



Training in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy entry requirements and accreditation of prior experience and learning

The following statements are the result of consultation between the AFSP Course Accreditation Committee (CRED), the AFSP Registration Committee, the AFSP Professional Affairs Committee and representatives of the Confederation of Family Therapy Training Institutes (CONFETTI).

These statements are made in order to emphasise and clarify points in the AFSP *Blue Book* (4th Edition, revised 2015) *Accreditation of Training Courses in Family and Systemic Psychotherapy and Systemic Practice*, in relation to Entry Requirements.

Entry Requirements

These extracts are from the *Blue Book* (4th Edition, revised 2015) outline entry requirements and the levels and length of training. The entry requirements clearly state that

“A prior relevant professional training or equivalent” is necessary at all three levels of training: foundation, intermediate and qualifying

Entry requirements

“Traditionally training has been designed on the assumption that entrants will already have completed training in another relevant profession (e.g. psychology, social work, psychiatry, teaching or nursing). The assumption is that entrants will have some knowledge of the workings of the health and social services, experience in working with other health and social services professionals, child development and psychology. In recent years individuals without this background have sought to train as family and systemic psychotherapists. This poses difficulties for courses which are not set up to cover the whole range of knowledge and skills required. It may be that courses wish to admit outstanding applicants who do not have a traditional background. Courses must demonstrate their method of assessing which areas of knowledge need to be covered in addition to the course and discuss how the candidate will be able to cover this.” Blue Book (4th Edition, page 18)

Applicants also need to have a first degree or evidence of ability to study at a postgraduate level; and successfully completed foundation and intermediate years of training in systemic practice (or equivalent) to proceed onto qualifying level.

Levels and length of training

The Blue Book covers all four years of training in family and systemic psychotherapy. For purposes of accreditation this training is divided into three levels:

- Foundation level (Year 1 - usually one academic year)
- Intermediate level (Year 2 - usually one academic year)
- Qualifying level (Years 3&4 - usually two academic years)

Dual Qualification

Training courses assume that candidates already have a good ability to work effectively within a mental health or associated field and will be able to build on this prior knowledge and skills.



At the start of training as a family and systemic psychotherapist an individual will typically have:

- A degree (3 years)
- A professional qualification (2-3 years)
- Some clinical experience, though some may have undertaken their professional training as part of their degree.

The full or complete family and systemic psychotherapy training is usually a further 4 years part-time study, carried out whilst the individual is working and applying the knowledge and skills acquired in training.

Dual Qualification Equivalence

AFSP recognises that there will always be exceptions to the traditional routes to training and so a certain degree of flexibility ensures that appropriate potential candidates are not excluded.

Until now decisions on these exceptions have been made by the training courses and monitored by CRED Panels when accrediting courses. However, in recent times two major developments in the wider context have impacted on the development of family and systemic psychotherapy as a profession and need to be taken account of.

They are:

- (a) the *Agenda for Change* process within the NHS with its repercussions for the voluntary and independent / private sectors; and
- (b) the Department of Health's *Mapping of Psychotherapies*. For these AFSP has been required to provide statements about training standards and equivalence.

The role of the association is to ensure that those training in family and systemic psychotherapy and then employed as family and systemic psychotherapists have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience prior to their training in family and systemic psychotherapy to enable them to practice in a range of settings.

AFSP Statement 1

It is recognised that there are a number of people who are currently family and systemic psychotherapists and working in a range of settings, but who fall outside of the stated entry requirements for admission to training, in that they do not hold a relevant prior profession. There are also a small number of candidates currently on qualifying Level training courses who do not meet the stated entry requirements for relevant prior profession but for whom the course has considered them as 'equivalent'. For over 20 years AFSP has been accrediting and monitoring training courses and therefore accepts that anyone who has successfully completed an AFSP accredited qualifying level training IN OR PRIOR TO 2007 or is REGISTERED with UKCP as a family and systemic psychotherapist is suitably experienced and qualified to practice within a designated family and systemic psychotherapy post.



Relevant Prior Professions List

In conjunction with CRED and CONFETTI, AFT has revised the list of relevant professional qualifications. As stated above, the *Blue Book* (4th Edition page 18) entry requirements specified the following professions as relevant – psychology, social work, psychiatry, teaching or nursing. These are elaborated below:

Psychology – clinical psychology, educational psychology and counselling psychology qualifications are considered relevant.

- Social Work – the generic professional qualification is sufficient whichever training route was undertaken (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate, or the employment based without an academic award attached). It is noted that social work is now a graduate profession.
- Psychiatry and other medical specialities – for qualifying level training speciality training registrar level or staff grade is required.
- Teaching – where individuals have had substantial experience in which they have worked with pupils and families in a counselling capacity.
- Nursing – mental health nursing and other nursing specialities which require counselling skills. It is also noted that nursing is now a graduate profession.

AFSP Statement 2

The AFSP board has agreed that the following professional training can now be included as relevant professional qualifications:

- Arts therapists (art, drama, dance and movement and music therapists), qualified and registered with the Health Care Professions Council, HCPC.
- Counselling – three-year minimum training, full BACP accredited membership (MBACP Accred.) and experience in the public or voluntary sector is considered essential to establish equivalence.
- Occupational therapy – qualified and registered with Health Professions Council.
- Speech and language therapy – qualified and registered with the Health Professions Council.

Exceptions

At foundation and intermediate level many courses currently operate a ‘widening participation’ philosophy which accepts applicants who may not have the required professional qualification, but who would find a foundation / intermediate level course useful to their work. These applicants may not intend to progress to qualifying level and registration as family and systemic psychotherapists. Course providers are expected to make all potential applicants aware of the AFSP entry requirements and if they accept certain individuals on to their training the course will need to ensure the applicants are informed that they may not be able to progress on to the qualifying level of training or be eligible for registration unless further training in a relevant profession is undertaken.

Training Institutions and course providers are required to establish their own internal APEL/equivalence procedures. They may consult AFSP CRED or Registration Committees about candidates whose applications present particular dilemmas. Training institutions will be required to provide documentation in support of their decisions in the APEL/equivalence route, including any additional requirements that they might stipulate. Currently there is an undertaking to develop greater coherence between courses in relation to applicants and this may result in further refinement to the



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existing course accreditation (CRED) guidelines.

All qualifying level courses are required to be provided at postgraduate level and as such must conform to the APEL procedures laid down by their academic institutions. However, these must take account of AFSP's requirements as the professional organisation body accrediting the course and ensures that applicants are appropriately qualified to undertake training, and ready on completion of the training to take up employment as family and systemic psychotherapists.

AFSP Statement 3

Advice to training institutions and course providers: At the time of their application potential candidates should be given the fullest possible information in terms of eligibility for progression to further levels of family therapy training; employment and career development prospects in respect of the NHS salary structure (Agenda for Change) and developments in the voluntary sector.

Essential components of prior professional training and how shortfalls could be met.

The essential components that a relevant prior professional usually brings are knowledge, skills and experience regarding:

- (a) developmental psychology
- (b) adult and child mental health
- (c) working in and with public sector services (including health and social care systems, multi-disciplinary teams and contexts)
- (d) managing risk.

AFSP Statement 4

AFSP has agreed to work with any institution(s) that wish to develop a course or modules that would top up any shortfall in a previous qualification or training that falls outside the nine professions specified. While this would not equate with a 'prior professional training' it would meet any deficit identified. AFSP agrees there is room for the development of such provision and an opportunity to provide a relevant background to train as family and systemic psychotherapists without a prior professional training.

UKCP Registration

It is only after the successful completion of an accredited qualifying training (year 3 & 4) that individuals are eligible to apply for registration as a Family and Systemic psychotherapist with the UK Council for Psychotherapy, UKCP.

Individuals who have completed foundation (year 1) and intermediate (year 2) levels of training may be referred to as systemic practitioners in accordance with the blue book page 18.

When an individual seeks registration with UKCP through AFSP, the Registration Committee require details of any equivalence and APEL decisions that were made in respect of the candidate's progression through their four year / three level training in family and systemic psychotherapy. This information is provided by the applicant, who should ensure that the courses they have followed provide this information for them.



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For fully qualified family and systemic psychotherapists who wish to apply for UKCP registration via AFSP and have not completed an AFSP accredited qualifying course (*for example, qualifying level courses provided outside of the UK, or UK trainings that are not AFSP accredited, or courses whose accreditation has lapsed*), the Registration Committee have an APEL process and application forms to access equivalency of training.

It is incumbent on qualifying level courses to determine if a candidate is ready for independent family and systemic psychotherapy practice, and if not then they should not be passed. The training institution may make a separate university award, with the professional qualification following later, to take account of the fact that some students have required an extended placement or a little more time to fully complete AFSP requirements such as their 200 workplace hours. Application for UKCP registration via AFSP, cannot be accepted until all components of the course are signed off by the training provider and course qualification awarded.

Chairs AFSP, CRED, PAC, Registration 2015 (Updated 2026)