ANNUAL REPORT

governance and audit:AUTUMN 2018

National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society

The National Counselling Society and

The National Hypnotherapy Society

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**INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR REPORT FOLLOWING**

**SITE VISIT ON**

**OCTOBER 10th, 2018**





This Report is being presented by Dr Phillip A. Rees, Independent Assessor responsible for Governance and Audit within the National Counselling Society and Hypnotherapy Society. The Report is the written outcome of a visit to the national administrative and management hub of the Societies at19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on Wednesday October 10th, 2018.

The Report will focus on three specific areas:

* The Purpose of the Visit
* The Content of the Visit
* The Outcome and Conclusions of the Visit

**The Purpose of the Visit**

The primary purpose of the visit was to fulfil the decision made at a meeting of the Societies Governance and Audit Committee February 6th, 2013 in London. The decision of that meeting was that the Independent Assessor should make a site visit ‘*to the administrative offices and monitor processes and procedures in real time as they occur. This may involve examining relevant files, databases and procedures.’*

This was subsequently discussed and ratified at the Societies Council Meeting held in London on April 9th, 2013; this meeting outlined and acknowledged the function and role of the Independent Assessor, and identified the importance of regular visits (Annually) to the Societies head offices as a means of supporting and monitoring the foundational procedures combined with accountability and standards of the Societies, and to fulfil the demands of the PSA accreditation process.

Since the last visit made by the Independent Assessor, there is recognition of the continuing exponential growth and development in the numbers of members and registrants who are joining the Societies.

The primary function of the visit, as on previous visits, was to examine how the policies and procedures of the Societies are administered and managed, and to focus on how the Societies seek feedback and involvement with registrants, members and a range of service users. To enable internal scrutiny of the Societies policies and procedures, which forms the basis of this Report, the Independent Assessor met with the Chair of the Societies Dr Chris Forester, Vicky Parkinson the Societies CEO, Deputy Chief Executive Freya Bottomley, Kate Mahoney the Head of Professional Standards, Karen Finneran the Acting Administration Manager and the Public Protection Officer(PPO), Samantha Hurdley; there is a separate and dedicated Report covering the meeting with the PPO and the overview of the Societies Complaints Processes and Procedures. For the purpose of this Report, there was open access to all relevant files and documentation in compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

A principal reason for the annual visit of the Independent Assessor is to reinforce the Societies commitment to the standards of transparency and accountability towards members, registrants, service users and the Professional Standards Authority, through regular and ongoing assessment and analysis of administrative and management systems and processes.

**The Content of the Visit**

The initial part of the visit was spent with **Dr Chris Forester, the Chair of the Societies and** **Vicky Parkinson** **CEO of the Societies**. The Chair is responsible for the appointment of the Independent Assessor and receives the Report from the IA following the annual site visit. On this occasion, the Chair attended the meeting to review with the IA the work of the Societies over the past year, and to look ahead to continuing growth and development over the coming year(s). It also afforded time and opportunity to flag up and discuss particular areas of concern; these were few in number but there had been a Complaints Appeal which had consumed a lot of time and concern for the Society over the past year and it was helpful to review and conclude that due process had been followed in the resolution of the complaint. The guidance and insights of the Chair are a major contributory influence in the management of governance and audit and a robust support to the work of the Independent Assessor. The strength of his role and authority within the Societies has been the motivation and inspiration behind the development of the work of the Societies.

The role of the CEO is crucial to the upholding of both the reputation and national development of the Societies, combined with the responsibilities of overseeing administration within the national office, in addition to addressing the needs of Registrants and prospective Registrants. The maintenance of ethical and professional standards and quality of services also falls within the remit of the Chief Executive.

The CEO is also responsible for preserving membership of the Accredited Register (AR) status through the Professional Standards Authority (PSA). As a result of recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, the Societies retain a large footprint on the national therapy map. There are a growing number of Professional Bodies who have achieved AR status with the PSA, and this recognition and status accords both kudos and credibility to both Societies. However, neither accepts this status and recognition lightly, and recognises the importance of constant reviews to ensure that standards are preserved. The Chief Executive also accepts the responsibility of addressing PSA Action Points to preserve the PSA status, whenever and wherever they may be required. The Chief Executive works closely with the Independent Assessor in ensuring the delineation of roles, especially between the role of Chief Executive, Registrar and Public Protection Officer. The Chief Executive also co-operates with the Independent Assessor in monitoring the decisions made by the Head of the Professional Standards Committee.

The Chief Executive ensures that standards are maintained *vis-à-vis* Registrants of the Societies and works closely to ensure that the standards and quality of training provided by external training organisations, and accepted by the Societies, are upheld – for the purposes of the Accredited Register. In addition, the Chief Executive shoulders the responsibility of contacts with the public, Registrants and Prospective Members and training providers; this involves close liaison with and management of the members of staff in the national office.

The site visit also included very informative time spent with the **Chief Executive** and **Freya Bottomley, the Deputy Chief Executive.** This focused on what has changed and gone well, since the last IA visit. It also highlighted current changes, developments and anticipation of changes in the future. These included:

1. Consolidation of CPD courses around the regions of the country. Some of these have been highly successful and some had had a mixed response.
2. Continued Growth of Membership.
3. The last year has seen the launching of two new online CPD courses – NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood) ‘Working with Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse in a Trauma-Informed Way’ and ‘Ethical Practice’. These newly launched courses have had a strong take-up and resulted in a growth of new subscribers to the Societies online platform.
4. The CEO and Deputy CEO have met with NHS England’s Senior National Lead for Sexual Assault and Abuse Services (SAAS) in the light of new NHS initiatives. It is hoped that this will lead to closer co-operation on the project.
5. Development of EMDR training. Following a contact by the Deputy CEO two Directors of EMDR training organization travelled from Germany to discuss a collaborative arrangement. This resulted in exclusive EMDR training for members – the first training sessions being October 20th and 21st, 2018.
6. Collaboration with the Alzheimer’s Society in developing an online programme for ‘Dementia’.
7. Deputy CEO met with HELP (EAP) and SAIF (Funeral Directors) to consider ways in which the NCS can work closely with both organisations. It is hoped that an online course can be developed for Funeral Directors and provide bereavement and grief training, in addition to good practice for counsellors.
8. Continuing growth and development of services to Members, Registrants and Service Users.
9. There has been an exponential growth in Training Centre(s) Accreditation with the NCS.
10. The Society had a stand at a Primary Care event in May, 2018 which provided positive opportunities to meet with GP’s, Healthcare Professionals and helped to develop further contacts with the NHS.

In addition to the above, there was discussion around two important areas impacting upon the work and influence of the Society.

1. The expressed concern by an announcement by BACP, UKCP and BPS working on a project (SCoPed) to set out the training requirements and practice standards for counselling and psychotherapy. This came as a surprise to many outside of the Society as well as to those who are daily involved in the counselling and psychotherapy sector from within the Society. Hitherto, it appears that the above collaboration group has been unwilling to engage with the wider professional bodies. The Society has responded with an open letter to other Accredited Register members, and this was published in the Humanistic Psychology newsletter; the Society will continue to monitor.
2. NCS has expressed a concern of a potential threat to the AR scheme for counsellors in that MP’s are seeking to ensure the Government bans conversion therapy. The Society, alongside many other organisations, has been working against Conversion Therapy for a number of years, publishing a Memorandum of Understanding against the practice (2015) and updating the document to warn against conversion therapy in relation to gender identity and sexual orientation (including asexuality).The Society has unequivocally stated its support for the endeavours of organisations such as Pink Therapy and Stonewall to ensure that issues of equality and diversity are fully addressed by the counselling and psychotherapy profession.

A further concern, however, is that the above lobbying within Parliament also appears to include the possible regulation of the whole of the counselling sector. The Society is using its influence to separate the issues. Avoiding HCPC statutory regulation which the professions have voiced concerns about, the Society is also using its voice and influence to ensure that AR as a compulsory requirement is the way forward. Although this may not reach the statute book, as it has been presented as a private bill and only gets a 10-minute window to present the argument, it remains a concern for the future.

The above conversation with the CEO and Deputy CEO highlights the involvement and influence of the Society within the professional sectors and the growth of its collaboration with all Healthcare Professionals.

To achieve the day-today management and administration of the Societies business, there is a dynamic administrative team currently led by **Karen Finneran, who is the Acting Administration Manage**r for the Societies. The IA was able to meet and discuss the major contribution of the Administration team to the smooth running of the Societies with Karen, who is contracted to work from April 2018 to April 2019 providing cover for Megan Nunn, who is on maternity leave. The Acting Administration Manager has a strong pedigree of working within the Hospitality, Building and Construction sectors which has provided her with a vast range of skills and competencies for her role with the Societies. There was a handover period of five weeks enabling Karen to assimilated systems and processes within the Societies, before Megan went on maternity leave.

The Administrative team of three - process general enquiries, student applications, membership and Registrant applications. The Administration team meet regularly together to share any concerns, questions or pressures that may emanate from the counselling and hypnotherapy sectors, and are generally relayed to the team through members, registrants and service users.

The discussion with Karen included the following:

1. The launch in April/May 2018 of two new Counselling/CPD Online courses. These were NAPAC ‘Working with Adult Survivors of Child Abuse in a Trauma-Informed Way’ and ‘Ethical Practice’. One result of this launch saw traffic through the online platform hit an all-time high. In just 3 months 475 Ethical Practice and 125 NAPAC were bought.
2. General discussion around CPD courses, which has also been discussed on a wider Societies platform – that is, the Societies Council. The last year has seen some course with a higher take up than expected, or others which have been disappointing in their take up. The calendar preparation for CPD 2019 programmes began in September/October 2018 and will continue to monitor trends of what is successful and what is not successful.
3. One important area for Administration support and management has been the introduction of the new General Data Protection Regulation. The deadline date for the GDPR was May 25th, 2018 and the Societies worked hard to inform members and registrants of its impact upon them. Following an initial slow response to emails, post and reminders sent out to members, a final push by the Societies resulted in over 2.500 emails being received asking for changes to their preferences.

The Independent Assessor can unequivocally report that the Societies have a very strong administrative team, who collectively present a wide range of skills and levels of competency, and not a little commitment to the ethos of the Societies, and work to ensure that good communication is preserved between the Societies and the Registrants, and the wider therapeutic communities. The management and administrative team ensure that there is a consistent approach to communicating the benefits of membership of the Societies, in addition to the upholding of standards.

This is continuing to be reflected in the Membership growth of the Societies. This has led to enthusiasm about ongoing expansion and growth. To reiterate comments above, however, no-one underestimates the importance of commitment to high standards and quality service provision. There is a clear belief that the team spirit has, in no small part, contributed to the increase in the quality of service that the Societies provide.

An informative and vibrant meeting was held with **Kate Mahoney, Head of Professional Standards.**

This role of Head of Professional Standards carries the responsibilities of overseeing and advising on the following:

* Policy and procedures of applications
* Individual members’ audits
* Training provider audits
* Government and regulation issues
* Relations with other professional associations

The brief of the Professional Standards Committee is to review and update the Society’s internal processes and procedures where professional standards are concerned and maintain an awareness of all external issues that may impact upon the profession of counselling and psychotherapy.

It is clear that Kate has made a huge impact on the reputation and development of Professional Standards and is committed to extending the influence of the Society upon training, and, in particular, accredited training, within the sector of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

The role of the Professional Standards Manager is to consider the delivery of recognized courses by Training Providers. This involves consideration of course content and the assessment process. An important, if not crucial, part of the role is to maintain and extend/develop standards. This involves fielding questions about training information, combined with considering complex membership applications. As with membership of the Societies, there is an exponential growth of recognized and accredited training providers.

As of 09.10.2018 24 Training Providers have sought information from Professional Standards regarding recognition of their training courses.

The involvement and influence of the Society is extending in different sectors and overseas.

1. The Society continues to proceed with a possible collaboration arrangement to offer an online course for counsellors and healthcare professionals in the area of dementia awareness.
2. The Societies Organisational members continues to grow.
3. The Society has received a couple of enquiries from overseas training providers, in Malaysia and Hong Kong, who have expressed an interest in gaining recognition for their courses. This will require a new ‘Standard’ for National Counselling Society Overseas Recognition. Two levels of recognition are envisaged: ‘Approved’ – equal to UK accredited, and Quality Checked with normal criteria for quality checked or advanced specialist training status.

**The Outcome and Conclusions of the 2018 Visit**

The Independent Assessor visits the Societies offices on an annual basis to ensure that an objective view of the work of the Societies can be guaranteed, and to ensure that transparency and accountability are clearly evidenced, and to ratify the demands of quality assurance. The following comments and observations echo and consolidate the conclusions proffered in the previous Annual Report (2017):

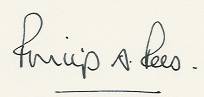
* **Communication.** There is continuing and excellent communication processes in place to ensure that enquirers speak with members of a team who are able to provide a constant, consistent and knowledgeable voice on the work of the Societies; this includes established members and Registrants of the Societies, potential members and Registrants, corporate bodies and organisations, professional bodies in the world of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, and educational/awarding bodies seeking information about accreditation status. The IA conclusion is that this is being achieved through the leadership and managements structures of the Societies, and the obvious cohesion of the team of staff based in Worthing.
* **Competence.** Scrutiny of the Societies by the Independent Assessor reveals a collective range of skills and abilities from Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Professional Studies, Public Protection Officer, across to all members of the Administrative Team. This is contributing to the ongoing development of strong marketing and advertising strategies, including the Societies website; saturation of the internet with excellent advertising; evolving CPD programmes including online and Regional meetings across the country, Facebook and Twitter and Monthly Bulletin updates. There is sound knowledge and understanding of the Societies, and all its policies including Complaints and the new DBS (formerly CRB) and GDPR requirements. The collective competencies also ensure quality of management and administration in addition to the dissemination of very high levels of information. This visit also acknowledged the ongoing commitment to quality and standards. Quality assurance underpins and reinforces the governance work of the Societies.
* **Commitment**. The visit of the Independent Assessor is designed to provide an impartial overview of the Societies; how they function; how they work to maintain the principles of the Societies, and how they can effectively communicate this to interested individuals and organisations. This Report concludes that there is strong executive management leadership within the Societies, and solid collegiality throughout the management and administrative team. The commitment to the Societies is clearly evident, and the management and administrative team are dedicated to developing the work and reputation of the Societies through increased knowledge and understanding of the therapeutic world, as well as enhancing the important principles and policies of an emerging, growing and influential professional body.
* **Collective Responsibility**. One factor was again outstanding during the visit of the Independent Assessor, and that is the clear intention on the part of the Societies to continue growing and developing as a major player in the professional therapeutic community of the United Kingdom, and beyond. The recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, and the achievement and maintenance of AR Register status will not lead, in the view of the Independent Assessor, to complacency within the Societies. There is clear recognition of the responsibility in maintaining the demanding principles and values of the Societies, meeting the needs of its members and Registrants, maintaining its professional status, overseeing complaints and public protection, and growing into a leading player in the therapeutic arena.

There is also awareness that nothing is ever perfect, and that there is always room for improvement. Changes are inevitable in all areas of marketing, advertising, communication and the promotion of all that the Societies represents. The Societies recognise that there is no room for complacency. The visit by the IA concludes that the Societies remain committed to maintaining the standards and principles of a Professional Body seeking to represent a large and growing cohort of professional and would-be professional therapists and counsellors, together with training bodies and organisations.

The purpose of this Report has been to provide an appraisal and overview of the work of the Societies as observed during the Independent Assessor’s site visit on October 10th, 2018 and to highlight good practice and identify any areas for development and improvement. At the same time, the intention is also to raise awareness of any concerns observed during the visit. This Report concludes that no major concerns were identified for action in the immediate future.

It is important to record that all objective and action points from any previous IA Report have been achieved.

The Independent Assessor presents and commends this Report as representing the comprehensive findings of an extensive analysis of the Societies work considered during the visit of the Independent Assessor to the National Counselling Society and Hypnotherapy Society on Wednesday October 10th, 2018.



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