Conform or not conform, that is the question

HQAI provides organisations with third-party quality assurance services grounded in feedback from vulnerable and at-risk people and communities. Third-party quality assurance is generally considered the most robust means to generate a reliable, objective assessment of the extent to which a standard is applied. Thousands of organisations across sectors use the process to credibly demonstrate compliance with standard and as a tool for learning and continuous improvement.

More than 70% of HQAI audited partners have chosen certification, the most trusted third-party quality assurance. A certificate by HQAI is valid four years providing periodic checks confirm the continuing conformity with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). Other schemes offered by HQAI are independent verification and benchmarking.

Accreditation

HQAI is accredited against international standards on auditing to assure stakeholders of the quality, rigour and independence of its services. Accreditation can be described as the certification of the certifying body by an official accreditation body. HQAI’s accreditation against ISO/IEC 17065:2012 was granted in December 2018 and covers HQAI-operated CHS certification.
Corrective Action Requests

During an audit, auditors might find non-conformities in the application of the standard. These can be minor or major and lead to Corrective Action Requests (CAR) that need to be closed (corrected) by the organisation within given timeframes through corrective actions.

A minor CAR still allows an organisation to be certified. It needs, however, to be closed usually within one to two years. An array of minor CARs on the same topic often indicates a systemic failure that can lead to the issuance of a major CAR.

A major CAR prevents an organisation from being certified or leads to the suspension of the certificate. However, if the major CAR is demonstratively closed within a maximum of six months, the certificate can be granted or restored. It is worth mentioning that suspensions are relatively common. They are a last resort to grant some more time to an organisation to correct a serious situation. A suspension is systematically reflected on HQAI’s website and organisations are required to inform directly affected stakeholders.

Suspension must not be confused with withdrawal of a certificate by HQAI and cancellation of the process by an organisation.

**Don’t play with time**

At the end of the timeframe for resolving a CAR, the organisation must have corrected the situation and minimised the risk of its recurrence. Time is crucial: a minor CAR that is not addressed within the specified timeframe automatically becomes a major CAR and has serious consequences for the maintenance of the certificate.

CARs have to be resolved through short and long term actions to ensure the issues identified by the audit report are corrected and will not reappear. Such corrective actions may be straightforward punctual corrections, but most often require changes in the organisation’s systems.

**Cause analysis**

During the surveillance audits (maintenance and mid-term) auditors check if the organisation is looking whether the root cause of a non-conformity is systemic or merely accidental. The findings laid out in the audit report help the organisation in the root cause analysis of non-conformities.

Some useful steps in the process of resolving a CAR can be summed up as follows:

- Review of the problem and identification of the cause(s) of the non-conformity. The cause can be hidden beyond several layers of symptoms, which the audit report attempts to highlight.
- Identification of an appropriate solution to address the root cause(s) of the non-conformity and to ensure that it will not reappear.
- Set-up of an action plan for the resolution of the root cause.
- Tracking of decisions and actions and assessment whether they address the root cause and prevent recurrence over time.

For more details about the different schemes offered by HQAI and third-party quality assurance policies please refer to [www.hqai.org](http://www.hqai.org) and address general inquiries to [contact@hqai.org](mailto:contact@hqai.org).