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**QAB**

**Quality Accredited Boatyard Standard**

**Introduction**

The QAB Standard, developed in conjunction with VisitEngland, provides clear criteria upon which hire boat operations are assessed. Meeting the requirements of the standard leads to VisitEngland QAB accreditation.



The QAB accreditation shows that hire boat operators are committed to quality and provides recognition for their hire boat operations and gives reassurance to hire boat customers.

The Standard’s criteria gives hire boat operators a means of benchmarking and can assist operators to develop their business processes.

The QAB Standard focuses on the systems and procedures hire boat operators carry out in running their hire boat operations, including:

* Health, safety, legal and environment processes.
* Hire boat handover processes.
* Website and brochure offerings.
* Arrival and departure procedures.
* Customer service procedures – onshore and when customers are away from the boatyard.
* Facilities, for example car parking, reception, toilets, etc.

Applying for QAB Standard accreditation is straight forward – details about this can be found on the British Marine website.

A QAB audit is undertaken at the hire boat operator’s base. A qualified QAB assessor visits and provides an impartial and professional assessment against the requirements and criteria of the standard. Following the site visit, the assessor produces a report providing feedback on the operator’s hire boat processes, whether the operator has attained QAB (met the required criteria) and provides feedback on how the operator’s hire boat operations can be enhanced.

**All British Marine members who hire out boats (overnight, or day/ or part of day) are required to attain the QAB Standard.**

Once QAB has been achieved, reassessment is undertaken every three years to ensure that hire boat standards and processes are being maintained and meet the requirements of the Standard. Reassessment can be undertaken more frequently if there are significant legal changes that impact on hire boat operations.

Operators meeting the requirement of the QAB Standard receive British Marine/VisitEngland QAB logos and a certificate that can be displayed at their premises and on their website providing real promotional benefits.

Further information about the QAB Standard assessment process, the QAB booking process, forms that need to be completed and the associated costs can be found on the British Marine website.

There is an optional Boat Grading Standard that focuses on the quality and condition of individual narrowboats and cruisers offered by hire boat operators and looks at the comfort and ease of use for those hiring them.

Boats assessed are graded between one and five stars.

Having boats graded and advertising these provides customers with clear expectations as to what they can expect on board and can improve the customer experience, which in turn can help hire boat operators achieve success.

Boat grading can only be undertaken if the hire boat operator have a valid QAB accreditation. However, a hire boar operator with QAB accreditation may choose not to have their boats graded, as they might operate their own boat rating scheme. If this is the case the QAB audit will also look at the in-house assessment process to ensure that it is transparent and does not mislead potential customers.

Hire boat operators requesting assessment against the Boat Grading Standard receive an annual visit from an experienced assessor, who will assess the boats against the national boat grading star rating criteria, which is based on the expectations of quality and comfort and standards in the industry.

Following the visit, the assessor provides feedback on how individual boats meet the boat grading criteria and how the quality might be improved upon to enhance customers’ experience and help improve business.

Operators who have their boats graded and awarded star ratings receive British Marine/VisitEngland Boat Grading logos that can be displayed at their premises and on their website and other marketing material.

It is easy to apply for Boat Grading, for instructions on how to apply for Boat Grading and the associated costs please look on the British Marine website.

**Completion of forms**

The relevant forms for both QAB and Boat Grading can be found on the British Marine website, or via contacting [qab@britishmarine.co.uk](mailto:qab@britishmarine.co.uk)

**Costs**

Current costs for QAB Accreditation and Boat Grading are detailed on the British Marine website [www.britishmarine.co.uk](http://www.britishmarine.co.uk)

**Quality Accredited Boatyard**

The following outlines the range of information that guides the QAB Standard assessment and accreditation process.

The areas that are looked at as part of the QAB Standard accreditation are show below. These areas are also detailed on the QAB self-assessment form that hire boat operators are required to complete electronically and return to British Marine, prior to the assessor’s visit.

The QAB criteria applies to overnight hire boats, day boats (those with no overnight accommodation) and those powered boats hired out for example during part of a day. Given this, there are certain criteria that may not have relevance those hired out hourly for example.

**Overview of the Boatyard**

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| The number of boats available for hire   * overnight * daily * hourly |
| The range of services provided to hire boat customers, for example:   * Direct boat bookings * Customer arrival and departure services * Car parking facilities * Toilet facilities * Housekeeping services * Emergency and maintenance services on the waterway * Quayside services; fresh water, etc. |
| The number of staff employed in different areas of the hire boat operation, for example:   * Reception staff * Engineers * Housekeeping * Handover staff |
| The range of staff training provided, for example:   * Customer service * Accessibility services for customers * Health & Safety * Handover * Boat Maintenance * Emergency Procedures * Other - data protection for example |

**Health, Safety, Legal & Environmental**

There are a number health, safety and environmental areas where information is sought and inspected, many of these requirements are set out in the Hire Boat Code, these include:

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| Do you have a documented Safety Management System in place? | Requirement |
| Name of the person who is the Designated Person | Requirement |
| Confirmation that a valid company Risk Assessment is in place and that it includes boats | Requirement |
| Do you have Risk Assessments in place for all boatyard and hire operations? | Requirement |
| Do you have a documented policy on risk assessment review with identified changes in circumstances which would trigger risk review? | Requirement |
| Who in the company is responsible for ensuring that all of the certification and licences are in place? | Requirement |
| Confirmation that a valid Fire Risk Assessment document is in place | Requirement |
| When the servicing of fire extinguishers is carried out and how often | Requirement |
| That valid boat licences are held for each hire boat | Requirement |
| That a valid boat safety certificate for each hire boat is held | Requirement |
| That there are valid Gas Safe certificates held for each hire boat which has gas onboard. | Requirement |
| That smoke detector(s) are installed on all boats | Requirement |
| That carbon monoxide detector(s) are installed on all boats | Requirement |
| Do you have a valid Stability certificate for each boat?  CRT by 1st April 2023  Broads by 1st October for Sailing vessels | Requirement |
| That lifejackets / buoyancy aids are provided to customers where there are tunnels on-routes | Requirement |
| That lifejackets / buoyancy aids are provided to minors | Requirement |
| That lifejackets / buoyancy aids are offered to customers | Requirement |
| Documented policy on how the operator ensures that every boat is in a safe condition for each hire | Requirement |
| How the operator keeps boat hire customers away from potentially dangerous areas (procedure and practices) | Requirement |
| Whether a documented Environmental Policy is in place and how it is adhered to | Requirement |
| Whether recycling facilities are provided on site and on board | Best Practice |
| Do you have documented emergency procedures for likely incidents? | Requirement |
| Do you have a documented procedure for conveying information about navigation restrictions or other hazards to hirers. | Requirement |
| Do you have a documented procedure for reporting relevant incidents and accidents to the appropriate authority? | Requirement |
| Do you have a documented self audit process? | Requirement |

**Company Website and/or Brochure**

The information available to customers is important so that they can make informed decisions, having been made aware of all relevant facilities and terms and conditions. Because of this the QAB looks at the information on the hire boat operator’s website and brochure. The following details the type of information examined as part of the QAB audit.

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| The correct display of logos and awards e.g. VisitEngland, QAB & star ratings, British Marine & British Marine Inland Boating logos | Requirement |
| Boat descriptions and any facilities on-board (such as kitchen, sleeping and bathroom arrangements, etc) and how clearly they are explained on the website and in the company’s marketing brochure/other materials | Requirement |
| Pictorial/layout plans for each boat are detailed | Requirement |
| On-board arrangements and facilities are clearly detailed, for example, pets welcome, provision of buoyancy aids, towels & bedding, TV, etc | Requirement |
| Details provided as to the type of electricity supply on the boats | Requirement |
| The terms and conditions of business are clearly laid out and easy to understand, for example:   * Deposit and payment terms * Cancellation policy * Insurance * Breakage policy * Data protection policy/privacy statement, etc | Requirement |
| A clear and unambiguous pricing policy is provided and special offers are clearly detailed | Requirement |
| The ease of use of the website search and booking functions | Best Practice |
| The ease in which customers can easily contact the hire boat operator with questions | Requirement |
| Process for customers to provide feedback | Best Practice |
| A Boaters Handbook/DVD – is made available on the website or provided via alternative means | Best Practice |
| Website provision is mobile friendly | Best practice |
| If an in-house grading scheme is operated, customers are informed that it is operated in-house and how a grading is achieved | Requirement |

**Office and Boatyard Procedures**

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| **On-line Booking System** | |
| The ease by which potential customers/guests can contact the operator with any questions that they may have |  |
| Opportunity for potential customers/guests to seek availability and fully complete a booking on-line and also via other means | Best Practice |
| Customers/guests are made aware of the Terms & Conditions at the time of the booking, for example:   * Deposits * Payment dates * Cancellation  Privacy and use of their personal information | Requirement |
| That on-line payments are carried out securely | Requirement |
| **Accessibility** | |
| Accessible features are detailed in the website or in other promotional material | Best Practice |
| Deaf customers, or those with hearing impairment are able to communicate and book either on-line, or via email | Best Practice |
| Whether some of the hire boats are more accessible than others and, where this is the case, this is made clear in marketing and booking information | Best Practice |
| Staff receive training to assist customers with special needs | Best Practice |
| **Arrival Procedures** | |
| Information is sent out to customers pre-arrival and what this information comprises (if relevant) | Requirement |
| The address of the yard and clear directions to the site are provided to customers/guests | Best Practice |
| Public transport links to the yard are provided | Best Practice |
| Where on-site car parking provided, this is clearly signposted, the surface is in good order, and it is well lit and secure | Best Practice |
| Assistance, or trolleys are provided to assist customers/guest transport luggage to boats | Best Practice |
| A standard ‘Welcome’ procedure is followed by staff in addition to Hire Boat Handover | Requirement |

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| Staff are well-presented and welcoming to customers/guests | Requirement |
| An out of hours procedure is in place and implemented | Requirement |
| **Return Procedure** | |
| A procedure and guidance is in place detailing the condition customers are expected to leave the boats and this is communicated to staff and customers/guests | Requirement |
| Departure times from the boats are clearly detailed and communicated | Requirement |
| Recycling facilities are offered and their use encouraged | Best Practice |
| **Customer Satisfaction Survey / Complaints Procedure** | |
| Whether a customer satisfaction survey is operated and communicated to customers/guests. This could be company generated or via social media, e.g. trip advisor, etc. | Best Practice |
| Whether all customers/guests are invited to provide make comments and feedback | Best Practice |
| The ways customers are encouraged to complete survey/feedback forms before they depart | Best Practice |
| The hire boat operator acts on any feedback received from customers | Best Practice |
| Evidence of any measurable improvement to any aspect of the business, as a result of customer complaints/feedback obtained | Best Practice |
| Where boats are let on behalf of third party owners, a written report is provided to the owner in order to provide quality feedback and improvement points | Best Practice |
| Whether the complaints procedure is clearly detailed and provided to customers/guests and how this is done (e.g. via the website and/or in written material) | Best Practice |
| How the operator deals with complaints if they are raised during the holiday | Best Practice |
| How the operator deals with complaints if they are raised following the holiday and departure from the boatyard | Best Practice |
| Any complaints received are monitored and analysed in order to identify weaknesses in procedures, or individual boats | Requirement |
| **Housekeeping** | |
| How the company ensures a high standard of housekeeping is maintained throughout the fleet |  |

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| How the housekeepers receive training and the type of training | Best Practice |
| Supervisory housekeeping staff employed | Best Practice |
| Spot checks are undertaken | Best Practice |
| The standard of housekeeping is included in the customer satisfaction survey | Best Practice |
| **Boat Maintenance** | |
| How the operator ensures that every boat goes out in good working order every time | Requirement |
| Whether a maintenance log is kept for each hire boat | Requirement |
| Whether worksheets are generated for mechanical and domestic defects and how these are generated | Requirement |
| What the servicing regime is | Requirement |
| Who is responsible for managing the boat maintenance | Requirement |
| Who conducts the boat maintenance | Requirement |
| A procedure is in place for responding to boat breakdowns or emergencies on the water | Requirement |
| A process is in place for checking for invasive species | Best Practice |

**In-House Boat Assessments (if company policy)**

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| How often each boat is assessed | Requirement |
| The criteria used for the assessment | Requirement |
| Whether the assessment process takes account of quality as well as facilities | Requirement |
| Provision of a clear explanation of the assessment scheme provided for customers | Requirement |
| Clear information as to whether an in house assessment is undertaken and detailing that it is not connected to VE or British Marine | Requirement |

**Boat Handover**

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| **Customer Log & Information** | |
| All customer log information is legible | Requirement |
| The specific name of the boat being hired is detailed on the hire boat handover document | Requirement |
| The date of hire is detailed | Requirement |
| The name of booker is detailed (it is also signed and dated) | Requirement |
| The name of the skipper is detailed (it is also signed and dated) | Requirement |
| The mobile phone number & car registration of hirer’s are detailed | Requirement |
| The names of all other persons in party are detailed | Requirement |
| Previous experience of those comprising the hiring party is detailed | Requirement |
| The number of non-swimmers in the party is detailed | Requirement |
| The age of any under 18’s in the party is detailed | Requirement |
| Life jackets/buoyancy aids are issued, as appropriate | Requirement |
| The route the party plan to take has been recorded | Best Practice |
| Name of handover staff is detailed | Requirement |
| The time the party arrived is recorded | Best Practice |
| The time that the handover started is recorded | Requirement |
| The time the handover was completed is recorded | Requirement |
| 1 additional crew member has been given emergency operation guidance | Requirement |

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| **Handover Staff** | |
| How many staff conduct the handover duties for the operator |  |
| The knowledge & experience that the individual handover staff |  |
| The training handover staff have received |  |

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| **Boat Acceptance Certificate**  The following information is the minimum requirement  Operators may add other relevant information |
| Safety on board   * People on deck * Falling overboard * Lifejacket/buoyancy aids * Smoke detectors * Carbon monoxide detectors * Fire extinguishers * Dangers of alcohol and being on and near the water |
| Boat handling   * Boat manual * Other waterway users * Steering, stopping and mooring * Route being taken |
| Engine   * Maintenance * Controls * Weed hatch instruction/use |
| Appliances on board   * Gas * Electric * Toilets * Energy saving |
| Environment   * Speed limits * Rubbish/litter/recycling * Reed/shallow water * Single use plastics avoidance during term of hire |
| Contact details   * Breakdown * Emergency * Accident |
| Waterways features (where appropriate)   * Locks * Fixed and/or swing bridges * Tides |
| Conditions of boats being hired   * Return time and state of boat |
| Signatures   * Skipper and one other instructed * Hirer * Handover staff |