



Your Essential Guide to the CQC Single Assessment Framework

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10 Things Every Registered Manager Can Do to Prepare

We're nearly a year on from the roll out of the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) new inspection format, the Single Assessment Framework (SAF). Since its phased roll out in November 2023, there have been a variety of reactions to the effectiveness of the new framework from across the care industry.



Most notably, an independent report was published on 15th October 2024 by Dr Penelope Dash – [Review into the operational effectiveness of the Care Quality Commission](#) – which highlighted concerns about the new framework.

But regardless of whether you're in favour of the new framework or not (and what changes may or may not be made in the future), there are still adjustments that need to be made to your assessment preparation process in the near term.

In this guide, we break down some of the key changes that are now in place under the SAF – and share 10 valuable preparation tips to help you get Outstanding in your inspection.

What is the new single assessment framework?

The underlying purpose of the new framework remains unchanged. The CQC wants to check that care providers are meeting regulatory requirements – and if they're not, take action to ensure standards are met.

The rating scales have also stayed the same, with care providers awarded either:

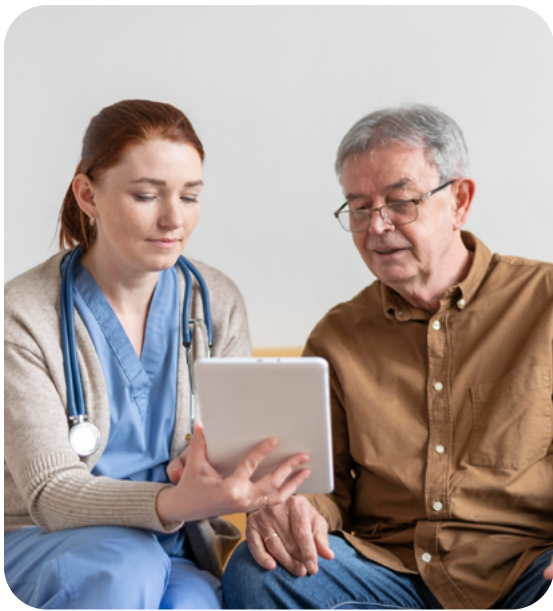
→ Outstanding

→ Good

→ Requires improvement

→ Inadequate

Similarly, [the 5 key lines of enquiry](#) remain unchanged in content (but are now referred to as 5 questions). Providers will still be assessed on whether their care is:



Essentially, the assessment criteria are similar, but the CQC's method of gathering evidence has been updated.

The main difference (and what gives the framework its name) is the move from the three different types of assessments that were used for hospitals, primary medical care, and adult social care to one framework that can be used for all of these providers.

The CQC wants to take a more data-driven approach to assessment while still keeping the experience of those being cared for as their primary indicator.

And part of this involves talking to a wide range of people during the inspection process – not just staff but also those being cared for and their families.

However, there are still quite a few fundamental differences in how the assessment process is carried out which we'll get into in the next section.

What are the key differences from the old framework?

One of the main differences with the new framework is the focus on quality statements.


Under each of the 5 questions, there are now quality statements that providers will have to provide evidence that they are meeting. There are [34 quality statements](#) in total and between 5-8 for each of the 5 questions.


A critique of the new framework is that the number of quality statements providers are assessed on during each inspection varies.


“We statements” and “I statements” help clarify the expectations for the care provided and the standard of care that those receiving it should experience.


Another fundamental difference is that the old assessment method relied only on inspections. Now, the idea is to have a continuous inspection model where providers can submit evidence directly and digitally, as well as collect it from people receiving care and other staff within the organisation.


The evidence collected will fall under one of the following six [evidence categories](#):


- 1  People's experience of health and care services

- 2  Feedback from staff and leaders

- 3  Feedback from partners

- 4  Observation

- 5  Processes

- 6  Outcomes

The evidence received by the CQC will determine how frequently they perform in-person inspections. Previously, the frequency of visits was based on the last rating the provider received and their risk assessment.

The plan was also to streamline the reporting process and reduce the time taken to provide feedback. However, this has yet to come to fruition, with some reports that it's actually taking longer than before to receive inspection results.

Considering these teething problems, it can be confusing for care providers to know how and what they will be assessed on. Proactive and ongoing preparation is vital so that you're ready whenever the CQC assessment takes place and ready to give evidence for all quality statements. Now, let's get into some practical steps to help make this happen.



10 tips to help you prepare

Before we get into our tips below, it's important to recognise that every provider has safety and compliance processes that are unique to how they operate – and ultimately, you know best how responsible care should be delivered within your organisation. The tips below are just suggestions to help relieve some of the stress and administrative burden that is often part of the CQC assessment process.

1 Get ahead with policy-driven care

From monitoring training to reporting events, it can seem that there's a policy for just about everything in care delivery. And although it's time-consuming to draft and update all of these policy documents, it's one of the most thorough ways of showing the standards that you work to.

CQC inspectors can read through your portfolios of policies and get a pretty detailed overview of how you operate on a daily basis. It's like giving them a guided tour of your commitment to quality.

Some key policies that you should look at as a starting point are:



Business continuity plan



Maintenance



Supervision matrices



Governance tracker



Training matrices



Statement of purpose



DoLS tracker



Employment tracker



Accidents and incidents reporting

Even if you don't have fully developed policy documents for each of these areas, identifying the lack of these in your existing process and outlining plans or timeframes for creating them is valuable for sharing with the CQC.

2 Proactively collect evidence

As we mentioned earlier, the CQC gathers evidence in a variety of ways, and the types of evidence they look for will depend on the kind of service you provide and whether you're a new or established service.



The evidence required will also depend on which quality statements are assessed and what information the CQC already has about your service.

This is because different processes may be better for collecting supporting evidence – such as providing digital documents via the portal or site visits to speak to those receiving care.

For your first assessment under the new framework, it's impossible to know which quality statements you'll be assessed on so it's critical to engrain a culture of reporting that will help you cover all bases.

3 Plan around quality statements

When gathering evidence, keep the 5 questions and quality statements front and centre. As you collect surveys, reports, or feedback, think about which of the 34 quality statements each piece aligns with, and make sure to file it digitally in a centralised system.

Doing this makes it much easier to organise and share the proper evidence with the CQC since you'll already have everything sorted and ready to go. Plus, it helps you spot any areas where you might be missing evidence so you can focus on gathering what's needed ahead of time – avoiding a last-minute scramble if the CQC decides to assess that specific area.

4 Submit evidence through the portal

The provider portal was launched in March 2024 and aimed to digitalise the care registration and inspection process.

Providers can submit certain notification types through the portal, which can be used as evidence for the assessment.

Currently, the [CQC's provider portal](#) does not consistently provide a smooth experience, and some providers are unable to use it effectively. However, they are actively making improvements and looking to add more services in the future, so this is likely to become more beneficial.

5 Provide context for inspectors

With the CQC's restructuring and the introduction of the Single Assessment Framework, some inspectors might not be as familiar with certain types of services as they were before. For instance, an inspector with a background in adult social care might now find themselves inspecting hospitals.

While the SAF is designed to work across all types of care providers, it can still be helpful to give inspectors extra context about the specific services you offer. This ensures they have a clearer understanding of your unique setting and can make more informed decisions during the assessment.

6 Put care recipients' needs at the forefront

The new framework places a stronger emphasis on outcomes – specifically, how your policies and actions directly impact the well-being of those in your care.

Prioritising high-quality care naturally supports effective processes and helps ensure positive outcomes.

However, as mentioned earlier, it's equally important to have the right policies and solid evidence in place to clearly demonstrate how you're delivering compliant, person-centred care. This documentation not only proves your commitment but also ensures that you're fully prepared for inspections and assessments.

7 Speak to other care professionals about their experience

Building a network of fellow care professionals in your area can offer valuable insights into how assessments are being handled by your local authority.

These networks are also great spaces to swap best practices and share tips on the most effective types of evidence for each quality statement.

Having open conversations with others in the field can highlight areas for improvement that the CQC could consider making. After all, a collective voice often has more influence than going it alone when it comes to driving meaningful, system-wide change.



8 Build a stable and engaged workforce

Consistency in staffing is essential for delivering high-quality care. Reducing reliance on agency staff wherever possible fosters a stable, well-connected team, leading to smoother operations and better outcomes for those receiving care.

To retain your staff, offering competitive pay packages combined with a genuine commitment to employee wellbeing is key. This can make your organisation a more attractive and supportive place to work. Regular staff surveys that track how you respond to their feedback also help demonstrate that you value their input and are actively working to improve their experience.

Maintaining safe staffing levels is crucial, not just for day-to-day operations, but also for business continuity in times of change or challenge. Promoting diversity and inclusion within your workforce enhances team dynamics, creating a stronger, more resilient team overall.

9 Anticipate a longer wait for the report



One of the key takeaways from the Independent Review of the CQC was that the feedback loop could take up to a few months – which is criticised as causing delays in implementing the necessary improvements.

Doing your best to prepare as much in advance as possible and having all relevant documentation ready can reduce some of the back-and-forth that may occur with your inspector.

Although there's not really anything you can do on your side to speed up the process after all evidence has been submitted, being forewarned can take some of the frustration out of the wait.

10 Lean on tech for reporting automation

Handling processes for compliance used to be a very manual and disjointed process, and for some organisations, it still is.

But digitalisation takes much of the pain out of the process by streamlining tasks and reducing paperwork.

With an all-in-one healthcare software platform, you can easily collect, store, and report on evidence for your assessments, helping you stay organised and compliant while freeing up more time to focus on delivering high-quality care.

Vatix enables care providers to report incidents from their computer, mobile app, or by scanning a QR code. This ease of access makes it much faster to report healthcare events, view corrective actions, and increase staff engagement with compliance.

How can Vatix help?

Vatix's platform enables you to **report on any events**, incidents, and near-misses that take place and monitor any follow-up actions. Corrective actions, **action plans**, and any supporting photos can be linked to the relevant report so a CQC inspector can get a complete overview of mitigation measures and outcomes.

The platform can also be used to complete **audits**, mock inspections, and **risk assessments**. Our customisable forms can be tailored to your exact organisational requirements, so you have only the fields and forms you actually need.

Our reporting dashboard also gives you (and CQC inspectors) all the information you need to get an accurate look at what is happening across your organisation.

Communication is also streamlined with in-platform messaging and automated reminders to notify your team about actions they need to complete or to alert them to upcoming reports or risk assessments that need to be done.

With Vatix's platform, you can ensure full visibility, streamlined communication, and proactive compliance, empowering your organisation to stay ahead of inspections and maintain the highest standards of safety and care.

If you'd like to find out more about how Vatix can help you navigate the Single Assessment Framework and get you one step closer to being rated as outstanding.

[Get in touch with our team today](#)

[GET IN TOUCH](#)