

Accredited Registers Impact Assessment

Accredited Register: Athena

Type of Review: Full initial application

Period under review: N/A

Date Approved for Panel: 23 December 2023

Introduction

Before we make a decision about accreditation, we undertake an impact assessment to understand likely effects on different groups, and the wider health system. We begin to gather the information required for the impact assessment when a Register first applies for accreditation. We consider any changes to impacts when we renew accreditation, and when taking other decisions that affect accreditation status such as imposing Conditions or suspension.

A key part of the impact assessment is consideration of equalities. The Equality Act 2010 imposes a legal duty, the Public Sector Equality Duty on all public bodies to consider the equality impact of its policies and decision making. The duty is known as the Equality Duty and it requires a public authority, in the discharge of its function to consider the following three aspects which form the basis of the duty:

- Consider the impact and eliminate unlawful (direct or indirect) discrimination and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people with protected characteristics and those who do not share these characteristics
- Foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do not share these characteristics.

This means that public bodies must consider equality impact on individuals protected under the Equality Act 2010 in carrying out their work. The Authority, therefore, needs to be always mindful of the public duty when carrying out its oversight role which includes the approving of registers. It needs to have 'due regard' to the needs to balance the three aspects which make up the Equality Duty when achieving its goals.

The Equality Impact Assessment is an important tool/mechanism for demonstrating 'due regard' through the consideration of evidence and analysis, actual and potential to identify positive and/or adverse impacts. The key groups we need to consider when making our decisions are, sex, age, ethnicity, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity.

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Impacts

Equalities impacts - summary

We reviewed information provided by Athena (AH), through its application form and on its website. We also sought to identify potential impacts through our review of the evidence for Standard One.

There are no current known sources of complete data about the number of Equine Practitioners (EPs), which is the main term used in the assessment to describe the roles registered by AH. AH estimates that there are approximately 300-400 across the UK. There are currently 50 on its register, but it expects this number to grow due to increasing interest.

There is little known about the diversity of AH registrants, or wider EPs. To date, AH has focused its capture of personal data on other areas. It has more recently developed an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy. It has also developed a [diversity monitoring form](#), to collect anonymised data about protected characteristics. This form explains that the reasons for collecting this information are to develop an understanding of the demographic and social profile of EPs, and to ensure the Equine Assisted or Facilitated Practitioner profession is open and accessible to all people of sufficient talent from all backgrounds. It collects data in the following categories: grade and level of membership, ethnicity, health, age, sexual orientation, gender, religion and social origins. During our initial Standard One assessment, we noted some areas where we think the Form could be updated to allow a more complete capture of data on protected characteristics, and to enable people who are non-binary or who do not want to describe their gender identity to complete the form. AH has now addressed these within the currently published form.

Although AH doesn't hold data about the diversity of service users, the groups it works with include children and vulnerable adults. The case study it provided was based on working with adults described as having moderate to acute mental health challenges. Groups referenced in the evidence we reviewed about the role of EPs included studies involving a range of different groups such as children with autism, older people in long-term care facilities, adults with hypertension, and adults with psychiatric adults. There are also many examples given of Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) being used in the context of self-development. We have therefore assumed that AH registrants could potentially be working with a wide range of people, some of whom may have quite complex needs.

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If delivered in a safe environment, the benefits of EFL, such as improved psychosocial interactions, may help to improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children and adults. This may be helpful in promoting collaboration between those with protected characteristics, and those who do not though noting the areas to address on the Diversity Form as specified below. Although it is not possible to be more specific at this point in terms of impacts on individual groups, collecting diversity data will enable AH to better understand its registrant profile, which it can use to help advance equalities. We did not identify any potential adverse impacts of accreditation on different groups through our assessment, and we note AH's description of why it is important to understand its registrant profile in terms of diversity, on its application form.

Impacts on groups with protected characteristics

Age

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified
Positive	Children and Young People	Accreditation may support the provision of EFL to children and young people to enhance psychosocial skills.		February 2022

Disability

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified
Positive	People with mental health challenges	Accreditation may support the provision of EFL to people experiencing mental health challenges.		February 2022

Gender reassignment

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Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Marriage and civil partnership

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Pregnancy and maternity

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Race

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Religion or belief

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Sex

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

Sexual orientation

Type of impact	Group(s) affected	Description	Actions required	Date identified

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Cost and market impacts – summary

Knowledge of the current market of EPs is incomplete, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain the impact of accreditation. Given that the Register is relatively small in number, any impacts are likely to be minimal. However, we note AH's view that the market appears to be developing and so this would need to be kept under review.

AH acknowledged the importance of registrants maintaining reasonable costs in its application. It does this by encouraging itemisation of costs, to ensure transparency about the pricing for service users and avoid financial exploitation. AH also liaises directly with funding providers to ensure value for money in service provision and commissioning.

Social and environmental impacts – summary

Horses are directly involved in the provision of services. AH has a [Framework for ethical treatment of horses](#) in place that it expects registrants, and organisational members to follow. These are based on standards of equine care developed by the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants (IAABC). It includes a focus on providing appropriate conditions for the nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state of horses. Assuming this is followed, we have not identified any adverse impacts related to use of horses.

Athena would be the first organisation accredited by the Authority that involves the direct use of animals to deliver therapeutic services. It is important to consider the impact of this on the wider programme. Animal-assisted therapies have become widespread¹, although as noted in Standard 1 the evidence about benefits is still building and further studies are needed to understand its effectiveness in health and well-being contexts. Animal-assisted therapies in general are likely to be considered as complementary therapies. The PSA accredits other complementary therapy registers, and there are examples such as the National Counselling Society/National Hypnotherapy Society which combine these with psychological therapies.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30057046/>

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Decision

This is the first Register involving animal-assisted therapies that the PSA has accredited, and issues relating to this were explored through the preliminary Standard One assessment².

We considered which are the main groups likely to be affected by accreditation of Athena, and what the main impacts are likely to be in terms of equalities, cost/markets, social and environmental impacts. This has included consideration of our duty as a public sector body under the Equality Act 2010. There are no current known sources of complete data about the number of Equine Facilitated Learners (EFL). This means little is known about the diversity of AH registrants, or wider EFL workers. Athena has developed an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy and begun to collect anonymised data about protected characteristics to develop a better understanding of the demographic and social profile of Equine Assisted or Facilitated Practitioners. We have identified some potential improvements to the form and will monitor progress when we assess Athena against the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard (Standard Nine) that was introduced in July 2023, at its next renewal assessment.

We determined that overall, it is in the public interest to accredit Athena. Accreditation should help ensure that people seeking EFL services can have confidence in standards. A key consideration throughout the assessment has been the potential conflict arising from Athena offering both training that can lead to registration and managing the register itself. The further actions issued at the initial Accreditation Panel meeting were aimed at creating greater separation and oversight of these functions. We considered that Athena has addressed these and have issued additional Conditions of accreditation to further strengthen this area. The Accreditation Panel considered these were sufficient to address the risk of potential conflict of interest, and that overall it is in the public interest to accredit Athena.

² https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/accredited-registers/panel-decisions/athena-herd-preliminary-standard-1-panel-decision.pdf?sfvrsn=b4714820_4