

Quality in Befriending

The UK quality standard for
befriending services

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Befriending
Networks

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Quality in Befriending – the UK quality standard for befriending services

“The quality of services provided by third sector organisations is important to a range of stakeholders for many different reasons. For funders the achievement of a quality award can demonstrate that the organisation wants to learn, improve practice and provide the best possible services for people and communities. In some cases it can also provide some evidence that the organisation may be less of a risk.” **Keith Wimbles, Chief Executive, Voluntary Action Fund.**

Befriending is an activity which should be seen as part of a continuum of social care provision. It is undertaken usually by volunteers, matched with people who are socially isolated, who may be very vulnerable due to age, health or disability, and very often on a 1:1 basis. It is imperative in service delivery that standards of practice are as good as they can be, in order to support the befriender and the befriended, and to deliver the best possible service. Achievement of the Quality in Befriending Standard indicates that a befriending service is well-planned, with every process thought through, and well executed, with high standards of practice.

What is Quality in Befriending?

Quality in Befriending [QiB] is a quality award for befriending services, launched in 2010. Developed by Befriending Networks (BNs), it is closely aligned with the BNs Good Practice in Befriending guide and the SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) credit-rated Vital Skills in Befriending training courses.

QiB is open to member services of Befriending Networks, irrespective of where they are based (see below for specific eligibility criteria). The standard was developed with support from Charities Evaluation Services (the authors of PQASSO) as well as other quality experts within the voluntary sector. There are two levels at which QiB can be awarded:

- QiB Award (Good Practice)
- QiB Excellence (Excellent Practice)

The value to funders

Funders will find the achievement of Quality in Befriending to be a valuable indicator of good and excellent practice in befriending services. Applicants are required to register that they are aiming to apply for QiB, and a list of both registered and approved services is held on the

Quality pages of the Befriending Networks website (www.befriending.co.uk). The BIG Lottery(Scotland) put together ‘top ten tips’ for befriending services applying to their Investing in Communities programme, one of which they identify as being prepared to work towards QiB :

‘Quality matters. We’re keen to invest in good practice in befriending projects. Projects we fund are expected to work towards Quality in Befriending (QiB). QiB is the new quality standard for befriending projects developed by Befriending Networks. If your project is eligible for QiB this can be included in your project costs.’

(BIG Lottery: Top Ten Tips)

In addition, the Scottish Government’s national mentoring scheme for looked after children, branded as “intandem” and managed by Inspiring Scotland has endorsed the Quality in Befriending Award as one of two Quality Awards it requires funded services to work towards.

The value to befriending services

- befriending staff have the opportunity to review all aspects of the services they manage
- services receive a ‘health check’ and advice on how they can continue to develop the quality of their practice
- achieving QiB can help to increase the confidence of potential referrers, befriendees and befrienders, and strengthen funding bids

Scope

QiB assesses the core work of befriending services and is not an assessment of the wider organisation. The practice areas covered by QiB are:

1. the service
2. the befriendeed
3. the befriender
4. the match

Eligibility

BNs aims to help all befriending services develop their practice. However, in order to ensure that services don’t spend a lot of time preparing a QiB application only to find that their structure doesn’t meet the fundamental requirements of the award, there are 8 eligibility criteria in place. Any service which doesn’t meet these criteria but which would still like to work on developing the quality of their practice should contact BNs to discuss what other options are available.

Eligibility criteria

1. This standard is for services which:

- work with 'vulnerable' and/or 'isolated' people
- provide companionship - the aim is to do things **with** people, not **for** them
- have a strong emphasis on the idea that the primary intervention is the relationship - the relationship may be used to achieve goals, but achieving the goals is not the primary aim (contrast with mentoring where the focus is the issue at hand and the imparting of knowledge)

To summarise: in befriending, the issue makes you vulnerable and/or isolated - the relationship is how you tackle the resulting vulnerability and isolation. This corresponds to positions 1-4 on the Befriending/Mentoring Spectrum (see pge 12 "**Good Practice in Befriending**" for more detail).

2. Befrienders must work in a mainly befriending role (i.e. not as carers / personal assistants / shoppers / DIY helpers etc).
3. The service should have been in operation long enough to have completed at least one full cycle of work before registering (i.e. befriender referrals and assessments, befriender recruitment, training and selection, matching, providing support to befrienders, reviewing matches).
4. The service should be currently active (i.e. have undertaken all the tasks listed in 5 above within the last 12 months)
5. Funding should be in place for the service to continue for at least the next 12 months, or funding applications to enable this should have been submitted.
6. All required policies, procedures and forms should be in place and being used.
7. The service needs to have given consideration to the staff: befriender ratio described in 'Good Practice in Befriending'. Services should have a considered rationale which can be submitted as evidence, where ratios significantly exceed guidelines.
8. All services which apply for QiB must be BNs members and must remain members throughout the time that they hold the award. Within a multiple service application, (i.e. an organisation which has several befriending services supporting different groups of befriendees or in different locations) each separate service which is included must have (as a minimum) its own satellite membership with BNs.

Cost

Fees are levied on a sliding scale depending on the annual turnover of the service. For current information, contact Befriending Networks directly (0131 261 8799) or download the "**Information for Services**" document for the Quality pages of the website (www.befriending.co.uk).

Practice areas

The four practice areas identified in the Quality in Befriending Award are all reflected in Befriending Networks' credit-rated 'Vital Skills in Befriending' training. Coordinators who have successfully completed all nine elements of this training will be well placed to have the information and knowledge necessary for the attainment of QiB; however, completion of the Befriending Networks training is not a prerequisite for undertaking QiB. Coordinators will simply have to demonstrate that they have received sufficient training to successfully carry out their duties.

The four practice areas and what is assessed within them are also closely linked to "**Good Practice in Befriending**" a member publication available from our website.

How to apply

Detailed instructions about the application process are downloadable from the BNs website (<http://www.befriending.co.uk/quality-awards.php>). After initial enquiry, if the service is eligible for QiB, BNs will e-mail an overview of the requirements and indicators so that an informed decision can be made about whether or not to proceed.

Once a service has decided they definitely wish to proceed, and once the registration fee has been paid, login details are generated for the staff member managing the application to access the online platform which hosts the Award process. At this stage, the service is listed on the BNs website as 'Aiming for QiB'.

The service is given 9 months from receiving login details to submit evidence for assessment against each of the 96 indicators across the 4 Practice Areas to demonstrate Good Practice. Evidence can be uploaded at any point from receipt of login details, but assessment work will only begin once the service authorises BNs to raise the invoice for the submission fee and this has been paid.

Services can focus on achieving the Award and then upgrade to Excellence as part of the same application, or if confident to do so, can tackle the additional Excellence indicators first time around, which means at least one piece of evidence should be uploaded against each by the end of the 9 month deadline.

Assessment

QiB applications are assessed by Befriending Networks as a 'desktop' exercise, i.e. there are currently no site visits involved. BNs reserve the right to review this process, however, as with all other steps of the QiB assessment.

In order to achieve QiB, the service must demonstrate by provision of evidence that they meet all the requirements in the four practice areas.

Assessment outcomes

The possible outcomes for each assessment are:

1. Achieved 'Quality in Befriending Excellence' (awarded for a duration of three years)-i.e. they have achieved Excellent Practice throughout all four Practice Areas
2. Achieved 'Quality in Befriending Award' (awarded for a duration of three years)-i.e. all four Practice areas have been achieved as Good Practice, but not all as Excellent Practice
3. Not yet fully achieved-additional evidence is required **or** some changes in practice are required to reach the required standard.

Verification

One in four assessments, plus any borderline applications, will be checked by a verifier. Any discrepancy in the assessment decisions will be resolved through discussions between the assessor and the verifier.

Appeals process

Should an applicant be dissatisfied with the outcome of the assessment, there is an appeals process. If the application has not been verified, it will be and the verifier's decision is final. If the application has already been verified, the initial assessor will discuss the application with the verifier. If there is a difference of opinion or if they still agree that the application is not successful, a second verifier will be asked to reassess the application, and their decision will be final.

Feedback from applicants

Services which have either achieved QiB or been recommended to resubmit an application after failing to meet the QiB indicators within agreed timelines will be sent a Follow-up form. When compared with the Application Form, this allows BNs and the befriending service to observe any changes in:

- staff's knowledge about their service
- the service's strengths
- the availability of evidence for the four practice areas

It also provides feedback on the value of the award for befriending services, and the quality of support offered by BNs. The results are used to review the award and contribute to BNs' policy of continuous improvement.

On whether completing the QiB process had changed service delivery, members told us:

“I feel that our service delivery is tighter and more robust now.....It has been very useful to get the knowledge I had in my head down on paper.... “

“More direct consent is now taken from young people in connection with the sharing of their information. More information is provided to parents/carers regarding boundaries & responsibilities. Management of waiting list and keeping those potential referrers informed is more robust.”

“Having applied twice in the past for the Approved Provider Standard, I found the QiB application process to be more in-depth, and really befriending specific.”

Follow up

This document is intended to provide an overview of the Quality in Befriending Award and the processes involved in achieving this. There is additional information available on the Quality section of the BNs website at <http://www.befriending.co.uk/quality-awards.php> and if require any further information we would be happy to hear from you by telephone, 0131 261 8799 or email, info@befriending.co.uk.



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