



Psychotherapy and Counselling  
Federation of Australia

# PACFA Training Standards (2022)

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# Preamble

**This document provides the requirements and standards to be met by all educational providers that deliver counselling and psychotherapy courses and programs accredited by PACFA.**

The PACFA core training standards are designed to provide a national high quality and inclusive educational framework for the counselling and psychotherapy professions. They outline minimum training requirements for developing skills and achieving competence by graduates entering the professions. The standards aim to ensure a quality learning experience for students, which supports developing professional identity and the skills, knowledge, and competence required for effective and ethical professional practice.

The *PACFA Indigenous Healing Practice Training Standards (2021)* exist as stand-alone guidelines for the accreditation of the Indigenous Healing Practice training programs.

The *PACFA Training Standards (2022)* were developed by the PACFA Professional Standards Committee and the Education Program Accreditation Committee in consultation with a range of stakeholders and ratified by the PACFA Board and Council. These standards are based on the previous Training Standards (2020 and 2018) and developed with recognition of the need to:

1. provide a framework that ensures that graduates of counselling and psychotherapy can deliver safe and ethical practice for the Australian community.
2. clarify the minimum essential learning content and volume that is consistent with the Australian Qualifications Framework
3. provide guidelines for developments in learning and teaching in the context of digital learning platforms and pedagogies
4. respond to the changing social and mental health and wellness needs of the Australian community
5. promote consistent quality, excellence and ongoing development of education and training in counselling and psychotherapy.

The counselling and psychotherapy professions draw on various theoretical and practice modalities. Consequently, these training standards were established to provide a minimum entry-level into the professions rather than entry to specific modalities. Different training providers may place additional requirements on students reflective of their training priorities. The minimum level of education and training for the counselling and psychotherapy professions is a Bachelor degree or Post Graduate Diploma with supervised practice experience as outlined in the following document. Training providers are encouraged to go beyond the minimum requirements and place additional requirements in their programs, reflecting their training priorities.

For the purpose of accreditation, the Training Standards are to be read in conjunction with the *Accreditation Application Guidelines*.

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# 1. Australian Qualifications Framework

The *PACFA Training Standards* are based on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) standards and levels of learning. A key principle of the AQF is the volume of learning which is the "...duration of all activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes specified for a particular AQF qualification type" (p. 11). The requirements outlined in this document reflect the AQF recommended volume of learning at AQF levels 7–9 (undergraduate Bachelors, and post-graduate Diplomas, and Masters degrees), specific to the counselling and psychotherapy professions.

## 2. In-training requirements

In-training requirements detail the minimum requirements for academic content, skill development, and supervised practice within any given training program.

"Membership" requirements for practising members are separate from "training" requirements and include ethics, insurance, membership of a PACFA College and payment of membership fees (see Appendix 2).

## 3. Discipline-specific education and training

### 3.1 Training

Education and training in counselling and psychotherapy must be undertaken in a qualification approved by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) or the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) at either the undergraduate or postgraduate levels (AQF level 7 to 9).

The following principles apply to all courses/programs accredited by PACFA:

- Training must recognise the validity and place of different "schools" and modalities of counselling and psychotherapy.
- Training must promote a respectful understanding of the differences and similarities between theories.
- Training must be based on a coherent philosophical framework, selected theories, and evidence-informed practice.
- Training must recognise that the therapeutic alliance is key to counselling and psychotherapy practice and facilitates the opportunity for clients to experience self-reflective understanding and self-determined change.
- The minimum volume of learning detailed below applies to any undergraduate or postgraduate program. Training must be completed over a minimum period of two years. 400 hours of direct teaching (minimum) (at AQF level 7–9). This may be made up of:
  - 200 hours (minimum) direct person-to-person teaching focused on experiential practice and skills development of which:
    - 140 hours must be solely taught face-to-face and focused on experiential practice and skills development.
    - 60 hours may be synchronous online e.g., live interactive webinars.
    - The central focus of this person-to-person teaching must be on interpersonal counselling and/or psychotherapeutic skills development.
  - 200 hours of learning may be conducted via online asynchronous training for theory-based studies, instructed by the teacher/trainer.

### 3.2 Client contact

A minimum of 40 hours of face-to-face counselling, psychotherapy or Indigenous Healing Practice (client contact) with 10 hours of supervision (related to client contact) within or in tandem with training 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).

- A minimum of 10 supervision hours related to that practice with at least 50% being individual supervision. The remainder may be via small group supervision (no more than 6 trainees).
- Details of the client work must be included in a professional log which the student maintains and presents at assessment as evidence of completed practice hours. (Client confidentiality must be maintained in the log).
- If more than the minimum of 40 hours of supervised client contact is completed during the course, any additional client contact hours over and above the minimum requirements may be completed via synchronous video conferencing or telephone hours.
- Client contact generally requires other activities in addition to the 40 hours of face-to-face supervised client contact such as writing case notes, attending staff meetings, debriefing, counselling observations, and administration. These hours are not included in the 40 hours client contact required.

## 4. Admission

### 4.1 Principles

Prospective students need to demonstrate the presence of a set of human capacities as a pre-requisite for acceptance into counselling, psychotherapy or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Healing Practice programs. Accepted methods for assessing these capacities are interviews, questionnaires, and references from employers, past academic staff, and other such persons with accurate personal knowledge of those capacities:

- Prospective students need to have demonstrated self-awareness and a relational capacity, including the capacity to relate in a facilitative way with others and to reflect on and examine the impact of these actions.
- Prospective students need to demonstrate a capacity to understand and practice ethical behaviour in accordance with the *PACFA Code of Ethics*.
- The above qualities presume a certain level of mature life experience on the part of the applicant as shown by the capacity to reflect on and learn from experience, including being open to positive and challenging feedback.
- Interviews and selections for admission should be completed by the counselling/psychotherapy teaching team staff.
- Applicants must be made aware of the course's inherent requirements, including appropriate supervised therapeutic practice with clients face-to-face in a planned and structured client contact setting (placement).

### 4.2 Process

The process of selection must be non-discriminatory on the grounds of gender, class, cultural background, sexual identity, religion, disability or beliefs.

Academic credit for admission to a counselling, psychotherapy or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Healing Practice training program may be awarded if it meets the following requirements:

- No academic credit is allowed for the client contact and clinical supervision requirements which takes place during training.
- When academic credit is awarded, the total length, AQF level, and volume of training, including the academic credit, must meet the requirements of these Training Standards.
- Admission to a counselling, psychotherapy or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Healing Practice training program may be granted on the grounds of advanced standing equivalent to the requisite academic entry requirements of the training institution.



## 5. Learning and teaching

### 5.1 Philosophy of training

Each training course/program must have a clear statement of the philosophy of training (teaching, learning and practice) including a comprehensive rationale and learning objectives for what it seeks to achieve, underpinned by a coherent body of professional, evidence-informed knowledge.

Training providers must provide a clear statement of the following:

- **Philosophy of teaching and learning:** An outline of the teaching and learning philosophy that underpins the program, and how experiential learning and reflective practice are emphasised in the philosophy and teaching practice across the program.
- **Philosophy of practice that underpins the course/program:** A clear statement of the program's philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, including embedded values and beliefs, coherent models of the person (theory of personality), human development, theory of change, and the therapeutic relationship.

### 5.2 Core curriculum

Each program's learning outcomes must concisely outline the graduates' attributes, skills, knowledge and professional competence.

The program's learning outcomes must form a coherent body of learning and demonstrate the integration of learning outcomes across all units.

#### **Subject knowledge**

Graduates must demonstrate skills and competence related to knowledge of:

- Significance and role of the therapeutic relationship in the process of therapeutic change.
- Selected theories of human development across the life span.
- Overview of major schools of counselling and psychotherapy and their respective theories of psychotherapeutic change.
- Assessment processes including risks assessment and interventions.
- Selected theories of ethics, Federal and State laws relevant to the professional practice of counselling and psychotherapy, and *PACFA Code of Ethics*.
- Different conceptualisations of mental health and mental health conditions.
- Evidence-informed practice for commonly identified mental health conditions.
- Human diversity (ethnic, gender, sexuality, religious, spiritual) in varied social and cultural life contexts.
- Group process theory and group dynamics and their application to group work.
- Fundamentals of research and how it informs clinical practice.

## Skills

Graduates must demonstrate competence and skills related to:

- Establishing and maintaining therapeutic presence and therapeutic alliance.
- In-depth, facilitative attunement with clients.
- Relational engagement and ability to be client-specific.
- Other advanced counselling or psychotherapy skills related to the program philosophy of practice.
- Performing a broad assessment including mental health and all risk factors.
- Developing case formulations and establishing therapeutic goals.
- Utilising counselling and/or psychotherapeutic strategies and interventions.
- Maintaining reflective practice.
- Monitoring and evaluation of their own practice.
- Effective communication with a range of different stakeholders.
- Reviewing relevant research-informed literature or completing another aspect of a research project.

## Application of knowledge and skills

Graduates must demonstrate competence in the application of counselling and psychotherapy knowledge and skills related to the following core processes:

- Reflective practice.
- Assessment.
- Facilitating therapeutic change.
- Case formulation and therapeutic process planning.
- Evidence-informed clinical practice—critical evaluation of the therapeutic process concerning the applied model of counselling and or psychotherapy and the client's desired change.
- Effective application of ethical principles and legal requirements to clinical practice.
- Personal and professional development, including engagement in personal reflection and competent participation in clinical supervision.
- Collaboration with other mental health practitioners.
- Alternative modes of working with clients, including via video conference and telephone.
- Critical evaluation, appreciation and incorporation of current research findings in clinical practice.

## 6. Assessment

Training providers follow assessment policies and procedures that ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in their assessment processes. Assessment processes evaluate all core curriculum and achievement of clinical and professional competence and sound ethical practice comprehensively. Assessment methods are selected to ensure trainees have achieved the program's Learning Outcomes. An appropriate range of assessment types is employed to assess students on all aspects of the core curriculum.

Assessment tasks align with TEQSA requirements in relation to content, volume, level and types of assessment. Trainees must demonstrate knowledge of the philosophy of practice underpinning the Program and apply this framework in competent clinical practice. To achieve this, assessment tasks must include:

- demonstration of knowledge through a variety of suitable assessments; and
- demonstration of clinical skills through methods such as live supervision, recorded sessions (audio or audio visual) and rigorous frequent one-to-one supervision.

Students' readiness for practice is specifically assessed before students undertake placement (in addition to the unit assessments).

The capstone placement assessment ensures that the clinical supervisor thoroughly assesses graduates for their readiness for professional practice.

Trainees must receive timely, relevant, and detailed feedback on all assessment tasks.

## 7. Personal development

As counselling, psychotherapy and Indigenous Healing Practices prioritise the importance of "therapist factors" and the use of self in therapy, importance is placed on personal and professional development within the training program.

### 7.1 Personal development hours

Trainees must complete a minimum of 20 hours of personal development work within the duration of the training. This may include individual or family therapy, group therapy or self-awareness experiences, all of which must take place outside the classroom context.

### 7.2 Therapeutic relationship

An understanding of how one may use one's self in the therapeutic relationship must be integrated within the training program according to the particular modality. In addition, trainees are encouraged to have experiences as a client in a modality compatible to the one in which they are training.

### 7.3 Personal congruence

Trainees are actively encouraged to engage in personal therapy in order to deepen their personal congruence and self-awareness.

### 7.4 Conflict of interest

Trainee personal therapy should not create conflicts of interest that disadvantage the trainee's participation in the training program.

### 7.5 Personal psychotherapy

It is understood that psychotherapy trainees will be engaged in their own psychotherapy.

## 8. Staffing

### 8.1 Support

The training provider ensures that academic staff and supervisors are supported in their teaching, research, clinical training, and professional development by providing adequate resources, support staff and facilities.

### 8.2 Additional educators

Any training program in psychotherapy/counselling/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Healing Practices involves educators with varying levels of qualifications and experience. Alongside those who have primary responsibility for the training program, other educators with less or different training may enrich the learning environment with particular contributions. For example, these contributions may be from a graduate trainee who has a particular role with the students, or a trainer who is working towards full faculty membership, or from visiting consultants. An educator with insufficient clinical or teaching experience can be a part of the teaching team for a specific unit under the supervision of more senior staff, so long as they do not hold sole responsibility for that unit of study.

### 8.3 Registration

The counselling/psychotherapy education team will have at least 50% of teaching staff who identify with the counselling or psychotherapy profession through their professional registration with or eligibility to register with PACFA Registered Clinical Member. (This may include: Australian Counselling Association (the ACA) Level 4 Counsellor; Australian Psychological Society College of Counselling Psychologists; or Australian Association of Social Work as an Accredited Mental Health Social Worker.)

### 8.4 Education

All teaching staff have directly relevant education and experience in the assigned area/unit of teaching. Their qualification is one level higher than the AQF qualification level being taught, or they have equivalent professional experience (as required by TEQSA). Those teaching skills-based units have a minimum of 5 years of relevant clinical experience (full-time equivalent).

### 8.5 Qualification

Academic directors, heads of counselling and psychotherapy programs, and program/course coordinators who have the primary responsibility for a training program (curriculum content and educational processes) must have education and substantial clinical experience (equivalent to a minimum of 5 years of full-time practice) in counselling or psychotherapy. They must hold one of the professional registrations listed above.

### 8.6 Student and staff ratio

The recommended ratio of students to staff is 20:1, however the number of staff required to resource the teaching and learning within a program may vary depending on the size and structure of the course.

## 8.7 Requirements

Training programs with small student cohorts (25 students and under) must be resourced with a minimum of two dedicated staff qualified in counselling or psychotherapy.

## 8.8 Course coordinators

The following guidelines apply directly to course coordinators who have the primary responsibility for a training program. It is the responsibility of the course coordinator, in conjunction with the other faculty members, to monitor the standards of those additional training staff identified above. Course/program coordinators must:

- have a PhD or Masters qualification in counselling, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous Healing Practices, psychotherapy or a counselling related field of study
- be psychotherapists, counsellors or counselling psychologists of at least five years' equivalent full-time experience, and eligible for clinical or full membership of the professional body relevant to their qualification
- be concurrently engaged in psychotherapy/counselling practice relevant to the course they are teaching or have had extensive clinical experience sufficient for their role
- demonstrate competence in facilitating adult learning, with some training or equivalent work experience in in-training delivery
- monitor and maintain the standards of all additional training staff
- be willing to disclose to trainees their own training experience, philosophy of training and theoretical preferences
- be diligent with their own ongoing professional development and give evidence of such development when required
- comply with PACFA's *Member Code of Conduct* and expect the same of trainees
- ensure that the students evaluate all units and that the feedback is made known to the director and the appropriate lecturers
- not discriminate based on gender, class, cultural background, sexual identity, religion, or any disability or belief that does not directly interfere with the competent fulfilment of their training role.

## 9. Clinical supervision

- 9.1 Supervision is an essential component of any training program
- Supervision plays multiple roles, including enabling student skill and competence development, upholding the standards of the profession, and protecting the public by ensuring that trainees engage in safe and ethical practice.
- 9.2 Supervision is a formal, collaborative process between supervisor and supervisee, which monitors, develops, supports, and assesses the development of supervisee competence in their clinical role
- 9.3 Supervisors must play more than an administrative role during supervision and seek evidence of supervisee's clinical competence
- 9.4 Supervision may be conducted in either one-to-one or small group settings
- At least 50% of the minimum requirement for supervision must be met by individual supervision..
- 9.5 Supervision groups must have no more than six trainees
- Larger groups will not be counted towards clinical supervision hours. The level of supervision must be appropriate to the level of complexity of the course of study and client work.
- 9.6 Modes of supervision presentation may include live interviews, audio or audio visual recordings, formal case presentations, process and/or case notes
- Client consent must be sought as a precondition for recorded or live interviews.
- 9.7 Supervision must include a clear supervisory contract with an approved supervisor
- 9.8 Supervisors must be members of a relevant professional association
- For example: PACFA Registered Clinical member, ACA Level 4, APS College of Counselling Psychologists, Mental Health Social Worker, as well as meet the PACFA Supervision Training Standards.

## 10. Quality assurance and training program evaluation

For quality assurance, each training program must be evaluated annually.

The evaluation process must:

- be informed by feedback from program staff, current and former students, and personnel in cooperating agencies; and
- include a survey of graduate outcomes. In Australia this is benchmarked against the Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT) surveys.

Students must have regular opportunities to formally evaluate units, staff, and the students' educational experiences. Each training program must consider advice and input from the profession through regular course advisory or reference committee meetings and discussions.



# Appendix 1

## Definition of terms relating to client contact

### Client

The term client is used in the context of the PACFA Professional Training Standards to refer to either client or patient. A client may be an individual, a couple, a family or a group in the context of counselling, Indigenous Healing Practices and/or psychotherapy provision.

### Client contact

Client contact, for the purposes of PACFA's Professional Training Standards, involves a range of experiences of the trainee working directly with clients (as defined above) where if possible and appropriate there are no dual relationships between the client and trainee.

Client contact hours, first and foremost, comprise face-to-face, in the same room or place, contact with the client. This may include up to 50% of the first 40 client contact hours being co-therapy where a student is providing group therapy. After the initial 40 face-to-face client hours, other methods of client contact such as telephone counselling, online counselling using web technology such as Skype, or additional co-therapy are allowable.

The following items are not part of client contact hours for the purposes of the Training Standards: Case presentation, supervision, reflective teams, note taking, role plays, practice sessions and client observation. These components are regarded as preparation for client work within the training context.

### Co-therapy

Co-therapy involves a trainee working with a trainer or qualified practitioner or another trainee in a dual capacity to provide psychotherapy or counselling at the same time with the same client or client group. For the purposes of the Training Standards, co-therapy only counts towards the required 40 client contact hours when provided by trainees and not when it is also provided by a trainer or qualified practitioner.

## Definition of terms relating to supervision

### **Clinical supervision**

Clinical supervision is a contractual, collaborative process which monitors, develops and supports supervisees in their clinical role. Clinical supervision can be undertaken as individual supervision and group supervision (see definitions below).

In clinical supervision, the central focus is on both the optimum outcome for the client and the professional development and self-care of the supervisee.

The process of clinical supervision is seen to encompass a number of significant components, including a formal agreement between the supervisor and supervisee.

It is an opportunity for supervisees to present relevant material regarding their clinical practice via case discussion, recordings of client sessions, role plays, etc., allowing space for reflective review by the supervisee and feedback by the supervisor. The supervisory relationship and process of supervision should be congruent with the developmental needs of the supervisee.

### **Individual supervision**

Individual supervision refers to clinical supervision undertaken by an individual supervisee with a designated supervisor.

### **Group supervision**

Group supervision is facilitated by a designated supervisor who simultaneously provides supervision and facilitates the group supervision process. Group supervision can be comprised of two to six supervisee members.

### **Supervisor**

A supervisor is a practitioner with a minimum of five years clinical experience who has supervision competencies that meet the requirements of the PACFA Supervision Training Standards. The supervisor is generally seen to have more experience than the supervisee with regard to professional seniority, skill development and possibly within a particular specialty.

### **Group supervisor**

A group supervisor who facilitates a group of supervisees, has developed specific skills to conduct the group process and to manage any group dynamics that arise. Group facilitation skills are needed in addition to the requirements for supervisors.

## Appendix 2

### PACFA membership/registration requirements for practising members

Entry requirements to PACFA membership as a Certified Practising or Registered Clinical member, or listing on the PACFA Register, are additional to the Training Standards. These may include, but are not limited to, evidence of qualification, identity, insurance and ethical standards.

Membership/registration requirements for:

- Certified Practising Membership (previously Provisional)
- Registered Clinical Membership (previously Clinical).

### Accredited training membership track

The full details of PACFA accredited training course requirements are covered by these Training Standards.

Applicants must have completed a PACFA accredited course of 400 hours of person-to-person Indigenous Healing Practice, counselling and/or psychotherapy training incorporating a minimum of 200 hours of direct instruction including a supervised practice placement which includes a minimum of 40 hours of face-to-face counselling, psychotherapy or Indigenous Healing practice client contact with 10 hours of related clinical supervision within the training program.

### General membership track

The requirements for the general membership track are the same as the requirements above, except the training program is not accredited by PACFA.

Applicants must have completed a qualification at AQF level 7 or above of 400 hours of person-to-person Indigenous Healing Practice, counselling or psychotherapy training incorporating a minimum of 200 hours of direct instruction and a supervised practice placement which includes a minimum of 40 hours of client contact with 10 hours of related clinical supervision within the duration of the training program.

Applicants under this track are meeting the requirements of the Training Standards through the completion of training undertaken in a non-PACFA accredited course. As the program is not accredited by PACFA, the individual's training must be assessed by PACFA in terms of curriculum, volume of learning and supervised practice requirements.

## Recognition of prior learning (RPL) membership track

Applicants with qualifications from cognate fields (as listed by PACFA) can apply for membership of PACFA using the RPL track.

Applicants who can apply via RPL include Counsellors, Indigenous Healing Practitioners or Psychotherapists who have cognate qualifications and a combination of other relevant training and substantial, relevant supervised practice experience. This training may not have been undertaken as a single course of study, or at a single institution, but in its entirety must meet the requirements of the Training Standards.

Applicants can join at either the level of a Certified Practising or Registered Clinical depending on their achievement of the required hours of practice. In cases where this is unclear, assessment will be completed by the relevant college.

## Registered Clinical membership

In addition to the requirements for Certified Practising membership as detailed above, applicants for Registered Clinical membership must have completed 750 hours of client contact post training and 75 hours of clinical supervision over a minimum of 2 years. Hours of supervised client contact that are completed post-training may be undertaken via synchronous video conferencing or telephone.

## References

Australian Qualifications Framework Council, *Australian Qualifications Framework Second Edition*, January 2013.

Australian Qualifications Framework Council, *Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework Final Report*, 2019.

