



Quality Standards for youth information, advice, counselling and support services

Preface

This manual represents the first national attempt to set quality standards for youth information, advice, counselling and support (YIACS) services. It is an important milestone both for Youth Access and the various organisations which form its membership.

YIACS services have a history spanning more than 25 years. Youth Access and its predecessor NAYPCAS, (the National Association for Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services) has represented and promoted the interests of the field for the greater part of this time. While many of the services providing YIACS have been located in the voluntary sector, the absence of a national youth policy has created piecemeal development; leading to considerable inequalities in the access young people in different parts of the UK have to such services and variable levels of expertise and resources.

Youth Access has consistently supported the right of agencies to respond to local needs by operating a variety of service models. In many ways, the value base and culture of these services has traditionally embodied many of the features and principles of quality. However, Youth Access has also, in common with its members, shared a long-standing concern about young people's right to expect greater consistency in the quality of the services they approach.

In setting the standards contained in this manual, Youth Access has made a significant attempt to capture the elements which make for good practice. It is hoped that the standards will contribute to a greater awareness and understanding amongst all those responsible for funding, managing and delivering YIACS services: leading to significant improvements in the quality of the work undertaken across the UK, and importantly increasing young people's awareness of the quality of services they are entitled to expect.

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Contents

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Section One: | Introduction to Quality Standards The development of the standards Using the standards Monitoring the standards Preparing for the work on Quality Acknowledgements |
| Section Two: | The Framework Values Core principles Key policy |
| Section Three: | Glossary |
| Section Four: | The Standard Areas 1. Management 2. Line management supervision 3. Recruitment, Selection and Induction of staff 4. Training 5. Publicity and promotion 6. Initial access 7. Premises 8. Information Services 9. Advice Services 10. Counselling Assessment 11. Counselling Services 12. Other Personal Support Services 13. Referral 14. Case Records 15. Casework Supervision 16. Monitoring and Evaluation 17. Partnership |

Introduction

Initially issued in the form of a consultation document, the standards have been the subject of widespread debate and consultation both within Youth Access's membership and with other significant bodies concerned with young people's access to YIACS services.

As a result of the consultation, the standards have undergone further revision and amendments. The standards now set out in this manual are a genuine attempt by Youth Access's Quality Standards Working Group to reflect the comments, concerns and agreement of those responding to the consultation.

The development of quality standards is not a static process, but one which will require constant and active maintenance and review, particularly as our knowledge grows and new information and resources become available. There are acknowledged gaps in the manual; in particular there is the recognition of a need for standards for mobile and outreach services. Both these gaps, and others which may emerge, will be developed in the future. Youth Access is committed to ensuring that any standards development work will be the subject of consultation with the field.

USING THE STANDARDS

Youth Access wants to enable users, staff, managers and funders to be clear about, and be able to communicate and secure, best practice. The standards are therefore intended to be used as a tool in a process in which an agency assesses and evaluates its services.

The standards must be considered within the context of the framework provided (see 'The Framework'). The values, principles and policies which form this framework are integral to any process which seeks to assess whether an agency is meeting the standards. Youth Access also advises agencies to familiarise themselves with the Glossary section to ensure that those involved in the assessment process share a common understanding of the various terms used.

Each standard represents a potential area of a YIACS service's activities. The format includes a statement of the standard area e.g. The agency has clear and accountable management structures and systems. This is followed by a set of 'Practice guidelines'. These are the elements which together, work towards the attainment of the standard. The items listed under the heading 'Monitoring Methods' are provided only as a brief guide to the sources of information to be considered when evaluating whether a standard is being met.

MONITORING THE STANDARDS

As mentioned above, the standards give only brief pointers to the ways in which an agency might measure and monitor the extent to which it is achieving the standards. A self-assessment guide is now available, and gives agencies more detailed help in generating the range of information required to support a whole agency approach to assessing quality.

Youth Access welcomes any comments or feedback on the standards.
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PREPARING FOR THE WORK ON QUALITY

A. PREPARING THE GROUND

Introduction - it's a bit like gardening!

What is prompting you to consider undertaking work on quality?

What might support or hinder you?

B. WHAT WILL SELF-ASSESSMENT CONSIST OF?

C. FIRST STEPS

1. Talk to people about Quality and Self-Assessment
2. Make sure you have enough support before you start
3. Decide how decisions will be made
4. Reflect on values and principles
5. Develop key documents
6. Choose the facilitator(s)

A. PREPARING THE GROUND

It's a bit like gardening!

The secret of successfully undertaking self-assessment is the same as that in gardening - preparation. Using the metaphor of your organisation as a garden, and likening self-assessment to the process of undertaking work to maintain and improve it, various important considerations come to light.

If it is an established garden, you need to look at what is already in place and identify what you value, as well as what you would like to change. If you know the garden well, you will be aware of the different plants that come up throughout the year. You may feel that your garden is already perfect and that there is no need to add anything or take anything away. However, during the self-assessment process you are about to find out what the other people who use the garden feel and think about it. They may point out some problems you hadn't envisaged or suggest some new plants or structures. They may take great delight in some of the things you hadn't even noticed.

There may be things about your garden that you *know* are not as you would like them to be. You may not have much chance to attend to it from day to day because you are so busy, and this is frustrating. It is tempting to rush out as soon as you have some time and start work in an area. Often you don't have time to finish or maintain the work, or see how it links with other parts of the garden.

Alternatively, if you are new to the garden, you may need to take some time to see what's there, before you decide to change it, otherwise you may dig up something good, and upset the other people who work in and use the garden. This is worth bearing in mind if you are a new Co-ordinator and keen to re-shape an already existing project.

You may be involved in starting the garden from scratch and there may be other sources of help you can look to before starting on self-assessment. For example, the Youth Access publication "Getting started".

What is prompting you to consider undertaking work on quality?

Before you start, then, take a look around. You may need to think together, as an agency about why you want to undertake this work. The following questions might help:

- What is it that you want to do and what is motivating you to do it?
- What is your vision for the future - how would you like the agency to look in, say, three years time?
- How can you make sure that the other people who have an investment get involved so that you can do a thorough job and maintain the work?
- Do you have all the skills you need to undertake this work, or do you need to find specialist help with some of it?

What might support or hinder you?

Having decided that you want to undertake the work you need to think about picking the right season. Of course conditions will never be absolutely perfect. The weather cannot ever be guaranteed (certainly in the UK!) but we know that if we try and plant something too early or at the wrong time, it will have very little chance of flourishing. This means there are some further questions to consider:

- When are you planning to do it?
- What are the conditions that will help you?
- What are the elements that may prevent you?
- How are you going to take care of what you "plant"?

You may find it useful to bring together some of the different stakeholders to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of your agency. This will help you identify some of the barriers you are likely to face when undertaking work on Quality, as well as begin to establish what will support the work. It gives everyone a chance to share his or her perspective and starts to get people into the frame of mind for self-assessment.

If you are going to do this job properly you will need time. The ground may need a lot of attention. You might have to dig it over a few times to help the soil break down lumps. You may need to feed it before it can sustain any plant life. You need to know that you can get out into the garden regularly and that other people will be helping you. You may need to be very patient. Some of the seeds you plant now may not turn into mature plants for a very long time!

B. WHAT WILL SELF-ASSESSMENT CONSIST OF?

The Self-Assessment materials are tools that will help you to explore how well your agency is meeting the quality standards. All the "stakeholders" i.e. people with an investment in your agency, are consulted in order to get their perspective on how well you are doing against each standard area. Self-Assessment involves both the gathering of "hard" data e.g. paper verification and "perception" data - people's feelings thoughts and opinions. The materials reflect this, providing monitoring checklists as well as asking people to give their perceptions via different pertinent questions. Collectively, you will identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.

This will not be a static picture; the most important thing is that you become an agency that undertakes to work towards continuous improvement. As this is an ongoing process the materials can be used repeatedly over time.

C. FIRST STEPS

1. Talk to people about Quality and Self-Assessment

It is important that as many people involved with your agency as possible have a clear idea of what the work on Quality is all about. It is a good idea to talk about it to as many people as possible and to give everyone an opportunity to ask lots of questions. It is essential that the idea of working towards quality is not dropped on busy people out of nowhere. Self-assessment needs to be seen as a genuine opportunity to improve communication and work together. You will find some useful material about Quality and Self-Assessment in the March 1999 edition of the Youth Access "Update", for example a list of benefits of undertaking Quality improvement.

2. Make sure you have enough support before you start

- Get support from the management body:
It is particularly important to ensure that you have the support of at least one senior member of the management group. Undertaking quality improvement is a process that will take a good deal of time. It is likely to raise lots of issues and questions. It is important that this process has the support of those people who make decisions and direct the work of the agency so that there is commitment to carry it through.
- Enlist the support of the staff team:
Whilst some members of staff will welcome self-assessment, others may feel threatened by the idea, especially if they are feeling stressed or under-resourced. It is important to emphasise that it is about highlighting existing good practice as much as identifying areas to improve. Again, be sure to listen to any concerns and to make sure people have a chance to air any worries beforehand.
- Inform and involve young people who use your service:
Let young people know who use, or who are involved with, your service what you are doing and why, and (where appropriate) talk with them about how they might participate. It would be useful to start the process (if you haven't already done so) of establishing a culture of user consultation and involvement.

3. Decide how decisions will be made

The self-assessment process will identify issues that you need to work on as an agency. The different stakeholders may not agree on what needs to be done, or what the priorities are. So before you start the process be clear how you will resolve disagreements and where the ultimate decisions will be taken if a consensus cannot be reached. For example, if staff understand from the beginning that the management committee will take the ultimate decision they will be prepared for this, but if they expect everything to be decided by consensus they are likely to resent being overruled.

4. Reflect on Values and Principles

The Youth Access Quality standards and self-assessment materials sit within a framework of values, core principles, and key policies. [Please refer to the section at the beginning of the Quality manual entitled "The Framework"]. It may be useful to take some time to re-visit the values and core-principles that those of you who are in membership have signed up to. Is everybody involved with your agency aware of these values and principles, and are they prepared to work within them?

5. Developing Key Documents

Before starting the process of self-assessment you need to confirm that you have the following documents in place:

- A written statement of purpose for your agency and a brief description of the services which are available.
- Three key policies:
 - Equal Opportunities
 - Confidentiality
 - User Involvement

Please refer to "The framework" section of the quality manual, which outlines what these policies should encompass.

6. Choose the facilitator(s)

The agency needs to be clear who will be facilitating the self-assessment. This person or people will make sure that they understand the methods and materials that are to be used. They will take responsibility for collating the results and for preparing the development plan.

- One option is to select somebody from outside your agency. Preferably someone who has some knowledge or understanding of the kind of service you are running, and who has some people or group work skills. A potential benefit would be that they would be more likely to be, and be seen to be, objective. A drawback may be that this is difficult to arrange in terms of time and cost. It may be possible to involve a person or people from another Youth Access Agency who are also undertaking the self-assessment process. Perhaps you could exchange so that someone from your agency will act as their facilitator? Alternatively you may be able to involve a university research department or a representative from another community group in your area.
- The Co-ordinator of the agency is another option. The Co-ordinator usually has contact with both the management group and the staff team as well as perhaps some of the young people who use the agency. In this respect they could be well placed to oversee the process. A drawback could be a lack of objectivity or that as their line manager the Co-ordinator may unwittingly inhibit the responses that the staff team need to be able to make.
- Alternatively your agency might elect a group of people to facilitate the process. Representatives could be drawn from all the different stakeholder groups. There would need to be a clear commitment from all the members of the group to see the process through. It would also be important to agree how decisions would be made (see point 3).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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| | |
|----------------|---|
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| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
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The Framework

It is essential that the standards set out here are consistently measured within the context of a framework which includes the values and principles of youth information, advice and counselling services

This framework is supported by a set of assumptions about the key characteristics of services and the necessity for key areas of policy.

The values, principles, and key policies operate together to provide a context in which to measure the standards; they are an integral part of the standards and underpin any monitoring or auditing process.

VALUES

Youth Access believes that all young people have a right to make informed decisions through access to information, advice and counselling. A belief which:

- respects the dignity and self-worth of each young person
- respects and values individual differences
- recognises and is sensitive to the growing autonomy of each young person
- respects every young person's right to be a voluntary participant in any helping process
- recognises the potential of each young person

These values are expressed in a set of common features which characterise youth information, advice and counselling services. Essentially these are services which are offered on a confidential, self-referral basis, where young people can readily access a range of flexible help in an informal setting.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Youth Access's 'Statement of Core Principles', which members agree to abide by within their work are set out as follows:

- Young people are central to the service and member agencies are committed to responding to their needs.
- Member agencies believe that young people have a right of access to quality information, advice and counselling services.
- The basis on which young people are able to make use of a service is made clear to each of them individually and a contract is agreed where appropriate.
- Member agencies of Youth Access aim to empower young people and treat them with respect based on an understanding of their individual culture and background.
- In all aspects of their work, member agencies of Youth Access aim to counter the oppression and discrimination faced by young people.
- Member agencies of Youth Access are working towards equality of access for all young people for whom their service is designed.
- Member agencies of Youth Access take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and well being of young people and workers in an agency.
- Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to ensuring their workers are competent to perform the range and depth of duties offered by the agency and provide a framework for staff development that includes support, supervision and training.

- Member agencies of Youth Access are committed to establishing and maintaining procedures for monitoring and evaluating the service they provide.

KEY POLICY

Quality provision demands minimum requirements in three key areas of policy: Equality of Opportunity, Confidentiality and User Involvement. It is essential that all three policies are written and made explicit to young people, staff, managers and relevant external bodies.

Equality of Opportunity

A policy which encompasses:

- paid and volunteer staff recruitment and training
- young people's access to services; meeting the needs of e.g. disabled, young parents
- management
- the link with information and service delivery
- the link with marketing and publicity

Confidentiality

A policy which encompasses:

- the link with child protection
- the training of staff
- the communication of policy to young people
- outline procedures for breaching confidentiality
- the process for reviewing the policy

User Involvement

A policy which encompasses:

- young people's representation in the management, planning and delivery of the agency's services
- young people's involvement in recruitment and selection
- young people's entitlement and responsibilities as the users of the agency's services
- how young people are consulted on services
- how young people can make complaints
- how user's views are integrated in quality assurance, planning and decision-making processes

Glossary

Agency

This refers to any organisation either statutory or voluntary, providing information, advice counselling and/or other forms of support to young people.

Appropriate

Where the word 'appropriate' is used in a standard it is intended to mean as being consistent with the individual agency's values, aims, objectives, policies, practice, systems, resources and/or local environment.

Evaluation

This is a process of analysing the information generated through monitoring and using it to make judgements about the service's effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its aims and objectives. It also includes assessing the outcomes of work undertaken and considering ways for improving service delivery.

Management Body

This refers to the body which has the legal responsibility for managing the finance and resources of the organisation. It includes management committees and also local authorities or other bodies where, for example, employment and legal responsibilities are divided between different organisations. In the case of an agency managed by for example a local authority, it is the authority not the agency to which some standards such as management and recruitment and selection will apply.

Monitoring

This is the systematic collection and collation of information e.g. the profile of users, income and expenditure.

National Code of Ethics and Practice

The standards are intended to complement existing professional codes. Examples include: BACP (the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy), BPS (the British Psychological Society), ETSI (The European Therapeutic Studies Institute), UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists).

Relevant

Where the word 'relevant' is found in a standard it is intended to mean that the standard is to be judged within the context of the individual agency's aims, objectives, policies, practice, systems, resources and/or local environment.

Services

The provision of any of the helping services listed below requires appropriately trained and supervised staff. Youth Access defines information, advice, counselling and personal support services as follows:

Information

The provision of systems and processes which make comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible information available to young people. There is no assessment or recommendation about the information's appropriateness, and decisions, choices and action are left with the young person. Information work can include signposting to other services or providing young people with resources to discover their own answers to their questions and needs.

Advice

Advice is concerned with helping a young person to change or cope with practical issues and problems. It seeks to widen the young person's choices by providing accurate and relevant information about their rights, options and potential courses of action. The advice worker may identify and recommend ways forward, but decisions and choices are left to the young person.

Any action agreed by the young person may be undertaken by, with, or on behalf of the young person.

Counselling

Counselling is an activity voluntarily entered into by a young person who wants to explore and understand issues in their lives which may be causing difficulty, pain and/or confusion. The boundaries of the relationship are identified and an explicit contract agreed between the young person and the counsellor. The aim is to assist the young person to achieve a greater understanding of themselves and their relationship to their world; to create a greater awareness of their personal resources and of their ability to affect and cope with their life.

Counselling Assessment

A counselling assessment is a respectful, collaborative and transparent process in which the counsellor ensures young people are central to the process and feel heard and understood. It seeks to maintain a balance between gathering sufficient information to understand the young person's needs and providing information about what help is available. Young people explore with the help of the counsellor their difficulty/pain and/or confusion and how it affects their life, what changes they want, their strengths; hopes for the future and how counselling might help. This information enables the counsellor and young person to consider whether counselling would be helpful or appropriate, or if access to a different YIACS service or a supported referral to another agency would be more beneficial. The counsellor explains relevant aspects of agency policy on confidentiality, information sharing, counsellor allocation, waiting times and internal and external referrals.

Personal support

This is a general term which embraces a range of helping activities, including befriending and both individual and groupwork. The activities are frequently aimed at reducing a young person's sense of social and personal isolation and may provide help with practical needs such as independent living skills.

Staff

Unless particular staff are mentioned, this refers to **all** members of staff, whether full or part time, paid or volunteer.

Advice staff

These are members of staff both paid and volunteer whose job entails the provision of the activities outlined below. (Please also see **Services - Advice**). They may have a range of job titles e.g. Information Support Worker, Advocacy Worker.

Advice is a process which includes the following activities:

- listening to young people;
- identifying and prioritising problems and concerns with them;
- providing information;
- clarifying the available options;
- enabling them to make choices and decisions;
- agreeing a course of action. This may either involve supporting them to undertake the action or negotiating and working on their behalf or taking action together.

It can also involve:

- representing young people in case conferences, tribunals and the courts
- informing and educating young people about their rights and responsibilities
- raising the awareness of policy makers and other service providers
- of issues affecting young people

Supervision

All staff are entitled to receive regular line management supervision. Staff engaged in regular face to face work with young people also require access to casework supervision. Both line management and casework supervision perform a role in the personal and professional support and development of staff, whilst also maintaining staff's accountability to the agency, While the focus and areas of responsibilities of each type of supervision are different, there are overlaps in the functions, Thus:

Casework supervision

The focus is on staff's practice with young people by providing a forum in which staff can express their thoughts and feelings about their work in a context which provides both support and positive challenges and feedback. It offers opportunities for staff to review their practice and gain insights about themselves, the client and the helping process. It can enable the development of new strategies for working with clients or for managing the stresses and tensions of the work. It is also a forum for checking out and maintaining standards of practice and the relationship between individual practice and the agency's policies. Casework supervision can assist staff to identify personal and professional development needs, but does not necessarily seek to meet them.

Line Management

The focus is on how the member of staff is undertaking and managing the duties outlined in their job description; how they are meeting work targets. It can involve reviewing work undertaken, assessing priorities, developing strategies for managing work and setting, planning and agreeing future activities. It is unlikely to consider the detail of work undertaken with individual clients, unless this has given rise to wider policy and practice issues. It is a forum to enable staff to do their job effectively and may involve identifying personal support, training and development needs and considering ways to meet these.

Standard Area 1: Management

The agency has clear and accountable management structures and systems.

Practice guidelines

- 1.1 The appointment and composition of the management body is consistent with Equal Opportunities practice and where relevant, the agency's Constitution
- 1.2 All new members of the management body undertake an Induction process to include:
 - the provision of an information pack
 - a process for ensuring understanding of the work of the agency
 - a process for enabling understanding of their management role and responsibilities
- 1.3 The management body has sufficient information and skills to undertake and meet its legal and financial responsibilities. This includes:
 - operating open and accountable financial procedures
 - meeting its employer responsibilities
 - meeting Health and Safety requirements
 - meeting its insurance responsibilities, particularly Employers and Public Liability Insurance and Professional Indemnity Insurance
- 1.4 The management body ensures it has sufficient skills and information, including information about the views of staff and users to plan effectively, to develop policy and to take decisions
- 1.5 The management body has systems to ensure it has sufficient information to account for the standard and level of work undertaken by the agency and its staff
- 1.6 All members of the management body are offered opportunities to attend internal and external training events

(Please see Appendix 1: A Checklist for Management Committees)

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Minutes of meetings
- Feedback from management, staff, young people and funders

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 2: Line Management Supervision

The agency provides competent and regular line management supervision for all paid and volunteer staff as part of the accountability process.

Practice guidelines

- 2.1 All line managers are trained or experienced in supervision skills and have appropriate experience or understanding of working with young people and the issues that affect them
- 2.2 The agency has a staff supervision policy which outlines:
 - a definition of line management supervision and its relationship to staff appraisal and any other forms of supervision
 - roles and responsibilities
 - frequency and location
- 2.3 All staff have:
 - a designated line manager
 - an employment contract or volunteer agreement
 - regular line management supervision appropriate to their workload
 - information about their responsibilities and work targets
 - access to their supervision notes
- 2.4 All line managers are familiar with and have access to:
 - the supervisee's job description
 - the agency's policies, work programme and development plan
 - any relevant professional codes and/or quality standards governing the supervisee's work
- 2.5 Staff development and training needs are assessed and agreed at annual appraisal

Monitoring Methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from staff and managers

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 3: Recruitment, Selection and Induction of Staff

The managing body has clear and equitable recruitment and selection procedures for paid and volunteer staff and provides relevant and effective induction within the first three months of their appointment.

Practice guidelines

- 3.1 The agency ensures that it operates a recruitment and selection procedure consistent with its Equal Opportunities policy and good employment practice
- 3.2 The agency has a job description and person specification to meet the needs of each paid and volunteer post
- 3.3 The agency has vetting procedures e.g. references, police checks, consistent with the remit of each post and in line with current legislation on criminal records
- 3.4 All those involved in the recruitment and selection of staff are sufficiently experienced and trained to be competent for the task
- 3.5 The agency holds on file for each member of staff a signed copy of his/her:
 - Employment contract or Volunteer Agreement
 - Job description
- 3.6 The agency has a standard induction process and a staff handbook setting out:
 - Designated management responsibility for induction
 - A checklist of information items
 - Arrangements for explaining the agency's policies including Equal Opportunities, Confidentiality, User Involvement, Health & Safety, Complaints, Disciplinary and Grievance
 - Arrangements for establishing contact with the local 'youth' and referral network
- 3.7 The agency conducts a training and development analysis with new staff
- 3.8 The agency has arrangements for conducting a review meeting for each member of staff during induction and provides opportunities for staff feedback on the induction process

(Please see Appendix 2: Recruitment and Selection Checklist)

Monitoring methods

- Documentation and procedure check
- Trace the process of last recruitment
- Check training of panel members
- Feedback from recently appointed staff

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 4: Training

The agency has an active, relevant and equitable training programme for all staff.

Practice guidelines

- 4.1 The agency has a designated training budget and/or provides a means for staff to access relevant training
- 4.2 The agency has systems to identify individual staff and whole agency training needs
- 4.3 All agency staff undertake training in Equal Opportunities as part of a rolling programme
- 4.4 All paid and volunteer staff are offered an annual training appraisal which includes consideration of any available national standards, internal and external developments and any personal development needs
- 4.5 The agency's staff are provided with opportunities:
 - to discuss the relevance of any training prior to attendance
 - to review their learning and consider its application to their own and the agency's work following attendance
 - to share skills and experience within the organisation
 - to develop their learning outside the context of formal training e.g. through reading, experiential work etc
- 4.6 The agency has records of all training offers and staff attendance at training, including systems for monitoring the relevance and suitability of training offered
- 4.7 The agency has systems to circulate information to all staff about any compulsory training and all internal and external training opportunities
- 4.8 The agency has procedures for recruiting and selecting trainers in line with its Equal Opportunities policy

Monitoring methods

- Written documentation
- Agency training plan
- Feedback from staff
- Staff attendance at training during the previous two years

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 5: Publicity and Promotion

The agency has effective ways of promoting and publicising its services to ensure that potential users are aware of the services available.

Practice guidelines

- 5.1 The agency has strategies for identifying and targeting potential users of its services
- 5.2 The agency provides young people and those in contact with them with clear accessible and up to date information describing:
 - its services
 - how to make contact
 - opening times
 - confidentiality statement
 - equality of access statement
 - location and access
 - complaints procedures
- 5.3 The agency ensures it actively participates in and is represented at relevant local and national networks and meetings
- 5.4 The agency has a marketing strategy to promote its work and to promote awareness of young people's needs

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Information material check
- Feedback from young people/carers/referring organisations

Standard Area 6: Initial Access

The agency is accessible to all young people in its catchment area or target group.

Practice guidelines

- 6.1 The agency actively seeks ways to identify and address both physical and psychological barriers to access
- 6.2 The agency maintains statistical records of the agency's users and compares this group to local demographic and other relevant information of young people's needs
- 6.3 Where appropriate, the agency's ansaphone and entry point provide information on opening times and relevant emergency contacts
- 6.4 All relevant staff are trained for reception duties, including how to manage contact with young people in crisis
- 6.5 The agency regularly reviews its opening hours and where appropriate, its drop-in and/or appointment systems and ensures that young people's feedback is incorporated in this process

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from young people
- Training records
- Out of hours telephone call

Standard Area 7: Premises

The agency provides a safe, secure and appropriate environment for its services.

Practice guidelines

- 7.1 The agency has procedures to maximise the access and use of all its services by different users e.g. the disabled, young parents and other minority groups
- 7.2 The agency ensures the health and safety of its staff and users through:
- a written Health and Safety policy which meets any legal and fire safety requirements
 - procedures to check health and safety
 - a written policy and procedures to manage emergencies
 - a written policy and procedures for the provision of any refreshments
 - a policy and displayed statement regarding the expected behaviour of young people and staff
- 7.3 The agency ensures that during opening hours staff do not work alone and the numbers are sufficient to ensure staff and young people's safety
- 7.4 The agency's reception arrangements respect young people's confidentiality
- 7.5 The physical environment provides:
- clean, comfortable decor and furnishings in a state of good repair
 - private rooms for one-to-one work
 - clean toilet facilities, which where appropriate, offer privacy for pregnancy testing
- 7.6 The agency's signs, posters and information are consistent with the agency's values and policy statements
- 7.7 The agency's complaints procedures are clearly explained and displayed
- 7.8 Where the agency is involved in sub-letting agreements or the provision of services outside its premises such agreements include written 'youth-friendly' clauses

Monitoring methods

- Written documentation
- Feedback from young people
- Premises visits

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 8: Information Services

The agency provides accessible information to enable young people to make decisions and choices

(please refer to the glossary section where you may find it useful to consider definitions for information, advice and advice staff)

Practice guidelines

- 8.1 The agency has a clear statement of its information provision, which includes:
 - a definition of its information provision
 - confidentiality
 - how users can access the provision
 - complaints procedures
 - rights and responsibilities of users
- 8.2 The agency has systems for collecting, storing, retrieving and updating information consistent with its statements of service
- 8.3 All information is organised, well presented and consistent with the agency's or national statements of core values and principles
- 8.4 The agency is able to respond to all young people's information requests either directly or through referral to others
- 8.5 All relevant staff are able to use the agency's information systems
- 8.6 Young people are given opportunities and appropriate support to make independent use of the agency's information
- 8.7 The agency monitors all information requested by young people

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from young people and staff

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 9: Advice Services

The agency provides a competent and empowering advice service to young people.

(please refer to the glossary section where you may find it useful to consider definitions for information, advice and advice staff)

Practice guidelines

- 9.1 The agency has a clear statement of its advice services, which includes:
 - a definition of its advice services
 - how to access the service
 - complaints procedure
 - rights and responsibilities of users
- 9.2 All advice staff have sufficient training to competently carry out their responsibilities and where appropriate, with reference to any nationally recognised standards
- 9.3 All advice work with young people is carried out within the following principles:
 - young people are given opportunities to express their needs and feelings about their situation
 - young people are provided with clear information, relevant to their needs
 - the implications of the options available to each young person are clearly explained to enable them to make their own decisions and choices
 - young people are aware of and agree to action taken on their behalf, unless this is overridden by confidentiality or child protection issues
- 9.4 The agency has policies and processes for responding to any young person's preference with regard to the advice worker (provided the request is in line with the agency's values and principles). Examples include race, culture, gender, and sexuality
- 9.5 Advice workers have access to and provide information in line with Standard Area 8
- 9.6 Advice workers operate referral procedures in line with Standard Area 13
- 9.7 All advice staff are trained and understand their responsibilities regarding the agency's policies on Confidentiality and Child Protection
- 9.8 When staff use counselling skills they have a working knowledge of and work within relevant national codes of ethics and practice
- 9.9 Advice workers maintain case records in line with Standard Area 14
- 9.10 All advice staff attend both line management and casework supervision in line with Standard Areas 2 and 15
- 9.11 The agency has procedures to check the accuracy, breadth and depth of any advice work undertaken

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Advice work records
- Staff records
- Feedback from staff and young people

Standard Area 10: Counselling Assessment

The agency offers a timely, transparent collaborative and respectful counselling assessment process.

Practice guidelines

- 10.1 The agency uses a range of accessible methods to provide young people with clear information on:
- What a counselling assessment is
 - How young people can access a counselling assessment appointment and the maximum waiting time
 - Why the agency makes an assessment of counselling need
 - How an assessment benefits young people
 - Who takes part in the counselling assessment process
 - How, what and why information is gathered
 - Who has access to information from the assessment
 - What happens following the assessment
- 10.2 All staff providing counselling assessments for young people are/have:
- sufficiently trained in line with Standard 11
 - completed a minimum of 450 hours of supervised counselling practice, of which a minimum of 150 hours must be subsequent to completion of training; over a period of not less than 3 and not more than 6 years; supervised to a minimum of 1.5 hours per month¹ (or can provide evidence of meeting equivalent standards of a nationally recognised body)
 - successfully completed counselling assessment training
- 10.3 The agency ensures that counsellors operate a process of counselling assessment that:
- Ensures young people feel central and are able to understand what counselling is and how it may or may not be of help
 - Enables young people to exchange relevant information about their difficulty/pain and/or confusion
 - Facilitates young people to begin to articulate how their difficulty/pain and/or confusion is affecting their life and what they want to change
 - Recognises and builds on a young person's resilience, strengths, personal and external resources
 - Explains, where appropriate, the range of help available in YIACS and other services and how they will be supported to access this
- 10.4 The agency has counselling assessment policy and procedure which meets the requirements set out in Appendix Nine
- 10.5 The agency develops and holds regular joint reviews of its referral criteria and cross-referral protocols with key voluntary and statutory agencies
- 10.6 The agency develops and regularly holds joint reviews on its information sharing protocols with relevant voluntary and statutory agencies

¹ BACP Accreditation Criteria 2004

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

- 10.7 The agency ensures that all referrals to and from a counselling assessment are operated in line with Standard 13 and the agency's confidentiality, consent and information sharing protocols and policy

(Please see Appendix Nine: A checklist for agency policy and procedure and a description of the elements of counselling assessment)

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Minutes of meetings
- Feedback from management, staff, young people and funders

Standard Area 11: Counselling Services

The agency provides an effective counselling service to young people.

Practice guidelines

- 11.1 The agency has a clear statement of its counselling services, which includes:
 - a definition of counselling
 - confidentiality
 - practical issues (e.g. time limits, waiting lists, costs)
 - theoretical background
 - complaints procedures
 - rights and responsibilities of the user
- 11.2 All counselling staff have sufficient training to competently perform their responsibilities and with reference to national standards (e.g. BACP accredited training, moderated Certificate and Diploma courses and NVQs)
- 11.3 The agency has policies and processes to ensure that counselling staff at the beginning of the counselling relationship
 - explore with a young person how counselling might meet their needs
 - explain how counselling operates within the agency and outline the boundaries of the counselling relationship
 - explain the agency's confidentiality policy and the purpose of supervision
 - explain, where appropriate, the processes for record keeping, typing of notes or taping sessions for supervision
 - explain where relevant, a young person's choice with regard to the taping of sessions and their right to access their case records
- 11.4 The agency has policies and processes for responding to any young person's preference with regard to the counsellor. Examples include race, culture, gender, and sexuality
- 11.5 Counsellors seek young people's permission before using any client work or notes for any external purposes (exceptions are where the Court summons the counsellor to give evidence)
- 11.6 Young people are helped to negotiate counselling contracts relevant to their individual needs
- 11.7 Counsellors operate referral procedures in line with Standard Area 13
- 11.8 Counsellors undertake regular reviews with their clients to ensure that the counselling continues to be purposeful and effective
- 11.9 All counselling staff are trained and understand their responsibilities regarding the agency's policy on Confidentiality and Child Protection
- 11.10 All counselling staff have a working knowledge of and work within relevant national codes of ethics and practice
- 11.11 All counselling staff maintain records in line with Standard Area 14

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

11.12 All counselling staff attend both regular line management and casework supervision in line with Standard Areas 2 and 15

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from young people
- Staff and training records
- Feedback from supervisors

Standard Area 12: Other Personal Support Services

The agency provides effective and clearly defined personal support services to young people.

(e.g. Befriending, informal support, drop-in work)

Practice guidelines

- 12.1 The agency has a clear statement of its personal support services, which includes:
- a definition of the type of support available
 - confidentiality
 - practical issues e.g. how to contact
 - complaints procedures
 - rights and responsibilities of users
- 12.2 All staff have sufficient training to competently carry out their responsibilities e.g. counselling skills, listening skills, groupwork skills training
- 12.3 All personal support work with young people is carried out within the following principles:
- young people are individually helped to understand the boundaries of the support available e.g. time limits, confidentiality
 - young people are provided with opportunities to express their needs and feelings
 - young people are enabled to make their own decisions and choices
 - young people agree to and are aware of, any action undertaken by staff and by when
- 12.4 The agency has policies and processes for responding to any young person's preference with regard to the support worker. Examples include race, culture, gender, and sexuality
- 12.5 Staff operate referral procedures in line with Standard Area 13
- 12.6 Staff have access to and provide information in line with Standard Area 8
- 12.7 All staff are trained and understand their responsibilities regarding the agency's policies on Confidentiality and Child Protection
- 12.8 When staff employ counselling skills, they have a working knowledge of and work within relevant national codes of ethics and practice
- 12.9 All staff providing personal support maintain case records in line with Standard Area 14
- 12.10 All staff attend both regular line management and casework supervision in line with standard areas 2 and 15

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Case records
- Staff records
- Feedback from staff and young people

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 13: Referral

The agency operates effective internal referral procedures and establishes clear mechanisms for inter-agency referral.

Practice guidelines

- 13.1 The agency ensures that all young people want to make voluntary use of its services
- 13.2 The agency has policies and processes to ensure young people actively agree to and understand the purpose of referral either to other staff within the agency or to another organisation
- 13.3 Young people actively agree to the exchange of any personal information and specify the agencies which may have access to this information, (unless there are confidentiality or child protection issues which override this)
- 13.4 The agency's literature explains how young people can refer themselves to the agency's services
- 13.5 The agency seeks to develop and regularly reviews protocols with significant local agencies to enable appropriate referral
- 13.6 The agency holds up to date information on other agencies appropriate to its services and is part of relevant local networks to assist effective referral

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Interviews and surveys with existing and referred users

Standard Area 14: Case Records

The agency has effective and secure systems for recording work carried out with young people.

Practice guidelines

- 14.1 The agency has a policy setting out:
- how case records, tapes and/or notes are kept confidential and secure
 - who has access to records
 - how long records are kept and how they are disposed of
- 14.2 The agency has procedures to ensure all appropriate staff are aware of and understand their responsibilities in relation to the policy on case recordings
- 14.3 The agency complies with any legal requirements regarding data protection
- 14.4 All work is recorded in ways which are consistent with the help offered. Thus:
- advice workers maintain case records to ensure continuity and accuracy in the issues explored, the information provided and any action taken
 - counsellors maintain case records to monitor their client work and ensure accountability to the agency's stated aims and policies
 - other staff maintain appropriate records for other personal support work in order to monitor their work and ensure accountability to the agency's aims and policies

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Training and induction records
- Feedback from staff
- Feedback from young people
- Random client file checks
- Checks on security arrangements

Standard Area 15: Casework Supervision

The agency ensures that all staff in direct contact with young people receive appropriate casework supervision, either individually and/or in groups to promote their professional and personal development.

(Casework supervision is separate from line management supervision and ideally conducted by different individuals.)

Practice guidelines

- 15.1 All casework supervisors are:
- competent and appropriately experienced practitioners
 - have experience or understanding of working with young people
 - have experience or understand the issues affecting young people
 - are familiar with any national professional codes relating to the activity being supervised
- 15.2 The agency has written contracts with all casework supervisors, in line with any relevant national codes for supervisors, which specifically sets out:
- the purpose of casework supervision
 - to whom and how the supervisor is accountable to the agency
 - the limits of the supervisor's authority
 - the supervisor's responsibility in relation to the agency's policies in particular Confidentiality, Child Protection and Disciplinary and Grievance
 - requirements on the frequency, format and recording of supervision sessions
- 15.3 All face to face staff have individual agreements setting out:
- the purpose of casework supervision and its relationship to any relevant national codes
 - how supervision relates to particular areas of the agency's policy on e.g. Confidentiality, Child Protection and Discipline and Grievance
 - requirements on the frequency, format and recording of supervision sessions
 - requirements regarding the use of notes and recordings arising from staff's work with young people
- 15.4 The agency has a policy on the confidentiality and accessibility of casework supervision notes and records
- 15.5 Staff's individual supervision needs are assessed and agreed at an annual appraisal
- 15.6 The agency has individual records of attendance at casework supervision

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from staff and supervisors

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 16: Monitoring and Evaluation

The agency has clear procedures and processes for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of its work.

Practice guidelines

- 16.1 The agency has systems for monitoring and reporting on:
- the use of its services
 - the extent to which it is meeting its work targets
- 16.2 The agency has systems for ensuring that the views of service users are central to its monitoring and evaluation processes
- 16.3 The agency shows how it uses collected information to:
- evaluate its services
 - contribute to its development and future planning
 - inform its fund-raising strategy
 - raise awareness of the issues affecting its users and gaps in other relevant organisations and services
- 16.4 The agency's performance measurement and quality assurance systems includes feedback from:
- staff
 - users
 - management
 - funders
- 16.5 The agency provides an annual report of its work
- 16.6 The agency has a complaints procedure detailing:
- the recording of complaints
 - procedures for responding to and resolving complaints

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Feedback from users, staff, management, funders and others

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

Standard Area 17: Partnership and joint working

The agency develops partnership and joint working arrangements relevant to the achievement of its strategic goals. Such partnerships support improvements in the development of, and access to safe, age and developmentally appropriate interventions and services for young people in the locality.

Practice guidelines

- 17.1 The agency has a clear statement of its purpose, strategic goals and core values and principles underpinning its work with young people. This is informed by regularly involving and seeking the views of young people and key stakeholders about its services
- 17.2 The agency has access to information about the full range of statutory and voluntary organisations and policy initiatives relevant to meeting the needs of all young people in its locality
- 17.3 The agency ensures that existing and potential partners and those responsible for commissioning services have up to date and appropriate information about the:
- Agency, its purpose and services
 - Distinct needs of young people
 - Diversity of young people with whom the agency works
 - Core values and principles of young people's services
 - Youth Access quality standards and the definitions and differences for example between counselling, mentoring, befriending, crisis listening, counselling skills, advice and information services
 - Evidence of good practice, unmet need and gaps in services.
- 17.4 The agency is pro-active in seeking opportunities to represent the agency's work and increase awareness of young people's needs e.g. through external working groups and making contact with key personnel responsible for planning, funding and commissioning young people's services
- 17.5 The agency works in co-operation with other statutory and voluntary providers to enable young people to have access to services and professionals in settings that best meet their needs
- 17.6 The agency works with other relevant service providers in both the statutory and voluntary sectors to establish protocols for joint referral and information exchange e.g. statutory mental health services, social services, housing organisations, legal advice services, NHS, Connexions and youth services

All evidence must be considered within the context of Youth Access's values, principles and key policies statements.

17.7 The agency develops written agreements with those organisations with which it has formal partnership arrangements to include:

- a commitment to ensuring services for young people are established with the most appropriate provider
- a definition of the roles and responsibilities of each partner
- any financial arrangements
- the monitoring and evaluation requirements

(Please see Appendix 10 - An aide memoir for developing partnership agreements)

Monitoring methods

- Documentation
- Minutes of meetings
- Feedback from management, staff, young people and funders