

Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia



PSYCHOTHERAPY

Training Standards



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1. Background

1.1 Purpose of the Psychotherapy Training Standards

The purpose of this document is to provide details of the requirements and standards that are to be met for formation as a psychotherapist and for recognition by PACFA's College of Psychotherapy as an Accredited Psychotherapist.

PACFA's Psychotherapy Training Standards are designed to provide a flexible, nationally consistent, high-quality framework to recognise, support and further advance the distinct profession of psychotherapy within PACFA and in Australia more broadly. These training standards and the volume of learning included within them deliver the requirements necessary to recognising psychotherapist formation as a distinct training approach and to support development of professional psychotherapy training in Australia.

In line with [The Australian Qualification Framework](#), these Standards aim to:

- Accommodate the diversity of training both now and in the future
- Support, develop and maintain accessible pathways to education
- Provide a framework for regulation across education and training sector
- Enhance the national and international mobility of students, graduates and workers
- Align with international education standards and frameworks.

The Training Standards serve as an umbrella embracing a range of psychotherapy modalities and hence are not written in language that reflects one particular modality at the expense of others. Their function is to define the minimum training and standards required for recognition as a PACFA Accredited Psychotherapist.

1.2 Relationship to other PACFA documents

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- The PACFA Training Standards 2020
- The PACFA Code of Ethics

The PACFA Training Standards refer to "In-Training" minimum requirements for academic content, skill development, and client contact experience (placements) for both counsellors and psychotherapists. There are three pathways to PACFA membership and registration for practitioners whose training meets or is assessed as equivalent to the Training Standards 2020 (see Appendix 1).

Membership of PACFA is available to psychotherapists through all three of the Membership Pathways detailed in Appendix 2. When joining PACFA, applicants are assessed against the PACFA Training Standards or for equivalence with them.

It is a membership condition for all psychotherapists to comply with the PACFA Code of Ethics.

The requirements for formation as a Psychotherapist as detailed in the Psychotherapy Training Standards are additional requirements over and above those necessary for PACFA membership. Recognition by PACFA as an Accredited Psychotherapist is available to psychotherapists who meet the requirements of the Psychotherapy Training Standards.

These requirements may be satisfied by various pathways and it is incumbent on the applicant to demonstrate this with relevant documentary evidence. Any one psychotherapy training provider is *not* expected to provide or meet all aspects of the volume of learning to be fulfilled for recognition as a PACFA Accredited Psychotherapist.

1.3 What is Psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy sits within a group of professions including counselling, psychology, social work, pastoral care, mental health nursing and psychiatry, whose areas of concern are the conception and experience of mental health, mental illness and emotional well-being.

At the core of the distinct profession of psychotherapy is a focus on the significance and transformation of individual, interpersonal and communal processes both in and out of awareness.

A psychotherapist has expertise in working through and with the experience of being with their client, relating to the way the client feels, thinks about, acts in and perceives their world. The purpose of psychotherapeutic work is to embrace change and healing in the life of the client in accordance with their values and aspirations.

Psychotherapy is practice that relies on the self of the practitioner and the development and exploration of a therapeutic relationship. Psychotherapists seek to develop critical awareness of their contributions and those of their client to the therapeutic field during their encounter. As change is life-long, psychotherapists are continually in formation, to enable their work with the complexities of the psychotherapeutic relationship.

1.4 General principles

PACFA's College of Psychotherapy is a non-modality specific College. The following principles apply to psychotherapy trainings recognised by PACFA.

- i) Trainings should:
 - recognise the existence of different psychotherapies, known as 'modalities';
 - promote respectful understanding of differences and similarities between theories.
- ii) Trainings should be informed by a philosophical framework, theory and evidence-informed practice.
- iii) The therapeutic alliance is key to all forms of psychotherapy and facilitates the opportunity for the client to experience change and self-reflective understanding.
- iv) A relationship-based method is common to all approaches, whether as the main medium of work or as the necessary background framework.
- v) The qualities of the practitioner in interaction with the qualities of the client are seen as essential to effective work. Adequate training of the psychotherapist is necessary for intense and complex work.
- vi) Change for a client is self-determined, self-directed and continues across a lifetime.
- vii) Exploration of the movement and interplay between the conscious, unconscious and/or different realms of experience is necessary for healing, growth and change.
- viii) The psychotherapist is required to be in supervision with an appropriately qualified supervisor on an ongoing basis.
- ix) The psychotherapist is required to undertake personal therapy as part of their formation as a psychotherapist.
- x) Inclusion within its field is both longer-term and shorter-term work, and work with different numbers and groupings of clients. This would be dependent on appropriate training for individual, couple or group work.

2. Psychotherapist Formation

The formation of a psychotherapist requires a level and depth of training involving three distinct aspects:

- Training
- Supervised practice
- Personal therapeutic work

The formation of a psychotherapist necessarily requires the integration of these three aspects. In most instances the three aspects of formation will occur concurrently, though are not necessarily included within or provided by the training program or a single training program.

A key aspect of Psychotherapy training is developing relational depth within the training, one's personal work and work with clients and supervision. The outcome is the development of a practitioner who can critically reflect on and articulate their practice.

The process of formation is generic to psychotherapy training; different modalities have additional specific requirements.

3. Volume of learning

The volume of learning in these standards has been benchmarked against relevant international standards for psychotherapy training.

The training for Psychotherapists shall be at a level and depth equivalent to a Bachelor's Degree or above and is understood to be a specialist form of training.

The length of training shall be appropriate to permit the consolidation and integration of theoretical knowledge and clinical experience. The training shall not be shorter than three years and may take place over an extended period of time.

Under the Recognition of Prior Learning Pathway if training is shorter than 3 years, additional training would need to be demonstrated to make up equivalence of 3 years.

Any one psychotherapy training provider is *not* expected to provide or meet all aspects of the volume of learning to be fulfilled for recognition as a PACFA Accredited Psychotherapist.

If the required volume of learning is not completed during the initial psychotherapy training, psychotherapist formation can take place through additional training, supervised practice and personal therapy.

The formation process needs to meet the following minimum requirements for volume of learning:

- i) A minimum of 450 hours of direct training contact (theory and practice). This is made up of attendance at:
 - face to face training
 - training via online synchronous training
- ii) A minimum 200 supervised face to face client contact hours in psychotherapy during training. Supervision during training should be at least 50% individual and 50% group supervision (group supervision not more than six members).

Supervised practice must be completed and assessed as successful by the training provider. Successful completion of supervised practice is required to be evidenced by a log signed by the responsible supervisor(s).

- iii) A minimum of 150 hours of personal therapeutic work consistent with the training approach normally undertaken concurrently with or within their training.

The therapy must be with a qualified psychotherapist and should be in a theoretical orientation aligned with the training.

Under the Recognition of Prior Learning pathway some therapy completed prior to training may be acceptable but it is expected that trainees will be in therapy throughout training.

In addition to the above requirements, there are additional requirements to be recognised as a PACFA Accredited Psychotherapist. For details see Appendix 2.

4. Admission

In addition to the requirements in the PACFA General Training Standards, trainees in psychotherapy need to:

- i) Be admitted via a selection process including a face to face interview;
- ii) Demonstrate that they have personal qualities suitable for the psychotherapy profession.

5. Training

5.1 Philosophy of practice

Psychotherapy training programs make a clear statement of the philosophy of practice underpinning the course and give evidence that the program meets the Psychotherapy Training Standards.

This philosophy of theory and practice includes:

- i) A model of the person and mind;
- ii) A model of human development informed by an understanding of cultural and gender diversity;
- iii) A model of human change and ways in which change can be facilitated;
- iv) A model of therapeutic relationship;
- v) A set of clinical concepts to relate theory to practice.

5.2 Experiential learning

Experiential learning is a core process in psychotherapy training and is to be distinguished from participating in practical skills exercises (such as role-play or simulation exercises). It involves learning through reflection on our own moment by moment experience and awareness. In psychotherapy, learning emerges from the lived experience of the psychotherapy modality as the psychotherapy trainee engages in their own personal psychotherapeutic process.

Experiential learning for the psychotherapist in training supports trainees in integrating and applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations that present themselves within the relational dynamics of the training process.

5.3 Psychotherapy competencies

Psychotherapy training will ensure trainees:

- i) Are able to articulate a personal theoretical orientation to psychotherapy and apply this through evidence-informed clinical practice with skill and creativity;
- ii) Have an in-depth, knowledgeable and critical understanding of at least one psychotherapeutic model;
- iii) Are aware of current theory and research and able to use sound clinical reasoning to inform their psychotherapeutic practice;
- iv) Are knowledgeable and skilled in determining when psychotherapy is and is not indicated;
- v) Are able to integrate theory and practice.

5.4 Psychotherapy curriculum

Psychotherapy Trainings will ensure trainees have an understanding of client experiences and perspectives including:

- i) An understanding of social, economic and political context to the work of psychotherapy;
- ii) A critical understanding of cultural, racial, socio-economic, gendered, heteronormative and disability bias in the theory and culture;
- iii) Knowledge, sensitivity, and understanding of general and specific issues and challenges that impact individuals, couples, families, organisations and communities due to inequalities and discrimination;
- iv) An understanding of human development and sexuality, including the place of psychosexual issues impacting on human wellbeing and understanding of when to refer on;
- v) Awareness and courage to communicate and take action to reduce the harm and trauma caused by discriminatory practice and insensitivity to power differentials within therapeutic, service provision, training and supervisory frames.

Psychotherapy trainings will include knowledge, understanding and application of the following in addition to principles of ethical conduct:

Therapeutic relationship

Psychotherapy training will ensure trainees are:

- i) Able to establish and maintain a therapeutic alliance;
- ii) Skilled in the safe and effective therapeutic use of the relationship between psychotherapist and client;
- iii) Able to be emotionally present, attuned to self, client and context;
- iv) Able to tolerate ambiguity, uncertainty and anxiety in relation to the psychotherapeutic process.

Human development

Psychotherapy training will ensure trainees are:

- i) Knowledgeable and have critical understanding of human development in the individual, group and social context. This includes family, group and political contexts over the human lifespan;
- ii) Able to use this knowledge therapeutically to assist clients in their personal growth, including working with developmental delays and disruptions.

Human change

Psychotherapy training will ensure trainees can:

- i) Articulate their theory of the human mind which may include:
 - Different levels of consciousness within the human mind/psyche;
 - Intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics;
 - Unconscious, altered, and unreflective states.
- ii) Articulate how theory informs their psychotherapy practice by:
 - Maintaining awareness of the processes and effects of unconscious, unaware or unreflective bias in the therapeutic relationship;
 - Actively working with aspects further from awareness;
 - Engaging in the practice of valuing and sharing internal and lived experiences.

Wellbeing

Psychotherapy training will ensure trainees are aware of the following and able to use that awareness to support their work with clients:

- i) The relationship between body, mind and spirit in human wellbeing
- ii) The landscape of human emotions
- iii) Human potential and resilience
- iv) Human distress in the context of society.

5.5 Psychotherapy assessment and Intervention

Psychotherapy Trainings will ensure trainees are:

- i) Able to identify and apply models of assessment appropriate to the modality used. This includes learning how to recognise mental health issues and difficulties, understand the psychotherapy relationship with mental health systems, relevant mental health services and legislation, and understand when and how to refer a client on.
- ii) Able to effectively use psychotherapeutic interventions suited to different stages of treatment;
- iii) Able to deepen and intensify the psychotherapeutic process as appropriate, keeping attuned to the level of intervention suited to the client;
- iv) Able to monitor therapeutic progress, being familiar with case formulations and diagnostic processes in psychotherapy;
- v) Able to manage the therapeutic setting including the boundaries of time and physical boundaries;
- vi) Skilled, knowledgeable and understanding of multi-disciplinary treatment, in relationship to other professionals and non-professionals included in client care;
- vii) Able to identify with the client(s) the end point of therapeutic intervention and conduct an appropriate ending process and in all circumstances work toward a respectful ending.

6. Research

Psychotherapy trainings will encompass principles of psychotherapy research in order to enhance the trainee's own practice. This will include:

- i) knowledge and understanding of basic research approaches and techniques, and their application to the investigation and evaluation of psychotherapeutic process and outcomes.
- ii) Learning to read, understand and critically evaluate research in relation to psychotherapy and have a working knowledge of research relevant to their modality and their own practice.

7. Supervised practice

- i) As part of psychotherapy training, psychotherapy trainees will engage in supervised psychotherapy practice with clients.
- ii) It is expected that a substantial proportion of the supervision requirement (at least half) is completed as individual supervision.
- iii) The supervised practice may be achieved through appropriately supported and supervised independent practice or in a practice placement or through a combination of these.
- iv) The supervised practice should be facilitated by supervisors who are qualified to supervise in the specialist modality or area of practice of the specialist psychotherapy training program.
- v) Training and ongoing professional development must include significant peer group and individual supervision. Supervision by an experienced psychotherapy practitioner should include reflective process and discussion of the experience of the psychotherapist when working with clients, exploration of inter-relational dynamics occurring between client, therapist and supervisor, as well as assessment, presentation, review, case formulation, and strategising on behalf of the client.

8. Personal therapeutic work

- i) The instrument of psychotherapy is the self of the therapist.
- ii) Over the period of psychotherapy training there is consistent personal psychotherapeutic work with a psychotherapist or a consistent psychotherapy group.
- iii) Personal therapeutic work takes place outside the training context. While it may be therapeutic, training which takes place in seminars, classes and workshop cannot be counted as hours of personal therapeutic work.
- iv) Personal therapeutic work is an ongoing commitment in the practicing life of a psychotherapist.
- v) Therapists have developed awareness of when their own psychotherapy is needed.

9. Training assessment

The following requirements apply to assessment in psychotherapy training:

- i) Assessment objectives ensure clinical and professional competency within the context of a chosen theoretical model and sound ethical practice. Modes and criteria of assessment will relate to these objectives.
- ii) Assessment procedures will be designed to ensure trainees can demonstrate fitness to practice as a psychotherapist.
- iii) Assessment methods ensure trainees achieve learning outcomes relevant to safe, effective practice as a psychotherapist.

- iv) Expectations relating to a psychotherapist's role as a professional in relation to their practice will be embedded in the assessment processes for both theoretical and practice elements of training.
- v) Trainers should provide transparency and accountability in their assessment processes.
- vi) Trainees should demonstrate not only knowledge of the model-specific theory but also an ability to apply this theory in competent clinical practice. Assessments could include:
 - demonstration of knowledge of theory through written assignments, oral presentations, case studies and contribution to class discussion; and
 - clinical skills via live supervision, recorded interviews (audio or audiovisual) and rigorous frequent one-to-one supervision.
- vii) Trainees should receive timely, relevant and detailed feedback on all assessment tasks.

10. Personal and Professional Development

Psychotherapists will:

- i) contribute to the development of the psychotherapy profession by, among other things, identifying and developing new knowledge and perspectives, sharing knowledge with others both formally and informally, and giving feedback and support to colleagues;
- ii) regularly update and review knowledge and skills concerning psychotherapy theories, techniques and outcomes, including evaluating relevant research for practice development.

11. Staffing

The following requirements apply to staffing for psychotherapy training programs:

- 11.1 Alongside those who have primary responsibility for the Psychotherapy Training Program, other educators and trainers with less or different training may enrich the learning environment with particular contributions.
- 11.2 The number of staff required to resource the teaching and learning within a program will vary depending on the size and structure of course. It is recommended that there are at least two staff members involved with any course, and that the staff to student ratio within the program is no more than 1:10. The range of qualifications and experience of academic staff should reflect the needs of the training program.
- 11.3 Training Staff
 - i) Training staff have qualifications in the psychotherapy modality of the training program. If there has been no qualification in the psychotherapy modality, they must have five years of supervised experience in the psychotherapy modality.
 - ii) Primary training staff and staff responsible for designing curriculum are psychotherapists who are able to be registered as clinical or full members of their relevant professional body.
 - iii) Training staff are concurrently engaged in practice in psychotherapy relevant to the modality or area of practice of the course they are teaching or have had extensive clinical experience sufficient to be registered as supervisors within their modality.

- iv) Training staff can demonstrate competence in facilitating adult learning, with some training or equivalent work experience in in-training delivery.
- v) Training staff adhere to and demonstrate ethical professional practice and support their application in trainees.
- vi) Training staff do not discriminate between trainees on the basis of gender identity, history or expression, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, intersex status, pregnancy and breastfeeding, class, race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, immigrant status, cultural background, faith/religion/spirituality, or any disability or belief that does not directly interfere with the competent fulfilment of their training role.
- vii) Trainees are regularly given the opportunity to provide feedback about the training staff and program. This feedback is made available to the organisation as a whole.

APPENDIX 1 – PACFA Membership Pathways

In accordance with the *PACFA Membership and Registration Requirements 2020*, there are three pathways to PACFA membership and registration for psychotherapists:

1. Accredited Training Pathway
2. Equivalent Training Pathway
3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Suitably qualified psychotherapists may join PACFA under the pathway that is most applicable to their training and formation.

APPENDIX 2 – Psychotherapist Accreditation Pathways

Applicants must meet the Psychotherapy Training Standards for accreditation by the College of Psychotherapy.

For each PACFA membership pathway, psychotherapist formation must be demonstrated to be eligible for recognition by the College of Psychotherapy as an Accredited Psychotherapist.

1. Accredited Training Pathway including psychotherapist formation
2. Equivalent Training Pathway including psychotherapist formation
3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) including psychotherapist formation

These accreditation pathways recognise professional formation involving time and depth of experience.

In addition to the in-training requirement detailed in these Psychotherapy Training Standards, the following additional requirements apply to be accredited by PACFA as a psychotherapist:

1. Post-qualifying supervised psychotherapy practice – 750 client contact hours as a psychotherapist and 75 individual hours of supervision with a psychotherapist supervisor
2. A written case to demonstrate psychotherapy core competencies with a long-term client.