



### **An alternative route to FMCA accreditation**

The FMSB has recognised that the growing role of family mediation in the resolution of family disputes outside court requires an increased supply of fully accredited family mediators.

As the existing portfolio scheme can sometimes be perceived as confusing and difficult to complete, the FMSB commissioned a project to develop a staged portfolio which would enable trainee mediators to achieve accreditation in a quicker and more focused way.

The FMSB would now like to invite mediation services, practices and individual PPCs who support trainees to contribute to this new initiative by becoming a test site for the staged portfolio.

### **What will happen to the existing portfolio scheme and FMC Standards?**

The existing route will not change and trainees who are already working towards accreditation will not be affected. The staged portfolio will offer a different approach to achieving the same FMC Standards and taking part will be completely voluntary.

### **What are the benefits?**

A staged portfolio will build momentum and motivation into the post-foundation training stage through encouraging trainees to have a focused approach to portfolio-building. It provides a framework for trainees to gather and write up evidence for their portfolio as soon as their co-worked and supervised practice begins.

There will be two smaller, less complex portfolio submissions which, when combined with enhanced PPC support, could lead to accreditation after eighteen months to two years, compared with an average of three years or more for the existing scheme.

Concentrating PPC support into specific and shorter periods of time will link professional support more meaningfully to the completion of the portfolio.

### **How will the staged portfolio differ from the existing scheme?**

An essential principle of the staged portfolio is that a trainee will begin their mediation practice by co-working with an FMCA mediator or PPC, whilst they work on their Stage 1 portfolio.

Mediators who join the pilot may not leave Stage 1 until they submit a portfolio which is assessed and demonstrate they can practice safely and effectively with enhanced supervision.

When the trainee is assessed as demonstrating an initial level of safe and effective practice in their Stage 1 portfolio, they will continue to work solo with enhanced supervision while they produce their Stage 2 portfolio.

This challenges current expectations about what trainees can expect to earn - and pay for – whilst they are working towards accreditation, in a system where there are no common standards across

private and state-funded work. Trainees who have completed a foundation course can practice solo with private clients but must be fully accredited to work solo with legal aid and voucher clients.

The FMC is in discussion with the Ministry of Justice about the option of Stage 2 trainees undertaking solo legal aid and voucher work, if they have been assessed as demonstrating an initial level of safe and effective practice at Stage 1.

As there are a wide range of fees and approaches to the support of trainees in different mediation settings, test sites will be free to negotiate financial arrangements with trainees, with advice and support if needed.

### **What is expected of services or individual PPCs who are interested in becoming a test site for the staged portfolio?**

A test site can be a mediation service or an individual PPC who supports trainees working towards accreditation. The FMSB hopes a wide range of services and PPCs will come forward to test out whether this approach to accreditation is suitable for a variety of situations, settings and backgrounds.

A key requirement is that the test site must facilitate access to work for the trainee whilst they work towards accreditation.

The test site should support at least one PPC to participate in the training provided, so they can provide appropriate support to the trainee on the scheme.

It will also be responsible for recruiting and selecting a trainee(s) and agreeing a training contract with them, which includes an estimate of any costs to the trainee and fees paid in Stage 2. The FMSB will support this process by making vacancies known to potential trainees.

The FMSB is looking for up to twenty test sites. If more than twenty sites come forward, selection criteria will be applied to recruit a diverse range of settings.

### **How can trainee mediators take part in the staged portfolio route?**

The existing portfolio route will be unchanged so trainees who decide to continue with this route will not be disadvantaged in any way.

The staged portfolio route could benefit trainees in a range of circumstances, provided they are linked with or recruited by, one of the test sites.

This includes:

- Recent graduates from foundation courses who are looking to start their careers.
- Foundation course graduates of the last two years who have no practice experience or who have begun observations/co-mediation.
- Graduates with some experience of private cases but who are looking for an opportunity to accelerate their progress towards accreditation and build on the evidence they have already gathered.

Trainees who have already started working towards accreditation will be able to join the pilot if they have (or will have) evidence and case material to meet the standard set at Stage 1 and the support of a PPC or service selected as a test site.

Trainees may want to encourage their service/PPC to apply to become a test site or may want to explore participating via another service or PPC.

### **Next steps**

- Information sessions for services/PPCs interested in becoming a test site will be held in w/c 5 and 12 February 2024.
- Applications to become a test site should be submitted to the FMC between 14 February and 11 March 2024.
- Test sites will be selected, using selection criteria if needed, by end of March 2024.
- The training session for PPCs will be held on 17 April 2024.

### **Test sites - summary of requirements:**

- Willing to work with the staged portfolio as developed, with expected co-working and solo working stages.
- Willing to recruit trainees directly and agree a training contract with them.
- Able to offer an agreed level work over agreed period to each trainee recruited, and work to the timescales.
- Able to support at least one PPC who can attend the training session and offer an agreed package of PPC hours (estimated 14 to 25 hours in total from start to accreditation).
- Able to provide estimate of costs in advance to the trainee including the package of PPC hours, co-working arrangements including arrangements for any fees prior to first portfolio submission and fees paid to the trainee when working solo prior to final portfolio submission.
- Willing to share learning and outcome of pilot with the FMC.

### **Selection criteria – in the event of too many sites applying, priority will be given to:**

- Achieving a wide range of settings, services, practices and locations, including solo PPCs.
- Services/PPCs able to demonstrate diversity and inclusion in their selection of trainees.
- Services/PPCs willing to recruit extra trainees for the pilot project.
- Ensuring the number of trainees seeking accreditation from the test sites can be processed within the existing assessor system without creating delays.