

## GUIDE TO THE ETHICS MARK

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### OVERVIEW & SUITABILITY

It is our central aim that applicants understand, internalise and embed their ethics and values for themselves. The Mark is a sign that an ethical approach is built into the mainstream of the applicant's everyday working and decision-making.

For relatively small organisations that are able to demonstrate their ethical commitment, The Foundation offers a 'fast-track' route to Ethics Mark accreditation. This involves three stages:

- Unassisted preparation of the Values Statement
- Feedback from stakeholders
- Assessment by an adviser and The Foundation

The Foundation wishes to make the Mark affordable for even very small organisations and therefore offers a streamlined process for such organisations. However, it should be stressed that this relies on the applicant being able to prepare a Values Statement that addresses the key ethical issues faced by the applicant, with very little external assistance. It also requires that applicants obtain feedback from stakeholders in a timely fashion. In essence, this is a 'DIY' version suitable for applicants with a clear understanding of how they are addressing key ethical dilemmas and the confidence to apply for The Mark with little assistance. If you find writing a Values Statement difficult, you might be advised to attend a preparation day.

At all stages you will be appointed an Ethics Foundation approved adviser to guide you through the process.

### STAGE 1 – PREPARATION OF YOUR VALUES STATEMENT

The Values Statement is a framework for drawing out a wide range of ethical and values issues – it is a canvas or table on which to spread out a lot of inter-related ideas and situations. It is important to balance 'theoretical' intents and philosophies with the 'realities' of practical examples and what is achievable. The Values Statement is NOT intended to be a mission statement, but rather it is a public statement of how you are addressing (and in some cases, struggling with) the key ethical challenges that you face as an organisation.

The starting point of the assessment process is to identify the key ethical issues affecting your organisation. These will include sectoral and wider issues as well as organisation specific issues. You then need to answer the questions in the pro forma statement and draw your statement as a cohesive document that summarises your ethical intent and practice. Statements may be highly structured, following question by question the Values Statement layout, or holistic, synthesising

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main themes. Examples of these different types can be viewed in the directory on the website.

### *Helpful hints*

- Don't agonize over the Statement too much! Just have a go as best you can. It won't be perfect, but it's better than deferring for ever.
- Try to include as many practical examples as possible. Readers are more impressed by what you have done, rather than what you will do
- Be completely honest. Customers are more likely to trust an organisation that admits its mistakes and inadequacies than one that glosses over the practical dilemmas that it faces
- Focus on your core activities and the day to day ethical dilemmas that these raise, rather than peripheral corporate social responsibility issues
- Remember that your Values Statement can be a two-edged sword. Your employees and customers will identify any inconsistencies, so be real.

The first draft of your Values Statement should first be submitted to your adviser, who may suggest amendments. Once a final version has been agreed, your adviser will post your Statement on The Foundation web site as part of the Directory, and you will be ready to submit your Statement to the scrutiny of your stakeholders (Stage 2).

### **STAGE 2 - VALIDATION**

Validation of your Values Statement takes two forms:

- a stakeholder survey
- consideration of other evidence

The question that we seek to address might be phrased as, 'do the espoused values stack up in practice'. In order to answer this, we ask you to consult the people that are likely to know your organisation best to confirm or reject your espoused values – that is, your colleagues, customers and suppliers.

The format of the survey may vary from applicant to applicant and several forms may be used including:

- postal invitation
- emails
- newsletter/circular
- annual report

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- Statement ‘on the wall’ with invitation slips or postcards

We have found that the most productive method is to email stakeholders with a direct link to the Values Statement on The Foundation web site. This enables stakeholders to respond directly via a password protected on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire is extremely simple. It just asks whether the Values Statement matches with the stakeholder’s experience of the applicant, and then allows for an open ended response on the ethics/values of the applicant. Responses are stored on the web-site and the identity of the respondents is not revealed to the applicant to ensure that respondents have the confidence to reply. However, advisers are able to contact the stakeholder to clarify the issues concerned if significant issues are raised.

The stakeholder survey is designed to produce an indicative sample, indicating that the Values Statement matches stakeholders’ everyday experience. The number of responses is less important than the demonstrable effort taken by the organisation to engender a response to the Values Statement. Your adviser will contact you to agree the type and number of stakeholders to whom the statement will be sent. This will include all employees and a cross section of customers, suppliers, the public and others as relevant. They will also issue you with a password and link for respondents to provide on-line feedback.

The survey would normally include:

- customers/clients
- employees/colleagues
- past staff (?)
- shareholders or those with a Trustee/legal or significant interest
- suppliers

It might also include members of the local community or other individuals, groups and organisations affected by your activities.

Your adviser will consider the results of the survey together with any additional evidence that you can supply to substantiate your stated policies. If any remedial action is felt necessary by your adviser, they will contact you to suggest a plan of action before submitting your application to The Foundation for the final assessment.

### **STAGE 3 - ASSESSMENT**

This is the final stage where the adviser submits your application to The Foundation for assessment. The process is one whereby your adviser will submit an assessment form to The Foundation,

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together with a copy of your Values Statement and any supportive evidence. The adviser makes a recommendation to The Foundation based on the acceptability of the Values Statement and the stakeholder feedback and other evidence. The recommendation also includes an action plan for the next three years.

The Foundation then make a judgement based on this report. In particular The Foundation will consider:

- Is the stakeholder feedback sufficiently supportive (a minimum of 70% of responses must be supportive)?
- Have any comments from the Survey been well taken and have they sufficiently been acted upon?
- Is the Values Statement a fair summary of the applicant's position and intent?
- Have all of the key issues been adequately addressed in the Values Statement?
- Is there sufficient ethical commitment and will this continue on being awarded The Mark?

The Foundation will compare the Values Statement to the key issues identified for that type of organisation, known best practice in the sector concerned and the feedback of stakeholders. We will be looking to form an overall, supported (validated) view of an

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- Ethical, values-led organisation
- Organisation that will continue to be values-led
- Element of pioneering or leadership –where possible

Responses from The Foundation should be within 1 month. If this is not possible, reasons will be given to the adviser and a new timetable agreed.

Difficult judgements will be referred to The Committee of Reference and will therefore take longer to decide. Reasons for referral will be given to the applicant via the Adviser within the 1 month deadline. A summary of all submissions and awards will be reported to The Committee of Reference on a quarterly basis. It is very unlikely that this will lead to any change in a applicant or holder's status.

### *Declinations*

The main reasons for declining an Award are:

- Insufficient information
- Incomplete coverage of (or failure to address) the main themes of the Values Statement questions and key issues.
- A less than satisfactory stakeholder response or inconsistencies between the Statement and stakeholder responses – as summarised by the adviser

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- Internal inconsistencies within any part of the submission
- Issues raised of a substantive nature by stakeholders or the adviser (but still warranting a submission)
- Failure to pay appropriate fees
- Failure to agree an ongoing action plan
- Failure to agree to conditions of use of The Mark

All declined submissions will be of first choice and in the first instance stated as deferred submissions and the adviser given a set time to rectify problems and resubmit.

There can be no time limit for application-assessment-award, but in practice it may be necessary to set timetables. There is no limit on re-submissions unless these become administratively or otherwise vexatious.

If a submission is declined there is an appeal route. This may be used if difficulties arise during the process. The adviser must present new information and this will be considered in detail by the Committee of Reference. The terms of reference for The Committee are available from The Foundation. If the Committee decides that further action or a time extension is not justified, then no further appeal is possible. This should take no longer than 3 months.

### AWARDS

Awards or other decisions will be notified to the adviser and applicant at the same time, where possible. Notifications will be public within 3 days. Holders must agree to the terms and conditions of holding and using the Mark (see **Terms and Conditions of Using The Mark**).

The mark holder will be required to display an animated invitation to read their Values Statement on their web site. This will take the site visitor directly to the mark holder's Values Statement and directory entry.

Presentations and accompanying publicity will be agreed with the applicant and usually be made at Ethics Foundation award ceremonies. Advisers are encouraged to celebrate their success at the Award Ceremony and to share in any publicity that this generates.

### UPDATING AND RENEWAL

The Mark holder is required to confirm that statement is up to date and to amend as necessary every year. This requires evidence of this having been circulated to key personnel. A re-assessment takes place every 3 years with a new action plan being set at that time.



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### **FOR FURTHER ADVICE & INFORMATION**

Please contact David Jackman in the first instance:

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