

# NZAC Counsellors 'Registered' Under New Self-Regulatory Process

# A turning point for the counselling profession in Aotearoa New Zealand

It is with great pleasure and a real sense of pride that I, as President of the NZ Association of Counsellors (NZAC), launch our association's enhanced self-regulatory process.

The NZAC has approximately 2800 members representing the majority of professional counsellors in New Zealand. We have opted for an enhanced self-regulatory process for our profession (as opposed to registration under the HPCA) after consultation with our members and a vote by them.

This document provides background to the move, outlines why we have chosen this pathway for the future of the counselling profession, and offers insights into our belief that ongoing continuing professional development, together with more robust tertiary qualification standards for new entrants, are critically important to ensuring high quality, professional counselling services.

Counsellors who are members of the NZAC:

- *are trustworthy*
- *will respect client confidentiality*
- *will listen to clients carefully and sensitively*
- *will help clients sort out how they would like things to be different*
- *will support clients in making the changes they choose to make*
- *must abide by the Association's strict Code of Ethics and are expected to be in regular supervision to ensure their ongoing professionalism and adherence to best practice guidelines.*
- *are committed to the Treaty of Waitangi and undertake Puawanaga Kaitiakitanga (cultural supervision)*
- *are educated and qualified specialists*

Moving to an enhanced self-regulatory process further strengthens our commitment to these values and will support and facilitate increased professionalism within the sector. This is a turning point for the counselling profession in Aotearoa New Zealand and it will further support New Zealanders to enjoy better mental health.

Regards,

**Bev Weber**

President - NZAC

October 2017

# NZ Association of Counsellors *Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa* introduces an enhanced self-regulatory process

## ***1. ASSOCIATION BACKGROUND***

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The New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) – Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa – was established in 1974 under the name The NZ Counselling and Guidance Association. Originally, it comprised of people either appointed to secondary schools as guidance counsellors or those involved in their training and employment.

With the growth in counselling and the increased diversity of people accessing counselling, in 1990, the name NZ Association of Counsellors was formally adopted.

From 42 mostly school-based counsellors in its early days, to approximately 2800 counsellors now, NZAC represents members who work in a variety of sectors; education, health, justice and social welfare, government agencies, community-based social service agencies, Iwi social services, Pacific Island Organisations, private practice and a range of ethnicity-specific helping agencies.

Their work is underpinned by a rigorous membership application process, a comprehensive code of ethics, a formal complaints procedure, a commitment to supervision and to professional development, as well as a commitment to Puawananga Kaitiakitanga [cultural supervision] in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## ***2. FUTURE OF THE COUNSELLING PROFESSION: AN ENHANCED SELF-REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT***

**NZAC members** recently voted to adopt an enhanced self-regulatory process as part of ongoing efforts to demonstrate the quality and professionalism of counselling in New Zealand.

The decision was taken to meet the needs of members, their clients and the people and organisations that employ/retain counsellors.

The new self-regulatory process has three core components:

- ***a more rigorous CPD programme***
- ***new training and education standards for new entrants into the profession***
- ***a rigorous and robust Code of Ethics***

### **MORE RIGOROUS CPD**

Education lies at the foundation of NZAC members' professional development, and is key to further cementing the Association's standing with organisations that contract and employ its counsellors. As such, a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme was introduced following the decision last year to launch an improved system for members to renew their annual practising certificates (APCs).

The new requirements for an APC are designed to further raise the already high standards of counsellors who are members of NZAC, and bring counsellors more in line with the requirements of members of other allied professional bodies in New Zealand. It also demonstrates to stakeholders, employers and funders that NZAC members meet basic standards of fitness to practise, while increasing responsibility and accountability.

As part of enhancing the CPD programme, past processes were reviewed, other allied professional bodies' requirements were investigated, and professionals from a variety of similar disciplines were consulted.

This led to key changes to the CPD process; asking members not only to report what they have done in the preceding year to advance their professional development, but also to start planning for the following year in a more considered and deliberate way, by referring to particular areas of competence. Additionally, 10 areas of competence were established for counsellors. These are listed on our website at: [www.nzac.org.nz/competencies.cfm](http://www.nzac.org.nz/competencies.cfm)

Essentially, it means that members will follow a much more robust CPD programme which will be independently audited to ensure its credibility and effectiveness.

This enhanced self-regulatory system has been developed to support, further develop and showcase the professionalism of members. It will:

- ***ensure the Association is recognised by all stakeholders as a leading professional body of counsellors***
- ***position counselling alongside other mental health professions***
- ***ensure the Association acts in a manner consistent with responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi – Te Tiriti o Waitangi***

**HIGHER TRAINING STANDARDS FOR NEW ENTRANTS**

In addition to enhanced CPD, NZAC is introducing a robust and comprehensive set of Counselling Education Standards that will come into effect from January 2019.

Counsellors who want to join the NZAC as provisional members (the initial membership category) will be required to hold a minimum of an undergraduate degree in counselling (three-year course) or a two-year Master’s degree in counselling. They will also be required to undergo a NZ Police vetting procedure.

This is a higher entry standard than what is currently required, which is an NZQA-recognised diploma at Level 6.

The new Education Standards guarantee new entrants joining the NZAC have a quality counselling degree that meets professional requirements. The new entry Standards won’t affect existing members.

Students of tertiary education programmes accredited as meeting NZAC’s counsellor education standards are

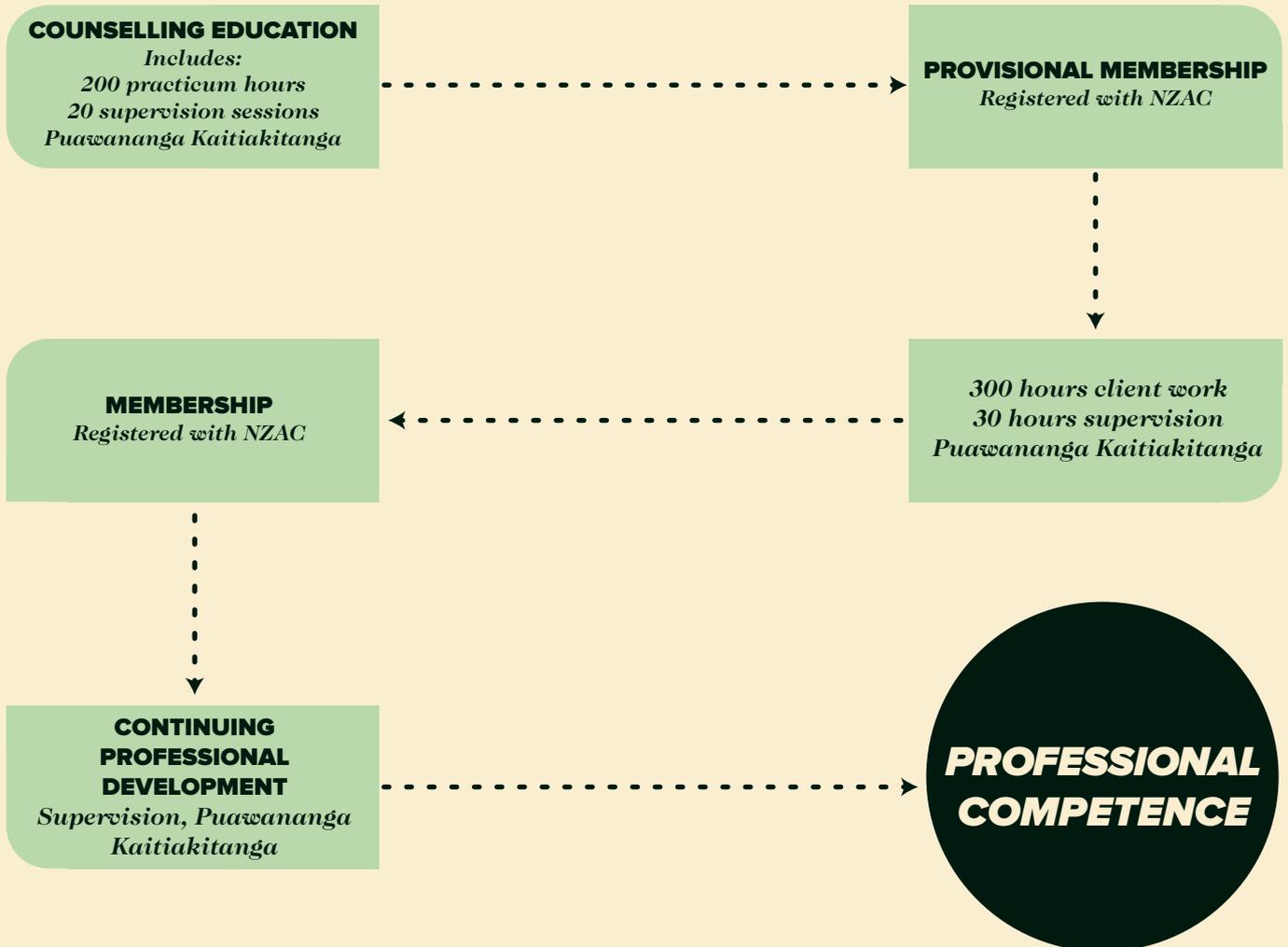
to be granted provisional membership on graduation. The first round of applications for accreditation closes in August 2017.

The NZAC’s Counsellor Education Committee will review provider programmes to ensure they meet the more rigorous training criteria and quality standards the Association now requires. This will provide indicators for quality delivery that would give NZAC confidence in graduates from an accredited programme.

**CODE OF ETHICS**

Upholding the demanding membership framework to ensure that counsellors are competent is the Association’s robust ethics processes. The NZAC’s Code of Ethics clearly outlines members’ professional responsibilities, and provides them with guidance if ever they lack clarity around a situation.

The NZAC Code is recognised by the Health and Disability Commission and the process used by the NZAC has been validated by a High Court Judicial Review.



### **3. COUNSELLORS REGISTERED WITH NZAC**

NZAC counsellors who meet the much stricter membership and professional development criteria will now be known as Counsellors registered with NZAC.

This new title will appear on a member's Annual Practising Certificate (APC) with the wording Member or Provisional Member Registered with NZAC. We urge anyone looking to employ a counsellor and work with counsellors to always look for a counsellor who is Registered with NZAC.

### **4. INCREASED CONFIDENCE FOR STAKEHOLDERS**

The NZAC is keen to ensure stakeholders appreciate the quality and professionalism of its members in particular, but also counsellors in general.

We believe our enhanced self-regulatory process will help to achieve that. The requirements for new members from 2019 to hold a minimum degree level qualification which meets NZAC standards, along with more rigorous continuing professional development, will lift the already good quality standards that NZAC members deliver.

Our goal is to give all stakeholders, but especially employers of counsellors and clients of counsellors, heightened confidence in the integrity of the profession and the efficacy of our services.

If you have any questions about the new professional development process we have put in place and how to find a counsellor registered with NZAC, please contact our Executive Officer, Antony McFelin:

***execoffice@nzac.org.nz***  
***(04) 471 0307***

# What the sector thinks

Vitae Chief Executive, Liz Pennington, says ongoing supervision, professional development programmes, and other robust frameworks are essential for counselling service providers to deliver efficient assistance.

“The enhanced self-regulatory process NZAC has introduced will go a long way towards engaging with and supporting the counselling workforce to continue to do their work and do it well. It gives counsellors the assurance that others are just as invested in their wellbeing as they are in a client’s wellbeing.” She emphasises such a framework is key to a competent counselling profession.

Chief Executive of Skylight, Heather Henare, echoes similar sentiments. “Quality of the service delivery and the guarantee of continued professional development is of paramount importance to Skylight as part of the good practice code guides our agency. All of these are in perfect alignment with the self-regulatory framework that NZAC has now put in place, so I’m very confident that NZAC counsellors will reach a new level of efficiency and quality of service.”

She believes the professional development and constant training is one of the best methods, coupled with clinical supervision, excellence and professionalism. “The fact that these two qualities will be reinforced by the self-regulatory process is timely and reassuring for the agency and its clients.”

Kathryn Barclay, a school guidance counsellor and member of NZAC says the processes associated with the new self-regulatory process will enhance the professionalism of counselling as seen by the public and stakeholders.

“The new, more robust processes will provide a way for stakeholders to be assured that requirements are in place, similar to what would have been achieved by registration under the HPCAA.

“I definitely support the change and believe it will produce enhanced learning.”

Kathryn supports the more clearly understood training standards that are now in place as part of the self-regulatory environment. “This means people embarking on training are confident that courses meet similar outcomes. It also allows our profession to be assured that graduates meet similar levels of training, which entrance into our profession requires. As somebody who has worked with placement counsellors from various institutions for about 14 years, I welcome these changes.”

Alastair Crocket, NZAC Life Member: “The self-regulatory regime NZAC has introduced will be better for the profession because it has the potential to deliver similar levels of assurance as state regulation with less cost. I believe this has the potential to improve the status of counselling with significant funders and the government.

I am also very much in favour of the more robust CPD programme that supports the new regime - it’s long overdue as is the move to introduce more robust tertiary training standards for new entrants to the industry.”

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- *The New Zealand Association of Counsellors represents approximately 2800 members and highly qualified counsellors who work with government funders, non-government agencies, schools, and directly with the public to help people deal effectively with life's stresses.*
  - *NZAC is a powerful and influential advocate for the profession.*
  - *NZAC sets professional and ethical standards for the counselling profession in NZ.*
  - *NZAC provides the structures for its members to deliver high quality, professional and effective counselling.*
  - *Quality counselling provided by a trusted NZAC professional is a valuable solution for many people suffering from life's stresses.*

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