

APPROVED PROVIDER STANDARD

Guidance Notes

PLEASE READ THESE NOTES CAREFULLY BEFORE STARTING TO FILL IN YOUR APPLICATION FORM. THEY CONTAIN IMPORTANT INFORMATION THAT WILL HELP YOUR APPLICATION TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

A NATIONAL STANDARD FOR MENTORING AND BEFRIENDING

The last ten years has seen a major growth in the use of mentoring and befriending as a vehicle for social change. The present Government has itself recognised their importance as a means of achieving its own policy objectives; for raising educational attainment; tackling crime and anti-social behaviour; addressing isolation in the community; and promoting active citizenship.

The Approved Provider Standard (APS) is a national benchmark for organisations running mentoring and befriending projects. Designed for use with projects of any size, it provides a realistic and credible basis for assessing core practice. The assessment framework is focused on the key management and operational areas that underpin the effectiveness of any mentoring or befriending project: the aims and structure; client referral and assessment processes; recruitment, selection and training of volunteers; monitoring and evaluation. Projects achieving the APS will be operating to a nationally approved standard that gives Government ministers, project organisers, and many thousands of volunteers, a reliable and objective benchmark of safe and effective practice.

Launched in November 2001, the APS was originally designed solely for use with projects in the field of mentoring. However, following the formation of the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) in 2004, the Standard has been revised so that it can be applied and used successfully with befriending, as well as, mentoring projects. The changes made to the APS, to adapt it for use with befriending projects, were the result of a comprehensive consultation and review process.

The Standard is promoted and administered by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) on behalf of the Government through the Active Community Directorate of the Home Office and Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Mentoring and befriending projects dependent on Government funding will be required in future to demonstrate a commitment to the Approved Provider Standard.

USING THE GUIDANCE NOTES

The MBF has produced these guidance notes to help you complete the application form. The notes explain the reasons why we require certain details from you. They also indicate the kind of information we need for each section of the application form and provide examples of appropriate evidence.

The application form and guidance notes are divided into three main sections;

- a) Application and contact details
- b) Facts about your organisation
- c) Project information

To help you cross-reference between the documents, the order and numbering of the questions are the same in the application form and guidance notes.

RETURNING THE COMPLETED FORM

Completed forms should be returned to the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation at the address shown below. Additional copies of the application pack can be obtained from this address.

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation
FREEPOST
NWW338IA
Manchester
M30 IAX

Please note that the APS assessment process is completely free of charge. Applications are treated in the strictest confidence.

If you would like the MBF to return your APS application/evidence portfolio to you after the assessment has been completed, please tick the relevant box on the application form.

NB: The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation is not liable for loss of applications due to mail errors. You are advised to take a copy of your application form and supporting evidence before posting. You may wish to send your application by recorded mail to ensure safe delivery to the MBF office.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In devising the assessment process we have balanced the importance of producing a Standard that is credible and worthwhile with the need for something generic which can be realistically applied to any form of one-to-one, volunteer mentoring or befriending, as well as to the variety of organisations involved.

We have identified five key areas that form the basis of the assessment.

1. Project aims and structure
2. Client group
3. Recruitment and selection of volunteers
4. Volunteer preparation and training
5. Monitoring and evaluation

Please make your responses to each of the questions as full and comprehensive as possible. Where supporting evidence is a requirement in your response to a particular question, this is clearly indicated in the guidance notes. The evidence is used to provide confirmation that the processes and procedures described in the narrative are being applied in practice. It also helps to build a more complete picture that will enhance and add to your written response. Supporting evidence should be cross-referenced with your narrative answers to assist the assessment process. Please note that you may be able to use the same evidence to support narrative answers for more than one of the APS questions.

The differences between mentoring and befriending projects, as well as between projects within the same sector, are considerable. The APS assessment process is sufficiently robust to take most variations into account. However, it is important that you provide as much background information as possible in your application, particularly in relation to the services you are trying to provide and the nature of the client group involved.

The Standard is awarded to a provider based on an assessment of a particular project. The vast majority of providers, operating in a specific local area and using a single delivery structure will only need to apply for the assessment of one project against the Standard. However, where an organisation is providing mentoring or befriending on a regional or national scale, it will be necessary to achieve the Standard for each project. The same ruling will apply to organisations offering different forms of mentoring or befriending i.e. where the purpose, client groups and methods of operation are not uniform.

Given the nature of the assessment process, the APS is not suitable for use with organisations that restrict their involvement to a limited range of activities, e.g. recruitment or training of volunteers only. Nor can the Standard be used to assess totally new projects, i.e. those that have not been through a full operational cycle. However, a 'Working Towards' status has been introduced that enables projects to

formally commit to the Standard a full twelve months prior to submitting their APS applications. New projects are, therefore, able to use the principles underpinning the APS as a framework for development, before submitting their full applications at a later date.

Although the APS assessment process is primarily a 'desk-top' exercise, we may need to contact or visit you to clarify certain issues. In some instances, following initial assessment of your application, we will offer an interim conditional approval with award of the full Standard subject to the satisfactory resolution of certain issues or evidence requirements.

If you have any queries about any aspect of the assessment process please contact the MBF on 0161 787 8600.

Section A - APPLICATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

This section of the form asks for basic information concerning your application. We also need to know how to contact you if we have any queries and to keep you informed. Please give us as many ways to get in touch with you as possible. We may also need to visit you to ask more questions or look at how your project works.

1. Name of the organisation

Please give the name of the organisation responsible for running your mentoring or befriending project.

2. Contact address

If you are a small community group this may be your local community centre or even your home.

3. Person to be contacted

Please give the name and contact details of a person with whom your application can be discussed and any queries addressed. This should be someone involved in the submission of your application and with some knowledge of the project that you wish to register for the Approved Provider Standard.

4. Declaration

This section needs to be signed by two people with the authority to commit your organisation to undertaking the Approved Provider process. If you are a small community group this may be you and one other helper. If you are a charity it may be your Chief Executive and Chair of your trustees.

For Office Use Only

Do not complete the box at the bottom of the page headed "For Office Use Only". We will use this to allocate a number to your application and record the date it was received. This will help us to keep you informed and track the progress of your application.

Section B - FACTS ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

We need to know what kind of an organisation or group you are and how you are legally constituted. This will help us to form a picture of your organisation and a context against which to review your application and the evidence that you provide.

1. What type of organisation are you?

You may need to describe your organisation under several headings e.g. registered charity, community group, limited company. Please use as many as you decide are appropriate.

2. Main activities and the work that you do.

Please describe your organisation under the following headings:

- its broad purpose
- the nature and range of services you provide and to whom
- the geographical area covered (national, regional or local)

3. Has your organisation achieved any other Quality Standards?

Please tell us if your organisation has achieved or is working towards any other quality standards. We would like to know the name of the award and the awarding body, the date that the award was made and when it will be reviewed.

Please note that it is not necessary to have achieved other awards in order to qualify for the Approved Provider Standard.

Section C – PROJECT INFORMATION

This section of the application form asks you to provide details of specific aspects of your mentoring or befriending project. Please make your responses to the questions as comprehensive as possible, providing supporting evidence where this is requested.

You should include 'live' evidence wherever possible (i.e. used rather than blank documentation), providing confirmation that the processes or procedures described in your narrative are being applied in practice. Issues of confidentiality can be protected by deleting/obscuring individual details/identity.

If you wish to submit more than one project for assessment against the Standard, you need to complete this section of the application form separately for each of the projects.

Please note that the non-specific and inclusive terms, 'volunteer' and 'client' are used throughout the document to define 'mentor/befriender' and 'mentee/befriendee.'

Project Aims and Structure

1. What is your mentoring or befriending project called?

Please give us the name of the project you are submitting for assessment against the Standard. Please note that the name you provide here will appear on the APS accreditation certificate.

2. What is the purpose of your project?

Please provide a brief history of your project, explaining how it came into being and why you felt it was needed. Your response should demonstrate that the project has a clear rationale for its existence. Please also indicate the length of time that the project has been in operation and identify any significant changes or developments that have been made since it was introduced.

Your response to this question should also include a list of aims that defines the purpose of the project and what you are trying to achieve. For example, you may have defined your aims in terms of improving the personal circumstances of a particular client group, such as the elderly or those with a disability. Other projects will have aims that are focused on improving personal behaviour, developing skills or enhancing educational achievement. Some projects will have been established to address a particular social issue, such as isolation, disaffection or disadvantage.

In some instances, the aims of the project will be incorporated in a wider policy or framework such as development plans for school improvement or area regeneration.

Here, your response should explain how your project contributes and adds value to the wider initiative.

In our assessment we will be looking for a link between the broad project aims and the specific outcomes or benefits you have identified for individual client-volunteer relationships. So, for example, a New Deal mentoring programme may identify 'overcoming barriers to employment' as a broad aim. The outcomes linked to this aim might include 'developing job search techniques' and 'learning new occupational skills'. In the befriending context, a project may have the aim of improving the personal circumstances of blind or partially sighted people. The benefits identified for individual clients might include 'maintaining independence' or 'reducing isolation'.

Please provide as supporting evidence any documentation (or relevant section/s) which describes your programme's aims. Suitable evidence includes policy statements, project proposals and funding submissions.

3. What organisational and management structure is in place to support your project?

Please tell us how your project is organised. Is there a full or part time project worker? If not, how is the project co-ordinated and facilitated? Is there a management or steering group consisting of the key stakeholders to whom the project co-ordinator reports?

If the project is one of a number of services provided by a large organisation, such as a major voluntary or public sector body, how is the project integrated within the structure of the parent body? Where the programme is delivered in partnership by more than one organisation, please outline the division of responsibilities between the partners.

Your response should demonstrate that there is an appropriate structure in place and sufficient resources to achieve the aims of the project, taking into account its nature and size. The roles and responsibilities of those involved in running the project should be clearly outlined. Please also supply information on the numbers of volunteers and clients currently engaged in the project.

Although it is unnecessary to include specific financial details, please tell us how the project is funded, giving the name of the funding body and the time period for which funding has been allocated.

Examples of appropriate evidence include an organisational chart, co-ordinator's job description/person specification and management or steering group meeting agenda/minutes. Please also provide as evidence, copies of any policies/procedures that have been developed for key management or operational areas of the project e.g. health and safety, equal opportunities.

4. What support mechanisms are in place to ensure that staff overseeing the project are operating effectively?

Please tell us how you ensure that members of staff overseeing the project are operating effectively. Do those involved in running the project have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are they assessed against these? Are regular meetings held between line managers and project staff to review progress? Are staff given the opportunity to attend local networking events involving practitioners from related fields? If the project is one of a number of services delivered by your organisation, are project staff included in internal training/development arrangements and staff appraisal procedures?

Your response should demonstrate that an appropriate review system is in place for supporting and monitoring the work of staff overseeing the project. Evidence should be provided which shows that project manager/workers have the necessary experience/background and have received appropriate training to carry out their roles successfully. You should also describe any arrangements aimed at providing further development opportunities for project staff, including internal/external training or networking activities.

Examples of appropriate evidence include details of training/network events attended, minutes of internal review meetings, notes of individual appraisal sessions.

Please note that this question is concerned with the support that is provided for project staff employed by your organisation. It is not necessary to include here details of any assistance given to volunteers or staff from third party or external organisations.

Client Group

5. To whom does your project provide services?

Please give details describing the characteristics of the client group(s) supported by your project.

6. How are your clients identified and referred to you for support?

On what basis are individuals identified to take part in your project? What referral/eligibility criteria are used? These criteria should be consistent with the aims of your project and with good equal opportunities practice. The project should be open to anyone regardless of their ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation, provided they meet the criteria identified for the target group. Individuals participating in the project should do so on a voluntary basis.

How is information about the project communicated to referral agencies and to clients themselves? Please describe the processes used for promoting the project and for selecting and referring individuals onto the scheme. Promotional literature used

should contain important details about the project and be in a form that is accessible to client target groups and referral organisations. Where referral onto the project is through a third party, please explain how you ensure that those referred meet with your eligibility requirements.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of promotional literature, information guides, relevant correspondence, an equal opportunities statement and documentation relating to referral procedures involving third party/external organisations.

7. How are clients made aware of what the project involves?

Please describe how clients are made aware of what they can expect from their involvement in the project. As a minimum we would expect this process to clarify:

- The purpose of the project and how it will operate
- The nature of the mentoring or befriending relationship and what benefits clients can expect from it
- The support available and what to do if any problems arise

In mentoring, this process will often be a structured activity where 'mentees' are 'prepared' for their involvement in the programme. For example, in schools the process may include group and interview activities, involving the teacher and project co-ordinator. In the field of youth justice, it may take the form of a meeting, involving the client and a group of professionals, with mentoring considered as one option amongst various forms of support or intervention.

In other projects, particularly in the context of befriending, it may be more appropriate for the process to be conducted on a less formal and structured basis, with the amount of written information kept to a minimum, so as not to deter clients. For example, it may be undertaken by the project co-ordinator, on a one-to-one basis, at the client's home. In these instances, introducing the scheme to the client is often carried out at the same time as the client's needs are assessed.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of induction or briefing materials, letters of confirmation and client interview/assessment documentation.

Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers

8. How do you recruit your volunteers?

Mentoring and befriending projects should have clear criteria with regard to the qualities, experience and characteristics of the individuals they wish to attract. These should be consistent with the aims of the scheme and the roles required of the volunteers within it. Equal opportunities principles should be applied to recruitment practices. For example, a variety of promotional and recruitment methods should be used to encourage diversity in volunteer recruitment.

Please provide details of your recruitment and selection process. Do you use any recruitment criteria for mentors? What are your sources of recruitment?

Your response should demonstrate that an appropriate and robust recruitment and selection process is in place that includes:

- Promotional literature that is clear, accessible and appeals to a diverse audience
- Assessment against person specification to determine suitability for role
- Background checks e.g. use of references, CRB checks, where appropriate
- Processes for dealing with applicants that are found to be unsuitable e.g. probationary period, satisfactory completion of initial training.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of marketing/promotional literature, person specification for volunteer role, equal opportunities statement, volunteer application forms or equivalent and notes from volunteer interview/ assessment processes.

9. What screening procedures and personal protection arrangements do you operate?

Ensuring the safety of participants lies at the heart of the Approved Provider Standard. Projects must ensure that the safety of both parties in the relationship is protected through the adoption and application of appropriate arrangements on matters such as personal protection or confidentiality. For example, all projects dealing with young people or vulnerable adults must provide evidence of the use of CRB checks. CRB disclosure should be backed up with other screening processes, including a structured interview/assessment process, effective recruitment and training of staff and procedures for anyone to raise concerns about an individual.

In addition, all projects have a 'duty of care' towards the people they work with and to protect them from harm. A risk assessment should therefore be carried out to decide whether clients are at risk if volunteers are not screened.

Where appropriate, depending on the nature of your project and client group involved, please outline what arrangements are in place for the following:

- Screening of all volunteers, including CRB checks
- Ensuring the health and safety of all participants (volunteers, clients, project workers)
- Dealing with complaints
- Ensuring client/volunteer confidentiality
- Ensuring the secure use of technology e.g. in e-mentoring schemes
- Ensuring good equal opportunities practice
- Ensuring participants are covered by relevant insurance
- Ensuring parental, family or third party consent

Examples of appropriate evidence include details of registration with the Criminal Records Bureau, confirmation of police checks, copies of insurance documentation and copies of policies/procedures relating to the points listed above. Please note that

you should include copies of 'live' documentation that can demonstrate evidence of implementation.

10. What process is used for matching clients and volunteers?

There should be a consistent process for identifying clients' needs and comparing these with volunteer characteristics. This process should aim to make the best use of the attributes, experience and interests that the volunteer has to offer, as well as being responsive to the client's needs and stated preferences.

The process may include the use of questionnaires, a structured interview process or group meetings to see how volunteers and clients interact. Whatever process for matching is chosen, it is also essential to have arrangements in place for dealing with relationships that turn out to be unsuitable.

Please outline the process you use for matching volunteers and clients.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of any documentation used, guidelines outlining matching procedures, records of face-to-face contacts, written feedback from participants.

Volunteer Preparation, Training and Support

11. How do you prepare volunteers so that they can offer effective support?

Please describe the process you use for preparing volunteers so that they are aware of the demands of the task and can offer clients good quality support. Your response should demonstrate that the process used is relevant and appropriate to the role required of volunteers in your particular project. However, as a minimum, initial training should include:

- Information on the background and purpose of the project
- Input relating to the client group
- Input on the nature of the mentoring or befriending relationship, including roles/responsibilities, skills used, boundaries of the relationship
- Information on the operation of the project, including policies/procedures, meetings' schedules and support available).

Volunteer preparation and training may be something that is delivered for you by an external organisation. If this is the case, please indicate how you monitor and evaluate what is being provided on your behalf? This process should give you the confidence that the training is meeting the needs of your volunteers and preparing them effectively for the roles required of them within the project.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of session timetables, relevant sections of training programmes, support materials/handouts, volunteer handbook/guidelines and attendee evaluation/feedback.

12. How do you provide on-going support for volunteers?

The role of a volunteer can be a demanding one and it will also be a new experience for the majority of adults undertaking it. Volunteers may need guidance and positive feedback to help them develop confidently into their role.

Regular contact by the project co-ordinator can be helpful in identifying and resolving difficulties at an early stage. Participants may require advice on the conduct of their relationship or need assistance in dealing with particular issues. Opportunities to meet with other volunteers can be a useful way of sharing practice and offering support. In some instances, it may be appropriate for projects to offer further specialist training, leading to some form of formal accreditation. With other projects, where the emphasis is on keeping communication simple and informal, it may be sufficient to keep in regular telephone contact in order to ensure that meetings are taking place and provide support where it is required.

Your response should show how you provide on-going support for clients and volunteers. This may include activities such as networking opportunities, production of newsletters, review meetings with the project co-ordinator, celebration events or further training opportunities.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of any documentation relating to the activities described in the paragraph above.

Monitoring and Evaluation

13. How do you monitor the progress of relationships and determine whether they are successful?

Every project should have a process in place for monitoring the progress of relationships and to determine whether they are functioning successfully and achieving the goals identified for them. The complexity of these processes may vary considerably between projects depending on the context in which the project is operating, the nature of the client group and the purpose of the relationship and what it is intended to achieve.

In mentoring most relationships will operate within a clearly defined time frame. Procedures will have been established setting out the parameters and frequency of meetings. A process and documentation will be in place for recording what is discussed and agreed at these meetings. Mentors and mentees will usually have agreed a basis for assessing progress that will guide the content of their sessions and provide a benchmark for measuring what has been achieved at the end of the mentoring process. Methods used for assessing progress may take the form of action planning, meetings where objectives are reviewed, individual target or goal setting linked to measurable improvements, mentors/mentees own reported perceptions of change and input from third parties, such as teachers in schools.

These processes may be less defined in the context of befriending, depending on the nature of the relationship and client group involved. Some projects will refer to the

client needs assessment, using this as a template for determining whether the services that are being provided are addressing the needs of the client. Others, especially where young people are involved, may use methods that are similar to those applied in mentoring, such as those listed in the paragraph above.

In befriending, the process of setting specific objectives to be achieved within a given time period may not always be appropriate. For some projects, the prime objective may simply be to establish a successful and positive relationship, one that may subsequently continue for many years. In this context, the goals and structure of the relationship may be defined only in broad or limited terms. Support from the project, although accessible, will operate 'at a distance' and documentation directly involving the client or volunteer may be deliberately kept to a minimum. Here, the monitoring process might take the form of periodic reviews to determine whether clients' needs are being met (circumstances may have changed) and to obtain confirmation from both parties that they remain positive about the relationship and want it to continue.

Please describe how you monitor progress and determine the success of individual mentoring or befriending relationships. Some of the processes you describe here may also contribute to other aspects of the project. For example, meetings between the project co-ordinator and the client or volunteer not only provide a means of reviewing progress but may also be used as an opportunity for offering further support to the individuals involved. Furthermore, information about individual relationships obtained as part of the monitoring or assessment process can be aggregated/analysed and used to contribute to the overall project evaluation.

Examples of appropriate evidence include written feedback from clients, volunteers or other stakeholders, copies of action plans, client needs' analysis, notes from review meetings and records of telephone contacts.

14. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your mentoring or befriending project?

To what extent are the overall aims of your project being achieved? What is working well and what can be improved? All projects need an evaluation process in place that enables them to assess the effectiveness of the service that is provided. They should also seek to continually improve their methods of operation in order to achieve better results.

Please describe what methods are used to evaluate your project. This may take the form of informal and/or formal period reviews, performance against contract requirements, feedback from participants and other stakeholders, use of satisfaction surveys, measurement of data linked to specific outcomes and external or in-house evaluation exercises.

Examples of appropriate evidence include copies of any documentation relating to the activities described in the paragraph above. Please refer to any changes/improvements you have made to your project as a result of these assessments.