

A quality standard for work with violent men

RESPECT

MEN & WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER
TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Respect – Accreditation of perpetrators' programmes

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In brief

Respect, the British membership organisation for people working with perpetrators of domestic violence, male victims and young people, has established a quality standard designed to give the public and commissioners in the public sector confidence in the quality of the services they are using or paying for.

The standard allows for two levels, 'safe minimum practice' (SMP) and full accreditation. Since the system was launched in 2008, nine organisations have achieved full accreditation and seven have achieved SMP. They range from small voluntary bodies to nationwide charities and multi-agency partnerships.

The development of the standard involved a two-year process of consultation with stakeholders and testing of the accreditation system. To achieve accreditation, organisations must supply information about their practices and systems, and be assessed through interviews and a site visit. An independent panel decides whether or not to award full accredited status.

The system is financially self-supporting through a £7,000 (€8,750) accreditation fee. However faster take-up is hindered by the financial insecurity of many service providers, which leads to short-term thinking rather than investment in sustainability.

The competitive tendering environment

In the UK violence against women has traditionally been seen as a criminal justice issue and the focus has been predominantly on domestic violence and to a lesser extent sexual violence. Since 1997 action has been taken to improve provision for victims of these crimes in criminal justice terms. New laws, new specialist domestic violence courts and specialist advisers have been introduced. In England and Wales there have been some important legislative and policy developments which improve the ways victims of violence are handled by the criminal justice system. There have also been policy developments addressing perpetrators' programmes, especially those connected with the Criminal Justice System. As far as service provision goes, competitive tendering processes are becoming increasingly commonplace, bringing a need for transparent ways of ensuring service quality.

Developing a standard

Respect, the British membership organisation for people working with perpetrators of domestic violence, male victims and young people, addressed the problem of standardising perpetrators' programmes, by setting minimum standards to guarantee their quality. The development of the standard and the pilot of the assessment process were supported through grants from the Lankelly Chase Foundation and the Home Office. Accreditation provides a recognised framework for delivering programmes in many different ways, allowing skilled practitioners and effective projects to gain recognition for their work, to support safe practice and to assist with fundraising.

The standard was launched in 2008 after a two-year period during which Respect consulted external stakeholders and tested the assessment processes. Respect assessed 24 organisations providing a Domestic Violence Prevention Programme (DVPP) and an Integrated Support Service (ISS) for the partners and ex-partners of those attending the DVPP. The organisations assessed range from charities with an annual turnover of more than a million pounds (£1.25m) to small organisations operating on less than £100,000 (£125,000) a year. They include multi-agency partnerships, stand-alone charities, statutory agencies and large national charities where the Domestic Violence Prevention Service (DVPS) makes up only one element of their overall service provision. The background of the organisations and the staff they employ varies, including criminal justice, child protection, family counselling, psychotherapy, psychology and specialist domestic violence professionals.

The effectiveness of the process is proven by its take-up: there are now nine Respect-accredited organisations in the UK, and a further seven have reached the initial 'safe minimum practice' (SMP) level. Take-up would have been quicker had not Respect underestimated the amount of support that organisations would need to achieve the levels of quality required. Organisations with accreditation have been better at weathering the current financial crisis because they are good value for money, have strong management and because they are organisations that are thinking ahead.

The accreditation process has had an impact on new services that are now setting up using the standard as the template for the service, making their journey to accreditation smoother. Since the launch of the accreditation process Respect aimed to make it self-financing to guarantee sustainability. For the past four years Respect has managed to meet costs through accreditation fees and has also managed to hold fees at the same level since accreditation started, so efficiency has been guaranteed.

Accreditation has been developed so that the public, funders, commissioning agencies and other professionals can be assured of a high-quality, safety-focused service. The requirements have been developed from the lessons learnt from available research and practice. Practitioners, policy-makers and researchers have all been involved in developing and testing these requirements. The standard and assessment methods will be reviewed every three years to ensure that they are updated as knowledge and experience expand. The second edition of the standard, introduced in 2012, has drawn on lessons from the first 24 assessments and integrates the feedback from a consultation with Respect members and external stakeholders.

The process holds perpetrators accountable for the violence they use. It has a strong basis in human rights and gender analysis and it is based on an anti-discriminatory approach with the recognition of women/victims and men/perpetrator diversity. It provides a clear, appropriate and comprehensive definition of domestic violence, guidance and supervision.

Applying for accreditation

The Respect accreditation standard is appropriate for organisations providing domestic violence prevention programmes (DVPPs) working with men who use intimate partner violence (IPV), and also providing integrated safety services (ISS) for partners and ex-partners of these perpetrators. It sets out all the requirements for the management and operation of these services, and the evidence that will be sought to demonstrate that an organisation meets these requirements. It also provides guidance on how the requirements can be met.

The accreditation process is supported by Respect's membership officer, development director, assessors, accreditation panel chair and members. An organisation's initial accreditation costs £7,000 (€8,750). To help its members reach the required standard, respect offers its members training, information and support including a resource manual containing sample policies, procedures and other documents, the web-based Redamos case and data management system, and pre-accreditation support including an on-site service review. Members also receive regular updates, information and discounted training.

Members of Respect can apply for an initial 'safe minimum practice' (SMP) assessment or for full accreditation. If the information they submit is complete, Respect assigns two (or in the case of SMP assessments, one) assessors to conduct site visits, review recordings and policies and conduct interviews with staff.

The assessors submit their report to Respect and the applicant organisation. In the case of SMP assessments, Respect decides whether the organisation has reached the minimum standard. On the other hand full accreditation requests are judged by an independent accreditation panel, which questions the assessors on their judgements before deciding whether to pass, fail or give the organisation a further six months to meet the required standard.

To ensure the quality of provision, adherence to the standard is verified through spot checks, and, if there is evidence which demonstrates a breach, the standard can be revoked.

Barriers to adoption

The strong points of establishing the standard are that there was intense prior consultation among key stakeholders, and the assessment processes were tested before being introduced.

However it has run up against some barriers to more rapid adoption. Implementing service standards requires a culture change: it is about developing services that have long-term sustainability. However many candidate organisations rely on short-term funding and cannot invest in sustainability when their immediate future is uncertain. In addition, some organisations are led by experienced practitioners who have little interest in succession or in creating something that will outlive their working lives. Commissioners too sometimes fail to understand the broad range of tasks involved in an effective intervention with domestic violence perpetrators. And it is a demanding standard: organisations seeking accreditation are required to be as effective at supporting victims of abuse as they are at working with perpetrators. They have to be able to work across a range of institutions, specifically those dealing with child protection, criminal justice and health, and need the skills and systems to identify and manage risk. This requires skilled staff and facilitators and investment in organisational learning.

The lessons learned from the introduction of the standard are that the practice of self-assessment that was common before the implementation of the accreditation system is inadequate to give the public and commissioners confidence in a service. Transparency and accountability are needed. Secondly, accreditation is about an organisation's ability to monitor, learn and improve its own practice, so it is important to focus on practice as well as on systems.

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Further information

Website



SMP standard



Accreditation standard



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