



Psychotherapy & Counselling
Federation of Australia

Specialist Training Requirements for Accreditation 2018

DRAFT

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INTRODUCTION

Counsellor and Psychotherapist education courses prepare people to be effective professionals in counselling and psychotherapy. Accreditation by PACFA under the Specialist Training Standards 2018 set out the standards for quality courses that further prepare counsellors and/or psychotherapists to become area specialists and be recognised for their specialist training.

The role of the Education Program Accreditation Committee (EPAC) in relation to specialist training is to ensure that specialist training programs accredited by PACFA meet the Specialist Training Standards 2018 and conform with the Specialist Training Requirements for Accreditation. PACFA policy requires periodic review of accredited programs and of PACFA's Requirements. The educational experiences required by PACFA's Specialist Training Standards and Requirements for Accreditation are based on due notice and consultation with the professional community and represent collective and informed judgment about their relevancy and appropriateness.

These Requirements are not intended to discourage creativity on the part of training providers. Providers wishing to justify variations from the Requirements for their course may submit statements of rationale as part of their submission. EPAC will determine whether those variations accomplish the outcomes that the Specialist Training Standards and Requirements for Accreditation are designed to ensure.

Background

In April 2018, the PACFA Council adopted new training standards based on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) standards and levels of learning. The AQF framework is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. The decision to align PACFA's Training Standards (2018) with the AQF was aimed at raising standards to improve opportunities for professional recognition of PACFA-registered counsellors and psychotherapists as providers of mental health care in Australia.

During the development of the 2018 Training Standards, it was recognised that there are many small but high-quality training providers of specialty counselling or psychotherapy education whose programs would not fit within the AQF Framework, but which nonetheless provide high quality specialist training. The Specialist Training Accreditation Scheme, which includes the Specialist Training Standards and Requirements for Accreditation, was therefore created, in part, to provide a pathway of recognition for these high-quality specialised training courses. Accreditation of specialist training also has benefits for clinicians, the public, the profession, and other specialist programs through the creation of a Specialist Training Accreditation Scheme.

Purpose of Requirements for Accreditation

The Specialist Training Requirements for Accreditation are intended to promote consistent quality and excellence in specialist education and training in psychotherapy and counselling. Accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental process of self-review and external review intended to evaluate, enhance, and publicly recognise quality counselling and psychotherapy education and training programs.

Accreditation is intended to protect the interests of trainees, benefit the public, and improve the quality of teaching, learning, research, and professional practice. PACFA seeks to encourage organisational freedom, ongoing improvement of education and training programs, sound educational experimentation, and constructive innovation.

The accreditation process involves judging the degree to which a specialist training course has met the PACFA Specialist Training Standards and Requirements for Accreditation and achieved the goals and objectives of its stated training model. PACFA as the accrediting body should not explicitly prescribe the educational goals of a course or the processes by which they should be reached; rather, it should judge the degree to which a program achieves outcomes and goals that are consistent with its stated training model and with the requirements contained in this document and the PACFA Specialist Training Standards.

Graduates of PACFA accredited specialist training programs can have confidence that their specialist training meets PACFA's standards for quality and provides them with appropriate preparation for professional practice in the chosen area of specialist practice. Where the graduate has completed other training that meets the PACFA Training Standards (2018), they may be eligible for PACFA membership or registration. Where an area of specialisation is covered by a specialist PACFA College, graduates of accredited specialist training programs who also meet the PACFA Training Standards (2018) may be eligible for recognition through the PACFA Colleges.

Eligibility

Specialist Training programs seeking accreditation by PACFA should ensure that the content and design of the program aligns with PACFA's Specialist Training Standards and Requirements as set out in this document.

EPAC defines a course as a structured sequence of educational and clinical experiences for which accreditation by PACFA is sought. In the context of the Specialist Training Standards and these Requirements for Accreditation, "courses" are offered by an identifiable program team. Courses seeking accreditation must have a comprehensive program rationale and objectives or overall vision of what the course seeks to achieve underpinned by a coherent body of professional knowledge.

EPAC recognises that alternative instruction methods (for example, distance learning) are currently used in many counsellor education courses. The following principles apply when evaluating these:

1. Accreditation for courses will be based on their demonstrated compliance with the PACFA Specialist Training Standards (2018);
2. Courses that use alternative instruction methods will be evaluated with the same standards for accreditation as courses that employ more traditional methods; and
3. Courses that use alternative instruction methods are subject to the same level of review as programs that employ more traditional methods.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCREDITATION

The PACFA Specialist Training Standards 2018 are the criteria for the preparation of specialist professional counsellors and/or psychotherapists. Applicants seeking accreditation must document how each course meets the PACFA Specialist Training Standards 2018 and these Specialist Training Requirements for Accreditation 2018.

1. Specialist Training Standards 2018

Applicants are required to address all standards in the Specialist Training Standards 2018. Please refer to the Specialist Training Standards 2018 as you complete the Application Form.

2. Education and Training Provider Requirements

The following section sets out the requirements to be met relating to the Education and Training Provider, its Information Resources, Organisation and Administration, Quality Mechanisms and Program Evaluation. Please refer to this section as you complete the Application Form.

PACFA will assess the Specialist Training Requirements of those Education and Training Providers who are not TEQSA/ ASQA accredited to ensure they have appropriate arrangements in place for the staffing, facilities, organisational and information resources, and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure high quality specialist education.

If the Education and Training Provider offering the course is formally accredited by a State or National accrediting body in the vocational or higher education sector (TEQSA/ASQA), then the information requested in this part of the application is not required.

2.1 Education and Training Providers

- A. Education and Training Providers who do not have TEQSA/ASQA accreditation and who wish to accredit specialised counselling or psychotherapy training courses through PACFA will need to demonstrate that they have met appropriate standards with sufficient systems of quality and academic governance to enable professional level specialised training.
- B. The current training calendar, brochure, handbook, catalogue or bulletin accurately describes the program team and each program offered, including admissions criteria, minimum program requirements, policy requirements (for example, assessment and grading policy), and financial information.
- C. The course team is clearly identified as part of the education and training offerings and has primary responsibility for the preparation of trainees in the program. If more than one program team has responsibility for the preparation of trainees in the program, the respective areas of responsibility and the relationships among and between them must be clearly defined.
- D. Cooperative relationships exist between the course team and other course teams that contribute to the professional preparation of trainees in the program as well as off-campus professional and community resources.

- E. The education and training provider is committed to providing sufficient support to ensure continuity, quality, and effectiveness in all of the program's learning environments.
- F. The education and training provider gives encouragement and support for course staff to actively participate in professional organisations and activities (for example attendance and participation in professional conferences, registration with PACFA and leadership positions in PACFA or in PACFA Member Associations.)
- G. The education and training provider makes available to trainees in the course support services including referral to counselling and psychotherapy services where appropriate.

2.2 Information Resources

- A. Access to information and other learning resources is appropriate for scholarly inquiry, study, and research by program staff and trainees.
- B. The institution provides support to course staff and trainees to ensure access to information systems.

2.3 Organisation and Administration

- A. Course descriptions and requirements are published and disseminated to all prospective trainees.
- B. A clear procedure for responding to inquiries of prospective trainees has been identified and carried out.
- C. The program admissions criteria, as well as selection and retention procedures, are distributed to prospective trainees. These criteria must meet the minimum requirements of the PACFA Specialist Training Standards. These include consideration of:
 - 1. Completion of previous education or work experience in counselling and/or psychotherapy;
If trainees do not have previous education or work experience, trainees have been assessed for:
 - 1. Potential success in forming effective interpersonal relationships in individual and small-group contexts;
 - 2. Openness to self-examination and personal and professional self-development.
- D. An appropriately delegated authority within the organisation makes admission decision recommendations.
- E. Prior to, or at the beginning of the first term of enrolment in the training program, the following should occur for all trainees:
 - 1. A handbook is disseminated or material is posted on-line that includes the program's:
 - a. academic appeal policy;
 - b. retention policy explaining procedures for possible trainee remediation and/or dismissal from the program;

- c. program rationale and program objectives.
- F. The program has procedures for disseminating current information to all trainees enrolled in the program, and associated personnel.
- G. The program has a clear grievance procedure to resolve trainee complaints.
- J. Trainees receive appropriate academic advice throughout their enrolment in the program. Trainees follow a planned program of study. The planned program of study identifies the following:
 - 1. Program prerequisite educational and/or professional experiences;
 - 2. Core educational requirements;
 - 3. Specialised educational experiences;
 - 4. Supervised practical experience, if required; and
 - 5. Appropriate elective educational requirements.

2.4 Quality Mechanisms and Program Evaluation

- A. Course objectives and learning outcomes are developed and revised when necessary through review on a regular schedule. This evaluation process is based on input from program staff, current and former trainees, and personnel in cooperating agencies.
- B. The course staff conducts a developmental, systematic assessment of each trainees' progress throughout the program, including consideration of the trainee's academic performance, professional development, and personal development.
- C. Trainees have regular and systematic opportunities to formally evaluate staff and the trainees' educational experiences.
- F. Provision of results of trainee course evaluations to staff.

ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Please refer to the document Process for Reviewing Specialised Training Courses in Psychotherapy and Counselling **reproduced at Appendix 1**. This document outlines the process for assessing applications and the accreditation process.

APPENDIX 1

Education Program Accreditation Committee

Process for reviewing Specialised Training Programs in Psychotherapy and Counselling

INTRODUCTION

The Psychotherapy & Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) reviews specialist psychotherapy and counselling training programs to ensure that they meet the criteria required by the PACFA Specialist Training Standards.

Responsibility for reviewing specialist psychotherapy and counselling programs is delegated to the Education Program Accreditation Committee (EPAC).

This document sets out the process to be followed when reviewing a PACFA-accredited specialist training program.

1. APPLICATIONS FOR SPECIALIST TRAINING ACCREDITATION AND REACCREDITATION

- 1.1 An application for specialist training accreditation or reaccreditation of a specialist course is first received by the PACFA office. Payment of the non-refundable application fee should accompany the application.
- 1.2 The PACFA Office forwards the application to the Accreditation Advisor for a first assessment. The Accreditation Advisor will complete a Conflict of Interest Form.
- 1.3 A second Assessor will be sourced from EPAC. The EPAC Assessor will also complete a Conflict of Interest Form.
- 1.3 The application will be assessed initially by the Accreditation Advisor and EPAC Assessor unless there is a conflict of interest (See Section 3).

The Accreditation Advisor and EPAC Assessor will either:

- Undertake the accreditation application review and make a recommendation to the EPAC Chair and EPAC on the submission (See section 4, 6 and 7).

OR

- Undertake the accreditation application review and site visit and make a recommendation to the EPAC Chair and EPAC on the submission.

OR

- After consultation with EPAC, inform the Applicant that further development of the application is required before submitting the documentation to a panel.

- 1.4 If further development of the application is required, the Applicant will be invited to submit amendments to the application within twelve months of the date of original submission. These changes will then be further assessed by the Accreditation Advisor, EPAC Assessor and EPAC.
- 1.5 Applications remain current for a period of twelve months from the date of original submission. After that period the Accreditation Advisor and EPAC chair will seek endorsement from EPAC to refuse the application. A new application fee would be required for any re-submission after the twelve-month period.
- 1.6 Training providers are asked to lodge their applications as early as possible, particularly if there is an important target date that they wish to meet. If amendments or a site visit are required, the application process can take three to six months to complete.

2. REQUESTS FOR EXEMPTION FROM CLIENT-CONTACT HOURS

- 2.1 A minimum of 15 hours of supervised face-to-face counselling or psychotherapy practice in the specialist training modality is a required component of specialist training courses; however, training providers may seek an exemption from this requirement.
- 2.2 Requests for exemption should be made on the initial application. The request should detail a rationale for not including supervised practice as part of the specialist training program and an alternative pathway(s) to supervised practice that can demonstrate trainees have developed competence to practice in the specialist modality or area of practice.

3. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 3.1 If the Applicant, Accreditation Advisor, or EPAC Assessor believe there is a potential conflict of interest that should prevent the Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor from assessing the application, they may request that the EPAC Chair to appoint another member of EPAC to assess the application in their place. If a dispute arises in this process, the matter is referred to EPAC for a decision.
- 3.2 Once the appointment of an alternate Assessor from EPAC is confirmed, the alternate Assessor will complete a Conflict of Interest Form and return it to the PACFA Office.
- 3.3 The alternate Assessor will assess the application as described in section 1.3 to 1.5.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY OF ASSESSORS

- 4.1 The Assessors are accountable to EPAC and their first duty is to ensure that the review of the accreditation application and any site visit is conducted according to this documented process.
- 4.2 Any concerns which emerge during the review, which relate to either the review process or PACFA documentation or policy, must be communicated to the EPAC Chair.

5. SITE VISITS

- 5.1 Site visits may be a part of the Specialised Training Accreditation and Re-Accreditation process. They are arranged by the Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor in consultation with the

nominated person in the organisation applying for accreditation. The site visit may be attended by either the Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor, or both Assessors.

- 5.2 The Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor will negotiate an agreed schedule with the nominated person for the site visit.
- 5.3 The site visit may include meetings with program staff, administrators, advisors, and trainees (current and/or recent graduates). The training provider is expected to ensure that full coverage of requesting program staff and trainees/graduates are represented at the site visit.
- 5.4 The site visit will also involve review of the site and resources, such as libraries or other training facilities.
- 5.5 A half day or less will normally be sufficient for an accreditation visit, if required. Training conducted at multiple sites may require variations from this schedule.

6. RECOMMENDATION OPTIONS

- 6.1 After the site visit, the Accreditation Advisor and EPAC Assessor will make one of the following recommendation options to EPAC, which will then follow the process in Section 7 to arrive at a final decision:
 - i) A recommendation for full accreditation for up to seven years for courses accredited with TEQSA or ASQA, or offered by a TEQSA registered Self-Accrediting Authority, or full accreditation for five years for other courses, subject to no significant structural changes in the course concerned for the duration of the accreditation, or a fall in standards of education and/or resources during the accreditation period.
 - ii) A recommendation for conditional accreditation with a requirement for certain issues of concern being addressed within a period to be specified. In such circumstances, the period of accreditation may be limited to less than five years. The training provider may also be required to furnish a report to EPAC at prescribed intervals, outlining progress in meeting the conditions.
 - iii) A recommendation to refuse accreditation. In such cases, an adverse report plus the full application documentation will be referred to EPAC for a full review.

7. PROCESSES TO BE FOLLOWED AFTER REVIEW

- 7.1 After review of the application and site visit, if required, by the Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor, the following process will be followed:
 - i) At the end of the review process, the Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor prepares a report and recommendation for EPAC and forwards it to the Chair of EPAC.
 - ii) Upon receipt, the report will be sent to the training provider with a request for comment on matters of fact only within two (2) weeks.

- iii) A training provider may apply for an extension of time beyond two weeks but not exceeding four weeks to the EPAC Chair, providing reasons for the proposed extension of time. The EPAC Chair will normally grant the extension.
- iv) The Assessors' report and the training provider's response are presented to EPAC which then makes a final decision.
- v) The EPAC Chair, Accreditation Advisor or EPAC Assessor, or nominee, writes to the training provider informing them of the outcome of the deliberations of EPAC.

8. REPORTS OF REVIEWS

8.1 The following guidelines must be used in the preparation of the report:

- i) The report must focus upon the degree to which the training provider meets the Specialist Training Standards and the Specialist Training Requirements for Accreditation. The Assessors' judgement should be based on the information provided by the training provider and other interested parties, and on material collected through discussions and observations of the course.
- ii) A recommendation of provisional accreditation must be accompanied by clearly stated requirements for change and the criteria by which achievements of the changes will be judged.
- iii) The review is a retrospective process. However, it may be appropriate for the report to include appropriate prospective comments.

9. CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

- 9.1 Accreditations are normally for up to five years from the date of accreditation, or for up to seven years for courses that are already accredited by TEQSA or ASQA accreditation.
- 9.2 Unless otherwise stated, accreditation applies only to the specified training program.
- 9.3 Courses are accredited as structured, with the content at the date of accreditation and based on the information provided by the Education and Training Provider, which must be current at the date of accreditation. Any conditions to accreditation are outlined in the Accreditation Advisor's or Assessor's report and letter of accreditation. While PACFA expects, and accepts, some variation over time (as the training course develops), details of significant structural changes must be notified to PACFA through the Accreditation Advisor immediately, who will then consider the impact of the changes on the accreditation.

10. SIGNIFICANT STRUCTURAL CHANGE

A significant change can be a change in the duration and structure of a course, a change in objectives, or delivery mode, a substantial change in philosophy, emphasis or physical location of a course, or significant changes forced by reduced resources, particularly in staffing levels. The normal evolution of courses, in response to feedback and content review, would not be considered as a major change.

No more than 25% of course content and structure may change during the period of accreditation; if more than 25% changes a new application for accreditation must be filed.

11. APPEALS AGAINST THE DECISION

Should an institution disagree with the accreditation decision, an appeal setting out the basis for the disagreement may be sent to the PACFA CEO within one month after PACFA has advised the institution of the recommendations confirmed by EPAC. The appeal will be forwarded to the PACFA Board for action. The appeal will be reviewed, and final determination of the accreditation decision will be made.