



Service Accreditation Standards

1. Community Mediation in Scotland

Community Mediation has now been established in Scotland as a tried and tested means of resolving neighbourhood conflict. It is comparatively inexpensive, quick, gets to the root of the problem, and is often successful where all other methods of intervention have failed. Most Scottish local authorities now have access to mediation services.

Different models of service provision have been developed, from independent specialist charities to in-house Local Authority mediation services. Similarly, the range of activity and client access differs widely. Some services are directly accessible by the public, while others act only on agency referrals. These differences in approach are also found in relation to levels of independence, training, case management and a range of other practice issues.

We view difference as a strength, allowing a range of good practices to develop. Regardless of the model of service delivery, however, the Scottish Community Mediation Network (SCMN) believes that the general public in Scotland have a right to services, which are effective and efficient. The standards set out below are those we consider necessary for a fully competent community mediation service to meet.

2. Standards

2.1 Core Standards

All services should have the following characteristics:

- a. **Free at point of delivery:** the service should not charge individuals for standard mediation services
- b. **Open and accessible to all residents:** there should be no discrimination between tenures.
- c. **Operating within an appropriate ethical framework:** mediators act within Scottish Mediation Network 'Code of Practice for Mediation in Scotland'.
- d. **Impartial:** services should be committed to acting without favour towards or against either party. This will involve a degree of visible independence or autonomy.
- e. **Committed to quality and safety of service:** services should ensure staff are adequately trained, supported and supervised, the service operates within legal requirements, and all paid mediators are either accredited under the SCMN Mediator Accreditation Scheme or are in the process of seeking accreditation.
- f. **Community-based:** services should have clear, direct links to the community they are working in.

2.2 Specific Standards

a. Staff Recruitment and Support:

- > A comprehensive written job description and job specification as well as clear terms and conditions of employment.
- > An induction process that familiarises post-holders with the organisation, its policies and methods of operating and identifies initial training needs.
- > A formal procedure of support and supervision with the opportunity to reflect on individual practice and continued professional development requirements.

b. Recruitment And Support For Services Using Volunteers:

- > A volunteer contract or equivalent, outlining rights and responsibilities.
- > An induction process that familiarises post-holders with the organisation, its policies and methods of operating and identifies initial training needs.
- > A formal procedure of support and supervision with the opportunity to reflect on individual practice and continued professional development requirements.

c. Mediator Training:

- > A requirement that all service mediators undergo adequate mediation training of at least 30 hours and delivered by trainers with direct experience of working in the field.
- > A facility for ensuring that inexperienced mediators have the opportunity to shadow/co-mediate with experienced mediators.
- > A requirement that all mediators undertake at least twelve hours a year of CPD.

d. Equal Opportunities/Access to Services:

- > Good accessibility for people with mobility restrictions or arrangements in place whereby they can easily use the service.
- > Service publicity is targeted sufficiently and appropriately for its intended client group, and is available in other languages/media.
- > The service is covered by an active equal opportunities policy and staff/volunteers are given adequate equal opportunities training.

e. Safety:

- > There is an active service policy covering personal safety and health and safety in the work environment.
- > The service operates risk assessment procedures for casework activity.
- > Staff and volunteers are given adequate personal and health & safety training.

f. Referrals Policy:

- > There is a referrals procedure covering the steps to be taken and any indicators of suitability/unsuitability for mediation.
- > Referrals are accepted via post, telephone and e-mail.
- > If referrals are not accepted a clear reason is given to the individual/agency making the referral.

g. Case Management System:

- > There is a written description of the case management process clear enough to be understood by new mediators and support staff.
- > The process specifies the criteria for accepting/rejecting cases, allocation of cases, how and when contact will be made and any service practice guidelines to be followed.
- > There is a case record system, which identifies what stage a case is at, and actions taken to date.

h. Confidentiality/Access to Records:

- > The service has a clear policy on confidentiality available to clients and referring agencies and covering circumstances where confidentiality may be broken (e.g. child abuse, harm to clients, serious crime).
- > The service has a clear policy on access to records available to clients and referring agencies and complying with the requirements of the Data Protection Acts.
- > Mediators and support staff are aware of and follow the service's policies on confidentiality and access to records.

i. Monitoring And Evaluation:

- > There is a statistical recording system for cases which records case numbers, nature of dispute and outcomes.
- > There are systems in place for the monitoring of standards of casework (e.g. client questionnaires, sampling procedures) and the service has a customer complaints procedure.
- > The service undertakes periodic reviews of its performance in relation to case activity, outcomes, and profile of clients.

3. Accreditation Process

3.1 Assessors

SCMN's Standards Committee will appoint a panel of no less than seven assessors. Assessors will have a minimum of two years experience of relevant casework and will receive training in assessment procedures.

Member services participating in the scheme will agree to contribute an assessor's time and expenses arising from assessment duties when required, as well as contributing any time and expenses arising from assessors acting under the training and mediator accreditation schemes. In return services and their mediators will have access to free accreditation under all schemes. No assessor shall undertake any more than five assessments per year.

3.2 Access To Assessment Process

Any member service of SCMN agreeing to participation conditions (see 3.1 above) and which has been providing a community mediation service to the public for at least one year will be eligible to apply for accreditation.

3.3 Assessment Process

- a. Applicant services will complete the Evidence Claim Form and return it together with any supporting documentation to the SCMN Administration Centre, who will allocate Assessors. Three copies of the Evidence Claim Form together with two copies of the supporting documentation are required.
- b. Assessors will satisfy themselves that the Evidence Claim Form is completed appropriately and may make a request for clarification or further details if necessary.
- c. The assessors will contact the service to arrange a suitable date for an assessment interview and to explain the next steps in the process.
- d. During the interview (normally between 2-4 hrs) the assessors will be given the opportunity to view the service's premises and to conduct interviews with staff, volunteers if used, and any other individuals/agencies (e.g. referral agency representative) she/he has previously arranged with to be in attendance.
- e. During the assessment interview the assessors will satisfy themselves that evidence meets the following requirements:
 - > **Valid:** there is a clear relationship between the evidence supplied and the standard it seeks to meet;
 - > **Sufficient:** there is enough evidence to indicate the standard can be met consistently;
 - > **Current:** the evidence demonstrates the candidate's current knowledge and skills;
 - > **Authentic:** the evidence is the candidate's own work.
- f. The assessors will complete a brief written report form and will forward this to the Centre for internal verification within two weeks of the visit.
- g. The Centre's Internal Verifiers will sample a proportion of assessor reports together with the relevant evidence portfolio and either accept or substitute the assessor's recommendation. If the assessor's recommendation is not fully accepted, the assessors will be provided with written reasons.
- h. The Centre will inform the service and the Standards Committee of the decision in writing and shall include a copy of the assessors' report and, if appropriate, written reasons for substituting the assessors' recommendation. The time between the assessment interview and the Centre notifying the service of its decision shall not be greater than 30 days, other than in exceptional circumstances.

- i. If the service's application has been considered not to warrant service accreditation, it will be entitled to engage with the Appeals Process (see Appendix 1). If an appeal is unsuccessful a service may not reapply for service accreditation within a year of the original decision being made.

3.4 Accredited Services

Accreditation will be current for a period of two years from the date of the assessor's decision, and will be extended for a further two years on receipt of a service accreditation renewal form - see appendix 8. After this period has expired services will be required to make a fresh application under the full Assessment process.

Services with current Accreditation will be entitled to use the "Accredited Service" logo and publish the following statement on all documentation and publicity:

"We are an approved community mediation provider under the Scottish Community Mediation Network's Service Accreditation Scheme."

Appendix 1

Service Accreditation Standards: Appeals Process

If you do not agree with the decision on your evidence claim you should lodge an appeal in writing within 21 days of the decision date. Your appeal will be heard by the Appeals Committee, which will consist of two members of the Standards Committee not previously involved in assessment of your Evidence Portfolio, and a representative of an independent external body, such as Scottish Mediation Network. The hearing will take place no longer than 30 days after receipt of the appeal letter.

Your service will be entitled to have a representative appear in person and to bring a further representative/supporter if desired. The decision of the Appeals Committee will be given in writing and will be final.

The Guidance

How can my Service appeal?

The Centre will send you a decision letter along with an appeal pro-forma which will allow you to appeal the decision.

How long do I have to appeal my decision?

You have 21 days from the date you receive the decision.

What decision can I appeal against?

You can appeal against a decision not to grant service accreditation on the following grounds:

- > The assessment is founded on an error of material fact.
- > The assessment has failed to take account of all appropriate evidence.
- > The assessment is clearly unreasonable or perverse in light of the available evidence.
- > The assessment procedure has not been followed.

Who will hear the appeal?

A panel of two members of the Standards Committee (one from the voluntary sector and one from an in-house service) who were not involved in the original decision, along with a representative of an independent external body, such as Scottish Mediation Network.

Will our service be accredited during the appeal process?

During the appeal process you will not be accredited.

What happens after we have sent in our appeal?

After your appeal form is received, a letter will be sent out to you within 5 working days. This letter is to let you know that we have received your form.

When will our appeal be heard?

Your appeal will be heard within 30 working days of receipt of your appeal form.

Can we attend the appeal hearing?

A representative of your service will be entitled to appear in person and to bring a representative/supporter if desired.

When do we find out the decision of the appeal?

You will be informed in writing of the decision within five working days of the decision.

If a decision cannot be reached, the panel will keep you advised of the progress of your appeal or the further timescales that may be required to investigate further.

What decisions can the panel make?

The Committee will decide either to overturn the original decision made in your case or to uphold the original decision. If the panel overturns the original decision you will receive accreditation within 30 working days of the decision date.

What happens if we are still unhappy with the panel's decision?

The decision of the appeals panel is final. You may wish to take independent advice in these circumstances.

SCMN Standards Committee
C/o Scottish Community Mediation Centre
Sacro, 17 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX

Service Accreditation Standards: Letter of Appeal

I wish to appeal against your decision of [date] not to grant service accreditation on the following grounds:

(Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Name:

Designation:.....

Service name:

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Please return to:

SCMN Standards Committee
C/o Scottish Community Mediation Centre
Sacro, 17 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX