



Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia

2024 Program accreditation standards review

Background paper

1. Overview of PACFA's accreditation function

1.1 What is PACFA's role?

The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) is the national peak body for the counselling, Indigenous healing practices and psychotherapy profession, representing more than 8100 members. PACFA provides self-regulation functions for the profession, including program accreditation, registration and a diverse range of member services.

One of PACFA's core functions includes ensuring that education providers delivering counselling and psychotherapy programs meet the *PACFA Training standards, 2022* and that individuals seeking registration and membership meet the *Registration and Associated registration standards* and are sufficiently competent and safe to practice.

1.2 What are the Training Standards, 2022?

The current *Training Standards* set out the minimum standards and requirements for a program of study delivered by a higher education provider to be accredited and for a professional to be registered and hold membership with PACFA.

The *2022 Training Standards* were developed by the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) and the Education Program Accreditation Committee in consultation with a range of stakeholders and ratified by the PACFA Board and Council. These standards are used for both the assessment of programs of study for accreditation and for individuals seeking registration and membership with PACFA.

The PSC undertook a further review of the standards which resulted in the separation of the professional standards for registration and membership from the training standards. These PACFA Board approved *Registration and Associated Registration Standards* (registration standards) were implemented in March 2023.

2. Information about the 2024 program accreditation standards review

2.1 What is the review about?

The 2024 review of the program accreditation standards is a major review focussed on updating the current standards. It aims to:

- Align the 2022 standards with contemporary educational practices, such as online education, to ensure that they are relevant and practical for current and future educational contexts.
- Integrate recent regulatory changes in the education sector, including those outlined in the Australian Qualifications Framework, to remain in step with the national education policies and guidelines.
- Consider government directions, such as the establishment of national standards, to ensure alignment with broader professional standards and expectations.

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- Benchmark against other health profession standards, both nationally and internationally to ensure standards are competitive and comprehensive.
- Be grounded in research and evidence with a focus on outcomes-based education, to emphasise the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the application and impact of these in practice settings, and to ensure that the standards not only reflect current best practice, but also effectively prepare practitioners for the counselling and psychotherapy profession.

Through this comprehensive review process, PACFA seeks to develop a set of program accreditation standards that are robust, forward-looking and outcome-focused, preparing graduates not just for the current professional landscape, but for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

2.2 Why is the review happening now?

The current suite of accreditation standards are essentially updated guidelines of the 2018 and 2020 Training Standards that predate PACFA's membership with the Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and NASRHP, and before the Australian Government announced its funding for a review with the intention to establish National Standards for counselling.

The NASRHP framework requires there to be a regular review of the program accreditation standards. To ensure good governance practice PACFA must, from time to time, review its standards and ensure that all relevant stakeholders have input into the review and development of accreditation standards through wide-ranging consultation.

While the current set of standards has served well, the evolving professional and educational landscapes necessitate timely review. There is also a need for the current standards to incorporate contemporary educational practice (e.g. online education) and encompass new regulatory changes in the education sector and Governmental directions.

In summary there is a need for the program accreditation standards to be reviewed to take account of broader developments in the health sector and in the regulation and quality assurance of higher education programs.

Further information regarding [NASRHP's evidence-based national framework of regulatory standards](#) can be found on the NASRHP website. Additionally, details regarding the [AHPA membership standards](#) can be accessed on the AHPA website.

2.3 How is the review being undertaken?

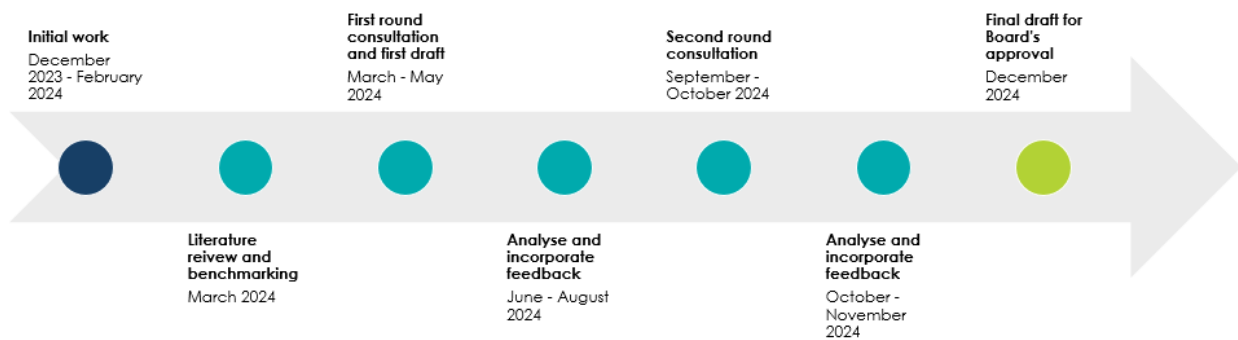
PACFA has set up a webpage for the review: [2024 Program accreditation standards review](#). The webpage includes a link to the consultation survey questions within this background paper. The survey will remain open until 25 March 2024. Please note that PACFA will not publish any individual survey responses but may publish a summary of the responses received, without identifying information.

The webpage also includes information regarding the online Zoom sessions that will be provided for stakeholders preferring to provide summarised thoughts and feedback in that format. Please use the below registration links which are also available on the webpage:

- [Thursday 7 March 2024 at 1:00pm - 2:30pm \(AEDT\)](#)
- [Thursday 14 March 2024 at 10:00am - 11:30am \(AEDT\)](#)

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The following timeline has been developed for the review of the program accreditation standards.



PACFA is aiming to complete the review of the program accreditation standards by December 2024.

2.4 What is out of the scope for the 2024 program accreditation standards review?

The review will not cover:

- accreditation processes and procedures,
- scope of practice for counsellors, Indigenous Healing Practitioners and psychotherapists,
- the development or review of professional competencies, and
- any matters to do with the assessment of individuals for PACFA membership or registration and/or the Registration and Associated Registration Standards.

3. First round public consultation

PACFA has recently commenced its review of the *PACFA Training standards, 2022* to ensure they meet current and emerging needs.

PACFA invites interested stakeholders to participate in the first round public consultation for this review which is open for three weeks from 4 March 2024 to 25 March 2024.

As part of this initial consultation phase, you are encouraged to submit responses to a survey related to key changes or ideas you believe may be necessary for consideration by the *Program accreditation standards review working party* (Working Party).

3.1 What is the purpose of the first round public consultation?

To enable stakeholders with an interest in the counselling and psychotherapy profession to comment on key issues regarding the review of the program accreditation standards for counselling and psychotherapy programs.

3.2 What pre-reading is required?

Please read this short paper and review the *PACFA Training standards, 2022* (standards).

3.3 What are the first round consultation questions?

PACFA welcomes responses to the consultation from anyone with relevant expertise and an interest in the Training Standards used to assess programs of study for the purposes of accreditation. Please use the questions to share feedback about the current program accreditation standards and any changes you feel are necessary.

We are asking the following questions:

First round public consultation questions

1. *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation standards?*

2. *What amendments should be made to ensure that the requirements for having a counselling and psychotherapy program accredited are expressed in a clear, concise and unambiguous manner?*

3. *Do the current accreditation standards cover the breadth of requirements that should be expected if a program is to equip a graduate with the minimum competencies needed to safely and competently practise as a counsellor?*

4. *If not, what changes are required and why?*

5. *Are the suggested courses/topics for counsellors and clinical experiences for counselling and psychotherapy students outlined in the Training Standards sufficient to guide education providers in the development of a curriculum for counselling and psychotherapy programs?*

6. *If not, what changes should be made to the subjects and clinical experiences outlined in the accreditation standards?*

7. *Are there any changes which should be made to the accreditation standards based on current research findings, government policy or relevant industry guidance?*

8. *How should higher education regulatory frameworks and other relevant frameworks be incorporated into the accreditation standards?*

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9. *To what extent are the accreditation standards clear about the evidence required of education providers to demonstrate compliance?*

10. *What changes to evidence requirements would provide a clearer demonstration of compliance with accreditation requirements?*

11. *How could the accreditation standards be articulated so that compliance is demonstrated by the achievement of the outcomes that are expected of graduates of a counselling and psychotherapy program?*

12. *How could the achievement of these outcomes be measured?*

What happens next?

Following the first round public consultation period, PACFA will analyse the feedback and identify key themes to present to the Working Party for consideration. This ensures the Working Party considers stakeholder perspectives, concerns and suggestions into the next phase of the review process.

PACFA is committed to using this feedback to inform and guide the subsequent stages of the review process, ensuring the draft accreditation standards reflect the needs and expectations of the profession. PACFA's commitment to transparency and inclusivity will guide us throughout the review journey and we aim to keep stakeholders informed of progress and opportunities for further engagement.

We look forward to receiving your feedback and thank you for your ongoing support.

If you have any queries regarding the consultation phase or the review process, please contact Nghi Robinson, Head of Education at standardsreview@pacfa.org.au.

