

Ratings characteristics for the quality assurance of serious further offence (SFO) reviews

The rating characteristics indicate what will guide a quality assurer to give a specific rating. They are designed to describe **some** of the features that we can expect to see at each rating level.

Rating characteristics must not be used a checklist or to repeat the basis on which inspectors make their decisions – this is the role of the questions and prompts. Instead, the rating characteristics should act as a reference point for the SFO inspector to assign ratings for each of the standards.

It is not expected that every characteristic must be present for the corresponding rating to be given. Some elements could be good, for instance, while others require improvement.

The characteristics for 'Good' and 'Requires improvement' are closely aligned to the key questions and prompts in the standards framework.

'Outstanding' captures where the review exceeds good, in the following ways:

- highly analytical, in-depth yet concise
- investigative and revealing
- holistic and transparent
- inclusive, using accessible and appropriate language
- well-researched and strongly evidenced.

And, where the review contains a number of the above characteristics, and the rest of the review is overwhelmingly of a good standard.

The characteristics for 'Inadequate' capture whether the review is:

- confused with regard to the narrative of events
- equivocal and vague
- inward-looking and lacking balance
- characterised by gaps and unanswered questions
- unresponsive and inaccessible
- unfocused, with unclear actions.

Each individual SFO review will have an overall composite rating. The overall rating is calculated by adding the score for each standard rating. The scores are as follows:

'Outstanding' = 3, 'Good' = 2, 'Requires improvement' = 1, 'Inadequate' = 0.

Banding based on four standards (and number of points on scale of 12)	
0 – 2 points	'Inadequate'
3 – 6 points	'Requires improvement'
7 – 10 points	'Good'
11 – 12 points	'Outstanding'

We will be rating solely on the quality of each SFO review and how comprehensively it meets the standards in each case. Judgements on whether the 'right' or 'wrong' course of action was taken by practitioners are for local SFO reviewers themselves to make. However, if evidence suggests these judgements are inaccurate the QA process will highlight this and suggest appropriate amendments.

1. Analysis of practice: The SFO review provides a robust and transparent analysis of assessment, planning, implementation and reviewing practice at all levels.

Outstanding

The SFO review provides a fully robust and transparent analysis of practice.

The review provides a highly analytical and in-depth analysis of assessment, planning, implementation and reviewing work during the period under review, in a concise manner. The reviewing manager considers whether all reasonable actions were taken by the probation service. The review fully analyses all crucial decisions, missed opportunities and underpinning reasons for the deficiencies in the case, and exceptional practice, where they exist. The review considers whether the probation service's findings in relation to risk of serious harm and need in assessment, were reflected in the work carried out in the planning, delivery and reviewing phases, with clear focus on risk of serious harm, where it is present. The reviewing manager has taken an investigative approach when exploring underpinning issues relating to practice deficits, or beneficial and positive work, where it exists. The reviewing manager has undertaken their own enquiries in relation to domestic abuse and child and adult safeguarding or other areas of practice where these are missing, to inform their analysis. They have considered drawing on wider sources of information which may enhance their analysis.

The review provides context for the work carried out by the key probation practitioners, including manageability of workload, the experience and skill of relevant staff, office culture and the quality of management oversight and supervision. This information is further evidenced by interviews with the relevant middle and senior managers.

The review contains additional research into the quality of working arrangements between probation and other partner agencies where appropriate. The review, where necessary, compares local/service level agreements with the realities of practice on the frontline. The reviewer's findings are robustly supported by the information elicited during explorative interviews with all relevant staff.

The reviewing manager has identified and been responsive to, where necessary, all practice issues, and has ensured these are raised through the appropriate channels.

Good

The SFO review provides a sufficiently robust and transparent analysis of practice.

The review provides a sufficiently robust and transparent analysis of assessment, planning, implementation and reviewing practice in the case. The reviewing manager considers whether all reasonable actions were taken by the probation service. The review analyses all crucial decisions, missed opportunities, and underpinning reasons for the deficiencies and exceptional practice in the case, where they exist.

The review considers whether the probation service's findings in relation to risk of serious harm and need in assessment, were reflected in the work carried out in the planning, delivery and reviewing phases, with clear focus on risk of serious harm, where it is present. The reviewing manager has taken an investigative approach when exploring underpinning issues relating to practice deficits, or beneficial and positive work, where it exists. The reviewing manager has undertaken some enquiries in relation to domestic abuse and child and adult safeguarding or other areas of practice where these are missing, to inform their analysis.

The review provides context for the work carried out by the key probation practitioners, including manageability of workload, the experience and skill of relevant staff, office culture and the quality of management oversight and supervision. There is sufficient examination of collaboration with other agencies, with evidence-based judgements presented. The reviewer's findings are supported by information elicited during interviews with all relevant staff.

The reviewing manager has identified and been responsive to, where necessary, any practice issues, and has ensured these are raised through the appropriate channels.

A rating of 'Good' indicates that the review has identified and analysed practice sufficiently, but there were some gaps in analysis that were not deemed to be critical but would have enhanced the quality of the review.

Requires improvement

The SFO review provides an insufficiently robust and transparent analysis of practice.

The review provides an insufficient analysis of assessment, planning, implementation and reviewing practice in the case. The reviewing manager only considers some of the reasonable actions by the probation service. The review analyses some crucial decisions, missed opportunities, underpinning reasons for the deficiencies and exceptional practice in the case, where they exist, but some gaps are present.

The review does not fully consider whether the probation service's findings in relation to risk of serious harm and need in assessment, were reflected in the work carried out in the planning, delivery and reviewing phases, with a lack of focus on risk of serious harm, where it is present. The reviewing manager has not taken a sufficiently investigative approach when exploring underpinning issues relating to practice deficits, or beneficial and positive work, where it exists. The reviewing manager has not undertaken enquiries in relation to domestic abuse and child and adult safeguarding or other areas of practice where these are missing, to inform their analysis.

The review provides insufficient context for the work carried out by the key probation practitioners, including manageability of workload, the experience and skill of relevant staff, office culture and the quality of management oversight and supervision. Examination of

collaboration with other agencies, where appropriate, is lacking. The information elicited during interviews with staff is not adequately examined or fails to corroborate the reviewing manager's findings.

The reviewing manager has not identified all practice issues and has not ensured these are raised through the appropriate channels.

Inadequate

The SFO review does not provide a robust and transparent analysis of practice.

The review provides a limited and/or inaccurate analysis of assessment, planning, implementation and reviewing of practice in the case, which may also be overly descriptive. The review fails to consider whether the probation service took reasonable actions in this case. The review does not explore key decisions that the quality assurance process has recognised as a crucial or missed opportunity or a key underpinning reason for a deficiency. There is an inadequate examination of collaboration with other agencies.

The review fails to consider whether the probation service's findings in relation to risk of serious harm and need in assessment, were reflected in the work carried out in the planning, delivery and reviewing phases, with no focus on risk of serious harm, where it is present. The reviewing manager has failed to consider or undertake their own enquiries in relation to domestic abuse and child and adult safeguarding or other areas of practice where these are missing, to inform their analysis. The reviewing manager has not taken a sufficiently investigative approach when exploring underpinning issues relating to practice deficits, or beneficial and positive work, where it exists.

The review does not provide context for the work carried out by the key probation practitioners, including manageability of workload, the experience and skill of relevant staff, office culture and the quality of management oversight and supervision. There is no examination of collaboration with other agencies, even where this is identified as a key finding. The review does not include the 'voice' of the necessary staff, either due to omissions in the review or because the relevant staff were not interviewed (despite being available).

The review has not highlighted exceptional practice where it is present or ascertained if this should be shared with a wider audience.

The reviewing manager has failed to identify all practice issues and has failed to ensure these are raised through the appropriate channels.

2. Sufficient judgements: The SFO review provides clear and balanced judgements on the sufficiency of practice.

Outstanding

The SFO review provides clear and balanced judgements on the sufficiency of practice.

The judgements on the sufficiency of practice are insightful, highly analytical and revealing, with a focus on the appropriate supervision period. The reviewing manager provides in-depth and sound evidence-based judgements in respect of systemic and/or procedural factors in relation to probation practice and decision-making. This includes judgements on all aspects of management oversight for all levels of staff. The review sufficiently reaches conclusions in respect of probation practice and the involvement of all relevant partner agencies to inform the action plan.

The review includes evidence from exploratory and investigative interviews, and clear judgements about the practice of all relevant staff. Where relevant, evidence has been collated from senior leaders and national HMPPS representatives. There are unequivocal judgements on systemic and procedural factors in relation to probation practice and decision-making, which could lead to wider actions where suitable.

The review effectively and thoroughly explains the significance and impact of deficiencies and missed opportunities throughout the review period.

The reviewing manager has drawn clear conclusions about the probation service's partnership working and highlights where improvements are required.

Overall, there are consistently sound and balanced judgements which inform the action plan.

Good

The SFO review provides sufficiently clear and balanced judgements on the sufficiency of practice.

The judgements on the sufficiency of practice are analytical and balanced, with a focus on the appropriate supervision period. The reviewing manager reaches conclusions on systemic and/or procedural factors in relation to probation practice and decision-making. This includes sufficient consideration of management oversight and sound judgements in relation to this.

The review includes evidence from the interviews completed and judgements about the practice of all relevant staff. Where relevant, some evidence has been collated from senior leaders and national HMPPS representatives.

The review mostly explains the significance and impact of deficiencies and missed opportunities throughout the review period.

The reviewing manager will have come to a sufficient conclusion about partnership work.

Overall, there are a number of sufficient judgements which can inform the action plan.

Requires improvement

The SFO review does not consistently provide clear and balanced judgements on the sufficiency of practice.

The review describes rather than analyses some of the systemic and/or procedural factors in probation practice. As a result, some judgements lack clarity and/or a fair balance of evidence. The review draws some conclusions based on practice outside of the perimeters of the investigation. There is inconsistent exploration and analysis of decision-making and insufficient consideration of management oversight, resulting in limited judgements.

The review does not fully consider the impact of crucial decision-making and/or missed opportunities. The conclusions reached in respect of the probation service's multi-agency practice are limited.

The review gives very limited insight into the significance and impact of deficiencies and missed opportunities throughout the review period.

The review lacks evidence from the interviews carried out and judgements about the practice of relevant staff. Limited evidence has been collated from senior leaders and national HMPPS representatives when this was relevant.

Overall, there are limited sufficient judgements to inform the action plan.

Inadequate

The SFO review does not provide clear and balanced judgements on the sufficiency of practice.

The review lacks evidence from staff interviews. There are inaccurate judgements regarding systemic and procedural factors, or these issues have not been considered.

The review takes a descriptive rather than analytical approach to process and overlooks the systemic and/or procedural factors in relation to probation practice and decision-making. This results in limited or absent judgements on the effectiveness of probation practice.

Conclusions are not drawn regarding the effectiveness of management oversight.

The review does not make relevant or sufficient judgements on the probation service's multi-agency practice, where it is relevant to the case.

The reviewing manager has not interviewed the relevant staff members and therefore the review contains significant gaps regarding judgements about the practice of relevant staff. No evidence has been collated from senior leaders and national HMPPS representatives.

The reviewing manager has not considered the significance or impact of missed opportunities/crucial decision-making in the case.

Overall, there are no sufficient judgements to inform the action plan.

3. Learning: The SFO review enables appropriate learning to drive improvement

Outstanding

The SFO review fully enables appropriate learning to drive improvement.

The SFO review effectively and consistently identifies learning for staff at all levels, and/or learning on a local, regional and national level, where applicable. It also fully explains where learning has already been taken forward or where changes have already been made to local or national policy to effect change. The reviewing manager uses evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of changes where possible/applicable.

The action plan evidences well-researched learning to drive improvement, where it exists, for individuals and probation services. Identified learning is imaginative yet simple, with practical and achievable actions. The review clearly explains why specific areas of learning were not included in the action plan.

The action plan robustly addresses all appropriate deficiencies and exceptional practice identified at a local and national level, including probation's multi-agency working. Every action contains SMART objectives. The action plan is responsive to the training and/or learning needs of the staff involved. The action plan clearly focuses on ensuring that all relevant learning is identified and is translated into developmental actions that can be carried out and monitored to ensure similar errors are not made in the future.

The review effectively draws on learning from other sources such as national action plans, inspection reports or other reviews from their area to inform the action plan, however, ensures the learning is relevant to the review and action to be taken.

The review has been through a robust countersignature process, which has ensured that it contains all relevant information to drive forward effective learning.

Good

The SFO review sufficiently enables appropriate learning to drive improvement.

The SFO review effectively identifies learning for staff at all levels, and/or learning on a local, regional and national level, where applicable. It also explains where learning has already been taken forward, or where changes have already been made to local or national policy to effect change. The reviewing manager uses some evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness or change where possible/applicable.

The action plan enables appropriate learning to drive improvement at all levels, where it exists. Where appropriate, it sufficiently identifies areas for improvement at the local and national level. The action plan sufficiently captures all learning and practice improvement.

The action plan is responsive to the training and/or learning needs of the staff involved. It addresses deficiencies identified at the local and national level in the review and contains SMART objectives. There is some consideration of multi-agency learning which informs the action plan. The action plan focuses on ensuring that all relevant learning is identified and translated into developmental actions that can be carried out and monitored to ensure that similar errors are not made in the future.

The review may draw on learning from other sources such as national action plans, inspection reports or other reviews from their area to inform the action plan.

The review has been through a sufficient countersignature process, which has ensured that it contains all relevant information to drive forward effective learning.

Requires improvement

The SFO review insufficiently/inconsistently enables appropriate learning to drive improvement.

The SFO review partially identifies learning for staff at all levels, and/or learning on a local, regional and national level, where applicable. The review does not consistently explain where learning has already been taken forward or where changes have already been made to local or national policy to effect change.

The action plan only partially enables some of the identified learning to drive improvement, where it exists, and not all levels of staff have been considered for learning.

The review insufficiently identifies areas for improvement at the local and national level. The action plan does not capture all the learning and/or practice improvement identified.

Staff's needs have not been considered in the action plan. The action plan does not include all gaps identified at the local and national level in the review. There is limited or missing consideration of multi-agency learning in the action plan. Some of the actions are not SMART. The action plan is inconsistent with the findings of the review. As a result, not all relevant learning has been translated into developmental actions that can be carried out and monitored to ensure that similar errors are not made in the future.

The review does not draw on learning from other sources to enhance the action plan.

The review has not been countersigned to a sufficient standard, which has resulted in missing information, and subsequently missed learning opportunities.

Inadequate

The SFO review does not enable appropriate learning to drive improvement.

The SFO review fails to identify relevant learning for staff at all levels, or at a local, regional and national level, where applicable. The review does not explain where learning has already been taken forward or where changes have already been made to local or national policy to effect change.

The action plan fails to identify key learning to drive improvement, where it exists, and the learning for staff at all levels has not been correctly identified.

The review does not identify relevant areas for improvement at the local and national level. The action plan does not capture the learning and/or practice improvements identified.

The action plan largely fails to include the appropriate learning and staff's needs have not been considered. The action plan does not include all gaps identified at the local and national level in the review. There is no consideration of multi-agency learning in the action plan. The objectives in the action plan are not SMART. The action plan is inconsistent with the findings of the review. As a result, limited relevant learning has been translated into developmental actions that can be carried out and monitored to ensure that similar errors are not made in the future.

There is no consideration of drawing on learning from other sources to enhance the action plan.

The review has not been countersigned to a sufficient standard, resulting in significant omissions in the information provided and associated actions to drive improvements.

4. Victims and their families: The SFO review is appropriate to share with victims and their families and meets their needs.

Outstanding

The SFO review is fully tailored to meet the needs of victims or their families

The style and language used in the review are inclusive and simple to read. Any use of professional jargon or acronyms is explained, and the review contains clear explanations of process, where necessary. The review is accessible to a reader with no knowledge of the work of probation and is sensitive to the impact that findings might have on victims/families. The reviewing manager anticipates what information might be most pertinent to the victim/family and sets this out clearly early in the review.

The review clearly and concisely explains the significance of deficiencies and missed opportunities during the case, and the impact these had so they can be understood by a wider audience. It threads a narrative of the risks that are most relevant to the circumstances of the SFO through the review. This provides full transparency and focuses on the issues that are most likely to be of concern to the victim/family.

The review presents well-evidenced judgements, with clear and relevant examples to inform the reader and support understanding.

The review contains accurate information, which is presented clearly and is concise without compromising on quality.

The review contains only information that can be shared with victims, and there is appropriate and effective identification of information for non-disclosure.

Good

The SFO review is sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of victims or their families.

The style and language used in the review are inclusive and simple to read, and any use of professional jargon or acronyms is explained. The review contains explanations of process, only where necessary. The review is accessible to a reader with no knowledge of the work of probation and is sensitive to the impact that findings might have on victims. The reviewing manager has mostly considered what information might be most pertinent to the victim/family and sets this out clearly in the review.

The review sufficiently explains the significance of deficiencies and missed opportunities during the case and the impact these had. The review attempts to thread a narrative of the risks that are relevant to the circumstances of the SFO through the review. This will provide transparency and focus on the issues that are most likely to be of concern to the victim/family.

The review presents mostly clear judgements, with relevant examples to inform the reader and support understanding.

The review contains accurate information, which is presented clearly and is mainly concise. There may be minor errors which require amendment but are easily rectified and do not affect the overall quality.

The review contains only information that can be shared with victims/families, and there is appropriate identification of information for non-disclosure.

Requires improvement

The SFO review is insufficiently tailored to meet the needs of victims or their families.

The language used in the review is at times ambiguous and includes some professional jargon and/or acronyms without necessary explanation. The review fails to explain some basic probation processes, which would provide clarity. The review is somewhat accessible to a reader with no knowledge of the work of probation and is mostly sensitive to the impact that findings might have on victims. The reviewing manager has not fully considered what information might be most pertinent to the victim/family and, as a result, this has not been set out clearly in the review.

The review insufficiently explains the significance of deficiencies and missed opportunities during the case and the impact these had. The review has not successfully threaded a narrative of the risks that are relevant to the circumstances of the SFO through the review. The review fails to focus on the issues that are most likely to be of concern to the victim/family.

The review presents unclear judgements, with gaps in the supporting evidence.

The review contains some inaccuracies, which affects the clarity of the review. In parts, the information is not concise. The review contains errors which need to be rectified as they affect the quality of the review.

The review contains some information that can be shared with victims; however, some sensitive information is included and therefore there is insufficient identification of information for non-disclosure.

Inadequate

The SFO review is not tailored to meet the needs of victims or their families.

The language used in the review is broadly ambiguous and contains significant professional jargon and/or acronyms without necessary explanation. The review fails to explain some basic probation processes, which would provide clarity. The review is inaccessible to a reader with no knowledge of the work of probation and is indifferent to the impact that findings might have on victims. The reviewing manager has not considered what information might be most pertinent to the victim/family and, as a result, this information has been omitted.

The review fails to explain the significance of deficiencies and missed opportunities during the case and the impact these had. The reviewing manager has not identified or analysed the risks relevant to the circumstances of the SFO. The review fails to focus on the issues that are most likely to be of concern to the victim/family.

The review presents unclear judgements with gaps in the supporting evidence.

The review contains inaccuracies and is not clear and concise. The review contains numerous errors which need rectifying as they affect the quality of the review.

The review has included sensitive information and there is ineffective identification of information for non-disclosure.