Apprentice to Business Owner (A to B) – business skills and mentoring program

Program Guidelines

October 2012
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Introduction

The Apprentice to Business Owner – business skills and mentoring program (‘A to B Program’) provides training in nationally recognised qualifications in small business management and business mentoring support for tradespeople who are seeking to, or have recently, established a business.

Many tradespeople operate as subcontractors, sole operators or small businesses. In addition to the trade specific competencies and professional licensing training received during their apprenticeship, to sustain a viable business they also need to develop small business management skills, to ensure they meet business and employment regulations, and have sound financial and business plans.

This can be achieved through some higher level qualifications in a relevant trade business management qualification or small business management qualifications.

A range of advisory services are available through the internet and existing government programs, such as the Australian Government’s Small Business Advisory Services, Enterprise Connect and state/territory government sponsored programs. The A to B Program provides training and mentoring for eligible tradespeople that complements these other services.

The A to B Program is a nationwide training program delivered across both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, and administered by organisations known as A to B Program Brokers (‘Brokers’).

Brokers may deliver A to B Program services directly or choose to subcontract other entities to deliver elements of the A to B Program service functions around Australia.

The A to B Program comprises four main role groups:

- Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (‘the Department’) – responsible for overall management of the A to B Program
- Brokers – contracted organisations responsible for administering the A to B Program for target numbers of Participant places
- A to B Program Providers (‘Providers’) – entities, including Registered Training Organisations (‘RTOs’), delivering one or more service delivery functions
- A to B Program Participants (‘Participants’) – eligible tradespeople approved by Providers to receive training and mentoring services under the A to B Program

A to B Program services to be delivered by Providers are categorised into three components:

- Selection – promotion and marketing of the A to B Program and administration of application processes including selection of Participants
- Training – delivery of eligible Nationally Recognised Qualifications
- Mentoring – provision of Business mentoring services for up to 12 months

About these guidelines

These A to B Program Guidelines (‘the Guidelines’) outline the objectives and overview of the A to B Program and set out the requirements for the delivery of A to B Program services from February 2013.

These Guidelines are incorporated into and form part of the Deed of Standing Offer and an Order between the Department and A to B Program Brokers for the administration and delivery of A to B Program services. For the definitions and explanations of key terms, click on the link or go to the Glossary of Terms.
Part A – Overview of the A to B Program

1. Objectives

The objectives of the Apprentice to Business Owner – business skills and mentoring program is to provide business management training and support for eligible tradespeople to develop business management skills, so that subcontractors and new business owners can successfully establish and operate a business.

2. Outcomes

The primary output is the delivery of the A to B Program across Australia to Participants by Brokers and Providers, ensuring training and mentoring provided is relevant, innovative and responsive to the needs of individual Participants.

The primary outcome is that Participants make informed decisions whether or not to start a business, and for those that do or those already in business, that they are still in business 12 months after completing the Program.

3. Selection of Brokers

Brokers are selected through an open tender process and placed on the A to B Program panel for the administration and delivery of the A to B Program services.

4. Budget allocations

The A to B Program is demand-driven with capped funding. In order to manage the A to B Program within the allocated Program budget, the Department will allocate a number of Participant places and budget for a set time period to Brokers, through Orders. Brokers will be paid on a per Participant basis.

5. Use of the funding

Funding will support tradespeople who have completed their trade training and are preparing to or have recently (within 24 months) established a business. The funding will support:

a) the cost of training in Eligible Qualifications delivered by RTOs
b) provision of business mentoring services for up to 12 months including assistance and advice about regulatory compliance, financial, marketing and business management
c) marketing, promotion and administration of application processes including selection of Participants
d) Brokers’ costs to administer the A to B Program

6. A to B Program delivery

The Department contracts with Brokers to administer A to B Program services on behalf of the Australian Government. Brokers may subcontract one or more Providers to deliver some or all of the services (that is: selection of Participants, business management training qualification delivery, and business mentoring support). However, the Broker retains overall responsibility for delivery of all services, including those provided by any subcontracted entities, and meeting contractual obligations with the Department consistent with these Guidelines, Deed of Standing Offer and Order between the Broker and the Department. Brokers must not subcontract overall contract management.
For the purpose of delivering A to B Program services, the Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines must be read and complied with jointly. Where these documents are inconsistent, the Deed of Standing Offer and Order takes priority over the Guidelines to the extent of the inconsistency.

The Department reserves the right to amend these Guidelines from time to time at its discretion. Brokers will be advised of changes to the Guidelines and must ensure Providers are aware of all changes within five business days. Brokers and Providers must adhere to the most current version of the Guidelines.

In exceptional circumstances Brokers may provide a business case seeking a waiver from the Department where a requirement under these Guidelines is not able to be met. Each decision will depend on the circumstances and business case provided by the Broker and will be at the Department’s absolute discretion.

Brokers and Providers must comply with all relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation (e.g. legislation in relation to privacy), all relevant national standards which apply to their organisation (e.g. the National Standards for Registered Training Organisations) and comply with Relevant Laws.
PART B – Selection of Participants

7. Selection of A to B Participants

Brokers have overall responsibility for the administration of the A to B Program including promotion of the Program nationwide, across both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Brokers are to develop fair and transparent application processes, using appropriate management procedures to address conflicts of interest. Application processes should include strategies for determining eligibility, suitability and capacity to fully engage in the A to B Program. Brokers may deliver the selection services directly or subcontract suitable entities to market the A to B Program and run applicant selection processes.

Providers will call for applications which must be assessed, at a minimum, against the eligibility criteria for Participants set out in clause 8 (below). Providers are to take into account applicants’ proposed or current business activities, academic abilities and make a judgement about the suitability and capacity of the applicant to participate in and benefit from the A to B Program, including capacity to undertake and complete the qualification.

Providers should aim to achieve an equitable distribution and spread of available places across states and territories and metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Only eligible tradespeople may be approved to be Participants within allocated Participant Places available.

Providers are to inform applicants of the progress and outcome of their applications.

Tradespeople applying to be an A to B Participant will be expected to provide proof of:

- identity
- citizenship

After assessing applications, Providers, together with Brokers (who ultimately approve Participants), must decide which applicants will be accepted as Participants. Successful applicants must be advised:

- their personal information will be used for program administration purposes and may be shared with the Department and other Government departments. Providers must obtain, from all Participants, written consent through the execution of a Privacy Notice. A Privacy Notice template is available at Attachment A.
- the A to B Program is funded by the Australian Government, administered by the Broker and managed by the Department
- of their responsibilities regarding attendance and participation in the A to B Program and that failure to meet these expectations may result in the Participant being withdrawn
- of their responsibility to commit to their individual Training and Mentoring Plans
- of their responsibility to fill out a Participant Satisfaction Questionnaire on completion of training and Business Mentoring
- the Department may contact them to obtain their views on the services provided as part of a program evaluation.
8. Eligible A to B Participants

To be eligible, individual tradespeople must:

a) have permanent residency, that is, as an Australian citizen or as a permanent resident of Australia
b) have successfully completed a trade-related apprenticeship in a trade listed on the NSNL
c) be preparing to or have recently (within 24 months) established a business
d) not be an Undischarged Bankrupt
e) not have previously completed the eligible qualifications offered under the A to B Program
f) not be subsidised from other government funding, including Commonwealth, States and Territories, for the same eligible qualifications offered under the A to B Program

9. Record keeping

Providers must maintain files and records of all marketing and application rounds. All applications and documents are to be retained in a form that can be retrieved and used to support any decision made by the Provider about the applicant’s eligibility at a later date, i.e. during routine monitoring by the Department and Broker.

Providers must retain files for a period of seven (7) years from the date the last action was completed.
PART C – Training

10. Training eligible for funding
The training funding is for Eligible Qualifications delivered by an accredited RTO that has Eligible Qualifications in scope. If the A to B Program Broker is also an RTO with an Eligible Qualification in scope, then the Broker may deliver the training.

Eligible Qualifications are Nationally Recognised Qualifications in small business management such as Certificate III in Micro Business Operations (BSB30307) or Certificate IV in Small Business Management (BSB40407) or a relevant trade business management qualification.

11. Arranging training
Brokers are responsible for determining which Eligible Qualification is most appropriate for each Participant. The assessment of which Eligible Qualification (that is Certificate III or Certificate IV) is most suitable, should take into account the Participant’s proposed or current business activities, academic abilities and capacity to undertake and complete the training.

Brokers are responsible for arranging training for Participants, to be provided by suitable RTOs. Participants must commence training within two months of their application being approved, and training should be completed within 12 months of commencement.

12. Registered Training Organisations
RTOs must:
   a) have Eligible Qualifications in scope
   b) offer, and where appropriate undertake Recognition of Prior Learning (‘RPL’) or Recognition of Current Competencies assessments for each Participant
   c) arrange credit transfer for Participants who have previously completed some units of an Eligible Qualification
   d) have a history of good performance in the delivery of training
   e) demonstrate compliance with the Australian Quality Training Framework
   f) provide flexible delivery options such as part-time, outside business hours, distance mode.

13. Skills assessment
Tradespeople may have gained business skills through, for example, informal or formal training, work experience and voluntary work.

Participants must be offered Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Recognition of Current Competencies assessment by RTOs.

Credit transfer should occur where a Participant has previously completed some units of an eligible qualification but not the full qualification.

Providers must maintain detailed records of any skills assessment as part of the Participant’s file. RPL must be completed prior to the course commencement date and the Participant’s records must be updated prior to this date.
14. Training plans

Personalised training plans must be agreed between the Participant and the RTO on commencement. RTOs must retain the original on the Participant’s file and provide Participants with a copy. Where RTOs are not Brokers, copies of training plans must be submitted to Brokers within one week of execution.

15. Payments

RTOs will be entitled to receive payment for delivery of training services in accordance with the following milestones:

- 50 per cent of course costs, incorporating outcomes of skills assessments, for each Participant on commencement of training
- 50 per cent of course costs for each Participant on completion of training (Participants who withdraw prior to completion will not attract this payment).

Where Brokers subcontract training services, they are responsible for paying subcontracted RTOs on achievement of payment milestones.

16. Record keeping

Participants’ files including personalised training plans and records of any skills assessment must be made available to the Department and Brokers on request, including during monitoring processes. Files must be retained for a period of seven (7) years from the date the last action was completed.
PART D – Business Mentoring

17. Business mentoring
Providers will provide business mentoring to Participants for up to 12 months from the time the Participant is approved to receive training and mentoring under the A to B Program. Business mentors are people with proven business acumen and experience in planning, marketing, finance, accounting, delivery, compliance and other relevant business skills that enable them to fulfil the responsibilities of being a business mentor. They give assistance and advice to Participants to maximise the potential success of the Participants’ businesses or to help Participants make informed decisions whether or not to start a business.

18. Qualities business mentors should have
As business mentors provide Participants with assistance and advice about regulatory compliance, financial, marketing and business management, Providers must ensure that business mentors have appropriate or adequate business skills to fulfil their obligations.

Suitable mentors would also have:
- a clear understanding and experience of small business skills and management practices,
- the ability to listen and communicate effectively
- the ability to guide and not drive or take over the direction of the business venture

It would be desirable, where possible, for business mentors to have experience and knowledge in the Participants’ trade and industry.

19. Mentoring plans
Providers delivering business mentoring services under the A to B Program must develop, in consultation with each Participant, a personalised business mentoring plan. The mentoring plans must be tailored to suit individual Participants’ circumstances and requirements and should include, but be not limited to:
- number and timing of mentoring meetings (at least six)
- format of mentoring meetings, whether in-person, skype, video conferencing, tele-conference or a mixture
- details of the business mentoring support that will be provided
- define what is expected of Participants during the business mentoring components

The mentoring plans are to be agreed to and signed by both the Providers and Participants. Mentoring plans are to be amended, as required, throughout the mentoring period to ensure they reflect any changes in Participants’ ambitions and circumstances.

Providers must retain the original and any updated versions on the Participants’ files and provide Participants with a copy of the original and any updated versions. Where Providers delivering business mentoring services are not Brokers, copies of original signed mentoring plans and any updated versions, are to be submitted to Brokers within one week of execution.
20. Business mentoring to A to B Participants

Business mentors provide the following support to Participants:

- assistance and advice about financial, marketing and business management to help Participants develop their businesses
- assistance and advice to help Participants develop business plans
- advice on record keeping, invoicing and payment processes
- assistance and advice about relevant regulatory compliance such as:
  - ongoing currency of business insurance
  - lodgement and payment of all statutory obligations including but not limited to Goods and Services Tax, Withholding tax and Superannuation Guarantee for employees
  - completion of any registrations
  - gaining of any approvals and permits

Appropriate records must be kept by Providers, on Participants’ files, demonstrating the extent of the business mentoring support provided to Participants.

Providers must maintain appropriate and adequate contact with Participants during the mentoring period in line with the agreed business mentoring plan.

21. Mentoring completion reporting

Providers must, within two weeks of completion of the mentoring support, prepare a Business Mentoring Completion Report for individual Participants which should include, but is not limited to:

- details of mentoring services provided including dates and format of mentoring meetings
- commencement and completion dates of mentoring support services
- assessment of benefits of mentoring support services to Participant

Where Providers delivering Business Mentoring services are not Brokers, copies of completed Business Mentoring Completion Reports must be submitted to Brokers within one week of report being completed.

22. Payments

- Providers will be entitled to payments for delivery of Business Mentoring services in accordance with the following milestones:
  - 50 per cent of mentoring fees on submission of signed business mentoring plans
  - 50 per cent of mentoring fees on submission and acceptance of Provider Business Mentoring Completion Reports. (Participants who withdraw prior to completion of the training will not attract the second mentoring payment).

Where Brokers subcontract business mentoring services, they are responsible for paying subcontracted Providers on achievement of payment milestones.

23. Record keeping

Participants’ files including mentoring plans, records of mentoring services provided and completion reports must be made available to the Department and Brokers on request, including during monitoring
processes. Files must be retained for a period of seven (7) years from the date the last action was completed.
PART E – Roles and Responsibilities

24. A to B Program Brokers

Brokers may deliver A to B Program services directly, or may choose to enter into subcontracting arrangements with other entities (known as A to B Program Providers) to deliver aspects of the Program on their behalf.

Brokers retain overall responsibility for administering the A to B Program and are financially and contractually responsible for meeting all contractual obligations and the performance of all services, including the responsibilities of subcontracted Providers.

Brokers are responsible for obtaining, from Participants, a completed Participant Satisfaction Questionnaire when a Participant has completed both the training and Business Mentoring service components. The questionnaire template is available on the Department’s website (TBA). Copies of Participant Satisfaction Questionnaires must be forwarded to the Department with the performance report at the end of the Order period.

Brokers must comply with the Deed of Standing Offer, these Guidelines and agreed Orders to:

- deliver all aspects of A to B Program services as specified in the Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines
- meet all reporting requirements according to their contractual obligations
- promote the A to B Program within contracted states and territories – across both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas
- select and subcontract suitable entities as Providers and effectively manage subcontracted Providers to deliver appropriate services
- arrange the selection of Participants and connection of Participants to RTOs and business mentors
- facilitate Participants’ attainment of an Eligible Qualification and relevant Business Mentoring support through provision of appropriate training and Business Mentoring services
- explain to Participants their responsibilities and obligations and how their personal information will be used
- ensure that subcontracted Providers are legally bound and perform their obligations consistent with the Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines
- ensure staff who provide any services under the A to B Program are aware of their obligation to protect confidentiality of Participants and record and protect information that relates to Participants’ involvement in the A to B Program
- monitor A to B Program delivery and Providers to ensure the services delivered are consistent with the terms of the Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines
- disburse funds to subcontracted Providers providing training and business mentoring services consistent with the terms of the Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines (see Part C clause 14 and Part D clause 21)
- manage the allocated budget and number of allocated Participant places
- inform the Department of any issues with the implementation of the A to B Program and assist with managing risks
notify the Department of potential financial viability issues which may impact on the Broker’s ability to continue to deliver all or any of the contracted services

• collect data from Providers and provide it to the Department as required

• retain files for a period of seven (7) years from the date the last action was completed.

25. A to B Program Providers

Providers may be Brokers delivering A to B Program services directly or entities subcontracted by Brokers to deliver some or all of the service delivery functions under the A to B Program. Providers must meet the following minimum standards as they apply to their subcontracts, including:

• managing subcontracted services within allocated places or budget

• provide Participants with high quality services tailored to their needs

• meet all reporting requirements according to contractual obligations

• address requests for information and resolve complaints

• ensure staff who provide any services under the A to B Program are aware of their obligation to protect confidentiality of Participants and record and protect information that relates to Participants’ involvement in the A to B Program

• immediately advise Brokers of any management and performance issues that may affect the delivery of A to B Program services including, but not limited to:
  o Participant withdrawals (within one week of the withdrawal)
  o any inability to meet obligations under their subcontracts with Brokers
  o financial viability issues
  o suspected or alleged fraudulent activities or other potential contraventions of the law
  o conflicts of interest

• ensure the Department and Brokers have access to their premises and records for the purposes of monitoring the A to B Program services and ensuring compliance with their Broker’s Deed of Standing Offer, Order and these Guidelines

• retain files for a period of seven (7) years from the date the last action was completed.

26. Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research & Tertiary Education

The Department is responsible for the overall management of the A to B Program and will:

• enter into Orders with A to B Program Brokers for the procurement of services to administer and deliver the A to B Program

• manage the A to B Program including allocation of budget and Participant numbers to Brokers

• manage Deeds of Standing Offers and Orders with Brokers including relationship management, monitoring performance, contract variations, payment of invoices

• manage compliance with contractual obligations including reporting requirements

• investigate complaints regarding the A to B Program, Brokers and/or Providers and take action where required
investigate allegations or evidence of fraud or other malpractice by Brokers and/or Providers and take action as required

- monitor the performance of Brokers, program delivery and Participant outcomes.
- evaluate the A to B Program.

27. Performance Management

The Department will undertake performance monitoring of Brokers. This will ensure funds are used appropriately and Brokers are meeting their contractual responsibilities. Monitoring also provides the opportunity to identify policy and delivery issues.

Monitoring may include on-site monitoring, targeted monitoring, desk-top monitoring and evaluations and reviews.

The Department will review Brokers’ reports and other monitoring information to evaluate the outcomes against the objectives of the A to B Program, including whether a Participant’s needs have been met.
## Glossary of Terms – definitions and explanations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A to B Program Brokers</td>
<td>An A to B Program Broker is an organisation which has entered into a Deed of Standing Offer and Order with the Department to undertake administration and delivery of A to B Program services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to B Program Participants</td>
<td>An eligible tradesperson who has been approved by an A to B Program Provider to receive training and business mentoring services under the <em>Apprentice to Business Owner – business skills and mentoring</em> program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A to B Program Providers</td>
<td>An A to B Program Provider is an entity which has entered into a contract with an A to B Program Broker to deliver one or more A to B Program services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Mentoring</td>
<td>Business mentoring is assistance and advice provided by a person with proven business acumen and experience in planning, marketing, finance, accounting, delivery, compliance and other relevant business skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deed of Standing Offer</td>
<td>The Deed of Standing Offer is the agreement entered into between the Department and organisations placed on the A to B Program Panel for the provision of A to B Program services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible Qualification</td>
<td>Eligible qualifications are nationally recognised qualifications in small business management such as Certificate III in Micro Business Operations (BSB30307) or Certificate IV in Small Business Management (BSB40407) or a relevant trade business management qualification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Skills Needs List</td>
<td>The National Skills Needs List (NSNL) identifies trades that are deemed to be in National skills shortage based on research conducted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The Australian Apprenticeships website provides further information about the NSNL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationally Recognised Qualifications</td>
<td>A nationally recognised qualification is an Australian Qualifications Framework qualification, as specified by a nationally endorsed training package or an accredited course that provides training for that qualification. Only Registered Training Organisations that meet government quality standards such as TAFEs, private providers and vocational divisions of universities can provide nationally recognised training. Nationally recognised qualifications include accredited courses and endorsed training package qualifications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>An Order entered into by the Department and A to B Program Broker to form a contract for the provision of services in accordance with the Deed of Standing Offer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition of Current Competencies</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of current competencies is the assessment of a person’s current capacity to perform. It applies if an individual can demonstrate that they hold a competency as a result of past relevant training and current experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition of Prior Learning</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning assesses an individual’s formal, non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a VET qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Registered Training Organisations</strong></td>
<td>Registered Training Organisations are those training providers registered by the national regulator, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), or, in some cases, a state regulator in accordance with the National Standards for the Regulation of VET within a defined scope of registration. A training organisation must be registered in order to deliver and assess Nationally Recognised Training and issue nationally recognised qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevant Laws</strong></td>
<td>In administering the Program, the Department, approved organisations and subcontracted entities are bound by the provision of:</td>
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<td>• Privacy Act 1988</td>
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<td>• Freedom of Information Act 1982</td>
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<td>• Racial Discrimination Act 1975</td>
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<td>• Sex Discrimination Act 1984</td>
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<td>• Disability Discrimination Act 1992</td>
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<td>• Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986</td>
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<td>• Ombudsman Act 1976</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Approved organisations should familiarise themselves with these Acts and seek their own legal advice to ensure compliance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undischarged Bankrupt</strong></td>
<td>An undischarged bankrupt is a person who has been declared bankrupt and has hence been under the control of the Bankruptcy Act 1966, and has not yet been discharged by the relevant trustee or official from further obligations to repay debts under the Act. This also applies to a person who is declared bankrupt in another country</td>
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Attachment A – Privacy Notice

Apprentice to Business Owner – business skills and mentoring program (A to B Program)

I understand that:

a) my personal information will be collected for the purposes of training and assessment, business mentoring support, reporting, administration and evaluation of the Program;

b) my personal information may be disclosed to the following:

- the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE);
- other Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments; and

c) the purposes of the above disclosure may include:

- reporting, administration, and evaluation of the Program;
- verifying or reporting on my progress in the Program; and

d) my personal information may also be disclosed to another party without my consent where authorised or required by law.

I consent to release of my personal information for the above purposes.

.................................................. ..................................................
(Signature of participant) (Date)

If the above statement was read to you, please indicate the person who assisted you.

.................................................. ..................................................
(Name) (Relationship)