

# Developing the New Quality Mark



## **First General Consultation on the Draft Standards and Potential Assessment Methods – Findings Report April 2009**

**Produced by the Working Together for  
Advice Project – Quality Workstream**



## Section 1 – Background

- 1.1 In the first joint initiative of its kind, a consortium of advice networks led by the Advice Services Alliance (ASA) has secured funding from The Big Lottery Fund to develop a quality mark standard for advice agencies that provide services at the current CLS General Help and General Help with Casework Quality Mark level (GHQM). This is part of The Big Lottery funded Working Together for Advice Project.

The new quality mark will be owned by the sector and will aim to replace the CLS GHQM. The major difference from the CLS GHQM is that the new quality mark will test both organisational standards and quality of advice standards and will provide a specific assessment of the quality of advice given by an advice service. It is designed to encourage continual improvement offering users and funders' assurances about service quality.

- 1.2 Following extensive consultation during 2008 a range of standards against which advice services will be assessed have been designed. The standards cover two main areas.

- **the quality of advice assessment** – The quality of advice assessment is new and checks the accuracy and quality of the advice given to clients in a sample range of cases
- **a service (organisational) audit** – similar to organisational audits in many quality standards, the audit will also look at the procedures used for managing advice.

- 1.3 During the consultation period the draft standards have been widely circulated in the advice sector for the purposes of general consultation. A consultation survey was also circulated which asked a series of questions designed to gather the sector's views on the draft standards and a range of assessment methods for the quality of advice standard that will be tested during the pilot phase of the quality mark between April – December 2009. The consultation survey went live on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009 and closed on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2009. During the consultation period 138 individuals and organisations looked at the draft standards and provided answers to some of the survey questions, and a total of 61 (44.2%) individuals and organisations completed the entire survey. In addition 2 organisations provided their comments separately without completing the consultation questionnaire<sup>1</sup>.

- 1.4 Whilst this first consultation survey focused on the draft standards and the different types of quality of advice assessment methods, the survey also allowed respondents to make any general comments on the issue of the development of the new quality standard.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of those organisations who participated in the consultation survey and who provided their contact details are listed in Annex 1 to this report.

There will be further opportunity for the sector to take part in general consultation in 2010 after the independent evaluation of the pilot phase has taken place. The findings from the consultation survey are provided in the remainder of this report.

## Section 2 – About Your Organisation

2.1 Participants were asked to tick all of the descriptions that described their organisation:

**Table showing answers to question 2.1**

Description	Response %	Response Count
Member of AdviceUK	28.5%	39
Member of Age Concern Federation	13.1%	18
Member of Citizens Advice	38.7%	53
Member of Youth Access	6.6%	9
Member of the Law Centres Federation	2.9%	4
Advice provider that is not part of the above networks	8.8%	12
Funder of advice services	1.5%	2
Organisation that only provides advice and information	3.6%	5
Organisation that provides a range of services including advice and information	27%	37
VCS infrastructure organisation	2.2%	3
Accreditation or regulatory body	1.5%	2
Authority or other local statutory body	6.6%	9
Government department/agency	1.5%	2
Other – please say what*	7.3%	10

\*The additional descriptions of organisations included:

1. Specialist Advice Agency (housing)
2. Secretariat to Age Concern federation
3. Registered Charity/Charity
4. Sector Skills Council
5. Local Authority Welfare Rights Unit

6. Local Authority Youth Service – Information and Support Service
7. Freelance Consultant
8. Institute of Money Advisers

## Section 3 – The Quality of Advice Standard

The following questions were asked about the Quality of Advice Standard:

### 3.1 Is it clear what the standard is trying to achieve?

Of the 67 people that responded to this question 100% indicated that it is clear what the quality of advice standard is trying to achieve. Additional comments that were made included:

- It's very clearly written and well laid out
- The document felt familiar with already holding the old CLS QM. It is written clearly and easy to understand – An Age Concern
- Trying to achieve a sector-wide advice standard across services that deliver advice, in different areas, to different client groups, through different media may be problematic! See later comments about assessment of quality: we would probably need to have an internal quality assessment externally verified, due to the unique nature of the service
- It must be borne in mind that some advice agencies are small, relying on volunteers, whilst others large with full time paid staff. The required standards benchmarks must take this into account as size is not determinant of quality-An Age Concern
- This is nothing new for CABx and it is time that all advice-giving organisations were made to comply with the same standards – A CAB
- OK at a high level; but the lack of detail may make it difficult to audit consistently

### 3.2 Do the different criterion which make up the standard adequately cover all of the aspects of advice giving?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 3.2**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	81.8	54
No	16.7	11
Don't know	1.5	1

14 people made additional comments in relation to this question and these comments will be taken into consideration in the next redraft of the standards.

### 3.3 What do you think are the practical challenges of assessing quality of advice within your service?

57 people responded to this question and provided some useful insight into the practical challenges of assessing quality of advice. A summary of the key messages appears to be:

- The resources available, particularly for smaller organisations
- Where advice is one of many functions carried out by agencies
- Lack of consistency across the sector
- Consistency and selection of Assessors
- Reliance on written case records
- Having enough experienced supervisors
- Getting the sample right
- Ensuring a good understanding of the agency’s working context

### 3.4 Please look at the definitions in the glossary of the Draft Standards. Do you agree with the definitions of Advice, Casework and Information

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 3.4**

Definition	Yes	No	Don’t Know	Response Count
Advice	87.5%	10.9%	1.6%	64
Casework	68.3%	23.3%	8.3%	60
Information	81.4%	6.8%	11.9%	59

Where people had indicated that they didn’t agree or were unsure about the definitions they were invited to tell us what they proposed. 31 people provided their suggestions.

A clear message from the comments received is that many people do not agree with the current definition of casework and in particular “Casework starts at the point where the organisation disputes or challenges the decision of a public body or third party on behalf of a client”. This is something that the Workstream’s definitions sub group is currently reviewing.

## Section 4 – Service Standards 1 - 6

### 4.1 Service Standards 1 – 6

Respondents were asked to indicate in relation to each service standard whether it is clear what each standard is trying to achieve.

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 4.1 & 4.3 - 4.6**

Service Standard	Yes*	No*	Don't Know*
1 - Case and Enquiry Management	100% (60)	0% (0)	0% (0)
2 - Access, Client Care & Community Relationships	98.6% (59)	0% (0)	1.7% (1)
3 - Governance	96.6% (57)	1.7% (1)	1.7% (1)
4 - Planning	96.6% (57)	0% (0)	3.4% (2)
5 - Financial Management	98.3% (59)	0% (0)	1.7% (1)
6 - People Management	96.7% (58)	1.7% (1)	1.7% (1)

\*Response count in brackets.

Respondents were also asked whether they would like to make any amendments, additions or deletions to each of the service standards and a number of suggestions were made for each service standard which will be reviewed at the next redrafting stage.

In relation to the Case and Enquiry Management Service Standard respondents were also asked to indicate if they agreed with the requirements for section (a) on advice only and section (b) on advice with casework. The results were as follows:

### 4.2 Do you agree with the requirements for advice and advice with casework?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 4.2**

Answer	Response %	Response count
Yes	93.3%	56
No	1.7%	1
Don't Know	5%	3

Again, respondents were invited to suggest alternatives and a few suggestions were made and will be reviewed at the next redraft stage.

## Section 5 – General Questions

### 5.1 The standards are split into the processes you need to show and the documents you need to have in order to meet the standard. Do you find this helpful?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 5.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	96.6%	57
No	1.7%	1
Don't Know	1.7%	1

Comments were invited and 7 comments were received:

- 5 of these comments indicated that the format was clear and helpful.
- One respondent indicated that there appeared to be an excess of paperwork for advice that you claim should be completed in one sitting
- One respondent indicated that it would be helpful if template documents were available as an option

### 5.2 Are you clear how the new standards differ from the CLS General Help Quality Mark?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 5.2**

Answer	Response%	Response Count
Yes	67%	39
No	22.4%	13
Don't Know	10.3%	6

The purpose behind this question was to test whether respondents understood the message that the new standard is concentrating on an assessment of quality of advice which is something which the CLS GQM does not provide. Based on some of the comments that were received in relation to this question it is apparent that the question could have been better phrased as several respondents thought that we were asking them to compare both standards and be able to identify the differences between them – which they were obviously unable to do.

Pertinent comments included:

- The new QM will concentrate on the advice standards as well as the organisational standards where the old systems focus was on I&A. In particular the emphasis is going to be about quality of advice and I welcome this change to focus on continual improvement of practitioners.
- They appear more user friendly and more relevant to advice and advocacy provided from the community and voluntary sector but as for any specifics I am unsure
- Greater emphasis on quality of advice
- Clearer link to actual advice, rather than structures and processes
- I think they are less exacting in the detail leaving more scope for organisations to interpret them in a way that is practical for them
- The new standard is clearer but covers a lot of the GHQM requirements.
- The standard has been watered down

### 5.3 Are the standards relevant to the work of your organisation?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 5.3**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	93.1%	54
No	5.2%	3
Don't Know	1.7%	1

16 respondents provided additional comment and the pertinent comments included:

- But we would have a lot of work to do to ensure compliance
- The standard will ensure that the advice provided is correct and of a high standard - this will give clients confidence in the service

- Clearly supports Youth Work and the developing Integrated agenda
- Yes and we are already working towards ensuring benchmarking, monitoring and recording of information is going to reflect the required standards
- Particularly relevant as covers quality of advice given by all our services
- Our service is a unique one: clients do not necessarily ring back after the first call. We would hope that this is because the advice was sufficient, but it is difficult to prove this. Equally, if a client rings back, it could be for a variety of external reasons unconnected with the advice given. So assessing the quality of our service may or may not be problematic, if there is a one-method-fits-all approach.
- On the whole they are very relevant, although seem to be very similar to those used and adopted by the Citizen's Advice Bureau (having worked at number of those sites), Age Concern is some what less "bureaucratic" as the quality of Advice is paramount, dealing with older people (many of them having disability / health issues) invariably means offering clients more time to discuss their issues, we offer a specialised service. Therefore it is important that we can allow the time for this and not get over burdened in the "overloading of policies, procedures, checklists", a balance needs to be made.
- Because [we are] an IYSS project I think we are going to struggle to meet some of the requirements and have the documentation in place as the advice service is one of many that we provide. It may be very time consuming to try to meet all the requirements

#### 5.4 Do you find the standards easy to understand?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 5.3**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	93.1%	54
No	3.4%	2
Don't Know	3.4%	2

The following additional comments were made:

- Standards are easy to understand but the process of how these will be introduced is over-complicate
- Will be easier to implement and self-assess against
- Because I have been involved in CLS QM audits before the language feels familiar and I understand what the standards are asking
- Easy to understand, but may be more complex to put in to practice

- Liked the simple and concise way they are set out and the glossary was useful
- Some are more easy than others, in particular the 3 and 4 is difficult
- It depends on how you are going to evaluate for awards

## Section 6 – Quality of Advice Assessment Method External Assessment

It was explained that in this method a qualified assessor from outside your organisation undertakes an assessment of an agreed sample of case/enquiry records using an agreed set of criteria (and a “scoring system”) to assess the quality of advice being delivered by your agency. The following questions were asked:

### 6.1 Do you think that external assessment is the best way to assess a quality of advice standard?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 6.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	63.8%	37
No	12.1%	7
Don't Know	24.1%	14

23 respondents added comments and the key messages which were evident from these comments were:

- Cost will be a major consideration
- The need for assessors to have an understanding of the sector and its clients
- A combination of internal assessment and external verification may be more preferable

### 6.2 What are the added value / benefits of delivering a case file review through external assessment

43 respondents provided their views on this question. A sample of these comments included:

- Independent
- Impartial
- Adds credibility – gives external validation of your work
- Good practice being described and disseminated during assessment and accreditation process
- Promotes self assessment against known quality criteria over a period of time – therefore encouraging the application of the standards to every day work
- Consistency across varied services will raise standards for clients
- All advice giving organisations are assessed to the same standards
- Funder confidence
- More likely to see the agency and advice from a client’s perspective
- Customer confidence

### **6.3 What do you think are the practical challenges in delivering an external assessment of the quality of advice standard?**

48 respondents provided their views on this question. The key messages from these comments included:

- Working with a variety of organisations using different information sources and recording systems. Checking technical accuracy of advice
- Cost implication
- Finding assessors that are suitably qualified to judge the service/Achieving consistency between assessors, cost of assessment, training and recruitment of assessors
- Establishing a case sampling method that is adequate and reasonably fair across different kinds of services might be difficult.
- Maintaining a level standard of assessment
- Demonstrating that the external assessment is free from bias and is in it's processes and procedures transparent and verifiable
- Acceptance of the findings by the organisation being assessed
- Lack of resources to fund external assessments.

## Section 7 – Quality of Advice Assessment Methods Self Assessment with External Verification

It was explained that this method uses a suitably qualified person within your own agency to undertake an assessment of an agreed sample of case/enquiry records. A number of these assessments are then verified externally to ensure the assessment is correct. The suitably qualified person would probably be an adviser/caseworker with a minimum of two years experience in the area of law concerned. The following questions were asked:

### 7.1 Do you think that is the best way to assess a quality of advice standard?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 7.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	55.2%	32
No	25.9%	15
Don't Know	19%	11

27 respondents added comments and the key messages which were evident from these comments were:

- Difficult to be unbiased
- As long as there is a high proportion rigorously examined externally.
- I doubt internal assessors will be able to find sufficient time to do this on top of their other work.
- The person involved should have specific training and experience in carrying out these types of reviews.
- Could be seen as less independent than the external option.
- CitA experience has shown that services find that external assessment can be supportive as a tool to help improve standards. But a combination of self assessment and external assessment/verification may be appropriate for the better performing service
- It would be less cumbersome but open to the challenge that the assessor chose cases in a non random way

### 7.2 What are the added value / benefits of delivering a case file review through self - assessment with external verification?

41 respondents provided their views on this question. A sample of these comments included:

- Problems needing remedial action may be identified quicker.
- Organisation continually assessing their own systems and work.
- Self assessment ensures better understanding of the work of the agency/organisation
- It allows for organisations to make internal changes and improvements without feeling dictated to or judged. External verification adds more legitimacy to the procedure.
- As long as an independent person is identified in the organisation and is qualified to carry out the file review I think this is less intrusive and more practical way to undertake case reviews. I would welcome an external verification as an additional measure.
- May be less resource intensive, but this needs to be tested. It ensures that the responsibility for the quality is held within the service, and is an ongoing process i.e. not just left to the external assessment
- Some degree of independent review but with less burden
- Organisation likely to take more ownership of findings if they carried it out themselves.

### **7.3 What do you think are the practical challenges to delivering a self assessment of the quality of advice standard?**

42 respondents provided their views on this question. The key messages from these comments included:

- Internal resources of the organisation
- Time constraints
- It may be difficult to establish a case sampling method that is adequate and reasonably fair across different kinds of services. Establishing agreed common elements of case file review may prove problematic
- We would need to look at training the internal assessors and giving them support.
- Finding suitably qualified staff to undertake the assessments in smaller organisations
- Ensuring no corners are cut and avoiding a tick box approach - this can be done by requiring evidence to be produced against each standard
- Lack of perspective/ objectivity: difficult to do when you know the individuals involved, and are influenced by impact of outcome on organisation - although these issues can be overcome, they are challenges
- Consistency between organisations carrying out self assessment.

## Section 8 – Quality of Advice Assessment Methods Observation

It was explained that an additional range of assessment methods are also being looked at to see if they can be useful in demonstrating the quality of advice. The input of respondents was invited.

**Observation** Observation could be delivered by one of three methods:

- a) an External Assessor or a member of your own staff sitting in and observing a sample of advice interviews by different advisers.
- b) audio taping or videoing interviews which can be played back for an assessor to observe.
- c) phone interviews could also be listened into live or taped.

Observation aims to assess the quality of advice given first hand. It will also assess elements of the service standards; particularly those centred around access, client care and community relationships. The following questions were asked:

### 8.1 Do you think that observing an advice session can add extra value to the traditional case file assessment of quality of advice?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 8.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	66.7%	38
No	21.1%	12
Don't Know	12.3%	7

Respondents were also asked to suggest what extra value/benefits observation will add. 39 respondents gave their views, and whilst the question asked about extra value and benefits many of the comments focused on the practical challenges. The key messages from these were:

- It is a false environment and will not give a true picture.
- Looks at the way the advice is delivered as well as the quality.
- A practical assessment of the quality of advice given.
- Not all staff would be comfortable with this method.
- Problems of confidentiality

- It would be difficult to ensure that enquiries came in to coincide with the assessment.
- Observation should complement other methods of assessment.
- Objective feedback and picking up bad habits that may have been developing for some time.

## 8.2 Would you be prepared to have observed interviews as part of your assessment for the new quality mark?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 8.2**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	61.4%	35
No	12.3%	7
Don't Know	26.3%	15

## 8.3 What do you think are the practical difficulties of observed interviews?

48 respondents provided their views on this question. The key messages from these comments included:

- Client permission and confidentiality.
- Clients not feeling they are getting a private, confidential service and therefore not discussing what is really bothering them.
- Advice workers worrying about the 'test' and losing focus with the client.
- May need several interviews to get a true picture - therefore time consuming.
- May be artificial as adviser may behave differently when being observed than they would normally do. Ideally it would be good to combine the two methods - both case records from times when an adviser was not observed and observed interviews. Would help give more meaningful feedback and explore where in the advice giving process organisations were falling down or excelling.

## Section 9 – Quality of Advice Assessment Methods Mystery Shopping

It was explained that this method involves an assessor telephoning (and in some cases visiting in person) an advice agency and asking for advice on one of a range

of predetermined scenarios. The mystery shopper will assess the response of the advice agency against a standard answer. Mystery shopping is not suited to assessing casework, but can play a role in assessing quality of advice criteria including: Diagnosis; Advice options, consequences and limitations; Action or support; Signposting and referral. It is also particularly suited to assessing service standards on access, client care and community relationships. The mystery shopper's findings can be compared with the findings of a traditional case file assessment. The following questions are asked:

### 9.1 Do you think mystery shopping can help assess quality of advice?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 9.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	75.9%	44
No	12.1%	7
Don't Know	12.1%	7

Respondents were also asked to suggest what extra value/benefits mystery shopping will add. 32 respondents gave their views, and whilst the question asked about extra value and benefits several of the comments again focused on the practical challenges. The key messages from these were:

- You get a true picture of the real service provision.
- Will be easier for workers to deal with than someone observing them. Keeps workers on their toes if they know a mystery shopper is imminent.
- It can provide a perspective from the client's point of view, and will track their experience from entering the advice agency and through the interview until they leave.
- Valuable feedback for an agency checking accuracy of case recording.
- Should get a more balanced view of how advice is given and combined with reading a case record can examine whether case recording was an issue rather than poor advice. On the negative side you would need to carry out a large enough sample to make an meaningful assessment of quality of advice - this appears to be a waste of adviser's time in advice agencies who are already struggling to meet demand.

### 9.2 Would mystery shopping be practical for your telephone advice service?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 9.2**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	67.2%	39
No	17.2%	10
Don't Know	15.5%	9

23 respondents provided additional comment to this question and a sample of those comments included:

- Good way of assessing attitudes and skills.
- We would get objective feedback.
- Could be used, but I prefer assessments to be made up front and not secretly, especially when volunteers are involved. They deserve respect and consideration for the time they give and this would not show this to them.
- This should be relatively easy to do. Given under-supply of telephone advice, however, care is needed over time taken on calls.
- Would be good to have feedback as to what approach does / doesn't assist callers in providing information required for adviser to assist appropriately.

**9.3 If you answered yes to question 2, would you be prepared to have mystery shopping as part of your assessment for the new quality mark?**

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 9.3**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	65.9%	29
No	9.1%	4
Don't Know	25%	11

13 additional comments were made in relation to this question, the majority simply indicated that more consideration to the actual process would be required and that staff consultation would be necessary. The remaining comments included:

- It's a way of checking that we are delivering what we say we are and that when someone contacts us we are giving the best service possible. Their experience of contact with us is important and different from current monitoring systems.
- Quality of information is important.

- As long as this was a requirement and not an option of the assessment process. It would also need to be delivered to a high standard and consistently
- From an advice management view it would be good to get good objective feedback. However, volunteer advisers will not like it, and I am convinced that good advisers will leave the service if it is introduced.

#### **9.4 What do you think are the practical challenges of running mystery shopping assessments?**

34 respondents provided their views on this question. A representative sample of these comments included:

- Numbers of calls need to be limited so as not to tie up the service in answering non- genuine calls (every call answered is likely to prevent a genuine caller from getting through).
- Resource intensive especially for large samples.
- Cost and time.
- Data protection re recording information.
- Again the issue of representativeness arises - how representative is one or two interviews of a whole organisation? How the results of the mystery shopping would be used is also an issue - in particular the weighting accorded to this aspect of assessment. It would need to be fairly heavily qualified in order not to create unrepresentative results.
- Ensuring mystery shopper is properly prepared and consistent in approach.
- Very much a snapshot & not scientific - Have a limited role of usefulness, but no place in a quality audit.
- I dislike any sort of secretive testing of services. It depends on the integrity of the mystery shopper and what sort of results would be produced, if we had no idea of who they spoke to, how would this help us to feedback and compliment or assist in any shortcomings.

## **Section 10 – Quality of Advice Assessment Methods Client Interviews**

It was explained that this method would involve a 5 – 10 minute interview with a client immediately after their advice interview. It would be carried out by a member of staff who would ask a standard set of questions seeking feedback on the client's impression of the advice service they received. This will see if an assessor can make

any comparison between the client's impression and the actual quality of advice given through a case file assessment. The following questions were asked:

### 10.1 Do you think that client interviews can add extra value to the traditional case file assessment of quality of advice?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 10.1**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	66.7%	38
No	17.5%	10
Don't Know	15.8%	9

Respondents were also asked to suggest what extra value/benefits client interviews will add. 35 respondents gave their views, and whilst the question asked about extra value and benefits several of the comments again focused on the practical challenges. The key messages from these were:

- A good way of checking client's understanding of the advice and information given as well as checking how well they feel they have been helped (or not).
- It will best measure approach and interpersonal skills of advisor.
- Good to use direct client feedback on the service and give a user perspective on the value of advice
- Immediate feedback of advice and the process.
- If we are a client focused service, the client perspective is vital. However, we know that clients do not always like the advice they get, so would need to be sure exactly what we are asking them.

### 10.2 Would you be prepared to have client interviews as part of your assessment for the new quality mark?

The results were:

**Table showing answers to question 10.2**

Answer	Response %	Response Count
Yes	56.1%	32
No	17.5%	10
Don't Know	26.3%	15

21 additional comments were made in relation to this question, over half of those (12) expressed reservations and their thoughts on the practical challenges of client interviews. A sample of these comments included:

- This seems like the least viable option and would give a very subjective view of the service. Clients can appear unhappy with a service because they didn't get the answer they wanted even though the worker did everything right (e.g. telling a client they are ineligible for means tested benefits after performing an accurate check - however good the worker is at dealing with the situation and explaining things to the client the client can still perceive the service in a negative light because they wanted to be told they could have more money).
- As ours is a telephone service it might be difficult to resource this and carry it out practically. Our trials of this have not been that successful in reaching clients after calls and it locks up resources.
- We already burden clients with observed interviews during the training process and find a proportion unwilling - there may be a greater reluctance for clients to agree. It will also be very time hungry process. Volunteer advisers may also feel this is a step too far. For paid advisers it is perhaps less of a problem?
- We work with very vulnerable people & this could be very stressful to some clients who struggle to engage with the service in the first place ensuring clients understand & consent to this would add considerably to our workload!
- Sometimes however young people access our service with pre-conceived ideas due to bad advice from others about what their rights are. When we discuss with them their options and entitlement they may not be happy not because the information is incorrect but because it doesn't meet their expectation so that then they may see the advice interview as negative.

### **10.3 What do you think are the practical difficulties of client interviews?**

41 respondents provided their views on this question. A representative sample of these comments included:

- Client consent and time issues in what are always very busy services.
- Difficult if drop in service - If immediately after seeing advisor the client may not be in a position to assess if the information resolved their problem
- Many of our customers are very elderly so having an interview directly after the advice phone call (which can last up to 50 mins) may be too much. If not straight after it would need to be carried out fairly soon after to keep the memory fresh. Our advice is telephone and email based and so face-face interviews will not be possible.
- Difficult to arrange/conduct, expensive, could be biased if face to face on premises of organisation, time consuming.
- Clients would probably not welcome this.

- Difficulties of Client Interviews - Resources - takes resources away from front line advising. Client's interpretation of what they had been told may be different from advisers.

## Section 11 – Cost of Delivery Options

The new Quality Mark will need to balance affordability with effectiveness to applicants. This section sought to understand what importance respondents place on the range of assessment methods available compared with the potential cost of those methods.

**11.1 Which are your favorite methods of delivery?** This Question confirmed that Case Review by Self Assessment with External Verification was the preferred method of quality of advice assessment delivery with Case Review by External Assessment a close second. A large number of respondents also liked Mystery Shopping. The full data for all options is shown below.

**Table showing answers to question 11.1**

Assessment Method	Response %	Response
Case Review by External Assessment	60.7%	34
Case Review by Self Assessment with Verification	64.3%	36
Observed Interviews	39.3%	22
Mystery Shopping	57.1%	32
Client Interviews	41.1%	23

**11.2 Please rate the extent to which you agree with this question. “It’s important that the new quality mark provides advice services with access to a range of assessment methods which will suit their organisation”**

Respondents showed a clear desire for a range of assessment methods with 91% of participants agreeing or partly agreeing with this question. 66% fully agreed .

**Table showing answers to question 11.2**

Response	Response Percent	Response Count
Completely Agree	66.1%	37
Partly Agree	25.0%	14
Partly Disagree	5.4%	3
Completely Disagree	3.6%	2

Whilst comments indicated the desire to avoid a “one size fits all” approach equally there were a significant level of concerns that any range of methods offered consistency in delivery of assessments.

**11.3 Please rate the extent to which you agree with this question. “It’s pointless having a range of assessment methods which deliver great feedback but which increase the cost of the assessment process”.**

Answers to the above question indicated that cost was seen as a significant factor for 74% of respondents who agreed or partly agreed with the statement.

**Table showing answers to question 11.3**

Response	Response Percent	Response Count
Completely Agree	28.1%	16
Partly Agree	45.6%	26
Partly Disagree	19.3%	11
Completely Disagree	7.0%	4

Comments showed recognition of the need to invest in a quality product but there was a strong plea for affordability, balancing cost and effectiveness and avoiding the development of a range of methods without any real purpose.

These responses and the comments made by respondents show that they too are struggling with the challenges of costs verses flexibility. 75% of the respondents fully agreeing with question two also fully or partly agreeing with question 3. Significantly Case Review by Self Assessment with External Verification remained the favorite method of assessment for both respondents who fully agreed with question 2 and question 3.

## Section 12 – Conclusions

### 12.1 Quality of Advice Standard

The consultation response gave a good indication that there is generally a clear understanding of what the Quality of Advice Standard is trying to achieve and general agreement that the standard as drafted covers the key aspects of advice giving.

### 12.2 Assessment of Quality of Advice

The consultation response provided some consistent messages about assessing quality of advice. These were primarily that:

- Cost and the limited time and resources of agencies are a major factor.
- Achieving consistency of assessment across the sector is a major challenge but if achieved will raise standards for clients.
- There is some interest in using a variety of quality of advice assessment methods and not just the traditional case file assessment, and there was a particular interest in mystery shopping. However, this is tempered by concerns over cost, resource constraints and the impact on clients and staff.

Clearly there is still a lot of work to do on producing a quality of advice assessment system that can be used by the sector as a whole, and the Quality Workstream's pilots will provide more research into the best way forward.

### 12.3 Service Standards

The consultation response gave a good indication that the Service Standards have been drafted in a way which clearly demonstrates what they are trying to achieve, receiving a positive response rate for each standard ranging from 96.6% to 100%.

There is still some work to be done however on educating the sector on the aims and objectives of the new quality standard and how it differs from the CLS General Help Quality Mark. The consultation findings demonstrated that many people are still confused about how the work that is currently being done by the sector relates to the resurrection of the CLS General Help Quality Mark audit process by the Legal Services Commission. More work will need to be done on this area.

The Quality Workstream pilots will now be running until the end of 2009 and the standards and processes will be reviewed and refined early next year to take into account both the consultation and pilot findings.

## Annex 1

List of those organisations participating in the consultation survey that provided contact details:

Redbridge CAB	Camden under 25s advice centre	Age Concern Torbay
CAB Cylch Conwy District CAB	Young People's Support Foundation	Age Concern Blackburn with Darwen
Ipswich CAB	the bridge	Age Concern Leeds
Stoke on Trent CAB	west sussex youth service	Age Concern Birmingham
South Holland CAB	DMBC Youth Service	Age Concern Cheshire
Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureaux	Disability Advice Service Lambeth	Age Concern Tower Hamlets
Camden CAB	Bright Project	Age Concern the federation
Sydenham CAB	Migrants Resource Centre	Age Concern Hull
Wansbeck Citizens Advice Bureau	Community Law Service (Leicester & County)	Age Concern Devon
Chelmsford CAB	The Disability Resource Centre	Age Concern Forest of Dean
Wychavon CAB	Birmingham Law Centre	Age Concern Hounslow
Calderdale CAB	Surrey Welfare Rights Unit	RNIB
Middlesbrough CAB	Stonewall Housing	Shelter
Middleton CAB	Castle Advice Service	National Debtline (Money Advice Trust)
Washington citizens advice bureau	Turkish Cypriot Women's Project	National Youth Advocacy Service
Rushmoor CAB	East European Advice Centre	Institute of Money Advisers
Bedworth Rugby & Nuneaton CAB	Loughborough University	The Legal Services Commission
Citizens Advice Allerdale	University of Nottingham Students' Union	Skills for Justice
Sudbury & District Citizens Advice Bureau	money Advice & Community Support Service	Derby City Council
Poole CAB	Refugee Action	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Felixstowe Citizens Advice Bureau	Preston & W Lancashire Racial Equality Council	Halton Borough Council
Wokingham & District CAB	Hoxton Trust Legal Advice Service	Eaga plc.
Dover Deal and District Citizens Advice	Assessor for Quality Counts Age Concern	Partnership Quality Systems
Citizens Advice QAA Team	Age Concern Bournemouth	
Archway	Age Concern Bolton	