

Service Accreditation Scheme

Guide to applying for and maintaining accreditation

All resources mentioned in this guidance are available under the corresponding title for download [online](#) or on request via [email](#)

Introduction

This guide explains more about the process of making an application for accreditation. It outlines everything you need to consider when putting an application together. It also provides an overview of how you maintain accreditation over the five-year term of accreditation when awarded.

Please read this guide in conjunction with the full Service Accreditation Scheme 2003, which details the criteria to be met (Part I), how to put an application together (Part II), the assessment process (Part III) and the requirements to maintain accreditation (Part IV). This guide assumes you have read the Scheme details and understand the requirements.

All underlined text provides a direct link to the pertinent pages of the BACP website. Simply click on the link to access the information there.

As a BACP organisational member, you are held to account under our [*Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*](#) and all applications are assessed within this in mind.

Single or multiple services?

If you want to accredit more than one service or location, you may need to make more than one application for accreditation. If you require two or more organisational memberships with us then each would need to apply separately for accreditation. The other key distinction is whether there is one governance and management structure in place, or more. A single service has one governance structure in place, multiple services have more than one in place. By governance we mean a Board of trustees or directors at the head of the management structure, even if similar policies and procedures are in place for the service to function. Single services can be provided in multiple centres or venues, as long as the governance covers all locations. Multiple services may provide services in one venue or location.

A single service may provide a number of different counselling or psychotherapy 'projects', targeting different population cohorts. It may be a generic service offering therapy for a wide range of conditions, or aimed at those with specific issues, such as trauma, bereavement, addiction and so forth. Multiple services may look the same as this, but each service would have a different governance structure, be a recognised subsidiary service, or a service that is part of an umbrella organisation.

If the counselling or psychotherapy service is part of a larger organisation that offers a range of support services, only the counselling and psychotherapy service can apply to become accredited and once accredited, that award sits squarely with that counselling or psychotherapy service.

You may find it helpful to discuss this with us before starting your application if you are unsure.

Who is making the application?

If you are part of a larger organisation, it is that parent organisation that holds BACP organisational membership and who applies for accreditation. So you need to make clear in your application: the name of your organisation, the name of the counselling or psychotherapy service you are looking to accredit, and list the methods of delivery that the application encompasses; for example, couple counselling, children & young people counselling, telephone counselling, e-counselling etc.

Please note that BACP does not accredit organisations, it accredits counselling and psychotherapy services *provided* by organisations.

Working with children and young people (CYP)

We expect that all practitioners who work with CYP, qualified or trainee, should have some training in working with this cohort. Appropriate training may include professional CYP training at diploma and post-graduate level, or specialised continuing professional development (CPD) training. CYP practitioners must also receive robust and appropriate supervision from supervisors who are themselves, competent to work with the CYP cohort.

Whilst there are currently no specific criteria on working with CYP in the service accreditation scheme, we would expect you to work within the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* and this will be assessed under criterion 6.2.1. Please refer to the [Guideline for Services Working with CYP](#), available from the website, for information about the criteria which will need specific address for CYP services.

Student placements

Placement providers working with CYP should only allow trainee counsellors to undertake a placement with them if the student has been assessed, either by the training provider or by you as the placement provider, as having the basic competences to practice safely and ethically with CYP. You will need to detail your requirements of students before offering a placement under criterion 4.3.3, or you will be requested to do so under criterion 6.2.1 with regard ethical practice.

Further information on the basic standards expected by BACP can be found on our website under [Information /Ethics and Standards /Competencies & Curricula](#). This can either form part of student training or part of a placement provider induction and training process. This can also be supplemented by the [Counselling MindEd](#) resources which are free to access and provides a certificate of completion as evidence.

Online (video) and telephone working

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown situation across the UK since March 2020, we are being flexible with regards to remote practices. However, if you are providing remote therapy services, we do expect to see that your practitioners have as a minimum, completed primer training for working online. Students on placement may also undertake some online or telephone practice as long as they have had some training and they have permission to do so from their training course.

All practitioners working online or by telephone must be assessed for their competency to work in this way and you will need to explain how you do this in your application. You will

also need to ensure your policy, procedures and other documents reflect this way of working. For more information please visit our [working online resources](#) webpage.

Steps to applying

Whether you are new to service accreditation or not, we suggest that in putting together an application, you follow the following steps:

Step 1: Contact person

Identify someone in your organisation who is going to be the BACP 'contact person' for accreditation purposes and who will be submitting your application. This may or may not be the named BACP main contact within your organisation.

This individual will need to have a good understanding of how the Service Accreditation Scheme works and will involve speaking to staff, volunteers (if applicable) and users of the service, at various stages in the initial self-assessment stage. The contact person (referred to as 'you' from this point on) will need to devote time and resources to making the application.

It is advisable that you read through the service accreditation scheme [terms & conditions](#) before you sign the applications declaration and submit your paperwork. These are available from our website for download or is available on request. The terms & conditions detail what we expect from applicants and our accredited services, and what you can expect from us.

Step 2: Initial self-assessment

It's worth assessing first, how close you are to evidencing each of the criteria. You may find your current policies and procedures need development or existing documents need review - if they are over three years old we will expect them to be reviewed and dated.

Use the criteria to provide a gap analysis. You may find you are already meeting a particular criterion but are yet to cement this into a policy and procedure.

If you have already self-assessed or externally assessed your service for another quality assurance scheme, you will have a firm foundation already in place. However, the BACP Service Accreditation Scheme is a unique quality standard and it is therefore very unlikely that materials used for one quality standard will be transferable as a whole, into an application for BACP service accreditation. It should be expected that there may be some duplication required, but you will need to decide whether the evidence you have used for that, is sufficient or appropriate to a counselling/psychotherapy service. Our advice is to treat your application for accreditation as a completely separate exercise.

Websites are accessed as part of the application assessment process. It is therefore advisable that you include a look at your internet presence at this stage. Even if you do not have an organisational website, you will probably find that your service is listed in local resource websites. Investigate and make sure your details & service descriptions are correct. If your service does have a website, look to see if it is current and fit-for-purpose. You may also use your website content to evidence some criteria in your application.

Finally, you are advised to consider the BACP *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. There are a range of Good Practice Resources available to our members on the website which you may also find helpful.

Step 3: Action planning for improvement

Your initial self-assessment may reveal that some criteria are not yet able to be fully met. For each of these, it is recommended that you draw up an action plan to show what needs to be done, and by whom.

This will enable you to prioritise and bring your colleagues up to date with where you wish to make improvements. Having staff on board not only helps to highlight your desire to provide a quality service, but also that you value their input and feedback on issues that directly concern them.

The more specific the action plan, the better they will help you meet accreditation requirements. We recommend that you identify the timescale, who will be involved and the resources required.

Step 4: Putting your application together

The application form asks you tell us what you are doing to show how you are meeting each criterion and then asks you to prove that, with supporting evidence.

The application form is available for download from the service accreditation webpages under Applying for Accreditation. Please complete all sections, which will ensure that the assessor has all the information they need to complete their assessment. It is expected that supporting evidence will be submitted for every criterion; if a criterion is not relevant to you we would not expect evidence, but you will need to explain why in your self-statement.

You can start putting your application together at any time, but please note that all supporting evidence must be current, by which we mean, no older than three years.

Foundation information

Space is provided at the front of the application form for you to provide a brief overview of your organisation and the counselling or psychotherapy service applying for accreditation.

You are asked to confirm the Centres and locations of all venues in which you provide counselling or psychotherapy services. If your organisation has multiple counselling or psychotherapy service you will need to make it clear what the differences are and consider whether more than one application is actually required.

Declaration of support

This statement acts to confirm the service is an actual, professional and reputable counselling service and that the individual is happy to support your application for accreditation. They do not need to read through your application, just support it.

The statement must be from a professional, independent of and external to, your organisation, but having some current or past association with it. They cannot be a supervisor working with the service, an employee, client or ex-client of the service or a member of your trustees. Good examples include referral sources such as a local GP,

consultant psychiatrist or other mental health professional, or a manager from a local organisation you have contact with.

The statement need not be long, but must be presented on letterhead paper (not yours), clearly naming your organisation and counselling or psychotherapy service (if different), confirm how they know the service and that they support your application for accreditation. It must be signed and dated. Alternatively, the declaration can be sent direct to us via the individuals professional email address, or direct to you and forwarded on to us by you.

Self-statements

You must address each of the criteria with a 'self-statement', briefly describing how you believe you are meeting each criterion.

The temptation may be to simply re-state the criterion, but try to look beyond this and provide sufficient detail to describe a rounded view of how your service operates. Remember, the assessor will know nothing of your organisation or service.

For example criterion 4.3.2 states that 'A training & development policy should exist for all staff'. You could state; 'We have a training & development policy in place - see appendix X'. But a good response would be along the lines of 'Our training & development policy forms part of the Staff Handbook and is discussed during new staff induction training. Staff are consulted on and informed of review updates by email as they occur, with a revised version attached for them to read through.' The first statement is adequate; the second statement is explanatory and provides a better understanding of how the service is managed overall.

Supporting evidence

Your self-statements need to be supported by hard evidence wherever possible. Our advice would be to look for hard evidence for *every* criterion. It is expected that 95% of criteria will be evidenced. Criteria may not be met if supporting evidence is not provided, no matter how detailed a statement you provide.

Examples of appropriate evidence include policies & procedures, reports, publicity materials, photographs, photocopies of certificates, organisational intranet or website screenshots or printed pages, presentation or training slides, minutes of meetings, copies of emails, spreadsheet examples, template forms, etc. Remember your application is treated as confidential.

Provide an appendix of all your supporting evidence, clearly numbered as 1, 2, 3... and front these with a full list of contents that form your appendices.

Think creatively about evidence. Remember that one document may support more than one criterion. Only submit one copy of each document and reference the appendix number against as many criteria as appropriate. Always direct the assessor to the relevant page(s) and paragraphs within larger documents. If the assessor has to hunt down the evidence it may be missed... so make it easy for them to pass the criteria by viewing the information that shows you are doing what you say you are doing.

Please **do not** submit an application with multiple copies of one or more specific documents. Neither do you need to include full copies of any BACP publications you reference, such as the Ethical Framework, as we already have access to these.

If evidence forms only a small part of a large document, only the relevant pages need be submitted rather than sending the entire document. However, if you do this, make sure it is obvious which document the pages have been extracted from and explain this in your self-statement. Do make sure each extracted page clearly refers to the original document in a header or footer, and do front with a copy of the title page and contents list of the entire document.

Do keep referring back to the criterion and your self-statement to make sure you are addressing the specific requirements and using appropriate evidence. Make sure your evidence is current and provide documents which are dated; which is good practice.

Please consider photocopying double-sided so reduce the amount of paperwork you will need to submit. This will be more cost-effective and environmentally friendly. Bulky, unwieldy applications are also harder to assess. Also, it is usual for some documents to be able to evidence more than one criterion. Remember we only need one copy of each document, just cross reference to as many criteria as appropriate.

If documents used as supporting evidence are available on your organisational website, you may wish to provide a hyperlink to the relevant webpage in your application. You may then decide whether or not to provide a hardcopy screenshot as part of your submission, but if not, please ensure the link is correct and working, otherwise criteria may not be satisfactorily evidenced. You will also need to provide the link in the list of your appendices.

Your application needs to be clear and presented in an organised manner to make it easy for the assessor to see you are meeting each criterion. Applications that are not complete, collated and organised appropriately will be returned with a request to address and resubmit. We will not be able to post a copy back to you.

Your application will be treated as confidential, but we would expect to see anonymised evidence if and where appropriate.

Assessor decision & comments

Space has been provided within the application form for each criterion, for assessors to confirm their decision and add comments as part of their assessment of your application. Applicants are requested to leave these sections blank. This will then form your final assessment report.

Step 5: Submitting your application

We only need one complete version of your application, which must be uploaded into a secure portal which we will provide a link for when you inform us that you are planning to submit an application.

Please ensure that your application form is provided as a Microsoft Word document as this will be used by the assessors to complete their assessment report. Your supporting evidence should be numbered and provided in an 'appendices' folder and be accompanied with a list showing appendix number and document titles as stated in your application form.

The submission date will be taken from the date of the email you send to confirm your papers have been uploaded.

As a condition of making your application you agree that BACP reserves the right to ask for further evidence if required. The Service Accreditation terms and conditions are accessible from the [Applying for Accreditation](#) webpage.

Application fee

Please see the website or contact us to check the current fee at the time of your submission.

Payments are preferred by BACS transfer whenever possible (our details are provided on request). We also accept payment over the phone by debit/credit card by contacting our Customer Services Team on 01455 883300. Do ensure all correspondence with us states your organisational membership number and reason for contact.

Assessment process

We will acknowledge receipt of your application by email by return. Before assessment, we will carry out a routine check to ensure that:

- Part A - Eligibility Criteria 1-3 are met
- The declaration of honesty has been signed and dated
- The foundation details are sufficiently clear
- Your declaration of support is appropriate
- Presentation of the application is ordered and appears complete
- The submission fee has been paid

If there are any queries, we will contact you by email to address these before forwarding your application on for assessment.

Your application will then be assessed against the Service Accreditation Scheme Part B - Operational Criteria. Points of clarification and additional information may be requested by email. If requests cannot be met within the specified time, we may determine that the pertinent criteria have not or cannot be met.

The assessor will then complete their section of the application form submitted.

Ten per cent of applications are randomly chosen for moderation, which ensures the assessment standards are maintained by all assessors and across time.

Timetable for the assessment process

It is difficult to predict precisely how long the process will take from the time an application is received by BACP, to the issue of the assessment report. It will depend partly on the number of queries we have, how long you take to respond, whether your application requires moderation as part of the ongoing standardisation process, and on the total number of accreditation applications awaiting assessment at any one time.

BACP's aim is to make the process run as quickly as reasonably possible. We endeavour to issue your assessment report within four months of receiving your application.

Assessment outcomes

Once the assessor has completed their sections of your application, we will upload the report into your secure portal and inform you of this by email, along with a reminder of the link for access.

If your service has met all the criteria, then your service will be awarded BACP Accreditation for a period of five years. You will receive a certificate along with your assessment report. You will be provided with the accredited service logo and be listed in our online [Accredited Services Directory](#)

If the assessors consider that some criteria have been insufficiently evidenced, they will set conditions for you to address before accreditation can be awarded and these will be detailed at the end of your application assessment report. You will be provided with a resubmission template and a deadline in which to address and submit. The conditions will specify what is needed in order to satisfy outstanding criteria requirements.

Resubmissions are assessed by the same assessor wherever possible and follow the same assessment process. There is no fee for a resubmission of papers.

Assessors may also make recommendations for improvement or development, which do not impact on whether a criterion is being met or not. However, if you go on to become accredited, you will be asked to feedback on your considerations and any resultant actions within your first annual monitoring submission.

If, following a resubmission, there are any unmet conditions, your application will be deemed to be unsuccessful at this time. However, a full new application can be submitted as soon as you feel you are meeting all the criteria standards.

You may appeal the final decision if you have grounds. Please note that disagreement with the assessor decision is not grounds for appeal. You will have three months in which to submit an appeal. Further details are provided in Part III of the Service Accreditation Scheme.

Maintaining accreditation

You need to maintain your organisational membership throughout your accreditation term in order to maintain accreditation. An invitation to renew your annual organisational membership will be sent separately by our membership team.

You will also be asked to submit an annual monitoring form for which we will provide you with a template two month before a deadline set in line with your membership renewal date and *not* your accreditation award date. You will be asked to upload your completed form and any supporting evidence into your secure portal and let us know by email when done.

You will be asked to tell us about any changes that have taken place within the accredited service during the previous year which may impact on your accreditation, so you will need to refer back to the criteria as you complete the form.

All annual monitoring forms go for assessment and you will receive a feedback report via the secure portal and email notification from us. Any questions should be addressed within the specified time and we may require you to submit further evidence if necessary. Failure to provide an annual monitoring submission or offer a satisfactory response to any queries we have raised, may result in the withdrawal of your accredited status.

BACP reserves the right to conduct a quality assurance visit where a service has failed to comply with the requirements for maintenance of accreditation, the cost of which will be met by that service.

At the end of your accreditation term you will be invited to submit a further application to renew your accreditation term for a further five-year period and how to go about that.

Data protection and confidentiality

All applications and annual monitoring submissions are treated as confidential with access restricted to named individuals. The onus is on the applicant to ensure that the materials used as part of their application are GDPR compliant.

Once accreditation has been awarded, all application and assessment papers will be retained in your secure portal and on BACPs limited access operations drive, for the duration of your accreditation term. These will be deleted in full, within three months of the successful renewal of accreditation or when an accreditation has lapsed.

You can access the secure portal at any time during your accreditation term. Access to your secure portal can be changed at any time by emailing a request to accred.service@bacp.co.uk

All email correspondence, unless saved in your secure portal, will be deleted within three months of when we have notified you of your application decision.

BACP reserves the right to ask you about your working practices at any time throughout your accreditation term.

Under GDPR, individuals have the right to be informed about the collection and use of their personal data, it is a key transparency requirement under the regulations. This is communicated via our Privacy notice that is on our website [here](#) and on the footer of our external emails.

Further information

Please visit the [Service Accreditation](#) webpages of the [BACP website](#).

If you wish to discuss any particular criterion or element of the assessment process in more detail, please contact us as accred.service@bacp.co.uk

General information about BACP services and resources should be directed to our [Customer Services team](#) at bacp@bacp.co.uk or by phone on 01455 883300.

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