Reading Advice Network

RAN
Quality Standard

Version 3, May 2021

Reading Advice Network Quality Standard

The <u>Reading Advice Network</u> (RAN) brings together the voluntary organisations who give information and advice to people who live or work in Reading, with the aim of improving the quality and accessibility of those services. The right information and advice, given when people are facing a crisis or at their most vulnerable, can transform lives for the better. The RAN Quality Standard is designed to enable your organisation, your funders and your service users to be confident that you are giving a high-quality service to the people who come to you for help. It sets out the key elements that make up a high-quality service and shows how these can be demonstrated.

In addition to the RAN Quality Standard, your organisation will need to secure the Safe and Sound Governance Mark awarded by <u>Reading Voluntary Action</u> (RVA). This covers areas such as the governance and management of your organisation, financial control, staff and volunteer policies, monitoring performance, safeguarding and health and safety. The requirements are set out in an RVA booklet which works as a self-assessment tool, but to be awarded the Mark you need to contact RVA. They will arrange a consultation based on the self-assessment tool, and offer the support your organisation might need to achieve the award. The Safe and Sound Governance Mark is a requirement for full membership of the Reading Advice Network.

The RAN Quality Standard, which complements the Governance Mark, is in two parts:

<u>Part 1</u> covers organisations that signpost and give assisted information.

<u>Part 2</u> covers organisations that give advice and do casework.

'<u>Signposting</u>', '<u>Giving information</u>', '<u>Assisted information</u>', '<u>Advice</u>' and '<u>Casework</u>' are all defined in the <u>Glossary</u> at the end of this Standard, starting on page 11.

This booklet works as a self-assessment tool, so you can take the part(s) that cover the services your organisation provides and work through each of the key elements to see how your organisation measures up.

To become a full RAN member, which <u>Reading Borough Council</u> now expects of any organisation delivering its commissioned services that gives information or advice, get in touch with RAN at **<u>chair@readingadvicenetwork.org.uk</u>**

We will arrange an independent assessment for your organisation against the appropriate part(s) of the Standard, and offer additional training or support, where necessary, to enable you to achieve the Standard. The assessment will take into account the size and nature of the organisation, and focus not on whether its systems are simple or complex but whether they achieve the best outcomes for service users.

NB: Any organisation that already holds one of the following Quality Standard Accreditations will automatically have met the requirements of the correspondingly marked RAN Quality Indicators. Assessors will require proof of accreditation.

<u>AQS</u>   - Advice Quality Standard
<u>IIP</u>   - Investors in People
<u>Matrix</u> - Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services

RAN Quality Standard

Part 1

Organisations who Signpost and give Assisted Information

1.1   RAN Quality Measure: The service is strongly customer-focused
It is important for organisations to put the needs of those who use their services at the centre of what they do, so that the service, whether face-to-face, by phone or online, is welcoming and accessible.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Information about the service is clear and easily accessible	Observation	
Waiting areas, where they are required, are clean and comfortable	Observation	
Contacts with service users are friendly and welcoming	Are service users greeted warmly - in person, by phone and online? Are the next steps for the service users explained clearly by the person greeting them? Are expected waiting times explained clearly?	
Opening times are clearly advertised	Observation	
Services are accessible and responsive to service users' needs	Have reasonable and appropriate arrangements been put in place for service users with a range of different access needs *(1)*? Is the organisation willing to work flexibly to accommodate service users with other specific access needs? Have staff and volunteers received training in working with service users with different access needs?	
There is a clear process for signposting to other organisations	Do staff and volunteers demonstrate the ability to signpost clearly? Do staff and volunteers have access to accurate information about the services offered by other organisations?	
There is a clear confidentiality policy in place, covering office and remote workers *(2)*, and it is understood by staff, volunteers and service users **(AQS/Matrix)**	Does a written confidentiality policy exist? Is there evidence that staff and volunteers are aware of it? is the policy clearly accessible?	
Service users know how to complain	Is a clear complaints policy and procedure in place? Is the policy clearly accessible by service users seeking help in person, by phone, or online?	

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
There are arrangements in place for gathering feedback and information about outcomes *(3)* from service users, and using this to develop the service	Is there evidence that feedback is regularly collected? Does the organisation gather information about outcomes? Does the organisation use this to develop its service?	

(1) See the definition of 'Service user access' in the Glossary
(2) See the definition of 'Remote workers' in the Glossary
(3) See the definition of 'Outcome' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** or the **Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services** will automatically have met the correspondingly marked Quality Indicator of this part of the RAN Standard.*

1.2   RAN Quality Measure: Service delivery is properly supervised

To ensure that signposting and information-giving is consistently accurate, it is important that staff and volunteers are always able to contact an experienced and competent supervisor if they have questions they need to ask.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
A supervisor is available to support those who are signposting and giving assisted information **(AQS/IIP)**	Is supervision *(4)* readily available - face-to-face, by phone or online - at all times that signposting or information is being given?	
There are clear and adequate criteria for appointing supervisors **(AQS/IIP)**	Do supervisors *(5)* normally have a minimum of 2 years' experience in their field?	
Supervisors maintain and develop their knowledge and expertise **(AQS/IIP)**	Do supervisors have relevant and ongoing training for their role?	

(4) See the definition of 'Supervision' in the Glossary
(5) See the definition of 'Supervisor' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** or **Investors in People** will automatically have met this part of the RAN Standard.*

1.3   RAN Quality Measure: Staff and volunteers are trained and supported to develop

The training, support and development of staff and volunteers is essential if they are to remain with the organisation and give a consistently good service.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Staff and volunteers have structured induction and initial training, including on the organisation's policies and procedures **(IIP)**	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
Staff and volunteers have regular supportive contact *(6)* with their line manager **(IIP)**	Are records of this kept on individuals' personal files?	
Staff and volunteers are expected to access continuing training and development **(IIP)**	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to share, where appropriate, the learning from training with those who are unable to attend	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to alert staff and volunteers to developments that are relevant to their work	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to ensure reference materials are up to date and accessible both to office and remote workers	Observation, and interview with manager	

(6) See the definition of 'Regular supportive contact' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved **Investors in People** will automatically have met the correspondingly marked Quality Indicator of this part of the RAN Standard.*

1.4   RAN Quality Measure: Enquiries, and responses to them, are properly recorded and checked

To ensure that the provision of information is handled consistently it is important to have clear records of service user enquiries, and responses to them, which are regularly checked.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Clear and accessible records are kept of each discrete service-user enquiry **(AQS)**	Are records of each enquiry *(7)* available and accessible to the relevant people?	
At least 1 in 5 enquiries are checked to ensure that the provision of information has been done correctly**(AQS)**	Are there records of enquiry checking *(8)* in place that show this?	
Recording of service user enquiries is within Data Protection and Information Assurance guidelines **(AQS)**	Is information about individual service user enquiries kept securely, in the office and by remote workers, and only accessed by appropriate individuals? Are service user enquiry records kept for 6 years?	
Corrective action *(9)* with the staff member or volunteer concerned, and with the service user where practicable, is taken when mistakes in providing information or signposting are identified **(AQS)**	Is a clear system in place to show when corrective action is required, what this involves, and when the action has been taken?	

(7) See the definition of 'Enquiry' in the Glossary
(8) See the definition of 'Enquiry checking' in the Glossary
(9) See the definition of 'Corrective action' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** will automatically have met this part of the RAN Standard.*

RAN Quality Standard

Part 2

Organisations who give Advice and do Casework

2.1   RAN Quality Measure: The service is strongly customer-focused

It is important for organisations to put the needs of those who use their services at the centre of what they do, so that the service, whether face-to-face, by phone, or online, is welcoming and accessible.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Information about the service is clear and easily accessible	Observation	
Waiting areas, where they are required, are clean and comfortable	Observation	
Contacts with service users are friendly and welcoming	Are service users greeted warmly - in person. by phone or online? Are the next steps for the service users explained clearly by the person greeting them? Are expected waiting times explained clearly?	
Opening times are clearly advertised	Observation	
Services are accessible and responsive to service users' needs	Have reasonable and appropriate arrangements been put in place for service users with a range of different access needs *(1)*? Is the organisation willing to work flexibly to accommodate service users with other specific access needs? Have staff and volunteers received training in working with service users with different access needs?	
There is a clear process for making referrals to other organisations	Is a clear referral policy in place? Are there records of referrals?	
There is a clear confidentiality policy in place, covering office and remote workers *(2)*, and it is understood by staff, volunteers and service users **(AQS/Matrix)**	Does a written confidentiality policy exist? Is there evidence that staff and volunteers are aware of it? is the policy clearly accessible?	
Service users know how to complain	Is a clear complaints policy and procedure in place? Is the policy clearly accessible by service users seeking help in person, by phone, or online?	

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
There are arrangements in place for gathering feedback and information about outcomes *(3)* from service users, and using this to develop the service	Is there evidence that feedback is regularly collected? Does the organisation gather information about outcomes? Does the organisation use this to develop its service?	

(1) See the definition of 'Service user access' in the Glossary
(2) See the definition of 'Remote workers' in the Glossary
(3) See the definition of 'Outcome' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** or the **Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services** will automatically have met the correspondingly marked Quality Indicator of this part of the RAN Standard.*

2.2   RAN Quality Measure: Service delivery is properly supervised

To ensure that advice and casework is consistently accurate, it is important that staff and volunteers are always able to contact an experienced and competent supervisor if they have questions they need to ask.

There also need to be arrangements in place to monitor and manage the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers giving advice or doing casework.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
A supervisor is available to support those who are giving advice and doing casework **(AQS/IIP)**	Is supervision *(4)* readily available - face-to-face, by phone, or online - at all times that staff and volunteers are giving advice or doing casework? Are procedures in place for structured supervision to monitor and manage the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers giving advice or doing casework?	
There are clear and adequate criteria for appointing supervisors **(AQS/IIP)**	Do supervisors *(5)* normally have a minimum of 2 years' experience in their field?	
Supervisors maintain and develop their knowledge and expertise **(AQS/IIP)**	Do supervisors have relevant and ongoing training for their role?	

(4)See the definition of 'Supervision' in the Glossary
(5) See the definition of 'Supervisor' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** or **Investors in People** will automatically have met this part of the RAN Standard.*

2.3   RAN Quality Measure: Staff and volunteers are trained and supported to develop

The training**,** support and development of staff and volunteers is essential if they are to remain with the organisation and give a consistently good service.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Staff and volunteers have structured induction and initial training, including on the organisation's policies and procedures **(IIP)**	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
Staff and volunteers have regular supportive contact *(6)* with their line manager **(IIP)**	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
Staff and volunteers are expected to access continuing training and development **(IIP)**	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to share, where appropriate, the learning from training with those who are unable to attend	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to alert staff and volunteers to developments that are relevant to their work	Interviews with staff and volunteers, and records	
There are arrangements in place to ensure reference materials are up to date and accessible both to office and remote workers	Observation, and interview with manager	

 (6) See the definition of 'Regular supportive contact' in the Glossary

*Organisations that have achieved **Investors in People** will automatically have met the correspondingly marked Quality Indicator of this part of the RAN Standard.*

2.4   RAN Quality Measure: Cases are properly recorded and checked

To ensure that cases are handled consistently it is important to have clear case records which are regularly checked.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Clear and accessible case records are kept **(AQS)**	Are case records available and accessible to the relevant people?	
At least 1 in 5 cases are checked to ensure that the case has been handled correctly**(AQS)**	Are there records of case checking *(7)* in place that show this?	
Case recording is within Data Protection and Information Assurance guidelines **(AQS)**	Is information about individual cases kept securely, in the office and by remote workers, and only accessed by appropriate individuals? Are case records kept for 6 years?	
Corrective action *(8)* is taken with the caseworker, and the service user where practicable, when mistakes in casework are identified**(AQS)**	Is a clear system in place to show when corrective action is required, what this involves, and when the action has been taken?	

(7) See the definition of 'Case checking' in the Glossary
(8) See the definition of 'Corrective action' in the Glossary

Organisations that have achieved the **Advice Quality Standard** *will automatically have met this part of the RAN Standard.*

2.5   RAN Quality Measure: Giving advice *(9)* and doing casework *(10)* using good quality procedures

It is important that the organisation has good procedures in place to guide those giving advice and doing casework, and that these procedures are followed.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Met/Not yet met
Does the organisation have clear procedures for giving advice and doing casework?	Written procedures exist covering both office and remote workers	

Do the procedures expect staff and volunteers to:
  - explore the issues presented by the service user
  - check that the service user's basic needs are being met
  - look for other relevant issues
  - use verified sources of information to support advice and casework
  - ensure the service user goes away knowing what is going to happen next, and what he or she needs to do
	Is all this set out in the written procedures?	

Are the staff and volunteers familiar with the procedures?	Interviews with staff and volunteers	
Does the organisation have professional indemnity insurance?	Insurance policy certificate	
If the organisation gives debt advice, is it registered with the Financial Conduct Authority?	FCA registration certificate	

(9) See the definition of 'Advice' in the Glossary
(10) See the definition of 'Casework' in the Glossary

Glossary
Key definitions

Advice – involves an assessment and diagnosis of the service user's need, so may involve specific questions and/or requests for further information to identify the service user's actual need, not just their expressed need. This may then be followed up by:

- Providing information and explaining options

- Identifying any further action required or identifying next steps

- Signposting the service user to a specialist resource following thorough assessment of their needs

- Assisting the service user to make a referral to or appointment with a specialist advisor or service

- Identifying relevant legislation or regulation and advising how it would apply to the service user's circumstances, including identifying the implications and consequences of proceeding/not proceeding and the grounds for taking action, and advising on the merit of such actions

- Identifying dates by which specific actions must be taken in order to secure the service user's position

- Assisting the service user to identify and/or fill in relevant forms, such as claim forms, financial statements, etc.

- Assisting the service user to draft a letter or letters to relevant third parties

- Assisting the service user to identify what supporting information they may need to produce

- Making telephone calls or sending emails on behalf of the service user to secure specific information if appropriate and the service user is not able to do this without assistance

Advisors –

- Must always be trained and competent

- Tailor advice to the needs of the particular service user, i.e. advice is person specific

- Normally conclude their work with or for the service user in one interview, but may have some further contact with the service user following actions resulting from that one interview, if required

- Do not act on behalf of the service user; the service user retains responsibility for the matter being dealt with

- Must give advice that is accurate, current and complete

Assisted information – providing service users with support to access and use the information they have requested. This may be as a result of a service user's expressed need or a simple assessment of their capability and any vulnerability.

Case checking – cases where advice is provided or casework is undertaken are checked by a supervisor to ensure that the advice provided is accurate, current and complete or the case has been handled correctly

Casework – involves an assessment and diagnosis of the service user's need, so may involve specific questions and/or requests for further information to identify the service user's actual need, not just their expressed need. This may then be followed up by:

- Taking action on behalf of a service user to move the case on

- Initial negotiations with a third party on behalf of a service user, by telephone, email or letter

- Undertaking follow up work, which might include

    o Taking action to obtain detailed information on behalf of the service user

    o Challenging the decision of a third party

    o Further negotiations with a third party to protect the service user's rights and/or effect resolution

    o Undertaking a larger volume of work over an extended period of time with and/or for the service user

    o Supporting or representing the service user at a court or tribunal to challenge or appeal against a decision

Caseworkers –

- Must be someone who has the required level of competence

- Must present themselves to third parties as acting on behalf of the service user

- May be the service user's named representative with the service user's agreement

More complex casework requires the presentation of complex legal arguments. This may include –

- Representation and litigation, e.g. at a court or a tribunal hearing

- Applications to a higher court or tribunal

- Complex negotiation

In these situations the caseworker:

- Must have detailed knowledge of case law

- Must have knowledge of related areas of law

- Must have skill and experience in the type of case they are representing

Corrective action – if information or advice is found not to be accurate, current or complete, action is taken to ensure that in future information or advice is accurate, current and complete and, if possible, that a service user who has not been given the correct information or advice is followed up and given the correct information or advice.

Enquiry – an initial inquiry from a service user which results in them receiving information, advice or casework

Enquiry checking – initial enquiries are checked by a supervisor to ensure that assessment and diagnosis of the service user's need is accurate and effective and that the enquiry is then handled by the right person

Giving information – providing information in response to the service user's own definition and assessment of their enquiry or need. The service user is then responsible for taking any further action that they require.

Outcome – the result of the information, advice or casework for the service user

Regular supportive contact - the staff member or volunteer has the opportunity at least every four to six weeks to discuss issues with their line manager

Remote workers - staff members or volunteers who are working at home, or elsewhere away from the office. They must:

- Have access to relevant reference materials, and to supervision, whenever they are giving information, signposting, giving advice or doing casework

- Ensure all contacts with service users comply with their organisation's confidentiality policy

Service user access - the access experienced by individuals in need, whatever their particular personal access issues - language, disability, etc. - to services:

- Provided from home, an office or elsewhere

- Provided face-to-face, by phone, or online

Signposting – providing factual information about the role of another organisation and information about how to find or contact that organisation. The service user is then responsible for taking any further action they require.

Supervision – professional oversight of the work of staff or volunteers who provide information, advice or casework, to ensure that:

- Their work is accurate

- Their work is timely

- Their work is proportionate

- They are supported well, in order to be able to give their best and maintain well-being, and to prevent stress and/or burnout

- Service users are treated with respect

- Workloads are manageable

- Training opportunities are identified and appropriate training is provided

- Service users are signposted, supported, advised or are able to access a caseworker according to their need and that they achieve the best available outcome to meet that need

Supervisor – a person who provides line management and professional support. This can be in terms of leading and managing a session, and also providing professional support and mentoring

www.readingadvicenetwork.org.uk/quality-standard/

For further information please visit our website or contact us by:
Telephone: 07834 363144   email: chair@readingadvicenetwork.org.uk

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