

# **Irish Self Catering Federation Quality Framework**

Fáilte Ireland Approved

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The self catering product is an essential part of the accommodation offering for Irish tourism. The Irish Self Catering Federation is the sole representative and lobbying body for owners of self catering properties in Ireland, recognised as such by consultative bodies, local and central government and every leading tourism group. Our aim is to promote and defend the interests of owners giving voice to issues affecting our sector.

The Irish Self Catering Federation (ISCF) has over 100 members who represent some 5,000 holiday homes in Ireland. The overall sector employs 7,000 people both on a full time and seasonal basis throughout Ireland.

Our vision is to increase national and international consumer awareness of the range, quality and value of the Irish self catering sector throughout Ireland while pushing for equal representation and exposure for self catering within the tourism industry.

The ISCF is not a marketing body, rather the Federation represents the views and issues which effect the operation of self catering accommodation in Ireland. It is an owners 'network, run by owners. The aim of the ISCF is to recruit all operators under one umbrella body, who agree to a code of ethics and legislative requirements and commit to a consistent approach to quality within the products they offer. The objective is to provide reassurance for visitors whenever they choose self catering accommodation that they have chosen quality accommodation and can expect to receive excellent service during their stay. This reassurance will also be provided to tour operators and Tourism Ireland markets when referring to the [www.letsgoselfcatering.ie](http://www.letsgoselfcatering.ie) website.

The ISCF Quality Framework is to be introduced to target self catering operators which work outside the current approval systems and who have recently entered the self catering market via a range of online platforms.

### **Criteria for Membership of ISCF**

All ISCF members must agree to the membership criteria as set out in ISCF Memo and Articles of Association. Members of ISCF agree to adhere to the ISCF Quality Framework as outlined in this document, which has been mandated by members at the 2021 AGM.

This includes a requirement to comply with the legislative requirements of providing accommodation in Ireland:

- Building Regulations
- Fire Safety Regulations
- Planning Regulations

It also requires that members comply with ISCF's quality, standards and service criteria, comply with the ISCF Code of Ethics (Appendix 1 of this document) and have public liability insurance.

### **Why establish an ISCF Quality Framework?**

The role of the ISCF includes a desire to improve and maintain the standards, quality and service provided by self catering operators in the wider self catering sector.

The ISCF is committed to improving standards of quality and service within the self catering sector, and has identified Fáilte Ireland's Third Party Framework approach as a vehicle to support this.

As we start 2021, ISCF's aim is to broaden its membership taking in those outside the existing approval systems already provided by Fáilte Ireland. The ISCF Quality Framework is intended to embrace those existing approval systems to ensure the highest standards of facilities and Health and Safety measures, excellent levels of hospitality and service starting with a warm welcome to provide a great guest experience.

### **What is the role of the ISCF within its Quality Framework?**

The ISCF undertakes to:

- Ensure compliance with the criteria outlined in this document
- Provide advice and support to owners on continuing quality improvement
- Seek annual acceptance of the criteria by owners
- Visit 20% of Quality Framework members annually to assess against the Quality Framework criteria and provide advice and assistance where required

### **The Main Features of the ISCF Quality Framework are:**

- Initial online Self-Assessment by self catering operators which will require a self declaration of compliance with Statutory requirements such as Fire Safety
- Pre-Assessment online research of quality, standards and reviews by ISCF
- Annual acceptance of criteria by members
- Support from ISCF on quality and health and safety requirements
- Ongoing assessment via major online review sites, general reviews
- Complaints handling
- Regular internal Quality Assurance reviews and visits to ensure consistence of process and adherence to the criteria.

## **2. Criteria for Participation**

Membership of the ISCF is diverse, and we welcome all self catering operators irrespective of the number of properties that they have, the region in which they

are based and the type of self catering accommodation they offer (apartment, cottage, house, etc).

In order to participate in the ISCF Quality Framework, the business must be a member of the Irish Self Catering Federation.

All ISCF members must agree to the membership criteria as set out in ISCF Memo and Articles of Association, in addition to the following:

- All self catering owners and operators must also agree to comply with the ISCF Code of Ethics.
- They must also comply with the legislative requirements of providing accommodation in Ireland:
  - Building Regulations
  - Fire Safety Regulations
  - Planning Regulations
- All members must comply with ISCF's quality, standards and service criteria
- All members must have public liability insurance.

Compliance with each of the above will be verified as part of the Approval Process

### **3. Approval Process**

As previously outlined, participation in the ISCF Quality Framework will be a requirement of all members of the ISCF.

The approval process will include:

- Initial response to enquiry from a prospective new member/existing member to join the Framework by the ISCF
- Pre-Assessment online research of quality, standards and reviews by ISCF of the property
- Acceptance by ISCF that the property owner/manager should proceed to Online Assessment
- If the applicant is a business operating as Manager of multiple properties on behalf of owners an arrangement will be made for an ISCF Assessor to visit the business if necessary. See section 3.2 for additional details for Business members with multiple properties.
- If the applicant is an Owner of multiple properties registered as a Business they may choose to complete an Online Assessment as an owner for each property, or as a Business for Multiple properties. See section 3.2 for additional details for multiple properties.
- ISCF will provide ongoing assessment of member properties via major online review sites, general reviews, regular internal Quality Assurance reviews and visits to ensure consistence of process and adherence to the criteria
- Annual acceptance of criteria by members
- Agreement by members to an on-site assessment within a 2 year period

- Agreement by members to an Assessor's visit in the event of a serious breach of the Code of Ethics and standards.

Any issues that arise during the completion of the Online Assessment will be dealt with by the administration office of the ISCF.

All issues will be recorded in a QA system set up by the ISCF to contain information relating to all matters of the ISCF QA Framework.

When the ISCF is satisfied that the owner or business property/ies meets the stated criteria of the Quality Framework they will be accepted as a member of the ISCF and included in the Quality Framework. The member will receive the QA ISCF Quality Mark and a certificate to declare the member is part of the QA Framework and may upload their property on the [www.letsgoselfcatering.ie](http://www.letsgoselfcatering.ie) website.



For those properties new to the market with little or no reviews, the ISCF undertakes to give advice to the owner and assist in their completion of the Framework application.

All Operators must accept that they may be chosen for onsite assessment within 2 years. Some of these assessments may be completed by Fáilte Ireland assessors, using ISCF Quality Framework criteria.

### **3.1 Online Self-Assessment for Owners**

As part of their application by a self catering Owner for membership of the Irish Self Catering Federation, the Member will be asked to complete an initial self-assessment to ensure that they comply with the overall criteria for the Quality Assurance Framework as outlined in this document.

The link to the online self-assessment form will be provided by email to the Member.

Online Self Assessment form for Owners not registered as a business i.e. individual properties

[Click here to see the online form the member is required to complete.](#)

**Form is to be completed by businesses with 8 or more units or Management Agents in 3.2 below**

On completion, the Owner will submit the form to the ISCF who will review the form to ensure that all mandatory criteria are complied with. Should there

be any questions with a No answer, the ISCF will contact the owner to determine the reason for this.

The Owner will receive an automated email to confirm that their application has been submitted

The applicant will receive feedback on their QA Framework application within 5 working days either to confirm that they have been successful or to outline any issues that need to be addressed.

The forms submitted will be held on the ISCF server. All reports can be exported into excel format, giving all of the details of the owner applications and results, which can be easily filtered to give relevant data. In addition this will also contain information on the frequency of online and telephone assessments/advice by the ISCF; frequency of visits by ISCF assessors; complaints and outcome.

A copy of the data submitted can be provided to the Operator if required at any stage.

### **3.2 Online Assessment for Member Businesses with multiple properties**

A business who acts as a Manager and Booking Agent for multiple properties, and that business being a member of the ISCF, will be deemed responsible for ensuring the quality of all their properties which are eligible to display the ISCF Quality mark and adherence to the requirements of the ISCF QA Framework at all times. The Manager of the Business will be required to complete an online Business Self-Assessment, as a declaration of compliance.

[Form is to be completed by businesses with 8 or more units being managed](#)

In order for that business to be approved under the ISCF QA Framework, 10% of their properties must be assessed as part of an initial Assessor's on-site visit, unless more than 10% of the property portfolio of that member have been approved or registered with Fáilte Ireland.

The Manager acting for multiple properties who fulfils the criteria of 10% Fáilte Ireland approval / registration will be asked to complete one Online Assessment and provide details of the their in-house quality checks.

Once a minimum of 10 % of the properties have been assessed or fulfil the FI percentage and are deemed acceptable in terms of the requirements of the ISCF Quality Framework, the framework may be applied to all properties which are part of the Manager's portfolio of properties. The Business will be informed that

this accreditation can only be displayed / used when the property is booked by the customer through the Business Member's platform.

The ISCF Quality Framework logo will only be provided to the member, and not to the individual properties within the group.

A business which acts as manager for multiple properties, will be required to show in addition to quality checks that they have the following in place before they will be approved as a member of the ISCF QA Framework:

- Formal complaint handling process
- Updated list of properties to which the ISCF QA Framework approval will apply
- A process by which properties which leave their group will be asked to remove any references to the ISCF QA Framework approval.

ISCF reserves the right to remove the QA Framework approval and logo from properties / businesses which do not comply.

### **3.3 Pre-Approval Online Research of property by ISCF**

The QA Framework Co-ordinator or an assigned individual will then seek reviews from a number of sources to determine the suitability and quality of the Operator's property. These will include:

- Requesting reviews from the self catering Operator
- Reviewing online customer review websites which include (but are not limited to) TripAdvisor, Booking.com, AirBnB, etc
- Reviewing records of complaints which required action by the ISCF.

We acknowledge that reviews are subjective, and that even properties providing an excellent product may occasionally receive negative reviews, however we will require that properties approved under the ISCF Quality Framework receive positive feedback on at least 80% of their reviews.

Note: this step will be completed by a limited number of individuals to allow for a consistent approach.

### **3.4 Approval**

Properties which are considered of appropriate quality (as outlined above) will be deemed approved under the ISCF Quality Framework.

These properties will receive the following:

- An email confirming their approval under the ISCF Quality Framework
- A Logo / digital mark which they can use on their marketing collateral to promote their approval
- An opportunity to become listed on [www.letsgoselfcatering.ie](http://www.letsgoselfcatering.ie) and highlighted as Quality Assured

- Details of how to request a listing on the Discover Ireland website (if one is not already in place)

Note: businesses that are Fáilte Ireland approved can choose to appear as such on the DiscoverIreland.ie website.

### **3.5 On-going Checks on Quality**

In order to ensure the quality of properties under the ISCF Quality Framework is maintained, the Quality Framework Co-ordinator will ensure that online feedback is reviewed quarterly by ISCF Administration and that properties receiving consistent negative feedback are included in the next scheduled on-site assessments.

### **3.6 On-site Assessment of Property by ISCF**

All members will receive an on-site assessment visit within 2 years of joining the ISCF Quality Framework during which they will be assessed to ensure compliance with all mandatory aspects of the criteria. Please see the Assessment Report / Criteria within this document for further details. A panel of assessors contracted by the ISCF will complete the visits to 20% of members each calendar year.

In order to maintain quality standards and to ensure compliance, we propose to complete an on-site assessment at least every 4 years, and more frequently should serious complaints be received or those that relate to health, safety and legislative compliance issues.

Where there are issues or areas for improvement observed during the onsite visit, the Assessor will agree an appropriate completion date with the Operator.

### **3.7 Annual acceptance of criteria by members.**

All members of ISCF and therefore participants in the ISCF Quality Framework will be required to accept the criteria (which may include updates) annually.

Please see section 4 of this document, Renewal Process, for further details.

### **3.8 Approval of existing ISCF members**

There are currently 130 ISCF members, of which approximately 40% are approved or registered under Fáilte Ireland Quality Assurance Schemes (as at January 2021). We propose that the following application process will be required for the remaining 60% members

- Email to be sent to all members requesting they complete the self-assessment form and return it to the ISCF Quality Framework Co-ordinator.
- Email should also remind all members that they must have all statutory requirements in place.

All Operators must accept that they may be chosen for onsite assessment within 2 years. Some of these assessments may be completed by Fáilte Ireland assessors, using ISCF Quality Framework criteria.

#### **4. Renewal Process**

All ISCF Members will be required to confirm their acceptance of the Quality Framework criteria (including changes, where relevant) and their participation within the scheme each year. This will be included in the ISCF Membership renewal process.

#### **5. De-listing Process**

As outlined in section 4 of this document, all ISCF Members will be required to confirm their acceptance of the Quality Framework criteria and their participation within the scheme each year.

If a member does not accept the criteria and / or their participation within the scheme in any given year the reasons for this will be discussed with the member and escalated to the Executive Council for review. e.g. If the reasons are not deemed acceptable, i.e. the member is just dismissing the need for being part of the Quality Framework, the member will be denied renewal of membership of the ISCF.

If the member does not agree to participate in the Quality Framework, the following actions must be taken:

- \* The member will be requested to remove the ISCF membership logo from any marketing collateral
- \* The listing, if any, on the Letsgoselfcatering.ie website will be removed
- \* The property will be removed from the QA Framework members 'list.

#### **6. Assessor / Advisor Role, Selection and Training**

Jacinta Doolan, (Council ISCF) as a Director of Trident Holiday Homes, acted as exclusive Irish agent to Country Holidays Ltd., a UK based cottage Holiday Company from 1992 to 2018. During that time, Trident recruited and inspected 900 properties (now 450) to Visit Britain standards for Country Holidays Irish cottage portfolio marketed in GB. Country Holidays has been the subject of merger and acquisition during the last 25 years. Owned by Cendant Corporation, Wyndham Worldwide and currently by Platinum investments in

the US it trades as cottages.com. In 2020 cottages.com discontinued its programme in Ireland.

It will not be possible to have a full-time dedicated team of assessors / advisors given the current structure of the Irish Self Catering Federation. However, a small team of individuals will support the evaluation of online self-assessments on a part-time basis particularly when there is a large volume of applications to be evaluated. They will work in various regions to cut down on travel and to be readily available. The Assessments will only take place outside June/July and August unless deemed necessary.

These Assessors will carry out on-site audits of 20% of all members of the ISCF QA Framework annually. The work will be on contract and they will also be available to make a visit should the ISCF see the need to do so, in the event of a serious complaint for example. A separate form for complaints handling is here. Assessors will be briefed as appropriate based on the details as outlined in the Assessor Guidelines document. Briefings will take place on appointment to their role or prior to completion of the QA Framework related activity. Training in the ISCF Quality Framework will initially be given by Jacinta Doolan, who led the development on behalf of the ISCF.

## **7. Assessment Reports**

### **7.1 Self-Assessment Report**

As outlined in section 3.1 of this document, an online form will be used for the self-assessment form.

On completion of the form, the applicant will get a confirmation email that their application has been received and they will get a confirmation by email of its success within 3 working days. The owner will also get an ISCF QA sticker for the property and a certificate for display in the property, denoting that they are part of the ISCF QA.

### **7.2 On-site Assessment Report**

Using the Irish Self Catering Federation (ISCF) criteria set down for the Quality Framework, the Assessor will carry out an audit of the property to ensure the self -assessment completed in the first instance by the Owner / Manager is a true and honest depiction of the property.

Using this [online form](#), the Assessment will focus on each of the minimum requirements at the time of the visit - Overall impression, cleanliness and housekeeping, condition of fixtures, fittings, soft furnishings in each room,

health and safety audit, welcome for guests pre and post departure and during their stay.

The Assessor will be determining whether the property as presented under each heading/area is 'Acceptable' or 'Not Acceptable', with a provision for comment as to what can be done to render any unacceptable area, acceptable.

The 'ISCF Assessment Criteria' have been developed to both guide the Assessor through the on-site assessment and act as an Assessment report.

Each point will be marked as 'Acceptable' or 'Action Required'. At the bottom of each section, there is a comment box where the Assessor will elaborate on what the action is, and what the outcome with the owner was. An estimated date for the completion of the action will be inserted.

Should the Action refer to non-compliance with statutory regulations or is as a result of the Assessor not being satisfied with health and safety measures in place (a layman's view), a decision will be made as to whether the property should have its QA mark removed if the action required takes longer than 4 weeks. This will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

## **8. Appeals Process**

We will request that anyone appealing our decision with regard to any assessment submits their appeal in writing to [info@iscf.ie](mailto:info@iscf.ie). The appeal will then be reviewed by the QA Framework Co-ordinator. Details of all actions / communications related to the Appeal will be recorded and stored in the master file secured on the ISCF server.

Depending on the nature of the appeal, action taken may include one or more of the following:

- A phone call with the Owner / Agent to discuss the details of their self-assessment
- An on-site visit
- A second on-site visit completed by a different assessor
- A review of the case with the member of the Executive Council with nominated responsibility for the QA Framework.

We will endeavour to conclude the appeals process within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal.

## **9. Complaints Handling**

The Irish Self Catering Federation (ISCF) Quality Framework is designed to reassure guests that the property they have booked meets the ISCF quality and service standards and ISCF Code of Ethics.

Should a complaint be received by the ISCF regarding a member property, the ISCF will always acknowledge receipt of the complaint but will in all cases seek to have the resolution made between the owner and the customer.

The ISCF will consider the following when dealing with the matter:

- Complaints relating to breach of the quality / standards within member properties who are part of ISCF Quality Assurance scheme
- Complaints within member properties which are not related to standards e.g. commercial aspects, if such complaints refer to issues where the owner has not abided by the ISCF Code of Ethics.

All complaints must be sent in writing to the ISCF after all efforts to resolve the matter have been made with owner/manager in the first instance.

It is to be noted that the ISCF will fully support complaints that relate to quality of product and service provided by a member under the ISCF Quality Assurance Framework.

Where a complaint received relates to commercial aspects of the agreement between the property and the customer (complainant), the role of the ISCF shall be limited to informing the ISCF member property that a complaint has been received and that efforts to resolve the issue are expected.

Each ISCF member should ensure that their Terms and Conditions document clearly sets out their complaint handling process. This should state that the booking is a contractual agreement between the property and the guest, and that all efforts to resolve issues will be addressed between the two parties.

The nature of each complaint will vary, so each one will be assessed individually as to how it is best handled.

Written records will be maintained by ISCF in line with their data retention policies.

## **Complaint Handling Process**

1. A written complaint is received by ISCF from a customer of a member property, who is part of the QA Framework
2. ISCF communicates by phone in the first instance with the member to understand the nature of the complaint and how it has been handled by the member so far and seek copies of correspondence between the owner and the customer, if any.
3. If complaint has not been dealt with by the owner/manager, the ISCF requests them to acknowledge and resolve the complaint directly with the customer.
4. ISCF will respond to the customer to acknowledge receipt of the complaint, at the same time copying in the owner (templates provided).
5. If the complaint refers to a serious breach of the Code of Ethics, quality and standards the ISCF will arrange an Assessor's visit to the member to seek a resolution.

**Note:**

In the event that a property is the subject of a serious complaint about standards (or more than three complaints about standards within any twelve month period), an inspection will be organised by the ISCF.

The owner / representative will be given the opportunity to redress any issues of concern and a resolution sought for the complainant.

If this is not achieved, the property will be removed from the Quality Framework and the owner's membership of the ISCF will be rescinded.

**10. Provision of Data to Fáilte Ireland**

Data will be provided to Fáilte Ireland if requested, on an agreed basis (currently twice per year). Data provided will include:

- Membership numbers and property details
- Details of properties which have left the QA Framework since the last update
- Room numbers and bed spaces
- Complaints - numbers and type.

**11. Framework Details and Criteria**

The Quality Framework will be reviewed annually to ensure the criteria is relevant and up to date. The ISCF propose that the initial agreement with Fáilte Ireland will be for a period of 3 years, with a full review in October 2023.

All self catering owners and operators must agree to comply with the ISCF Code of Ethics (See Appendix 1 of this document) and the ISCF Assessment Criteria. All Operators must accept that they may be chosen for onsite assessment within 2 years. Some of these assessments may be completed by Fáilte Ireland assessors, using ISCF Quality Framework criteria.

The business must confirm they are aware of and addressing its statutory obligations i.e. Building Regulations, Planning Regulations, Fire Safety Regulations.

See ISCF Assessment Criteria document for full details.

