

The Single Assessment Framework: innovation, systemic failure and (potential) redemption.

Mei-Ling Huang
Partner

rwk
goodman

Background - Purpose of CQC's SAF

Before Covid:

- Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs)
- CQC inspectors would come in on a regular basis
- Used the “prompts” to inspect
- “Rating characteristics” in plain English.

November 2023

Three big systemic changes:

1. New IT system
2. Changed team structure
3. Implementation of the Single Assessment Framework (SAF)

Purposes of the SAF

- Provide an ongoing assessment and monitoring of quality, safety and risk
- Gather evidence in a variety of ways
- Use evidence and information received to trigger an assessment
- Update ratings more regularly

How was the SAF supposed to work?

34 “quality statements”

- **Safe** – 8
- **Effective** – 6
- **Caring** – 5
- **Responsive** – 7
- **Well-led** – 8

Six evidence categories

1. People's Experiences of health & care services
2. Feedback from staff and leaders
3. Feedback from partners (LA's, ICBs, etc.)
4. Observations
5. Processes
6. Outcomes (NHS only)

Findings of Dr Penny Dash and Sir Mike Richards

- May 2024 – Dr Penny Dash asked to review the effectiveness of CQC.
- July 2024 – CQC asks Prof. Sir Mike Richards to review the Single Assessment Framework
- October 15th – publication of both reports.

“...Changing team structure, changing IT and introducing a new framework all at the same time was bonkers.”

– Senior CQC Executive

Dash Report Findings

- Loss of credibility at CQC
- CQC not listening to their own people
- Reduction in inspection activity
- 15,800 inspections in 2019/20
- 6,700 in 2023/24
- Other types of inspections are filling the gap

Dash recommendations

- Rapidly improve operational performance, fix the portal, improve the use of data and improve the quality and timeliness of reports.
- Rebuild expertise within CQC and relationships with providers.
- Review the SAF and ensure it is fit for purpose, with greater focus on effectiveness and outcomes.
- Clarify how ratings are calculated and make the results more transparent.

Richards report findings

- CQC has been unable to fulfil its primary purpose
- CQC staff are demoralised and angry
- Policy and strategy have been separated
- The SAF is too complex and doesn't allow for the differences in size at organisations

Richards report recommendations

- Fundamental reset of the organisation
- Relationships between inspection staff and providers should be reinstated
- Aspects of the SAF should be retained with modifications. Other aspects should be suspended and scrapped, including the evidence categories and scoring system.
- CQC should work closely in partnership with leaders of health and social care to design improved approaches to assessment and inspection

What's next???

**rwk
goodman**

Scoring

“Providers do not understand how ratings are calculated and, as a result, believe it is a complicated algorithm or a ‘magic box’. This results in a sense among providers that it is ‘impossible to change ratings’ ”.

- CQC have said they won’t score evidence categories anymore.
- The complexity of the scoring process was making assessments take longer than the old system.
- Explains (at least in part) why the number of reports done under the SAF has plummeted.
- 1,379 inspections SAF undertaken between December 2023 and September 2024. Only 885 were of adult social care services.

So, what should CQC do?

Care Provider Alliance (CPA) has been collecting the views of care providers to support Mike Richards' review of the SAF.

First stage focused on capturing your operational experiences of the SAF, closed on the 20 October.

Second stage to provide recommendations about CQC regulatory assessments, including:

- An understanding of what providers want
- The changes required to establish consistency in assessments in different sectors
- Clearer definitions of what “good” looks like
- Clearer guidance on what the process will be

CQC consultation on ratings characteristics

- CQC consultation asking for feedback on a draft set of ratings characteristics. Closes on 30 November.
- “Test and learn” pilot

What do we now want to achieve out of the reinventing of the SAF?

1. Focus on outcomes
2. Improved culture
3. Transparency
4. Better communication
5. Simplicity – “KISS”
6. Right to reply

Questions? Thoughts?

rwk
goodman