

# Consultation Report - What We Heard and How We Responded

Summary of outcomes and recommendations from the accredited professionals scheme review project

30 September 2022

## Background

The Accredited Professionals Scheme is part of the planning system created under [Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 \(legislation.sa.gov.au\)](#) (**the Act**). The Act provides for the establishment of an Accredited Professional Scheme (**the Scheme**) for planners, building certifiers, land surveyors and other industry professionals involved in making development decisions.

The [Planning, Development and Infrastructure \(Accredited Professionals\) Regulations 2019 \(legislation.sa.gov.au\)](#) (legislation.sa.gov.au) (**the Regulations**) prescribe the classes of accreditation and authorised functions for each class of accreditation. The Regulations were gazetted on 7 February 2019, and the Scheme became operational on 1 April 2019.

The Accredited Professionals Scheme provides reliability, flexibility and accountability of decision-makers in the planning system. The Scheme gives development applicants greater confidence in the way their submissions are assessed.

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 accompanied by evidence that supports their eligibility to become accredited in the class that they request.

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

# Introduction

Since its implementation, a number of potential improvements of 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 response to this, and given the three-year anniversary of the Scheme, the Planning and Land Use Services 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.

There were many positive comments made throughout the Scheme's review ranging from feedback on the ease of lodging an online application for accreditation through to general support for the intentions of the Accredited Professionals Scheme and its purpose. Further positive comments were received about the process of collecting feedback from stakeholders through a variety of consultation techniques. Specifically, regional areas expressed their gratitude and recognised the efforts made to undertake a true and meaningful consultation process which kept stakeholders connected and engaged throughout the review.

The Department would like to thank those who took the time to provide feedback throughout the review process. The feedback received has assisted in shaping an enhanced Scheme for accredited professionals and stakeholders.

# Focus Areas

Through stakeholder engagement and consultation, the following topics were highlighted as key areas of focus for the Review Project:

1. Broad industry issues
2. Qualifications, skills and experience
3. Available Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities
4. Current CPD requirements
5. Internal governance
6. Renewal requirements
7. Guidance documents
8. Software and website information

The Project Manager sought feedback from industry stakeholders on these topics from May – September 2022 through surveys, workshops and direct contact.

This Consultation Report provides a summary of the comments made throughout the Project and the resulting recommendations or outcomes.

# 1. Broader industry issues

## COMMENT

The benefits of the Scheme need to be clarified.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

In consultation with industry, the review process explored the purpose of an accreditation scheme and arrived at a common understanding on the benefits of the Scheme.

In the workshop held on 18 August 2022, the following statement was established and endorsed by the participants:

*'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'*

## COMMENT

Clarity around the purpose of the Scheme and why it was implemented

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Scheme was introduced to provide assurances to the South Australian Government that practising professionals are performing at a certain standard, developing trust with the community and industry. The Accreditation Authority has been established by the South Australian Government to deliver this Scheme.

## COMMENT

Regional councils are experiencing difficulties attracting staff with appropriate qualifications to obtain accreditation. Consultation with regional councils is critical.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

Regional councils were frequently consulted throughout the review. It was recommended that the Authority explore other pathways to obtaining planning accreditation through alternative qualifications or experience.

## COMMENT

If applying for Planning Level 1 accreditation, this should automatically cover Planning Levels 2, 3 and 4.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority review the Regulations with a view to proposing that any Planning Level 1 Accredited Professional can carry out the activities of all Planning Levels.

## COMMENT

The core competency requirements for Planning Level 1 Accreditation should be reviewed.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The core competency requirements for Planning Level 1 Accreditation are aligned with the National Qualifications Framework. The Authority has reviewed the core competency assignment requirements and determined that they adequately reflect the statutory function that an Assessment Manager is accredited to perform.

Note: Current Registered Planners are not required to undertake the core competency assessment course in addition to being a Registered Planner with the Planning Institute of Australia.

## COMMENT

The core competency requirements for Planning Level 1 accreditation are unnecessary and should not be required to obtain Planning Level 1 accreditation.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

When the accreditation scheme was introduced in April 2019 Planning Level 1 'conditional' accreditation was granted to Planners who *had not* previously demonstrated peer reviewed compliance with the (5) core competencies. This was allowed during the transitional period to enable the industry to continue to function on the condition that these accredited professionals would complete the requirements within 24 months of obtaining initial accreditation.

As the Planning Level 1 role is important in providing advice to Assessment Panels, performing statutory functions and making decisions in their own right, the Authority is of the view that demonstration of these core competencies is necessary and provides assurances to the Minister that Assessment Managers are performing at a certain standard.

## COMMENT

Workplace pressures and other factors have contributed to the inability of Assessment Managers who hold Planning Level 1 'conditional' accreditation, to demonstrate peer reviewed compliance with the core competencies in the required timeframe.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority has offered for Planning Level 1 'conditional' holders to [apply for an extension](#) to complete the core competency requirements and be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## COMMENT

Develop a brand identity that Accredited Professionals could use to demonstrate their accreditation under the Scheme.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

A brand identity was developed by the Authority for this purpose including a supporting [brand style guide](#).

## COMMENT

The cost of accreditation and CPD can be expensive.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

A comparison of the costs to obtain and maintain accreditation across jurisdictions was undertaken. Through this process it was identified that the South Australian Accreditation Authority application fees are low compared to other jurisdictions. The initial application and renewal fees are commensurate to the work effort in carrying out an assessment and processing of the application itself.

Furthermore, the introduction of the national [Automatic Mutual Recognition Scheme](#) recognises interstate building accreditation, making it easier for building professionals to take up job opportunities across most of Australia. This enables them to use their single home state accreditation without having to apply and pay for a new one when working in another state.

The [Guide to the Accredited Professionals Scheme](#) provides information on the variety of categories that can assist an accredited professional when considering the breadth of activities they could undertake to meet their CPD requirements. The range is intended to provide options in delivery methods and associated costs to ensure Accredited Professionals continue to maintain and broaden their knowledge and abilities and stay up to date with latest developments in response to the ever-changing nature of the industry.

The Authority is also working with industry bodies to align their CPD so that it meets the prescribed requirements under the [Planning, Development and Infrastructure \(Accredited Professionals\) Regulations 2019](#). It is recommended that the Authority provide more information on the availability of CPD activities that align to the mandatory professional competencies under the Scheme.

## COMMENT

Members of an equivalent scheme should not have to pay a fee when applying for accreditation under the Scheme.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The application fee for accreditation contributes to the time spent processing an application including, the review, assessment and approval process. The fees are set out in a Ministerial fee notice published in the *South Australian Government Gazette* and provided on page 12 of the [Guide to the Accredited Professionals Scheme](#). The fee to process an application where the applicant is a member of an equivalent scheme, is significantly reduced to reflect this.

## COMMENT

Explore an option for accreditation of semi-retired professionals with reduced requirements.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority undertake a risk/benefit analysis and consider if accreditation of semi-retired professionals, with reduced requirements (e.g. CPD), could be an option in the future.

## COMMENT

There were some views that private certifiers should go through a more rigorous process to obtain accreditation and be subject to annual audits.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority considers that the five-year audit cycle is an adequate risk-based approach. The [spot check audit program](#) offers rolling monitoring and exception reporting, targeting high concern and priority compliance areas and issuing corrective action notices. Whilst Accredited Professionals are audited at least once every five years, they may be audited more regularly if they are identified in a high-risk category.

To achieve a fair and reasonable outcome, and giving consideration to the introduction of Automatic Mutual Recognition, the Authority considers the current requirements to obtain accreditation achieve a consistent approach that are aligned with the recommendations in the Building Confidence Report.

## COMMENT

Greater transparency around the Accredited Professionals complaints, audit and compliance and enforcement processes.

## OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority publish information on their compliance and enforcement policy as well as audit and complaint statistics and make this information publicly available on the PlanSA website. Information on the [Audit Program](#) and [Complaints Process](#) is already publicly available.

## 2. Qualifications, Skills and Experience

### COMMENT

When referring to the qualifications, skills and experience required to obtain accreditation, consistency between industry bodies and the Scheme is important.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The eligibility requirements stated in the [Qualifications, Skills and Experience document for Accredited Professionals \(QSE document\)](#) have been reviewed to align with equivalent schemes where appropriate.

### COMMENT

The courses listed in the QSE document were not up to date and require regular review.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The qualifications listed in the QSE document were reviewed and updated following consultation with industry bodies, universities, and qualified education representatives. A review of qualification requirements across other jurisdictions was also undertaken to strive for national consistency in line with the [Building Confidence Report](#). It is recommended that a process be established to regularly review the QSE document in consultation with academic institutions to ensure it is kept up to date.

### COMMENT

A greater range of qualifications to be recognised for Planning Level 2 accreditation is needed to help increase diversity of assessment panel members.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority explore other pathways to obtaining planning accreditation through alternative qualifications or experience.

### COMMENT

There is currently no recognised planning qualification offered in South Australia which is contributing to the difficulty with obtaining and retaining planners in the profession.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Department, at the request of the Minister for Planning, is establishing a Taskforce to address the skills shortage and limited tertiary education pathways in SA for built environment professionals including planners.

The Taskforce will include representatives from:

- Relevant tertiary education providers (UniSA, Flinders University, University of Adelaide, TAFE SA)
- Relevant industry boards and peak bodies

- Key representatives from DTI

Discussions are currently underway with TAFE SA to look at developing an entry level Planning course. Further to this, it is recommended that the Authority commit to exploring how this could provide a pathway to accreditation for para-planners under the Scheme.

The Department is also engaging with the Department for Education, aimed at enhancing the curriculum and raising student awareness of career opportunities relating to built environment professions.

#### COMMENT

Further guidance is needed to satisfy the skills and experience requirements for building accreditation under the QSE document.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

An FAQ has been included in the QSE document, outlining the application requirements for building accreditation relevant to the level of accreditation sought. This helps to further define the pathways to becoming an accredited building professional in line with the [Building Confidence Report](#).

#### COMMENT

How can un-recognised qualifications, including those from overseas, be assessed?

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

As the Authority is not a registered training organisation, the appropriate pathway to have other qualifications assessed would be to seek recognition of prior learning in a recognised qualification through a registered training organisation.

To demonstrate that international qualifications are equivalent to Australian Standard, they can be assessed by an assessing body linked to the Department of Immigration, such as VETASSESS or through the Department of Education and Training.

VETASSESS ([www.vetassess.com.au](http://www.vetassess.com.au)) has been approved by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to determine the equivalence of planning qualifications.

#### COMMENT

How can allied professions such as registered architects be recognised for the purpose of obtaining planning accreditation?

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

Allied professions have a pathway to obtain accreditation for Planning Level 2 as listed in the QSE document. In addition, it has been recommended that the Authority explore other pathways to obtaining planning accreditation through alternative qualifications or experience.



### 3. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities

#### COMMENT

Further information is sought around the availability of CPD activities that cover the mandatory competencies required under the Scheme.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority provide more information on the availability of CPD activities that align to the mandatory professional competencies under the Scheme.

## 4. CPD requirements

### COMMENT

Further guidance is needed around what appropriate CPD looks like and how to correctly complete the CPD activity log required under the Scheme.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

CPD fact sheets are available at [Accredited professionals scheme | PlanSA](#). Information about CPD is provided on pages 15-19 of the [Guide to the Accredited Professionals Scheme](#) with an example of how to complete the CPD activity log on page 19.

### COMMENT

The Authority to provide CPD training for Accredited Professionals.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority is committed to providing information that links accredited professionals to Registered Training Organisations that provide training in the mandatory professional competencies under the Scheme and exploring specific training for Assessment Panel Members.

### COMMENT

If CPD is undertaken through another industry body, this should be recognised for the purpose of the Scheme.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority is working with industry bodies to align their CPD so that it meets the prescribed requirements under the [Planning, Development and Infrastructure \(Accredited Professionals\) Regulations 2019 \(legislation.sa.gov.au\)](#).

The Accreditation Authority's CPD requirements are mandated by the Regulations and may not strictly align with the CPD requirements associated with any particular institute or association. However, CPD points earned under the Scheme are likely to count towards the requirements of those associations/institutes and vice versa.

### COMMENT

Further clarification is required around limitations on the maximum number of CPD points that an Accredited Professional can undertake in a particular category (e.g. Conferences, Seminars, Lectures, Workshops & Study Tours, Self-Guided Learning vs Formal Education & Training etc).

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The recommended maximum number of CPD points assigned to a particular category accounts for the difference between passive learning and active or structured learning, encouraging CPD to be conducted using both delivery methods.

#### COMMENT

There should be no need to undertake an additional 10 CPD points for Planning Level 2 if accreditation is held at any other Planning Level.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority review the Regulations to remove the need to undertake additional CPD points for Planning level 2, if the Accredited Professional holds a Planning accreditation at another level.

#### COMMENT

The amount of CPD units required for the purpose of accreditation is too high.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The CPD requirements under the Scheme have been reviewed and compared across several industry bodies. The current amount of CPD required under the Scheme is considered to be adequate however, it is recommended that the Authority explore whether the requirements under the Regulations, to undertake 10 units of CPD for accredited professionals who hold only Planning Level 2 should be reduced.

#### COMMENT

The Authority should develop an electronic records management system for CPD activities in order to easily capture and maintain CPD records and collect evidence as required under the Scheme.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority is exploring the business requirements to determine if an electronic CPD records management system is viable. In the interim the Authority will remove the need for CPD to be witnessed to make this process less onerous. The updated [CPD activity log form](#) is available on the PlanSA portal. Record keeping and evidence is still required to be maintained as part of the audit process.

#### COMMENT

The requirement to undertake 2 units of CPD in ethics within a 12-month period is excessive and should be reduced.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority explore whether the requirements under the Regulations, to undertake 2 units of ethics within a 12-month accreditation period is appropriate and whether this should be reduced.

#### COMMENT

CPD professional competencies should be more appropriately aligned to the level and type of accreditation and its specific functions.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority review the Regulations to assess the CPD professional competencies against the relevant levels of planning and building accreditation and their consistency with the [Building Confidence Report recommendations](#).

#### COMMENT

Surveyors CPD mandatory professional competencies should be listed separately to Planners and align with the Surveyors Board of SA CPD Policy.

#### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

Accreditation allows surveyors to perform functions as a relevant authority for the assessment of 'deemed-to-satisfy' land divisions (planning consent only). This is in addition to the functions a licensed surveyor would ordinarily perform. As such, the Authority is of the view that the additional competency units are adequate to enable surveyors to perform their statutory functions. The Authority will, however, review the Regulations to ensure the competencies are relevant to the role of a surveyor.

## 5. Internal governance

### COMMENT

The Accreditation Authority doesn't have the skills or experience to undertake assessments of professionals wishing to be accredited.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

Industry was consulted and feedback was sought on the qualifications, skills and experience expected of those undertaking the assessments of professionals wishing to be accredited. It is recommended that the Authority publish information on the [assessment process](#) and the expected [qualifications, skills and experience of assessors](#) to provide transparency.

### COMMENT

Greater transparency is required in the assessment process for obtaining accreditation, including an option for a third-party review or an independent panel review.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority publish information on the assessment process and undertake investigations to allow for advice to be sought from third-parties in determining an application or an ability to have an application reviewed by a third-party. The Scheme's [peer review process](#) has also been implemented and published to provide greater transparency.

### COMMENT

The current turnaround time of 6-8 weeks for an assessment of an application for accreditation needs to be reduced.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority has reviewed their internal governance structure resulting in improvements to the assessment process which has resulted in a reduction to the projected assessment turnaround timeframe. This aims to reduce the assessment timeframe to four weeks for streamlined applications where further information is not required.

## 6. Renewal requirements

### COMMENT

Submitting a statutory declaration on renewal and having it signed by an approved witness is too onerous.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority has reviewed the renewal process and is making changes to the way a declaration is provided upon renewal to remove the need for it be formally witnessed.

### COMMENT

The Authority should explore a longer renewal period for accreditation of up to 3 years.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority has considered this request. At this time the Authority will maintain the 1-year renewal period to adequately manage insurance and CPD requirements given these are currently maintained on an annual basis. Proposed changes to the way a declaration is provided on renewal will help to make the renewal process less onerous in the short term.

It is recommended that the Authority revisit an extended renewal period once an electronic records management system for CPD activities has been explored further.

### COMMENT

Currently there is no ability for an accreditation to be placed on hold in particular circumstances (sabbatical or maternity leave etc) and/or the ability to request an extension of time to apply for continuation of accreditation.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority review the Regulations with a view to accommodating an extension of time to apply for continuation of an accreditation, or to include an option for accreditation to be placed on hold in particular circumstances.

### COMMENT

Currently a continuation of accreditation application is required to be submitted 28 days before the anniversary (expiry) of an accreditation with CPD. This leaves only 11 months for an accredited professional to undertake the required amount of CPD.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Authority review the Regulations so that the CPD period is the 12 months prior to the accreditation anniversary as opposed to the 12 months prior to the application for continuation.

## 7. Guidance documents

### COMMENT

Further guidance materials are needed for Assessment Panel Members.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The State Planning Commission is currently reviewing the [Code of Conduct for Assessment Panel Members](#) that provides guidance to all members of assessment panels to act honestly and ethically with a high degree of accountability. Further Guidance Materials are available at the following links:

[Fact Sheet for Elected Member on Assessment Panels](#)

[Fact Sheet for Assessment Managers](#)

## 8. Software & website

### COMMENT

It is difficult to find specific information needed for accreditation on the PlanSA website.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority has made enhancements to the accredited professionals pages on the [PlanSA website](#) so that information can be easily accessed, whether a person is applying for accreditation or maintaining accreditation. An FAQ has been attached to the QSE document to help provide further guidance when applying for accreditation.

### COMMENT

Better system integration and more streamlined processes to minimise duplication.

### OUTCOME / RECOMMENDATION

The Authority is reviewing options to enhance current system capability including exploring single login options for users of both the Development Application Processing system (DAP) and Accredited Professionals profiles as well as an ability for Accredited Professionals to update profile information.



# Outcome Recommendation Status

The table below provides the current status, as of October 2022, of the Review Project's recommendation:

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	<b>Under Investigation</b>
1	Create Scheme purpose statement	✓		
2	Review the need to <b>apply for Planning Level 2, 3 and 4</b> if already holding / or applying for Planning Level 1		✓	
3	Review the <b>core competency requirements</b> for Planning Level 1 Accreditation	✓		
4	Develop a <b>brand identity</b> that Accredited Professionals could use to demonstrate their accreditation under the Scheme	✓		
5	Review the <b>cost</b> to apply for accreditation	✓		
6	Explore an option for accreditation of <b>semi-retired professionals</b> with reduced requirements		✓	
7	Consider the accreditation process for <b>private certifiers</b>	✓		
8	Provide greater transparency around the Accredited Professionals <b>complaints, audit and compliance and enforcement</b> processes.		✓	

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	<b>Under Investigation</b>
9	Recommended <b>consistency</b> between industry bodies and the Scheme	✓		
10	Update the <b>courses</b> listed in the Qualification, Skills and Experience document	✓		
11	Consider a <b>greater range of qualifications</b> to be recognised for Planning Level 2 accreditation to help increase diversity of assessment panel members.			✓
12	Explore options to address how there is currently <b>no recognised planning qualification</b> offered in South Australia which is contributing to the difficulty with obtaining and retaining planners in the profession		✓	
13	Provide <b>guidance to satisfy the skills and experience</b> requirements for building accreditation	✓		
14	Explore <b>other pathways to obtaining planning accreditation</b> through alternative qualifications or experience.			✓
15	Further information is sought around the <b>availability of CPD activities</b> that cover the mandatory competencies required	✓		
16	Further guidance is needed around what is appropriate CPD looks like and how to correctly <b>complete the CPD activity log</b>	✓		
17	Further clarification is required around limitations on the <b>maximum number of CPD points</b> that an Accredited Professional can undertake in a particular category	✓		

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	<b>Under Investigation</b>
18	Review the requirement to undertake an <b>additional 10 CPD</b> points for Planning <b>Level 2</b> if accreditation is held at any other Planning Level.		✓	
19	Review the <b>amount of CPD</b> units required for the purpose of accreditation	✓		
20	Consider an <b>electronic records</b> management system for <b>CPD activities</b> in order to easily capture and maintain CPD records and collect evidence			✓
21	Review the requirement to undertake 2 units of CPD in <b>ethics</b> within a 12-month period		✓	
22	Review CPD professional <b>competencies</b> so they are more appropriately aligned to the level and type of accreditation and its specific functions.		✓	
23	Review <b>surveyors CPD</b> mandatory professional competencies to be listed separately to Planners and align with the Surveyors Board of SA CPD Policy.		✓	
24	Publish the qualifications, skills and experience expected of those undertaking the assessments of professionals wishing to be accredited	✓		
25	Publish the <b>assessment process</b> for obtaining accreditation	✓		
26	Reduce the turnaround time for assessment of applications	✓		
27	Review the <b>renewal process</b> to make changes to the way a declaration is provided upon renewal to remove the need for it be formally witnessed.		✓	

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	<b>Under Investigation</b>
28	Explore a longer <b>renewal period</b> for accreditation of up to 3 years.			✓
29	Review the ability for an <b>accreditation to be placed on hold</b> in particular circumstances		✓	
30	Review the Regulations so that the <b>CPD period</b> is the 12 months prior to the accreditation anniversary as opposed to the 12 months prior to the application for continuation.		✓	
31	Further guidance materials are needed for Assessment Panel Members.		✓	
32	Review how information is displayed on the <b>PlanSA website</b>	✓		
<b>Total</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>