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| **Human Services Standards**  **Feedback Forum** |
| Summary of Feedback – 20 October 2015 |
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## Human Services Standards Feedback Forum

## Introduction

The Department of Health and Human Services (Department) Standards and Regulation Unit (SRU) facilitated a quality forum on 20 October 2015, to provide organisations which had undertaken an independent review or self-assessment report and quality improvement plan   
(self-assessment) against the Human Services Standards (Standards) (gazetted as Department of Health and Human Services Standards), with the opportunity to provide feedback on the process.

Below is a summary of the key feedback received. It is notable that in all areas there were mixed opinions given the range of people’s experiences and expectations; however, the following areas were consistently raised:

* it is essential for auditors to have program knowledge/technical expertise
* there is still opportunity to improve communication to organisations
* organisations still struggle to identify the activities in scope of the review
* the Standards evidence guide and file audit tools were all seen as useful tools
  + overall Standards and review process/self-assessment process were seen as valuable.

The SRU has provided some notes in the document to respond to the queries where it can. The feedback continues to be considered by SRU and is provided to relevant stakeholders for their consideration.

The SRU would like to thank participants for attending the forum and providing this information.

## Feedback

### Choosing an Independent Review Body (IRB)

#### Questions for consideration

1. Did you attend either expo (July 2012 and July 2013) and was it helpful?
2. Are you planning to attend the expo in November 2015? If yes, as a curiosity, or as planning to change IRB?
3. Funding contribution – acknowledging it is a contribution was it completely out of proportion with the actual cost?
4. How did you choose an IRB – cost? Had worked with IRB previously? The governance and management standards it offered?
5. Did you feel empowered to negotiate with the IRB?
6. Did you get more than one quote or remain with the IRB you knew?

#### Feedback summary

* Auditor knowledge, technical expertise regarding services and the organisation could be improved.
* Review costs varied – they were not always the deciding factor in selecting a review body.
* The pre-review visit was useful in identifying gaps to address prior to the review.
* Organisations are still meeting multiple sets of standards from multiple funding streams/bodies.
* Expo was useful but would prefer summary of what the IRB can offer.
* There have been cost increases due to having interstate reviewers.
* Organisations are not sure what they should be asking.

***SRU notes:***

* *Auditors are required to have technical expertise; organisations should discuss their needs and services with the review body.*
* *Please refer to the IRB information on the website, including the factsheet for selecting an independent review body:* [*http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/human-services-standards-independent-review-bodies*](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/human-services-standards-independent-review-bodies)*.*

### Lead up to the review

#### Questions for consideration

1. Training – did you attend? Was it useful?
2. Preparation – did you get sufficient information (from your IRB, the SRU, the Departmental Division) to assist you to prepare?
3. Advising the SRU of dates – did you receive correspondence from Divisions in relation to not having secured a date when you in fact had booked review dates?

#### Feedback summary

* Training should be targeted based on people’s experience, role and service types.
* Feedback suggested communication from the Department and from IRBs was varied in quality and timeliness.
* Issues of having interstate IRBs – prefer face-to-face contact.
* Self-assessment and file audit tools were useful.
* There should be more guidance on the application of the Standards across the different program types.

***SRU notes:***

* *The format and content of the training will be reviewed in relation to this feedback for future sessions*.

### Tools

#### Questions for consideration

1. Evidence Guide – was it helpful?
2. Client File Audit tool (updated regularly) – was it helpful? How could it be improved?
3. Staff and Carer Audit tool (updated regularly) – was it helpful? How could it be improved?
4. Department’s self-assessment tool (for organisations exempt from independent review) – was it helpful? How could it be improved?

#### Feedback summary

* The evidence guide is useful.
* The Funded Agency Channel is complicated to navigate.
* Communication should be improved regarding tool and resource updates.
* There are old tools on the website.

***SRU notes:***

* *The SRU now puts dates to show when a webpage has been updated.*
* *The SRU maintains a contacts list for email updates and training/forum dates; if you would like to receive these directly, please email the SRU help desk at:* [*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au)*.*
* *Please report any website issues to the address on the webpage you visited or the SRU help desk (*[*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au)*).*

### External reviews or self-assessment

#### Questions for consideration

1. What are some of the positives that have come out of the external review/self-assessment process?
2. What were some of the challenges?
3. What is the experience of undertaking multiple reviews simultaneously (not relevant for self-assessment only)
4. Was the process for notifiable issues clear?
5. Were the non-conformances clear?
6. Were there any issues of applicability of Standards to all activities in scope?

#### Feedback summary

* Reports should capture feedback in relation to specific program / organisational areas.
* The Department should improve and ensure all programs have access to program guidelines.
* The Department should consolidate its guidelines.
* There should be more guidance on client participation in the review.
* The notifiable issues process was transparent.
* There were issues in relation to understanding of notifiable issues and (perceived) incorrect reporting of issues.
* There is preference for reports to clearly articulate improvement opportunities and suggested strategies.
* Multi-funded reviews are complex.
* Organisations struggle to identify their funded activity numbers.
* Changes to funding effects scope – there can be time lapse between arranging scope and the review.
* Interviews are done well.
* The review is good to identify gaps; increase organisation capability; improve outcomes; improve staff knowledge, accountability and learning opportunities.
* It can be a challenge getting all people in the organisation on board with quality.
* There were a number of comments in relation to the lack of notice from IRBs with changes of scope, interview and other audit requirements.
* More support is needed with self-assessments.

***SRU notes:***

* *Notifiable issues information is available on the website at:* [*http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/standards-and-regulation-unit-fact-sheets-and-information-updates*](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/standards-and-regulation-unit-fact-sheets-and-information-updates)*. If, during the review, there is concern about the reporting of a notifiable issue, the IRB and the organisation are able to contact the SRU help desk by email at* [*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au)*, or on phone number (03) 9096 2745, for guidance.*
* *Organisations should contact the person in the organisation responsible for managing the Service Agreement with the Department for details regarding the funded activity numbers. The organisations Departmental local area contact will also be able to provide the organisation with this information.*
* *The SRU is considering training needs and notes the feedback to hold a facilitated workshop on   
  self-assessments.*

### Review Reports

#### Questions for consideration

Please comment on:

1. Quality
2. Content/Structure
3. Did you get what you asked for? Or ask for anything extra?
4. Was the organisation followed up regarding missing activity numbers in the report and what, if any, system has the organisation put in place to resolve this matter in the future?

#### Feedback summary

* One report is preferred where there are multiple standards in use.
* Not all get a draft report, but this is seen as very useful when one is received.
* Reports should be in clear, simple language and strengths based.
* Some reports had a lack of commendations and were ‘nit-picking’ which does not encourage continuous quality improvement.
* Receipt of review report is varied and not always timely.
* Non-conformances are sometimes buried in the body of the review report.

***SRU notes:***

* *SRU will discuss the feedback with the IRBs and consider amendments to the review report requirements information, a summary of which is available on the website at:* [*http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/human-services-standards-independent-review-bodies*](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/human-services-standards-independent-review-bodies)*.*

### Communication

#### Questions for consideration

Was the communication helpful? How could it be improved?

1. From the IRB?
2. The Division?
3. The SRU?

#### Feedback summary

* IRBs may need more training in programs.
* The Department should improve its communication on program/policy changes.
* There should be more IRBs to choose from.
* IRBs should be more accountable.
* Information from SRU not getting through to people.
* Contact with IRBs between reviews is limited.
* The quality plan seems to be inflexible.
* Communication varies with IRBs and Divisions.
* Comment that organisations had not heard of the Quality Enhancement Officer role in each Division.
* SRU team members are responsive.

***SRU notes:***

* *The IRBs are subject to oversight from the Department and their own oversight bodies. If you have concerns regarding the conduct or performance of an IRB, that you have not had a satisfactory outcome of through the complaints/grievance management process of the IRB, organisations are invited to contact the SRU help desk via email at:* [*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au) *or on phone number (03) 9096 2745.*
* *The number of IRBs has fluctuated over time and other IRBs are welcome to apply. The SRU help desk details (*[*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au) *or phone number (03) 9096 2745) should be provided to interested parties.*
* *The SRU maintains a contacts list for email updates and training/forum dates; if you would like to receive these directly, please email the SRU help desk at:* [*hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au*](mailto:hsstandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au)*.*

### Final question

#### Questions for consideration

1. Please provide one key positive and one key opportunity for improvement about the HSS process
2. Others questions or feedback?

#### Feedback summary

* Opportunities for improvement:
  + More IRBs and better information
  + Consolidation of Standards / national standards
  + Organisations should embed quality rather than make it a ‘tick box’ approach to reviews
  + Improved communication
  + Increase reviewers knowledge (or programs and services)
  + Improve consistency in interpretation of the Standards (across programs)
  + Provide more notice for scope changes
  + Align Standards and reviews
* Positive feedback:
  + The Standards are open-ended and provide an opportunity to grow
  + Standards process and evidence guide
  + Standards and reviews provide motivation to look at the service and outcomes for improvements
  + Process provides opportunity for improvement and confirms you are doing a good job
  + Promote/increase transparency, consistency and accountability
  + The requirements of the Standards and the review process requiring organisations to be reviewed against a governance standard has driven huge improvement in the sophistication of organisation’s functions and systems. It has been a significant driver of positive change and quality improvement.

*Thank you again for the feedback which will be considered and passed on to appropriate areas.*