



The Mark of Excellence

Guidance for Organisations



The Mark of Excellence

Guidance for Organisations

Table of Contents

What is the Mark of Excellence?	Page 3
Benefits of the Mark of Excellence	Page 3
The AUA CPD Framework - a behavioural framework	Page 5
More about the Mark	Page 6
Registering for the Mark	Page 7
First steps	Page 8
Meeting the criteria	Page 9
The role of your adviser	Page 12
Working with your adviser	Page 13
Outcome of the development day	Page 14
Working through your action plan	Page 15
Applying for assessment	Page 16
Into the future	Page 18
Other resources and contact	Page 18
Appendices	
One: Discussion points	Page 19
Two: Sample Development Day agenda	Page 21
Three: Sample Assessment Day agenda	Page 22

What is the Mark of Excellence?

The AUA [Mark of Excellence](#) demonstrates investment in professional services staff, organisations' commitment to working with the [AUA Statement of Values](#) and [CPD Framework](#), and a clear demonstration that they have been embedded into professional staff development provision.

The organisation applying must be a higher education institution or substantial part of an institution. To discuss whether your part-organisation would be eligible, please contact the professional development team at the AUA on markofexcellence@aua.ac.uk in the first instance.

Benefits of the Mark of Excellence

For your organisation

'Working Towards' the Mark of Excellence means you as an organisation are:

- Publicly demonstrating your commitment to improved outcomes for students, staff and other stakeholders through building the effectiveness of your professional services staff
- Publicly recognising the worth of professional services staff, and that you hold them in parity of esteem with other HE professionals and invest in their professional development
- Demonstrating that you invest in high quality education, training and development for your professional services staff
- Signalling to potential professional services employees that they will have access to excellent professional development opportunities
- Improving your understanding and the effectiveness of your professional development programme to achieving organisational strategic goals

For staff

Professional services staff working in organisations working towards or holding the Mark of Excellence will know that they have:

- Ready access to a framework for professional development and your encouragement to take up those opportunities
- Professional opportunities and organisational recognition comparable to similar routes available to research and learning and teaching staff
- Opportunities to demonstrate and celebrate professional effectiveness in their current roles
- Opportunities to increase their understanding of the expectations of effective performance at all stages of their careers, and to support their career development every step of the way



The [AUA CPD Framework](#): a behavioural framework

Increasingly, behavioural approaches are being widely adopted as simple, pragmatic and highly effective approaches to help people, teams and organisations to perform effectively.

The AUA CPD Framework comprises nine behavioural groups, or elements. Each group has a descriptor that captures the essence of that element. The behaviours are built upon the AUA core values and ethos. The positive focus of each behaviour means that when widely adopted across an organisation, the Framework enables sustained cultural change.

The Framework was developed within the HE sector, and is widely used. It focuses on what individuals can do to develop in their roles and beyond, and ultimately to play their full part in the delivery of your organisation's vision and strategy. The behaviours are easily understood and are accessible to everyone. The Framework has now also been adopted outside the sector.

The AUA behavioural framework describes the way people approach their role, rather than the content of the role or individual performance standards within a role. It is distinct from a competency framework which establishes the standards required to fulfil any role effectively, even though competencies can be written in a behavioural way. One of the most powerful aspects of the behaviourally based framework is the control that it gives people over their own professional development.



More about the Mark

The Mark of Excellence is a ‘continuous improvement’ model not a ‘standards’ model. The approach of our team is collaborative and supportive, supporting your organisation to use the Framework to build on your existing organisational strengths, and supporting the professional development of your professional services staff, to enable your organisation to achieve your mission and goals.

The term staff development provision should be interpreted in its broadest sense. It embraces training but can also include the way that you recruit and induct new staff, how you support them through probation, how staff review processes are designed, and providing opportunities for secondment or work shadowing; in essence all mechanisms designed to support individuals and teams to reach their potential.

‘Working Towards’ the Mark will help you to plan and deliver staff development provision that staff rate highly, and that supports individual staff and teams to achieve your organisation’s longer term goals.



Registering for the Mark

The first formal stage of the process is for you to register to 'Work Towards' the Mark.

An online registration form is available [here](#).

For 2020-21 the cost of registration is £2,475 +VAT, plus your adviser's direct expenses which are invoiced at a later date: generally train fare and accommodation if required. This covers two days of an adviser's time, one of which is on site, with a half day before and after, and also gives you access to the 'community of practice', organisations that have either achieved the Mark, or are working towards it and who share knowledge, resources and good practice.

There will be a further charge to apply to be assessed but that isn't payable until you apply for assessment. The 2020-21 assessment charge is £1,775 +VAT, plus assessor's direct expenses which are invoiced at a later date as above.

What happens once you have registered?

Once you've registered you will be allocated an adviser, a member of our team of experts. You should expect your adviser to contact you to arrange an initial telephone conversation, within five working days of registration. You'll also be sent our 'Working Towards' logo to use on your stationery and website.

First steps towards the Mark

Your adviser is there to help you. Their key role is to support you to build your own internal capacity to understand and use the Framework within your professional services staff provision, to connect you with the many other organisations that have developed expertise and signpost you to resources already developed.

Ultimate responsibility for progressing and achieving the Mark lies, of course, with you.

So in preparation for that first conversation we recommend that you download a copy of the [self-assessment form](#) and begin to assess yourselves against each criterion and sub-criterion, as a first step towards identifying where you think you already meet the criteria, and the areas where you will need to develop.

At this stage the self-assessment is just a document for your own use or to share with your adviser, so you only need to make brief notes or bullet points.

It's helpful to your adviser for you to complete the first section. That will help them to understand your organisation as quickly as possible.

Setting up a working group or steering group

We understand that your organisation may have been using the Framework for some time. Even so working towards the Mark of Excellence is a significant piece of work. To achieve the Mark, you will need commitment and visible support from your senior leadership team, to be an organised and determined leader yourself, and to have a team of people around you with adequate time and resources to develop and embed the Framework into your staff development systems.

For this reason we strongly suggest that you set up a working group, a team of people, probably across the organisation and at different levels,

with the right mix of knowledge and skills to go forward. Now is the time to decide who you need on this team, how they should work together, and to whom they are reporting. This is something you can discuss with your adviser if you are unsure.

Meeting the criteria for the Mark of Excellence

There are four main criteria, each broken down into sub-criteria. The whole Mark can be seen [here](#) and the information below supplements that, picking up from panel discussions for Marks already awarded.

Criterion A

The organisation promotes the AUA values, and embeds them within their professional services staff development provision

The AUA has a [statement of professional values](#) that underpin the Framework. The focus of Criterion A is on those professional values, rather than behaviour. Your organisation, whether it's a whole or part of an organisation, is likely to have its own values. Indeed depending on your organisational structure different parts of your organisation may well have their own values. To demonstrate this criterion, your organisation value statement or equivalent document needs to be compatible with the AUA statement of values, with a clear line of sight to professional service provision in particular. Relevant policies such as staff development, recruitment and induction; appraisal; performance management and promotion need to align well with the AUA values statement. Relevant staff development provision should explicitly highlight professional values as an ethical basis for professional practice.

Criterion B

The organisation provides CPD opportunities for all professional services staff aligned with the AUA Framework of Behaviours

The conditions of the [creative commons license](#) under which the Framework is published mean that you can adapt the Framework to meet your organisation's specific needs. Under the terms of the licence, whether or not adapted, both Framework use and provenance must be explicitly credited to the AUA and it is important that this is highly visible.

To meet this criterion, you will need to show how your staff development provision explicitly covers the behavioural framework, and how it is accessible to all your professional services staff. For whole organisations, we would expect to see evidence of how your provision links to your longer term strategy (B3) in the agendas, reports and strategy documents of your strategic leadership team and management structures. For part organisation applications, you will need to show how the activities of the unit link with the organisation's overall strategy.

Criterion C

The organisation enables all staff to engage with CPD provision

To meet this criterion you will need to have analysed who accesses your CPD provision across a range of parameters, for example, by department, by staff grade, by diversity strands, and other pertinent factors, to identify areas of low take-up and show how these are being addressed. This criterion also highlights the importance of the organisation visibly and publically recognising staff who engage with CPD, as a way of demonstrating the value that the organisation places on CPD and the Framework.

Criterion D

The organisation has in place structures and processes to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the CPD provision for professional services staff, primarily in the context of applying the AUA Framework.

For most people this is probably the most challenging criterion but you shouldn't be put off applying for the Mark if you didn't adopt such a strategic or systematic approach at the outset, or if you haven't yet.

The purpose of this criterion is to encourage you to consider how your staff development provision and in particular how using the Framework contributes to your organisation's overall strategic aims, and to think about how you know this.

Ultimately you need to think beyond offering staff development provision that staff rate highly, to the impact that highly effective staff and teams of staff have in taking your organisation towards achieving its goals over the long term.

Please contact us for some tools and resources to help you (presentation from Strathclyde University at AUA Development Conference 2016)

Evidence to demonstrate long term measurement of impact might include

- A long term view of the intended strategic impacts, at organisational rather than individual level
- Clear decisions about the intended outputs, ideally at the outset of the process
- A clear outcome and impact measurement methodology over a period of time, ideally with baseline, target KPI's and monitoring
- Both qualitative and quantitative evidence
- Do you have any evidence that the impact you observe derives from the CPD Framework and behaviours?

The role of your adviser

Ultimate responsibility for progressing and achieving the Mark lies, of course, with you, but the role of the adviser, and the staff team in the AUA office, is to support you to do this. Your adviser is your key support, trusted expert and critical friend.

Their role is to help your organisation build its internal capacity to achieve the Mark, by sharing with you their knowledge of the Framework, knowledge of the Mark, and the accumulation of good practice and resources available. Your adviser will also be able to tell you about approaches that other organisations that have used to implement the CPD Framework at the level that the Mark requires.

Registration for the Mark includes the cost of two days of your adviser's time to work directly with you. This takes the form of a half day before a developmental visit, the one day visit itself and a half day post-visit to write you a brief report and recommendations for next steps. In practice, the time pre-and post the actual day at the organisation is likely to be built up over time on telephone calls, document reviews and so on.

The funding model assumes that you are already familiar with the Framework and have already integrated it into some of your staff development systems, processes and practice fairly extensively. The adviser has been allocated two days, and you may think you need more time and support than the basic model has allowed for.

If you decide that you would like to contract for more adviser time, this can be arranged through the AUA office, please contact the team for more information.

There are also other sources of lower-cost support available to you – see page 19.

Working with your adviser

Within a few days of your registering for the Mark, you should hear from your adviser who has been asked to set up an initial telephone call with you. The purpose of the call for your adviser is to introduce themselves and to gain an understanding of you, your organisation, and where you are on the journey towards the Mark so that they can gauge how best to support you. The purpose of the first phone conversation for you is to make that initial link, and to work out your next steps.

Some recommend that:

- If you have started to look at the self-assessment, it would be useful to share this with your adviser
- It would also be useful to discuss with your adviser how you intend to approach the project and who is on your working group, if you have already set one up, or if not, who you think you need
- It's important to agree a date and an agenda for your development day, establishing who will be there and the outcomes that you hope for from the day
- As part of this conversation your adviser can also signpost you through the library of resources available on aua.ac.uk
- Ensure that you have shared all relevant contact details

Adviser visit (your development day)

The agenda for your development day will vary depending on where you are on your journey. You will find a sample agenda for the day at the end of this guidance.

If you are already familiar with the Framework the ideal focus of the day is your own initial self-assessment. The day can be spent in probing your self-assessment, working collaboratively with your adviser to identify gaps between where you are now and successful achievement of the Mark, and helping you to identify your priority actions to close those gaps. You will find useful questions to help in the appendices.

Outcome of the development day

Your adviser will write a short report setting out conclusions from the day, setting out the areas identified for development, and next steps and actions where you were able to identify those on the day.

This report is for you primarily. It will be shared with the AUA office where it will be used to inform the progress of your application.

Please note, this report won't be shared with your assessor; assessment takes place independently of support and advice.

From this you should be able to develop a more detailed action plan, setting out required actions, next steps, and milestones allocating resources and responsibility and target timelines in the normal way. It is desirable to schedule the timeline leading to assessment, but this may not always be realistic.

It is anticipated that your adviser should be able to review your action plan and comment on it within the scope of the two days but this will depend on how extensively you have used them up to date. If you feel you need support, or have queries, but not have any further adviser time available, the AUA office and Link Trustee are also available to you by phone or email.

This is not a competitive process. We want everyone to succeed and, as a result of using the Mark, have excellence staff development provision for professional services staff.

Working through your action plan

The process of working through your action plan will be different for each organisation. The key to success at this point is to get your team together and monitor your progress regularly and to use the support that you have from your senior team to help to keep you on track with the resources that you need or to overcome barriers, and to celebrate your successes on the way. The community of practice, the AUA office and your adviser are at hand to support you if you need help.

Getting closer to assessment

The key document which goes to your assessor is your completed [self-assessment](#); the same form you began with, but this time, of course, your final version. Keep the form under review and draft a final version when you think you are close to being ready for assessment. Please note the word limit on the document and try to be as succinct as possible; remember that your assessor has been allocated half a day to digest your application and plan their visit.

It can be very helpful to think about your assessment day quite early on. You will want to introduce your assessor to the key senior champions at your organisation so you will need to plan well ahead to get the date into their diaries. The sample assessment day at Appendix Three should be helpful to you in thinking about this.

You can of course supplement your application with documentary evidence, but again, bear in mind that the assessor will need to digest it. You can also submit visual evidence such as short online pieces from colleagues if you think it useful, they can help to really illustrate the impact of working towards the Mark and any resulting changes to the culture of your organisation. The quality of the submission is much more important than the quantity of the submission.



You can contract adviser time through the AUA office, to review and comment on your draft assessment before applying for assessment, should you wish. This additional activity was not included in the pricing of the Mark, recognising that not everyone would want to access it.

Applying for assessment

The formal stage of the application is for you to apply to be assessed for the Mark.

The online application form is available [here](#).

Now you are going to be assessed the assessment fee is payable. The 2020-21 charge for this is £1,775 +VAT.

This fee covers two days of an assessor's time, one of which is on site, with a half day before, and a further half day subsequently to complete their report for the panel.

With the payment, please send your completed self-assessment and supporting documentation to the office, and we will allocate you an assessor.

Assessment

Assessment is on the basis of your self–assessment and other information you provide, together with a report written following the assessment visit from one of our team. This visit lasts for one day.

Once you have formally applied, your allocated assessor will be in touch to agree a date and an agenda for assessment. You can find an example agenda in Appendix Three.

Our whole team acts as both advisers and assessors so they are all experts, but your assessor will be operating entirely independently of your adviser. Please don't assume that something you have discussed with your adviser has been passed on, as it will not have been.

Please do try not to overload your assessor with too much information. Less can be more. At the end of the visit, your assessor will meet with you again and feedback key observations. They may request any further information which they feel hasn't been covered, and they will advise you of the next steps and the timeline.

Following the visit the assessor writes a report with a recommendation to the independent assessment panel so they will be unable to confirm the outcome immediately.

The Assessment Panel

The Assessment Panel is made up of three members with a nominated deputy, and meets as required.

As well as the panel members reviewing your application, they are also likely to ask your assessor to comment on your application.

As soon as the panel has met and agreed an outcome, you will be informed of this by the AUA office. The panel has the options of confirming a recommendation that you are awarded the Mark, awarding

the Mark subject to the provision of further information (which will be administered by the office) or referring it back for further work.

The Mark is a continuous improvement model and it is likely that either the assessor, or panel, or both, will make recommendations for how you can continue to benefit from further embedding the Framework in the future.

Into the future

Once you are awarded the Mark, you will hold it for a period of three years after which you will need to be reassessed.

You remain a member of the community of practice and we hope that you will continue to share your knowledge and enthusiasm for the Mark, and for a behaviourally based approach to staff development, with all your AUA colleagues and others in the sector.

Other resources

There are many other resources available to help you to understand and use the CPD Framework. You can find resources online at aua.ac.uk, via the AUA office by emailing markofexcellence@aua.ac.uk and by sharing knowledge, expertise and resources with other organisations already working with the Framework through the community of practice. Do ask your adviser or the AUA office if there is something that you need but cannot find.

Contact

If you are considering working towards the Mark and would like to discuss this further please email markofexcellence@aua.ac.uk or call the professional development team on 0161 275 2063 at the AUA office.

The AUA office is the hub for information distribution, and we are there to help you. Please do contact us if you have any queries.

Appendix One

Discussion points

Have you used the standard framework as published, or have you tailored it under the licence arrangements to your own context and organisation?

(If yes, the organisation-specific framework needs to be mapped against the Framework Fourth Edition, to ensure it fully covers the behaviours and meets the criteria of the Mark)

- Have you set up a project team? Who else is, or needs to be, involved?
- Have you considered how you will evaluate the longer-term impact of using the Framework?
- Have you undertaken any formal or informal consultation on the plan up to this point?
 - If yes, how is the outcome of that consultation being incorporated into the development and action plans?
 - If no, is this under consideration as part of the development or action plan?
- Who needs to be kept informed? E.g. individuals, groups or committees, AUA advocate, HR/staff development.
- What is the level of commitment to the project across the organisation, including, specifically, at the most senior levels?
- What do you think are the potential barriers to success?
- What resources do you have available to you?
- What is the current level of awareness of the AUA CPD Framework in the organisation?
- How much of your time is allocated to this project?
- Do you have any concerns about the project?
- Are there any 'no go' areas that you need to be aware of?

- How is the project being communicated across the organisation? Are the current communication plans meeting the needs of the organisation and of staff?

Other points:

- Structure of the organisation, where the department/team fits in the case of an application from part of the organisation
- Provision of background information to the adviser– e.g. structure charts, mission statement, organisational frameworks and systems, staff development policy/provision
- Clarify the total amount of adviser time that's available to you and agree how this will be deployed
- Do you have a champion at senior level – if not who could be approached?
- Consideration of administrative support to the steering or working group
- Access to individuals/resources within the organisation
- How will stakeholders be briefed about your plans?
- It might be helpful to write a glossary of your acronyms (e.g. appraisals might be called APRs, SDRs or many other terms).
- Clarify your expectations of the AUA input and of your own responsibilities?

Meeting the criteria

You will need to probe how you can demonstrate each criterion.

Ask yourself 'how do I know'? How can I show this?'

Appendix Two

Suggested framework for development day (adviser day)

Objectives:

- An honest assessment of current status, next steps and likely timescale;
- A review of the resources available to achieve the Mark to ensure that they are adequate
- Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of individuals actively working on the Mark. A steering group and/or working group is very strongly recommended

Following your adviser development day you should be in a position to put together a comprehensive 'project action plan' with specific objectives, owners and timeline.

Items to cover

Overview of the Mark

An examination of the initial self-assessment against each criterion and sub-criteria and capturing a gap analysis;

Identification of longer term required actions, timelines, and next steps

A clear understanding of future process and key contacts

Appendix Three

Sample Assessment Day Agenda

9:30: Arrival and meeting with key contact

Confirm any changes to expectations of the day

10:00: Meeting with cross-section of staff who have used the CPD Framework for professional development

10:45: Break

11:00: Meeting with cross-section of managers whose staff and teams have used the CPD Framework for professional development

12:00 Lunch and break

13:00: Meet with staff development providers

Depending on the structure of the organisation these individuals may be centralised or decentralised staff, or indeed contracted sessional staff, not employed.

14:00: Break

14:15: Meeting with senior staff

15:00: Break for the assessor to review their findings so far

The assessor will need a quiet space for this

15:45 Final meeting

Meet with key contacts to feed back observations, and to request any additional information which has not been covered.

Confirm next steps and timescale



*To note that assessors want to meet with a wide and representative group of colleagues (not only the advocates and AUA members)