

Accredited Registers

Condition Review: Athena Herd Foundation CIC (Athena)

January 2025

1. Outcome

At Athena Herd Foundation (Athena)'s initial accreditation, the Professional Standards Authority ('we') issued seven Conditions on its accreditation, three of which were to be completed by April 2024 and the other four by its next assessment in December 2024.

This report sets out our assessment of the actions taken by Athena to satisfy the Conditions that were to be completed by December 2024. Athena had already met the other three Conditions within the stipulated timeframes.

We found that Athena had met Condition 1, 2, 6 and 7.

2. Background

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.

At Athena's initial accreditation, completed in December 2023, we issued seven Conditions (a full list is published on Athena's directory page [Athena Herd Foundation](#)). Conditions 1, 2, 6 and 7 had to be implemented by the time of its next assessment in December 2024:

1. Develop and publish policies and procedures to make clearer how site visits are used to determine eligibility for the Register. This should include greater clarity on the circumstances in which they are required, what they involve, and how the site visit itself will be assessed.
2. Develop the detail of the Framework for Professional Standards and other codes of professional and ethical behaviours, so that they provide greater clarity about how they expect standards to be met in the context of equine therapy work. There should be a mechanism for making sure revised versions of the codes are communicated to registrants so that new requirements introduced post registration remain binding.
6. Establish clearer governance for oversight of education and training, such as through an Education Committee.
7. Publish key information about the PCRC, RAB and any other new governance arrangements. This should include the Register of Conflicts of

¹ Athena was originally assessed against the [Standards for Accredited Registers \(April 2016\)](#)

Interest, who fulfils key positions such as the Chair, and papers and minutes to demonstrate how the public interest is fulfilled. It should be clear how the governance arrangements work together as a whole. Athena could consider publishing diagrams of its governance structures to aid transparency.

This report discusses the actions Athena took to address the Conditions, as well as our decision about whether the Conditions have been met.

We reviewed the following evidence:

- a) Athena's reported actions about what it had done to meet Conditions 1, 2, 6 and 7.

3. Concerns leading to the Condition

Condition 1

Site visits can be undertaken as part of the registration process, if Athena determines that it is necessary to fully assess the competence of an applicant. There are not any guiding criteria for when a site visit is required, which could lead to inconsistency and actual, or perceived, unfairness.

Condition 2

The Accreditation Panel noted that some of Athena's key codes of practice, such as the *Framework for Professional Standards*, were set out at a high level. This could limit their utility for registrants and make it difficult to consider allegations of breaches of the code through its Complaints procedures. To address this, Athena should provide further detail about its expectations of its registrants in the context of their practice as EPs.

Conditions 6 & 7

Membership of Athena's committees appears to have been drawn from people who have had an association with Athena, in some cases through its training and/or organisational membership. Committee memberships include 'lay' people, but the definition drawn by Athena for 'lay' is that they are not members of the existing Register Team. (At the time of accreditation), the Chair of the PCRC was also Chair of Athena's Executive Committee.

This approach means that all members of the PCRC and RAB have close association with Athena or are otherwise practising within the field of the roles registered. This creates the risk that professional interests could become a prominent factor in decisions concerning the Register. The Accreditation Panel determined that it is important to seek to diversify the experience and selection of its governance Committee members to act as a counterbalance to the focus on professional experience. Condition 3 under Standard Five addresses this for the PCRC.

Further details can be found under Standards 2, 3 and 6 of Athena's initial accreditation outcome².

4. **Assessment of Conditions 1, 2, 6 and 7**

Athena provided its response to the Conditions on 28th November 2024:

Condition One

In compliance with the requirement of our Condition, Athena outlined the circumstances when site visits are required for both individual practitioners and organisational/centre applicants. Athena could not have been clearer about the circumstances that determine when a site visit is required in addition to the provision of the relevant application documentation. The overall aim of the visits is to ensure that the applicant demonstrates a commitment to and compliance with the Register's ethical position on the treatment of horses and animals generally. To ensure consistency and fairness in the process, Athena has laid down clear grounds or criteria to justify a site visit, and this is applicable to both individual practitioner and organisational applicants. Athena has further shed light on the combination of methods employed in site visits – physical presence and virtually. Moreover, Athena has stipulated the duration for a virtual visit (one hour) and the notice period (48 hours) required to undertake a site visit. In addition, Athena has identified the key issues involved in the process of site visits as required by our Condition, with details in an Appendix submitted for this review. We also confirmed that Athena's Registration Policy reflects these provisions and that a dedicated webpage on site visits exists on Athena's website for the benefit of the broader public. Above all, Athena has a standard process through which site visits are assessed, with provision for appeal if an applicant disagrees with a decision.

On the strength of the evidence provided by Athena, Condition One has been met.

Condition 2

Athena has revised both its *Framework for Professional Standards* as well as its *Ethical Basis for Best Practice in Equine Facilitated Interactions*. Both policies have been contextualised and are now contextualised within equine assisted therapy. Links to both policies are now available and accessible to registrants, members, service users and the public. The changes will also be communicated to registrants who meet the requirements for accreditation and are subsequently transferred to the Accredited Practitioner Register.

Accordingly, Condition 2 has been met and Standard Three has, therefore, been fully met.

² [240104 Athena Herd initial application outcome DRAFT CONF.docx](#)

Condition 6

Athena has established an Education and Training Committee for the Register. This Committee functions as part of the Register's governance process. Athena also provided details of the composition of the Committee and the arrangements in place for providing administrative support to the Committee. Accordingly, Condition 6 has been confirmed as met.

Condition 7

Similarly, with the publication of key information about the PCRC, RAB and sub-committees as required, Condition 7 has been met. Condition 7 entailed several examples of governance-related policies that could be published, including publication of the minutes of its Board meetings.

With Conditions 6 and 7 confirmed as met, Standard Six has now been fully met.

5. Conclusion

We therefore found that Conditions 1, 2, 6 and 7 have been met.

Athena Herd has demonstrated a significant commitment to meeting the Standards for Accredited Registers and in taking action to address conditions and recommendations imposed during initial accreditation. Overall, there is a cumulative picture of a well-functioning organisation that prioritises public protection.

We commend Athena for its fulsome response to the Conditions and for ensuring that all our Standards continue to be met in its first year of accreditation.