



Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers Accreditation Model:

Peer Review Guidance for Advice Providers

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER.....	PAGE NO
Introduction.....	1
Section A	2
Section B	4
Section C	11
Appendix 1 Generic Competences.....	18
Appendix 2: Case Selection Grid including Client Consent Declaration.....	28
Appendix 3: Peer review process flow diagram	29
Appendix 4: SNSIAP Case Submission Grid: Example Housing Specific Competences .	30
Appendix 5: Peer Review Assessment Report template	31

Introduction

At the heart of any good advice service is the ability to offer advice to clients that is accurate, effective, and appropriate to the circumstances involved. Good advice demands technical knowledge, skills, and experience from advisers.

Any agency providing advice to the public should have systems in place for supervising its advisers and checking the quality of their work. Peer review provides an external check on the effectiveness of that supervision and those quality checks.

In the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) accreditation process, independent peer review is the means by which the accuracy of the technical quality of advice provided by an agency is evidenced. A successful peer review assessment is required before an advice provider can progress to audit and SNSIAP accreditation.

This guidance describes the peer assessment process, the way it is applied to case files, how peer review forms part of the wider SNSIAP accreditation model, and other relevant matters.

The guidance is aimed at advice providers applying for SNSIAP accreditation.

Structure of the guidance

The guidance is divided into three sections:

Section A: Peer Review: An Overview

This section provides a description of what peer review is and how it forms part of the wider SNSIAP accreditation model.

Section B: The Assessment Framework

Provides a detailed description of the assessment framework, the criteria used to assess advice quality and guidance in the use of these criteria.

Section C: Conducting the Peer Review

Provides step-by-step guidance about the process for conducting a peer review. This includes selecting case files, assessing those cases, collating the results, reporting and decision making.

Appendices: Appendices are provided which detail the relevant competences upon which assessment is based, a process flow diagram, copies of the forms used and the report which advice providers will receive.

Section A

Peer Review: An Overview

Peer review examines the quality of advice given in a sample of individual cases dealt with by an advice provider. The assessments are usually made by trained Peer Reviewers with current specialist knowledge, skills and experience appropriate to the topic area they are assessing.

In the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) accreditation process, peer review is the means by which the accuracy of the technical quality of advice provided by an agency is evidenced. A successful peer review assessment is required before an advice provider can progress to audit and SNSIAP accreditation.

Self-Assessment

Before an advice provider applies for peer review it must carry out a self-assessment of its service to identify whether it complies with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) overall (both relating to the quality of its advice and the management of its service). If it is satisfied with its self-assessment it can then apply for a peer review of its Type II and/or Type III advice work.

Competences

The SNSIAP define the levels of technical competence that advice providers have to meet in housing, money/debt and welfare benefits in order to comply with the Standards. The peer review assessment will be based on these competences and its purpose is to encourage and support advice providers to continuously improve, by providing a means of evidencing how effective internal checks (supervision and case checking) are at assuring technical quality within their advice service.

The SNSIAP define the advice process as being comprised of some or all of the following components:

- Listening to clients;
- Diagnosing the problem;
- Giving information;
- Advising on the options available;
- Taking action on behalf of clients;
- Negotiating on their behalf;
- Representing clients' cases at tribunals and courts;
- Referral where appropriate; and,
- Enabling or empowering the individual to take informed action on their own behalf

Assessment criteria

Quality of advice assessment criteria will be applied to each case and to the way in which the case has been handled. The criteria used to assess the advice are:

- Diagnosis
- Information & Advice
- Support & Action

The assessment of each of the three Quality of Advice criteria will reflect the assessment against the competences for the areas of law identified in each of the sample cases.

Scoring process

The peer reviewer will decide whether each case complies or not based on a system of Red, Amber or Green scores awarded to each individual criterion.

- **Red:** Unsatisfactory. Missed issues or inaccuracies identified are considered by the assessor to be significant i.e. they have or will result in detriment to the client.
- **Amber:** Satisfactory with some areas for improvement. Missed issues have been identified but they are unlikely to result in detriment to the client i.e. agency intervention has led to an improvement to the client's situation but the issues that have not been addressed could have led to additional benefit.
- **Green:** Good. No inaccuracies identified and strong evidence of effective quality controls.

A case will be assessed as non-compliant if a Red assessment is awarded for any single criterion (Support & Action can be assessed as not applicable if the case only details active advice with no further action requirements).

The reviewer is required to describe and justify why each decision was reached with evidence linked to either a technical competence or a generic competence. Standard forms and SNSIAP generic and adviser competences will be used by the reviewer to ensure consistency.

Further detail of the areas of generic competence that may be assessed as part of the peer review process is given in Appendix 1. As the peer review process is designed to assess the quality of advice based on remote assessment of case files it will not be possible to assess all of the generic competences listed in the Standards.

Section B of this guidance details how the evidence will be assessed and scored in order to:

- identify how well the advice provider assures the technical quality of their advice;
- assess their competence to deliver a quality service to clients; and,

- identify potential areas of weakness in relation to specific areas of law.

Section B

The Assessment Framework

This section outlines the framework set by the assessment method and describes the quality criteria on which it is based.

The six elements of the assessment framework

The assessment framework comprises six main elements:

- **Choosing a sample** - a sample of case records is selected.
- **Identifying the areas of law** - for each case selected, the main enquiry topic raised by each case is identified. The peer reviewer will also identify where the advice provider has given advice on related topics or failed to identify issues with regard to related topics (using the SNSIAP Peer Review Form).
- **Assessing the quality of advice, case management and recording** - for each case selected, the quality of advice offered is assessed according to the quality of advice criteria (using SNSIAP Peer Review Form, Figure 1).
- **Aggregating the results** - the results of all the individual assessments are then aggregated (using SNSIAP Peer Review Collation sheets) to provide an overall assessment of the quality of advice found in the sample cases.
- **Consistency checking** - double-marking of a random selection of completed peer review assessments from the previous 3 months is undertaken by a second Peer Reviewer.
- **Moderation of the Assessment** - The Moderation Committee monitors and supervises the Peer Review Scheme on behalf of SLAB and The Scottish Government to ensure that all assessments meet agreed standards.

More detail on these processes can be found in Section C: Conducting the Peer Review.

Case Records

The peer review is based on the advice provider's case records and will be carried out at a location remote from the provider's usual place of operation. As a processor of personal data the advice provider must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, or other successor legislation (further detail on how this applies can be found on the Information Commissioner's website at www.ico.org.uk). To collect, process, store and share personal information for the purpose of SNSIAP peer review, the advice provider must obtain consent from their clients. If consent to share information for quality assurance purposes has not already been obtained consideration could be given to using the following or similar statement:

“I agree to the disclosure of my case file held by [insert name of agency] to external auditors for the purpose of quality assurance and continuous improvement of the advice service provided by [insert name of agency]”

YES / NO

If the client tells you that they do not wish their information to be shared, this must be recorded to ensure that their file is excluded from the peer review assessments. The advice provider will also be required to sign a disclaimer stating that client consent has been obtained for all files submitted for peer review. This will be part of the form used to submit the list of cases for selection (Appendix 2: SNSIAP Case Selection Grid).

Responsibility lies with the advice provider to ensure that they submit all of the relevant documentation and complete case files. Therefore the assumption on which the assessment framework is based is that case records will be legible, coherent and comprehensive, since proper case recording is accepted as fundamental to maintaining quality standards.

Where files are found to be incomplete or recording is such that no adequate assessment can be made of the overall impact of the quality of advice, the case in question will automatically attract a non-compliant assessment.

The quality criteria

At the heart of the assessment framework are the three quality of advice criteria used to inform and guide the case assessments. These are:

- Diagnosis
- Information & Advice
- Support & Action

Each of the criteria is applied to the case being assessed, with specific reference to the technical competences required for each of the areas of law identified within the case and marked according to the categories given below:

Red:

Unsatisfactory. Missed issues or inaccuracies identified are considered by the assessor to be significant i.e. they have or will result in detriment to the client.

Amber:

Satisfactory with some areas for improvement. Missed issues have been identified but they are unlikely to result in detriment to the client i.e. agency intervention has led to an improvement to the client’s situation but the issues that have not been addressed could have led to additional benefit. For example the file might note that a referral has been made but no explanation of why, to whom and whether accepted.

Green:

Good. No inaccuracies identified and strong evidence of effective quality controls.

Guidelines for Using the Quality Criteria

The following guidelines apply to the use of the respective quality criteria. They are not a prescriptive list that will be ticked for each file review. They will be used together with the adviser competences and generic competences detailed in the SNSIAP document. Technical accuracy of the advice is the core of the file review with the generic competences underpinning this as detailed in Appendix 1.

As a basis for their judgements on each case, Peer Reviewers will draw on these guidelines together with the SNSIAP adviser competences for each of the areas of law identified within the case record.

Each case selected will be assessed using a Peer Review Form (Figure 1: *SNSIAP Peer Review Form*). One form will be completed for each case assessed.

General points

The information in the files submitted for peer review must be clear enough for a peer reviewer to understand what the client has been advised and why.

In general, in making an assessment:

- the peer reviewer will be considering primarily if the advice provided is technically accurate under the law that applies for that area
- the peer reviewer will also look for evidence of the generic competence requirements
- where possible, the criteria will be marked independently of each other, however, where a significant error or omission is made under one heading this could bring down the overall mark. For example, where the diagnosis of the case is accurate but the information and advice given is technically wrong.

The advice given should not be marked down where it is clear from the records that, despite advice, the client opted for a course of action that was judged not to be successful.

Quality of Advice criterion 1: Diagnosis

Relevant aspects of the enquiry are explored to establish: the background, the facts, the client's goal and, where relevant, the client's personal circumstances.

Below are examples of what of a peer reviewer might assess as part of this criterion:

- identified and clearly stated the client's problem/s and identified what the client wants to achieve

- if required, further explored all issues presented and gathered specific details such as dates and times, gathered information from client's documents or third parties, e.g. amount of debt, date tenancy began, whether enforcement action taken
- explored whether discrimination was an issue
- recorded the information collected, e.g. if PIP form completed, a copy should be kept or details noted in the case record of information recorded on the form
- gathered information from client on whether they had already taken action to resolve the issue and the outcome of this.

Quality of Advice criterion 2: Information & Advice

Advice is researched using appropriate information sources and consultation

This criterion assesses the evidence of research, for example:

- use of client's documents which outline the client's contractual rights

This criterion also assesses whether all the client's potentially relevant options/rights have been fully considered and accurately identified. The reviewer may consider the following:

- the client's statutory rights/responsibilities.
- the client's contractual rights/responsibilities.
- range of legal remedies and other steps that can be taken in order to meet client's needs.
- grounds for taking action, e.g. possible fair/unfair reasons for dismissal, eligibility criteria for benefit and how the client meets them.
- interpretation of the information to fit the client's circumstances.
- advantages and disadvantages of remedies, limitations, strength of case.
- consequences of rights/responsibilities, e.g. amount of benefits, redundancy pay, risk of losing home, enforcement of debts.
- whether the adviser identified what options the client wished to take.

Quality of Advice criterion 3: Support & Action

The advice is concluded by: giving the client sufficient details on how to progress their case and, where appropriate, intervening on their behalf.

This criterion assesses the accuracy, completeness and effectiveness of the support and/or advice on next steps. Below are examples of what a peer reviewer might assess as part of this criterion:

- whether the adviser has considered if advice on next steps/action was required.
- whether practical assistance was offered where appropriate with completing forms, drafting letters, negotiations or other steps to progress the client's case, taking account of, for example:

- the client's capacity to represent their own interests;
 - whether the client had taken action on their own previously and been unsuccessful in progressing the issue;
 - the complexity of the issue.
- the quality of written and oral negotiations, form filling and other written records.
- whether the client was made aware of what would happen next, for example:
 - who to contact;
 - what action should / would be taken and by whom.
- whether advice was given on the time limits within which action needed to be taken.
- whether, where appropriate, a leaflet or self-help tool was given in support of the advice/next steps.
- whether the adviser failed to refer or signpost the client on where it was clear this was required.
- action plan agreed indicating what happens next, who is to do what and a clear timetable of actions.
- client's need for further information and/or support from other agencies.
- if there are any significant missed issues.

SNSIAP Peer Review Form (Figure 1)

- **Quality of Advice Assessment Table**

Quality of Advice will be assessed using the 3 assessment criteria and the evidence provided by the assessor should refer to adviser competences for each of the areas of law identified and the generic competence as detailed in Appendix 1.

Each criterion will be given an overall Red, Amber or Green assessment score (column 2) as detailed in Section 2 above. The overall colour score will be based on the net result of missed issues that have been identified for each area of law and how likely they are to result in detriment to the client.

The Diagnosis, Information & Advice and Support & Action criteria will be applied to each of the specific areas of law covered (column 3) and an assessment made of whether or not competence was evidenced for that area of law (column 4).

The evidence used to assess the individual criterion will be provided for each area of law and refer to the specific adviser competence detailed in the SNSIAP document (column 5).

- **Overall Quality of Advice Case Compliance**

The assessor will decide whether or not each case examined complies or not based on the RAG scores awarded to each of the individual criteria.

A case will be assessed as non-compliant if a Red assessment is awarded for any criterion (Support & Action can be assessed as not applicable if the case only details active advice with no further action requirements).

If the advice is accurate but, for example, the notes are unclear or there was limited evidence of the generic competence requirements, then an amber assessment would be awarded.

A green score will be given if the advice given is technically accurate and there is strong evidence of compliance with the generic competences.

Figure 1: SNSIAP Peer Review Form (completed by Peer Reviewer for each case assessed)

Quality of Advice Assessment Table

Assessment Criteria	Overall Score for Criterion G/A/R	Area of Law Assessed	Area of law competence Evidenced Y/N	Comments/Evidence per area of law (evidence must refer to SNSIAP competences including generic competence where relevant)
Diagnosis				
Information & Advice				
Support & Action				

Quality of Advice Assessment Compliance (Y/N)	
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Section C

Conducting the Peer Review

This section offers guidance on how the peer review will be conducted. The steps in the process and associated timings are illustrated in the flowchart in Appendix 3.

Throughout this section, reference is made to the standard forms on which the assessment results will be recorded.

Case Selection and Submission Methodology

The timescales for each of the stages described below are shown in the flowchart included as Appendix 3.

Before lodging interest in applying for accreditation against the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) with the Scottish Government an advice provider must first complete an agency self-assessment against the organisational standards, using the self-assessment form available on SLAB's website. This will enable the advice provider to determine if they are ready to apply for accreditation.

The self-assessment does not have to be submitted to SLAB at this time, but will form the basis of the application for accreditation and audit after successful completion of the peer review process.

If the advice provider self-assesses that they are ready for accreditation at Type II and/or Type III, they must first apply to SLAB to have their casework peer reviewed.

Once the advice provider confirms that they have completed the self-assessment SLAB will then:

1. Send the agency a pre-assessment questionnaire (PAQ) and a case selection grid (CSG)(Appendix 2: *SNSIAP Case Selection Grid*) and ask them to submit:
 - a list of all cases (for which they have client consent) from the last 12 months specifying the broad topic area of the case (Housing, Welfare Benefits or Money / Debt)
 - a disclaimer confirming that they have client consent to share their case files for quality assurance purposes for all case files listed in the case selection grid
2. Once completed, the selection grid should be emailed to SLAB and on receipt of the list of cases and the completed pre-assessment questionnaire SLAB will

allocate a Peer Review slot and initiate the review case selection process as detailed below:

- SLAB co-ordinator selects 30 cases from each of the three broad topic areas applied for (Housing, Welfare Benefits and Money / Debt).
- SLAB will send the agency the selection list using Appendix 4: *SNSIAP Case Submission Grid*. A grid will be provided for each of the three broad topic areas applied for.
- SLAB will instruct the agency to use the submission grid to identify the specific topic area competences evidenced in each of the selected cases.
- The advice provider will be informed of the date allocated for their peer review and given log-in details and guidance for case submission via the Cloud server.
- A deadline will be given for submission and the advice provider must confirm to the Co-ordinator that all files have been uploaded
- SLAB co-ordinator will move 15 randomly selected files per topic of advice into allocated folders onto the Cloud server for peer reviewers.

Collation of data and overall scoring

Once the peer reviewer has assessed all the individual case files, the results will be collated to produce an overall result for the assessment. A collation spreadsheet (*Figure 2: Peer Review Collation Sheet*) will list each case assessed and show the scores achieved for each criterion, whether compliance has been achieved overall and for each area of law evidenced. This spreadsheet will provide a visual representation of the areas for improvement identified by peer reviewers and enable the calculation of an overall score for quality of advice compliance in the topic area.

The spreadsheet is intended to supplement the written reports which will give more detailed and specific feedback.

Quality of Advice Assessment Score

In order to assess an advice provider's competence to deliver a quality service across the areas of law within their remit each assessment will produce an overall Quality of Advice assessment score. The score will be calculated by determining overall case compliance for each case using the Diagnosis, Information & Advice and Support & Action criteria recorded on the SNSIAP Peer Review Form (as detailed above).

The case compliance scores will then be used to give a percentage Quality of Advice score for the assessment overall (Example 1).

Example 1:

15 cases were examined by the reviewer.



- 13 were assessed as compliant for quality of advice (Y recorded - Peer Review Collation Sheet Column 5 - Overall Quality of Advice Compliance)

Quality of Advice Assessment Score - 87%

Assessment of Topic Specific Competence

As noted earlier, the peer review assessment will also examine agency competence in specific areas of law and this will be documented for each case in the SNSIAP Peer Review Form (Figure 1 Area of Law Competence Evidenced- column 4) and collated for all cases in the Peer Review Collation Sheet (figure 2). A tick or cross in the appropriate cell for each area of competence evidenced by the case will indicate whether the peer reviewer considers that the agency has or has not met the required competences for that area of law.

The pattern of ticks and crosses for each area of law will be used by the assessor to identify areas of strength and weakness. These areas of strength and weakness will be summarised in the final report.

Figure 2: Peer Review Collation Sheet (Example Housing areas of law)

Case Identifier	Diagnosis	Information & Advice	Support & Action	Overall Quality of Advice Compliance (Y/N)	2.1		2.2		2.3		2.4		2.5		2.6		2.7		2.8		2.9		2.10		2.11		2.12					
Case 1	r	r	r	N	√		x							x		x																
Case 2	g	g	a	Y						√						√																
Case 3																																
Case 4																																
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Case 12																																
Case 13																																
Case 14																																
Case 15																																
Quality of Advice Compliance Score																																

Results of Peer Review Assessment

The peer review process has been designed to assist advice providers wishing to achieve accreditation against the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers by testing whether an advice provider's procedures or controls for checking and managing the technical quality of their advice are effective and meet the level required by the standards.

The previous section outlined how the Quality of Advice compliance score is calculated. For advice providers to proceed to the audit and accreditation phase, the overall assessment score must achieve 75% or above, i.e. at least 75% of cases reviewed must have achieved compliance.

The final assessment report will indicate whether the advice provider has achieved the minimum score (75%) required to proceed to accreditation and the audit phase. It will also detail cases that have been marked as a non-compliant overall and the reasons why.

Peer Review Recommendations

The compliance scores calculated using the SNSIAP Collation Sheet will be used to evidence one of two Peer Review recommendations that will be included in the reviewer's report.

Not ready to apply for accreditation and cannot proceed to audit

If an advice provider scores less than 75% for Quality of Advice it means that the agency has incorrectly assessed that it was ready to apply for accreditation and the audit phase of the process. The peer reviewer will have found insufficient evidence in the case files to show that the organisation's procedures and controls for checking and managing its quality of advice are effective. The peer review report will detail why individual case files were assessed as 'compliant' or 'non-compliant', but as more than 25% of the cases reviewed were assessed as not meeting the Standards it would indicate significant issues with agency competence.

Ready to apply for accreditation and can proceed to audit.

If an advice provider scores more than 75% for Quality of Advice this would indicate that the advice provider had correctly assessed that it was ready to apply for accreditation and the audit phase of the process. The peer reviewer will have found sufficient evidence in the case files to show that the organisation's procedures and controls for checking and managing its quality of advice were effective.

The case file assessments may identify areas for improvement in the organisation's advice-giving.

Continuous Improvement



One of the aims of the SNSIAP and the associated accreditation model is to encourage continuous improvement. The conclusions reached and areas highlighted for improvement in the peer review report should enable advice providers to identify how they can continuously improve the quality of their advice service and if any action is required before they proceed to accreditation and the audit phase of the process.

Peer Review Report

Once the assessment is complete a report is sent to SLAB using the SNIAP Peer Review Report Template.

Double Marking

If an advice provider does not obtain the assessment score required to move to accreditation and audit a second peer reviewer will be asked to double-mark their case files. The reports of both the first and the second peer reviewer will be sent to the Moderation Committee, which will make the final decision on the outcome of the review.

Double-marking will also be carried out as a Quality Assurance Exercise every quarter on a selection of case files submitted to SLAB by agencies seeking to be peer reviewed. The case files to be double-marked will be randomly selected from all the case files submitted in the previous quarter and a report on the double-marked files will be sent to the Moderation Committee for discussion at the next Moderation Committee meeting. If they identify issues relating to peer reviewer consistency or any training needs, these will be incorporated into future Peer Reviewer training days.

Moderation Committee

The Moderation Committee will monitor and supervise the Peer Review Scheme on behalf of SLAB and the Scottish Government. Moderation of an agency's peer review report by the committee will act as the final stage in the Peer Review process. Successful sign-off of an advice provider's peer review report by the Moderation Committee will be required before an application can be made for accreditation.

Final Peer Review Report

At the end of the Peer Review assessment the advice provider will be sent a copy of the final assessment report and a copy of the decision of the Moderation Committee. They will also be given a copy of the Peer Review Collation sheet which will give a qualitative indication of performance of each case file covered by the assessment.



If the advice provider obtains the required minimum assessment score, details of how to proceed to the audit phase will be sent with the final report.

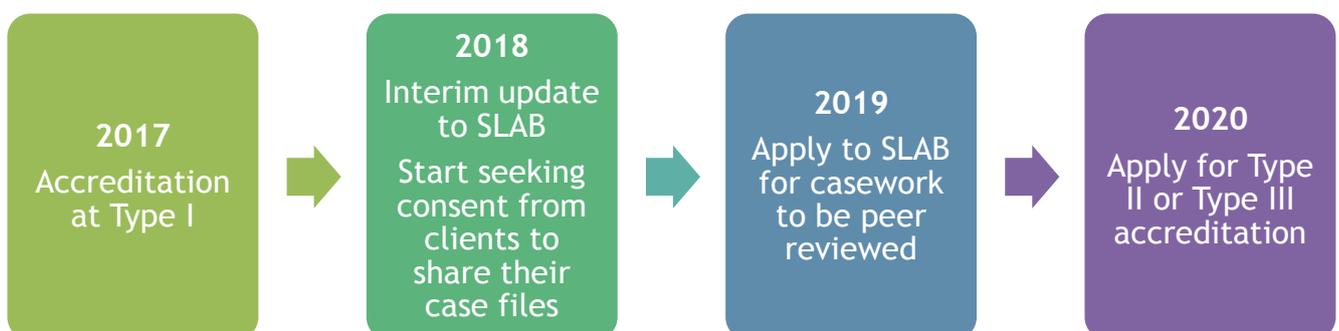
If the advice provider does not obtain the required minimum assessment score, details of how to apply to go through the process again will be sent with the final report.

Reaccreditation if an advice provider's remit has changed

Moving from Type I to Type II or Type III accreditation

An advice provider previously accredited at Type I only, who decides to apply for accreditation at Type II or Type III when their re-accreditation is due, must take the following steps, as the peer review of case work must be completed before an application for Type II or Type III accreditation can be made:

- seek consent from clients to share their case files for the purposes of quality assurance, for the 12 months prior to peer review so that they have sufficient case files with the required consent to be able to provide a year's worth of case files to SLAB for selection
- apply to SLAB for their casework to be peer reviewed 12 months before their re-accreditation is due so that the peer review process can be completed before they are due to apply for re-accreditation and does not hold up their application for re-accreditation and audit.



Appendix 1 Generic Competences

The following competences are generic competences for all advisers, and the agencies they work for that provide advice about Housing issues, Welfare Benefits and/or Money/Debt advice.

1.1 Effective Interviewing

Adviser Competence

Interviews clients effectively as part of holistic advice-giving.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Explores fully and clarifies the presenting problem, and any other problems, the context and clients' feelings	Assessed under Diagnosis
Gathers relevant key information, such information being driven by the advice category	Assessed under Diagnosis
Helps clients to identify key issues, priorities, goals and information needs	Assessed under Diagnosis and Information & Advice
By use of appropriate language and non-verbal communication, demonstrates a sensitivity towards diversity, equality and discrimination issues, including cross-cultural and disability awareness	Cannot be fully assessed by remote peer review of cases. Use of language and judgemental comments will be examined
Identifies relevant dates and action taken on any problems so far	Assessed under Diagnosis
Explores clients' situation to identify any barriers to exercising rights or meeting commitments and liabilities	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies when an interview via trained interpreter is appropriate and able to meet these competences when using interpreter	Limited assessment is possible but remote reviewer unable to assess client's language competence
Summarises actions to be taken, next steps and any follow up work. Explains boundaries and role of service. Agrees roles and responsibilities of adviser and client.	Assessed under Information & Advice



Closes interview in appropriate manner, agreeing future contact arrangements. Issues any standard paperwork (e.g. consent to act for client)	Assessed across all three criteria
Asks specific questions and probes surrounding facts to gather sufficient information from clients to undertake legal research (i.e. a "diagnostic interview") and where appropriate offers a benefit check. Where this is declined, it should be recorded clearly in the case notes	Assessed under Diagnosis
COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Identifies where information is insufficient for proper diagnosis and assists clients to gather further information or makes appropriate referral	Assessed under Diagnosis
Checks clients' understanding of their responsibilities when using the service	Assessed under Information & Advice
Checks clients' understanding of advice given and action to be taken	Assessed under Information & Advice

1.2 Recording and Managing Casework

Adviser Competence

Records advice and advocacy effectively.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
On paper based systems: makes legible, succinct notes which enable other advisers, supervisors, auditors and clients to understand all key information in the case. These notes should include advice given; actions taken; copy of the benefit check if appropriate; roles and responsibilities and the outcome of the case. Case recording should also clearly set out the context of the advice given and actions taken i.e. in relation to the information provided by the client. Case recording should also provide evidence of 1.1 Effective Interviewing	Assessed across all three criteria



On computer based systems: makes appropriate use of any agency computerised record system to make succinct notes which enable other advisers, supervisors, auditors and clients to understand all key information in the case. These notes should include advice given; where appropriate a copy of benefit check; actions taken; roles and responsibilities and the outcome of the case. Case recording should also clearly set out the context of the advice given and actions taken i.e. in relation to the information provided by the client. Case recording should also provide evidence of 1.1 Effective Interviewing	Assessed across all three criteria
Records/notes any deadlines/key dates (including any dates for follow up action)	Assessed across all three criteria
Retains copies of any implementation plans given to clients	Assessed across all three criteria
Where appropriate copies correspondence to clients	Assessed across all three criteria
Makes copies of any relevant documents (including claim forms) and keeps with case records	Assessed across all three criteria
Records outcomes of case	Assessed across all three criteria
Communicates to client where no further action will be taken by the agency e.g. case closing procedure	Assessed across all three criteria

1.3 Time Management

Adviser Competence

Manages time effectively.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Ensures deadlines are met	Assessed under Support & Action
Timeously informs service user of outcome	Assessed under Support & Action



1.4 Legal Research and Feedback

Adviser Competence

Undertakes legal research effectively. This includes evidence of the following:

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Locates and retrieves information relevant to clients' enquiries	Assessed under Information & Advice
With support, locates and retrieves information relevant to clients' enquiries in a standard, current textbook and/or information system	Assessed under Information & Advice
Uses second tier advice and/or specialist services to help research the law	Assessed under Information & Advice
Diagnoses clients' legal position where possible and within the limitations of Type I advice	Assessed under Diagnosis. Type I is not advice and not included in peer review
With advice and support from a Type II or III adviser, discusses options with clients	Assessed under Information & Advice
Identifies where urgent action is necessary including to meet time limits	Assessed under Information & Advice
Recognises need for more skilled advice or when cannot advise, for practical, legal or ethical reasons	Assessed under Information & Advice
Provides appropriate and sufficient information for clients and explains it clearly and accurately in a way they can understand	Assessed under Information & Advice
Helps clients to re-assess their situation and goals in the light of the information	Assessed under Information & Advice
Gathers and/or clarifies relevant facts by interview, telephone or e-mail with third parties	Assessed under Diagnosis and Information & Advice
Researches relevant legislation and case law, government, regulatory and industry guidance and Codes of Practice, policy statements, etc.	Assessed under Diagnosis and Information & Advice



COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Assesses the chances of success of different options and provides feedback and advice about the possible options which arise	Assessed under Information & Advice
Discusses all options and their consequences with clients	Assessed under Information & Advice
Helps clients to assess the appropriateness of the options and to make an informed choice	Assessed under Information & Advice
Checks clients' understanding of the advice given and where necessary, provides a written summary	Assessed under Information & Advice

1.5 Form Completion

Adviser Competence

Effectively completes forms for all areas of advice.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Includes concise, relevant statements of evidence/information	Assessed under Information & Advice
Attaches additional relevant information/evidence where appropriate or required e.g. Minimal Asset Scheme (MAP)	Assessed under Information & Advice
Makes arrangements for follow-up of forms which are submitted	Assessed under Support & Action
Checks accuracy of information on forms completed by third parties	Assessed under Information & Advice and Support & Action



1.6 Effective and Appropriate Referrals

Adviser Competence

Recognises own and agency's limits and makes effective and appropriate referrals.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
With advice and support from a Type II or III adviser, recognises limits of expertise and accurately identifies when an internal or external referral may be needed	Assessed under Information & Advice and Support & Action
Gives clients all relevant information about possible referral to help them to decide whether it is appropriate	Assessed under Information & Advice
Gives clients any help needed to minimise any barriers to pursuing a referral	Assessed under Information & Advice and Support & Action
Makes referral to another agency which is better placed to deal with the matter after ascertaining availability of service, access times/arrangements, communicating with the other agency	Assessed under Support & Action
COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Informs clients of likely costs or eligibility for help with costs if agency being referred to makes charges for services	Assessed under Information & Advice
Recognises cases which are either beyond the scope of the agency or which the adviser does not have sufficient knowledge and experience to advise about	Assessed under Diagnosis and Information & Advice
Liaises with other agency to ensure a smooth transfer of the work	Assessed under Support & Action
Supplies relevant factual details and documents	Assessed under Information & Advice



1.7 Negotiation/Advocacy

Adviser Competence

Negotiates when appropriate and effectively. This includes evidence of the following:

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Distinguishes when negotiation/advocacy is and is not appropriate	Assessed under Support & Action
Distinguishes when negotiation/advocacy should be in writing or by phone and confirms verbal negotiations in writing	Assessed under Support & Action

1.8 Representation and Litigation

Adviser Competence

Represents and litigates effectively.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Understands when a conflict of interest may arise and follows agency policy	Assessed under Information & Advice
Understands the role and ethics of advocacy in representation and litigation	Not assessed as part of remote peer review
Accurately judges when representation and/or litigation is an option for clients	Assessed under Information & Advice
Recognises when skilled legal help is required	Assessed under Information & Advice
Meets all deadlines involved in litigation and understands and uses any rules which allow litigation after a normal deadline	Assessed under Support & Action
Understands the correct legal remedy(ies) for particular problems	Assessed under Information & Advice and Support & Action
Understands and explains any risks associated with litigation to clients	Assessed under Information & Advice



Uses the possibility of litigation to strengthen clients' position during negotiation	Assessed under Information & Advice and Support & Action
COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Undertakes representation at Court according to rights of audience, subject area of expertise and any local practices about representation	Assessed under Support & Action
Understands relevant Court rules, protocols and procedures and basic principles of rules of evidence (e.g. hearsay)	Assessed under Support & Action
Challenges negative decisions, actions or legal interpretation which may be adverse to clients	Assessed under Support & Action
Identifies errors of law in decisions of the First-tier Tribunal in order to find grounds for appeal to the Upper Tribunal or makes a referral if not within the remit of the organisation	Assessed under Support & Action

1.9 Information Technology (in addition to where covered above)

Adviser Competence

Makes effective use of information technology for advice and advocacy.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Provides more detailed and precise advice about future options e.g. better-off calculation	Assessed under Information & Advice

1.10 General Benefits Checking, Income Maximisation & Information Gathering

Adviser Competence

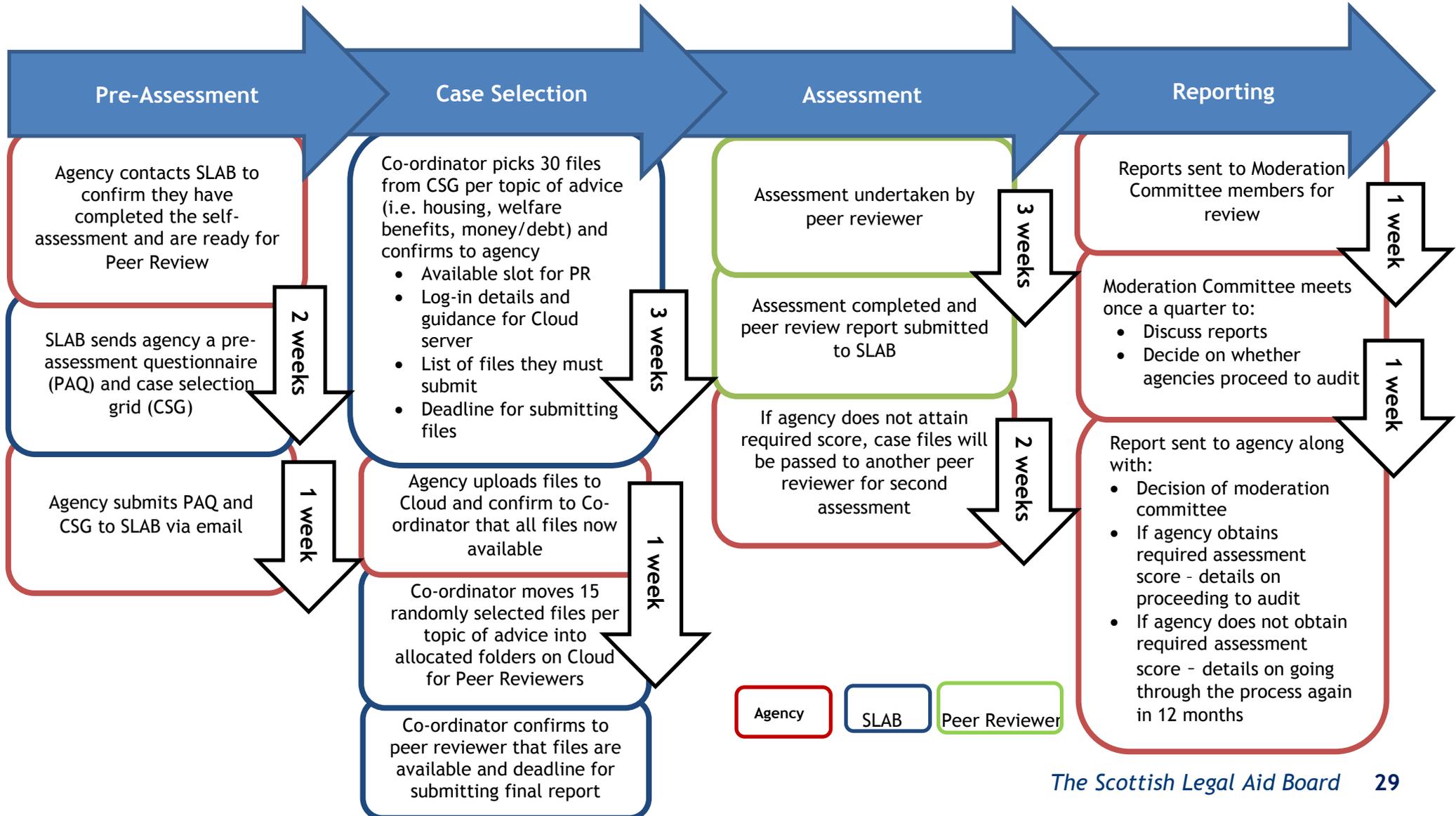
Undertakes a holistic assessment of benefits and tax credits and gathers relevant information in order to begin the process of income maximisation.

COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
Asks questions to check which benefits and/or tax credits are being received	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies common situations where people may be able to receive a benefit or a higher rate of benefit	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies common changes of circumstances which can affect benefit entitlement	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies situations where urgent action is needed and ensures that appropriate action is taken	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies common situations where claiming may have adverse consequences (e.g. if client or a family member is subject to immigration control) and seeks advice	Assessed under Diagnosis
In possible fraud cases, follows the agency's procedure	Assessed under Diagnosis and Information & Advice
Identifies possible claims for backdating	Assessed under Diagnosis
Identifies need for other advice in other areas	Assessed under Diagnosis
COMPETENCES	PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT
With advice, support and supervision, assists clients with claims for benefits and tax credits	Assessed under Support & Action
Progress chases benefit and tax credits applications and payments	Assessed under Support & Action
Has the skills and knowledge to access information on this topic in order to be able to respond to clients	Assessed under Support & Action
With advice, support and supervision in complex cases, dispute or appeal benefit decisions or request supersessions to the appropriate service/office	Assessed under Support & Action



After seeking advice, identifies cases for referral to a more specialist adviser	Assessed under Support & Action
Collects information from client, social security/tax credit sources which enables an accurate, multiple benefit/tax credit check to be done manually or on computer and details kept on file. Assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the case, the potential outcomes and consequences of different strategies and reassesses these in the light of the facts, possible counter-arguments and time limits	Assessed under Diagnosis and Support & Action
Researches entitlement to benefits and higher amounts	Assessed under Diagnosis
Has a good working knowledge of changes of circumstances which affect benefit entitlement	Assessed under Diagnosis
Contacts benefit and tax credit offices by phone and letter	Assessed under Support & Action
Writes detailed letters for mandatory reconsideration, appeal, revision and supersession requests.	Assessed under Support & Action

Appendix 3: Peer review process flow diagram



Appendix 4: SNSIAP Case Submission Grid: Example Housing Specific Competences

Note: For each case indicate the level of service evidenced under each appropriate area of law

Case Identifier	Housing Area of Law														
	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.10	2.11	2.12	2.13	2.14	2.15
Case 1															
Case 2															
Case 3															
Case 4															
Case 5															
Case 6															
Case 7															
Case 8															
Case 9															
Case 10															
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Case 26															
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Case 28															
Case 29															
Case 30															



Appendix 5: Peer Review Assessment Report template

Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers

Peer Review Assessment Report

Organisation:

Organisation contact:

Assessor:

Date of assessment:

Result of assessment:

Contact signature:



Contents

	Page
1 The findings	33
2 Conclusions and areas for improvement	35
3 Appendices	36

Appendix A: Peer Review Collation Sheet



1 The findings

1.1 Quality of advice assessment summary

Refer to the SNSIAP Peer Review Guidance for full details of assessment criteria.

A total of xx cases were looked at. The selection was based on the service remit as detailed in their application self-assessment.

Summary statistics:

Number of cases assessed	
Number of cases that complied with Quality of Advice Criteria	

Results of compliance with Quality of Advice Criteria are summarised in Table 1.

Compliance results

Table 1: Quality of Advice Criteria Compliance Results

	Number Assessed	Red	Amber	Green
Diagnosis				
Information & Advice				
Support & Action				

Positive areas of service:

-
-

1.2 Compliance details by case

Cases that complied with all criteria

The following cases achieved a Green for each of the quality of advice criteria:

•	•	•	•	•	•
---	---	---	---	---	---



•	•	•	•	•	•
•	•	•	•	•	•
•	•	•	•	•	•

Cases that complied with observations

XX cases complied with quality of advice criteria but achieved an Amber assessment for one or more of the assessment criteria.

Evidence used by the assessor for an Amber assessment is detailed for each case.

Case No.

- **Diagnosis**
- **Advice & Information**
- **Support & Action**

Cases that did not comply

XX cases did not comply as they achieved a Red assessment for one or more of the criteria.

Evidence used by the assessor for a Red assessment is detailed for each case.

Case No.

- **Diagnosis**
- **Advice & Information**
- **Support & Action**



2 Conclusions and areas for improvement

2.1 Assessors Conclusions:

Areas for improvement



3 Appendices

Appendix A: Peer Review Collation Sheet