

COSCA Counsellor and Psychotherapist Accreditation

INTRODUCTION TO DIPLOMA AND COMBINATION ROUTES TO ACCREDITATION

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A. AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION

What is Accreditation?

1. COSCA, the professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland, aims to maintain standards of qualifications, training and practice in counselling and psychotherapy. This is to protect clients and counsellors/psychotherapists, minimise the danger of malpractice and support the development of counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland. COSCA, therefore, has developed a system of accreditation of counsellors and psychotherapists, underpinned by its Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice.
2. The key purpose of Accreditation is to provide an assurance to the general public that a counsellor/psychotherapist has been assessed and deemed to have attained a mature, professional, competent, safe and ethical standard of practice. Accreditation is also about confirming and evidencing good practice. Accreditation is seen as a part of the professional development of counsellors/psychotherapists. Accreditation requires applicants to demonstrate the quality of their practice and that they have reached a standard that is acceptable for accreditation by COSCA.
3. COSCA recognises that any system of accreditation is as much a protection for the counsellors/psychotherapists concerned as a protection for their clients. COSCA delegates responsibility for the format and criteria of the COSCA accreditation process to its Accreditation and Recognition Standing Policy Group. Through detailed discussions, and consultation within COSCA and other professional counselling bodies, the Group has designed these accreditation criteria, and will continue to monitor and review them. The Group strives to work reflectively so that a sensitive balance between safety and creativity can be reached. Underpinning the whole development of an accreditation system is the recognition that accreditation for counsellors and psychotherapists is a crucial yet complex process. As such it will require continual refinement and revision.
4. COSCA aims to make the process of accreditation accessible and supportive. It is aware of the diverse backgrounds of qualifications, training and experience that counsellors and psychotherapists will bring to the process of accreditation and it has aimed to design a system that can assess this fairly. The process of accreditation is about enabling applicants to show that they have achieved set criteria and is not simply a question of verifying that an applicant has submitted appropriate documentation.

What happens to my submitted application?

5. Decision-making on applications for accreditation is the responsibility of COSCA's Counsellor/Psychotherapist Accreditation Panel. The Accreditation Panel is a working group comprised of experienced accredited counsellors/psychotherapists. The Accreditation Panel aims to provide the degree of consistency necessary to take account of the variety of approaches, qualifications, training and experience presented for submission by applicants.
6. In their deliberations, the Accreditation Panel is asked to compare the entire documentation against the criteria. An application should be such that the Accreditation Panel can say, on the basis of what has been submitted, that the applicant is fit, via their learning, skill and experience, to work as a counsellor/psychotherapist independently, as well as within organisations. On the basis of the application the Panel should also be able to be confident that members of the public seeking help from the accredited counsellor/psychotherapist will receive an appropriate response.
7. Applicants can draw upon training and experience gained while working as counsellors/psychotherapists independently, as employees, or as volunteers.
8. The timescale involved in the COSCA accreditation process is based on the understanding that becoming a counsellor/psychotherapist is a gradual process requiring consolidation through time. Where an applicant is applying via the Diploma route, and may have only limited previous counselling experience, the timescale allows for the consolidation of knowledge and skills gained during the Diploma training.
9. All written materials provided by COSCA for the accreditation process are the copyright of COSCA. Photocopying, or copying by any other means, is restricted to the personal use of the applicant.

How do I become a Practitioner Member of COSCA?

10. The first step in the process of accreditation is that an applicant must be a **Practitioner Member** of COSCA.

Practitioner Members are required to have completed a minimum of 300 cumulative contact hours of training in counselling/psychotherapy. The cohesive core of the above training needs to take place within a period of 5 years. As part of the above training, but not included in the 300 hours, you are required to have a supervised counselling practice placement. Additional training needs to be in substantial and planned blocks, and clearly progressional from the core training.

Practitioner Members are required to have a cumulative practice base of 200 hours, with an average of 2 hours per week; have a supervision ratio of 1:12; and have achieved 54 cumulative hours of continuing professional development with an average of 18 hours per annum over the last 3 years.

Applicants must abide by COSCA's Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice and reflect knowledge of the Statement throughout their application. Details of how to apply for Practitioner Membership are available from COSCA's website www.cosca.org.uk or by contacting COSCA's office.

Please note that you are eligible to apply for Practitioner Membership two years post your core training in counselling, psychotherapy.

B. APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ACCREDITATION

How do I submit my application for accreditation?

1. All applicants require to follow the most up to date Guidelines and use the most up to date Application Form. The most up to date information is available from the COSCA website: www.cosca.org.uk. You should include the date of the Guidelines in the box provided under Appendix B of the Application Form.
2. All applications must be submitted, **one master and four copies**, to COSCA, 16 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2NE, and be accompanied by the application fee. See COSCA's website for current fee. Applicants should keep a copy of their application.
3. Please present information clearly and **typed**. Applications that are difficult to read will be returned to the applicant and will have to be re-submitted at the next submission date.
4. Submission dates are twice yearly: the last working days of March and September. Applications arriving at the COSCA office later than these dates will have to wait until the following round.
5. The application must include a contents page, a supervisor's report, and an application checklist (see **Appendix A of the Guidelines, Criteria and Application Form**).

What are the outcomes of applying to the Accreditation Panel?

6. When determining each application, the Accreditation Panel has four options:
 - **Accreditation**
 - **Provisional acceptance for Accreditation** subject to minimal requirements or re-submission of certain documents. *See website for re-submission fee.*
 - **No Accreditation Meantime** – some section(s) will require re-submission. *See website for current fee.*
 - **No Accreditation** – substantial section(s) of the submission do not fulfil COSCA's requirements and considerable work is required, essentially representing a fresh application. *See website for re-application fee.*
7. The Chief Executive of COSCA will inform applicants in writing of the outcome, normally within 16 – 20 weeks of the submission date. The Panel will give details of where an application fails to meet the criteria. The extent of the re-submission is at the discretion of the Panel. Applicants will be invited to fulfil the additional requirements and resubmit only that specific area which has been indicated by the Panel.
8. Applicants can appeal against the decision of the Panel, through the COSCA Appeals Procedure, within three months of the decision being made. There are two grounds for appeal:
 - ✓ a failure to follow the assessment procedures and/or guidelines; or
 - ✓ the applicant has new evidence which might have influenced the decision had it been available when the Panel considered the application for accreditation.

COSCA Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists

9. Once accredited, your entry on the COSCA Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists will be updated to show that you are an Accredited Member of COSCA.

How do I become Re-accredited?

10. Please refer to COSCA website: www.cosca.org.uk Accreditation – Counsellor/Psychotherapist – Annual Renewal of Accreditation.

C. ROUTES TO ACCREDITATION

There are two routes to accreditation:

1. Diploma Route

The Diploma Route is for counsellors/psychotherapists who have completed a COSCA or equivalent validated diploma in counselling/psychotherapy and have at least two years post diploma counselling/psychotherapy experience. Please contact the Development Officer (Individuals/Courses) to obtain details on equivalency.

Full details of the Diploma Route are to be found in Guidelines, Criteria and Application for the Accreditation of Counsellors and Psychotherapists – Diploma Route.

2. Combination Route

The Combination Route is for counsellors/psychotherapists who have been working for several years, who have not completed a COSCA validated diploma or equivalent, but who have some formal core training, such as offered within an agency/organisation, and have significant practical experience.

Counsellors/psychotherapists applying for accreditation by this route must provide evidence of a combination of:

- i) Some cohesive units of formal counselling/psychotherapy training
- ii) Several years of practice under formal supervision at a minimum of 90 client contact hours per year.

In order to establish parity between applicants coming from a wide range of backgrounds COSCA has introduced the following system of measurement:

Counselling/psychotherapy practice. 1 year of supervised and verified practice (minimum 90 client hours/year)	= 1 unit
Core training – 300 cumulative hours of formal counselling/psychotherapy training, with the cohesive core of the training taking place within 5 years	= 4 units
Further counselling/psychotherapy training – a coherent block of 75 hours of training	= 1 unit

Together the total units for this route must add up to 10 units. Please note that all applicants must have completed 300 hours of core training (= 4 units) and a minimum of 450 supervised client contact hours.

It is possible to gain 10 units from a combination of counselling/psychotherapy practice and core training only i.e. 300 hours core training (= 4 units) plus 6 years of counselling/psychotherapy practice at a minimum of 90 supervised contact hours per year (= 6 units).

Combination Route applicants must indicate clearly in their application how they have arrived at the required 10 units.

Full details of the Combination Route are to be found in the Guidelines, Criteria and Application for the Accreditation of Counsellors and Psychotherapists – Combination Route.