

Developing the New Quality Mark

Briefing Three – Progress Update



Advice Plus Partnerships Support Proposed New Quality Mark

Support for the proposed New Quality Mark amongst Big Lottery funded AdvicePlus Partnerships is growing following recent presentations by the project at several AdvicePlus events. Over 50 AdvicePlus Partnerships are now operating across England, many of which have objectives to improve the quality of advice amongst their members.

We are delighted by the number of partnerships who have requested copies of our draft materials to use with their own local advice networks. Partnerships tell us they are attracted by the independence of the materials, the time our pre-prepared and tested materials will save their project and the relevance of the materials to the longer term quality assurance agenda within the sector. To date about 15 partnerships plan to use the material in their own projects and we will be offering these networks quality of advice assessor training in the Spring. In return users will give us additional feedback on how our draft material is working. Nick Hodgkinson, Programme Manager of Bradford Advice Network and Training Partnership said:

“The network of advice centres in Bradford is committed to raising the quality of advice by peer review and mutual support. So we were absolutely delighted to find that our Advice Plus project could work with WTfA by using the quality mark pilot materials. It means our local advice agencies get the opportunity to develop their systems and practices in readiness for the new, more meaningful quality audits of the future. And WTfA will get feedback on the proposed quality standards and assessment procedures from over 20 advice centres serving diverse communities in our district”.

If your AdvicePlus funded partnership wants to use the draft materials, attend a training course on delivering quality of advice assessments or be added to our mailing lists contact Judith Courts, Project Co-ordinator at judith.courts@citizensadvice.org.uk

Pilot Update

The Project's 20 pilot agencies from the Advice UK, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Youth Access networks have all successfully finished their pilots of the proposed New Quality Mark standard and audit processes.

This involved pilot agencies in a considerable amount of work as they tested not only the new standards but a wide range of delivery methods for Quality of Advice Assessment, such as self assessment with verification, mystery shopping and observed interviews. A really big thank you to all these agencies for their hard work.

The Project is now evaluating the huge mass of data the pilots have generated including delivering an independent evaluation of the whole process.

The evaluation findings will be available later this year and will be distributed widely through all normal mailings and this briefing.

Advice Agencies Have Their Say

As part of our commitment to broadest level of consultation with potential users of the New Quality Mark, the project delivered eight workshops to a wide range of advice organisations during October and November 2009. Participants included members of Youth Access, Age UK, Advice UK and members of Big Lottery AdvicePlus Funded partnerships. Workshops were held in Warrington, Birmingham, Newcastle, London and Exeter. Approximately 170 people attended.

All participants received a short update on the aims and work of the project but most of the time was spent finding out what members felt about the use of External Assessment and Self Assessment with Verification for delivering quality of advice assessments.

Participants were provided with feedback about the challenges these methods presented to advice agencies gathered from our formal consultation on the new draft standards earlier in the year and asked if they agreed with these challenges and how they could be overcome.

It was great to get feedback from such a diverse group of advice agencies and the project will use their findings to help in the reworking of delivery methods planned at the end of the pilot evaluation.

Challenges you identified...

External Assessment

- How to ensure assessors have the relevant skills and experience in practical advice giving across a wide range of agencies
- The impact of inconsistent and subjective scoring by assessors
- The need to avoid an overly bureaucratic scheme
- The administrative impact of even external assessment, particularly on smaller organisations

- The higher cost of external assessment and the difficulty of funding it on an ongoing basis

Self Assessments

- Perceptions that this is a 2nd best option
- Risks that cost are not less once the internal resources needed are factored in
- Challenges in finding internal assessors who have adequate skill and experience, particularly in small organisations
- Difficulties in ensuring internal assessors score consistently and objectively
- Problems in delivering if resources are not user friendly
- Risk of agencies ignoring the results in an internally generated assessment
- Risk of conflict with local partners if agencies “swop” assessors

Your Solutions

- Base costs on organisation size / income
- Sell the benefits of the Quality Mark to funders
- Recruit and induct external assessors carefully to ensure they have adequate “real life” experience
- Make assessment a process rather than a snapshot
- Provide a national data base of resource material which meet the needs of all types of advice providers
- Provide training and support for all assessors to ensure consistency
- Encourage agencies to see self assessment as a learning process
- Use buddying between local agencies to make self assessment affordable / viable
- Basing assessment on an agency’s own supervision and QAA processes

Full copies of the workshop findings can be obtained from the project staff below.

For copies of earlier bulletins or more information please contact:

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