

## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR**

This Report has been submitted by Dr Phillip A Rees, Independent Assessor responsible for Governance and Audit within the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society. The Report is the result of a visit to the national administrative and management hub of the Societies at 19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on Wednesday October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

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 commitment made at a meeting of the Societies Governance and Audit Committee which met on Wednesday February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in London, 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 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013; this meeting outlined and acknowledged the function and role of the Independent Assessor, and recognised the importance of regular visits (Annually) by the Independent Assessor to the Societies head offices as a means of supporting and monitoring the foundational procedures, 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, the Societies have moved to new office premises in Worthing, West Sussex, and this visit by the IA provided the opportunity to survey the new suite of premises which now houses the two Societies management and administrative officers. The new Societies hub provides an extensive suite of premises offering appropriate and comprehensive office accommodation to all Societies Officers, and thus enables total confidentiality of information sharing and conversations with Registrants and service users, together with a range of syndicate meeting rooms. The Societies are commended for the move to such suitable and appropriate premises, which will help to enhance their credibility, reputation and standing within the therapeutic community.

The primary function of the visit 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 Societies CEO and members of the administrative team, and was provided with open access to all relevant files and documentation.

An additional reason for the visit of the Independent Assessor was to reinforce the Societies commitment to the principle of accountability towards members, regulators and the Professional Standards Authority, through regular and ongoing assessment and analysis of administrative and management systems and processes.

## **The Content of the Visit**

To fulfil the aims and purposes of the visit, the whole day was dedicated to discussing with key office-holders their roles and responsibilities, and to observe them at work.

The first part of the day involved working with Liz McElligott who is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society. This crucial role includes upholding 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 standards falls within the remit of the Chief Executive.

The CEO played a crucial role in the achievement of Accredited Voluntary Register (AVR) status through the Professional Standards Authority (PSA), and the Chief Executive has been totally involved in the ongoing process of maintaining the AVR status through re-accreditation with the PSA. This has provided the NCS and HS with a large footprint on the therapy map. To date, there are only a small, but growing, number of Professional Bodies who have achieved this status, and such status accords both kudos and credibility to both Societies.

The Chief Executive has been responsible for guiding the Societies through the process of negotiations with the PSA in order to achieve and maintain the recommendations of the PSA Panel which were necessary in order to maintain AVR status. As Chief Executive she is also charged with the responsibility of addressing PSA Action Points in order to preserve the PSA status. The Chief Executive has worked with the Independent Assessor over the past two years in ensuring the delineation of roles, especially between the role of Chief Executive, Registrar and Public Protection Officer.

The Chief Executive ensures that standards are maintained with regard to Registrants of the Societies, and works closely to ensure that standards of training provided by other organisations and accepted by the Societies are maintained – for the purposes of accreditation and AVR status. In addition, the Chief Executive shoulders the responsibility of contacts with the public, Registrants and Prospective Members and training bodies; this involves close liaison with and management of the members of staff in the national office.

The Chief Executive has been central in the move to the new venue of the national offices of the Societies, and is content with the range of confidential space it provides, combined with considerable space for filing and the preserving of records; this is in addition to the space and comfort it provides to visitors and the opportunities for Conference Meetings.

Since the last visit of the IA there has also been a new Marketing Manager appointed and a new Deputy Chief Executive who also carries the responsibility of being the Registrar to the Societies.

In discussions with the CEO on what has changed, since the last IA visit, the following was noted:

- i) Development of Staff Training
- ii) New IT systems
- iii) Crucially, new Firewalls are now firmly established and in place.
- iv) There is an ongoing use of external professional experts.
- v) Growth of Membership

There was also discussion with the IA around those aspects of the Societies which have remained constant and require little movement or change:

- i) Membership perception of the Societies
- ii) Ongoing commitment to maintaining and improving, where necessary and required, the standards demanded by the PSA
- iii) Good relationship with PSA and UKCP
- iv) Maintaining links and connections to the new AVR organisations.

All of the above has been overseen by the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive also acknowledged that there are some things which have not changed, and still need to be addressed.

- i) Upgrade to new telephone systems
- ii) To improve and update the Societies website
- iii) Promoting and marketing the AVR Scheme
- iv) Develop Regional Meeting throughout Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Following the meeting with the Chief Executive, I met with Lucy Wightman the new Deputy Chief Executive and Registrar, who had been *in situ* for just three months. The new Deputy CEO had joined the Societies from a Finance and Investments background.

The new Deputy CEO was aware that her role was evolving, and she was still learning all the different aspects of her role. These would include:

- i) Registrar to the Societies
- ii) Overseeing the Complaints processes; she will be:
  - a) First port of call to any complainant
  - b) Responsible for final investigation and resolution of complaints from individual or organisation
- iii) Responsible for new applications for membership for both Societies and overall responsibility for Membership Services.
- iv) Annual Audit of the Societies
- v) Governance to ensure accountability

*(It needs to be recorded here that, shortly after my visit to the Societies, Lucy Wightman left the employment of the Societies.)*

Following the meeting with Lucy Wightman, I met with Freya Bottomley, who is the new Marketing and Membership Services Manager and had been with the Societies for about five months. She brings experience of working within caring communities; this has included working with the British Red Cross in the areas of Health and Social Care and the delivering of services within the community. She presents herself as competent and confident, and clearly offers a range of management and leadership skills. Her areas of responsibility cover:

- i) Marketing: raising the profile of the Societies through Social Media, Conferences and Events, e.g. Labour Party Conference Exhibition in September 2014. This role also involves

establishing strong links with appropriate Journals and Publications. In addition, the new Marketing Manager is working to continue the established working relationships with *Mind* in the campaign for better access to talking therapies. This role also involves maintaining and developing links with other organisations involved in healthcare and increasing the links that will benefit Registrants who are working collaboratively with a range of healthcare organisations.

- ii) Membership Services: this will be achieved through the increasing circulation of the monthly newsletter from the Societies; ensuring that the AVR logo is being used by those on the Register; raising the profile of the Societies; increasing the benefits of membership e.g. Indemnity Insurance.
- iii) CPD: new Manager is charged with the responsibility of finding venues for and organising CPD events throughout the whole year, on a regular basis. This is being achieved regionally to ensure availability of CPD training for all Registrants and interested individuals and organisations. This will involve employing the skills and expertise of experts in their own field.

Explored with Marketing Manager:

- i) What have you changed? Response – Social media growth; new contacts and advertising and marketing.
- ii) What has not changed, yet? Response – CPD; next year looking at developing and arranging more events and exhibitions.
- iii) What would she like to see change? Response – growth in membership for both Societies.

The Marketing Manager shoulders responsibility for the social interaction between members and the Societies. In this role, the Marketing Manager has already helped to develop marketing and advertising – i.e. publicity leaflets – and arranged events to promote the Societies; e.g. Exhibition Stand at the Labour Party Conference in September 2014. This is a crucial role of maintaining and developing the process of communication between the Societies and Registrants.

This role also carries the crucial responsibility of enabling members to become aware of all the benefits of membership – such as, CPD events, Professional Insurance, regular Newsletters, and eligibility for membership of the Royal Society for Public Health.

A further key member of the Societies team is Vicky Parkinson who was appointed to the role of Administrative Manager in January, 2014. This is a new role and involves the day to day workings and mechanics of the two Societies, i.e.

- i) Responsibility for the Administrative Team
- ii) Overseeing Management of the Office
- iii) Management Supervision
- iv) HR Role e.g. monitoring holiday entitlements for all staff
- v) Day to day financial management of the Societies, including the payment of invoices.
- vi) Developing new member's packs for both Societies – including the dissemination of information which will benefit all Registrants and interested parties.
- vii) Overseeing the management of Membership of the Societies.

In addition to the important administrative and management roles outlined above there are two other highly motivated and competent people who share the administrative site of the work. Susan Archer and Amy Bristow, who both joined the Societies in August 2014, and field daily enquiries from Registrants, members and potential members, in addition to other service users. The Independent Assessor is able to report that the Societies now have a very strong administrative team, who present a wide range of skills and competencies, and work to ensure good communication is maintained 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.

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

As an Independent Assessor, I visited the Societies offices to ensure that an objective view of the work of the Societies could be guaranteed, and I offer the following comments and observations as a reinforcement of my conclusions to the last Annual Report of 2013.

- **Communication.** There are excellent communication processes in place to ensure that enquirers to the Societies speak with members of a team who are able to provide a constant and consistent and knowledgeable voice on the work of the Societies, whether to established members of the Societies or potential members; corporate bodies and organisations; professional bodies in the world of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, or educational/awarding bodies seeking information about accreditation status. It is important to record 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 to members of the Administrative Team. This has enabled the development of strong marketing and advertising strategies, including the Societies website; evolving CPD programmes 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) 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 was 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 parties. There is strong leadership within the Societies, and solid collegiality. The commitment to the Societies is clearly evident, and the team at this new administrative hub are committed 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.

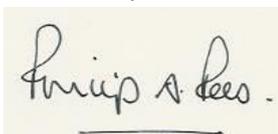
- **Collective Responsibility.** One factor was again outstanding during the visit of the Independent Assessor, and that was the clear intention on the part of the Societies to continue growing and developing as a major player in the professional therapeutic community of the United Kingdom. The recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, the achievement and maintenance of AVR Register status will not lead, in the view of the Independent Assessor, to complacency. 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 an important player in the therapeutic arena.

There is also recognition within the Societies team that nothing is ever perfect. There is always room for improvement, and changes are inevitable in all areas of marketing, advertising, communication and the promotion of all that the Societies stand for. The Societies recognise that there is no room for complacency. This knowledge will undoubtedly keep the Societies aware and challenged on how others perceive them, and they are 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 a realistic overview of the work of the Societies as observed during the Independent Assessor's site visit, and to highlight good practice. At the same time, the intention was 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.

In the Report from the IA in August 2013, a number of observations and recommendations were made. These included the development of staff members to assist with the growth of the Societies, and for a better location and more appropriate suite of premises to help in the development work alongside the growing reputation and influence of the Societies. I am pleased to record in this Report that both these objectives have been achieved in the past year.

The author presents and commends this Report as representing the comprehensive findings of an extensive analysis of the Societies work ascertained during the visit of the Independent Assessor to the National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society on Wednesday October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature reads "Phillip A Rees" in a cursive script. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

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