



Accreditation of Counsellor Higher Education Courses

ACA Higher Education Course Education Standards & Accreditation Procedures and Criteria



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Foreword

The Australian Counselling Association Inc (ACA) has produced this document to give providers of higher education (universities and private providers) coherent guidelines as to the standards and requirements for ACA course accreditation. This document is to be considered in conjunction with the minimum educational requirements for membership to ACA.

It provides the essential information for Providers seeking accreditation for their courses in the training and education of counsellors. Potential students, employers and clients are thereby able to identify aspects of such accredited courses.

Clients and employers benefit from knowing that the counsellors who serve them have undergone an appropriate, effective, accredited educational program.

The accreditation process establishes the standards for membership of the Association and in particular evaluates counselling course curriculums delivered by Providers; as well as specific quality standards to which providers must adhere in their delivery of courses.

The ACA accreditation process goes beyond the academic and occupational outcomes of courses by establishing provider standards for uniformly high delivery and support for courses, students and graduates.

The ACA's role in accrediting courses contributes to the Association's broader mission of supporting its members in developing and exhibiting their professional practice, to establish professional practice standards, and promote the benefits of the counselling professional to the public at large.

Furthermore the Association aims to: -

- Encourage the ongoing improvement of education in counselling,
- Increase confidence in the profession of counselling, particularly amongst the public,
- Represent practitioners, and potential future employers as stakeholders in the development of future practitioners and curriculum development,
- Help institutions promote their accredited counselling courses to those choosing a career in counselling,
- Establish uniformly high standards of delivery of accredited counselling courses,
- Clearly identify appropriate counselling courses to those choosing a counselling career,
- Identify graduates and professionals eligible for professional recognition by the Association,
- Increase the awareness of the Australian Counselling Association and enhance its reputation.

The document serves to emphasise that the ACA is committed to good practice and teaching and is the national forum for counselling standards.

The word counsellor/ing for the purpose of this document includes psychotherapy.

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Introduction

The ACA Scheme for the Accreditation of Counsellor Education Courses has attracted considerable interest from Providers that deliver or want to deliver counsellor education and training courses, from prospective students who want assurance as to the quality of education and training, as well as from potential employers who desire to recruit counsellors educated to a professional standard.

The criteria that follow are those accepted by the membership. Course submissions are assessed against the criteria and accreditation is granted for a three-year period.

Satisfactory completion of an ACA Accredited Course in counselling automatically meets the minimum education requirements for eligibility to apply for Level 1 Membership to ACA. Completion of an accredited qualification is only one requirement of membership, therefore the completion of an ACA Accredited course of study is not an automatic guarantee of membership. Additionally, completion of higher levels of qualifications such as Degrees or graduate courses qualifies the member for higher levels of membership after the satisfactory completion of post-training practice and supervision requirements have been met.

Only courses that have completed the accreditation process and have received confirmation of their Accredited status may include the words 'ACA Accredited Course' on their publicity material.

If prospective members have completed a course that is not accredited by ACA, then the prospective member will need to approach a Provider of an ACA Accredited Course and apply to have their current skills and knowledge assessed through the ACA Accredited RPL Process, which includes theoretical and practical assessment of all main competencies. Where an education gap is identified, the applicant must successfully complete training and assessment by the ACA Accredited Course Provider in the gap areas before an application for membership will be considered.

The criteria for accreditation provides ample scope for education and training programmes of different orientations and traditions to flourish equally. The course accreditation process is intended to preserve and enhance independence of approach while ensuring a common focus on those core elements in counsellor education, which are considered to be fundamental no matter how varied the rationales underpinning different courses.

All ACA Accredited courses are required to be recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and be delivered by Providers that are approved providers of Higher Education. All Providers are required to submit a written application addressing the criteria and requirements for accreditation of courses contained within this document.

It is imperative that all Providers who request for course/s to be accredited by ACA understand that this Association is for professional counsellors. As such we do not accredit courses that are intended for social workers, welfare workers or other allied health professions. These professions have their own professional bodies that can be approached regarding course accreditation. ACA does not approve of the concept of bundling several courses to make up the criteria required by this document. Membership requirements to ACA require the completion of a single course that meets the full minimum standards and requirements outlined in this document.

Part I

Criteria for Accreditation

The Australian Counselling Association recognises that an accredited course should provide a variety of learning opportunities and experiences. These should be aimed at developing a range of intellectual and personal capacities and attributes of the future counselling practitioner.

The Association accepts that courses submitted for accreditation will reflect a corresponding variety of approaches and theories. The aim of course accreditation is to maintain the standards of counselling courses, it is not intended to impose uniformity. The Association utilises criteria for evaluating courses for accreditation that are flexible enough to promote healthy diversity and innovation.

The Association further recognises that not all Providers wish to put forward their education programs specifically aimed at producing counselling practitioners.

The minimum requirement for membership to the Association is completion of an ACA Accredited Course. If prospective members have completed a course that is not accredited by ACA, then the prospective member will need to approach a Provider of an ACA Accredited Course and apply to have their current skills and knowledge assessed through the ACA Accredited RPL Process, which includes theoretical and practical assessment of all main competencies. Where an education gap is identified, the applicant must successfully complete training and assessment by the ACA Accredited Course Provider in the gap areas before an application for membership will be considered. Once they have successfully completed the ACA Recognised RPL Process, they are to submit their Bridging Certificate along with their Application for Membership.

Providers that deliver short courses may approach the Association for Recognition of that course for Ongoing Professional Development.

Whilst courses differ in the approach they take to counsellor education, all accredited courses need to fulfil both general and more specific criteria.

1. Organisational Criteria

- 1.1 All Providers delivering ACA Accredited Courses need to be recognised as a provider of higher education under the relevant federal or state legislation. Evidence of the currency of Registration is to be provided with the application.

Where ACA accreditation of the course is required to obtain initial course approval then the ACA accreditation may be provided subject to the completion of the provider of higher education registration processes. In this circumstance, the applicant is not able to promote the course until the relevant registration is received, and ACA accreditation of the course is confirmed in writing.

- 1.2 The Provider should hold sufficient insurance cover in accord with the nature of the business and the course/s it delivers including public liability, workers compensation, business insurance and professional indemnity insurance. Copies of current insurance policies should be provided as part of the application.

2. Staffing Criteria

- 2.1 The counselling program/s delivered by the Provider must be coordinated on a full-time, permanent basis by a Program Leader (or similar titles such as Course Leader or Course

Coordinator). Where a Provider delivers courses other than counselling programs, the Provider needs to demonstrate that the Program Leader (or similar title) is employed full time within the counselling courses. Documentary evidence of the employment relationship and its context must be provided.

- 2.2 Where the Provider delivers Bachelor or higher level qualifications, the minimum educational qualification of the Course Leader (or similar title) is a Doctorate in counselling or a related field. In this instance, the Course Leader must also be eligible for Level 4 Membership of ACA and provide a Curriculum Vitae along with certified copies of relevant qualifications and evidence of recent professional development and supervision with the application.
- 2.3 Core staff must be appropriately qualified and competent between them to cover all elements of the course. Core staff are defined as those who have substantive involvement in teaching, assessment and/or supervision, along with admission, course management and decision-making.
- 2.4 All non-administrative teaching and assessment staff should be eligible for membership to ACA. Core staff teaching in higher education programs of Bachelor level or above should hold a minimum of a Masters-level qualification plus several years' industry experience.
- 2.5 The structure of the academic team is to be included in the application along with position descriptions or written descriptions of roles and responsibilities.
- 2.6 In addition to the Course Leader (or similar title), there should be at least two core members of staff, with staff numbers being in accord with the expected number of students enrolled in the program. Curriculum Vitae of all core teaching staff must be included with the application along with anticipated student numbers for the 3 years of the course accreditation. Student:Teaching staff ratios should not exceed 16:1 for all face-to-face teaching, classes and assessment sessions.
- 2.7 There should be regular staff meetings and other forms of staff support, consultation and development, details of which must be included in the application.
- 2.8 Core training staff, external supervisors and any others making a significant contribution to the training programme should be familiar with and agree to work within the current version of the ACA Code of Conduct.
- 2.9 A description of administrative support staff involved in the administering and service delivery of the program must be included with the application. There needs to be sufficient administrative support staff available to sufficiently support delivery of the program/s.

3. General Course Criteria

The following criteria must be addressed:

- 3.1 An accredited course must create an appropriate mix of Academic, personal development, ethical considerations, skills components and client work, consistent with the level of the qualification and the core therapeutic approaches contained within the course. It is not implied that these elements are treated by the course as discrete elements.
- 3.2 In-depth education such as is expected of an accredited course, must provide a coherent grounding for the student in a variety of core therapeutic approaches relevant to counselling, and provide opportunities for comparisons with other approaches to counselling. The therapeutic approaches would be reflected, not just in theory, skills and practice of the students, but also in the way the course is structured, assessed, taught and administered. In

other words, the core therapeutic approaches run through the course, providing coherence and internal consistency.

- 3.3 The course must help students develop as reflective practitioners - people who are both willing and able to reflect on all aspects of their work as counsellors, learners and as members of the course. Implicit in this development as reflective practitioners is that the student must be encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. The student must also be required to monitor and evaluate their own work and personal/professional development.
- 3.4 Assessment should be progressive, with the assessment process including regular, on-going, constructive feedback through which the student is helped to identify and build upon strengths and take a developmental approach to difficulties. A final assessment on its own is not sufficient. The assessment process must be congruent with the therapeutic approaches being taught and include a range of assessment methods relevant to the delivery context and level of the course. The application must contain information on how the Provider ensures the integrity, validity, reliability and consistency of the assessment process.
- 3.5 It is mandatory for the course to include practical skills training undertaken or demonstrated by the student in a simulated setting.
- 3.6 There should not be large amounts of the course (in proportion to the total structure) covered through work-based training and assessment (please refer to page 11 below for further explanation). Any allocation of work-based training and assessment via a work placement or work experience needs to be justified in terms of hours and timing, with comprehensive details on assessment to be undertaken during the placement/experience, and how the placement/experience will be arranged, administered and monitored.
- 3.7 The student must be sufficiently supported during their studies with the types of study support options available being relevant to the delivery context of the course. Details of student support services must be provided as part of the application.
- 3.8 The Provider must provide details of processes in place to evaluate, review and continuously improve the course and its delivery.
- 3.9 Applicants are required to provide a sample of teaching materials/lesson plans, resources and assessments used during the course. Details of marking criteria and how the assessment decision is reached must also be included.

4. Specific Course Criteria

The following criteria relate specifically to the educational level of the course.

4.1 Bachelor-level Qualifications

- 4.1.1 Courses at Bachelor level are required to be at least 3300 nominal hours in length with a minimum of 2700 nominal hours being delivered by traditional teaching modes such as face-to-face teaching or external delivery. The nominal hours include self-directed study for the student and a reasonable proportion of directed and self-directed study is expected for each topic covered throughout the course.
- 4.1.2 The course must be delivered over a minimum duration of 36 months full time to allow for the developmental growth of the student through the course duration.
- 4.1.3 The course must contain at least 240 hours of face-to-face teaching and assessment incorporating at least 120 hours of experiential practical skills training.

- 4.1.4 The course must include a minimum of 336 hours undertaken in a work setting (work placement) of which there are a minimum of 40 hours of counselling directly with clients and at least 48 hours of counselling supervision.
- 4.1.5 The course must cover a range of foundational, theoretical and specialist topics that provide the Bachelor student a thorough and cohesive grounding in counselling and its therapeutic application at the Bachelor level.
- 4.1.6 The structure, educational methodology and assessment utilised within the course must allow the student to develop research, comprehension and evaluation skills, and the ability to acquire, review, consolidate, extend and apply counselling knowledge.

4.2 Postgraduate and Other Higher Level Qualifications

- 4.2.1 It is accepted that courses at the graduate level may be quite specific in nature. In this case, the course must provide a cohesive, comprehensive and complete coverage of the topic area.
- 4.2.2 Graduate Certificate courses more general in nature must cover a minimum of 4 therapeutic approaches, whilst Graduate Diploma and Masters level courses must cover a minimum of 6 therapeutic approaches.
- 4.2.3 Irrespective of the general or specific nature of the course, the concepts must be covered at a complex level with graduates being able to initiate, plan and implement interventions; display an expert command and application of complex and/or specialised counselling skills; and engage in supervisory, leadership or managerial capacities in relation to the counselling role. The complexity of the course should be apparent in the teaching materials for the course, assessment methods and criteria for assessment, and must relate to the appropriate AQF level.
- 4.2.4 Courses at Graduate Certificate level must be at least 400 nominal hours in length; courses at Graduate Diploma level must be at least 800 nominal hours in length; and courses at Masters level must be at least 1500 nominal hours in length. The nominal hours include self-directed study for the student and a reasonable proportion of directed and self-directed study is expected for each topic covered throughout the course.
- 4.2.5 Courses at Graduate Certificate level must be delivered over a minimum of 6 months full time; Graduate Diploma qualifications delivered over a minimum of 12 months full time; and Masters level qualifications must be delivered over a minimum of 18 months full time.
- 4.2.6 The course needs to contain a practical skills training and assessment component of the following minimum durations:
 - Graduate Certificate – 40 hours
 - Graduate Diploma – 80 hours
 - Masters – 120 hours
- 4.2.7 Graduate counselling courses need to specify and comply with the following minimum entry requirements for students entering the course:
 - Completion of an accredited counselling qualification within the last five years at the Diploma or Advanced Diploma level. (Accredited is defined as approved as a Nationally Recognised Training program or accredited course through a relevant state-based authority under the Australian Qualifications Framework).
 - Completion of an accredited Bachelor Degree in counselling.

5. Additional Criteria

- 5.1 All Providers of ACA Accredited Courses and those applying for such accreditation must be Organisational Members of ACA and thereby subject to the ACA Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure. Providers of accredited courses are accountable for the work of all staff, including 'external supervisors'. Organisational Membership is conferred on Providers after successful completion of this process.
- 5.2 Accreditation attaches itself to specific courses, rather than the Provider. If a Provider delivers two or more courses, which it wishes to enter for accreditation, then separate applications are required for each course. Additionally, if a Provider licenses their ACA Accredited course/s to others, then an application for ACA Accreditation must be made from the Provider whom holds the license to deliver the course addressing the criteria contained in Part II - Sections 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7, along with Part II - Section 3 - Criteria 3.5, 3.7 and Part II - Section 4 - Elements 1, 3, 4 & 5. In this instance, a certified copy of the signed License Agreement must be provided with the application.
- 5.3 The Courses Accreditation Scheme is for existing courses that have graduated at least one cohort of students, and have been able to develop in light of that experience. It is only when training procedures have been implemented that their effectiveness can be evaluated. Courses that do not meet these criteria may still apply for accreditation but will need to demonstrate how they will continually evaluate that course, by gathering and utilising feedback.
- 5.4 ACA Accredited Courses will be those in-depth courses offering Professional Counsellor education. Courses that offer only introductory modules to counselling will not be considered. Courses may contain counselling-related modules such as psychology, behaviour, personality and counselling skills and theories. Fringe subjects such as sociology and case management will be considered in conjunction with counselling subjects.
- Courses that do not reflect a high proportion of counselling content and application will not be considered regardless of their accreditation, title or delivery within the higher education sectors. Courses that do not have a high proportion of counselling subjects (minimum of 90% of the course should be counselling or counselling-related content and skills) that includes progressive assessment of counselling knowledge, skills and application; or whose primary subjects are human services, community work, welfare, casework or social-science, are not considered counselling qualifications.
- 5.5 It is expected that courses have a minimum number of hours as described for each level of qualification in Section 4 above. Courses should not assume that if they meet this minimum figure they will be accepted as admissible; an accredited course must be experienced by its graduates as a thorough educational course in counselling, not one that merely reaches minimal standards throughout.
- 5.6 Accredited courses need to demonstrate how they organise the course so as to fulfil the following Nine Elements of Counsellor Education Programs:

Nine Elements of Counsellor Education Programs

Element 1 Admission

Prospective applicants should provide detailed and accurate information about the course including its structure, aims, staffing, contents, assessment requirements, appeals process, fees (including any 'extras' e.g. supervision/personal therapy fees) and conditions of participation (e.g. time commitments).

The procedure for selection must be clearly explained and consistent with course rationale. Courses are expected to subscribe to an equal opportunities policy with respect to admission, course content and delivery. Courses also need to comply with the pathway/s to gain entry as described in the AQF and all requirements contained in this document for the respective level of the course.

Element 2 Self Development

Courses should:

- i. Provide regular and systematic opportunities for self-awareness work, which are congruent with the course's theoretical approaches.
- ii. Ensure that the student maintains a 'personal record' that monitors their self-development.

Element 3 Work-Based Training and Assessment (Work Placement /Experience)

Courses that offer work-based training and/or assessment with real clients as part of their curriculum must take extreme care that the client's wellbeing is of primary importance. In these cases, it must be disclosed to the client that the counsellor is a student of counselling, and the work of the student with clients must be suitably overseen by a qualified and experienced counsellor. Detailed procedures explaining how the student is overseen during the work-based training and assessment should be included in the accreditation application. Minimum qualification and experience requirements of the counsellor overseeing the student should also be included.

Registered counsellors, not unqualified students, generally undertake professional practice. It is an ACA consensus that counselling practice by a student should not be undertaken during study unless the student:

1. Is already a graduate from another counselling course and qualified, and/or
2. Is practicing in a controlled environment with a willing client, who has been fully informed of the student's status, and the work of the student is suitably and regularly overseen by a qualified and experienced counsellor.

Supervision of students during the placement/experience, regardless of the mode of study, should include the experienced counsellor:

- i. Helping the student to integrate theory with practice and to develop competent practice (i.e. training function).
- ii. Maintaining the student's personal and professional wellbeing with respect to client work (supportive function).
- iii. Affording a degree of protection for the student's clients (i.e. managerial function).

Assessment during the placement should include any combination of the following:

1. Log of client contact hours.
2. Portfolio of work.
3. Observation of counselling sessions.
4. Third party reports from an experienced counsellor who supervised the student in the workplace.

Element 4 Professional Supervision

Courses may offer professional supervision to students. However conflict of interest issues must be considered if the supervisor is also an assessor or tutor of the student.

If the course includes professional supervision, then it should be provided by an appropriately qualified and experienced ACA Accredited Counselling Supervisor, familiar with the core theoretical models applied by the 'counsellor-in-training'.

- For counsellors in training, supervision should be not less than 1 hour's presenting time to 8 hours client work, subject to an overall minimum of 1.5 hours presenting time per month.
- A mix of group and individual supervision is strongly recommended. Courses will need to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own arrangements. The amount of group supervision time that can be counted, as individual presenting time will be as currently defined by ACA.

Details of supervision should be included in a professional log, which the student maintains and presents at assessment.

Element 5 Practical Skills Training

Courses should provide:

- i. Structured experience and regular opportunities for observation, practice, feedback, (from both staff and peers), discussion and review.
- ii. Opportunities to practise the blend of skills appropriate to the core theoretical approaches covered in the course, these skills being identified and developed so that students can describe, analyse and utilise them.
- iii. A progressive monitoring and assessment of skills development.

Courses should note that they are responsible for the teaching and learning that forms the basis of their submission for accreditation. It is not acceptable for courses to count skills or other work which the student has done elsewhere, as part of the minimum contact hours.

Element 6 Theory

There should be extensive counselling theory, drawing upon relevant psychological and behavioural disciplines, to enable students to make explicit:

- i. The underlying assumptions, basic principles and elements, concepts, strategies and techniques of the core therapeutic approaches contained within the course of study.
- ii. The therapeutic process and principles and mechanisms of change as conceived in the core therapeutic approaches.
- iii. Comparisons with other counselling approaches.
- iv. The social system in which we live and the ways these affect client development and counselling practice. (The term 'social systems' is taken to include such factors as race, culture, gender, sexuality, politics, religion, ethics and class.)
- v. The theoretical basis for any specific client problems or issues included as topics in the course programme, e.g. anxiety, bereavement and loss etc.

Study of the core theoretical approach and related counselling practice may be informed and enriched by consideration of other psychological concepts and ideas by reference to current research findings.

Educators in counselling are traditionally creative in their teaching of theory. These guidelines are not intended to inhibit creativity by defining teaching methods but the methods used should be consistent with course rationale and philosophy. However, whatever forms the teaching of theory takes, the course should be concerned to assess how far the theory is being learned and applied by the student.

The course should expect substantial reading and written work (see Element 8 below) from the student to clarify philosophical and theoretical concepts and to show how these are becoming integrated with their counselling practice.

Element 7 Professional Development

It is important that during the course the student develops an understanding of the work of other professionals in the mental health field and has opportunities for meeting with at least some of them.

The student should be formally introduced to the ACA Code of Conduct and Best Practice for Counsellors before starting client work. The student should be given ample opportunity to study and discuss all aspects of the Code and to familiarise with its implications for practice and how it relates to their own values and attitudes.

Courses should provide on-going opportunities for the student and staff to meet as a community to reflect on aspects of the course.

The student should be made aware that successful completion of the course does not mark the end of their training and development. They should be reminded of the ethical requirement for supervision throughout a counsellor's working life and be encouraged to seek further opportunities for development and membership to a professional body.

Courses should provide opportunities to explore multicultural counselling competencies and standards and implications for the core theoretical model.

Students should be encouraged to read and understand research findings and how they might inform counselling practice.

Element 8 Assessment

Student assessment must be congruent with the core theoretical approaches and content contained in the course and a variety of assessment methods should be integrated throughout the course relevant

to the content and/or skills being assessed and the level of the qualification. The student should be fully appraised of assessment procedures at the start of the course and at the commencement of each assessment process. They should receive regular and constructive feedback on their progress.

There must be a substantial emphasis on the assessment of competence in counselling skills and practice undertaken during the course. This may be achieved through observation, verbatim reports, audio/videotape recording, examination, etc. Self-assessment by the student also has a role to play in determining competency of the student.

The course must include a substantial amount of assessed written work, for example case studies, essays, projects etc, amounting to at least 15,000 words in total for Graduate Certificate courses; 20,000 words for Graduate Diploma courses; and 45,000 words for Bachelor and Masters courses. The 'personal record' and 'professional log' are an addition to this requirement.

All assessment criteria must be clear and specific and made available to the student prior to assessment being undertaken. There must be a published Appeals Policy.

A course must provide a formal recognised qualification as an integral part of the program as well as a detailed transcript of learning outcomes/competencies/units/modules/subjects covered during the course. The award must indicate the name of the student, the name of the institution and the date of the award. It should also carry a personal signature. Providers should maintain a record of awards made. Accredited courses must provide students with a qualification that includes the words 'ACA Accredited Course' or a signed statement to the effect that they have successfully completed an ACA Accredited Course.

Element 9 Course Evaluation

Course evaluation, like assessment, should be an on-going, integrated process throughout the duration of the course and not just something which happens at the end.

- There must be regular staff meetings designed not just for planning but also for evaluation.
- Throughout, and at the conclusion of the course, the student should be given opportunity to evaluate their training experiences and give feedback on the course to staff.
- Improvements and changes to the course, its delivery and/or assessment and/or service provided to students should be justified and documented.

Courses must have a published Complaints Policy.

6. Recognition of Prior Certified and Government Recognition Courses

Courses that have government recognition and/or accreditation should not presuppose that the course will gain automatic accreditation with the Australian Counselling Association. In this instance, all requirements of this ACA Course Accreditation document must be met.

Courses that have developed a syllabus document or similar document for government recognition should submit this document **as part** of their submission for ACA accreditation.

Part II

This part is only relevant for Providers who wish to consider submitting their courses for formal assessment and approval

The Process of Accreditation

Courses must pass through stages of a process in order to gain accreditation, to maintain themselves in the Scheme, and to gain re-accreditation every three years.

In order that courses uphold their accreditation status they must meet and maintain all standards and requirements for accreditation at all times. The ACA maintains the right at all times during the accreditation period to conduct reviews and internal audits of the course to ensure that standards are maintained.

A. Advertising

Courses and/or Providers are not authorised to advertise accreditation with ACA until official notification has been given of such accreditation.

B. Special notes on course eligibility

In addition to the criteria listed in Part 1, courses should particularly note the following:

- i. The scheme is for counsellor education and training courses.
- ii. Courses with the term therapy rather than the term counselling in their *title* may be eligible providing that all criteria listed in Part 1 is satisfied. It should be clear that in this case the course is accredited by ACA as **counsellor** education.
- iii. Accreditation attaches itself to specific courses rather than Providers. If a Provider delivers two or more courses, which it wishes to have accredited then separate applications and fees are normally required. If the courses were identical and run by the same staff then they would be considered as a single course for the purpose of accreditation. However if the courses were different (e.g. a full time and a part time course), or if the staff were different, then a separate application would normally have to be made for each course. Where the courses are identical except in their staffing, the 'Application Stage' fee for one of the courses may be reduced.

C. Timetable for the Initial Accreditation Process

It is difficult to predict accurately how long an accreditation process will take from the time an official submission document is received by ACA. It will depend partially on the time taken by the course to respond to requests for further information or clarification and the number of course applications in process or being considered at the time.

For its part ACA will attempt, as far as is reasonably possible, to expedite the process. A response in writing acknowledging an application will be made by the CEO within one week and a report provided within six weeks from the date of application. Certain factors such as holidays, and other unforeseen difficulties may cause unavoidable delay but ACA is committed to try to minimise this.

D. Submission Document

A Provider wishing to proceed with an application for accreditation needs to submit a detailed course submission document in accordance with the following format.

A course application should constitute a substantive document, must cover each of the criteria and elements, and describe how the course satisfies the criteria set out in Part I of this document. The document should be typed on plain A4 sized paper. Pages should be numbered, a list of contents included and the Application for Accreditation Checklist (as shown in Appendix 2 – please complete the relevant checklist).

Although many courses have a variety of explanatory and promotional material already available, e.g. course leaflets, brochures, etc. the submission document should stand in its own right and provide complete and comprehensive coverage of the criteria.

The contents of the document should follow the structure outlined below.

Cover Sheet

This will include the following details:

- Title of the course
- Name of the Provider
- Name, address and telephone number of the contact person
- ACA Organisational Member number (if applicable)

A suggested template for the title is:

‘Submission to ACA for entry to the Scheme for the Accreditation of Counsellor Higher Education Courses of ... (Official course title) at ... (name of Provider)’.

Checklist

A completed **Checklist of Application Documentation and Attachments** (shown in Appendix 2 below). Please complete the appropriate checklist for your application.

Contents

A contents page should be included and the pages of the document numbered.

Format for Submission Document

Information should be clearly presented under the following subheadings. Information presented in some sections may overlap with information to be provided in other sections. In this case, referencing between sections is permitted (e.g., Please see Appendix 1) as long as explanation is provided to ensure the information is contextualised to each specific criterion to which it relates.

Courses which are licensed from another provider are required to complete at a minimum Part II - Sections 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7, along with Part II – Section 3 - Criteria 3.5, 3.7 and Part II – Section 4 - Elements 1, 3, 4 & 5. Applicants should provide any further information for the remaining criteria if the information/arrangements differs to the information provided for the accreditation by the Licensor.

A copy of the current licensing agreement (or similar) should also be included with the application so that ACA is aware of how responsibilities are discharged under the licensing agreement.

Course Structure

1. Organisational Criteria

1.1 Historical Background

Provide a brief statement about the organisation that is providing the course i.e. when/how the organisation and/or course was established including the date of completion of the first cohort of students and the range/type of any other courses or related counselling service which is provided by the organisation.

1.2 Provider Recognition

Please provide details of the organisation's registration as a higher education provider including documentary evidence.

1.3 Insurance

Include certified copies of current insurance policies as described in Part 1 - Clause 1.2.

2. Staffing Criteria

The following items must be included with the submission, either in the main body of the document or as appendices.

2.1 Staff Structure

Include a diagram of staffing structure (teaching and non-teaching positions) assigned to the counselling program/s of the organisation with details on roles and responsibilities of each position (Part 1 - Clause 2.6). Also display (through diagram and explanation) how this staffing structure fits in with the overall organisational structure.

2.2 Program/Course Leader

Details of the Program Leader and their qualifications and skills including a CV, certified copies of qualifications, evidence of recent professional development and documentary evidence of employment (e.g., employment contract) (Part 1 - Clause 2.1 to 2.3). Include details of ongoing counselling work (such as number of clients and context), counselling-related research, publications, and/or conference presentations. If the Program/Course Leader holds a qualification from overseas that is being relied upon for this application, then evidence must be provided that the qualification has been recognised as being equivalent by the appropriate authority in Australia.

2.3 Core Teaching Staff

Details of core teaching staff and their qualifications and counselling skills including a CV, certified copies of qualifications, evidence of recent professional development and documentary evidence of employment (Part 1 - Clause 2.4). Indicate if each member is an ACA member, or how their qualifications and experience demonstrate eligibility. Details of ongoing counselling work such as number of clients and context must be included. If a Core Teaching Staff member holds a qualification from overseas that is being relied upon for this application, then evidence must be provided that the qualification has been recognised as being equivalent by the appropriate authority in Australia.

2.4 Student/Teaching Staff Ratios

Anticipated student numbers over the next three years of the course, a calculation of student:teaching staff ratios (Part 1 - Clause 2.7) and the contact hours of each staff member.

2.5 Staff Support

Include details of staff meetings and other forms of support available to staff, and the ongoing development of staff. (Part 1 - Clause 2.8).

2.6 Administrative and Support Staff

A description of administrative and support (non-teaching) staff involved in the administration and service delivery of the program (Part 1 - Clause 2.10).

3. Course Criteria

Please refer to the information provided in Part 1 – Section 3 and Part 1 – Section 4 (respective to the level of the course for which accreditation is being applied) to address the following criteria.

3.1 Course Aim and Rationale

Include a brief description that covers the aim and rationale of the course, core theoretical approaches, the student target market for the course and any other concepts that underlie the course's choice of design, delivery and assessment.

3.2 Course Objectives

Include a list of the course objectives and how these relate to and encompass the AQF criteria specific to the level of the qualification (Part 1 – Clause 3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

3.3 Course Structure, Hours and Duration

Include a list of units/modules/subjects included in the course. The course structure should include details of timing/order of each unit/module/subject for both full time and part time completion, overall course duration for both full time and part time completion, pre-requisites, nominal hours/workload of each unit/module/subject, and actual teaching contact hours.

The outline of each unit/module/subject contained within the course should be included in an appendix. Each outline must include the learning outcomes/competencies achieved upon completion of the unit/module/subject.

3.4 Entry Requirements

Please list and describe any entry requirements that relate to the course.

3.5 Course Content

Provide a description of the main content themes and therapeutic approaches covered during the course in relation to the requirements for respective courses shown in Part 1 – Section 3, Part 1 – Section 4 and Part 1 – Section 5.

3.6 Delivery Modes

Describe how the course is delivered to students and modes of attendances. Include details of:

- a) support mechanisms in place for students (Part 1 – Clause 3.7).
- b) face-to-face training hours included in the course delivery and how/when these are delivered (respective clauses from Part 1 - Clause 4 relevant to the level of the course).

- c) work placement/experience hours, when this is undertaken and associated details (eg policies and procedures on the administration, delivery and monitoring of the work placement/experience).

Include examples of course materials and lesson plans utilised during the course in an appendix (for at least 25% of the course content) (Part 1 – Clause 3.9).

A list of the compulsory readings and recommended readings required for each unit/module/subject must be included in an appendix.

3.7 Course Assessment

Describe how students are assessed during the course, both theoretically and practically and, if applicable, during the work placement/experience (Part 1 – Clause 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 & 3.9).

Details must include overall course assessment strategies and also provide details of assessment methods for each unit/module/subject including assessment weightings (if applicable).

Include information (eg, organisational policies and procedures) on how the consistency, validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment process is ensured.

Also attach course assessments and marking/assessment criteria utilised during the course in an appendix (for at least 25% of the course content).

Also attach mapping guides that relate each performance criteria or unit/subject learning outcome to its related assessment/s during the course.

3.8 Course Review and Evaluation

Provide details of the processes in place to evaluate, review and continuously improve the course and its delivery.

Documentary evidence of prior evaluations, industry feedback from professionals, reviews and improvements should be included in an appendix.

4. Nine Elements of Counsellor Education Programs

The course submission document should address separately each of the nine elements of training detailed in Part 1.

The explanation for each element must show how the course relates to the specific criteria given for each element. Objectives, method and indicative content (i.e. topic first), teaching methods and indicative reading for each unit/module/subject should also be included in the explanation.

A list of practical and theoretical assessments and assessment procedures including marking scheme and arrangements for referral and deferral of assessed work should be provided under the Assessment element.

5. Facilities

Provide a description of teaching facilities and resources, library facilities and access to any other facilities required by the student such as audio and video equipment etc. Details of these resources should be given along with any other facilities or training services.

6. Other Policies

Include policies and procedures on recognition of prior learning and equal opportunity issues (including, class, race, gender, sexuality and people with disabilities).

The attitude the course adopts towards equal opportunity issues should also be expanded in the sections on Admission and Theory sections of the Nine Elements of Counsellor Education Programs.

7. Other Aspects of the Course

This is a 'miscellaneous' section, which might be omitted by some courses but could include a lot of material for others. In this section courses are encouraged to write about special features of the course that are not covered by the above structure for the Course Document. This is also the part of the document in which the course should make mention of ethical, professional or managerial issues which have been of recent concern to the course or its staff.

8. Appendices

All Appendices must be consecutively numbered and accurately cross-referenced during the main body of the course submission document.

9. Conclusion

The document should be signed and dated by the Program/Course Leader and, wherever possible, by the Head of Department or Manager.

E. The Application Stage

Three (3) copies of the submission document and cover sheet together with the Application Stage fee should be sent to the Accreditation Office at ACA.

The CEO will screen out any manifestly ineligible applications and advise the applicant, in writing, to withdraw. In this case, the submission document will be returned together with the Application Stage fee less an amount for administration. If an applicant chooses not to take this advice, the process may be continued and the entire Application Stage fee will be retained.

The ACA Board has appointed a Course Accreditation Panel comprising of between 3 and 5 members. The Panel members examine the course document and identify aspects of the course, which may seem inadequate or require clarification, whereupon the Panel writes to the applicant asking for additional information. The applicant should note that it would be important to respond in full to Panel requests at this point. If these requests cannot be met within a specified period then the course will be advised to withdraw its application.

If the Panel decides that the course does not satisfy the criteria for the Application Stage, then they will advise the applicant to terminate the process and a report will be sent to the applicant. In this situation, no refund of the Application Stage fee will be provided. A course may, as before, not take this advice and request a visit. In this latter case neither Application nor Visit Stage fees will be refunded.

F. The Visit Stage

The Panel or a representative may choose to visit the applicant. This will depend on the availability of the Panel members and the vicinity of the applicant to the panel member/s, and is at the discretion of the Panel. Where it is deemed appropriate by the Panel, the accreditation process may involve a visit during a time of course delivery. It should be noted that a visit is not always necessary and the need for such a visit is solely determined by the Panel.

In the case where a visit is deemed necessary, the CEO and other Panel members as deemed necessary will visit the provider's premises with prior permission from the applicant.

G. The Decision Stage

The Panel will prepare a written report on its findings in respect of the course's eligibility for accreditation. There are three kinds of recommendations that the Panel can make.

- i. The Panel may recommend that accreditation be granted. Usually a number of suggestions for improvement and ongoing development of the course would be included in the report.
- ii. The Panel may recommend that the course should not be accredited. The report will detail the reasons and a course is advised to seek consultation if it wishes to reapply. In this case a new application would be required at some later stage, when the course has been changed in light of recommendations made in the report.
- iii. The Panel may recommend that the course not be accredited until specific conditions are met. The conditions will be clearly stated and a maximum time (up to one year) provided for these conditions to be met. The Report will state whether the Panel are recommending that the course can be accredited *from the date of the visit* once conditions have been met or whether the changes required are too substantial for the recognition *to be thus backdated*.

When the course has met the conditions, the Provider is responsible for writing to the Course Accreditation Panel explaining in full how the conditions have been met; the specific changes that have been made; and how these changes affect other parts of the course. The Panel then decides whether accreditation will be recommended. Courses may consider themselves to be accredited by ACA when they receive written confirmation of this ratification from the CEO. Accreditation takes effect from the date stated in the confirmation letter. The first cohort of students that can be deemed to have attended an accredited course are those enrolling and attending the course from that stated date and completing the full-accredited course curriculum.

The final certification fee is payable at this stage. Courses will receive an ACA Certificate of Accreditation.

Appeals against a Panel's decision not to accredit must be addressed in writing to the Chair of the Courses Accreditation Panel. The legitimate grounds for appeal should be that the published process was not followed or that assessment has not been carried out with reference to published criteria. The Courses Accreditation Panel will take such reasonable steps, as it considers necessary in its absolute discretion to consider the appeal, including as appropriate recourse to an independent assessor. ACA reserves the right to charge a fee before considering an appeal.

Communication During the Accreditation Period

Courses accredited under these guidelines are accredited for a timeframe of up to 3 years. Providers offering approved courses under this scheme are required to ensure that the criteria listed in these Guidelines are in place at all times.

During this time, the communication of details are expected from approved Providers regarding their organisation and courses:

1. Significant changes to organisational structures, licensing arrangements, or staffing structures responsible for the delivery of the approved course.
2. Changes to the Program/Course Leader and its position responsibilities.
3. Significant changes to the course and its delivery and assessment.
4. Any other circumstances that may affect the ongoing compliance of the provider and its course with these criteria and guidelines.

The CEO will consult with the Courses Accreditation Panel (CAP) prior to response in writing regarding the changes.

Transition to these Standards

This version of the ACA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs took effect from 4 January 2010.

Courses previously approved and recognised by ACA under the previous standards are required to submit an application to ACA addressing these new standards. The application will be assessed against the new standards.

Providers whom had students currently studying an ACA recognised course were required to teach out the course prior to 30 June 2010. For students whom did not finish their course by 30 June 2010, the Provider was required to transition students to a course recognised under these new standards in order for the resulting qualification of the student to be recognised by ACA for membership.

If a provider decided not to transition current students to an ACA accredited course, the provider was obliged to advise students that the course they are currently enrolled in is no longer recognised by ACA as of 1 July 2010.

Providers of all courses recognised against the replaced (old) standards were required to advise **all current and new students** enrolling into their courses that the ongoing recognition/accreditation of the course by ACA after 4 January 2010 was dependent on the successful Accreditation of the Course **and the Provider** by ACA in relation to these revised standards.

If a Provider has not been successfully assessed against these new standards, current and new students of courses recognised under the previous standards are not to be misled in thinking that a course they were enrolled in prior to 30 June 2010 continues to be accredited by ACA. Hence, this may affect the student's eligibility to gain membership with ACA if they graduate from a course after these standards came into effect.

A Provider found to be in violation of this directive may have their accreditation immediately cancelled and may be banned from submitting an application for accreditation with ACA for up to 5 years.

Applications for Re-accreditation

An accredited course may seek re-accreditation by providing written evidence that it continues to meet the minimum standards for entry to the scheme as detailed in the ACA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Standards current at the time of applying for re-accreditation. If substantial changes have been made to the Accreditation of Counsellor Education Standards an entirely new application may be required, at the discretion of ACA. Guidelines for making a Re-accreditation submission are available from ACA. In summary, the process requires:

1. A submission detailing differences/improvements between the information presented in the original application for each accreditation criterion listed.
2. The information should detail results of ongoing monitoring, review and subsequent improvements made relevant to the specific criterion and details of significant changes.
3. A summary of student evaluation and feedback and records of industry consultation during the period of recognition.
4. Copies of External Auditor/Accreditation/Registration reports for the period.

N.B. it may be useful to include *relevant* appendices to illustrate or clarify aspects of the course report.

A Panel will consider applications for re-accreditation. Further information may be sought and in certain circumstances a Visit Stage may be deemed necessary. Otherwise, applicants for re-accreditation will only be required to complete the initial Application Stage procedure.

The cost of re-accreditation is the published cost at the time of re-accreditation.

Part III

Scheme Management and Fees

The Accreditation of Counsellor Education Courses Scheme is administered by the Courses Accreditation Panel (CAP), a sub-committee appointed by and accountable to the ACA Board.

CAP members requiring substantial experience are invited to join the Panel by the ACA Board. It is expected that Panel members may come from organisations that offer courses and must have substantial experience in course development, delivery, assessment and review. All members of the CAP are required to be objective. If it becomes apparent that there is a conflict of interest a CAP member may be asked to stand down by the ACA Board. The Courses Accreditation Scheme is accountable to the ACA Board through the Course Accreditation Panel.

The Courses Accreditation Panel has the authority to recommend or not recommend applications for accreditation to the ACA President. The ACA President is required to make the final decision on the approval or non-approval of an application, and to confirm conditions of accreditation and re-accreditation recommended by the Panel that investigates the course.

The Courses Accreditation Panel will recommend to the ACA President any proposed changes in the fees payable.

Fee Structure

The Scheme is partly funded from fees paid by courses applying (or re-applying) for accreditation. Fees for the stages of the accreditation process are payable in advance of each stage.

The Total amount payable for Course Accreditation is *approximately* \$3,500.00 at the current rate and includes the License to use the ACA Accredited Training logo on marketing material.

Please check with ACA the current fees before submitting an application.

The payments will be made in advance in two stages as follows: -

- Application Stage - \$1,750.00
- Final/Certificate Stage - \$1,750.00

Once approved, courses may indicate in their advertising they are ACA Accredited. Organisations must abide by the Acceptable Use Policy attaching to the use of the ACA name and logo, and ACA Accredited Training name and logo. A breach of the Acceptable Use Policy may result in immediate forfeiture of all rights, including the accredited status of the course/s. An organisation may only use the ACA Accredited Training name and/or logo as it applies directly to an accredited course and must refrain from using it in general reference, which may give rise to a person misinterpreting which course/s is accredited.

An administrative charge is made in the event of withdrawal before a Panel is formed.

The Fees for a **Re-accreditation** application are also payable in stages as follows:

- Re-accreditation Application Stage - \$1,500.00
- Re-accreditation Certificate - \$1,500.00

Re-accreditation only applies to a course that is essentially the same course structure and content as the initial accreditation of the course. If there are substantial changes to the course structure, its delivery and assessment or any other major aspect of the course, providers should seek guidance from the ACA CEO on whether the situation represents a new accreditation or re-accreditation process prior to submitting their application for re-accreditation. The CAP will be the final authority to determine if the accreditation or re-accreditation process applies to the particular circumstance.

APPENDIX 1

Guidelines for Client Work, Work Placements/Experience and Supervision in Counsellor Education Courses

Background

The purpose of these guidelines is to clarify the requirements for ACA accredited counsellor education courses in respect to courses that include counselling practice and/or counselling supervision. Furthermore, in principle, they are seen as applying beyond the boundary of the Accreditation scheme to education courses generally. The guidelines are a response to concerns raised by the ACA Board, the Courses Accreditation Panel, courses seeking accreditation, and counselling agencies that may be able and willing to provide placements for students on courses.

A non-qualified student is a student who has no completed counselling qualifications and is in the process of learning to be a counsellor, but has not finished any accredited course. ACA does not encourage non-qualified students to counsel clients (clients are not fellow students in a role play situation) without a qualified and experienced counsellor actually being present at the session. Viewing recorded footage after the session is not accepted as being sufficient supervision in the case of non-qualified students. The counsellor should debrief clients after being counselled by a non-qualified student.

In practice, the provision of suitable client work is an increasing problem for many counsellor education courses. The ACA Course Accreditation Panel acknowledges the difficulty, but, in order to protect clients, students/ trainees and the counselling profession, deems it is important that clear guidelines exist for the gaining of such experience.

1. Guidelines for Client Work and Work Placements/Experience

- 1 Working with real clients in a work setting may be part of a student's developing experience and learning of clinical work, and therefore it is important that this is not done at the expense of the client or the student. All work by counselling students should be sufficiently supervised by a workplace supervisor (whom is an experienced and qualified counsellor) with appropriate disclosure made to the client.
- 2 A course should have specific criteria for the selection of organisations and workplace supervisors to ensure the ongoing needs and safety of both the client and the student. They should work within the ACA Code of Conduct and in a manner that is congruent with the course orientation. Workplace Supervisors must be able to fulfil the educative function of integrating theory and practice and must be experienced practitioners.
- 3 The workplace should work to a contract with the course that includes assessment requirements, meetings and the issue of responsibility for the counselling work. The provider should ensure that regular contact is made with both the workplace supervisor and the student during the placement/experience to ensure ongoing support. Appropriate avenues must be in place for dispute resolution and/or mediation.

Clear guidelines and requirements on the objectives of the work placement/experience and duties/assessments/reports to be undertaken, must be made available to both the organisation hosting the student and the student prior to the work placement/experience commencing.

Suitable insurance should be held by both the provider and organisation to ensure liability and indemnity coverage of the student during the placement/experience.

2. Guidelines for Counselling Supervision during Education and Training

It is recommended that, if students are working with clients in accordance with the Guidelines set out in 1 above, that they undertake some counselling supervision during the process. Supervision sessions should be undertaken in a group and an individual setting.

Supervision may be offered by either the teaching staff member responsible for the student's completion of the course/unit and/or the supervisor of the student in the work setting and/or another external qualified counselling supervisor. In all supervisor settings, the counselling supervisor should meet the eligibility requirements for counselling supervisors as set out by ACA.

- 1 The relationship of supervision on the course along with supervision and other responsibilities in a training agency or placement should be clarified. If supervisors are employed separately by the Provider, then permission and arrangements (including the issues of clinical responsibility and confidentiality) for students/trainees to bring agency clinical material for consultative supervision must be clarified so that the educational and professional objectives of the course can be fulfilled.
- 2 If the supervisor is employed by the agency, the agency should have a formal contract with the Provider to cover responsibility issues, assessment requirements, general liaison with the course and finance.
- 3 Some courses permit, encourage or require students to have supervision of their client work with an 'external' supervisor who is employed neither by the course nor the agency. In this case the agency must give permission for agency clinical material to be taken to this supervisor for consultative supervision as in 1.1.1, *and* the course should have a written agreement with the supervisor in relation to the issues of clinical responsibility and supervisors' reports or assessment requirements. Such external supervision hours can be counted in the overall course staff/student contact hours only if there is a formal requirement for such contact between the supervisor and the course and the supervisor as is congruent with the theoretical orientation of the course and an adequate assessment of the student's clinical competence.

APPENDIX 2

ACA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs

Checklist of Application Documentation and Attachments Higher Education Qualifications

Please complete this checklist and submit with your application for accreditation to:

Australian Counselling Association
PO Box 88
Grange QLD 4051

Please ensure the following documentation is included with your application. Not including all documentation and attachments may result in your application being returned without being assessed.

Items to include in your application (please tick):

- A submission document that addresses all criteria in the order shown on pages 16 – 22 of the ACA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs document.
- Evidence of approval as a private provider of higher education programs.
- Attachments relating to criteria listed on pages 16 - 22 of the ACA Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs document, including but not limited to:
 - Copies of insurance policies
 - Subject outlines
 - Examples of course learning materials
 - Samples of assessments
 - Relevant policies as referred to in your application
 - Academic staff curriculum vitae, each accompanied by certified copies of qualifications and recent professional development.
(As described on page 6 above, the Course Leader (or similar title) must hold a Doctorate qualification in counselling (or a closely-related field) and be eligible for Level 4 Membership of ACA. Core staff teaching in higher education programs should have a Masters-level counselling (or in a closely related field) qualification plus several years industry experience.)

Please ensure all attachments are clearly numbered and accurately referred to in the submission document.

I confirm the above information and attachments are included for the purpose of assessment of our application for accreditation of the proposed program/s by the Australian Counselling Association. I understand that not including all required information will mean that our application will not be assessed.

Signature

Name

Date