Policy

Introduction

Overview of the certification process

To undertake certification, candidates must be financial members of the HGSA and be employed in a genetic counselling position. It is recommended that candidates apply to the Certification Committee to confirm that they are eligible to undertake full certification (‘Board Eligible’) within six months of commencing relevant employment in a clinical role. Submissions towards certification cannot be made until the next submission after Board Eligible status is granted. Board Eligible genetic counsellors are entitled to use the title Member of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (MHGSA).

To attain full certification, candidates must satisfy the knowledge, skills and competency requirements of the HGSA Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling and demonstrate full competency as a genetic counsellor. This is a general certification program. Certification in specialty areas (e.g., oncology, prenatal) is no longer offered by the HGSA. The assessment process is structured to allow candidates working in specialty areas to obtain general certification. Once certification is achieved, a genetic counsellor is entitled to use the title Fellow of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (FHGSA).

The governance and evolution of certification

In 1989, the Council of the HGSA appointed the first Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling to serve for a three-year term. The chair was the Vice-President of the HGSA (ex officio). This Board comprised a nominee of the Board of Clinical Genetics, two other HGSA-certified clinical geneticists, one person trained in general counselling and one person who had extensive experience working in counselling. These individuals were all chosen to represent the skills and expertise considered essential to the development of a certification process for genetic counsellors. The composition of the Board has been reviewed from time to time, reflecting the development of the genetic counselling profession in Australasia and the requirements of the HGSA under its constitution.

Training guidelines for HGSA certification in genetic counselling were developed in 1990 and substantially
revised in 2002. Around 2005, discussions began regarding the future of genetic counselling training in Australasia. After much consultation, it was agreed that a Master’s level postgraduate qualification (two-year full-time equivalent [FTE]) would be the minimum requirement for eligibility to undertake HGSA Certification in genetic counselling. A further minimum period of employment in the field of genetic counselling and satisfactory completion of a prescribed body of work fulfils the requirement to be awarded Board Certification.

In 2008, the Board, together with the Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors (ASGC), and with the approval of the HGSA Council, established an Oversight Committee to review the process of certification in genetic counselling and to substantially revise the training guidelines document. Membership of the Oversight Committee included then current Board members; the previous two chairs of the Board; members of the ASGC Executive, including the chair at the time; two convenors of Australian postgraduate genetic counselling programs; and others, to ensure a broad skill base and representation of all interests. The Oversight Committee developed a broad set of skills and competencies, which informed the development of the assessment tasks. Candidates must complete these assessment tasks satisfactorily to attain HGSA certification in genetic counselling. For further information, refer to the Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors Policy.

The Certification Committee is a functional sub-committee of the Board, and is responsible for administering the Practitioner Certification for Genetic Counsellors Policy. The Committee is primarily comprised of FHGSA genetic counsellors at least two years post-certification, with one member a clinical geneticist, preferably at least two years post-certification. The chair is appointed from the Committee membership. Committee membership is for an initial three-year term, but can be extended for a second term by mutual agreement. Expressions of interest from within the HGSA are sought when vacancies arise. The Committee once appointed receives administrative support from the HGSA secretariat. Details of the current Committee membership and Terms of Reference can be found on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website.

Certification

This section outlines the requirements and assessment tasks for certification, including professional status, eligibility, accredited courses, and specific submission requirements and dates. The process is presented schematically in Figure 1.

This section also outlines the assessment tasks for certification, which are:

- Logbook
- Long cases
- Literature review or publication
- Reflective skills assessments (transcript analysis)
- Candidate interview
- Continuing education reports
- Supervisors’ reports
- Evidence of English language proficiency may be required (see the English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy)
Submission dates

There are two submission dates each year:

- 31 March
- 30 September.

Please note that applications will not be accepted if they are received after the due date and will be processed the following round. Fee and payment details are available on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website. All necessary forms will also be available to candidates through the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website after the appropriate fee has been paid.

If you experience difficulties processing your payment or uploading your submission, please contact the HGSA Secretariat as soon as possible for assistance.

Board Eligible Requirements

Professional status

On successful application to the Certification Committee for ‘Board Eligible’ status, the candidate is entitled to use the title Member of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (MHGSA). Where the Certification Committee cannot confer Board Eligible status, the candidate will not be entitled to use the title Fellow of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (FHGSA). Candidates who attain Board Eligible status must notify the Certification Committee of changes to their employment that may impact on the eligibility requirements for undertaking genetic counselling certification.

Eligibility

Candidates must be financial members of the HGSA and have completed a two-year clinical Master of Genetic Counselling qualification (or a Graduate Diploma or a one-year or two-year Master’s degree awarded prior to 2015) from a program accredited by the Board of Censors Accreditation Committee. In addition, the candidate must be employed a minimum of 0.4 FTE in a genetic counselling role in a clinical genetics service that can meet the requirements for genetic counselling training. Candidates not employed directly by a clinical genetics service will need to demonstrate that a clinical genetics service has agreed to provide the necessary supervision and support for the candidate to fulfil the training and certification requirements.

Candidates seeking Certification who completed their genetic counselling qualification where English was not the first language of instruction and assessment may be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency as part of their eligibility.

For further information, refer to the English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy.

Accredited courses

Details of the accreditation requirements for genetic counselling programs and a list of accredited programs can be found on the Accreditation Committee page on the HGSA website.
The Certification Committee will provide written feedback after each submission. Any resubmissions will be due at the next submission date, either 31 March or 30 September, whichever is closer.

**Note:** Candidates who take more than one year between submissions 1 and 2 must also submit annual supervisors’ reports and CPD reports. Candidates with extenuating circumstances may apply to the Certification Committee for an extension of up to two years.

**The role of supervision**

Supervision is an accepted requirement in many professions. In the context of genetic counselling practitioner certification, supervision encompasses educational and supportive functions, development of self-awareness in the candidate, and may encompass case-management functions. There is an expectation that the candidate will undertake individual clinical supervision at the earliest opportunity after commencement of employment and that this be demonstrated in supervisors’ reports which should be submitted annually (on the same date every year) from Submission 1 until Submission 2 is accepted.

In order to be Board Eligible, candidates must demonstrate that their supervision arrangements meet the minimum required standards. Supervision is mandatory for those undergoing certification in genetic counselling.

Candidates will have a minimum of two clinical supervisors, including:

- a clinical geneticist certified by the HGSA (or international equivalent)
- a health professional with the requisite counselling skills and experience.
This does not preclude the involvement of additional clinical supervisors, such as a medical specialist, who provides supervision and expertise in a specialty clinical area, or a FHGSA certified genetic counsellor.

All supervisors are expected to have a greater level of experience in their professional area than the candidate and to have undertaken formal training in supervision. Training for supervisors may be offered periodically in conjunction with the ASGC conference; however, supervisors are also encouraged to seek out other opportunities for training in supervision.

**Medical genetic supervision**

The candidate must have one supervisor who is an appropriately certified (FHGSA or equivalent, at least two years post-certified) clinical geneticist, or another medical specialist with extensive experience in provision of clinical genetics services*, with whom they can discuss genetic, genetic counselling and medical issues that arise in their case work. This is also an educational opportunity to expand the candidate’s knowledge beyond the immediate requirements of a case. Candidates may have additional clinical supervisors, such as a medical specialist, who provide supervision and expertise in a specialty clinical area.

* If the proposed medical genetics supervisor is not FHGSA certified, a current CV will be required for the Certification Committee to assess suitability for genetics supervision, and ideally a FHGSA certified clinical geneticist should be nominated for additional support if required.

**Counselling supervision**

Counselling supervision encompasses discussion of counselling issues and case outcomes, including appropriate referrals; different counselling techniques and models; transference and countertransference; and issues of self-awareness in the counselling role, in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

The supervisor must be a suitably qualified counsellor with knowledge and awareness of the agency issues and caseload issues of the candidate. Suitable supervisors include:

- a FHGSA certified genetic counsellor, at least two years post-certification
- an accredited social worker with experience in hospital or community settings with at least two years’ experience
- an accredited clinical psychologists or registered psychologists with at least two years’ experience in hospital or community settings.

Please check with the Certification Committee if you are unsure of whether your supervisor is appropriately credentialed.

**Requirements for supervision**

Each week, the candidate must have a minimum of one hour FTE of supervision for genetics and one hour FTE of supervision for counselling. This can be achieved through a mix of one-on-one and group supervision. All candidates should participate in regular one-on-one supervision during their training. All candidates must notify the Certification Committee with details of their supervision arrangements, including qualifications and contact details for their supervisors, and the model (e.g., group, one-on-one) and frequency of supervision.

To maximise the benefits of supervision it is best facilitated with the use of a contract. This is standard practice with all supervision arrangements in other disciplines. The candidate is encouraged to draw up a contract and negotiate the details with their supervisor. Contracts should be reviewed from time to time.

Examples of questions to consider for the contract include:
• How often will we meet?
• What venue will we use?
• How will each session be structured?
• How will we determine the content of each session?
• What are the responsibilities of the supervisor?
• What are the responsibilities of the counsellor being supervised?

The contract should include a statement about the need for confidentiality, and a statement about the manner in which conflict between the supervisor and counsellor will be addressed.

If the candidate is finding their supervision unsatisfactory, the contract forms a useful basis of discussion of the situation with the supervisor. In some situations, both may agree that more suitable arrangements could be arranged for the candidate.

Supervision is not the same as personal psychotherapy. Although it is often appropriate to discuss and raise personal issues that affect case management, treatment of personal issues usually remains separate from supervision sessions. The supervisor and candidate may agree that referral or a pathway to handle such personal issues, or if conflicts arise, is indicated.

**Submission requirements for Board Eligible status**

The candidate must:

• submit a cover letter including an outline of supervisors’ details, including qualifications and experience in supervision, model and frequency of supervision and employment history
• submit a certified copy of their academic transcript (please refer to a guide for certification of documents such as that provided by the Department of Education and Training, downloadable at [https://www.education.gov.au/guidelines-certification-documents](https://www.education.gov.au/guidelines-certification-documents))
• submit the above documents electronically via the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website at one of the two submission dates listed above.
• if applicable, submit test results to demonstrate English language proficiency as per the (separate) English Language Requirement for Genetic Counsellors Policy.

The application fee must be paid electronically at the time of submission. All fees including application and HGSA membership fees must be up to date. Please note that as the HGSA membership annual cycle falls on 31 March each year, March submissions will not be assessed until fees for the following year have been paid. Fee and payment details can be found on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website.

**Certification Requirements**

**Eligibility**

To undertake certification the candidate must have previously been assessed by the Certification Committee as Board Eligible and must have worked a minimum of one year FTE in a genetic counselling role post completion of their post-graduate degree, if undertaking certification by portfolio; or minimum two years FTE for modified portfolio. Adequate supervision should be in place over this period. Submissions towards certification made simultaneously with Board Eligibility applications will not be accepted.

Candidates who completed their genetic counselling qualification where English was not the first language of instruction and assessment may be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency as part of their eligibility (see the HGSA English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy).
Submission requirements for certification

Candidates are required to make three separate submissions to complete the requirements for certification. Candidates must make each submission electronically according to the instructions on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website, at one of the two yearly submission dates listed above. Please note that incomplete submissions will not be processed.

For each submission, the candidate must:

- submit a cover letter
- submit the prescribed assessment tasks with pages numbered and name of assessment task in header or footer.

The first submission made at least six months after attaining Board Eligibility must also be accompanied by the appropriate fee. This fee must be paid electronically prior to submission. Fee and payment details can be found on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website.

Please note that applications will not be accepted if they are received after the due date and HGSA membership fees have not been paid. Please note that as the HGSA membership annual cycle falls on 31 March each year, March submissions will not be assessed until fees for the following year have been paid. Applications and fees received after the due date will be processed after the following submission date.

Portfolio/Modified Portfolio Submission 1

The first submission may be made at least six months after the candidate has attained Board Eligible status and has worked for a minimum of one year FTE in a genetic counselling role post completion of their degree, if undertaking certification by portfolio, or minimum two years FTE if by modified portfolio.

Submission 1 will consist of:

- a cover letter
- three long cases (may include an ethics case which may be submitted in Submission 1 or 2)
- 25 logbook cases (portfolio) or 50 logbook cases (modified portfolio)
- a reflective essay about a taped consultation
- a literature review or research publication (may be submitted at Submission 1 or 2)
- a continuing education report
- genetics and counselling supervision reports.

The Certification Committee will respond to Submission 1 with written feedback. If any resubmissions are requested, the candidate will be asked to submit this work at the next available submission date (six months later). The resubmitted work must be clearly distinguishable from the original using colours, different font or highlighted text but not Track Changes. The first resubmission should be labelled Submission 1 – Revision 1.

Subsequent revisions need to be labelled in order. Late resubmissions will not be accepted. If a candidate is unable to complete their resubmission by the next submission date, they must apply in writing to the Certification Committee for an extension. If a resubmission is accepted, it is possible to make Submission 2 at the following available submission date. For example, if Submission 1 – Revision 1 was accepted at the March submission date, it would be possible to make Submission 2 at the September submission date that year.

Portfolio/Modified Portfolio Submission 2
Candidates may submit Submission 2 after the Certification Committee has agreed that Submission 1 has been completed satisfactorily. Submission 2 must be made no earlier than one year FTE and no more than three years FTE after the initial Submission 1 (See Figure 1). This is irrespective of FTE employment. Candidates with extenuating circumstances may apply in writing to the Certification Committee for an extension of up to two years. If a candidate does not make their second submission within this time-frame, and has not received an extension in writing from the Certification Committee, they must start the certification process again.

Candidates are required to submit annual continuing education reports and supervision reports from the time that Submission 1 is first made and until Submission 2 is accepted. Further submissions will not be accepted if these reports have not been completed adequately.

Submission 2 will consist of:

- a cover letter
- two long cases (must include an ethics case if not submitted with Submission 1)
- 25 logbook cases (portfolio) or 50 logbook cases (modified portfolio)
- a literature review or research publication (if not submitted with Submission 1)
- a continuing education report
- genetics and counselling supervision reports.

The Certification Committee will respond to Submission 2 with written feedback. If any resubmissions are requested, the candidate will be asked to submit this work at the next available submission date (six months later). The resubmitted work must be clearly distinguishable from the original using colours, different font or highlighted text but not Track Changes. The first resubmission should be labelled Submission 2 – Revision 1. Subsequent revisions need to be labelled in order. Late resubmissions will not be accepted. If a candidate is unable to complete their resubmission by the next submission date, they must apply in writing to the Certification Committee for an extension.

Once Submission 2 is accepted, an offer will be made for the next available opportunity for a simulated consultation and interview. This may not be in the next round if places are already full due to high numbers of candidates completing submission 2.

**Portfolio/Modified Portfolio Submission 3**

The candidate must have satisfactorily completed Submission 2 before undertaking Submission 3. The Certification Committee will provide one or two interview and simulated consultation dates per year, depending on demand and logistics.

Submission 3 will consist of:

- a simulated consultation
- an interview
- a reflective essay about the simulated consultation that will be due two months to the day after the date of the interview and simulated consultation.

The reflective essay should be submitted electronically following the instructions on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website. The Certification Committee aims to offer the assessment tasks for Submission 3 as soon as possible after successful completion of Submission 2.
Submission 3 Interview and simulated consultation

Candidates who have satisfactorily completed Submissions 1 and 2 will be notified in writing of the date and location of the interview and simulated consultation.

Dates may coincide with the ASGC Annual Conference and/or HGSA Annual Scientific Meeting.

There may be another option offered after the September submission review date, which will be determined by the number and location of candidates who are ready for Submission 3 and the availability of Certification Committee members.

Certification Assessment Tasks

Logbook

Candidates will be expected to maintain a complete workbook of all cases they have been involved in whilst undertaking their certification, and draw from these cases for the logbook.

The objective of the logbook is to demonstrate a breadth of clinical experience with respect to genetics, psychosocial issues and counselling skills. Cases selected should reflect specific clinical encounters rather than support group meetings, presentations given to members of the community, managerial or other activities outside the clinic setting. These may be mentioned if they occurred in the context of the case and are relevant to the competency assigned (see the HGSA Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors), but should not be the main contact within the case. Cases should demonstrate that the candidate has primary responsibility and significant involvement for genetic counselling in each case. It is helpful to include as much detail as possible to highlight the candidate’s level of involvement in the case, consistent with the competency standard allocated to that particular case. In addition to this, there needs to be enough detail of the history and outcome of the case so that it may be possible for the reader to follow the rationale for the candidate’s approach to the case.

Only cases with significant contact in the three years preceding submission can be used for the logbook. Significant contact does not refer to the amount of time spent with the client, but rather that the quality of the contact or contacts is sufficient to demonstrate the relevant competency. Submissions 1 and 2 each require 25 or 50 cases (portfolio or modified portfolio, respectively) and each page should be signed by both the genetics and counselling supervisor(s).

If the candidate is working in a specialty area, 10 (20%) logbook cases for the portfolio and 20 (20%) logbook cases for the modified portfolio must be outside this area of specialty. Ideally, candidates will demonstrate cross-training in as many areas of genetics outside their specialty area as is practicable. The Certification Committee recognises that opportunities for this will vary. The minimum requirements are that 20 percent of logbook cases are chosen from any area outside the specialty area. For example, this may be in the area of paediatrics or cancer or other area of adult general medicine if working exclusively in the area of prenatal genetics.

Each logbook case ideally will be no more than 150 words (for the entire case). There is 10 per cent flexibility on this word limit (i.e. an upper limit of 165 words). It is helpful to include word counts for each case. The word limit is designed to encourage candidates to write succinctly, and to identify and focus on the key topics of discussion. The Certification Committee will not review work that exceeds the word limit.

Instructions for submitting the logbook can be found on the HGSA website.
Each short case should include:

- case number and a single competency standard assigned
- the dates and summary of contacts
- the condition and mode of inheritance
- a summary of issues and role of the genetic counsellor in the case.

The following table outlines the number of cases required for each area of competency.

**Table 1: Short cases: Number of competencies required**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency standard*</th>
<th>Total no. of cases</th>
<th>Submission 1</th>
<th>Submission 2</th>
<th>To illustrate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Communication skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Psychosocial aspects of genetic counselling they have provided with a focus on communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Reflective practice, counselling &amp; interview skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Psychosocial aspects of genetic counselling they have provided focusing on reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Critical thinking skills</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Breadth and depth of their clinical genetics knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Case management skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Complexity of their work and role as a genetic counsellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Professional &amp; ethical practice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>General complexity of the issues in the field of genetic counselling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For further information, refer to the [HGSA Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors](#)

**Please note:** the above numbers of cases are doubled for those undertaking the modified portfolio to make up a total of 100 logbook cases.

Logbooks will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- demonstration of the competency standards
- indication of mode of inheritance, where relevant
- demonstration of exposure to a variety of genetic conditions, including familial cancer, prenatal, paediatric and adult
• demonstration of clinical and counselling experiences highlighting the candidate’s involvement; for example, risk assessment, predictive testing, giving bad news, coping skills and counselling clients with challenging behaviours

• provision of sufficient detail and outcomes of counselling in the case to allow the reader to follow reasoning for interventions and approaches made by the candidate, and that these have been appropriate; test results should be included if known.

Work may be presented in dot point format with word counts indicated. A legend should be provided for abbreviations used and pages of the logbook should be numbered to allow easy referencing. Please note that excessive use of abbreviations can detract from the reader’s understanding.

Long cases

The candidate is required to submit five long cases that are a maximum of 4,000 words each (not including references). There is 10 per cent flexibility on this word limit (i.e. an upper limit of 4,400 words). The purpose of the word limit is to encourage candidates to write succinctly, and to identify and focus on the key topic(s) of discussion. There is no lower limit, however if insufficient detail is included in any section, cases will need to be resubmitted. The Certification Committee will not review work that exceeds the word limit. Cases with significant grammatical and typographical errors and incorrect referencing style will not be accepted, so careful proof-reading is recommended.

Only cases with significant contact in the three years preceding the submission can be used as long cases. If the candidate is working in a specialty area, at least one long case must be outside the candidate’s area of expertise. Candidates must not use cases that have been included in their logbook.

Each case study is required to demonstrate the candidate’s knowledge, skills and attitudes within a specific area. Reflective practice must be demonstrated with each case study. The Certification Committee expects to see an increase in the complexity of cases and counselling skills demonstrated over time.

One case should focus on an ethical issue and should demonstrate the candidate’s awareness of the ethical issues surrounding genetic counselling and the principles that underpin practice. Submission of the ethics case may be made with Submission 1 or 2. Theories covered may include Medical Principism (autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice) or other relevant bioethical theories, such as the Ethics of Care, Religious Ethics, Feminism and Narrative Ethics. Any number of case-related ethical considerations may be included and the discussion should emphasise these and any resulting counselling dilemmas that may have arisen. Although they may be summarised, the candidate would not be expected to explore other major counselling issues emerging from the case. The chosen ethics case should be clearly identified in the candidate’s submission.

Long case format

Cases should be set out in a similar format and should include the following:

• a completed cover sheet; this will be available from the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website

• the title of the case stating the specific issue being addressed

• a word count (excluding references and tables)

• a footer containing candidate’s name, page numbers and the case number/title

• background to the case history and the context of the candidate’s contact with the client; a statement confirming that names used in the case are pseudonyms
• a list of specific issues raised by the case (dot points are acceptable)
• discussion of one or more of these issues in the context of the candidate’s own management of the case. The candidate should highlight the counselling or ethical issues, and discuss the counselling interventions that were used. By a review of the relevant literature, the candidate should demonstrate that the interventions or management of the case is based on a sound understanding of counselling theory and ethics
• discussion of the use of supervision, including reflection on the case, learning gained through supervision and the impact of this on future practice
• a genetics discussion that is specific to the case and its management; that is, it should be applied genetics rather than merely a factual general discussion. This section should include discussion of any genetic testing undertaken, including rationale, limitations and interpretation of results as relevant. This section should be approximately 600 words (+/- 10%)
• a pedigree for each case
• references.

Assessment criteria

Candidate’s long cases will be assessed according to a demonstration of:
• an understanding of counselling issues relevant to the case
• counselling strategies used
• a review of relevant literature and how this relates to the counselling strategies used
• an understanding of genetic testing process and limitations, and test result interpretation (as relevant to the case)
• reflective practice and use of supervision
• clarity of language, grammar and consistency with formal report writing.

Literature review and publication

The candidate is required to submit either a literature review on a topic directly related to the practice of genetic counselling, OR a paper that has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The literature review or publication may be submitted at Submission 1 or 2.

The objectives of these tasks are to enable the candidate to:
• develop an appreciation of research methodology
• critically review and analyse current literature
• convey theory and research findings in a clear and precise manner.

Literature review

The candidate should choose a topic relevant to the practice of genetic counselling and prepare a literature review. The literature review must not be taken from the candidate’s postgraduate genetic counselling coursework. The candidate must demonstrate an ability to critique the professional literature on the topic and evaluate its relevance to the practice of genetic counselling. Details of how the review was conducted must be included (i.e. methodology section). The word limit is 5,000 words (excluding references) and must be included on the submitted review. There is 10 per cent flexibility on this word limit (i.e. an upper limit of 5,500 words. The Certification Committee will not review work that exceeds the word limit.

The literature review will be assessed on the following criteria:
• content (relevance and comprehensiveness)
• methodology of review
• quality of critique
• academic language
• referencing.

All areas must be deemed satisfactory for the candidate to pass.

Examples of some questions to ask when critically appraising research may include, but are not exclusive to the following:

• What was the research question and have the authors used an appropriate method to answer this?
• If sampling was involved, was the sample population representative and of an adequate size for the method used?
• Were data analysis methods used appropriate?
• Were sound conclusions made from the research results?
• What were the limitations (if any) and strengths of the study?
• Were there any gaps in the literature?
• Were there any research implications for future studies?

Items to include in the methodology of review may include the search strategy for identifying relevant articles. For example, search terms used and databases interrogated should be included. If reference lists were also reviewed or opinions of experts were sought to identify further articles, this should also be included. Inclusion and exclusion criteria should be described and reasons why these were chosen in relation to the selected subject of the review article.

Publication

If the candidate has written a peer-reviewed research paper that has been published or accepted for publication, this can be submitted in place of the literature review, provided that:

• the candidate is the first author (that is, they must have written the paper and made a substantial contribution to the research study)
• the word count is not less than 2,000 words
• the topic of research is relevant to the practice of genetic counselling; this may include counselling and/or genetics aspects of practice
• the work published consists of research commenced after completion of their Master of Genetic Counselling (or commencement of a genetic counselling position), or the candidate has demonstrated further depth of analysis and understanding of the research initiated during their course (with supporting evidence of this provided by their research supervisor and the convener of the Master of Genetic Counselling program)
• a summary of the research methodology is included if this is not in the paper.

Letters or opinions, commentaries and case reports may not be included. This assessment task is designed to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research methods and skills in critical appraisal of research. Co-authored research papers where there are two primary authors cannot be accepted since it is not possible to assess the candidate on the above criteria when it is unclear which components were covered by the candidate or the co-author.

Candidates who are unsure whether their publications will meet Certification Committee requirements are
invited to write to the Certification Committee with their proposal.

**Reflective skills assessments**

The reflective skills assessments are to be submitted in Submissions 1 and 3. Note the requirements for each submission are different.

The objectives of the reflective skills assessments are to demonstrate the candidate’s:

- use of counselling skills and a client-centred approach
- rationale for using the counselling skills applied and alternative strategies that could have been adopted
- ability to reflect on the client-counsellor dynamics and self-awareness.

The objectives relate predominantly to the demonstration of Competency Standards A and B.

**Submission 1: reflective essay**

Candidates are required to submit a reflective essay of 2,000 words (with 10% flexibility on word limit, i.e. an upper limit of 2,200 words) describing an audio or video-recorded consultation conducted as part of their standard caseload. The word count must be specified on the submitted work. The recording should be discussed in counselling supervision. Written consent for recording the session should be obtained, in accordance with the requirements of the candidate’s place of employment. For confidentiality, the recording should not be submitted to the Certification Committee.

The essay will include the following:

- a brief description of the context of the session, including (but not limited to) client and counsellor perceptions of referral; prior contact with the service; and a brief family history and pedigree (no more than 200 words)
- reflection on the consultation overall, including an evaluation of (but not limited to) the key counselling issues; key points in the interview; what went well; what might have been done differently; and issues arising for the counsellor (including any transference or counter-transference). Length 500-750 words
- use of supervision during the case and insights gained from supervision (100-200 words)
- transcription of a key continuous three to five-minute section of the consultation, with a detailed analysis of the counselling interventions used with reference to the literature (1,000-1,250 words; transcribed section not included in word count)
- supervisor’s comments on the case including acknowledgment that they have reviewed the recording (no less than 200 words; additional to essay word limit).

**Submission 3: simulated consultation and reflective essay**

The candidate will conduct a simulated consultation with an actor, which will be video-recorded. The candidate will be able to take a copy of the recording on a memory stick. For consistency, the scenario will be chosen from a set panel of genetic counselling scenarios. The candidate will be given a list of possible genetic conditions that may be the focus of the consultation. The scenario will be chosen randomly and may not be from the candidate’s specialist area. The candidate is encouraged to remember that this assessment focuses on identifying and addressing the client’s concerns and the use of counselling skills to achieve this. A detailed risk-assessment process is not within the scope of this assessment.

On the day of the recording, the candidate will be provided with a file containing the referral, a pedigree and
any progress notes to date.

The candidate will be given 15 minutes to review the file before the consultation. The candidate will have up to 45 minutes for the consultation. The candidate will be responsible for time management of the session and should ensure that the session is completed within the time-frame. The session will be stopped at 45 minutes if the candidate has not ended the session.

The candidate may ask for feedback from the actor. If so, this must also be recorded and the candidate is encouraged to use this as part of the reflective element of the submitted work.

The reviewers will provide brief oral feedback to the candidate after the consultation, with a formal letter to follow.

The reflective essay of 2,000 words (with 10% flexibility on word limit) will be based on the video-recorded consultation. The candidate must discuss the session in counselling supervision and must then indicate clearly the insights gained through supervision.

The essay will include:

- reflection on the consultation overall, including an evaluation of (but not limited to) what went well, the key counselling issues arising, what might have been done differently, and issues arising for the candidate (including transference or countertransference). Reflection on the actor’s feedback (if relevant) should be included in this section (500-750 words)
- identification of key points in the interview (include the time point in the audio recording) and the reasons why these points are perceived as crucial or turning points (250-500 words)
- transcription of a continuous three to five-minute section of the consultation at one of these key points, including relevant body language noted, with a detailed analysis of the counselling with reference to the literature (1,000–1,250 words; transcribed section not included in word count).

Key points are the points that the candidate felt were crucial or critical times in the counselling session, and that influenced the direction of the session or its outcomes. For instance, it might be a point at which the counselling seemed to ‘stall’ or where an insight was made, or the emotions expressed verbally or nonverbally changed.

**Submission 3 Interview and simulated consultation**

Candidates will be required to submit their essay electronically through the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website.

**Assessment criteria**

The reflective skills assessments are not intended to be a demonstration of ‘perfect’ work. Rather, the Certification Committee wants to see how the candidate works with their client, both in terms of tasks (to address their concerns, provide relevant information as necessary, and to manage the session, including any setbacks) and process. Process refers to the awareness of what is going on between the counsellor (candidate) and the client, and any impact the counsellor (candidate) might be making on the client.

In the second reflective skills assessment, the candidate will be assessed on the content of their essay, not the counselling session per se. However, a failure to identify key issues, or awareness of the dynamics and counselling approach will have a negative impact on assessment of the task.

The candidate will not be penalised for making ‘mistakes’ in the session, as long as they show awareness of what occurred and what they could have done instead.
The candidate will be assessed on their ability to:

- identify and synthesise the essential elements of a case in written format
- use counselling supervision to underpin and enhance self-awareness and insight into the process of the consultation, and to articulate the learning that has arisen through counselling supervision related to the case
- identify and address the client’s concerns and manage the consultation within a given time-frame (Submission 3)
- recognise defining moments in the consultation, and critically reflect on the dynamics of the consultation and counsellor’s contribution to these
- recognise counselling processes and skills that facilitated the client relationship and consultation outcomes, and identify those processes and skills that could have been used to overcome challenges in the consultation
- recognise, articulate and reflect on issues of transference or counter-transference if relevant.

Transcript analysis: choosing what to transcribe

Transcription of the entire consultation is not required. Candidates are encouraged to transcribe a section that they found challenging, which can then serve as a learning opportunity, particularly for Submission 1. If the candidate used interventions they were not happy with, they should state why that is and offer suggestions of other interventions that could have been used, including a rationale for doing so. For example, if the candidate thinks they moved into ‘rescue’ mode – rushing to inappropriately reassure – they should make a suggestion as to what could have been done differently.

For Submission 3, candidates may choose a challenging section of their consultation, or alternatively, may transcribe a section that they believe demonstrates a good use of their skills, particularly their use of advanced counselling skills, such as immediacy, empathy, metaphor or challenging.

Transcript analysis: formatting the transcript

Candidates should produce a verbatim transcript, with each line of text numbered for reference in the essay. The transcript must clearly show the client’s words and relevant body language, the candidate’s response and a detailed analysis of the counselling.

Note that producing a transcript is time consuming. On average, each minute of tape will take four minutes to transcribe.

Transcript analysis

The emphasis in the transcript analysis should be on the candidate’s counselling in response to the client. The candidate should begin their analysis with a rationale for why they chose this section for detailed analysis. They should then identify and provide a written analysis of each intervention they used during the transcribed section. In addition to identifying the intervention strategy used, candidates should describe the specific counselling skill and the effect of the strategy discussed. The candidate should also share their internal processes; that is, what they were thinking or feeling at the time, and how this influenced their counselling.

It is expected that the candidate also briefly discusses the broad issue raised by the transcribed section (e.g. guilt or grief) in the context of the literature.
Candidate interview

The candidate will be required to undertake a face-to-face interview with two or three Certification Committee members. Candidates will be asked to prepare one of their long cases for presentation at the start of the interview. The presentation can include PowerPoint slides. Candidates should provide a brief description of the case, the counselling skills used and the rationale for using these particular skills. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes long. Candidates should be prepared to answer questions from the Certification Committee after the presentation.

The interview may require the candidate to consider and discuss genetic counselling scenarios. The Certification Committee may ask the candidate to discuss other components of their submission for Certification.

The objective of the interview is to supplement the written work that is provided by a candidate. Genetic counsellors are often required to anticipate and respond to unexpected clinical situations in an appropriate and professional manner. This applies to both counselling practice as well as providing informational resources. An interview gives the Certification Committee the opportunity to observe a candidate’s ability to think and respond this way. It provides a means to determine if the candidate has integrated theory underpinning the competencies into their practice (as distinct from a novice practitioner who may predominantly consider this retrospectively). The interview, along with the video analysis, will give the Certification Committee an opportunity to see the extent to which the candidate is able to work as an autonomous team member and is able to be explicit about the theory that underlies their responses. Interviews also give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their thinking about the profession.

Assessment criteria

Candidates at this stage would be expected to meet the following criteria:

- provide a response to practice scenarios that demonstrates competency consistent with an experienced practitioner (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1995; cited in Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2001). This includes the ability to:
  - recognise the dynamics that occur between counsellor and client, and the ways in which this may affect the consultation
  - be explicit about the theory that informs their response and apply theory appropriately
  - apply counselling skills to facilitate client understanding and adaptation (Resta et al, 2006)
  - recognise and describe their role in relation to other health professionals, both those who are members of the team and those who are external to it
  - take a self-aware, client-centred approach to facilitate client support and decision making.

- act in accordance with the ethical, legal and philosophical principles and values of the HGSA Code of Ethics for Genetic Counsellors.

- demonstrate an appreciation of issues such as privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, discrimination, and other ethical or legal matters related to the exchange of genetic information.

- keep within the required time-frame for the presentation.

Candidates will be assessed on their ability to meet the criteria listed above throughout the course of the interview. Assessment will be qualitative, with either the interview accepted, or where concerns arise, constructive feedback will be provided. It is expected that feedback provided in the post simulation debrief and feedback letter is incorporated in the reflective essay, with appropriate reference to the literature.
resubmission is requested, details of what is required will be provided by letter.

**Continuing Professional Development**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a requirement for all MHGSA and FHGSA genetic counsellors. CPD reporting through the HGSA website is required from Submission 1. See the **Continuing Professional Development for Genetic Counsellors Policy**.

**Supervisor reports**

Candidates are required to submit annual supervision reports from each of the candidate’s supervisors, regardless of whether other assessment tasks are being submitted or not. Annual supervisors’ reports are required from Submission 1 until Submission 2 is accepted. These reports must be completed by the supervisor and candidate together.

It is expected that a candidate’s counselling and genetic supervisors will regularly discuss the candidate’s progress to ensure they are working satisfactorily towards their certification. However, the principles of confidentiality should be observed during this discussion. To facilitate this process, candidates are encouraged to discuss their supervision reports with all their supervisors and share the Certification Committee’s response to submissions with them.

**Transitional Provisions**

The transitional provisions describe the options available to candidates who have commenced Part 1 or Part 2, or have attained cancer genetic counselling certification under the previous guidelines. The transitional provisions are underpinned by the fact that the degree of competence demonstrated at awarding of certification has not been changed in the new guidelines.

For clarity, the previous certification system is referred to as Certification by Case Reports. Candidates who have previously commenced this will have the option to apply to transfer to Certification by Modified Portfolio.

**Certification by Modified Portfolio**

This option is available to candidates who commenced submitting cases for certification by Case Reports but did not complete certification by March 2013. The key differences between Certification by Modified Portfolio and the Standard Portfolio are the number of logbook cases to be submitted, and the requirement of an additional year (FTE) of employment as a MHGSA genetic counsellor. This latter requirement also applies to those who obtained Part 1 Certification but have not yet begun certification (Part 1 being the previous qualification that preceded the introduction of the Master of Genetic Counselling).

Once a candidate is Board Eligible and applies to commence Certification by Modified Portfolio, the time-line for submissions will be the same as for candidates submitting by the standard portfolio (see Figure 1).

The modified portfolio consists of:

- five long cases (refer to above for details of the long case requirements)
- a logbook of 100 cases (see above for details of the logbook requirements, and note that for candidates working in a specialty area, 20 (20%) logbook cases must be outside of the candidate’s area of expertise)
- a first-author publication or literature review
- two reflective skills assessments
- an interview
• annual continuing education reports
• annual supervision reports.

Candidates who have Part 1 by graduate diploma or by one-year coursework Master degree or by checklist (but have not yet commenced submitting case reports) will require two years of full-time equivalent (FTE) experience before being eligible to apply for Certification by Modified Portfolio. If candidates have not previously applied to the Certification Committee for Part 1 (case report system), they may apply to be Board Eligible under the current certification system to be eligible to make submissions towards certification.

Transfer from cancer certification to general certification

In 1998, the Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling introduced the option of obtaining certification in cancer genetic counselling. As part of the review of training guidelines in 2008–09, the Board decided to remove this option for all future candidates undertaking certification by the same process. This decision was made with recognition that genetic counsellors are now working in a number of specialty areas and that the certification process should allow a broad assessment of competency-based learning, much of which can be obtained within the specialty area. The Certification Committee recognises that the alteration in certification may mean that genetic counsellors with cancer certification may wish to transfer to general certification. This is not mandatory; however, some genetic counsellors may wish to do this, for example in response to changes in employment or a desire to update their qualifications.

Candidates are encouraged to write to the Certification Committee regarding their intention to request this transfer and their proposed timeframe for submission.

Any FHGSA (cancer) genetic counsellor applying to transfer to general certification must provide the following:

• a cover letter
• two letters of recommendation from appropriate senior colleagues, for example, manager, counselling supervisor, FHGSA genetic counsellor or clinical geneticist
• up-to-date curriculum vitae detailing work experience, research activities and educational activities
• clinical evidence to demonstrate breadth and depth of experience in the form of a logbook of 25 cases. The logbook cases must be in areas other than cancer genetics, such as general, paediatric and/or prenatal genetics. Please refer above for details of the logbook requirements
• a reflective essay that compares and contrasts the counselling skills used in general versus cancer genetic counselling. The word limit for the essay is 2,000 words.
• one long case (non-cancer) that demonstrates clinical expertise, and written and analytical skills. Please refer above for details of the long case requirements.
• a reflective skills assessment as described for Submission 1. Please refer above for details. The case should not be in cancer genetics.

Candidates must submit all of the above (i.e. the entire submission) to the Certification Committee electronically through the Committee page on the HGSA website.

Please note that submissions that do not include all of the above will not be processed. There is no fee to transfer from cancer to general certification.

Submission dates - there are two submission dates each year:

• 31 March
• 30 September.
Please note that applications will not be accepted if they are received after the due date and will be processed the following round. If you experience difficulties uploading your submission, please contact the HGSA Secretariat as soon as possible for assistance.

The Committee will respond to this submission with written feedback. The candidate will be asked to provide any requested resubmissions at the next available submission date. Late resubmissions will not be accepted. If a candidate is unable to complete their resubmission by the next submission date, they must apply to the Committee for an extension in writing.

Certification eligibility for overseas trained and/or certified genetic counsellors

In Australasia, the HGSA grants certification via two successive stages:

- Board Eligible to undertake certification (MHGSA) – requires a two-year clinical Master of Genetic Counselling qualification (or equivalent) and employment in a clinical genetic counselling role
- Certification (FHGSA) – requires employment in a genetic counselling role and satisfactory completion of a prescribed body of work related to clinical practice
- candidates seeking Certification who completed their genetic counselling qualification where English was not the first language of instruction and assessment may be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency as part of their eligibility. Refer to the English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy.

A working party has examined countries that have well established training and certification requirements, namely Canada, USA and UK. Currently, there are no reciprocal agreements for certification between these or any other countries. It is important that genetic counsellors achieve certification equivalency in the country in which they are working if certification exists in that country. Genetic counsellors who have trained in Australia are eligible to become certified by the HGSA. Genetic counsellors who have trained and/or are certified overseas will also be eligible to apply for certification in Australasia, although the requirements may differ.

Genetic counsellors without certification

Genetic counsellors who have trained overseas but do not hold certification in any country may apply to the Certification Committee to become eligible to apply for certification through the HGSA. The Certification Committee will consider the relevance and transferability of a postgraduate university qualification in genetic counselling obtained from an overseas institution, before conferring Board Eligibility. Once eligible, the candidate will be permitted to complete the same certification process as for Australian trained genetic counsellors.

Genetic counsellors with overseas certification

Genetic counsellors who have trained in Australasia or elsewhere and are certified from a recognised international body may apply to the Certification Committee for HGSA certification. In this instance, the candidate may be required to complete a reduced portfolio compared with those undertaking certification within Australia and New Zealand. This is to ensure that all genetic counsellors certified by the HGSA have obtained the same minimum amount of clinical experience and have demonstrated the same competencies assessed in the same manner. Clinical experience and the manner in which competencies have previously been assessed will determine the requirements to achieve HGSA certification.
Genetic counsellors with certification from GCRB/AGNC (UK and Ireland)

The training and certification process is very similar between the UK and Australia/New Zealand. Both groups of genetic counsellors must obtain at least two years FTE clinical experience after obtaining a two-year Master of Genetic Counselling, or equivalent, to become eligible for certification. Therefore, genetic counsellors certified by the GCRB/AGNC will be eligible to apply for HGSA certification after working for six months in Australia or New Zealand and demonstrating an understanding of how practice differs between the two countries (see below for more details).

Genetic counsellors with certification from ABGC or CAGC (USA or Canada)

The university training of genetic counsellors in USA and Canada is similar to the two-year clinical Master of Genetic Counselling degree in Australia. Genetic counsellors in USA and Canada obtain certification by undertaking a professional board examination, which assesses both clinical genetic and counselling knowledge. Genetic counsellors in both countries have means to demonstrate the breadth of their clinical experience using clinical placements and/or logbooks and the Board exam. In the USA or Canada there is no minimum requirement for clinical experience before obtaining certification.

It is important to ensure that all genetic counsellors granted HGSA certification have the same minimum clinical experience and have demonstrated and had their competencies and skills assessed in a similar manner. Therefore, genetic counsellors certified by the ABGC or CAGC will be eligible to apply for HGSA certification once they have completed at least two years FTE employment in a genetic counselling role. They will also have to demonstrate their competencies and skills as other candidates do when applying for HGSA certification.

Reduced portfolio requirements for HGSA certification if already certified in the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA

For genetic counsellors with certification from GCRB/AGNC (UK and Ireland) the requirements for HGSA certification are:

- financial membership of HGSA
- payment of the application fee, which must be paid electronically at the time of submission. Details of fees can be found on the Certification Committee page on the HGSA website
- six months FTE recent clinical experience in Australia or New Zealand.

And submission of the following (Submission 1):

- submission of a 2,000 to 3,000-word essay or case study demonstrating the candidate’s understanding of how clinical practice differs between the two countries. Topics for discussion may include things such as health care systems, clinical and laboratory protocols, cultural issues, medico-legal issues or any other relevant issue
- proof of continued professional development in the time since certification/recertification granted
- three references:
  - current manager/ supervisor who can confirm 6 months FTE in Australia or New Zealand and regular attendance at counselling supervision
  - previous (UK) counselling/clinical supervisor confirming clinical skills, counselling skills and varied clinical experience across different aspects of clinical genetics, and participation in ongoing supervision
  - previous (UK) manager confirming duration (FTE) of clinical experience
● Curriculum vitae
  o certified copies of qualifications and certifications. Please refer to a guide for certification of
documents such as the one provided by the Department of Education and Training,

In addition to the above requirements, genetic counsellors with certification from ABGC or CAGC (USA or
Canada) also need to submit the following:

  • one long case study as per certification guidelines
  • one reflective skills assessment as per certification guidelines for Submission 1 (Reflective skills
    assessments section).

**Submission dates** - there are two submission dates each year:

  • 31 March
  • 30 September.

Please note that applications **will not be accepted** if they are received after the due date and will be
processed the following round. If you experience difficulties uploading your submission, please contact the
HGSA Secretariat as soon as possible for assistance.

The **Certification Committee** will respond to Submission 1 with written feedback. The candidate will be asked
to provide any requested resubmissions at the next available submission date. Late resubmissions will not be
accepted. If a candidate is unable to complete their resubmission by the next submission date, they must
apply to the Certification Committee for an extension in writing.

**Genetic counsellors with certification from any other country**

Genetic counsellors who have attained certification from a country other than those already mentioned are
invited to write to the **Certification Committee** to determine their eligibility for HGSA certification. The
Certification Committee will then review the training and certification requirements of the country in
question to determine the requirements for the genetic counsellor to demonstrate their competencies in a
manner similar to those who achieve HGSA certification.

Also refer to the **HGSA English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy**.

**Counsellors with overseas certification that has lapsed**

In cases where a genetic counsellor was certified overseas but their certification has lapsed or not been
renewed for any reason, the candidate may write to the Certification Committee to determine their
eligibility for HGSA certification and the necessary requirements.

Also refer to the **HGSA English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy**.
References

American Board of Genetic Counseling: www.abgc.net

Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors: www.agnc.org.uk

Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors: www.cagc-accg.ca

