

# ANNUAL REPORT

The National Counselling Society and  
Hypnotherapy Society

**Presented by Dr. Phillip A Rees**

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**Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit**

**National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society**

## INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR REPORT FOLLOWING VIRTUAL SITE CONTACT/VISIT ON JANUARY 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022



This Report is presented by Dr. Phillip A. Rees, Independent Assessor responsible for Governance and Audit within the National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society. The Report is the written outcome of a virtual visit/contact with the national administrative and management hub of the Societies at 19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on Thursday January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Originally, this on-site annual visit had been planned for October 2021, and then November/December 2020 but, due to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the arrangements for the visit were delayed until early 2022. It was agreed that the visit/contact should go ahead virtually, and the January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022 date was agreed.

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 6<sup>th</sup>, 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 9<sup>th</sup>, 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 underscoring the accountability and standards of the Societies, and to fulfil the demands of the PSA accreditation process.

The primary function of the virtual visit, as on previous on-site 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 Interim Chief Executive arranged an agenda of meetings for the Independent Assessor between 9-00am and 4.00pm on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022. This included conversations with:

Jyles Robillard-Day : Interim CEO

Rachael King : Professional Conduct Officer

Amy Bristow : Business Operations Manager

Kate Mahoney – Head of Professional Standards

Faye Blackwell : Head of Engagement and Development

Camilla Hyland : Head of Membership Services

Elaine Lighten : Communications Manager

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**

Content of the virtual visit/contact involved conversations with Society personnel including Interim CEO, Professional Conduct Officer, Business Operations Manager, Head of Professional Standards, Head of Engagement and Development, Head of Membership Services and Communications Manager.

### **(Virtual) Meeting with Jyles Robillard-Day, Interim Chief Executive Officer.**

The Societies CEO, Meg Nunn, started her maternity leave in July 2021 and the Deputy CEO, Freya Bottomley assumed the role as Interim CEO. However, a month into her temporary role as Interim CEO Freya announced that she would be leaving the Societies. The role of Interim CEO is now being covered by Jyles Robillard-Day stepping up from his role as Assistant CEO and Head of Engagement and Development. The Interim CEO has brought to this role professional and robust skills and wide employment experience together with strong leadership and management skills. This has been acknowledged and experienced by all those working with him.

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 and, in addition, to addressing the needs of Registrants and prospective Registrants. The maintenance of ethical and professional standards and quality of services 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 and maintained. The Interim Chief Executive also accepts the responsibility of addressing any PSA Action Points to preserve the PSA status, whenever and wherever they may be required. The Interim Chief Executive works closely with the Independent Assessor in ensuring that the auditing and governance of the Societies remains of paramount importance in terms of public recognition and accountability.

The Interim 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 Interim Chief Executive shoulders the responsibility of contacts with the public, Registrants

and Prospective Members and training providers; this involves close liaison with all members of staff in the national office.

The structures of the Societies have been addressed to enable the Interim CEO to focus and prioritise on developmental areas for the Societies.

A range of important topics were considered by the Independent Assessor and the Interim CEO, in reviewing what had changed over the past twelve months. This included discussions on the challenges and problems that need to be addressed. An important area for discussion has been recent consultation with the PSA regarding the future recognition of Professional Bodies.

Other areas which have been part of the remit and influence of the Interim CEO have included:

- (i) Changing structures of NCS management and administration.
- (ii) The Interim CEO oversees the work of Committees, Managers, the team in Worthing and all Members and Registrants to promote the influence of the Societies within Counselling and Hypnotherapy sectors.
- (iii) The movement and development of SCoPED, and the continuing way that it is impacting upon the counselling landscape. The sharing of relevant information to Members and Registrants on the Society website has been much appreciated by Members, Registrant and Training providers for its clarity and user-friendly language.
- (iv) The development of the sub-register for Children and Young People with the Professional Standards Authority – the first AR to have such a sub-register. This has generated a lot of support and interest from the Members and Registrants and from the wider counselling community. At the time of the site contact/visit, this was still waiting for final approval by the PSA.
- (v) Development of the new website, using ‘Wattle’, for the Societies.
- (vi) Working with Head Office staff and Ambassadors to maintain the continuing growth of membership within the Societies.
- (vii) Change of name for the NCS - from late 2022 it will be called ‘National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society’.
- (viii) Reviewing the barriers to recognition and Accreditation status for both the NCS and Members and Registrants in general.

The above highlights the influence of the role of the (Interim) CEO in underscoring the involvement and influence of the Society within the professional sectors, together with the growth of its collaboration with all Healthcare Professionals, and combined with the challenges that continue to face the NCS. The NCS is fortunate to have an Interim CEO who provides experience, dedication, and rigorous commitment to the upholding of Standards and to the ongoing growth and development of the Societies.

### **(Virtual) Meeting with Rachel King, Professional Conduct Officer (Complaints)**

The current Professional Conduct Officer was appointed in November 2020 and brings a wide range of skills and experience. A separate Report for Complaints and Concerns will be submitted for the purpose of this Independent Assessor annual site contact visit.

### **(Virtual) Meeting with Amy Bristow, Business Operations Manager.**

Amy Bristow was appointed to the role of Business Operations Manager in January 2021 having previously held the posts of Head of Membership Services from June 2020 and Office Manager from May 2019. Amy had previously worked at the NCS between 2014 and 2015 as a Society Administrator. Previous external experience includes that of Litigation Executive with a firm of Solicitors and Senior Case Administrator with Sussex Police.

The responsibilities of the Business Operations Manager have included:

- Overseeing Accounts
- Monitoring and Development of Websites, e.g., Wattle.
- Liaison with CEO and other Departmental Heads.
- CPD changes
- Regular weekly meetings with other staff members.
- Working with economic changes/management within the Society.
- Business economics
- Name change of Society which has progressed and is scheduled to begin in October 2022.
- HR documents
- IT Support

Since the previous annual site contact visit and Report, the Business Operations Manager has overseen changes in relation to new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Content Management Systems (CMS) which benefit both Societies and increase levels of efficiency.

The digitalisation of all member files has now been completed. This enables all the work of membership files and records to be administered as a paperless process.

A further development has been the work with the Society web developers to create a process whereby applications for membership with the Societies will be completed online. Historically, there were forms that could be completed online but the online process will increase efficiency, fully integrate the process within the new CMS and bring the Society in line with other Professional Bodies.

The Independent Assessor acknowledges that this area of the Societies work does not always receive the profile that it deserves. Through the development of new processes, and commitment of the Business Operations Manager, the Societies functions competently and effectively in meeting the needs of all general enquirers, potential members, registrants, and service-users.

**(Virtual) Meeting with Kate Mahoney, Head of Professional Standards.**

The 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 – chaired by the Head of Professional Standards - 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.

The Head of Professional Standards has an influential impact on the reputation and development of Professional Standards and remains committed to extending the reputation of the Society upon training, and accredited training, within the sector of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

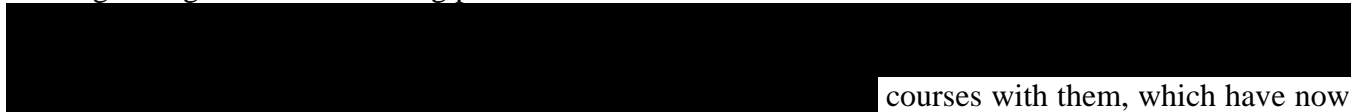
The role of the Head of Professional Standards, as Head of Training Services, is also to consider the delivery of recognized courses by Training Providers. This involves examination of course content and the assessment process. An important, if not crucial, part of the role is to maintain and extend/develop 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.

The last twelve months have been very challenging for Training Standards as they have worked to support training providers meet the demands of online learning with the added complexities around virtual assessment of learning. Many training providers now talk about blended or hybrid learning: Training Standards have also been involved in developing the understanding of Synchronistic Tutoring - working at enabling teaching staff to develop their roles from simply teaching online to tutoring online and being involved in all aspects of the group learning process; that is, involvement in role-play, in the classroom discussions and presentations, essays and reflective learning and exploring the transition between levels and qualifications.

As of 27.01.2022 the following reflects the numbers of Actual and Projected figures of course(s) recognized in 2021:



In addition to the above, the involvement and influence of the Society is extending in different sectors and with a growing number of training providers:



courses with them, which have now

been recognized by the Society. There are other new training providers in the pipeline who are seeking recognition of their courses.

2. There has been very positive and affirming feedback from Training Providers during the COVID lockdown period with appreciative comments on the support received from the Society and from the Head of Professional and Training Standards and the Training Standards Assistant/CPD Co-ordinator.
3. Over the past year there has been a few colleges and training providers who have expressed an interest in NCS training recognition. This indicates the growing influence of the NCS in both private and public sectors.

The Training Standards Assistant/CPD Co-Ordinator has recently left the Society and the Society is currently recruiting for a suitable replacement. This is also providing an opportunity to review the responsibilities of the next post-holder.

The Independent Assessor acknowledges that, through the leadership of the Head of Professional Standards and Training Services, together with the Professional Standards Committee, Professional Standards remains fundamental to the credibility and accountability of the work of the Societies and recognises its importance to the overall effectiveness of the work of the Societies.

### **(Virtual) Meeting with Faye Blackwell - Head of Engagement and Development.**

The new Head of Engagement and Development Engagement, having practiced as a Counselling Practitioner for 20 years, was appointed in October 2021.

The head of Engagement and Development has continued the work of the previous post-holder – now Interim CEO - to nurture and develop existing relationships within the Counselling sector and beyond, as well as creating new ones. Through attendance at various conferences, events/seminars, connecting with individuals and organisations on LinkedIn, as well as general research, the Head of Engagement and Development has been engaging with the following individuals and organisations:

- MPs Sarah Champion and Lisa Cameron.
- British Safety Council / Being Well Together (Faye presented a webinar for them).
- Blue Light Together Campaign
- The Royal Foundation
- Beyond (CYP charity)
- Employers Initiative for Domestic Abuse
- The Anti-Discrimination Foundation
- Spokz People (a disability charity)
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Psychological Professions Network
- Universal Access to Counselling and Psychotherapy campaign
- Mates in Mind



- Paranimo

In addition, the work and responsibility of the Head of Engagement and Development has been to challenge universities and colleges, as well as businesses and EAPs, who have not included NCS in their course provision, job advertisements etc. In addition, the Head of Engagement and Development has looked for conferences and events that the NCS could attend for promotion and networking, such as the Watercooler event being held at London's Olympia, and Health and Wellbeing at Work at the NEC, Birmingham. Barriers to employment for NCS members continue to be challenged, as it still appears that advertised roles for Counsellors and Psychotherapists can still exclude NCS members. This has been the case within Northern Ireland, as well as the other countries of the United Kingdom. The Head of Engagement and Development is involved in challenging the lack of recognition for the NCS, and at looking for ways of expanding the understanding and influence of the NCS within the Counselling and Psychotherapy sector.

The Head of Engagement and Development represents the NCS on various committees such as the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion and the MOU2 regarding the banning of conversion therapy. Development work undertaken by the Head of Engagement and Development includes the following activities aimed at improving and developing the involvement and influence of the Society:

- Developing NCS values and ethos, and assisting with rebranding
- Research into Personal Healthcare Budgets
- Development of a new category of Organisational Membership (OM) - The Society adapted its criteria, and created 2 categories of OM. This is so that we can increase the number of OM's we are able to work with.
- Taking on the role of assessing and recruiting OM's from Kate Mahoney
- Developing the Ambassador programme
- Creating an internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) committee
- Looking at creating a domestic abuse policy for staff
- Expanding and engaging more with our regional Northern Ireland committee
- Assisting with PSA renewal / Standard 1b.

For the future, the Head of Engagement and Developing is looking to improve the work and understanding of ED&I and has signed up to schemes such as Working Forward (run by the Equality and Human Rights Commission), in the hope that the Society can work towards being eligible for the Disability Confident Scheme.

The Independent Assessor acknowledges that the role of the Head of Engagement and Development will further help with the development and growth of the NCS locally, regionally, and nationally and not only promote the NCS but also challenge those who would exclude the NCS from professional involvement in the counselling sector. The Independent Assessor affirms the initiative of the Society in continually assessing new ways of extending the influence of the NCS across all sectors, which includes the therapeutic community and the political community.



## (Virtual) Meeting with Camilla Hyland, Head of Membership Services

Membership Services act as a front door to the services of the National Counselling Society. To achieve this day-today management and administration of the Societies business, there is a strong administrative team currently led by Camilla Hyland, Head of Membership Services assisted by a team of Membership Services Officers. The Independent Assessor can record the continuing important contribution that Membership Services makes to the smooth running of the Societies. There has been some streamlining of the Membership Services structure and provision in the recent year, and this has further improved the service provision to Members, Registrants, Training Providers and Organisations and to the wider Counselling and Hypnotherapy sectors. This has included the implementation of a new software package, *Zendesk*, from the beginning of July 2021. This has improved team efficiency in addition to enabling access to member interactions in one place.

Membership Services audits general enquiries, student applications, membership, and Registrant applications in addition to the processing of payments. The Administration team meet regularly together to share any concerns, questions or pressures that may emanate from the counselling and hypnotherapy sectors, and these are generally relayed to the team through members, registrants, and service users.

Important aspects of the work of the Membership Services include:

1. The application process has now changed. Previously we used the SignNow platform (whereby the team had to manually input applicant data into the system). Applicants can now apply directly through the website. This information feeds through to our CRM system ready for the team to assess. This new process is much slicker, faster and has reduced human error. The feedback from applicants has all been positive.
2. Membership Services now record monthly Membership totals highlighting net growth and loss. In addition, there is a record kept of all emails received, applications received and applications awaiting assessment. This allows more direction for the Membership Services Team to prioritise different tasks, as required.

[REDACTED]

The Independent Assessor acknowledges the range of skills within the Membership Team and their importance to the success and profile of the Societies, and records that the ongoing growth and development of the Societies is due, in no small measure, to the skills and talents of the dedicated Membership team. The Independent Assessor also acknowledges, from conversations with people across the UK - in various training establishments as well as individuals who have joined either the NCS or NHS - that there is high regard for the Membership Team and their responses to enquiries and enquirers.

The Independent Assessor can confidently report that the Societies have an excellent Membership Services Team, who collectively provide 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 and service users. Membership Services also 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 consolidation of the Societies. To reiterate comments above, however, no-one underestimates the importance of commitment to high standards and quality service provision. The view of the Independent Assessor is that the Membership Services Team achieves its aim of being the front door to the Societies, and in no small part contributes to the increase in the quality of services that the Societies provide.

### **(Virtual) Meeting with Elaine Lighten (Societies Communication Manager)**

Elaine Lighten was appointed to the role of Societies Communication Manager in August 2020, having previously worked in Membership Services.

Since August 2020, the Communication Manager's main role and focus has been the development of the Societies' monthly magazines and creating a visually appealing and interactive online magazine. The format of the new publications is more in the form of a Journal than a Newsletter and has been enthusiastically received by the Membership. The Independent Assessor has heard very positive comments and feedback from Members and Registrants, and Training Organisations, who receive the new publications. The NCS publication is called '*Counselling Matters*' and is published on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month and the Hypnotherapy publication, called '*Hypnotherapy Today*' is published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. Both publications are showing an increase in reads per edition and the development of themed editions has stimulated further interest in the publications. The introduction of the Student Counsellor Magazine is also proving to be a success, and represents the promising influence of the magazine, providing exposure to the Society and potentially reaching new counsellors and psychotherapists.

The Communication Manager is also tasked with the responsibility of developing social media on Twitter, FaceBook and LinkedIn. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The goal is to increase growth and engagement with the social media platforms in addition to developing closer collaboration with recognized organisations and training providers. Other projects include transforming documents into the more friendly, flipbook formats as well as developmental work on the Societies website to ensure that everything runs faster. This will be of particular benefit with new online courses produced by the Societies. In addition, all promotional leaflets are now online; printed versions are still available upon request but are mainly online.

The Communications is eager to extend an even greater collaboration - engaging and interactive - with Members, Registrants and Organisations/Training Providers using monthly publications, social media and training guides. The Communications Manager aims to enhance the 'Member Led' slogan of the Societies in her current role and future development plans.

The Independent Assessor acknowledges the investment of time, energy, and commitment into the production of the online magazines which is another source of contact and education between the Societies and representatives of Counselling and Hypnotherapy across the sectors. It is also another indicator of the progressive ethos of the Societies.

### **The Outcome and Conclusions of the 2021 Virtual Visit/Contact**

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 (2021), given the unusual circumstances brought about because of the pandemic health crisis:

- **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, training providers, professional bodies in the world of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, and educational/awarding bodies seeking information about accreditation status. The Independent Assessor's 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 Interim Chief Executive, Public Protection Officer, Head of Professional Standards and Training Services, Business Operations Manager, Head of Membership Services, Head of Communications and includes all members of the Societies 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 Magazines. There is sound knowledge and understanding of the Societies, and all its policies including Complaints and the DBS and GDPR requirements. The collective competencies also ensure quality of management and administration in addition to the dissemination of accurate information. This virtual visit also echoed the ongoing commitment to quality and standards. Quality assurance underpins and reinforces the governance work of the Societies, and underscores good practice.
- **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 and leadership within the Societies, and solid collegiality throughout the management and administrative team. The commitment to the Societies

is clear, 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.

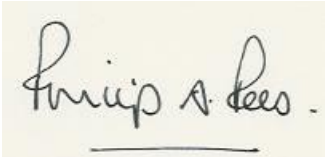
- **Collective Responsibility.** One factor was again outstanding during the virtual visit of the Independent Assessor to the Societies, and that is the clear intention to continue growing and developing as a major player in the professional therapeutic community of the United Kingdom, and beyond. The recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, and the achievement and maintenance of AR Register status will not lead, however, 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 contact visit by the Independent Assessor 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 virtual site visit/contact on Thursday January 27th, 2022 and to highlight good practice and identify 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 also record that all objective and action points from any previous Independent Assessor 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 virtual visit/contact of the Independent Assessor with the National Counselling Society and Hypnotherapy Society on Thursday January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

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

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