

WHAT WE HAVE HEARD REPORT

ACCREDITED PROFESSIONALS SCHEME

DISCUSSION PAPER



Introduction – a new Accredited Professionals Scheme

The Accredited Professionals Scheme (the scheme) is a key component of the new planning system created under the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016*. The scheme will ensure that individuals and businesses undertaking development can have confidence in the professionals making development assessment decisions.

The scheme will create consistency in decisions made, more transparent accountability and more choice for professionals and applicants when engaging with the development process in South Australia.

Accredited professionals under the scheme will need to meet prescribed requirements for qualifications, experience and specialist knowledge relevant to the type of work they are performing.

All sectors of the industry, government and the community expect that professionals making decisions in development assessment uphold a high standard of ethical conduct, and for the same standards to apply to planning and building professionals in both the public and private sectors.

The scheme introduces a new code of conduct, improved management of complaints and investigations, and a required program of continuing professional development (CPD). This will ensure that accredited professionals are held to a consistent standard and are required to maintain that standard through their career.

The scheme also includes:

- **More choices for professionals**

Professionals will have the choice to select accreditation by the South Australian Government, or a recognised scheme from a private accreditor.

- **Faster processing for applicants**

Development applicants will have the choice to engage accredited professionals in the public or private sectors, resulting in faster and more responsive turnaround times on applications.

- **Management of complaints and investigations**

The scheme provides a clear audit, complaint, investigation and appeal process to ensure confidence in all decisions.

- **Centralised public register for all accredited professionals**

The South Australian Planning Portal will record all professionals accredited under the scheme. This will provide an up-to-date directory of all planning and building decision-makers with their level of accreditation and any specialist fields.

Discussion on the Accredited Professionals Scheme:

A discussion paper on the Accredited Professionals Scheme was made available for public consultation from 4 February – 30 April 2018, and received 61 written responses from local councils, industry groups, resident groups and university representatives.



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Ten questions were asked of respondents in the discussion paper, as follows:

Question 1: How could the accreditation scheme affect you?

Question 2: How might private entities (industry advocacy groups, educational institutions, etc.) support the scheme?

Question 3: What should the role of building professionals be in planning decisions? Why?

Question 4: Should professionals from allied fields that are accredited as Assessment Panel Members (such as architects, engineers, environmental managers and so on) have the same requirements for continued professional development and training as planning professionals?

Question 5: How might the scheme vary between urban and regional contexts?

Question 6: In addition to design, performance, good decision making and engagement, what other types of continued professional development and training should be required to retain accreditation?

Question 7: Should building certifiers need additional experience to approve 'performance solutions' under the Building Rules?

Question 8: For the new Level 4: Building Inspectors, what should be the required qualification and experience?

Question 9: Do you agree that the processes undertaken by accredited professionals to arrive at particular decisions should be audited under the scheme?

Question 10: Are there areas where the proposed scheme can be improved?

During the consultation period, two workshops were held with planning professionals. The first workshop on 14 March 2018 discussed the elements of the Accredited Professionals Discussion Paper. The second, held on 11 April 2018, workshopped the CPD Educational Program. A total of 181 planning professionals attended the two workshops.

These workshops were recorded and can be viewed at [saplanningportal.sa.gov.au](http://www.saplanningportal.sa.gov.au) (http://www.saplanningportal.sa.gov.au/planning_reforms/new_planning_tools/accredited_professionals_scheme).

Nine additional questions were asked of planning professionals at the workshops, as follows:

Question 11: For those that don't have a qualification, what is an appropriate mechanism to evaluate their level of expertise?

Question 12: Are the proposed accreditation levels right?

Question 13: Are the levels (function, qualification and experience, and recognised equivalent scheme) adequately described or should they be described differently?

Question 14: Are the methods of recognition of expertise for accreditation broad enough?

Question 15: Who should be managing and investigating complaints against accredited professionals?

Question 16: What is the preferred method of training for Continuing Professional Development?

Question 17: What should be the mandatory core competencies at each level?

Question 18: What other competencies should a person at each level possess?

Question 19: How should existing professionals transition as accredited professionals in the first instance?



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Summary of Consultation:

Some respondents addressed the consultation questions, while others sent letters or emails containing their views on the discussion paper more broadly.

A summary of all consultation responses below provides an overview of the key themes raised:

Question 1: How could the accreditation scheme affect you?

Overall respondents supported the accreditation scheme.

Respondents said the introduction of the scheme was an opportunity to upskill the profession and introduce accountability.

Respondents supported a centralised public register of accredited professionals, but some indicated concern that the scheme would be a duplication of existing requirements.

Respondents' key concern was the impact of the costs of the scheme on councils and individuals.

Respondents highlighted that many of their current panel members are retired or semi-retired, and said that the new scheme may not be financially viable for these people, discouraging them from becoming accredited.

Some respondents highlighted a concern that the scheme would remove planning from councils and community in favour of private practitioners.

Respondents suggested increasing the renewal period.

Question 2: How might private entities (industry advocacy groups, educational institutions, etc.) support the scheme?

Respondents said that education institutions already providing training to professionals should be incorporated into the scheme to continue providing that education. Entities that can support online training should also be included.

Respondents supported existing professionals bodies such as AIBS and PIA being recognised as 'accrediting bodies' for the purposes of the scheme, however highlighted that people should not be disadvantaged if not a member of a professional body.

Question 3: What should the role of building professionals be in planning decisions? Why?

There was a mixed response from respondents about the role of building professionals in planning decisions. Suggestions included limiting decisions to Accepted Development only or allowing an Assessment Manager to delegate power to undertake some Deemed-to-Satisfy assessments providing there is a minimum level of knowledge.

Question 4: Should professionals from allied fields that are accredited as Assessment Panel Members (such as architects, engineers, environmental managers and so on) have the same requirements for continued professional development and training as planning professionals?

Respondents said that the CPD requirements of the scheme must take into consideration any CPD required by existing professional bodies.

Some respondents indicated that having the same CPD requirements as planning professionals may not be achievable in rural settings.

Question 5: How might the scheme vary between urban and regional contexts?

While respondents in regional areas supported a varied scheme that responded to the challenges presented to regional areas, overall respondents said that all accredited professionals should be assessed to the same standard regardless of the regional or urban context.

An alternative suggested by respondents was to place a higher emphasis on experience over qualification in rural contexts, but not to make the system unjust. Respondents also suggested creating a pool of professionals that could be drawn from regional councils, which would negate the need for the scheme to vary. Regardless, respondents highlighted that the scheme needs to be sensitive of the limited budget of those smaller, rural councils.

Respondents said that the ability to contract building professionals for expert advice would help address the issue of limited specialist expertise in rural areas.



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Question 6: In addition to design, performance, good decision making and engagement, what other types of continued professional development and training should be required to retain accreditation?

Respondents suggested a range of training that should be required by the scheme, including project management, policy, social planning, negotiation, conflict management, bushfire requirements, heritage preservation and case law updates.

Respondents said they supported a CPD program but that it should not be onerous on accredited professionals.

Question 7: Should building certifiers need additional experience to approve 'performance solutions' under the Building Rules?

Respondents either said the current requirements were fine, or that only those building certifiers providing expert advice should require additional experience.

Question 8: For the new Level 4: Building Inspectors, what should be the required qualification and experience?

Overall respondents said they were concerned that a Building Inspector needs knowledge and experience suitable for the type of building work to be inspected. Support for this accreditation level was mixed.

Question 9: Do you agree that the processes undertaken by accredited professionals to arrive at particular decisions should be audited under the scheme?

Overall respondents strongly supported auditing, complaints and investigations mechanisms within the scheme. These mechanisms would increase the integrity and accountability of the profession, and allow for continuous feedback and improvement.

Question 10: Are there areas where the proposed scheme can be improved?

Respondents suggested a range of ideas that could improve the scheme.

There was a large emphasis on minimal fees and red-tape, to allow the scheme to run effectively. Complaint processes should be streamlined and the renewal period extended.

Respondents also said that there should be bushfire protection and heritage training and awareness, and that there should be Assessment Panel Members with bushfire protection and heritage expertise.

Question 11: For those that don't have a qualification, what is an appropriate mechanism to evaluate their level of expertise?

Respondents provided numerous mechanisms aimed at each level of accreditation proposed in the paper. Responses included exams, case studies, undertake courses, peer reviews, log book, recognition of prior learning, CV submissions, referees and interviews.

Overall there was a strong focus on demonstrating competencies relevant to the accreditation level, and having up-to-date experience in the field.

Question 12: Are the proposed accreditation levels right?

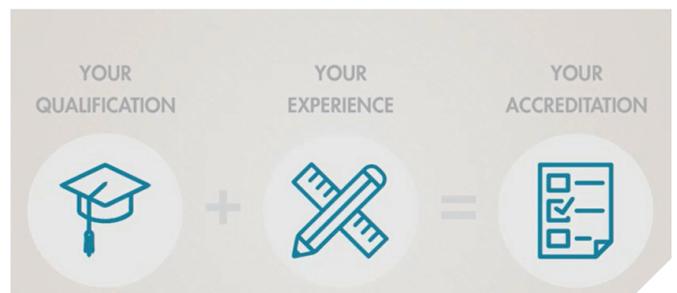
There was a prevailing view by respondents that all four planning accreditation levels needed more years' of experience than stated in the Discussion Paper. Respondents said that the higher the level of responsibility provided by accreditation, the higher the level of experience should be.

There was overwhelming support for removing Level 4: Land Division Accredited Professional. Respondents said they were concerned that there are too many external/council related factors that need to be taken into consideration in undertaking a land division, and that professionals at this level would not have the required knowledge.

Generally respondents supported the four building accreditation levels, but highlighted concern that Level 3: Building Certifier was too restrictive in only allowing assessment of Class 1 and Class 10 buildings.

Respondents raised questions regarding the ability of planning graduates to participate in the scheme, and how delegations from Assessment Managers would work.

In relation to Level 2: Assessment Panel Members, respondents highlighted that a broader range of professions should be listed, including Building Surveyors, and that Architects should require less experience due to the rigorous requirements to become an Architect.



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Question 13: Are the levels (function, qualification and experience, and recognised equivalent scheme) adequately described or should they be described differently?

Respondents suggested various alterations to the descriptions provided in the Discussion Paper.

Responses focused on the level of experience required for each accreditation level, and the restrictions imposed on certain levels (Level 4: Land Division Accredited Professional and Level 3: Building Certifier).

Respondents said in relation to Level 4: Building Inspection that the term 'Inspector' was no longer in use.

Respondents said that Building Surveyors should be listed as an option for Assessment Panel Members.

Respondents also said that the requirements for Level 1: Assessment Manager needed to align with the PIA Registered Planner requirements.

Question 14: Are the methods of recognition of expertise for accreditation broad enough?

Overall respondents said there were numerous methods for recognition of expertise, but highlighted challenges in regional settings. In addition to assessing expertise against core skills or competencies, respondents highlighted the use of audits, portfolios, interviews and 'top-up' courses as methods of recognising expertise.

Respondents focused on the importance of the collective knowledge of an Assessment Panel rather than just individual knowledge, and suggested an ability for Regional Councils to co-opt a person of expertise for an individual application.

Question 15: Who should be managing and investigating complaints against accredited professionals?

Overall respondents strongly supported that Auditors and Investigators need to be independent, appropriately qualified and report to the appropriate higher authorities.

There were mixed views from respondents on whether councils should or should not be responsible for administering complaint mechanisms. Respondents highlighted the importance of a single point of contact for complaints, and that the process for dealing with complaints needs to be clear and transparent.

Respondents said accredited professionals have public accountability when it comes to responding to complaints. The consequences for breaking the rules need to be clearly set out in the Code of Conduct, as well as the distinction between a complaint and decision review.

Question 16: What is the preferred method of training for Continuing Professional Development?

Overall respondents said that training should be made available online, and could be delivered through a range of delivery methods.

There was wide support for recognising a range of activities that constitute Continuing Professional Development, such as events, teaching and participation, and writing/peer review of papers.

Respondents highlighted cost as a factor in considering CPD, in addition to the importance of having a large range of training providers to choose from.



Question 17: What should be the mandatory core competencies at each level?

Respondents referred to the PIA core competencies.

Question 18: What other competencies should a person at each level possess?

Respondents said understanding of the Code of Conduct, and Ethics were important.

Question 19: How should existing professionals transition as accredited professionals in the first instance?

Respondents said there could be a range of processes implemented to transition existing professionals into the new scheme. Overall there was consensus that there needs to be consideration of the skills and abilities of candidates, demonstrated and supported by evidence, to perform at the required standard.

Processes suggested by respondents included interviews, testing, providing a detailed portfolio and references. Respondents indicated interim arrangements would aid in transitioning to the new scheme.

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Other Comments:

Respondents provided a range of comments related to the scheme.

There was strong support from respondents that the members of the SCAP are required to be accredited professionals. Respondents also suggested that arborists are required to become accredited.

Respondents' requested clarification on the issue of insurance and whether the LGA Mutual Liability Scheme would cover council staff, or if they would need to purchase individual insurance.

Many asked whether policy planners, State Government planners and experts providing advice would need to be accredited.

Respondents indicated that there was confusion that as the Building Levels progressed based on experience, so too do the Planning Levels progress based on experience as a hierarchy.

Respondents sought clarification on the number of Assessment Managers per council, and accreditation versus registration.

Respondents said they were concerned applicants will 'shop around' for a private accredited professional that will give them a favourable result rather than the correct result.

Next Steps:

The Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure is currently considering all responses to the Accredited Professionals Scheme consultation.

Hearing the views and experiences of a range of people and organisations has been a valuable part of developing this important new initiative and we sincerely thank everyone who has provided feedback.

After considering this feedback, the department will publish the detailed Accredited Professionals Scheme, articulated in draft Regulations, for further consultation in mid-2018. This will include the new code of conduct and will provide planning and building professionals and community with a final opportunity to have a say.

In early 2019, the department will announce and establish the final Accredited Professionals Scheme. This will be supported by a set of procedures.

In mid-2019, all affected professionals will be required to transition to be accredited under the scheme. By late 2019, it is anticipated that all professionals requiring accreditation will have sought accreditation as required under the scheme, so that decision makers are ready to assess applications when the Planning and Design Code commences operation.

