

The Diploma of Fitness: the rationale

**A letter to the health and fitness industry from Dr Grant Pavia,
SA Director, Australian Institute Pty Ltd**

In the latest Fitness Industry Training Package (SRF04) Service Skills Australia has introduced the new qualification of a Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204). To accommodate graduates of this new award, Fitness Australia has created a new registration category: Fitness Therapist.

The Australian Institute Pty Ltd is a Registered Training Organisation (Provider Number 21508) offering courses in personal training, gym instruction, group exercise instruction, massage and remedial massage. To service the requirements of the industry, the Institute is currently developing a unique program of delivery and assessment for the Diploma of Fitness qualification (SRF50204), which will accept enrolments in the second half of this year (subject to approval).

The purpose of this letter is to explain to you, the industry, the rationale behind the structure and development of the Australian Institute's Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) program. We are also seeking your vital input and feedback in relation to this award. The units of competency contained in the training package are set and must be strictly adhered to. However, there is a degree of flexibility in how the Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) may be orientated or structured. The Australian Institute has made a conscious decision to consult with leading players within the industry, and seek their input into the proposed course design. It is absolutely essential that we have the support and endorsement of the industry to ensure the appropriate vocational outcomes for the graduates, and to meet the needs of the industry.

Let's start by addressing the question: 'What is a fitness therapist?' According to *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary* a therapist is 'a person skilled in the treatment of disease...and is often combined with a term indicating the specific type of disorder (i.e. speech therapist) or a particular type of treatment rendered (i.e. physical therapist)'. The term 'therapist' is widely known and has been used in the medical and health fields for many years. There are a number of allied health professions that use the term including, among others, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and beauty therapists.

What is new, however, is the term 'fitness therapist' which is used to describe the fitness professional who has the qualification of Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) and is registered with the industry peak body, Fitness Australia. It is hoped that, over the coming years, the fitness therapist will

be recognised and accepted as an allied health professional by the medical and health industries and the community at large.

The health and fitness industry is undergoing considerable change. In the past it has, in the main, just delivered a range of fitness products, which has been continuously growing and expanding. But with the advent of extensive contemporary scientific research that clearly validates the health benefits of exercise, there are new and expanding market opportunities for the industry such as the 'special populations' market consisting primarily of people with a range of chronic disease states including asthma, arthritis, diabetes, obesity and cardiorespiratory conditions.

Increasingly, many members of the medical and allied health professions are recognising the value of using the facilities provided by modern health, fitness and recreational centres. A number of health organisations such as the National Heart Foundation, the Arthritis Foundation, the Diabetes Foundation, the Council on the Ageing and others are developing, implementing and promoting exercise programs for their respective members that can be carried out in industry centres. The qualified fitness therapist is needed to assist in the delivery of such programs as well as develop the confidence of the referring parties.

It is our intention that the Institute's Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) be structured in such a way as to adequately produce a graduate with a variety of competencies that not only comply with the Fitness Industry Training Package (SRF04), but that also provide them with vocational outcomes that will make them attractive, employable staff members for the industry.

The Institute's Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) is intended to produce graduates that can register as a fitness therapist, and possess particular expertise to market and deliver exercise programs to assist in the prevention, treatment and management of a range of chronic disease states for special populations. They will have a particular interest in working with other allied health professionals for the good of their clients, and in using the excellent range of equipment and facilities that the health, fitness and recreational industry offers.

In a most recent report (January 2006) on 'The State of the Industry', John McCarthy, the Executive Director of IHRSA, recognised as one of the world's leading and

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most respected lateral thinkers in health and fitness, had this to say about the Industry's Educational Mission:

'Leveraging the industry's greatest unearned asset'

'Almost every day, a new research report is published that documents the breadth and depth of the health benefits of regular exercise. The research underlying these reports is conducted at some of the world's most distinguished medical centers. It is published in medical journals that are recognised as authoritative by doctors and health educators everywhere in the world. Collectively, this research constitutes the greatest 'unearned asset' that this industry has ever received. It also constitutes the most 'underleveraged asset' that this industry enjoys. Why? Because even today few fitness facilities leverage this information to their full advantage. Why is leveraging this asset so important to the growth of your business? For seven reasons. First, it elevates the value of what you do. To almost every person, health – their own and that of their loved ones – is of supreme value. By highlighting your contribution to health, you highlight the value of what you do. Second, it elevates the public understanding of your role in your community. You are not only a fitness center. You are also a health promotion and disease prevention center. This positioning puts you at the center of what every community deems important. Third, it enhances your connection to the medical community. We, in this industry, are not health care providers. But we are allied to the health care industry, and in many instances we can be an indispensable ally. By continually and creatively communicating the health benefits of regular exercise, we emphasize the connection of our business to medicine. Fourth, it elevates the stature of your fitness personnel. By continually dispensing this information, your fitness personnel become positioned as allied to the health care providers rather than simply as adjunct professionals in body-building or beauty-making businesses. Fifth, it increases the likelihood of getting licensed health care professionals integrated into your business as they realize the importance of what you do for people with diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, etc. Sixth, it educates your community in such a way that they will turn to you for counsel whenever the subject of the importance of exercise is raised. You can become 'the authority' in this arena. Seventh, it will enhance the professionalism and the professional standing of your company in the community you serve.'

This encapsulates the philosophy behind the Institute's planning and development of the Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204). It is the Institute's belief that these graduates, as fitness therapists,

will help the industry capitalise on the wonderful opportunities afforded by the 'special populations' market. Furthermore, there will be considerable vocational outcomes for these fitness professionals, and benefits to the clients, in having qualified staff who are trained to a high level.

The Units of Competency of the Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204), which are laid down in the Fitness Industry Training Package (SRF04), must be followed and are non-negotiable until if or when it is revised. The title of each competency is detailed for your reference at the end of this article.

The Australian Institute, while complying with the obligatory Units of Competency, is aiming to structure its Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) in such a way as to produce a graduate with a clearly defined and specific employment outcome – a registered Fitness Therapist – with particular strengths in the following areas:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Planning and delivering of exercise to a range of special populations at low and moderate risk
- Working collaboratively with allied health professionals
- Sales and marketing of special population exercise programs
- Massage therapy
- Strength and conditioning
- Managing other staff and services
- Financial management
- Frontline management.

We request from you your support and/or constructive feedback in relation to our proposal, so as to assist the Institute in producing a course of study that truly meets the needs of the industry as well as complying with the training package. (SRF04)

We would love to hear from you! Please forward your endorsement, comments and/or feedback to: Dr Grant Pavia, Australian Institute Pty Ltd, 1202 Old Port Road, Royal Park SA 5014, or alternatively via e-mail to grant.pavia@aif.edu.au.

Thank you very much for your consideration and interest in the development of future fitness professionals!



Dr Grant Pavia
SA Director
Australian Institute Pty Ltd

DIPLOMA OF FITNESS (SRF50204) COMPETENCY DETAILS

The requirement for a Diploma of Fitness (SRF50204) is achievement of thirty-one (31) Units of Competency. This qualification facilitates the development of the following knowledge and skills:

- making referrals and working collaboratively with allied health professionals in regards to a range of internal/external clients in a fitness specialist setting
- receiving and responding to rehabilitation referrals from allied health professionals
- undertaking more extensive postural appraisals of moderate risk clients in order to plan and deliver corrective exercise programs for clients under the guidance of allied health professionals
- providing nutritional information to clients with specific nutritional requirements, under the guidance and supervision of medical and allied health professionals
- applying in-depth knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the major systems of the human body to the planning and delivery of fitness programs for moderate risk clients. Understanding of the physiological processes maintaining homeostasis of each body system, examining how these processes are undermined by disease and disorders
- providing body composition management programming for clients
- providing advice to fitness clients about exercise related injuries, and their prevention and management under the guidance of allied health professionals
- planning and delivering exercise programs for low and moderate risk individuals, focusing on the role of exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle and to prevent major diseases in adults
- planning and delivering exercise for moderate risk client groups of children and young adolescents, developing a consultative network.
- Applying fitness assessment protocols to a potential client group, identifying the need to refer, and review exercise programs for children and young adolescents in conjunction with allied health professionals
- planning and delivering exercise for people with disabilities in conjunction with an allied health professional
- planning and delivering exercise strategies that will enhance musculoskeletal rehabilitation in conjunction with an allied health professional
- planning and delivering exercise for moderate risk clients with cardiorespiratory needs
- planning and delivering exercise programs for clients at moderate risk of metabolic disease, primarily metabolic syndrome (impaired glucose tolerance, hypertension, obesity, dyslipidaemia) in conjunction with an allied health professional
- planning and delivering exercise for moderate risk clients with musculoskeletal needs
- planning and delivering exercise programs to clients with neurological impairments who present with no more than moderate risk of untoward event or exacerbation of impairment during exercise.

In addition, students are required to complete elective units of competency from any training package within the sport and recreation industry (community recreation, fitness, outdoor recreation, sport) or from any other endorsed training package from any other industry. Units selected must be relevant to the occupational outcome sought and should be appropriate to the qualification level. ♦



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