



**Helplines
Standard**

Brochure

2021-2024



Nationally recognised quality standard defining and accrediting best practice in helpline delivery

Helplines Partnership (HLP) is the membership body for organisations that provide helpline services in the UK and internationally.

HLP facilitates high quality helpline provision for callers by offering services to helpline providers. These include training, Helplines Standard accreditation, Consultancy and access to the Helpline Freephone Range, (a dedicated range of free to caller telephone numbers exclusively for not for profit helplines).

Helplines Partnership raises the profile of the sector by representing its members' interests and influencing the social policy agenda. HLP gives providers of helpline services a voice to help them build sustainability and promote excellence, choice and accessibility for everyone.

Introduction

The Helplines Standard defines and accredits helpline practice. This quality framework is an excellent way of ensuring your helpline is effectively meeting the needs of service users. Accreditation is valued by many funders and is a great motivator for your helpline team.

The Helplines Standard recognises that the world of helplines is incredibly diverse and encompasses:

- Voluntary, statutory and commercial service providers
- Local, regional, national and international operations
- Paid staff and volunteers
- Multi-channel communications such as phone, SMS, email, live webchat, and social media

The Helplines Standard recognises and accommodates this diversity. It also emphasises the importance of strategic planning and partnerships which are essential for the sustainability of helplines.

The first version of the Helplines Standard was originally launched over 20 years ago and has been continuously developed and refined since then and this updated version reflects the latest changes in the helpline world.

Helplines Partnership is committed to raising standards across the sector and strongly encourages helplines to demonstrate their commitment to quality and best practice for the benefit of their callers, funders, staff and everyone impacted by their service.

Guidance: The Assessment Process

One to One telephone Call

Helplines Partnership offer a free one to one phone call with one of our Helpline Standard Assessors.

We strongly recommended this if you intend to undergo the assessment process for the first time. The phone call will explain the steps in more detail and guide you through some of the most frequently encountered challenges.

Structure

The Helplines Standard consists of criteria grouped into three sections:

1. The Organisation's Strategy and Aims
2. Helpline Service
3. Human Resources

Each section breaks down into numbered subject headings containing individual criteria identified by a number and a letter such as:

2b) Have reliable measures in place to assess quality assurance

It is important to note that not all criteria will be relevant for every helpline. There is some criteria which may not be applicable if you do not operate a particular type of service (such as an online forum). If this is the case, you do not have to provide evidence for this.

Each criterion contains guidance about:

- How it will be assessed?
- What the assessor is looking for?
- Examples of evidence?

The suggested evidence examples are provided for guidance and are not an exhaustive or prescriptive list. Please feel free to supplement evidence in line with the guidance below.

Evidence submission and assessment

After signing up for assessment to the Helplines Standard you will receive a workbook and a template to submit your evidence. The written submission for each criterion should not exceed 250 words but can be supplemented by documentation of the type referred to in the 'examples of evidence' box. In your written submission you must specify the appropriate document/s and the location within it e.g. "see document 9a page 2, para 4."

The assessor will also take the opportunity to corroborate the evidence submitted through questioning and observation. You can see where this will happen where the assessment type is shown as 'assessment visit'. Some criteria are only assessed when our assessor visits your helpline, and some are also supplemented by contact with relevant partners. This is also shown in the 'how it will be assessed' box.



UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

IN THIS SECTION:

- Enquiry and Agreement
- Evidence Submission and Assessment
- Assessment Visit
- Follow up
- Sample Contacts
- Assessor's report
- Final report and Expiry

ENQUIRY AND AGREEMENT

When you are ready to proceed, please contact services@helplines.org for a no obligation enquiry form and then send it back to us. We will then provide an agreement to sign, and when this has been completed, we will provide you with the workbook and your evidence template along with submission instructions. Assessment fees are detailed on our website.



EVIDENCE SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT

We will agree a date by which you will need to complete your evidence submission online. This is normally within six months of signing up to the process. Your evidence will then be reviewed by an assessor.

ASSESSMENT VISIT AND FOLLOW UP

Your assessor will conduct a visit during which they will observe and speak to at least two helpline workers and spend some time with the helpline manager. This is so that the assessor can corroborate the written evidence. The assessor may conduct some follow up work to verify written evidence, for example emails or phone calls with partners or funders.

SAMPLE CONTACTS AND ASSESSORS REPORT

The assessor will contact your helpline through all its channels to verify written evidence. These will not be 'mystery shopper' contacts and if the assessor speaks to anyone, they will reveal who they are and why they are calling.

The assessor will compile their report based on the evidence submitted, observations and discussions against the criteria of the Standard. The report is then internally moderated and verified.

FINAL REPORT AND EXPIRY

Your report will be sent to you no more than one month after all your evidence has been submitted, along with your certificate of accreditation and the Helplines Standard logo. Your report will contain a summary of the criteria, and will detail some of the areas you have excelled in. It will also offer recommendations where additional work could take place to further improve the quality of your service. If you do not pass the accreditation, you will have an option of a three months' extension to gather the missing evidence and to resubmit. This may incur additional charges.

Accreditation lasts for three years from the date of your final report.

We will be looking for evidence which is:

Clear	Your evidence needs to be easy for an assessor (they are unlikely to be a specialist in your subject area) to understand.
Specific	Your evidence needs to give particular examples of how you meet the criteria with relevant dates and details included. This helps to avoid general statements which simply repeat the criteria.
Sufficient	Your evidence must meet each criterion in full and satisfy all of the necessary requirements in the 'what the assessor is looking for' box.
Current	Documents, policies, plans and budgets must be in current use and have been reviewed within the last three years. Systems and procedures must be in current operation. Examples should have taken place in the last 18 months.

It is good practice for someone within your organisation who is unconnected with the helpline to read the submission. This will help ensure the content can be easily understood and that you have avoided making assumptions about the assessor's knowledge of the service.

Sample Question:

The Organisation's Strategy and Aims

1. Strategic Planning

1a) Have a clear and current definition of the helpline remit		
Criteria	Examples of evidence	Yes / No / Information Required (For Assessor Use)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear definition of the purpose of the helpline• What audience(s) the helpline is aimed at• Nature and focus of the service• Specialties / areas• Geographical areas• Channels• Opening hours• Language interpretation provision• Demonstration that it is reviewed periodically and amended if required	Appropriate sections of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home webpage• Publicity materials• Annual report• Meeting minutes• Strategy documents• Written account of changes resulting from a review	
Describe how you meet the evidence requirements (up to 250 words)		

Feedback from organisations that have been accredited to the Helplines Standard



PART OF THE
MARTIN JAMES FOUNDATION

The application process was a time consuming but positive experience as it provided the opportunity to do a simultaneous service review of Fosterline. It was very helpful to take time to reflect on what we do, how we do it but also how this is clearly evidenced. When reaccreditation of Fosterline was confirmed, it was a morale boost to the staff and a reflection of a team effort. It also helped to independently confirm that the changes put in place during the pandemic had not impacted negatively in any way on the quality of the service offered. We have used the successful reaccreditation within marketing materials such as social media posts, on our website and within our wider organisation and included it within reports to commissioners. We will also use the reaccreditation to support us in any tender process.



We consider it very important for LawCare to have the Helpline Standard Accreditation because it reassures our service users that we are a helpline which operates according to a recognised best practice standard. We found the process of applying for the accreditation to be a very useful exercise. It helped us to take an objective look at how we operate, including analysing areas of our service we might not otherwise have considered such as communication across the organisation and input from volunteers. Our assessor was approachable and helpful, and although there is a large amount of work involved in preparing the submission it was worth the effort not only for the ability to display our accredited status but also because it helped clarify how we can comprehensively offer the best possible support service to legal professionals across the UK.



Brighter Futures - Staffordshire Mental Health Helpline

I would like to say that the whole process obtaining re-accreditation felt very supportive. I wasn't made to feel as if it was a chore or that we had to jump through hoops at every turn. This was my first time going for the accreditation and I can categorically say it was a pleasant experience. On the actual day of the assessment, I was put at ease very quickly, how the day was going to look was explained to me thoroughly so we knew what to expect. All in all a good experience, so Thank you Helpline Partnership!

Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Channel	A means by which the helpline may be accessed, such as telephone, email, text message, instant message, online forums or social media
Contact	A single interaction between the helpline and a service user, for example a phone call
Effective	Functioning in a way that produces the desired result
Efficient	Functioning without unproductive effort
Guidance	Advice on how to implement plans, procedures or processes
Helpline	A service providing information, advice and/or support via non-face-to face channels
Helpline worker	Any person, paid or volunteer, who works for the helpline – including supervisors, managers, people who take calls or answer instant messages, and administrative roles

Partner	An external organisation or individual that you work with in order to support or deliver an aspect of your helpline service
Personal data	Information that could identify a living individual
Policy	An overall approach in relation to a specific issue
Process	A step-by-step method for doing something specific
Real-time	Where the service user and the helpline worker are in communication with each other at the same time
Referral	Passing information about a service user to another organisation so that the other organisation can take up contact with the service user
Service user	A person using any aspect of the helpline service
Signposting	Providing a service user with information about another organisation
Social media	Internet-based tools that allow people to communicate and share information with each other, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

Specification	A detailed description of what is required or provided
Staff	A helpline worker either paid or unpaid (unless otherwise stated)
Stakeholder	Person or organisation with a legitimate interest in the helpline
Supplier	An external organisation or individual from whom you purchase a product or service
Systematically	A structured and documented way of doing things
User generated	Material contributed by service users
Work environment	The physical area(s) from which the helpline service is delivered, which may include home working

For more information or to book your one-to-one call, contact us at:

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