



# Mapping the Benefits of the Respect Standard

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**Respect**

Words used by funders and commissioners  
to describe the Respect Standard

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competent **reassurance**  
**confidence.** best practice  
**useful** safety **rigorous**  
 standards recognised quality mark  
**outcome-focused** quality assurance  
 well-respected evidence-based  
 enabling evidence delivery  
 valued updated guidance detailed  
 comprehensive infrastructure  
 well-researched survivor-centred  
**robust** evidenced  
 no-harm  
**quality** **safe**  
 credible necessary  
 effective **thorough**  
 wraparound support clear

# 1. Introduction and research methods

## 1.1 Introduction

The Respect Standard is a quality assurance framework for safe, effective, and survivor-focused work with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Currently in its third edition with a fourth being developed, it is applicable to UK-based organisations working with perpetrators of domestic abuse. In order to achieve accreditation, organisations are required to provide evidence that they meet the requirements of the Respect Standard. In line with article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, it is the safety, well-being and freedom of victim-survivors of domestic abuse that are required to be at the centre of work with perpetrators.

The first edition was launched by Respect in 2008, building on the ‘statement of principles around work with perpetrators’ and then ‘service standards’ of the National Practitioners Network. What was originally a page and a half has developed into a much longer document based around ten core principles.

### Principles - The Respect Standard (3rd edition)

1. Do no harm
2. Gender matters
3. Safety first
4. Sustainable change
5. Fulfilling lives
6. The system counts
7. Services for all
8. Respectful communities
9. Competent staff
10. Measurably effective services

To date, accreditation has been awarded to organisations rather than to specific programmes, interventions, or practitioners (though this may change as part of the 4th edition revisions). Ongoing, annual monitoring is required (including the possibility of spot checks)

and there is a complaints process for service users and professionals. There are five sections that make up the Standard, and organisations are required to evidence each of these:

### Sections - The Respect Standard (3rd edition)

- A. Management of the organisation
- B. Intervention delivery
- C. Diversity and equality
- D. Multiagency work
- E. Innovation framework – testing a new intervention

As the domestic abuse perpetrator intervention sector has grown over the years, the Standard has expanded to manage this diversity of interventions. Where the 3rd Edition focused on the well-established structured groupwork interventions and the emergence of Intensive Case Management models of Work (Drive) the 4th Edition is expected to expand to cover Out of Court Disposals, Brief Intervention, and Stalking Interventions.

## 1.2 Research methods

Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) were commissioned by Respect to map the benefits of the Respect Standard as part of their wider ranging review of their achievements as they celebrate their 21st anniversary. The work was conducted in July, August and September 2021 and ethical approval was granted by Durham University Department of Sociology Research Ethics Committee.

We used a combination of an online survey and semi-structured interviews in this research, as follows:

- Online survey of 18 Respect accredited member organisations
- Interviews with 18 funders, commissioners and policy leads.

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A number of themes emerged from the survey and the interviews, which are overlapping in nature.

### 2.1 The importance of prioritising survivor safety and welfare in service design and delivery

Many commissioners talked about the importance of holding safety at the centre. As the importance of working with perpetrators came more clearly into view, so did concerns about how this could best be done.

*From a funder's perspective, really early on it became clear to us a number of things, that work with perpetrators was an important part of any equation, but it was an area of work where a lot could go wrong so funders were very wary of it, and Respect knew what they were doing, so the Standard then flowed from that. (Interview 1)*

Hence, the requirement for victim-survivor contact and support – something that may seem obvious but is not a requirement for perpetrator intervention work in many or even most areas of the world – was and continues to be an important one.

*The bit that's really important is that there is wrap-around support so you know it will be done safely. That they're keeping in contact with others, making sure they're safe - that's the most important thing really. There's no point going on a programme if you're not checking others around them are safe. (Interview 3)*

*Things that I liked about it was that, you know, there's whole support for victims. It seems very thorough to me. And it does give us a resource to check provision against which is useful. (Interview 10)*

In addition to the importance that commissioners placed on safety, this was also the case from the survey respondents – 100% agreed that the primary benefit that their organisation derives from being accredited is that 'it helps us to ensure that the work we do with perpetrators is grounded in safe, effective and established practice'. As one survey respondent put it, 'to provide a gold standard, safe service to safeguard victims and children' (Respondent 2).

### 2.2 Confident commissioning

Commissioners were generally very aware of the dangers of commissioning poor quality domestic abuse services. Having the Respect Standard acted as a benchmark – a quality mark that showed an organisation had met a high standard and undergone a thorough assessment process.

*You want to ensure that you're commissioning the best of the best, and not just somebody who's created a programme that may very well work, but actually, you've got a guarantee that you're getting what is safe and what is doable - so that is why we go for accredited services. (Interview 9)*

Although there are a broad range of different types of organisations and interventions within them, accreditation through Respect meant that there was a level of consistency around the quality of the services they would be providing and a complaints mechanism if things went wrong.

*It's about that confidence; confidence to know that the service that you are provided under that standard is going to be a high-quality service looking at all safeguards and aspects over the period. And it's also having those reports back on that standard nationally. When individual organisations apply for*

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*Respect accreditation, Respect standards, it's that benchmark. It's got that consistency across the country as well, consistency and service delivery. (Interview 11)*

This made them feel more confident about commissioning in an area that many saw as 'risky'.

*A lot can be quite, you know, a risky set of activities, working with perpetrators of domestic abuse. You can't just go in there without some evidence base or some kind of structured approach. And I think that's what the standards to me. That's their main focus really - to standardise, drive up standards, and give some assurance for people who are spending public money on services, that they're working with people who understand what they're doing and can demonstrate a degree of effectiveness. They provide a degree of standardisation; they should drive up quality. And they provide assurance that the people that you are providing funding for work in a particular way that is designed to maximise effective effectiveness in terms of positive outcomes. (Interview 14)*

By reducing the 'risk' that was attached to commissioning interventions for domestic abuse perpetrators, this was said to 'unlock' funding:

*Most funders are not specialists, so if we come across something that we don't know, that we are not sure about safety wise, we usually won't. The Respect Standard unlocks funding, it helps funders and commissioners with the funding flow. (Interview 1)*

This 'unlocking' of funding was one of the reasons that was given by accredited members as to why accreditation was important and the benefits it brought them. 82% of respondents agreed that a primary benefit was 'it helps us secure funding for our work by ensuring

that funders have confidence in our working practices' and 35% were prompted to become accredited because it was required by a specific funder or commissioner. The Respect Standard was the way that survey respondents were able to demonstrate the quality of their service, as one put it 'So our funders and commissioners know we are delivering a safe DVPP that manages risk of the victims in a safe way and holds men accountable for their behaviour.' (Respondent 16). In fact, it was reassuring to the staff within accredited organisations themselves of the approach they were taking 'Having the Respect accreditation gives me assurance that we are working safely to keep victims/survivors and their children safe.' (Respondent 10)

### 2.3 Robustness of the accreditation process

Although the cost, time and energy it can take for an organisation to become accredited was sometimes a concern to organisations, it was clear that for many funders and commissioners, such robust processes are important.

*These aren't standards that are easy to get unless you're really implementing them well. Some standards are easier than others and I would see this as one of the more robust ones. (Interview 2)*

*What I do know from some of my key stakeholder partners, is there is a frustration of the nature of how long it takes to get that standard, the process to go through that standard. However, equally, you could argue on the other side – well, actually, it's not something you just take off the shelf and start doing. It's a standard that you have to work towards. And there's so many areas that need to be checked, benchmark quality-assured, to ensure that if you become that agency, who has got that Respect Standard, and working to that Respect Standard, you are doing it safely, right, and under the auspice of what Respect are telling people it should be. (Interview 11)*

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The desire to demonstrate the quality of their service was the top reason why survey respondents said their organisation had applied for accreditation – with 100% saying that accreditation was important to demonstrate quality. Some organisations felt that the accreditation process had actually improved their practice. One of the survey respondents told us:

*'It has helped us to standardise both policy and practice and recognise particular skills shortages. It has helped us to take a 'long hard look at ourselves' in particular areas and address gaps in policies and any procedural issues; particularly changing supervision structures and recognising training needs.'* (Respondent 8)

### 2.4 The importance of Respect's strong standing in the sector

Funders and commissioners talked about being relieved when finding there was such a strong and respected organisation to look to for guidance. It varied between interviewees as to whether they became aware of Respect or the Standard in the first instance. As time went on though, the strength of both were seen as an important combination.

*A standard is only as strong and as useful as the organisation that backs it up, so its reputation is Respect's reputation, so as long as Respect continues to be the 'go to' organisation on quality and on development in this field then the Standard is going to be great.* (Interview 1)

*As a commissioner, it gives us the reassurance ... because as the commissioner, we haven't got the expertise. So it's about that external reassurance that people are doing the right thing.* (Interview 10)

*It is the Standard that is seen nationally as that accredited standard. So as a commissioner of services, when we are asking for services or looking to tender for services, we will be looking for a Respect accreditation or other national standard. Now, if you have a look, there are some other standards but they're not as well-known as Respect. Respect are well-known in their field. They are well-known for what they do, they are leaders at what they do.* (Interview 11)

*We became aware that Respect were a leading organisation and that we knew that that was a quality intervention and that was evidence-based and that was something that we would want our families to participate in.* (Interview 12)

As well as the importance of the Standard in terms of domestic abuse perpetrator work, interviewees who had worked in the sector for a long time also felt that Respect had played an important and leading role in the introduction of standards and accreditation into the wider violence against women and girls sector.

*I would say that the Respect Standard was a bit ahead of the broader accreditation standards across the sector, in terms of how you set up something that is good quality and how to maintain it.* (Interview 2)

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### 3. Suggestions for future development

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Given that the Respect Standard is currently being updated, some of the suggestions made as part of this research may already be under development. It is also possible that some could be included as an outcome of this research. Some suggestions will most certainly have been considered by Respect before. For example, the length of time it takes and the difficulties associated with meeting the Respect Standard were mentioned by some funders/commissioners and by some accredited organisations as a concern. Having said this, the robustness and quality assurance that was highlighted in the earlier part of this report is an important factor for stakeholder confidence.

As a compromise, it was suggested that sharing more widely approximate timings and stages of a typical accreditation process might help manage expectations:

*The process seems quite lengthy. And I'm not saying that it's necessarily negative. I just wonder whether, and this is just from a commissioner's point of view because we haven't obviously been through that accreditation ourselves, I wonder whether people realise how long it takes to potentially be accredited. I certainly didn't have a realisation of how long it would take. (Interview 10)*

An important point raised in terms of the future is that perpetrator intervention work is on a steep upward trajectory in the UK at the time of writing (September 2021). This brings with it obvious advantages about the availability of services, but some concerns were raised about whether a sudden influx of interventions will mean there will be increased development outside of the Respect accreditation framework. Concerns were raised about existing accredited

providers having a monopoly in a given area which may not be useful:

*Ultimately, you don't want to stifle the market and only have those pre-accredited providers swimming in a relatively small fishbowl so to speak. (Interview 14)*

Another raised the concern that with a limited number of providers in some areas, a regional monopoly could develop, which over time could be associated with a false reassurance of quality.

An area of potential development is the countering of disinformation about the Respect Standard. Many participating in the research had heard of various criticisms of the Respect Standard or the accreditation process that either were not currently true (linked to an earlier, now outdated version of the standard) or had never been true. This disinformation can lead to avoidance of the Respect Standard and we recommend Respect run an information campaign when the forthcoming version of the Standard is published that aims to counteract some of the disinformation, which seems to focus predominantly on a) the cost of accreditation and b) an overly monolithic, rigid view of interventions without room for innovation.

In terms of future areas to consider within the Standard, it is not surprising that remote working was mentioned. As one interviewee put it, 'moving with the digital times a little bit more within the Standard.' Other suggested areas of expansion were around same sex domestic abuse, female perpetrators and male victims, children of perpetrators and adolescent to parent abuse.

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## 4. Conclusions

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The words that funders and commissioners used to describe the Respect Standard, as shown on page 1, provide a strong endorsement of the impact and value they place on it. Words such as safe, quality, thorough, evidenced, respected, reassurance, confidence, and rigorous were used.

Accredited members did sometimes find the Standard difficult to meet as they were going through the assessment process, but ultimately saw it as a process that highlighted any gaps and in doing so gave them greater confidence about that they were providing a service with the highest possible quality and safety standards. Workforce development around recruitment and retention on a sector-wide scale will be needed to ensure organisations continue to meet the high standards required of them (e.g. male/female skilled facilitators).

As they move forward into the 4th edition of the Respect Standard, everyone involved in the evolution from the National Standards in the late 1990s/early 2000s to the evidence based, highly respected, sector leading Standard and accreditation process can be proud of the contribution they have made to 'unlocking' funding for perpetrator intervention services and ensuring that the highest quality services are delivered to perpetrators, with victim-survivor safety at their centre.

Suggested reference: Westmarland, N. and Zilkova, Z. (2021) *Mapping the Benefits of the Respect Standard*, Durham: Durham University.

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