

The Specialist Support Quality Mark Standard

The Advice Services Alliance's response to the
Legal Services commission's consultation paper

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1 Introduction

1.1 ASA is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

1.2 Overall, we find the language and layout of the draft clear

2 Section A: Access to Service

2.1 We believe that an answerphone message, which gives details of the service's opening hours, should be a compulsory requirement of the Quality Mark. However, the requirement for the message to state that the service is part of the CLS and has a Quality Mark should not be mandatory.

3 Section B: Seamless Service

3.1 It is our view that providers of specialist support should be required to keep signposting records. However, we note that the information that is to be recorded is considerable and includes "the reason for the signpost eg providing details of relevant experts; encouraging the professional client to refer the lay client on." This information is likely to take some time to record. Furthermore, in order to be able to make a decision about whether to signpost for the example reasons given, the specialist support adviser will have to listen to and record the details of the case and is likely to have to ask the caller questions.

3.2 In view of this, we believe that in order to ensure both effective signposting and effective record-keeping, the specialist support service provider should be paid for the time spent to take the call and to record the signpost.

4 Section C: Running the Organisation

4.1 We agree with both the call-handling and ICT failure requirements.

4.2 We note that the guidance on requirement C3.2 states "Where the technology is available, information collected could include the number of calls received, handled or lost." Such technology is available and could be bought by the specialist support provider. However, it is expensive and its purchase should not be a requirement of the Quality Mark. The guidance would be clearer if it said:

"The service must collect and monitor information on the number of people having difficulties accessing the service. This could be done by using a telephone system which collects information on the number of calls, received, handled or lost. Where the service does not have such a system, this information could be collected on a periodic basis by including...."

5 Section D: People Management

5.1 We agree that the telephone skills training at induction and the systems for supervision are adequate. In particular, we favour the supervision arrangements at requirement D4.2 which allow for informal peer supervision sessions where appropriate.

- 5.2 We are not in a position to comment on the individual category specific competence requirements. These should be approved by the relevant practitioner groups.
- 5.3 We believe that in a specialist support service, where all advisers are required to have high levels of individual competence, it is not necessary for the co-ordinator to meet the category specific adviser competencies. This will allow services to adopt the organisational structure that suits them best.

6 Section E: Running the Service

- 6.1 We agree with the requirements for file review.

7 Section F: Meeting Clients' Needs

- 7.1 We are concerned about requirement F1.1 which states that advisers must offer written confirmation of every piece of one-off advice. Whilst we recognise that it is generally good practice to confirm advice in writing, it is our view that, as callers to a specialist support service are themselves professional advisers, they should not require the same level of support as a lay client. However, we anticipate that if callers are offered written confirmation, most will accept this offer. This will significantly reduce the number of calls the service can take. As a compromise, the requirement would be acceptable so long as written confirmation can take the form of a copy of the specialist support adviser's case notes, sent where possible by e-mail. This would minimise the amount of time spent by the specialist support adviser in doing follow-up and allow more time to answer further calls.
- 7.2 Overall, we find the draft Quality Mark clear.
- 7.3 However, as we stated in our recent response to the consultation on the draft Quality Mark for specialist telephone advice, we are in favour of the LSC's moves to simplify the Quality Mark audit process and concentrate on the quality of advice. We feel that the production of new quality marks is not consistent with this policy.
- 7.4 Furthermore, given that the LSC only invited applications for participation in the Specialist Support project from organisations with the Specialist Quality Mark or the Quality Mark for the Bar, we are unclear as to the value of having a separate Quality Mark relating to the provision of specialist support. There is considerable repetition of Specialist Quality Mark requirements in this draft and it is our view that it would be more efficient to produce a small booklet of supplementary requirements or simply to incorporate the requirements into the Specialist Quality Mark.