

Natural England Standard Quality Management



1:0 About this standard

Introduction

Our corporate plan and delivery framework set out our commitment to continue to improve the products and services we offer to people. One of the ways we do this is by ensuring we have good quality management covering the use of quality assurance, the application of quality control measures and the use of quality audit. This ensures consistency and integrity in our delivery and in our advice and decision-making across all areas of the business, such as:

- In the way we gather, use and store evidence, including information, data and facts
- In the development and management of our agri-environment and advice schemes
- In our responses to casework consultations
- In the way we administer our regulatory role
- In the way we communicate externally
- In the way we deliver all of our internal processes (for example performance management)?

What does this standard cover?

This standard provides a framework for quality management. By applying the standard staff will understand the difference between quality assurance and quality control and how and when these aspects of quality management must be applied to their work.

Who is this standard for?

The standard applies to everyone in Natural England and to the people and organizations working on our behalf to ensure all our work is delivered to the highest level of quality and consistency. However, the way this standard is used will vary between business units, work areas and job roles.

2:0 The standard

This standard is divided in 2 sections:

- [Definitions](#); and
- [Mandatory requirements](#) (with links to supporting guidance)

Definitions

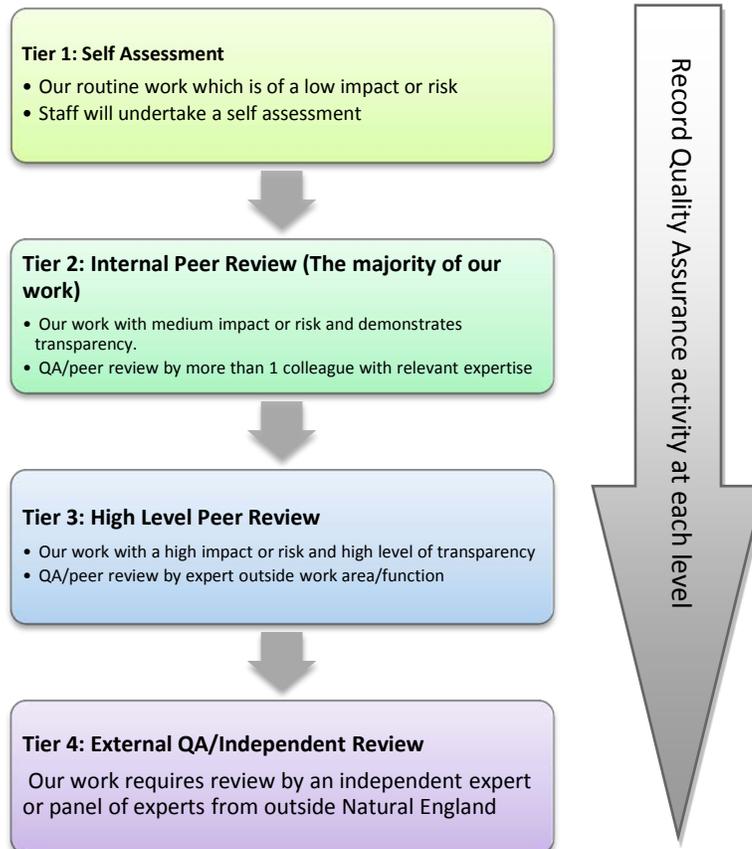
Quality Management is the activity used to direct, control and coordinate quality and includes the following:

- **Quality Assurance** - the procedure or set of procedures used to establish confidence that a piece of work meets specified quality requirements and is fit for purpose.
- **Quality Control** - the checks to ensure that the quality requirements have been met at an appropriate stage in a process or activity.
- **Quality Audit** - a process for examining quality to determine if we are complying with our defined quality assurance procedures.

Mandatory requirements		
	What	How
1.	Directors and Area Managers must ensure that their business areas have appropriate quality management processes in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Quality Management Standard➤ Guidance
2.	All business areas must have a clear process for recording quality assurance undertaken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Records Management Standard
3.	Quality assurance must follow Natural England's tiered approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Tiered approach to quality assurance (refer to Annex 1)
4.	The level of quality assurance applied to a piece of work must be proportionate to the circumstances and reflect the level of risk involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Risk & Issues Standard➤ Application of tiers in casework (refer to Annex 2)

Annex 1: Quality Assurance - The Tiered Approach;

There are four possible tiers of Quality Assurance (QA) which functions must use to manage the quality of their work, as illustrated in the diagram below.



The tiers are graded and it is expected that higher numbered tiers will follow on from the lower ones. As our organizations business is so wide ranging **it is the responsibility of each team to specify the level of QA required for a particular work area at the start of the activity**; although the level may be adjusted at a later stage if circumstances change.

Annex 2: Quality Management – The application of tiers in casework

The specific categorisations are not carved in stone – they will evolve both as we develop thinking on governance and as, in individual cases, staff make specific judgements about what fits best to specific circumstances.

Context for advice or decision	Examples	Tier 1 Self- assessment	Tier 2 Internal Peer Review	Tier 3 High Level Peer review	Tier 4 External Independent review
Land Use planning casework decision	New starter, basic level skills undertaking low risk case work	✓	✓		
Land Use planning casework decision	Practitioner undertaking low risk casework with reference to the aide memoire	✓			
Land Use planning casework decision	Practitioner or Expert – significant reputational risk (<i>NE Advice changing; NE Advice not agreeing with EA; Previous Case History; Challenge from LPA</i>)	✓	✓	✓	
Land Use planning casework decision	Expert – application leading to significant effect / damage to designated site – (<i>competent authority deciding not to take NE advice</i>)	✓		✓	
Land Use planning delivery frame work	Expert – working towards a strategic approach to dealing with a Habitats Regulations issue, across Local Authority boundaries	✓		✓	
Land Use Discretionary Advice Service	All casework provided through the service	✓	✓		
Land Management decision	HLS option selection – technical assessment, basic & practitioner skill level	✓	✓		

Context for advice or decision	Examples	Tier 1 Self-assessment	Tier 2 Internal Peer Review	Tier 3 High Level Peer review	Tier 4 External Independent review
Land Management decision	HLS option selection – technical assessment, expert skill level	✓	✓	✓	
Land Management advice	HLS agreement sign off – all skills level	✓	✓		
Land Management advice	Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer – direct delivery of advice to farmers on diffuse water pollution - practitioner	✓	✓	✓	
Ad hoc response to requests for information and/or advice	General enquiry	✓			
Emergency consultation regional / national	Major oil spill; zoonotic or plant disease outbreak; major national security incident	✓	✓ (where possible)		
Emergency consultation local	Oil spill impacting sub regional area; local security incident; wildfire incident.	✓	✓ (where possible)		
NE Guidance Documents related to statutory functions	Procedures relating to species licensing; agri-environment scheme literature	✓	✓	✓	
Advice and decisions based upon NE Guidance Documents	Species licensing, statutory site casework, planning case work, agri-environment scheme technical literature.	✓	✓	✓ (potentially difficult or contentious cases)	
Advice to government on national policy development	White Papers; proposed EU legislation	✓	✓	✓	
Advice to government on in-confidence policy development		✓	✓	✓	
Advice to government on major aspects of policy/ legislation implementation	Proposed new site series and sites designated by government.	✓	✓	✓	✓
NE Summaries of Evidence	Input from the CoP	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evidence Reviews	Upland Evidence review	✓	✓	✓	✓

Context for advice or decision	Examples	Tier 1 Self-assessment	Tier 2 Internal Peer Review	Tier 3 High Level Peer review	Tier 4 External Independent review
NE Research Strategy		✓	✓	✓	✓
Evidence reports	Technical reviews e.g. NECR100 Managing soil biota to deliver ecosystem service	✓	✓	✓	
Regulation	Peer review of European Protected Species Casework (primarily newt, bat and dormouse licensing) , utilising species networks with topic leads	✓	✓		
Landscape & Biodiversity	Papers for Exec Board & Ops Group	✓	✓	✓	
Landscape & Biodiversity	Parliamentary Questions	✓	✓	✓	
Landscape & Biodiversity	Article 17	✓	✓	✓	✓
Landscape & Biodiversity	Programme spend budgets and project bidding exercise in Q3-4 each year	✓	✓	✓	
Landscape & Biodiversity	National Character Areas development	✓	✓	✓	✓
External Affairs	Briefings for Chair and CEO	✓	✓	✓	
Customer Services decision	Monthly quality control Peer Checking on irregularities and ES scheme processing.		✓		
Customer Services decision	Genesis supervisory quality checking – a percentage of work case items carried out by individual users are checked as part of Genesis accreditation requirements. Two types of checks, Automatic (genesis selects cases for checking on a risk / random basis) and		✓		

Context for advice or decision	Examples	Tier 1 Self-assessment	Tier 2 Internal Peer Review	Tier 3 High Level Peer review	Tier 4 External Independent review
	Manual (manager defines type and level of check required)				
Customer Services decision	Post authorisation Classic Schemes Management Checks – Quality Control Checks carried out by line managers on all staff who authorise claims.		✓		
Customer Services	Mystery shopper exercise/ Quality Audit.		✓		
Landscape & Biodiversity	L&B programme spend procurements (MOAs and grants over £10k) to check to ensure internal standards met for identifying delivery outputs, reporting and partner contributions		✓		

Quick reference**Type of standard** Operational Standard**Purpose:** This standard sets out how Natural England manages the quality of our work.**Owner(s):** Performance and Resources**Sign-off:** Ken Roy (Director of Performance and Resources)**Publication:** Master version**Review date:****Issue Number** Final 3.0

Document Amendment Record			
Issue	Amendment detail	Author	Date
0.1	First draft to broaden the Evidence Operational Standard on Quality Assurance and Peer Review	Alison Tytherleigh	30.10.2012
0.2	Amended to include comments from Fiona Markwick	Alison Tytherleigh	07.11.2012
0.3	Incorporating amendments and comments from Gail Brown, Amanda Craig, Elly Hill & Mike Doughty	Alison Tytherleigh	18.12.2012
0.4	Incorporating comments from an internal consultation (Mike Doughty, Laura Hodgkisson, Allison Potts, Gemma Smith, Adele Wimhurst, Pippa Langford, Kate Heveron	Alison Tytherleigh	28.01.2013
0.5	Amended to include diagram and comments from Amanda Craig, Gail Brown & Mike Doughty	Alison Tytherleigh	12.02.2013
0.6	Amended to incorporate comments from Fiona Markwick	Alison Tytherleigh	15.02.2013
0.7	Amended to incorporate comments from Rob Aubrook, Tim Hill, Paul Lambert and Mike Smith	Alison Tytherleigh	28.02.2013
1.0	Final version	Alison Tytherleigh	27.03.2013
1.1	Update to move to new standards format and minor edits to confirm relationship with R&I standard and to make more relevant to internally focussed staff.	Fiona Markwick	29.10.2013
2.1	Take forward standards in new format, design decision pyramid in line with R&I standard. Update Tier examples.	Stephen Brook	20.03.2014
2.2	Director revisions	Stephen Brook	01.04.2014
3.0	Sign Off	Ken Roy	20.05.2014