

Criteria for an Equivalence Decision



Overview

Equivalence decisions are for counsellors/psychotherapists who wish to join the ACC register. This includes counsellors who have trained overseas, counsellors whose training is interrupted or incomplete, and counsellors who belong to professional organisations outside of the Partnership of Counselling and Psychotherapy Bodies (PCPB).

The Partnership of Counselling and Psychotherapy Bodies ([PCPB](#)) consists of six professional organisations in the UK with Professional Standards Authority (PSA) accredited registers, which developed the [SCoPEd framework \(2022/2025\)](#).

Equivalence decisions are made by experienced counsellors/psychotherapists who will use their professional judgement to assess the applicant's qualifications, additional training and experience against the SCoPEd framework (2022/2025), and other membership criteria which are set out below.

Entry-level training standard

The equivalence decision is based on evidence, provided by the applicant, that the training and experience they have had meet or exceed the standards set by ACC for entry to our register.

An applicant has to demonstrate that they have training and experience that maps onto the minimum qualifying entry level, which is:

- achieving a minimum level 4 diploma in counselling, which is accredited by an academic or vocational qualification accrediting body (in the U.K. these accrediting bodies come under OFQUAL);
- the training has taken place predominantly in an in-person training setting (i.e., circa 70% of in-person training with any online component being in a synchronous learning environment). Distance learning and exclusively online training courses will not meet this criterion;
- the course specification has a minimum of 300 guided learning hours (the time a learner is being taught, instructed or participating in training under the guidance or supervision of a tutor/lecturer, including assessment time);
- the course includes a 100-hour supervised clinical placement as an integral part of the core counselling training, which has in-person and, where relevant, online provision;

- the qualifying and/or subsequent training and experience have equipped the applicant to provide a counselling/psychotherapy service which demonstrates the competencies set out in column A of the SCoPEd framework.

When applicants have trained overseas, the criteria set out above for qualifying training may also be evidenced by post-qualification training and experience.

Where an applicant's qualifying training has been interrupted, prior relevant training and experience can be put forward as evidence, and ACC may set some further conditions in terms of training and practice before equivalence can be reached.

Application process

Applicants wanting to join ACC's register through the equivalence route will need to submit the relevant application form. There are different application forms for different types of applicants: for those who have trained overseas, those who have incomplete/interrupted training and those who belong to other professional organisations outside of the PCPB partnership and are not otherwise recognised as equivalent. See ACC's website, [here](#), for a list of memberships deemed to be equivalent.

What the application forms have in common is that they ask for details of training, practice experience, and professional memberships. Applicants are also expected to complete a mapping exercise to show where their training and experience meet the SCoPEd column A competences. Some applicants will be newly qualified, others may have been in practice for some time, and there may also be applicants who want to present a portfolio of training and experience for an equivalence decision.

All applicants will need to provide references from a professional sponsor, such as a clinical supervisor (or clinical manager), and a Christian sponsor. A Christian sponsor is explained in a 'frequently asked question' on ACC's website [here](#). Finally, applicants will be asked to confirm that they are willing to commit to ACC's ethics and practice standards and terms and conditions of membership.

The assessment of the application is undertaken by ACC assessors who are experienced counsellors/psychotherapists and who are in addition also responsible for the assessment of counselling and supervision audits and accreditation applications. The assessors will carefully consider all the information that is provided against the criteria set out in Appendix 1 and may request further information from and/or a discussion with an applicant before reaching a decision.

Information to be provided by the applicant to support the process

Applicants need to submit:

1. Copies of certificates of all core/foundation counselling/psychotherapy training, the academic level of the course¹, together with a detailed breakdown of what was covered in the training (e.g. transcript, curriculum outline, other description, including the marks/results) and the web address of the specific course and training provider².
2. Certificates relating to further additional counselling training, for example, higher diplomas, master's degrees, supervision qualifications, etc., and web addresses of each training.
3. If applicable, details of membership of other counselling professional bodies and accreditation/licensing.
4. Completed SCoPEd column A competence mapping table.
5. A reference from the current supervisor (or clinical manager) which states:
 - their name, occupation, counselling/supervisory qualifications and in what capacity they know the applicant and for how long;
 - a statement to the effect that in their professional opinion the applicant is a safe, competent practitioner (with reference to the [SCoPEd Framework \(2022/2025\)](#), and of suitable character in relation to ACC's Ethics and Practice to be considered for registered membership of the ACC.

¹ Where educational levels are not clear, the assessors may request that the applicant acquires a NARIC certificate of equivalence. Please be aware that charges apply. *NARIC is the UK's national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills.*

² For certificates and transcripts in other languages, please submit a certified translation.

6. A statement outlining summary counselling practice hours gained normally post qualification in different settings and totals for accompanying supervision for a specified period of practice, for example:

2017-2018

Counselling Practice

200 hours at Oak Tree Counselling Centre (include web address, telephone number and contact person)

55 hours private practice (include web address and directory listings as available)

Supervision

15 hours 1 to 1 in person supervision private practice (name of supervisor and contact detail)

22 hours group supervision with two other counsellors at Oak Tree Counselling Centre (name of supervisor and contact details)

Supervision sessions are spread out so that there is a minimum of 90 mins each month.

7. Representative sample of continuing professional development (CPD) activities with CPD certificates where available, ideally from the last three years.
8. A reference from a Christian sponsor who can confirm that the applicant is someone who identifies as a Christian.

A note on counselling practice hours

Counselling practice hours are hours spent providing counselling or psychotherapy services to a client, patient, or service user. This is normally an intentional activity, where the therapist and client enter into a formal contract to meet regularly for an agreed period of time, and where a therapeutic relationship is established and sustained. The counsellor uses knowledge and skill gained through training and practice experience to select and utilise various known approaches and interventions, in order to help the client resolve their psychological difficulties and/or cope with life challenges. Psychological difficulties

can include issues that overlap with a client's faith and spirituality. Counselling practice in the U.K. requires that a counsellor have a supervisor and professional indemnity insurance.

Counselling hours cannot therefore be hours spent in providing pastoral care and support, spiritual direction, and/or chaplaincy. However, hours spent in employment (paid or voluntary) that have the key attributes of a counselling relationship, as described above, may be accepted. Where an applicant wishes these hours to be taken into account, they need to provide further information to support a reasonable claim that the activity was counselling and not mental health support delivered in the context of pastoral care, coaching/mentoring, spiritual direction, or chaplaincy activities.

Specifically, you will need to tell us:

- Details of setting (location, type of clients, whether general or specific, such as an addiction service, whether carried out one to one, group work, face to face and/or online).
- Under what agreement or contract were you seeing clients (for example, a contract of employment or a service description)?
- What service did the client believe they were coming for?
- What were the arrangements in terms of the number of sessions on offer, assessment and referral practices, and payment (if any)?
- What approaches and interventions were within the scope of the service?
- What boundaries were in place (e.g., confidentiality/limits to confidentiality; existence of dual relationships/avoidance of dual relationships)?
- What ethics and practice guidelines applied to the service?
- What supervision arrangements, if any, were there for the service (e.g., frequency, face-to-face, peer group etc)?

Successful applications

An equivalence decision does not automatically allow entry onto ACC's register. There are further criteria associated with registered counsellor membership which are set out in the online application process on ACC's website. These include, for example, an applicant's status with regard to whether they have been subject to a professional complaint and/or have unspent criminal convictions.

An equivalence decision may also be conditional on an applicant accepting a restriction in the scope of their practice and/or undertaking some further CPD training before being admitted onto the register, or in their first year of registered membership.

Accreditation

Depending on the level of training and professional accreditation with other counselling bodies, an applicant may be able to apply to transfer this into an ACC accreditation. There is a separate accreditation recognition process. Further information on accreditation and the accreditation recognition process can be found on the ACC website [here](#).

Appendix 1 Criteria for Assessing Equivalence in Training

Qualifying Training		
Format	Curriculum Evidence	Mandatory /Desirable
Can be achieved over more than one training course in more than one training institution. Majority of study must be in a face-to-face context (circa 70%).	Skills training including relational aspects of counselling and supervision [This element must be in an in person /face-to-face training set-up]	M
	Depth study of one or more approaches to counselling, e.g., humanist, behaviourist, systemic, integrative	M
	Spiritual and religious integration and interventions	D
	Ethical codes, their content, and importance and how to deal with ethical dilemmas	M
	Standards of Practice covering dual relationships, contracting, confidentiality, record keeping, supervision, CPD	M
	100-hour supervised clinical placement [This element must include a proportion of in-person /face-to-face client work]	M
	Academic equivalent to or exceeding UK level 4 diploma	M
Factors taken into account if shortfall in above		
- evidence of successful completion of substantial relevant professional training at a pre or post qualifying level (not distance learning) - evidence of reasonable level of regular counselling/psychotherapy practice allowing for explainable practice breaks - evidence of regular supervision/peer support in line with standards of practice operational in country practicing in - evidence of continuing CPD cover in line with the standards of practice operational in country they are practicing in - evidence of adequate insurance cover in line with the standards of practice operational in country they are practicing in - evidence that advertising and promotion fall within the UK's Advertising Standards Authority guidelines or equivalent (in short that the applicant is not making false claims about themselves or their practice)		

Document history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	February 2021	First version issued
1.1	August 2021	Addition of further guidance on counselling practice hours
1.2	April 2023	Updated with new name, logo, branding
1.3	April 2026	Review and update to reflect additional equivalence application forms and SCoPEd column A mapping table
