

Accredited Registers

Condition Review: Athena Herd Foundation CIC

1. Outcome

At the Athena Herd Foundation's (Athena's) initial accreditation, the Professional Standards Authority issued seven Conditions on its accreditation, three of which were to be completed by 30 June 2024 (see page 18 of the published outcome report).

This report sets out our assessment of the actions taken by Athena to satisfy the Conditions.

We found that Athena had met Conditions 3, 4, and 5.

2. Background

We assess registers against our *Standards for Accredited Registers* ('the Standards')¹. Where a Register has not met a Standard, we can issue Conditions. A Condition sets out the requirements and the timeframe that a Register must meet.

At Athena's initial accreditation, completed in December 2023, we issued seven Conditions (a full list is published on Athena's directory page <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/what-we-do/accredited-registers/find-a-register/detail/athena-herd-foundation>). Conditions 3, 4, and 5 had to be implemented by 30 June 2024:

3. The PCRC should be expanded to include members who are not involved in other aspects of Athena's work, such as training. It should ensure that the investigation and adjudication of complaints are not carried out by the same individuals.
4. Decisions made by the PCRC should not be subject to ratification by the RAB.
5. Guidance on complaints should clarify how it will be decided which cases are appropriate for consensual disposal, how decisions would be made about these, and whether any findings (other than sanctions) would be published.

This report discusses the actions Athena took to address Conditions 3, 4, and 5, as well as our decision about whether the Conditions are met. Athena's

¹ Athena were originally assessed against the *Standards for Accredited Registers* (January 2024). https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/accredited-registers/standards-for-accredited-registers/standards-for-accredited-registers-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=cfae4820_4

responses to the remaining Conditions will be considered at their next full renewal assessment in December 2026.

We reviewed the following evidence:

- a) Athena's reported actions about what it had done to meet Conditions 3, 4, and 5
- b) Carried out website checks to assess the accuracy and completeness of the actions Athena has taken.

3. Concerns leading to the Conditions

At its initial meeting for the assessment of Athena's application for registration, the Accreditation Panel (AP) of 30 March 2023 concluded that Standard Five was not met. It, therefore, issued three Actions relating to Standard Five that Athena should take:

- **Action One:** Create a clearer firewall between management and oversight of key regulatory functions such as complaints and registration, and the other services that Athena provides, including its education and training provision. This should include making sure that the governance groups established to oversee these functions have the ability to make final decisions about outcomes of individual registration applications, and complaints.
- **Action Three:** Complete recruitment to and provide an update on the work of the Professional Conduct and Review Committee (PCRC) and Register Advisory Board (RAB). This should include an update on recruitment and confirmation of Chairs, examples of agenda, papers and minutes that demonstrate how they work in practice.
- **Action Four:** Review the Compliments and Complaints, Malpractice and Maladministration, and Sanctions Policies to ensure these provide a clear and robust process to handle complaints against registrants.

The AP reconvened on 20 December 2023 to consider the steps Athena had taken on these Actions, and the other outstanding issues. It determined that whilst Standard Five was broadly met, greater independence and separation of roles is needed within the complaints process. The small number of registrants (currently numbering around 15) reduces the risk of this being an immediate issue, and that this could be addressed through Conditions. All three Conditions were to be resolved within three months.

Further details can be found under Standard 5 of Athena's initial accreditation outcome².

² [240104 Athena Herd initial application outcome DRAFT CONF.pdf](#)

4. Assessment of Conditions 3, 4, and 5

Athena provided its response to the Conditions on 1 March 2024.

Athena stated that it had taken action to enable it to satisfy the Conditions:

- the expansion of the PCRC to include lay persons unconnected to other activities of Athena <https://athenaherd.org/apr-pcrc/>
- review of its governance policy <https://athenaherd.org/apr-governance/>, to ensure separation of responsibilities between the RAB and the PCRC.
- review of its complaints handling policy <https://athenaherd.org/apr-handling-complaints/>
- revision of its publication guidance <https://athenaherd.org/apr-professional-conduct-publication/> on the issue of consensual disposal <https://athenaherd.org/apr-consensual-disposal/>

We reviewed the actions Athena has taken, and we carried out website checks to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the information.

We confirmed that the composition of the PCRC has been expanded. The new policy now provides for not less than six (6) members. Half of the members will now be lay persons with “no active relationship to the activities of Athena”. As a matter of fact, the current membership of the PCRC stands at eight (8) – three members of Athena and five lay members, including the Chair.

This expansion has enabled Athena to meet the second element of the Condition – a separation of persons dealing with investigations and adjudication functions. The revised policy now stipulates that the PCRC’s sub-group of three members will hear the original complaint, make an assessment, and recommend actions or sanctions as appropriate. Thereafter, a differently constituted sub-group of three will independently adjudicate on those recommendations, ensuring a clear separation between the two functions.

We also confirmed that Athena has reviewed its governance arrangements and has further clarified and separated the complaints decision-making relationship between the PCRC and RAB. Although no specific reference is made to the PCRC not reporting to the RAB, the new policy provides that the RAB no longer has any oversight role over any decision reached by the PCRC, which now works independently. This review of functions is clearly reflected on the Register’s website.

In addition, we verified Athena’s claim that it has reviewed its complaints handling process. The information and guidance dealing with the Consensual Disposal process has been expanded and the publications policy revised substantially. The new policy outlines the circumstances under which the consensual disposal approach would be considered, with the PCRC making the final decision on which complaints should be subject to consensual disposal.

The policy also makes it clear that the outcome of every stage of its complaints process (including the original complaint, the findings, the actions agreed, or sanctions imposed) would be published on its website in the interest of its members, service users, practitioners, and the public.

Athena has accordingly updated its website to reflect these revisions of its policies and procedures.

5. Conclusion

We, therefore, found that Conditions 3, 4, and 5 have been met. Athena's actions on the remaining four Conditions would be assessed at Athena's full renewal assessment in 2026.