



Intentions for family mediation legal aid contracts from April 2018

7 February 2017

In the *Headline intentions for civil legal aid contracts from April 2018* which we published on 20 January 2017 we confirmed that family mediation contracts will end on 31 March 2018 and that we would publish further information on the future of family mediation services.

This document now outlines our intentions for family mediation.

Outline of services

We intend for the delivery of family mediation services under the new 2018 Standard Civil Contract ("Contract") to commence from 1 April 2018.

As all current family mediation contracts will end on 31 March 2018, all organisations that wish to deliver legally aided mediation services after this date must successfully tender for a Contract. This includes family mediation providers who currently hold a legal aid contract to deliver family mediation services.

The government remains committed to family mediation as a key route to helping family disputes avoid court proceedings. We will therefore not make significant changes to how family mediation services are delivered under current contracts.

We will maintain the quality of mediation services under current contracts but will no longer require family mediation providers to hold the Mediation Quality Mark (MQM). Instead, the Contract will require that mediators and mediation organisations meet the standards set out by the Family Mediation Council (FMC) and the Family Mediation Standards Board. The Contract will include the key quality standards set out in the MQM and these requirements will then become direct contractual obligations.

Tender Timetable

The procurement process and timetable for family mediation services will mirror that for other face to face 2018 civil legal aid contracts. We therefore anticipate the procurement process is likely to start in April 2017 with services commencing on 1 April 2018.

We intend to run a two stage process. The first stage will be the completion of a Selection Questionnaire ('SQ stage') (formerly known as a pre qualification questionnaire). The second stage will be an Invitation to Tender ('ITT stage').

The SQ stage for face to face services is likely to follow a similar approach to that used in previous procurement processes and will test an organisation's suitability to contract with us in addition to meeting the standard SQ requirements. Organisations that are assessed as suitable to hold a legal aid contract will be invited to respond to the subsequent mediation ITT.

The ITT stage will test organisations' ability to meet our minimum service requirements. **All organisations that are assessed as being suitable to contract with us and as meeting the minimum service requirements will be awarded a Contract.**

As now, there will be no limit to the number of mediation matters that a provider can commence and will be able to approach us at any time for an increase in the number of matter starts allocated to it. Organisations will not be required to bid for a specific volume of work.

Proposed timeline

SQ opens	April 2017
Notification of SQ outcome	June 2017
ITT opens	August 2017
Notification of ITT outcome	December 2017
Verification process	January-March 2018
Contracts issued	March 2018
Contract start and service commencement	1 April 2018