



The Consultation Institute Quality Assurance



The
Consultation
Institute



What is Quality Assurance?

Quality Assurance (QA) is a structured assurance programme from the Consultation Institute (tCI).

Working alongside your consultation team, it is designed to provide organisations undertaking public consultation with a high level of assurance that their activities are in line with best-practice expectations. These are outlined in the Consultation Institute's Consultation Charter, the UK government's Consultation Principles and UK case law.

Through a series of seven interventions (see p.4), the QA process has been designed to ensure that your consultation activities meet the required standard, reducing the risk of costly errors, reputational damage and possible legal challenge.

Quality Assurance is usually initiated before a public consultation programme commences. However, QA can be tailored to look at specific aspects of the consultation process, for instance to review pre-consultation and options development, or equalities analysis, both of which have come under increasing scrutiny in recent legal challenges.



Provides organisations with a high level of assurance in their activities



Ensures your consultation meets the required standard and reduces risk



Helps to avoid reputational damage and possible legal challenge



Can be tailored to look at specific aspects of your consultation process



Working together

Quality Assurance is delivered using a team of two experienced tCI Associates, an Assessor and a Verifier. They work closely with your team to provide support in preparing for each intervention, ensuring that standards are understood and, where required, providing practical advice on how to prepare.



The roles of the Assessor and Verifier

tCI appoints an experienced, trained Associate to work with you as an Assessor. Working closely with your consultation team, the Assessor will ensure that you are well prepared to meet the requirements of each stage of the QA process. The Assessor will act as a critical friend throughout, working to tCI's detailed methodology.

A Verifier is also appointed to provide formal 'sign off' for each stage of the QA process. The Verifier works with the Assessor to ensure that standards are observed, and confirms when your consultation has satisfied the requirements for each stage of the process.



The process

tCI provides every client undertaking Quality Assurance with a copy of the Client Handbook, which contains information on the scope and requirements of each intervention. This guide helps you to collate any documentary evidence required and provides you with a clearer understanding of what the Verifier will be seeking from you to sign-off each stage of the process.

Following each intervention you will receive a letter of confirmation from the Verifier indicating the standard which has been achieved for that element of the QA process.

On completion of the QA process, tCI will provide a letter of confirmation stating whether your consultation as a whole has met the requirements to be awarded good-practice or best-practice status. You will also receive a public endorsement from tCI for use with any communications activities.



Intervention Zero

Review of historic (pre-consultation) activities in support of the case for change, shaping of proposals or options development and appraisal. This is to ensure that there are no gaps, omissions or assumptions which might create concerns for the forthcoming public consultation.



Scope and Governance

A consultation should be clear about the purpose of consulting and what matters are open to stakeholder influence. To achieve 'sign-off', a consultation needs an authoritative scoping document describing key aspects of the exercise, its constraints and coverage.



The Project Plan

Consultations need professional project management. Activities, roles and responsibilities and resources all need to be identified and documented in a project plan, alongside a robust stakeholder analysis to identify which audiences need to be engaged. tCI's planning checklist will support you in preparing for this stage of the process.



Consultation Document Review

It helps to have an independent review of your consultation documentation. tCI does not endorse the substantive content of consultation materials, however, we do ensure that the information is clearly presented and sufficient to enable intelligent consideration of your proposals.



Mid-Point Review

This is an important opportunity to consider the progress against the Project Plan and make amendments before it is too late. Using a structured review, this stage considers progress achieved, what complaints or criticisms may have been received, and what, if any, remedial actions are required.



Closing Review

The Closing Review considers whether the consultation activities have been delivered in line with the project plan, and whether sufficient engagement has taken place with the relevant stakeholders. We also revisit the data analysis plan to confirm this is suitable for analysis and reporting activities.



Final Report

The final intervention focuses on the reporting of findings from the consultation. The aim is to ensure that the report of findings is a balanced and true representation of the views which have been received and is suitable to inform and influence the decision-makers and meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

*** Intervention Zero is not required if the client has completed the Institute's Certificate of Consultation Readiness**



Good practice or best practice?

tCI offers two levels of accreditation: good-practice and best-practice.

Good-practice indicates that your consultation has been undertaken to an acceptable standard when reviewed against key elements of tCI's Consultation Charter and current legislation and case law.

Best-practice indicates that you have meet all the requirements of tCI's Consultation Charter and have in our opinion delivered all aspects of your consultation to a high standard.



What our clients say

"We recently held the mid-term review for our consultation and it was a great opportunity for us to take stock of how things were going. The Institute has provided us with such sound advice. Their recommendations have been tremendously helpful."

Sally Baxter, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB

"tCI's assistance has been invaluable. It has complemented our in-house expertise and means that we can address any future high-profile, potentially controversial, consultations with confidence. If we have any doubts we know who to call."

Bruce Hill, Improvement and Development Manager, Tonbridge and Malling BC

"I grant permission for the Claimant to pursue the Consultation Issue, but dismiss the complaint for reasons which I have stated. I am fortified in coming to that conclusion to some extent by four additional factors:

- First, the consultation process itself was subject to independent scrutiny by the Consultation Institute's Independent Quality Assurance process and initially the process was deemed to be of good-practice.
- Secondly, this was later upgraded to best-practice status"

The Honourable Sir Stephen Silber, High Court Judge in R (ex parte Hinsull) v NHS Dorset CCG, 2018



Who has undertaken QA?

Ashford Borough Council
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
Bracknell Forest Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Cheshire Fire and Rescue
Derbyshire Fire & Rescue
Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue
Eastbourne Borough Council
Edinburgh Airport
Essex County Fire & Rescue
Essex Police
Freshwater (UK)
Gloucestershire Libraries
Gravesham Borough Council
Hampshire F&R/Isle of White
Hampshire Fire & Rescue
Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Highways England (Jacobs)
Hywel Dda University Health Board
Improving Healthcare Together
Independent Schools Inspectorate
Lincolnshire County Council
London Fire Brigade
Maidstone Borough Council
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Moorfields Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
NECS
NHS Bedfordshire CCG
NHS Calderdale & Greater Huddersfield CCG
NHS Chorley & South Ribble CCG
NHS Dorset CCG

NHS East Riding of Yorkshire CCG
NHS England
NHS Gloucestershire CCG
NHS Herts Valley CCG
NHS Islington CCG
NHS Islington CCG (NL Partners in H&C)
NHS Lincolnshire CCG
NHS North England CSU (North Teeside FT)
NHS North of England CSU
NHS North Staffordshire CCG
NHS North West London
NHS South Wales Programme
NHS South West London
NHS Southwark CCG
NHS Surrey Heartlands CCG
NHS Sunderland CCG
NHS Wakefield CCG
North Ayrshire Council
Northampton Borough Council
Powys County Council
Radioactive Waste Management
Shepway Borough Council
Suffolk Fire & Rescue
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Transport for Greater Manchester
Transport for London
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Wycombe District Council
York and North Yorkshire LEP



About tCI

The Consultation Institute is a politically neutral, best-practice membership organisation raising standards in public engagement and policymaking since 2004. It provides a range of products and services such as advice, training, leadership and quality assurance to the public and private sectors across the UK and beyond. The principles of honest intention drive its values.

The Consultation Institute has a mission to develop high standards for public consultation and improve representative democracy. By this, we mean ensuring the public consultation (and thus decision-making) is meaningful and has integrity - and that consultees' rights are upheld. One of our core goals is to "bring together and disseminate consultation-related best practice in the public, private and voluntary sectors."



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info@consultationinstitute.org

+44 (0) 1767 318350