

SQS 6

The service unit regularly plans, reviews and evaluates its own performance, and has an effective mechanism by which service users, staff and other interested parties can provide feedback on its performance.

- 6.1 The service unit develops and documents appropriate plans to guide its operations and provide a basis for evaluating its performance.
- 6.2 The service unit has policy and procedures for obtaining feedback from service users, staff and other interested parties on its performance and for responding to such feedback, and such policy and procedures are accessible to them.
- 6.3 Action is taken in response to performance / quality issues identified during review and evaluation processes.

A. INTRODUCTION TO SQS 6 - PLANNING, EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

It is important for an agency to develop a routine for planning, reviewing and evaluating its performance. The review and forward planning process assists an agency to focus on adapting to its changing environment. It also helps develop a future vision and plan which is understood by staff, service users, families and interested others such as volunteers, board members and members of the public.

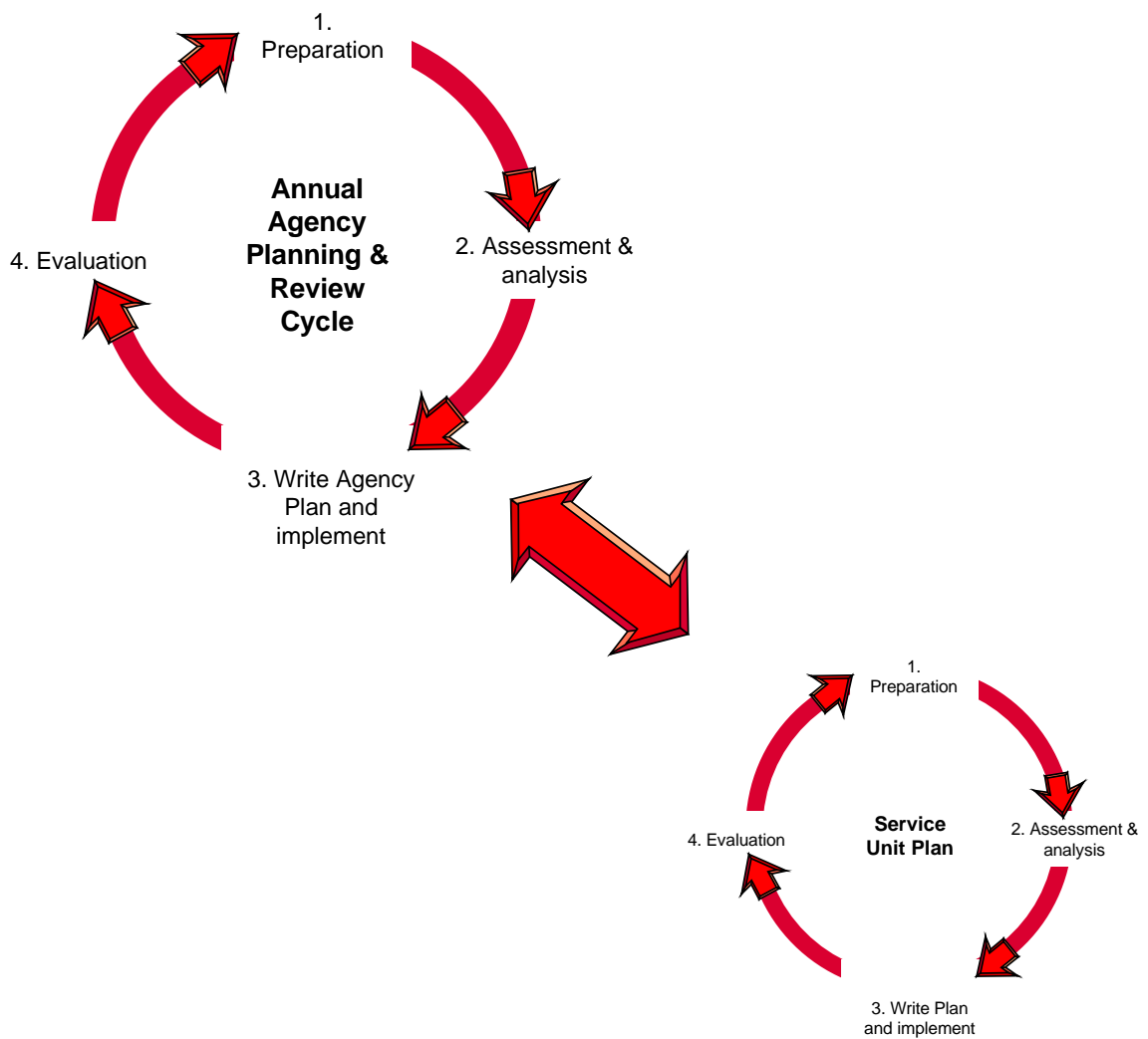
A strategic plan is a high order plan determined by the agency to guide services and programs. It has a long-term focus, is strategic and agency wide. It is not an amalgamation of services and program plans. Rather, these plans should be derived from the strategic plan.

A strategic plan is a map, which is overlaid on the goals, objectives and programs that the agency is aiming to accomplish. The review and planning process helps to sift through the numerous and diverse elements competing for the agency's time and resources and enables it to focus operations more specifically and with a clear sense of direction.

In facilitating the service units to meet the requirements of SQS 6, your agency will:

- have a solid foundation for its activities, achieved through regular performance assessment, forward planning and incorporation of the views of service users, staff and others into the organisation's future plan;
- have a planning process and framework for asking on a regular basis — what is our mission? are we heading in the right direction? and how are we doing?
- have integrated and timely planning systems, i.e. strategic plans, operational plans and budgets; and
- have a mechanism for obtaining feedback from service users, staff members and other interested parties on its performance and for responding to such feedback.

There are numerous planning models and ideal planning processes - all of which are variations upon a common theme. A planning model suitable for social welfare services is shown in the diagram overleaf. This diagram illustrates the core components of the planning process at an agency level and how this links in with the service unit level. SQS 6 aims to ensure that all service units have a structured review and planning process. The approach taken by a service unit to meet the SQS requirements will differ depending upon whether it is part of a larger agency or a small individual service.



B. REQUIREMENTS FOR MEETING SQS 6

In order to meet SQS 6, your service unit will need to undertake the following:

1. Prepare a service plan and evaluate the service unit's performance against the service plan

The exact details of your service plan will depend upon the service type. However the plan, apart from covering activities to be implemented and resources required, should spell out the objectives, tools for assessing effectiveness, and timeframe for evaluation. This plan will guide the operations of your service unit and form the basis of evaluating the service unit's performance in the specified timeframe.

As illustrated in the subsequent section of this document, your specific service unit plans will link into the overall strategic plan for the agency.

There may be three different sources of measures in evaluating performance:

- Specific to and required by the agency
- Specific and related to the service unit plan, and
- Required by the Funding and Service Agreement

However, to meet this standard, it is not necessary to develop new indicators apart from those spelt out in the performance standards in your Funding and Service Agreement as output standards, essential service requirements, and outcome measures, if specified. Assessment of whether a service unit has met this criterion depends on the specifications in its own plan and if such plan is implemented.

2. Have policy and procedures for obtaining and responding to feedback on the service unit's performance

This will include:

- providing service users, staff and others with the opportunity to channel feedback on the service unit's performance
- mechanisms for obtaining feedback, such as surveys, meetings and interviews;
- processes to manage the feedback information received;
- mechanism to responding to the feedback.

3. Ensure that the relevant policies and procedures are implemented and are accessible to the service users, staff and other interested parties.

4. Address issues and problems identified through the review and evaluation process and document the follow-up work taken

The process of reviewing past activities and seeking feedback from service users, staff and others may identify performance problems or issues related to the quality of services being delivered by your service unit. This standard requires that appropriate actions are taken to address the identified problems and documented.

C. RESOURCES TO ASSIST YOUR SERVICE UNIT TO MEET SQS 6

This handbook contains the following resources to assist you to meet the requirements of SQS 6;

- Guidelines on service review and planning ;
- Sample policy on feedback on the service unit's performance; and
- Guidelines on the preparation of procedures for feedback on the service unit's performance.

The documents provided may be used either as:

- a basis for developing guidelines specific to your service unit, in the event that you do not already have existing documents in this area; or
- a checklist for reviewing and, if necessary, amending your service unit's relevant guidelines, if you already have such items in place.

The guidelines for service review and planning describe some of the key considerations when undertaking service evaluation and future planning. The guidelines may assist you in writing up any procedures for review and planning.

The SQS does not require that you have written policies and procedures for service review and planning except in relation to obtaining and responding to feedback from service users, staff and other interested parties. However, we consider that written procedures (perhaps in the service unit's operations manual) would ensure a reliable planning cycle and assist in meeting the reporting requirements of the Funding and Service Agreement and the Statistical Information System.

GUIDELINES ON SERVICE REVIEW AND PLANNING

Each service unit will develop its own planning and review timelines to suit its particular requirements. Large agencies may already have in place a strategic planning cycle including review and planning at the service unit level.

We have developed these guidelines to assist smaller agencies to undertake their planning and review process. Rather than prescribing how service review and planning should be undertaken, we have illustrated a planning process model and have highlighted some of the key activities in order to assist service units to develop their own procedures.

The main components to consider in developing your approach to service review and planning are:

- the broad approach you will take to the planning process;
- the specific steps to take to implement this approach;
- the three key documents which are:
 - the strategic plan;
 - operational plan; and
 - budget.

We consider each of these components below:

1. The approach you will take for the planning process.

In the introduction to this SQS, we outlined a broad approach to planning. This approach linked the development of the agency plan with the development of the service unit plan. The agency plan will provide the overall direction for the service unit, and the service unit's plan will need to be consistent with the agency plan.

In this section we describe these in more detail.

Step 1 Preparation for developing the agency plan.

Step 2 Assessing and analysing the current and future situation at the agency level.

Step 3 Writing the agency plan (which includes the three key documents i.e. the strategic plan, the operational plan and the budget).

Step 4 Preparation for developing the service unit plan.

Step 5 Assessing and analysing the current and future situation for the service unit, taking into account the broad directions the agency and community wish to pursue.

Step 6 Writing the service unit plan (which includes the three key documents i.e. the strategic plan, the operational plan and the budget).

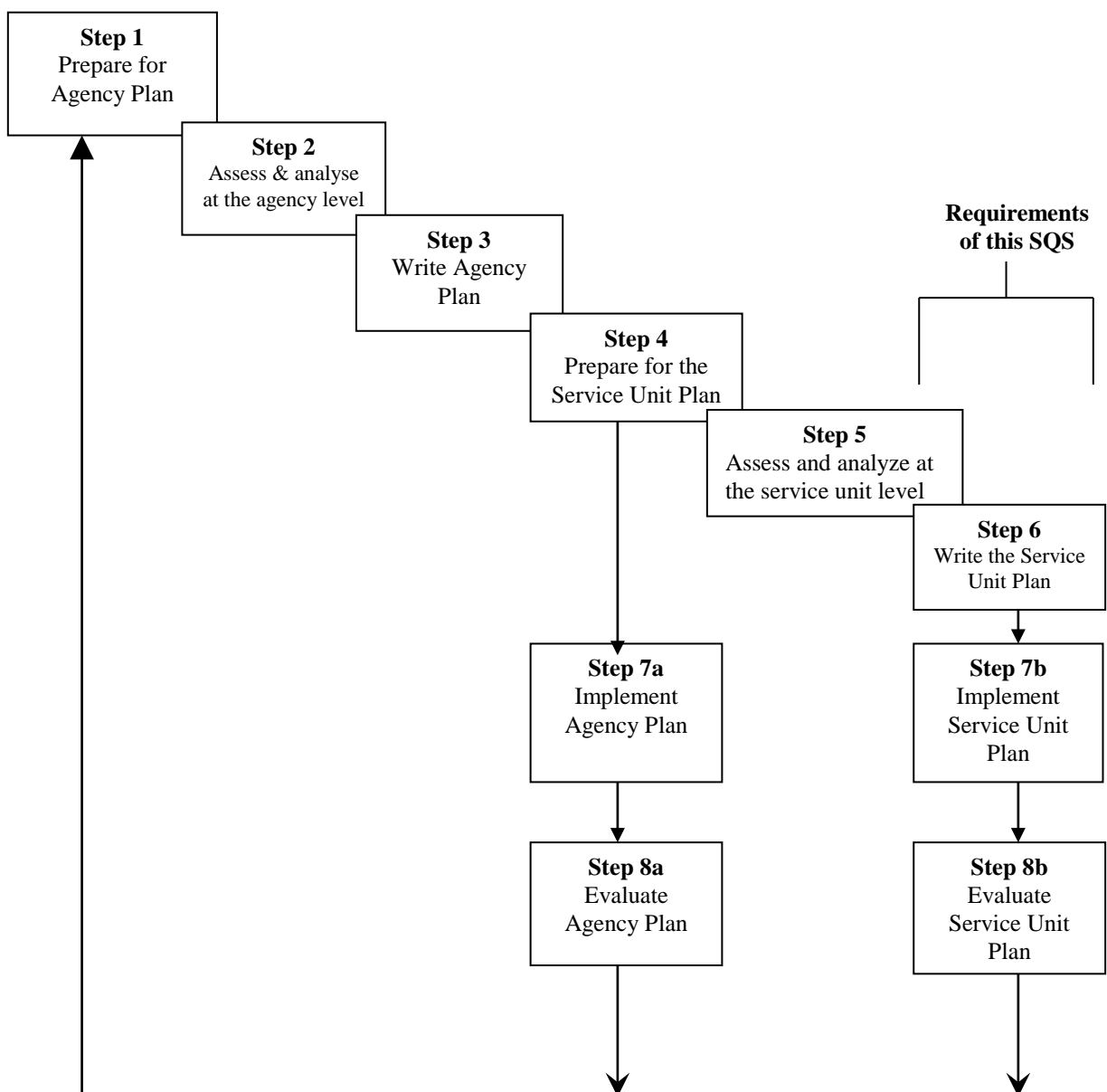
Step 7a Implementing the agency plan.

Step 7b Implementing the service unit plan.

Step 8a Evaluating the agency plan.

Step 8b Evaluating the service unit plan.

These steps are illustrated in the following diagram.



2. The specific steps to take to implement this approach:

The major processes that are carried out at the agency level and the service unit level are:

- Preparing for the planning process;
- Assessing the current and future situation;
- Writing the plan;
- Implementing the plan; and
- Evaluating the plan.

We describe each of these major processes below:

Major process	Issues to consider	Questions to ask
Preparing for the planning process	Administrative issues prior to commencement, such as: timing & scheduling planning process participants communication facilitator location & costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How to co-ordinate with the requirements of FSA, annual budget cycle, staff holidays & program demands? ▪ What should be the frequency and intensity of the planning process? ▪ Should the plan be developed over a number of weeks or during a weekend retreat? ▪ Who should attend and from what levels in the service unit? ▪ How can service users become involved? ▪ How do we inform staff, service users and others about the process? ▪ How can we facilitate their contribution? ▪ What skills are we looking for? ▪ Is the right person an internal or external person? ▪ Where will we hold the planning meeting(s)? ▪ What will costs associated with the planning meeting(s) be?
Assessing the current and future situation	How to gather data about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ current situation ▪ emerging needs ▪ gaps in service ▪ clarification of organisational values ▪ environmental assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the future of the organisation? ▪ What do we anticipate happening in the next e.g. 6 months, 2 years? ▪ What basic beliefs guide this organisation? ▪ What new and/or unmet needs are we aware of? ▪ How can these needs be quantified/described? ▪ What is happening in our external environment?

Major process	Issues to consider	Questions to ask
	How to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ review achievements and challenges of the past year ▪ gather on views of service unit performance including service user's feedback, ▪ review achievement of performance measures ▪ examine external opportunities & threats, internal strengths & weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What have been our results? ▪ Did we achieve our objectives? If so, how well did we do it? What could we have done better? ▪ Who are the key stakeholders? ▪ What is important to them and how do they judge the success of this organisation? ▪ What are some of the critical issues facing us in the next twelve months?
Writing the plan	Content of the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic plan ▪ Operational plan ▪ Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See section 3
Implementing the Plan	How to allocate responsibility for carrying out elements of the plan including resources (human, financial, equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What resources are required to implement the objective? ▪ Who will carry out the objective? ▪ What budget allocation is required?
Evaluating the Plan	Monitoring of progress towards achieving goals and assessment of results achieved, also includes regular review and updating of plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are we achieving our objectives as specified in the plan? ▪ What has happened since developing the plan that influences our capacity to implement it? ▪ Is it still a viable plan? If not, what areas need redevelopment? ▪ Are we performing as expected?

3. Three key documents

The service review and planning cycle will result in producing three key documents:

- strategic plan;
- operational plan; and
- budget

The following descriptions may be useful in helping you to organise the information generated through the planning process. The plan on your service unit's operation will spell out the services/work planned ahead, objectives to be achieved and tools and timeframe for evaluation.

Strategic plan:

A document, which is future oriented and contains a consensus view about future actions and activities of the agency. It is the result of a structured process of evaluation, review and planning. The strategic plan is reflective, evaluating the past, and also predictive, setting the blueprint for the future 3-5 years. It contains the mission and vision of the agency as well as some implementation details of goals, objectives and resource allocations.

The strategic plan will focus at an agency level and be concerned with overall directions and goals. Service units may then develop their own plans based upon priorities identified in the agency plan.

Component	Description	Questions to ask when writing this component
Mission statement	A clear, concise statement which expresses the focus of the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How do we define our purpose?▪ What makes this service unique?▪ What are the basic needs this service fulfils?
Goals	A broad definition of the desired outcomes of the organisation & its activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What are the 2-3 key priorities or key themes that we are seeking to achieve this year?

Operational plan:

A document derived from the strategic plan which develops the objectives, resources, responsibilities and implementation strategies into specific detail and guides the achievement of the priorities in the strategic plan. For the agency, the operational plan will cover all service units in a summary manner. At the service unit level, the operational plan will be more specific and give very detailed guidance about the service unit's operating parameters.

Component	Description	Questions to ask when writing this component
Objectives	The objectives arise from goals and include quantitative measures of success & achievement, focus on when & how much.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What will we do to achieve this objective?▪ What actions are required to complete it and by when?▪ Who is the target group?▪ What resources are required to implement the objective?▪ Who will carry out the objective?▪ What budget allocation is required?

Budget:

The budget process provides the means to determine the financial resources available to carry out your service plan, to allocate the resources into appropriate areas and monitor the use of those resources.

SAMPLE POLICY

FEEDBACK ON SERVICE UNIT'S PERFORMANCE

[Insert name of service unit]

1. *[Insert name of service unit]* is committed to *[insert mission of your service unit, for example ' providing family life education to enhance family functioning, strengthen family relationships and to prevent family breakdowns']*.
2. *[Insert name of service unit]* endorses the principle of service user and staff participation through ensuring that they are well informed about issues affecting the service and aware of their rights to voice their opinions and give feedback on the service performance.
3. *[Insert name of service unit]* is determined to maintain a high quality service through continuous quality improvement that includes receiving and responding upon feedback concerning its service and performance from service users, families, staff and interested others.
4. *[Insert name of service unit]* will conduct regular exercises to seek feedback, opinions and other information on its performance. These exercises will be structured in such a way as to encourage full participation by service users, family, staff and others. *[Insert name of service unit]* will endeavour to provide any necessary supports to service users to facilitate the feedback process.
5. Information generated through the feedback mechanisms will be used in a constructive manner to continuously improve services and the overall performance of the service unit, and meet the changing needs of the service users.
6. This policy will be made accessible to service users, staff and other interested parties.

DATE: *[Insert date policy is created]*

DISTRIBUTION: *[Insert how and to whom policy will be distributed]*

REVIEW: *[Specify when and how the policy will be reviewed]*

GUIDELINES ON THE PREPARATION OF PROCEDURES FOR FEEDBACK ON THE SERVICE UNIT'S PERFORMANCE

1. Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared to assist a service unit develop procedures to implement its policy on feedback on a service unit's performance as required by SQS 6.

2. Contents of procedures

The contents of the procedures for obtaining and responding to feedback will depend upon the nature of your service type and the size of your service unit. The proposed contents need to be reviewed to reflect your service unit's requirements.

There are five main aspects to the guidelines:

- i) Communication of key information;
- ii) Ways of seeking feedback;
- iii) Support to service users to give feedback;
- iv) Channels of responding to feedback; and
- v) Management of the information received.

i) Communication of key information

It is important to ensure that service users, staff and other interested parties are well informed on matters of importance concerning the service unit.

Your procedures will need to cover how this may be achieved, for example through:

- identifying the information requirements of service users, staff, and others including:
 - the type(s) of information that they need or would like to know in order to facilitate the evaluation process;
 - how frequently they require it;
- developing a schedule for the regular preparation and dissemination of information;
- preparing a strategy to assist the service unit to communicate with service users, staff and others should a major issue arise;
- developing ways of communicating the above information. For example, this may be through your annual report, regular newsletters, notice-boards, information bulletins, regular meetings or teleconference calls; and
- developing a mechanism to advise service users, staff and others of these procedures and their entitlement to give feedback to the service unit.

ii) Ways of seeking feedback

Receiving feedback and opinions on both a formal and informal basis is critical for the quality assurance activities of the service unit.

There are many ways in which feedback may be sought and received by the service unit. It is important that the service unit creates an atmosphere of trust and openness that encourages people to feel comfortable about voicing their opinion, concerns or praises. The service unit must be sensitive in how it deals with this information and willing to act upon legitimate concerns to the extent of its abilities. Your procedures should reflect the above points.

The type of feedback received may range from an opinion on the variety of programs offered by the service unit to a request to adjust individuals' day-to-day services.

Your service unit's procedures should cover some of the following feedback activities and structures. You may wish to attach any proforma that you endorse.

Suggestions for obtaining feedback from service users and families include:

- ask for feedback on an informal basis;
- assessment or review of an individual's needs;
- individual service planning meetings;
- service user representatives on committees;
- service user advisory committee to the management committee;
- regular focus groups;
- complaints and grievance processes;
- analysis of incident reports;
- surveys;
- feedback forms at the end of activities/service;
- annual interviews;
- residents committees (in residential services);
- parents meetings (in child & adolescent services);
- telephone and fax 'hotline' for service users;
- suggestion boxes;

Suggestions for obtaining feedback from staff include:

- exit interviews when they leave the service unit;
- regular agenda item for staff meetings;
- regular staff reports to committees or the committee of management;
- complaints and grievance processes;
- analysis of staff turnover;
- analysis of incidents reports;
- surveys.

In addition, feedback may be received from others such as volunteers through interviews and surveys and members of the general public through interviews, surveys and analysis of donations and participation in fundraising events.

iii) Support to help service users to give feedback

Some service users may require assistance to provide feedback to the service unit. This may be through help from another person such as a family member or support person nominated by the service user. It is important that the service unit reassures the service user and the family member (or supporter) that they are a welcome part of the feedback mechanism. The service unit should communicate with the service users on what information the unit are needed in evaluating and reviewing its performance.

Your procedures should include ways in which a service unit can convey its support. This will include assurances that meaningful opportunities will be created to provide feedback.

For example, this may include guaranteeing that:

- adequate time will be made available to the person;
- meetings are scheduled at a time that suits the service user or supporter;
- venues are accessible; and
- suitable forums are scheduled.

Feedback may also be provided through elected or nominated representatives. For example, the service unit may have a service user representative position on the management committee. In this circumstance, the service unit should also ensure that there are opportunities for other service users to provide input to and receive feedback from these representatives. Supports such as photocopying or telephone links may be required to be in place to facilitate this communication between service users and their nominated representative(s).

iv) Channels of responding feedback

Your procedures will need to specify how to respond to the feedback from service users, staff and other interested parties. This may include:

- Service user advisory meeting
- Staff meeting
- Notice board
- Newsletter

v) Management of the information received

Your procedures will need to specify how to manage the information that you receive as part of the feedback process.

Some of the information will be very specific to the individual concerned and relevant to their case notes and service plan.

Other information may focus on the service unit as a whole or a particular program and require analysis and reporting. Your procedures should specify how this may be done and how it links into other practices such as your staff training needs analysis (SQS 5). You can use a flow chart to illustrate the management process.

You will also need to consider other issues, such as:

- storage of the information;
- access to the information;
- confidentiality; and
- disposal of the information.

3. Links

You should consider how this SQS relates to others and link accordingly. For example, this SQS relates to other SQSs dealing with information (SQS 1), reporting (SQS 3), staff training (SQS 5), informed choice (SQS 12) and complaints (SQS 15).

4. Administration Issues

In this section of the procedures, you will need to indicate:

- the date of the procedures;
- how and to whom the procedures will be distributed; and
- how and when the procedures will be reviewed.

- End -