

The Athena Herd Foundation (Athena)

Once accreditation has been granted, a register must tell us of any significant changes it has made or plans to make. We consider these through our Notification of Change process.

The process

The Professional Standards Authority (PSA) accredits registers of people working in a variety of health and social care occupations that are not regulated by law. To become an Accredited Register, organisations holding registers of unregulated health and social care roles must prove that they meet our **Standards for Accredited Registers** (the Standards).

Once accreditation has been granted, a register must tell us of any significant changes it has made or plans to make that may affect whether it meets our Standards. We consider these changes through our **Notification of Change** process. Not all changes will require a notification of change and in some cases, it will be sufficient to tell us about them at either an annual check, or full renewal assessment.

Changes requiring a notification of change application are considered by an Accreditation Panel (the Panel). The Panel will decide whether to accept the change or not.

The options available to the Panel are:

- Accept the change
- Accept the change, with Conditions and/or Recommendations
- Not accept the change at this time, with reasons specified
- Adjourn to request further information from the Register.

Notification of change

Athena Herd Foundation (Athena) operates an Accredited Register for Equine Practitioners (EPs). EPs work in a range of contexts, including therapeutic and corporate development. Many EPs will also be trained in other disciplines, such as

counselling and psychotherapy. These practitioners will blend a range of therapeutic approaches when working with service users.

Athena's registrants must hold a qualification in equine-facilitated and associated therapeutic practices at Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) Level 4 or equivalent. Registrants with advanced qualifications and experience may hold higher grades of registration.

Athena applied to add four new roles to its register:

1. Equine Facilitated/Assisted Psychotherapist/Therapist (EFP)
2. Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist (EFOT)
3. Animal Assisted Psychotherapist/Therapist (AAT)
4. Horticultural Therapist (HT)

At the time of the assessment and preparation of this report, these new roles have not yet been added to the Athena register.

Athena Herd Foundation (Athena)

We considered Athena's Notification of Change application under the 2023 edition of the **Standards for Accredited Registers** which were in place when the Notification of Change was first submitted in April 2024 and updated in November 2024.

The outcome

We decided that the change would not affect Athena's compliance with the Standards for Accredited Registers. The Panel approved the change subject to Conditions, following a review of evidence supplied by Athena and gathered by the Accreditation Team.

We issued Athena the following Conditions:

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.
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.

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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.

We issued Athena the following Recommendation:

1. Athena should seek to enter into an information sharing agreement with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), ensuring that this covers issues such as publication of information about Athena on HCPC's website.

The Register

This section gives an overview of the Athena and its register.

Name of organisation	Athena Herd Foundation CIC (Athena)
Website	www.athenaherd.org
Type of organisation	Private Company Limited by Guarantee without share capital; Company Number 11914686 incorporated on 29 March 2019; Community Interest Company (CIC); Registered Offices: High Lees Farmhouse, Wagon Lane, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 6PT, UK; previously known as Athena Herd CIC (29 March 2019 – 18 June 2021) https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/11914686
Role(s) covered	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equine facilitated practitioner• Equine assisted practitioner• Equine practitioner• Equine interactions• Equine facilitated learning• Equine assisted learning• Equine Facilitated/Assisted Psychotherapist/Therapist (EFP)• Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist (EFOT)• Animal Assisted Psychotherapist/Therapist (AAT)• Horticultural Therapist (HT)
Number of registrants	28 as of 1 January 2025
Overview of governance	The Register Advisory Board (RAB) has responsibility for oversight of the management and day to day running of the Register. There is a Professional Conduct Review Committee (PCRC), which has responsibility for complaints and which functions independently. There is also an Executive Committee, which consists of five Directors.
Overview of the aims of the register	<p>The objectives of the Athena Foundation Accredited Practitioner Register are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• create and maintain professional ethics and standards that prioritise the health and wellbeing of clients and public and protects them from harm or injury;• promote and maintain client confidence and public credibility in the benefits of Equine

Facilitated Interactions and the delivery thereof;

- provide a clear definition of professional standards required to support the delivery of Equine Facilitated Interactions;
 - maintain ongoing compliance with these standards by all registered Practitioners.
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Assessment against the Standards

1. Standard 1 | Eligibility and ‘public interest’ Standard

- 1.1 The One of the four new roles Athena intends to add to its register, Equine Facilitated/Assisted Occupational Therapist (EFOT), is a protected title held by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and, therefore, raises issues about statutory boundaries.

The Panel set the following Conditions:

- 1.2 In order to continue to qualify as a “voluntary accredited register” with the additional roles, Athena must accept the Condition suggested in bullet point 1.3 below.
- 1.3 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 HCPC as “Occupational Therapists”.
- 1.4 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.

2. Standard 2 | Management of the register

The Panel set the following Conditions:

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
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The Panel recommended that:

- 2.4 Athena should seek to enter into an information sharing agreement with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), ensuring that this covers issues such as publication of information about Athena on HCPC's website.

The Panel recommended that:

- 2.5 PTUK should consult further on its competency framework, including the potential for alignment with SCoPEd standards, for the new role it is proposing to add.

3. Standard 3 | Standards for registrants

The Panel set the following Conditions:

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Athena must ensure that areas of specialty practice are appropriately controlled by setting out what registrants can or cannot do under the new roles.

4. Standard 4 | Education and Training

The Panel set the following Conditions:

- 4.1 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
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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.

5. Standard 5 | Concerns and complaints about registration

- 5.1 We have not identified any impacts from the proposed changes affecting this Standard.

6. Standard 6 | Governance

- 6.1 We have not identified any impacts from the proposed changes affecting this Standard.

7. Standard 7 | Management of the risks arising from the activities of registrants

The Panel set the following Condition:

- 7.1 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.

8. Standard 8 | Communications and engagement

- 8.1 The Panel agreed that some minimum requirements of this Standard were impacted - 8(1), 8(2), 8(4) and 8(6) - but that separate conditions were not required.
- 8.2 The Panel noted that this Standard would be met by Conditions already set on Standard 2 and Standard 7 above.

9. Standard 9 | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 9.1 We have not identified any impacts from the proposed changes affecting this Standard.

Share your experience

We ran a public consultation for Athena between 18 November 2024 and 6 January 2025. The responses highlighted a few themes which the Panel considered in its decisions under the relevant Standards above.

Impact assessment (including Equalities assessment)

Viewed against the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, the impact of Athena's proposed changes may or may not be significantly incremental, but it would certainly not alter the affected groups, principally children and young people (Age) and people with mental health challenges (Disability). For both groups, the impact of the proposed changes would be positive and, therefore, beneficial.

The Panel, therefore, agreed that it was in the public interest to accredit the new registers, subject to the Conditions above.

Timelines

As Athena plans to officially open registration to the new registers by 1 November 2025, all Conditions should be met two months prior to that date (i.e. 1 September 2025).