

# Autism Accreditation:

## Guidance on completing the Beacon Status application.

### About the award

- Our graded award system (Aspiring/Accredited/Advanced) primarily focuses on how well you support the autistic individuals you directly work with on a day-to-day basis,
- However, this means that limited attention is paid to the work you do outside of your provision with the wider community or other professionals and organisations, even though such work can be very important and impactful.
- The Beacon Award was introduced to provide a means by which this work can be recognised. The name of this award emphasises that it is given to schools and services that stand out and have established themselves as centres of excellence in the field of autism, who carry out exceptional work in sharing their knowledge and understanding of good practice to educate, guide, inspire and illuminate others beyond their setting.
- The Beacon Award is only given to schools and services which have already achieved an Advanced award. This is because we believe that a school or service should first and foremost achieve recognition for the high quality and consistency of the support they directly provide before they seek recognition as 'experts' in the field through the work they do with others.
- However, the Beacon Award should not be seen as a higher award than the Advanced Award or one which schools or services should automatically aspire to. Rather it is better to see it as a standalone award that accompanies rather than upgrades the Advanced Award.
- While the Beacon Award is a prestigious recognition, it is not intended or right for everyone. We understand that not all schools and services have the same strategic aims or resources to extend to the wider community. Your provision is unique, and while we encourage applications for this Award, they are completely optional.

## What do I need to know for the application process?

- If you have achieved an Advanced Award within the last 18 months and have an active membership plan, you can apply for Beacon Status. If more than 18 months have lapsed, you will have to wait until you have been reassessed.
- Application forms can be obtained from your Accreditation consultant. Please return the completed form to our Autism Accreditation Quality Manager, Stephen Dedridge ([stephen.dedridge@nas.org.uk](mailto:stephen.dedridge@nas.org.uk)) using the subject heading 'Application for the Beacon Status'.
- Our Autism Accreditation Quality Manager will then forward the application form to our independent panel of professionals with expertise in the field of autism.
- Please note that neither our Quality Manager nor your accreditation consultant can provide bespoke advice on your application content, other than referring you to this guidance document. However, it is a good idea to ask other professionals you work with (both within and outside of your organisation) to give you feedback on how well your application reads.
- Our consultants do not attend this panel. Our Autism Accreditation Quality Manager will attend to advise on the process, but they do not have a vote or influence the outcome.
- When writing your application form, please be aware that the panel members may not have any prior knowledge of your provision or the work that you do. Your application should contain enough context and information to give them a clear understanding and help them make their decision.
- The panel will only read through and consider the parts of your application within the 3,000 words. Anything above that will not count towards your application.
- You can include appendixes to provide visual context, including graphs and tables, but any significant text within an appendix will be included in the word count.
- You can also include hyperlinked text in your application to direct the panel to a webpage, document or other online content. However, the panel members are not obliged to read or consider this content.
- The panel's decision is final, and there is no right to appeal. You will only have the opportunity to resubmit your application within this assessment cycle if exceptional circumstances apply. Otherwise, you will have to wait until your Advanced Award is reassessed before submitting again. This delay aims to give you enough time to develop your provision within the wider community and act on the panel's feedback.
- Once you have achieved the Beacon Award, you are not required to reapply for the Award. However, you may choose to renew your Award so it does not become dated and based on historical rather than current practice.

## What is the panel looking for?

To achieve beacon status, the panel will need to determine that your application form provides **clear evidence** that your provision carries out **exceptional work** that has had a **significant impact** on knowledge and understanding of autism in the following key areas:

- How family and those who advocate on behalf of an autistic individuals understand their autism and how best they can be supported.
- How other professionals understand and work with autistic people.
- How people who live and work in the local community understand and support autistic people to be socially included.
- How your provision contributes to expanding our understanding and knowledge of what constitutes good practice in supporting autistic people, for example by contributing to action research.

The Panel would hope to see that you meet the expected high standards in all four areas. However, some discretion is allowed for the panel to give the award if work in some areas is highly impressive but not so strong in other areas.

## What do we mean by 'exceptional work'?

**Exceptional work** is work that is much greater or more than typically expected from similar provisions.

### Be selective.

A good way to start writing your application form is to list everything you do under each heading and then narrow your list down to the activities you think could be defined as exceptional. Given the word limit, you are better off describing a fewer 'exceptional' activities in sufficient detail rather than trying to include everything you do.

### Provide specific details.

You might consider an activity as 'exceptional' because you are the only provision of your type carrying out such an activity to the best of your knowledge. In this context, your claim that it is exceptional is based on its unique nature.

However, it is likely that other provisions are doing similar activities. For example, if you are a school, you might be proud of the workshops you run for parents. Yet, many schools run parent workshops, so you need to convince the panel that your workshops are especially impressive. Simply using superlatives such as 'outstanding' or 'successful' will not carry much weight with the panel unless you provide specific details and data to show why such terms are justified. Perhaps it is your creative work to engage with families who might be considered 'hard to reach'; maybe it is the innovative way in which you have made workshops accessible or interactive; or perhaps it is the skilful way in which you have involved people with lived experience.

Make sure you take credit when you should.

Imagine if in their application form, Manderley House care home references taking residents to arts and crafts sessions run by a local charity. It may be the case that Manderley worked very closely with the charity to plan and deliver the sessions, but if this detail is not included in the application, the panel may assume that credit due to Manderley House is limited to just arranging the visits.

Similarly, if your provision has produced or co-produced a resource, you should clarify your involvement, or the panel could assume you got the resource from another organisation.

When listing research and publications written by staff members or an external body, ensure you make the role played by your provision itself explicit and that you identify what the findings were or whether any resources were produced rather than simply referencing that you facilitated or hosted the research.

Involvement of autistic people

The panel is particularly hoping to see evidence of bespoke activities and approaches that celebrate neurodiversity and impact on quality of life. This work could include helping individuals to become more independent, have more choices and opportunities or have a greater chance of living an enjoyable and fulfilling life.

Panel is also expecting to see evidence that autistic people are consulted with and learned from and that activities are done with them rather than for them. This work could refer to co-production or co-delivery and could relate to the involvement of autistic people supported by your provision within the community.

## What do we mean by 'significant impact'?

**Significant impact** is information or data supporting your claim that an activity benefitted autistic people and achieved specific goals.

Remember, throughout your application, you should aim to show the link between an activity and the impact on autistic people, whether directly or through improved support, understanding or opportunity. This impact should then be supported by relevant evidence.

### Outcomes data

For example:

*X number of people attended the event this year, an increase of Y% from the last year. Z% went on to get work placements.*

*X number of people visited our webpage where they could download our resources.*

*Y sessions were held over a two-year period.*

*Z leaflets were given out during the event.'*

### Evaluation data

For example:

*Of the X number of people who completed our survey, Y agreed with the statement 'The session has given me a better understanding of autism'.*

### Impact data

What gap or issue did the activity hope to address, and is there any evidence that it was successful. For example:

*After we produced bilingual flyers and asked for them to be distributed at the local community centre, there was an X% increase in the number of families from the Bengali community attending the sessions.*

### Sustainability and on-going development

The panel will want reassurance that a described activity was not a one-off event but had been developed and expanded over time or that there are plans in place to ensure this will happen.

*With more Bengali families attending our sessions, our staff worked with these families to keep them engaged. Of the families who initially attended our sessions, X% kept coming back and were positively engaged with our staff.*

## **Testimonials**

You can include short quotations from autistic individuals, families, professionals or members of your local community in your application who you feel they have benefited from your work.

## **Stories**

While we appreciate it is impossible to include every detail, giving an example of a specific outcome achieved by an individual or a group of individuals can really help bring your application to life.

## **External validation**

Where possible, you should reference evidence that your work has been approved or recognised by an external body. For example:

- Quality mark accreditation, such as the Leading Parent Partnership award, CPD accreditation, Investors in People etc
- Awards given within the education, health and care sectors, such as the Home Care Awards, Building Better Healthcare awards, Tes Schools Awards
- External funding, for example your local authority funding your outreach work, which could be based on a cost-benefits analysis
- Positive media attention about your work or an activity described in your application. For example, you could include a hypertext to an online news article
- Partnership work with external organisations – you will need to explain the achieved outcomes and your contribution within this partnership.

If you have any further questions about the process or practicalities, please get in touch with your accreditation consultant at the National Autistic Society or contact our Accreditation team at [enquiries.accreditation@nas.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.accreditation@nas.org.uk).