

Condition Review: Association for Animals Horticultural and Equine Practitioners – AAHEP (formerly known as Athena Herd Foundation)

1. Outcome

- 1.1 At the Association for Animals Horticultural and Equine Practitioners (AAHEP)'s notification of change, the Professional Standards Authority ('we') issued 13 Conditions on its accreditation, all of which were to be completed by 1st September 2025 (see paragraph 12 of the published outcome).
- 1.2 AAHEP, formerly known as Athena Herd Foundation, was granted a Certificate of Incorporation on Change of Name by Companies House on 1st October 2025.
- 1.3 This report sets out our assessment of the actions taken by AAHEP to satisfy the Conditions.
- 1.4 We found that AAHEP had met all 13 Conditions.

2. Background

- 2.1 We assess registers against our Standards for Accredited Registers ('the Standards')¹. Where a Register has not met a Standard, we can issue Conditions. A Condition sets out the requirements and the timeframe that a Register must meet.
- 2.2 At AAHEP's notification of change, completed in August 2025, we issued 13 Conditions (a full list is published in the report from that assessment [2507 NOC Outcome Athena.docx](#)). All 13 Conditions had to be implemented by 1st September 2025:
 - 1. In order to continue to qualify as a "voluntary accredited register" with the additional roles, Athena must accept the Condition suggested in number 2 below.

¹ Standards for Accredited Registers, 2023 edition:
www.professionalstandards.org.uk/publications/standards-accredited-registers

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2. Athena must make it explicit that to qualify for the title of “Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist” under its register, all applicants must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as “Occupational Therapists”.
 3. Athena must further revise its risk matrix to take a fuller or more comprehensive account of risks and mitigations, especially those associated with horticultural therapy.
 4. Athena must fully implement its planned review of its processes for all routes to registration to ensure that they are sufficiently robust, taking into account the underlying requirements of each of the new roles to be added to the Register.
 5. Athena must ensure that continued practice competence is taken into sufficient account in its review of the registration and annual revalidation requirements for the new roles.
 6. Athena must ensure that the Register is updated to reflect the new roles and any entries pertaining to them.
 7. Athena must ensure that the information its register holds on all registrants under the new roles is clear, accurate and accessible, ideally aided by an information sharing agreement with the HCPC and reliance upon declarations.
 8. Athena must complete the planned review of the terms and conditions of registration to consider any differences relating to the proposed new roles to be added to the register.
 9. Athena must ensure that areas of specialty practice are appropriately controlled by setting out what registrants can or cannot do under the new roles.
 10. Athena must complete its planned revisions to its education and training courses to ensure that practitioners of the new roles have a minimum Level 4 qualification, or equivalent, and are fully equipped for the equine community.
 11. Athena must complete its planned review of the composition of its quality-assuring Education and Training Committee to consider representation from the new roles to be added to the register.
 12. Athena must complete its planned revisions to its Certificate of Proficiency to consider the four new roles to be added to the register and the importance of experience in those roles.
 13. Athena must complete its planned update to its website and other public materials to provide clear and accessible information about the limitations and benefits of treatments offered by the new roles.

2.3 This report discusses the actions AAHEP took to address the Conditions, as well as our decision about whether the Conditions are met.

2.4 We reviewed the following evidence:

- AAHEP’s reported actions about what it had done to meet all 13 Conditions.

3. Concerns leading to the Conditions

3.1 Below are the details of what led to the Conditions:

Condition 1: *In order to continue to qualify as a “voluntary accredited register” with the additional roles, AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must accept the Condition suggested in [Condition] 2 below.*

AAHEP is a voluntary professional organisation with an Accredited Register of Animal, Horticultural and Equine Practitioners that initially registered six roles. Through a notification of change application made prior to introducing the change, AAHEP informed us that it intended to add four new roles to its register relating to animal and horticultural practice and submitted the relevant supporting evidence. While three of the roles give no cause for concern and are permissible for addition to the AAHEP register, the fourth (“Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist”) contravenes our definition of a “voluntary accredited register” and can only be added on the condition that prospective registrants are perpetually registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This is because the title is protected by law and held by HCPC as the statutory regulator.

Condition 2: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must make it explicit that to qualify for the title of “Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist” under its register, all applicants must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as “Occupational Therapists”.*

AAHEP is a voluntary professional organisation with an Accredited Register of Animal, Horticultural and Equine Practitioners that initially registered six roles. Through a notification of change application made prior to introducing the change, AAHEP informed us that it intended to add four new roles to its register relating to animal and horticultural practice and submitted the relevant supporting evidence. While three of the roles gave no cause for concern and are permissible for addition to the Athena register, the fourth (“Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist”) contravenes our definition of a “voluntary accredited register” and can only be added on the condition that prospective registrants are always registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). This is because the title is protected by law and held by HCPC as the statutory regulator.

Condition 3: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must further revise its Risk Matrix to take a fuller or more comprehensive account of risks and mitigations, especially those associated with horticultural therapy.*

AAHEP reported that they had identified no “new” risks associated with the four new roles they intended to add to their register. Prior to submission of its notification of change (NoC) application, AAHEP had revised sections of its Risk Matrix to take account of the new activities they were proposing to add. They reported that two risk categories in particular, “technical competence” and “care of service user”, had been revised and appropriate mitigation measures identified. However, we noted from our desk research that additional risks existed that were associated with horticultural

therapy that AAHEP had not identified, and for which mitigation measures were required. We concluded, therefore, that while AAHEP had demonstrated a firm grasp of the risks associated with most of the practices of the new roles it wished to introduce and had proffered appropriate mitigation actions, risks relating to horticultural therapy needed to be more comprehensively captured and mitigated. We noted that this observation was applicable to both Standard One and Standard Seven.

Condition 4: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must fully implement its planned review of its processes for all routes to registration to ensure that they are sufficiently robust, taking into account the underlying requirements of each of the new roles to be added to the Register.*

AAHEP has clear processes for all entry routes into its Register, including equivalence routes through its Certificate of Proficiency policy, and these are published on its website. AAHEP's existing registration policy is also clear on entry processes and what is expected of applicants. These various register entry processes demand a comprehensive declaration of all related qualifications and professional memberships and accreditations, including Therapeutic qualifications and professional memberships. The new roles to be added require, in addition to revising the current application form and registration policy, a review of other processes to acknowledge the requirements of the changes to be occasioned by the additional roles. AAHEP was already planning to do this and indicated that it had a clear idea of what needed to be done.

Condition 5: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that continued practice competence is taken into sufficient account in its review of the registration and annual revalidation requirements for the new roles.*

AAHEP has in place established policies and processes for register entry through all routes, including an equivalence route. These make clear what is expected of registrants and are published on its public-facing website. They include a full declaration of relevant qualifications and professional memberships. However, as AAHEP intended to introduce four new roles to its register, these processes would have to be reviewed to consider recognition of the changes that the new roles would necessitate. AAHEP's planned review of its registration and re-registration processes would need to encompass a re-evaluation of policies and processes relating to continued practice competence, including continued professional development (CPD). CPDs are a requirement at revalidation as evidence of continued practice competence for existing roles. AAHEP would need to be clear about appropriate CPD requirements for each of the new roles it intended to introduce.

Condition 6: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that the Register is updated to reflect the new roles and any entries pertaining to them.*

AAHEP's accredited register of practitioners displays the full information of every registrant, and this is published on its website and accessible to the broader public. The information includes full name of registrant, a unique identity number, details of qualifications possessed by registrant, and link to a registrant's website where this exists. We noted that AAHEP was silent on how the proposed change would affect this minimum requirement. Therefore, as part of the proposed review discussed under Condition 2, Condition 4 and Condition 5 above, AAHEP should ensure that the Register is updated to reflect the new roles and any entries pertaining to them. We also noted that this observation is applicable to some minimum requirements under Standard Eight.

Condition 7: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that the information its register holds on all registrants under the new roles is clear, accurate and accessible, ideally aided by an information sharing agreement with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and reliance upon declarations.*

AAHEP's accredited practitioner register displays the full information of every registrant, and this is published on its website and accessible to the broader public. The information includes full name of registrant, a unique identity number, details of qualifications possessed by registrant, and link to a registrant's website where this exists. We noted, however, that AAHEP was silent on not only how it would reflect the new roles on the register, but also how it would ensure the integrity of the information its register would hold of all registrants enrolled under the new roles. If possible, this quality assurance process should be aided by an agreement between AAHEP and HCPC, coupled with reliance on registrant declarations. Therefore, as part of the register updating discussed under Condition 6 above, AAHEP should ensure that the information its register holds on all practitioners enrolled under the new roles is clear, accurate and accessible. We also noted that this observation is applicable to some minimum requirements under Standard Eight.

Condition 8: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete the planned review of the terms and conditions of registration to consider any differences relating to the proposed new roles to be added to the register.*

AAHEP's standards for registrants are clear on all aspects, including the requirement for supervision, continued professional development, professional behaviour, ethical basis for practice, and the ethical treatment of horses and animals. However, AAHEP accepts that the existing standards for registrants would need to be considered against all the four roles it wished to add to the register. In view of this, any written agreement or contract between AAHEP and its registrants would necessarily need to be reviewed, especially in the case of registrants for the title of Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist (EFOT/EAOT). Here, the terms and conditions of registration would need to be explicit that prior and continuous registration with HCPC is mandatory. AAHEP undertook to look at the standards that are engaged under these

new practices and to reach out for appropriate contribution from qualified professionals and/or other regulators and registers.

Condition 9: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that areas of specialty practice are appropriately controlled by setting out what registrants can or cannot do under the new roles.*

As AAHEP was introducing four new roles to its Register, it would need to ensure that areas of specialty practice between the roles are appropriately controlled. This is to avoid the risk of a registrant being on one part of the AAHEP register and doing things that they are not trained to do. AAHEP should, therefore, clearly set out what registrants can and cannot do in the practice of each of the four new roles.

Condition 10: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned revisions to its education and training courses to ensure that practitioners of the new roles have a minimum Level 4 qualification, or equivalent, and are fully equipped for the equine community.*

AAHEP is proposing to introduce four new roles to its Register. For that reason, it is proposing to make some adjustments to its education and training courses in line with the proposed additional roles to ensure that practitioners are fully equipped for the equine community. AAHEP's current standards for education and training require a minimum Level 4 AAHEP-approved Equine Facilitated qualification for register entry. AAHEP also accepts a recognised and regulated qualification of a minimum Level 4 in any associated therapeutic practice, such as those AAHEP is seeking to introduce. AAHEP further enrolls registrants who come through its equivalence route, a completed Certificate of Proficiency. However, AAHEP suggests that these education and training standards would need to be revised in light of the new roles to ensure that the equine/animal community is well served. In the case of EFOT/EAOT particularly, but also for the other three new roles, there will need to be a defined certified knowledge of equine/animal anatomy and physiology. This represents an important additional resource for practitioners, to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of both service users and animals is maintained.

Condition 11: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned review of the composition of its quality-assuring Education and Training Committee to consider representation from the new roles to be added to the register.*

AAHEP now has an Education and Training Committee composed of three members. This Committee plays a critical role in quality-assuring AAHEP's education and training courses for register entry. However, its membership only reflects the current professional representation of AAHEP's Register. In light of the proposed addition of four new roles to AAHEP's register, there will be a need to revisit the composition of this

Committee. AAHEP assured us that if approved, “there will be appropriate representation from these proposed roles” on its quality-assuring Education and Training Committee.

Condition 12: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned revisions to its Certificate of Proficiency to consider the four new roles to be added to the register and the importance of experience in those roles.*

Against the backdrop of the proposed addition of four new roles to the register, AAHEP submits that its Certificate of Proficiency (CoP), which constitutes the equivalence route for entry into the AAHEP register, would need to be revisited in the same way as other routes. As AAHEP puts it, “the standard Certificate of Proficiency will also need to be amended as an option for EFOT”. We require that experience as an element of equivalence is considered as part of AAHEP’s review.

Condition 13: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned update to its website and other public materials to provide clear and accessible information about the limitations and benefits of treatments offered by the new roles.*

AAHEP has an easily accessible website which holds information on the benefits and limitations of the activities of practitioners for all the roles it currently registers. However, AAHEP is proposing to add four new roles to its register, all related to equine, animal and horticultural practice. Therefore, information on the benefits and limitations of these new roles would invariably need to be incorporated into AAHEP’s website and other public materials in a clear manner and made accessible to the broader public. We noted that this necessity for updating the website is also applicable to some minimum requirements under Standard Eight.

3.2 Further details can be found under AAHEP’s notification of change outcome².

4. Assessment of Conditions

4.1 AAHEP provided its response to the Conditions on 1st September 2025.

4.2 Below are the details of the actions taken by AAHEP and our assessment:

Condition 1: *In order to continue to qualify as a “voluntary accredited register” with the additional roles, AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must accept the Condition suggested in [Condition] 2 below.*

² [2507 NOC Outcome Athena.docx](#)

AAHEP accepted the logic of the Condition and the basis on which it is predicated. AAHEP provided evidence of the action it has taken to satisfy Condition 2 below. As AAHEP has acted on Condition 2, we concluded that Condition 1 has been met.

Condition 2: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must make it explicit that to qualify for the title of “Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist” under its register, all applicants must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as “Occupational Therapists”.*

AAHEP informed us that their application form has been revised and now includes HCPC membership confirmation and appropriate reference prior to enrolling on the register as Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist (EFOT/EAOT). An annotation on the application form against EFOT/EAOT applications clearly states that:

“Applicants seeking to register as Equine Facilitated (or Assisted) Occupational Therapists must provide proof of their Allied Health Professional qualification and must also be registered members of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)”.

AAHEP submitted the revised application form for verification. To reinforce the annotation, the form proceeds to request for “HCPC membership details (if applicable)”, making it mandatory for EFOT/EAOT applicants to submit all relevant HCPC related credentials prior to enrolment with AAHEP.

AAHEP reported that this development came in the aftermath of a meeting they held with HCPC’s Head of Registration, where the two agencies arrived at an understanding that all relevant EFOT/EAOT applications will be confirmed against the online records of the HCPC register and recorded as part of AAHEP’s application process. In effect, the AAHEP Register’s application spreadsheet has been revised to enable the capture of HCPC-related data where appropriate. Columns for HCPC membership and confirmation of checks have been added to the spreadsheet (see Condition 7 below for details).

As further evidence of the comprehensive overhaul of their registration processes, AAHEP also submitted for verification their proposed revised wording of their Registration Policy. A careful perusal of the proposal immediately suggests that substantial rewording would be effected to every section of the policy to reflect the new roles to be added to the register. For example,

- references in the policy to the “Ethical Framework for Best Practice in Equine Facilitated Interactions” will be renamed “Ethical Framework for Best Practice in Animal and Equine Assisted Services, as well as Horticultural and Nature-based Services”
- Another example is AAHEP’s suggestion that all references to Equines will be extended to include “...and other animals”.

AAHEP undertakes to ensure that both the revised application form and the updated Registration Policy will be uploaded to their website following PSA approval. Accordingly, we concluded that Condition 2 has been met.

Condition 3: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must further revise its Risk Matrix to take a fuller or more comprehensive account of risks and mitigations, especially those associated with horticultural therapy.*

We confirmed AAHEP's report that it has further revised its Risk Matrix and added two new risks relating to horticultural therapy. These are captured under items 5 and 6 of AAHEP's Risk Matrix, which they submitted for verification.

The new risks added to the Risk Matrix, both under the category of "Care of Service User", read:

No. 5

"Service users are exposed to specific risks in the Horticultural or Natural environment that place them at risk of physical harm or injury. These include but are not limited to: the use and handling of tools and related machinery; the use and handling of chemical products used in horticultural process; compromising personal hygiene and health through working directly with the soil; physical equipment or machinery working, or being used, and tools and materials being left around on the ground(s) or blocking pathways".

No 6

"Service users are at physical risks because of the situation and/or environment that they are taken into to undertake the provision of service (Horticultural or Nature-based Therapy). Such risks include, but are not limited to: accessibility challenges onsite for those requiring cognitive, postural or mobility support; exposure to weather and seasonal related conditions that result in effects such as, extremities of temperature, slippery or uneven surfaces; exposure to direct sunlight; exposure to pollens and potentially toxic plant material".

In both cases, AAHEP has identified existing controls and developed extensive mitigation measures associated with these risks. These are all clearly outlined in AAHEP's revised Risk Matrix. Accordingly, we concluded that Condition 3 has been met.

Condition 4: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must fully implement its planned review of its processes for all routes to registration to ensure that they are sufficiently robust, taking into account the underlying requirements of each of the new roles to be*

added to the Register.

As part of satisfying this Condition, AAHEP referenced action it has taken to satisfy Condition 2 above, where we confirmed that both its application form and registration policy have now been revised and updated. These actions reflect the specific requirements of the newly registered roles as discussed under Condition 2 above.

Further to that, however, AAHEP informed us of several other actions it has taken to fulfil Condition 4:

- amended the contents of the Register’s main landing page on its website: the page will now be re-titled to read “UK Professional Standards for Animal and Equine Assisted Services as well as Horticultural Therapy”
- added new information to the “Protecting the Public” webpage: this page will now include three new paragraphs under a new section titled “Other animal assisted and horticultural therapies” to reflect the new roles
- carried out revisions to the “Framework for Ethical Treatment of Horses” policy, which will now read “Framework for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.”

In their totality, these revisions and updates, scheduled to be uploaded to the website following PSA approval, constitute an overhaul of AAHEP’s register entry processes through all routes and standards for all roles. Moreover, they take into full consideration the underlying requirements of each of the new roles to be added to the Register and are, therefore, sufficiently robust for the new dispensation. They, therefore, satisfy the requirements of the Condition. Accordingly, we concluded that Condition 4 has been met.

Condition 5: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that continued practice competence is taken into sufficient account in its review of the registration and annual revalidation requirements for the new roles.*

We noted under Condition 2 that AAHEP has had consultations with the HCPC on processes for the registration of EFOT/EAOT applicants. AAHEP reported that in addition to this, they have already commenced similar discussions with other organisations, “such as Social Farms and Gardens in the UK and various animal-related organisations about drawing appropriate expertise into the Register’s process governing registration/revalidation to properly reflect these new disciplines”.

In the aftermath of these consultations, AAHEP’s revalidation form, like its initial registration form and registration policy, has been amended and updated to reflect all the new roles and the specific requirements relevant to them. The revised renewal form was submitted for verification.

As part of demonstrating that their revalidation form has been revised to take sufficient consideration of the new roles, AAHEP acknowledged that procedurally the new arrangements imply that all registrants renewing registration for Occupational Therapy roles must confirm continued registration with HCPC and that this will need to be

verified in the same way initial registration is verified. Consequently, as in the case of the initial registration form, AAHEP has included in the revised revalidation form the annotation referenced under Condition 2 above, viz:

“Applicants seeking to register as Equine Facilitated (or Assisted) Occupational Therapists must provide proof of their Allied Health Professional qualification and must also be registered members of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)”.

The revised form also makes provision for specific CPD requirements for the new roles, all of which have been added to the list of titles, in the same way as it does for the existing roles. In the section on requirements, registrants renewing their registration are required, amongst other things, to provide a “Statement of completed CPD hours in the last 12 months” and to indicate “Supervision in hours undertaken in the last 12 months”. In addition to the fact that these must be supported with relevant/appropriate documentation, registrants are also required to confirm “that you consider yourself to be in every way continually fit to practice”. This is quite a significant declaration at revalidation and rendered Condition 5 met.

Condition 6: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that the Register is updated to reflect the new roles and any entries pertaining to them.*

AAHEP informed us that the process of capturing new registrants on their Register and website has been reviewed to make provision for the new roles. As enrolment onto any of these roles is yet to commence, no details of practitioners under any of these titles yet exist on the AAHEP Register. However, AAHEP took care to provide a screenshot of their website under the “Practitioner Details” section to illustrate how this webpage would be updated to include all the new roles they have identified. AAHEP explained that:

“As can be seen below in the screen shot from the website under “Details”, “Practice” in the example below it shows “Equine Facilitated Practitioner” ...This role is selected by the Registrar when the practitioner is set up on the system. The selection box in the system admin area will be extended to include all new roles such that they will be selected appropriately on completion of application or renewal”.

AAHEP goes on to show on the screenshot all the roles on their Register that the Registrar would select from, including all the new roles that have been added:

- Equine Facilitated Psychotherapist
- Equine Assisted Psychotherapist
- Equine Facilitated Therapist
- Equine Assisted Therapist
- Equine Facilitated (or Assisted) Occupational Therapist
- Animal Assisted Psychotherapist
- Animal Assisted Therapist

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- Horticultural Psychotherapist
 - Horticultural Therapist
 - Horticultural Practitioner

In effect, AAHEP has in place established internal processes for regular updates to their accredited register, and this will be done when information on new registrants is available. The demonstration is a clear indication that this is easily doable. Although no data yet exists that can be verified as up to date and accurate, we noted that the mechanism to ensure this happens exists. All that is now required is mere activation of the new system when registration to the new roles commences. AAHEP has provided both an illustrated test and an explanation of how this would work in practice. We are satisfied that a tried and tested mechanism for updating the Register exists. This is all AAHEP can realistically do for now. The actual updating and accuracy checking of the Register can be confirmed at their next assessment after registration to the new roles has commenced. We concluded, therefore, that Condition 6 has been met.

Condition 7: AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that the information its register holds on all registrants under the new roles is clear, accurate and accessible, ideally aided by an information sharing agreement with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and reliance upon declarations.

We have noted in our discussion under Condition 6 above that AAHEP's process for capturing the details of new registrants on their Register has been reviewed to take account of the new roles. We also noted that as enrolment to any of these new roles is yet to commence, no details of the new practitioners yet exist on the AAHEP Register. We noted further, however, that AAHEP has taken care to provide a screenshot of their website under "Practitioner Details" to illustrate how this webpage would be updated to include all the new roles they have identified. Therefore, in preparation for ensuring that details on registrants are clear, accurate and accessible, AAHEP has provided a screenshot of the "Personal Details" webpage on its Register where this information will be uploaded once registration to the new roles has begun.

AAHEP explains that it is in the "About my Practice" field on this webpage that clear and accurate details of practitioners and therapists would be held, including website details if any.

However, as in the case of Condition 6 above, no information as yet exists of registrants to the new roles for uploading to this webpage as registration is yet to commence. Only when that happens, would we be able to assess if this information can be judged to be clear, accurate and accessible. Again, as in the case of Condition 6 above, we are satisfied that AAHEP has put in place the mechanism for assuring that the information it will hold of registrants to the new roles would be clear, accurate and accessible to the broader public. This is based on the tested illustration it has provided to that effect. In our register check at our last assessment of AAHEP, we concluded that the information on the register was generally clear, accurate and easily accessible via AAHEP's website.

With use of the same system, we don't expect the information on registrants to the new roles to be any different.

On the issue of HCPC's role in supporting the process of ensuring that AAHEP's Register is clear, accurate and accessible, we noted in our discussion under Condition 2 above that AAHEP reported having had conversations with HCPC's Head of Registration. In that regard, a tacit understanding has developed between the two agencies in relation to the registration of EFOT/EAOT practitioners which provides that:

"No actions will be taken by [AAHEP] without undertaking checks against the 'practitioner' listings on the HCPC website (<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/check-the-register/>) as well as reviewing the work and findings of HCPTS [Health and Care Professionals Tribunal Service] <https://www.hcpts-uk.org/hearings/recentdecisions/>".

As the overall AAHEP register of practitioners is relatively small at this stage, this arrangement is thought to be sufficient and manageable. According to the agreement, any concerns or questions arising during implementation should be directed to the Head of Registration at HCPC. And while HCPC does not wish to be advised of members joining the AAHEP register, we are further informed that "[AAHEP] and HCPC have agreed to maintain a close dialogue and review the process as it develops".

To this effect, AAHEP submitted an unsigned document which encapsulates the understanding between the two agencies. This documentation may not have the status of a formal agreement, but it is quite useful for purposes of AAHEP's business continuity. As the understanding between the two institutions places no obligation on HCPC, it is left with AAHEP to ensure that it puts in place a process for continuously assuring that its data on EFOT/EAOT practitioners is consistent with that held by HCPC. The document AAHEP submitted for verification adequately serves that purpose. Based on this analysis, we concluded that Condition 7 has been met.

Condition 8: AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete the planned review of the terms and conditions of registration to consider any differences relating to the proposed new roles to be added to the register.

We noted in our analysis under Condition 2 above that AAHEP's application form has been revised and updated. This form outlines in detail the terms and conditions of registration to which all AAHEP registrants must sign up.

The form details the standards of education and training required; specifies the category of registrants affected (PSA accredited practitioners); states the objectives of the AAHEP Accredited Practitioners Register; includes declaration of compliance with AAHEP's key policies and standards of professional behaviour; requests for personal details; indicates the various titles under which registrants can apply; incorporates an annotation for those applying for the EFOT/EAOT titles; provides a comprehensive list of requirements; and clarifies registration fees. These have all been updated to reflect the requirements of the new roles.

We also noted in our discussion under Condition 4 that wording for AAHEP's registration policy has been revised and updated to reference all the new roles AAHEP is adding to its Register. These actions reflect the specific requirements of the newly registered roles as discussed under Condition 2.

Similarly, we noted under Condition 5 that AAHEP's registration renewal (or revalidation) form has been amended and updated to reflect all the new roles and the specific requirements relevant to them.

Furthermore, in our Condition 6 analysis, we noted that AAHEP has informed us that the process of capturing new registrants on their Register and website has been reviewed to make provision for the new roles. The same applies to the process of capturing clear and accurate data on registrants to the new roles discussed under Condition 7 above.

Put together, the revisions and updating cited above and carried out by AAHEP constitute a wholesale review of the terms and conditions that will govern registrants to the new roles. All differences between existing and new registrants have now been addressed. Pivotal to this review process is the updating of AAHEP's terms and conditions of registration to accommodate registrants for the new roles. For this reason, we concluded that Condition 8 has been met.

Condition 9: AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must ensure that areas of specialty practice are appropriately controlled by setting out what registrants can or cannot do under the new roles.

AAHEP acknowledges the importance of clear and unambiguous clarification in the scope of practice for each of the four new roles it seeks to introduce to the register. AAHEP reported that for this reason, it has developed role and service descriptions for all the roles, particularly the two roles of Animal and Horticultural therapists. These are the two roles (among the four new ones) that emerged as critical in our evidence analysis of AAHEP's NoC application and required much greater clarification in terms of practice parameters. The role and service descriptions of the other two – equine-assisted psychotherapy and equine-assisted occupational therapy - are relatively well established.

Accordingly, AAHEP submitted the various service descriptions for verification:

- Animal Therapist
- Horticultural Therapist
- Equine Assisted Psychotherapist
- Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist.

A review of the role and service descriptions revealed that each clearly outlines the following:

- the meaning and definition of the role
- what practitioners are expected to do or not do
- the implications and obligations of register membership
- clear definition of boundaries and practice restrictions
- in the case of the Horticultural therapist role, recognition of the status of and services provided by allied practitioners, such as Horticultural Practitioners, who do not have recognised therapeutic qualifications.

With areas of specialty practice clearly delineated for all four roles, there should be little or no confusion about what each AAHEP registrant is expected to do. AAHEP further informed us that the role and service descriptions for all roles will be published on their website and “also linked to from the ‘Protecting the Public’ page amends”. In the case of the Horticultural therapist role, there is recognition of the status of, and services provided by, allied practitioners such as Horticultural Practitioners, who do not have recognised therapeutic qualifications. This way, AAHEP has taken action to ensure that registrants of the new roles are clear about what they can or cannot do in their practices. We concluded, therefore, that Condition 9 has been met.

Condition 10: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned revisions to its education and training courses to ensure that practitioners of the new roles have a minimum Level 4 qualification, or equivalent, and are fully equipped for the equine community.*

In its submission, AAHEP informed us that all recognised Equine Assisted Services (EAS) courses are specifically listed on its website. We noted that AAHEP unequivocally sets out its expectations of education and training standards at the outset, contained in the opening paragraph on its education and training webpage:

“The Register recognises the importance of maintaining high standards in education and training. These standards ensure that members of the public, service users, or clients receive services founded on professional ethics and that prioritise health, wellbeing, and safety”.

AAHEP then goes on to clearly and carefully stipulate the two broad categories of qualifications it accepts for entry into its Register:

- Successful completion of the AAHEP Level 4 Equine Assisted Services Practitioner Diploma; or
- Successful completion of, and proof of qualification for, non-AAHEP training in Equine Assisted Services.

The stipulation in the second bullet point above is swiftly followed by a further clarification, which insists that “these (qualifications) must be **recognised, regulated qualifications** at a minimum of **Level 4** on the **Ofqual** (or regional UK equivalent) **Regulated Qualifications Framework**” (bold emphasis in original).

In short, AAHEP submits that the courses it accepts for entry into its Register, and which are listed on its webpage, are Ofqual regulated courses or others that have sought recognition from the Register. AAHEP suggests, therefore, that the same would apply to qualifications for all the four new roles it intended to add to its register.

As part of its endeavour at ensuring minimum Level 4 qualifications for entry to the new roles, AAHEP informed us that it has already identified one Ofqual regulated course covering animal-assisted interventions – a Level 5 course known as “The Elysian Approach” – which it will add to its list of recognised courses.

Unfortunately, AAHEP has been unable to identify a similar Ofqual regulated course for the Horticultural Therapist role. AAHEP’s position is that for now, “all other qualifications will need to be submitted to the Standards of Education and Training Committee for recognition”. In the case of EFOT/EAOT roles, AAHEP’s consideration is that those applying “will need to be trained to an appropriate level to support HCPC membership, in addition to appropriate recognised EAS qualifications or Certificate of Proficiency (where appropriate)”.

In effect, as AAHEP is clear on the educational and training requirements for registration into all of its existing roles, it is similarly clear that the same requirement will apply to the educational and training requirements of the new roles to be added to AAHEP’s Register. These would invariably be recognised and regulated qualifications at a minimum Level 4 on the Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework (or equivalent). Secondly, AAHEP’s **Certificate of Proficiency** registration process exists as an equivalence route for register entry (see Condition 12 below for details). AAHEP’s Standards of Education and Training Committee exists as the quality-assurance mechanism for all its education and training entry qualifications and processes.

AAHEP has further outlined its position on what equine-related qualification it would recommend for practitioners of the new roles to ensure they are properly equipped for the equine-assisted services sector. We have noted above that AAHEP publishes its list of “recognised” courses, including specific equine-related therapeutic qualifications. AAHEP informed us that these will be recognised in the context of appropriate new roles. As AAHEP has clarified,

“for those with existing (non-equine) professional therapeutic qualifications and existing professional registrations, non-therapeutic equine qualifications of the Certificate of Proficiency approach will be considered”.

AAHEP’s plan is that as their Education and Training Committee develops, they “will extend where appropriate specific requirements and specific courses that are recognised, for example [they] will be looking into some Allied Health Professional post-graduate programmes in the market”. In the meantime, the performance and success of the Education and Training Committee in identifying appropriate training

courses for especially the Horticultural Therapist role will be assessed at our next annual check or other assessment. With this assurance in the aftermath of AAHEP's review of the education and training requirements for the new roles, we concluded that Condition 10 has been met.

However, in the course of the assessment, we were contacted by one of AAHEP's stakeholders about the Horticultural Therapist Register who outlined some discomfort with the qualification level being proposed for this role. We noted also that AAHEP has introduced the Level 4 Horticultural Practitioner role. With two roles within the domain of Horticultural practice, an opportunity arises for AAHEP to engage with this stakeholder over the appropriate qualification level for the Horticultural Therapist role. Therefore, the Decision-Maker issued a recommendation to support the work around decisions about qualifications for registration under the Horticultural Therapist title:

Recommendation: AAHEP should engage with relevant stakeholders for Horticultural Practice in making decisions about qualification levels for the Horticultural Therapist practitioner group.

Condition 11: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned review of the composition of its quality-assuring Education and Training Committee to consider representation from the new roles to be added to the register.*

AAHEP assured us that it is committed to delivering on its undertaking to “seek relevant professional experience to either join full-time, or advise on an ad-hoc basis, appropriate representation to support assessment of Education and Training requirements for new roles”.

We noted in our analysis under Condition 10 above that AAHEP has been able to identify one regulated Animal Assisted qualification in the market (which it will add to its list of entry qualifications). However, AAHEP also reported that they have identified “no regulated Horticultural qualifications in the market at this time”. AAHEP concedes, therefore, that its Education and Training Committee will require informed advice to support this process.

In our discussion under Condition 5 above, we noted AAHEP's report that in addition to HCPC, AAHEP has had conversations with other stakeholders, “such as Social Farms and Gardens in the UK and various animal-related organisations about drawing appropriate expertise into the Register's process governing registration/revalidation to properly reflect these new disciplines”. In a follow-up email to its submission, dated 11th September 2025, AAHEP confirmed that:

“...we have identified an individual within the Social Farms and Gardens organisation who has agreed to act as a consultant to the Education Committee to ensure a clear understanding for that body with regard to identifying appropriate conditions for, and assessing the detail of, relevant horticultural qualifications”.

With this confirmation, we concluded that the process of incorporating appropriate expertise onto AAHEP's Education and Training Committee prior to the commencement of registration into the new roles had begun. The success of the Education and Training Committee's work would be assessed at a later date through an annual check or other assessment. In the context of AAHEP's Certificate of Proficiency (CoP) policy as an equivalence route (see below), the co-option of expertise should enable the Education and Training Committee to effectively perform its quality-assuring role of assessing the appropriateness of qualifications for register entry on a case-by-case basis for the new roles. With the reconstitution of AAHEP's Education and Training Committee (with consideration in mind of representation from the new roles to be added to the register) effected and a recommendation for collaboration on horticultural therapist registration, we concluded that Condition 11 has been met.

Condition 12: *AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned revisions to its Certificate of Proficiency to consider the four new roles to be added to the register and the importance of experience in those roles.*

AAHEP submitted that as in the case of the other routes of register entry, it has revised its Certificate of Proficiency (CoP) and taken full account of the relevance of experience in its admission to the register through this equivalence route.

AAHEP informed us that as promised, it has already “strengthened the CoP requirement generally to ‘5 years continuous practice’ for Equine Practitioners”. AAHEP further explained that “this will by default become applicable to all ‘new’ roles, equine, animal or horticultural”. AAHEP submitted the revised and updated CoP policy for verification.

In the second paragraph of its CoP policy, we noted that AAHEP is clear that applications through this route “will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and either accepted or rejected”, with the opportunity for re-submission or appeal in the case of rejection. AAHEP's CoP policy further outlines the conditions governing registration through its equivalence route:

“To be awarded a Certificate of Proficiency, applicants will need to prove a demonstrable minimum of five years in continuous practice, as well as providing the following:

- Copies of all professional qualifications supporting the registered practice indicated in their application (non-Equine, Animal or Horticulture/Nature-based specific), i.e. therapeutic, counselling or psychotherapy
- Details of any memberships of related professional bodies
- In line with the Registration Policy copies of appropriate Allied Health Care qualifications if Equine Facilitated (or Assisted) Occupational Therapy role is applied for, as well as proof of existing membership of Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

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- Transcript and or detail of previous any (Equine Assisted Services, Animal or Horticultural/Nature-based) related learning of all professional qualifications supporting the applied-for practice
 - Two reference clients (who can be approached directly by the Register)
 - One professional referee who has worked alongside you, or engaged (or witnessed) your work, who will commit in writing to the quality and effectiveness of your applied-for practice
 - Three written case-studies* of between 1500 and 2000 words (one client per case study):
 - For Equine Assisted Services applications (including Counselling and Psychotherapy sessions) no less than four sessions per case study
 - For other Animal Assisted or Horticultural applications no less than 3 months of regular provision.”

AAHEP’s CoP policy even makes it clear that “all submitted case studies need to have been undertaken and completed within the 12 months prior to the date of application”.

We noted, therefore, that in this revised version of its CoP policy, AAHEP makes specific requirements for the new roles. We noted further that over and above these conditions for entry through the equivalence route, AAHEP requires that successful applicants granted a Certificate of Proficiency “will still need to comply with the general commitments and conditions of registration.” Furthermore, the importance of experience (minimum of 5 years of continuous practice) has been taken into sufficient account. On the basis of this analysis, we concluded that Condition 12 has been met.

Condition 13: AAHEP (formerly known as Athena) must complete its planned update to its website and other public materials to provide clear and accessible information about the limitations and benefits of treatments offered by the new roles.

AAHEP submits that as part of the process of implementing all the Conditions discussed above in recognition of the requirements of the four new roles it wished to add to its register, it has engaged in substantial updating of most of its policies, processes, procedures and other materials intended for public consumption. AAHEP went on to reiterate these reviews:

- Under Condition 2, we noted that AAHEP has revised its application processes, principally its application form and registration policy, taking into consideration the new roles it is introducing to its register
- Under Condition 3, AAHEP reported revising and updating its Risk Matrix to account for risks arising from the activities of registrants of the new roles
- Under Condition 4, we confirmed that AAHEP has revised both the landing page of its website as well as the “Protecting the Public” webpage on account of the new roles
- We agreed that the revalidation or renewal form and process under Condition 5 have also been revised and updated

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- Similarly, we noted AAHEP’s report under Condition 6 that the “Practitioner Details” page of its register have been reviewed and would be updated with the addition of data of registrants of the new roles
 - The roles and service descriptions of animal-assisted therapist, horticultural therapist, equine-assisted psychotherapist and equine-assisted occupational therapist discussed under Condition 9, clarifying practice boundaries and denoting what the respective practitioners are expected to do or not do, are confirmed to have been developed for uploading to the website
 - Even the webpage on education and training qualifications has been updated and new courses identified for addition to AAHEP’s current list of acceptable qualifications for register entry
 - The equivalence route, embedded in its Certificate of Proficiency (CoP) policy, has not eluded AAHEP’s scrutiny and review as part of the overall revision and updating of its processes.

At various points in its submission, AAHEP has informed us that this task of comprehensively updating its systems, processes, policies and public information is currently taking place offline and may not be immediately accessible or noticeable to the public. However, once approval of its meeting these Conditions has been given, the website will go live with all the updates. This explains why AAHEP took care to submit as evidence for this assessment mostly attachments of the documents and policies under reference.

With indisputable evidence that all its systems and processes to be published on its website have been updated to reflect the new roles, albeit offline for now, we concluded that Condition 13 has been met.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 AAHEP has provided evidence to meet all of the imposed conditions that flowed from the inclusion of new practitioner groups on their register. This assessment confirms that the efforts made by AAHEP have demonstrated that the conditions and, as a result, the Standards for Accredited Registers are met. The one recommendation we issued under Condition 10 is simply intended to support the work around decisions about qualifications for registration under the Horticultural Therapist title.
- 5.2 We, therefore, found that all Conditions have been met.