



Psychotherapy & Counselling
Federation of Australia

Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Applications

This document is a guide to completing an application for PACFA membership or registration via Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This process allows for assessment of equivalence with formal counselling and psychotherapy training for applicants who have not completed the training specified in the PACFA Training Standards.

The RPL pathway recognises the totality of skills and knowledge gained through, but not limited to, formal training, industry based training, professional development activities, work experience and life experience. This pathway is consistent with the principles for Recognition of Prior Learning set out in the [Australian Qualification Framework \(AQF\)](#).

Applicants are required to provide evidence that addresses the guidelines in order to demonstrate that their training, work experience and level of knowledge and competence acquired through other forms of learning is equivalent to that of practitioners listed on the PACFA National Register.

Requirements for PACFA membership or registration

The training and supervised practice requirements for PACFA membership and registration outlined in this document are based on the *PACFA Training Standards* and the current *Membership and Registration Requirements*.

PACFA TRAINING STANDARDS

Volume of Learning

The minimum volume of learning requirements listed below apply to any program, whether undergraduate or postgraduate.

400 hours of learning (minimum) (at AQF level 7-9). This may be made up of:

- i) 200 hours direct person-to-person supervised learning of which 60 hours may be synchronous online (e.g., interactive webinars).
 - This equates to 140 hours, which must be solely taught face-to-face, plus 60 hours of synchronous training
 - The central focus of this person-to-person learning is on interpersonal and/or therapeutic skills development
- ii) 200 hours of learning may be conducted via online asynchronous training for theory-based studies.

Supervised practice

A minimum of 40 hours of face-to-face counselling or psychotherapy practice (client contact) with 10 hours of supervision (related to client contact) must be completed within training 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).

For Clinical Membership and Registration, an additional 75 hours of post-qualifying supervision linked to 750 additional hours of post-qualifying client contact, accumulated over a minimum two-year period, are required. Hours of supervised client contact that are completed post-training may be undertaken via synchronous video conferencing or telephone.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) PATHWAY

Where an applicant's professional training, supervision and development do not fit the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards or equivalent, an application to PACFA for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Provisional or Clinical membership or registration may be made.

All Applicants with overseas training are required to apply via RPL. This enables PACFA to assess whether the training meets the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards. For some overseas qualifications that PACFA is not able to assess, a formal assessment by VETASSESS, the government qualifications assessment body, may be required.

Applicants who may apply via RPL may include but are not limited to:

- Psychotherapists or counsellors whose training in psychotherapy or counselling does not meet all of the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards but who have other relevant training and/or substantial, relevant supervised practice experience, as assessed by the relevant PACFA College;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing practitioners whose training as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Healing Practitioner does not meet all of the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards but who have other relevant training and/or substantial, relevant supervised practice experience, as assessed by the College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices (CATSIHP);
- Graduates from cognate fields (such as psychology, social work or occupational therapy) whose training is accredited by TEQSA or ASQA at AQF level 7 to 9 and who complete additional training in psychotherapy or counselling that does not meet all of the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards but who have other relevant training and/or substantial, relevant supervised practice experience.

RPL applicants must demonstrate how the totality of their training and experience is equivalent to the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards. The PACFA Training Standards will be used as the guide in assessing the RPL applications. The guidelines below will be considered when assessing RPL applications.

1. Training

1.1 Training relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice

Guidelines:

- Applicants need to demonstrate how their completed training is equivalent to the requirements of the PACFA Training Standards. Please provide as much detail as possible for the training

undertaken to support your RPL application.

- Where an applicant's training is made up of multiple courses rather than a single counselling or psychotherapy training program, the training must have been comprehensive and in depth, and must relate to counselling or psychotherapy practice and be equivalent to the requirements of PACFA's Training Standards.
- The courses which form the basis of the RPL application must have been theoretically informed and practice-based. The modality of the courses must have been situated within the broader field of psychotherapy or counselling models and have a coherent underpinning philosophy of practice.
- As psychotherapy and counselling are practical arts, theoretical components should have been taught in ways that relate to practical situations. Teaching should have utilised methods such as lectures (live or audiovisual), written notes, set readings, seminars, group discussions, role-plays and experiential training methods.
- Applicants are expected to have completed training covering the following subjects or their equivalent:
 - Models of assessment and intervention
 - Knowledge and integration of social contexts
 - Referrals and referral options
 - Suicide risk assessment and management
 - Ethics of clinical practice and supervision
 - Professional development
 - Theories and processes of psychotherapy or counselling
 - Alternative modes of working with clients, including telephone and video-conferencing, incorporating potential security and confidentiality issues
 - Stages of human development
 - Knowledge and integration of the range of understanding human diversity including culture, gender, sexual identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, class, religion and ethnicity
 - Specific training in indigenous awareness and acknowledgement of indigenous history
 - Self awareness
 - Familiarity with research on counselling and psychotherapy effectiveness
- Psychotherapy training is expected to demonstrate psychotherapist formation as assessed by the College of Psychotherapy.
- Counselling training is expected to demonstrate counsellor self awareness development as assessed by the College of Counselling
- Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practitioners is expected to demonstrate formation as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Healing Practitioner as assessed by the College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices (CATSIHP).
- Training in cognate fields such as social work, psychology and occupational therapy is expected to be accredited by TEQSA or ASQA at AQF level 7 to 9.

Examples of supporting evidence include:

- Certified copies of transcripts or certificates of completion of all relevant courses, including transcripts for incomplete courses
- Details of the curriculum for each course such as copies of course handbooks and subject outlines
- Specify for each course how much learning was theoretical and how much was experiential

- Specify for each course how much learning related to self-awareness activities, interpersonal and communication skills training, and use of oneself in the therapeutic relationship
- Evidence of client contact hours and supervision of practice undertaken during the courses, for example practice and supervision logs.

2. Other forms of learning relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice

2.1 Supervised practice

Guidelines:

- Supervision and client contact hours cannot be used to substitute for training in the RPL application, but can be used to support an application where the training does not meet all of the requirement of the PACFA Training Standards, for example:
 - Demonstrated practice with a substantial number of clients
 - Demonstrated experience in working with a diverse range of clients
 - Development of specialist skills required to work with specific client groups
 - Substantial experience of personal therapy or other personal development activities relevant to training for particular therapy modalities
- For Provisional membership/registration
 - PACFA’s minimum supervised practice requirements are 40 client hours linked to 10 hours of supervision
 - This is ideally completed during training at the ratio of one supervision hour for every four client contact hours.
- For Clinical membership/registration
 - Ideally, the frequency of supervision since qualifying meets PACFA’s requirements for 10 hours of supervision per annum, or 15 hours per annum if practice hours exceeded 400 client contact hours in a year;
 - PACFA only accepts peer supervision hours when practitioners have significant clinical experience;
 - Ideally, some supervision hours will have been individual rather than in a group. As a guideline, PACFA suggests that at least 20 hours of individual supervision have been completed since qualifying.
- If an applicant has not completed a placement within the training (40 client contact hours and 10 supervision hours), equivalence to training supervision must be demonstrated. As a guideline, they should show evidence of at least 100 client hours and 25 hours supervision to gain membership since qualifying
- For further details, see the definitions of supervision and peer supervision in the Appendix.

Examples of supporting evidence:

- Completion of online supervision logs at the PACFA Portal. These are completed when making the online application but can be updated at any time in the Portal
- Supervision Verification Forms or supervision logs signed by the applicant’s supervisor(s) or letters signed by the applicant’s supervisor(s) that state the number of client contact hours and supervision hours completed
- A report from the applicant’s current supervisor and any other recent supervisors’ reports attesting to the capacity of the applicant to provide competent, ethical supervision services to counsellors and/or psychotherapists

- For Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Healing Practitioner Applicants, evidence similar to the examples above in relation to support provided to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community members, would be required.

2.2 Counselling or psychotherapy work experience

Guidelines:

- Work experience as a counsellor or psychotherapist relates to employment in a counselling or psychotherapy position, or working in private practice
- The position is expected to require counselling and/or psychotherapy skills and competencies

Examples of supporting evidence:

- Comprehensive curriculum vitae listing details of employment history as a counsellor or psychotherapist, and/or locations and business names for private practice
- Position descriptions or other documents outlining the functions undertaken, relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice
- A description of the role(s) performed, hours per week and years of duration
- Evidence such as letters of employment, references from supervisors or managers or copies of performance appraisals
- For Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Healing Practitioner Applicants, evidence similar to the examples above in relation to support provided to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders community members would be required

2.3 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in counselling or psychotherapy

Guidelines:

- Evidence of CPD is required to demonstrate that the applicant has kept up to date and maintained currency while practicing as a counsellor or psychotherapist
- CPD activities undertaken must be related to counselling or psychotherapy practice
- CPD is not a replacement for comprehensive training in counselling or psychotherapy

Examples of supporting evidence:

- Copies of certificates or other evidence of participation in CPD
- A brief statement explaining how the learning outcomes from CPD support the RPL application

2.4 Other relevant work and life experience

Guidelines:

- Evidence of work experience in other fields related to counselling and psychotherapy may be provided where this has contributed skills relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice
- Evidence of personal development activities may be provided where these activities have contributed skills and experience relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice

Examples of supporting evidence:

- Please refer to the examples of supporting evidence listed in section 2.2 above.

2.5 Contribution to the counselling and psychotherapy profession

Guidelines:

- Applicants who have made a substantial contribution to the counselling, psychotherapy or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices professions may use these contributions

to support the RPL application.

- This may include:
 - Contributions to counselling or psychotherapy professional associations or other relevant professional bodies
 - Contributions made to the public profile of counselling or psychotherapy
 - Contributions made to counselling and psychotherapy research or education

Examples of supporting evidence:

- Evidence of professional association memberships, roles and achievements
- A list of counselling or psychotherapy education roles and achievements
- A list of counselling or psychotherapy publications

How to make an RPL application to PACFA

Applicants are to complete the online Application Form on the PACFA Portal. Please use the Provisional or Clinical membership or registration application form at the PACFA Portal.

In response to the question asking whether you wish to apply via RPL, please select “Yes”.

In addition to the standard PACFA application fee, there is an additional fee to apply via RPL. For details of current fees, please see the Schedule of Fees at the PACFA website. Payments may be made by credit card, cheque or direct bank transfer.

RPL applications are to address the RPL Guidelines by providing supporting evidence relating to the following matters which are detailed in these Guidelines:

1. Evidence of counselling or psychotherapy training:
 - 1.1 Training relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice
2. Other forms of learning and development relevant to counselling or psychotherapy practice:
 - 2.1 Supervised practice
 - 2.2 Work experience as a counsellor or psychotherapist
 - 2.3 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in counselling or psychotherapy
 - 2.4 Other relevant work or life experience
 - 2.5 Contribution to the counselling and psychotherapy profession.

APPENDIX

Supervision definitions

What is supervision?

- Supervision is a contractual, collaborative process which monitors, develops and supports supervisees in their clinical role. The central focus is on both the optimum outcome for the client and the professional development and self-care of the supervisee.¹
- The process of clinical supervision encompasses a number of significant components, including a formal agreement between supervisor and supervisee.
- It is an opportunity for the supervisee to present relevant material regarding clinical practice via case discussion, and perhaps recordings of client sessions, role plays, allowing a space for reflective review by the supervisee and feedback from the supervisor.
- Supervision can be undertaken individually or in a small group of no more than six members. It is not the same as administrative or management supervision, nor is it the same as personal therapy of the supervisee.

What is peer supervision?

- Peer supervision is a formal process where therapists contract to provide collegial critiquing and enhancement of each other's clinical client work. Colleagues or peers work together for mutual benefit, rotating the roles of supervisor and supervisee.
- Peer supervision can be undertaken as a dyad or in a small group of no more than six members.
- Peer supervision is generally only accepted for practitioners who have provided evidence of more than five years of substantial clinical experience since qualifying (i.e. more than 750 client contact hours linked to more than 75 hours of supervision) prior to commencing peer supervision.²
- PACFA generally accepts no more than 50% of supervision requirements as peer supervision.

¹ PACFA Training Standards 2020

² Membership and Registration Requirements and Annual Renewal Requirements 2020