

Quality Accounts: a guide for Overview and Scrutiny Committees

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Contact Details	Richard Owen NHS Medical Directorate Skipton House 80 London Road London SE1 6LH
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Quality Accounts: a guide for Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs).

Healthcare providers publishing Quality Accounts have a legal duty to send their Quality Account to the OSC in the local authority area in which the provider has its registered office, inviting comments on the report from the OSC prior to publication.

This gives OSCs the opportunity to review the information contained in the report and provide a statement on their view of what is reported.

Providers are legally obliged to publish this statement (of less than 1000 words) as part of their Quality Account.

Providers must send their Quality Account to the appropriate OSC by the 30 April each year. This gives the provider up to 30 days following the end of the financial year to finalise its Quality Account, ready for review by its stakeholders.

This mini-guide has been produced specifically for OSCs and draws on relevant information already published in the Quality Accounts toolkit :

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Qualityandproductivity/Makingqualityhappen/qualityaccounts/index.htm>

What is a Quality Account?

Quality Accounts are annual reports to the public from providers of NHS healthcare services about the quality of services they provide. This publication mirrors providers' publication of their financial accounts.

Who has to provide one?

All providers of NHS healthcare services in England, whether they are NHS bodies, private or third sector organisations must publish an annual Quality Account. Providers are exempt from reporting on any primary care or NHS Continuing Health care services.

What is the purpose of a Quality Account?

The primary purpose of Quality Accounts is to encourage boards and leaders of healthcare organisations to assess quality across all of the healthcare services they offer, and encourage them to engage in the wider processes of continuous quality improvement. Providers are asked to consider three aspects of quality – patient experience, safety and clinical effectiveness. The visible product of this process – the Quality Account – is a document aimed at a local, public readership. This both reinforces transparency and helps persuade stakeholders that the organisation is committed to quality and improvement. Quality Accounts therefore go above and beyond regulatory requirements, which focus on essential standards.

If designed well, the Accounts should assure commissioners, patients and the public that healthcare providers are regularly scrutinising each and every one of their services, concentrating on those that need the most attention.

Quality Accounts aim to enhance accountability to the public and engage the leaders of an organisation in their quality improvement agenda.

How will they be used?

Quality Accounts will be published on the NHS Choices website and providers will also have a duty to:

- display a notice at their premises with information on how to obtain the latest Quality Account; and
- provide hard copies of the latest Quality Account to those who request one.

The public, patients and others with an interest in their local provider will use a Quality Account to understand:

- where an organisation is doing well and where improvements in service quality are required;
- what an organisation's priorities for improvement are for the coming year; and
- how an organisation has involved service users, staff and others with an interest in the organisation to help them evaluate the quality of their services and determine their priorities for improvement.

Commissioners and healthcare regulators, such as the Care Quality Commission, will use Quality Accounts to provide useful local information about how a provider is engaged in quality and tackles the need for improvement.

Quality Accounts will be public-facing documents, published on NHS Choices

How will the process of producing a Quality Account benefit the provider?

The process of producing a Quality Account is an opportunity for organisations and clinicians to collect, review and analyse information relating to quality, so that they can decide where improvement is needed in such a way that it becomes part of the core business of the organisation.

It can also help with benchmarking against other organisations.

The process of producing a Quality Account also provides an opportunity for providers to engage their stakeholders, including PCTs, LINKs and the public, in the review of information relating to quality and decisions about priorities for improvement.

This sort of quality monitoring and improvement activity can have many purposes for the provider. For example it will help them to assess their risks and monitor the effectiveness of the services they provide; the information could also inform their internal monitoring of compliance with CQC registration requirements.

Why are OSCs being asked to get involved with Quality Accounts?

The Department of Health engaged widely with healthcare providers, commissioners, patient groups and third sector organisations in the development of Quality Accounts.

A key message from our stakeholder engagement activity was that confidence in the accuracy of data and conclusions drawn on the quality of healthcare provided from these figures is key to maximising confidence in those reading Quality Accounts. Without some form of scrutiny, service users and members of the public may have no trust in what they are reading.

OSCs, along with LINKs and commissioning PCTs, have been given the opportunity to comment on a provider's Quality Account before it is published as it is recognised that they have an existing role in the scrutiny of local health services, including the ongoing operation of and planning of services.

The powers of overview and scrutiny of the NHS enable committees to review any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the area of its local authority. Each local NHS body has a duty to consult the local overview and scrutiny committee(s) on any proposals it may have under consideration for any substantial development of the health service in the area of the committees' local authorities, or on any proposal to make any substantial variation in the provision of such service(s).

How can OSCs get involved in the development of Quality Accounts?

OSCs are ideally placed to ensure that a provider's Quality Account reflects the local priorities and concerns voiced by their constituents.

If an important local healthcare issue is missing from a provider's Quality Account then the OSC can use the opportunity in the form of a statement to be included in a provider's Quality Account to highlight this omission. Some of these issues might not directly relate to healthcare quality, so their omission by the provider might be unavoidable (given their legal obligation to report on healthcare only) and your commentary should acknowledge that.

Quality Accounts aim to encourage local quality improvements, OSCs can add to the process and provide further assurance by providing comments on the issues they are involved in locally.

OSCs may also wish to comment on how well providers have engaged patients and the public, and how well they have promoted the Quality Account.

OSCs should not feel that they have to comment on areas of the Quality Account where they do not have relevant knowledge. However, conversations between providers and OSCs should start at the beginning of the planning process for the production of a Quality Account so both the provider and the OSC are aware of each other's expectations in the process.

OSCs could therefore comment on the following:

- does a provider's priorities match those of the public;
- whether the provider has omitted any major issues;
- has the provider demonstrated they have involved patients and the public in the production of the Quality Account; and
- any comment on issues the OSC is involved in locally.

What must providers do to give OSCs the opportunity to comment on their Quality Account?

A provider must send their Quality Account to the OSC in the local authority area in which the provider has its registered or principal office located.

They must send it to the appropriate OSC by the 30 April each year. This gives the provider up to 30 days following the end of the financial year to finalise its Quality Account, ready for review by its stakeholders.

The OSC then has the opportunity to provide a statement of no more than 1000 words indicating whether they believe, based on the knowledge they have of the provider, that the report is a fair reflection of the healthcare services provided.

The OSC should return the statement to the provider within 30 days of receipt of the Quality Account to allow time for the provider to prepare the report, which will include the statement, for publication.

If the provider makes changes to the final published version of their Quality Account after having received the statement (possibly as a result of the statement), they are required to include a statement outlining what these changes are.

How does the review of Quality Accounts in April fit in with the other activities carried out by OSCs?

Quality Accounts do not replace any of the information sent to CQC by OSCs as part of CQC's regulatory activities.

Quality Accounts and statements made by commissioners, LINKs and OSCs will be an additional source of information for CQC that may be of use operationally in helping to inform their local dialogues with providers and commissioners.

It is recommended that discussions around the proposed content of a Quality Account and review of early drafts of the report is conducted during the reporting year in question so that by April each year OSCs will already have a good idea of what they expect to see in a provider's Quality Account and may have commented on earlier versions.

Where local elections are being held in April and OSCs will not have the opportunity to review Quality Accounts, it is advised that where possible, OSCs discuss plans and suggest content for Quality Accounts with providers when they reconvene in the summer.

Stakeholder engagement in the development of a Quality Account should be a year-long process – ideally starting at the beginning of the reporting year.

Which OSC should a provider send its Quality Account to?

A provider must send their Quality Account to the OSC in the local authority area in which the provider has its registered or principal office located. This may be different from the geographical area of the lead commissioner. In these cases, liaison and co-operation will be the key to achieving a rounded view on the organisation for whose Quality Account you are providing feedback.

Does an OSC have to supply a statement for every Quality Account it is sent?

No. The role of OSCs in providing assurance over a provider's Quality Account is a voluntary one. Depending on the capacity and health scrutiny interests of the OSC, the committee may decide to prioritise and comment on those providers where members and the constituents they represent have a particular interest.

It would be helpful to let the provider know that you do not intend to supply a statement so that this does not hold up their publication.

Does the statement have to be 1000 words long?

No, this is a maximum set in the Regulations. We have increased the maximum limit for situations where LINKs and OSC wish to produce joint comments.

Working with commissioning PCTs, LINKs and other stakeholders

Existing DH guidance recommends that scrutiny of services provided, commissioned or planned by a single NHS body covering more than one local authority area, is undertaken by a joint committee.

Joint committees may therefore wish to work together when considering Quality Accounts for organisations that provide services across multiple authority areas such as ambulance trusts. For instance, joint arrangements may already be in place for providing third party comments on providers to the CQC (for instance, to provide comments to CQC about a provider's compliance with registration requirements) and it would be appropriate to use these existing arrangements to discuss provider's Quality Accounts.

It should be noted however that the legal requirement is for a provider to send their Quality Account to the OSC in the local authority area in which the provider has its registered or principal office located and to publish within their final Quality Account any statement that they have provided. It is important therefore that, when OSCs jointly consider a provider's Quality Account, it is the OSCs residing in the local authority area that sends the statement back to the provider. If the statement has been jointly written, it would be appropriate to state who has contributed to it.

How OSCs and other stakeholders work together is left for local discretion as there is variation across authority areas.

When OSCs jointly consider a provider's Quality Account, the OSC residing in the local authority area for the provider should send the statement back to the provider.

What should OSCs do if they receive a Quality Account from a provider with a national presence?

Some OSCs may receive Quality Accounts from multi-site providers. We do not expect an OSC to assure the quality of a national provider. Instead, we ask that the provider demonstrates how they nationally engage stakeholders day-to-day and in the production of the Quality Account.

How does Quality Accounts fit with the wider quality improvement agenda?

The objectives for Quality Accounts are to encourage boards and leaders of healthcare organisations to assess quality across all of the healthcare services

they offer, and encourage them to engage in the wider processes of continuous quality improvement, holding them accountable to stakeholders.

How do Quality Accounts relate to the work of regulators such as CQC and Monitor?

Quality Accounts do not replace any of the information sent to CQC as part of their regulatory activities. Quality Accounts and statements made by commissioners, LINKs and OSCs will be an additional source of information for the CQC that may be of use operationally in helping to inform their local dialogues with providers and commissioners.

When providing comments on a Quality Account, OSCs should consider whether their reflections on the quality of healthcare provided should also be submitted to CQC.

Monitor's annual reporting guidance requires NHS foundation trusts to include a report on the quality of care they provide within their annual report. NHS foundation trusts also have to publish a separate Quality Account each year, as required by the NHS Act 2009, and in the terms set out in the Regulations. This Quality Account will then be uploaded onto NHS Choices.

Monitor's annual reporting guidance for the Quality Report incorporates the requirements set out in the Department of Health's Quality Accounts Regulations, as well as additional reporting requirements set by Monitor. This is available from Monitor's website.

Quality Accounts for OSCs - Getting started

Before you receive a draft Quality Account:

- Identify which providers will be sending their Quality Account to you and start discussions on proposed content early on in the reporting year.
- Providers have been encouraged in guidance to share early drafts of their Quality Account and useful background information on the content with stakeholders.
- Discuss the provider's proposed content of their Quality Account at an early stage to ensure that it includes areas that have been identified as being local priorities.

Once you have received a draft Quality Account (between 1 – 30 April):

- Before providing a statement on a provider's Quality Account, OSCs may wish to consult with other OSCs where substantial activity (for instance specialised services) is provided to patients outside their area.
- Write a statement (no more than 1000 words in length) for publication in a provider's Quality Account on whether or not they consider, based on the knowledge they have of the provider, that the report is a fair reflection of the healthcare services provided. The statement could include comment on for instance, whether it is a representative account of the full range of services provided.

Sending the written statement back to the provider:

- Send the statement back to the provider within 30 days of the draft Quality Account being received. Your statement will be published in the provider's Quality Account.
- If the provider makes changes to the final published version of their Quality Account after having received the statement (possibly as a result of the statement), they are required to include a statement outlining what these changes are.