

# Accredited Professionals Scheme

Review Summary – September 2022



ACCREDITATION  
AUTHORITY



**Government of South Australia**

Department for Trade  
and Investment

# Review

## Accredited Professionals Scheme

*'The purpose of the Accreditation Scheme is to provide confidence to all stakeholders in the development system, by establishing transparent and standardised expectations that support ethical, consistent and accountable decision making and outcomes'*



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# Overview

The Accredited Professionals Scheme (**the Scheme**) is a program that enhances decision-making in the planning system and gives applicants greater confidence in the way that their development applications are assessed.

The Scheme is part of the planning system created under *the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*.

The Scheme began on 1 April 2019. All planning and building professionals can apply to become accredited under the Scheme.

Under the Scheme, planning and building professionals who assess development applications must maintain minimum standards of professional practice and produce evidence that they are sufficiently qualified to make key decisions at certain levels.

Applicants for accreditation must lodge their application with evidence that supports their eligibility to become accredited in the class they are seeking.

The Chief Executive of the Department for Trade and Investment (**the Department**) is the Accreditation Authority and administers accreditation for planning and building professionals.

Once accredited, Accredited Professionals are registered in a central database managed by the Department which is publicly accessible on the [PlanSA portal](#).

All Accredited Professionals must:

- hold professional indemnity insurance (or be covered by another form of indemnity scheme)
- comply with the Accredited Professionals code of conduct
- participate in regular compliance checks
- complete specified units of continuing professional development (CPD).

Since its implementation, a number of potential improvements to the Scheme have been identified, which are aimed at providing a more efficient and easy-to-use system for practitioners to become and remain accredited.

In addition, recent legislative changes from the Commonwealth have meant that a body of work was required to implement Automatic Deemed Registration (under the Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme) for building practitioners from other jurisdictions who wish to practice in South Australia.

In response to this, and given the three-year anniversary of the Scheme, the Planning and Land Use Services (**PLUS**) area of the Department initiated the Accredited Professionals Scheme Review Project (**the Project**). The purpose of the Project was to deliver a 'health check' of the Scheme and identify and refine areas for improvement.

The Project was delivered over a period of six months, from April to September 2022.

# Introduction

This report outlines the review process and the enhancements made to the Scheme and recommends further enhancements for consideration. All enhancements and recommendations are based on research, investigation and discussions between Accredited Professionals, industry bodies and internal operational staff through the 'consultation' phase of the Project.

The implemented enhancements and recommendations in this report represent ideas from both key industry stakeholders and department staff who have an interest in the Scheme, and address issues and expectations that emerged during the consultation process. Outcomes range from suggestions that will significantly change the way the Accreditation Authority is viewed across industry, through to internal changes that streamline processes and improve efficiency within the Department and the Scheme.

In developing these enhancements, the Project Manager undertook research and analysis and worked closely with the Accreditation Authority, industry stakeholders (including regional contacts) and the Heads of Building and Heads of Planning Groups to identify and fine-tune the enhancements.

It is believed the enhancements outlined in the Accredited Professionals Scheme Review Consultation Report - 'What We Heard and How We Responded' will positively build on the relationships between the Authority, existing Accredited Professionals and key industry stakeholders. Each enhancement made or recommended in this report has been tested with key industry stakeholders, professionals and department staff to ensure the recommendations are supported.

# Purpose

To improve the current Scheme by implementing a number of enhancements, which are aimed at providing a more efficient and easy-to-use system for practitioners to become and remain accredited, and to meet the requirements of the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* (the Act) and [Planning, Development and Infrastructure \(Accredited Professionals\) Regulations 2019](#) (the Regulations).

# Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of the Project aim to ensure that the various elements of the Scheme:

- reflect the important role of Accredited Professionals in the planning system as skilled and qualified decision makers.
- are clear, consistent and easy for Accredited Professionals to understand.
- are fit-for-purpose and user-friendly.
- operate in an efficient and timely way.

# Enhancing the Accredited Professionals Scheme

The Project focused on the following areas for improvement:

- Updating the recognised qualifications under the Scheme and publishing a guide for practitioners that outlines what qualifications will be accepted by the Accreditation Authority.
- Implementing processes and system improvements required to accommodate Automatic Deemed Registration under the Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme for building professionals.
- Making improvements to the CPD arrangements under the Scheme, including:
  - o Developing guidance material to support practitioners in completing and recording CPD.
  - o Developing a process for identifying Registered Training Organisations who offer training courses or seminars that meet CPD requirements.
  - o Reviewing the current CPD requirements with a view to ensuring the requirements are clear, consistent and fit-for-purpose.

- Reviewing the internal governance arrangements for the determination of applications for accreditation and compliance monitoring, including:
  - o Identifying agreed and defined responsibilities for accreditation assessment across building, planning and the Scheme Coordinator.
  - o Incorporating greater transparency measures to provide practitioners with added clarity and certainty on how their applications are assessed.
  - o Developing a policy for monitoring compliance with the Scheme, to ensure Accredited Professionals are maintaining standards and being held accountable.
- Reviewing the Accredited Professionals IT solution (workflow management tool) to provide internal efficiencies and improved useability for customers.
- Developing a new brand identity for Accredited Professionals that can be used to demonstrate their accreditation to the market.

# Stage 1 – Consultation

The consultation stage included various methods of obtaining feedback through:

- Workshops and focus groups
- Surveys
- Face to face meetings
- Online meetings

Positive and constructive feedback was received throughout the Review Project.

In March 2022, a survey was sent to Accredited Professionals and stakeholders, asking five key questions. The questions focused on qualification, skills and experience, CPD, assessment and renewal timeframes and the online application process. Each question sought suggested improvements. The survey was open for two weeks and received over 110 responses. A program called Trello, which is a visual work management tool, enabled the importation of over 450 comments and assisted in sorting the comments into themes for each survey question.

While some Accredited Professionals had no concerns and held a positive view of the Scheme, there was several reoccurring themes. These themes focused around:

- The accreditation requirements being too onerous
- The desire for a consistent approach nationally
- The desire for recognition of other accreditation frameworks
- The desire for transparency around the experience of officers undertaking accreditation application assessments and assessment processes
- Requiring clarity around CPD expectations, particularly the amount of CPD points required and how they are applied across all levels of accreditation
- The cost of accreditation, cost of CPD and accessibility of CPD training
- The desire for a longer accreditation period e.g 3 years as opposed to an annual renewal
- The need for greater clarity on the Scheme in general

## Stage 2 – Investigation

The investigation stage saw stakeholders delve into the detail of the survey feedback in face-to-face sessions, which enabled the Project to focus on key areas for improvement.

The first consultation session consisted of two focus groups held on Monday 6 June 2022 at the Office of Design and Architecture (ODASA), 28 Leigh Street, Adelaide. These initial sessions focused on the qualifications, skills and experience requirements and the governance structure and assessment process. The participants were presented with a list of updated courses, a list of expected qualification, skills and experience of those undertaking assessments for the Accreditation Authority and a draft governance structure for feedback.

Participant feedback was considered and an updated version of the Scheme's [Qualification, Skills and Experience document](#) (Appendix 2) was released in July 2022 (noting further updates may be made post completion of the Project). A new governance structure / assessment process was also implemented to streamline the processing of applications for accreditation (Appendix 3). For further transparency, the Accreditation Authority's assessment role and expected expertise is attached (Appendix 4).





## Stage 2 – Investigation

The second consultation session was a workshop and was held on Thursday 18 August 2022 at the Consumer and Business Service Centre, 95 Grenfell Street, Adelaide. This workshop identified and defined the benefits and purpose of an accredited professionals scheme given the existence of other industry associations and accreditation bodies. This allowed for a more focused conversation about the need for a government regulated scheme and the opportunity for such a scheme to add value to existing industry associations and accreditation bodies. The workshop also allowed a deeper exploration of the CPD requirements of the Scheme.

During the workshop, the participants developed a purpose statement, that highlighted the importance of the Scheme:

*'The purpose of the Accreditation Scheme is to provide confidence to all stakeholders in the development system, by establishing transparent and standardised expectations that support ethical, consistent and accountable decision making and outcomes'*

The feedback received from the focus group and workshop was positive and encouraging. Participants welcomed new ideas and actively participated in constructive discussion.

## Stage 3 – Implementation

Stage 3 focused on implementing as many ‘quick win’ enhancements as possible (based on the feedback received through consultation), noting further enhancements are recommended for investigation post this Project.

The enhancements and outcomes are contained in Appendix 1 – Accredited Professionals Scheme Review Consultation Report - What We Heard and How We Responded.

At a high-level, the Project delivered the following:

- A purpose statement for the Scheme
- A brand identity for Accredited Professionals
- A new governance structure and process for the assessment of applications for accreditation
- A reduction in the projected assessment turnaround time
- Updates to the qualifications, skills and experience recognised by the Authority for the purpose of the Scheme
- The implementation of Automatic Deemed Registration required under the Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme
- Recommendations on proposed regulation changes for consideration
- A CPD fact sheet to help clarify requirements
- Facilitated discussions with industry bodies to better align CPD requirements
- Improvements to the CPD Activity Log form and enhancements to the renewal process

## Stage 4 – Close out

The final stage of the Project focused on developing ongoing policies and procedures to support the outcomes from the Project. Refer to Appendix 1, Accredited Professionals Scheme Review Consultation Report - What We Heard and How We Responded' for details on what was said throughout the Project and what was done in response.

# Appendices

Appendix 1 - [Accredited Professionals Scheme Review Consultation Report - What We Heard and How We Responded](#)

Appendix 2 - [Qualification, Skills and Experience document](#)

Appendix 3 - [Accreditation Authority Assessment Process](#)

Appendix 4 - [Accreditation Authority Assessment Roles and Expected Expertise](#)