

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR

Membership & Accreditation

AUSTRALIAN STATE AND TERRITORY
FINANCIAL COUNSELLING ASSOCIATIONS

JANUARY 2015



Contents

About the Standards	3
Interaction of the Standards with the Regulatory Framework	4
Overview of the Standards	5
Membership Requirements	6
Continuing Professional Development	7
Supervision	8
Implementation and Other Issues	9

This document sets out national standards for membership and accreditation of financial counsellors in Australia.

The standards have been agreed by the eight State and Territory financial counselling associations:

- Financial Counselling Tasmania (FCT)
- Financial and Consumer Rights Council (FCRC)
- Financial Counsellors Association of NSW (FCAN)
- Financial Counsellors ACT (FC-ACT)
- Financial Counsellors Association of QLD (FCAQ)
- Money Workers Association of the NT (MWANT)
- South Australian Financial Counsellors Association (SAFCA)
- Financial Counsellors Association of WA (FCAWA)

Financial counselling is a national profession and the development of national standards is consistent with this.

Interaction of the Standards with the Regulatory Framework

There are two types of licence that may apply to the work of financial counsellors.

- An Australian Financial Services Licence if you give advice about financial products. This obligation is imposed by the ***Corporations Act 2001***.
- An Australian Credit Licence if you provide credit services. This obligation is imposed by the ***National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009***.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission operates both of these licensing schemes.

Financial counselling services are exempt from holding both of these licences, but the exemptions are subject to strict conditions. Broadly, the exemptions for both licences require that the financial counselling agency:

- Does not charge any fees or receive any remuneration arising from the financial counselling service
- Does not provide any financial product advice or credit activity outside the exemption
- Ensures that its financial counsellors have appropriate training and adequate skills and knowledge
- Ensures that its financial counsellors are a member of, or eligible for membership of, a financial counselling association.

The national standards are therefore an important link with the exemption from licensing for agencies.

For more information: see [Fact Sheet 2](#) on the FCA Website.

Overview of the Standards

Membership Categories (for financial counsellors)	Affiliate (non-voting) Associate Accredited or Full
Qualification	Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling)
Professional Development	If working as a financial counsellor, 20 points per membership year
Supervision	If working as a financial counsellor: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Employed 0.5 FTE or more – minimum of 10 hours per membership year; or➤ Employed less than 0.5 FTE – minimum of 6 hours per membership year.
Experience	24 months full time experience for accredited/full membership (including time spent studying if relevant)
Ethics	Must adhere to the Australian Financial Counselling Code of Ethical Practice

There are three categories of membership for **financial counsellors**:

1. affiliate
2. associate
3. full/accredited.

State/Territory associations may also have additional categories of membership for financial counsellors, for example, life membership. They may also provide for membership for other professionals, such as financial capability workers.

Affiliate (non-voting)	An individual working in the financial counselling sector in a related role OR Actively studying for the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) or has completed the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) - but is not working as a financial counsellor.
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Associate	Working as a financial counsellor AND Actively studying for the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) OR Holds the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) and has not yet had 24 months full-time experience, however meets the requirements for continuing professional development and supervision.
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Accredited or Full Members	Has had 24 months full-time experience working as a financial counsellor (including while studying if relevant) AND Holds the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) AND If working as a financial counsellor, meets requirements for continuing professional development and supervision OR If not working as a financial counsellor, meets requirements for continuing professional development.
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All members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Agree to abide by the Australian Financial Counselling Code of Ethical Practice➤ Agree to abide by relevant State/Territory rules
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Note: Some states may have other membership categories, such as financial capability workers.

Continuing Professional Development

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the reinforcement or acquisition of skills or knowledge relevant to the workplace.

Application

Applies to associate members and full/accredited members.

Amount

A financial counsellor must complete **20 points of CPD per annum**, with a minimum of one session from each of three categories as set out below.

Three categories

Technical – e.g. content knowledge relevant to legal issues, banking, fines, EDR/IDR, superannuation, hardship, insurance, completion of Statements of Financial Position

Skills – e.g. counselling, mental health, communication (written, verbal), interviewing, cultural awareness, suicide prevention/training and negotiation

Ethics – e.g. conflict of interest, boundaries, counselling relationships, cultural awareness, options- client choices; appropriate referral to other services

Points Table for CPD

CPD TYPE	Points
Full day training block	6 points
Live attendance at PD lecture or tutorial training session or half day training block	3 points
Preparation and delivery of a training session for financial counsellors	4 points
Preparation of training sessions for community education	4 points
Delivery of training sessions about financial counselling related topics (i.e. where the material has already been developed)	2 points
e-learning session – interactive (e.g. FOS tool)	2 points
Audio-lecture/podcast (listen/watch only)	2 points
Online questionnaires developed by State/Territory associations that test current knowledge	1 point
Research project contributing to policy work	3 points
Contribution of an article on a relevant topic to media/ newsletters/association material	1 point
Reading article about technical and educative aspects of financial counselling	1 point (max of 2 points)
Supervisors only – provision of professional supervision to a financial counsellor	1 point per person supervised (max of 4 points)

Applies to:

- Associate members
- full/accredited members

Requirement for Supervision

If working as a financial counsellor:

- Employed 0.5 FTE or more – minimum of 10 hours per membership year; or
- Employed less than 0.5 FTE – minimum 6 hours per membership year.

Requirements to be a Supervisor

To be a financial counselling supervisor a person must hold the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling) and have:

- Three years FTE financial counselling experience OR
- Another suitable qualifications as approved by a State or Territory financial counselling association.

A supervisor must also have completed a suitable course in professional supervision acceptable to their State or Territory association.

Definition of Supervision

Professional supervision supports the work of a financial counsellor. The supervision process provides a forum to discuss casework, clinical aspects of the role and the the counsellor's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

- Professional supervision is an equal relationship founded on mutual trust and respect.

Line management supervision is a different process to professional supervision.

- Line management is undertaken by a person or persons to whom the financial counsellor reports.
- Line management includes oversight of the casework undertaken by the financial counsellor as well as ensuring the financial counsellor meets organisational goals and complies with standards.

Transition, mutual recognition, governance and review

Grandfather Clause re Full/Accredited Membership

A grandfather clause will apply for financial counsellors who are full/accredited members of their State Associations as at November 2014 and who hold the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling).

These members will continue to hold this level of membership and will not be required to meet the requirement for 24 months of full-time experience (if not already held).

Date of Effect of the Standards – Transition Times

With the exception of NSW, the standards will be in place in all States/Territories by the end of 2016.

NSW will have the standards in place by the end of 2019.

Mutual Recognition

A financial counsellor will join the relevant State/Territory association where they spend the majority of their working time.

A member in one State/Territory will be expected to transfer membership to another State/Territory if they re-locate.

Governance

State and Territories will set up a CPD Advisory Group.

Review

The standards will be reviewed in three years time – by 17th November 2017.