1.2 Operational Standards and Controls

Each department at the Board has a specific secretariat function to support members to carry out their statutory duty and deliver high quality decisions.

Key elements to support high quality decision-making:



Individual department performance standards are set and agreed by senior management, and overseen by executive committees. The secretariat is required to adhere to the Staff Code of Conduct which sets out the expected behaviour and conduct across all departments.

2.2 Monitoring Standards and Intervening

Our guiding principles of monitoring quality and intervention are:

- Real time quality intelligence will be obtained through quality assessment, managerial reporting on quality control and feedback from internal and external stakeholders;
- Analysis of quality intelligence to understand our current performance and management of risk;
- Effective and proportionate interventions to secure high quality, whenever necessary.

The Quality Assurance Team is responsible for monitoring the administration of quality assessment procedures for members and facilitating a holistic approach to drive quality standards throughout the Board.

The Quality Assurance Team collates data from a wide range of processes to understand the fullest picture of quality by:

- Administering member quality assessment at key stages of the parole review, for general practice monitoring and member development through accreditation;
- Collaborate with managers across the Board to administer audits of operational support quality controls that impact member delivery;
- Facilitate engagement and feedback to promote best practice;
- Provide support and guidance to facilitate continuous improvement;

The levels of intervention carried out will be proportionate to the area(s) of concern.

2.3 Working in Partnership

The Parole Board is committed to the professional partnerships established with our stakeholders. Our quality assurance processes may identify external quality issues that impact the delivery of our statutory duties.

It is the responsibility of each department to report internally on external quality issues, in a timely and consecutive manner, for action by senior management to address with stakeholders.

Similarly, the Parole Board has established a number of open channels for stakeholders to provide feedback on the quality of our work for review and action by senior management.

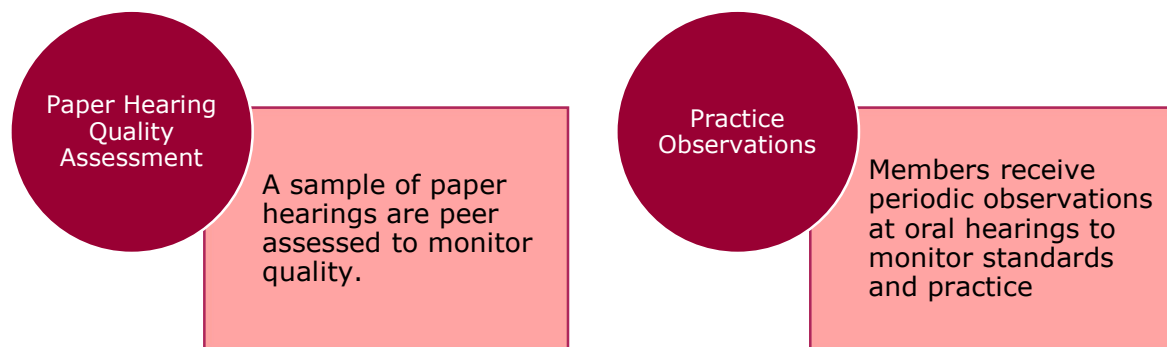
3. Member Quality Assurance

3.1 Overview

Quality assessment leads to an improved quality of service for stakeholders and helps identify good practice, and gaps in training needs and knowledge.

The foundation of quality assessment is the Members' Core Competency Framework which establishes expectations concerning member knowledge, values and behaviours. Member quality assessment builds on the members core competencies, setting out how competencies (standards) are sampled and measured.

Currently, the Parole Board carries quality assessment of members' decision-making in two key ways:



Neither the Paper Hearing QA nor the Practice Observation process must interfere with a panel's independent decision-making.

The quality assessment process is peer led and is intended to support members by promoting benchmark standards. It is essential that member peers employ these standards and embody the Parole Board's values of transparency, reflectiveness, and fairness. Both forms of quality assessment are two-way processes, conducted by the assessor/observer and the panel member in terms of strict confidence.

Throughout this process both parties are expected to be respectful, constructive when exchanging feedback and work with any appeals or criticism objectively, upholding the Parole Board Member Code of Conduct at all times.

3.2 Paper Hearing Quality Assessment

Paper Hearing quality assessment addresses how well risk assessment and decision-making is conducted and recorded within the paper hearing process, based on agreed standards derived from the members' core competency framework.

The purpose of paper hearing quality assessment is:

- to ensure public protection is not compromised and the Parole Board's reputation for high quality, robust decision-making as recorded in these documents is maintained
- to examine how consistently and appropriately members are applying MCA training, guidance and policy directions to risk assessment and decision-making in order to meet overarching standards
- to identify good practice which can be shared more widely and detect substandard practice which suggests gaps in organisational guidance and results in feedback that promotes development by the individual member.

3.2.1 Paper Hearing Quality Assessment Procedure

Every member who completes a paper hearing will receive at least one peer quality assessment by a trained quality assessor, every 12-18 months.

The rate of assessment is based on the average annual workload of members and the Board may increase the number of assessments at a proportionate rate to a member's workload, but not less than the minimum set above.

The assessment will include one paper decision (positive or negative) and one paper direction for an oral hearing.

This procedure applies to all active members.

This framework sets out the guiding principles of member quality assurance, with the administration processes detailed within the Member Quality Assurance Guidance.

Quality assessors make ratings for each element of the decision or the direction. They draft commentaries to explain their findings. Aspects of good practice are commended, and poorer or questionable performance is identified.

The assessment is recorded by the Quality Assurance Team and any consequential actions (such as developmental support, reassessment or accreditation) are taken.

3.2.2 Appointment of Quality Assessors

Members are able to be accredited as quality assessors if they hold MCA accreditation, meet the relevant eligibility criteria detailed below, and attend quality assessor training to ensure that they have the required knowledge and capabilities. In order to maintain accreditation as a quality assessor, the assessor must regularly attend assessor forums.

Eligibility Criteria:

In order to apply to become an MCA quality assessor, a member must be actively undertaking MCA panels for at least 2 years prior to application.

The member must have received a pass grading for a paper decision and a pass grading for oral hearing directions, within the last MCA round. The pass gradings do not have to be within the same MCA panel sent for quality assessment.

3.2.3 Outcomes and Member Support

Quality assessment does not seek to challenge the decision of the panel. The role of the assessor is not to question the judgement and independence of the member, but to consider whether the decision-making was reasonable on the basis of the evidence provided and to assess whether actions have been justified and adequately explained in the decision or set of directions.

Upon conclusion of each paper hearing quality assessment, the assessor provides a report to indicate whether the member being assessed has sufficiently demonstrated the core competencies. The assessor provides an overall grading to reflect the general effectiveness of the decision or set of directions.

Where the grading indicates that the decision or directions do not meet the expected standard in one or more significant area, the Quality Assurance Guidance sets out the procedure for proportionate intervention and support by the secretariat, which may include further assessment, training, mentoring and where necessary a temporary suspension of the MCA accreditation.

Where the grading indicates that the decision or directions meet the expected standards, this information is collated for the promotion of best practice.

3.3 Practice Observations

Practice observations are the quality assessment method for oral hearing panellists.

Practice observations involve an accredited member observing an oral hearing to ensure that a specific member of that panel is effective in their role and is meeting the Core Competencies, in a similar manner to the Paper Hearing Assessment. Members receive feedback from the observer.

3.3.1 Practice Observation Procedure

Every oral hearing panellist will receive at least one practice observation, by a trained peer observer, every 12-18 months.

The rate of observation is based on the average annual workload of members and the Board may increase the number of observations at a proportionate rate to a member's workload, but not less than the minimum set above.

The practice observer will observe a panel in operation and consider a member's performance in the context of that hearing's preparations, its functioning and reasons writing. However, the observer must not interfere with the independent decision-making of the panel.

This procedure applies to all active members.

This framework sets out the guiding principles of member quality assurance, with the administration processes detailed within the Member Quality Assurance Guidance.

Upon allocation of a practice observation, the practice observer will have access to the same information as the panel including the dossier. The observer is to make contact with the panel in advance of the hearing date and should be copied into all pre and post hearing emails to and from the panel. This will ensure that the practice observer has a full and rounded view of the practice of the member.

Practice observations are competence and evidence based. The observer will indicate whether the member has met the competencies or detail areas for further development and training.

3.3.2 Appointment of Practice Observers

Members are able to be accredited as practice observers if they hold MCA accreditation, meet the eligibility criteria, and attend practice observation training to ensure that they have the required knowledge and capabilities. Once a practice observer has been trained and accredited in the role, they may assess the performance of any colleague. Whether or not accredited as panel chair, the observer may scrutinise the practice of a panel chair. Whether or not a specialist member, the observer may scrutinise the practice of a specialist Parole Board member. This is because standards for assessment are clear and explicit as set out in the member core competencies.

Eligibility Criteria:

In order to apply to become a practice observer, a member must:

- Be accredited as an oral hearing co-panellist
- Actively undertaking the role of a co-panellist for two years prior to application
- Concluded a minimum of 50 cases at oral hearing as a co-panellist
- Hold MCA accreditation
- Passed a recent practice observation under general assessment.

3.3.3 Outcomes and Member Support

Upon conclusion of each practice observation, the observer provides a report to indicate whether the member being observed has sufficiently demonstrated the core competencies in relation to their role in the proceedings. The observer will also indicate if training, coaching or mentoring support is required or has been requested by the member.

In addition to standard practice review, practice observations form a critical part of the Panel Chair accreditation procedure. Accreditation procedures are detailed within the Member Administrative Policies and Processes.

The primary emphasis of practice observation is support and guidance to make improvements and strengthen good practice, not fault finding. Where an observation raises cause for concern, the secretariat must support the member in meeting the competencies. Where the practice observer and member have agreed appropriate further action, the secretariat pursues this as a personal development plan. The plan might suggest further practice observation in the near future, mentoring, coaching, shadowing a colleague's work, or further training

3.4 Monitoring and Reporting

The purpose of the member quality assurance is to contribute to the Parole Board's quality assurance programme by reviewing how well risk assessment and decision-making have been conducted in sampled cases. On the individual level, its primary aim is to provide feedback to the member being assessed in ways designed to encourage improvement and best practice.

Member quality assurance is monitored on an ongoing basis and all assessment reports are analysed to extract practice themes which can inform future training materials and guidance for members.

The Quality Assurance Team collate findings on a quarterly basis for submission to the Standards Committee and sharing with the wider membership.

4. Functional Support and Quality Assurance

4.1 Overview

Parole Board Members are supported in the decision-making role by six secretariat departments, also called functional hubs. Each hub has a distinct purpose, setting their own standards and quality controls in order to meet the needs of members.

4.2 Operational Hub (Casework) – The casework teams within the operational hub are responsible for processing all cases that are referred to the Parole Board, and effectively managing processes and procedures set out in the Generic Parole Process (GPP). This includes case preparation and management at key milestones within the parole process such as paper hearing management and oral hearing management.

The operational hub has a number of casework key assurances and quality control measures with the purpose of monitoring quality and intervention when necessary. This includes but is not limited to:

- Dossier Triage
 - Upon initial referral, parole dossiers used for member decision-making, collated and owned by HMPPS Public Protection Casework Section are checked to ensure essential reports and information are available to the allocated panel member/s.
- Paper Hearing Management
 - Effective communication of panel member/s directions and decisions with stakeholders.
 - Effective case progression, including escalation of quality concerns.
- Oral Hearing Management
 - Securing witnesses for live evidence
 - Effective communication of panel member/s directions and decisions with stakeholders
 - Effective case progression, including escalation of quality concerns.

Operational quality assurance seeks to maintain a high standard of case management and progression throughout each stage of the parole process.

Standard setting, benchmarking and quality control measures are set out within the Case Management Handbook, which is a mandatory resource of processes and procedures for all operational hub employees.

4.3 Legal Hub (Litigation and Legal Advice) – The legal hub is responsible for delivering the legal framework and strategy of the Parole Board. Key functions within the legal hub include:

- Legal Advice to Members
 - The Legal Team provide advice to members on legal issues arising in decision-making. Legal advice does not interfere with the independent decision-making of members, but to clarify any legal parameters or considerations for members when negotiating complex case issues to deliver high quality decisions.
- Reconsideration Mechanism
 - The legal team manage the reconsideration mechanism, which allows for cases to be reconsidered upon application by either the Prisoner or the Secretary of State for Justice, in instances where a procedural irregularity or irrationality has occurred within the decision. The legal team regularly analyse the outcomes of reconsideration grants to inform committees and the membership on the quality of decision-making.
- Judicial Review and Private Law Claims
 - Other than cases eligible for the reconsideration mechanism, there is no formal right to appeal a Parole Board decision. The only other recourse to legally challenge a parole decision is by Judicial Review. The legal team manage all judicial reviews brought against the Board and regularly report on any quality issues or best practice upon conclusion of the legal case.
 - Upheld judicial reviews have the ability to amend Parole Board practices and introduce new legal considerations for members when making decisions. The legal team, through the practice of legal regularity assurance, consistently review outcomes of judicial reviews and connected amendments to statutory laws to inform the Board and our members of relevant changes on an ongoing basis.

4.4 Policy Hub – The policy team has three core functions. It is responsible for:

- Developing and implementing policy and guidance in relation to member practice and performance. It ensures there is a robust and up-to-date policy and guidance framework in place to support the delivery of consistent, high quality decision-making and to support the organisation’s strategic direction. It also ensures that policy and practice reflect changes brought about by new case law from judicial reviews and/or changes in legislation.
- Providing case specific practice advice to members and to the secretariat. This is done in close liaison with the Legal Hub.
- Taking forward the Board’s commitment to an evidence-based approach to informing continuous improvement of policy and practice related to parole. This includes outcomes and recommendations from good quality research and thematic studies. It supports the Board’s internal Research Governance Group and Research Governance Framework as well as linking to the National Research Council

Through regularity assurance, the policy hub works closely with internal and external stakeholders to ensure members have the most up to date policy and guidance available to them, taking into considering the changing landscape of the criminal justice system, to support high quality decision-making.

4.5 Transformation Hub – The transformation team is responsible for planning the future of the Board, which includes IT system improvements, strategy and business planning, continuous improvement, performance analysis and change management.

4.6 Governance Hub – The governance team is responsible for a wide range of functions to support members in the delivery of their role and management corporate governance. Key functions intersecting with quality management include:

- Quality Assurance Management
- Risk Management and Corporate Assurance
- Internal and External Communications
- Complaints, Feedback and Freedom of Information Requests
- Accounting and Finance
- Information Security and Compliance

4.7 People Hub – The People function deliver and monitor the learning and development of Parole Board Members and the Secretariat. They are responsible for the continuing professional development of Members and oversee:

- Member Accreditation
- Mentoring and Coaching
- Training Sessions and Courses
- Member recruitment, retention, and succession planning.

The people function also provide pastoral care for members and human resources services to the secretariat.

5. Governance and Accountability

5.1 Organisational Control Framework



5.2 Key Committees and Groups

At the corporate level the Parole Board has formal mechanisms for overseeing performance, risk and the standards. The identification of good practice in risk assessment and decision-making, the training and development of Parole Board members and delivery of quality assurance are the result of collaboration between members and the secretariat. Within this collaboration, key committees, individuals, and groups play integral roles in promoting quality standards:

5.2.1 Standards Committee

Provides oversight and guidance on quality assurance and professional development which includes accreditation, competence, performance, policy development and maintaining standards of practice.

5.2.2 Review Committee

Undertakes a review of Parole Board decisions on prisoners released on parole and on licence or those prisoners released on temporary licence, following a Parole Board recommendation to transfer to open conditions, who are, within 3 years of the Parole Board decision, recalled and charged with committing a serious further offence

5.2.3 Audit and Risk Committee

Reports on internal and external audits to the chief executive. Advises the Parole Board on corporate governance and risk control. Monitors key performance indicators across the organisation.

5.2.4 Quality Assurance Team

Leads the co-ordination of member quality assessment activities, allocating resources and providing feedback to members on completion of assessments. Facilitates benchmarking activity involving Parole Board members who are accredited quality assessors and ensures that support and training is available to members where assessment outcomes indicate a gap in skill or learning.

Analyses and collates quality assessment data for information sharing and best practice.

5.2.5 Quality Assurance Working Group

This group consists of senior managers from each functional hub, who undertake a review of quality concerns and escalations with the objective to find a suitable remedy for resolution. The group is a central point for collation and analysis of quality assurance data and reports to executive committees and member groups.

5.2.6 Quality Assessors

Trained and accredited group of experienced Parole Board members who undertake paper hearing quality assessments, guided by the core competency framework.

5.2.7 Practice Observer

Trained and accredited group of experienced parole Board members who undertake observations of panel members at oral hearings.

5.2.8 Mentors

Trained and accredited group of experienced Parole Board members who support new and existing member to gain and/or improve practice knowledge and experience.

6. Review

The Quality Assurance Framework will be reviewed at committee level on an annual basis. Interim reviews may be initiated to incorporate new quality assurance practices and procedures.

The Quality Assurance Team will undertake bi-annual reviews of the framework, with the objective to test the effectiveness of the framework.