National Counselling Society & National Hypnotherapy Society
SOCIETY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
21st April 2021 – Via Zoom

In attendance:
Liz McElligott (Societies Chair)
Meg Moss (CEO Societies)
Elaine Lighten (Societies Communications Manager)
Amy Bristow (Societies Business Operations Manager)
Jyles Robillard-Day (Societies Assistant CEO)
Kate Mahoney (Societies Head of Professional Standards)
Freya Bottomley (Societies Deputy CEO)
Rachael King (Ethics Officer)
Rob Kidd (Lay Council Member)
Ros Wright (Lay Council Member)
Ted Sangster (Lay Council Member)
Harriet Mortimer (Lay Council Member)
Tina Russell (Lay Council Member)

Apologies:
Camilla Firth (Societies Head of Membership Services)

The meeting was opened, and all were welcomed to the meeting. Thanks were given to all for attending.

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The minutes of the last Council Meeting were agreed by the Council, with no changes to make and no questions.

The new Chair, Liz McElligott, was introduced to the Council. Liz gave a potted history of her relevant experience. She was originally a social worker, then lived overseas and decided to study counselling & psychotherapy as part of working during the Asian tsunami disaster and supporting people there. When she joined, between the two Societies there were about 800 members altogether, and only two members of staff. She remarks that it's amazing to see how the Societies have grown and developed. She still feels a great pride – especially having been in it from what feels like the beginning. Her main achievement during her time as CEO was at the beginning of the AR scheme with the PSA, which didn't exist in 2010/2011; Liz was very involved with the PSA in helping to create what the programme eventually became. She reflects that we were delighted to be one of the first groups to get accreditation. It was daunting, but that feeling was shared by everyone involved. Lots of professional politics came up at that stage, but the Authority were already fair minded and did things very well. Liz is delighted, and considers it an honour, to have been offered the position of Chair.

This month saw a change in the way the Council Work in that reports are sent around to Lay Council members a week before the meeting to allow them to read and digest the information presented; Society Staff therefore do not read out their reports in the meeting, so these will no longer be part of the minutes. We will be presenting the questions and discussions from Lay Council members going forwards.

The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update provided by the **Chief Executive**. The first topic was the hiring of an Executive Assistant to support the Executive Team while Meg is on Maternity Leave. The Chief Executive asked the Council if they had any advice on good practice for hiring and utilising an Executive Assistant. Rob Kidd advised that we are really clear on the remit of the EA, so that person doesn't feel like they've become everyone's 'dogsbody'.

Ted Sangster agreed with Rob, adding that, given it's a new position, he would suggest that there needs to be a formal means of assessing if it's working for everyone, for example by review every three months, or being explicit that we accept it's a "new position, this is what we think it will be, but it's a work in progress", and make it clear to the successful applicant at beginning of the relationship that things might change.

The Chief Executive also asked about the Council's experience with Risk Matrix software or otherwise. The Professional Standards Authority have asked us to review the spreadsheet that we currently use to see if there may be better ways of presenting the data.
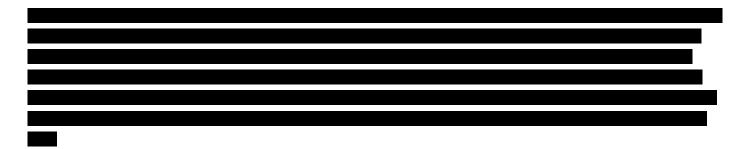
Rob Kidd advised that some sort of spreadsheet is the best home, because of tabular data. It's important to make sure that every column really earns its place, and keep scores as simple as possible. A scale of 1-3 is all that anyone will need. You could make the document available to people to collaborate on – for example, a shared spreadsheet on Office 365 for everyone to input on.

Tina Russell noted that it would be an idea to have different worksheets for each department, and then the front worksheet has some formulae that gives a summary, an overall view. You would then go to each different worksheet for each area. In her experience all professional bodies use Excel.

Ted Sangster has experience of Risk Registers, and was horrified when he found that there were some solutions priced at £24k a year. He advises that a straightforward spreadsheet is more than sufficient. It needs to be simple so that people can understand it, use colour coding, and a scoring system to identify particular risks – for example, Impact/Likelihood. Ted offered to send some examples to the Chief Executive after the meeting.

The Chief Executive asked the Council if they had any recommendations for how the Societies might go about expanding the conversation around autonomy-centred practice and its importance in the profession.

Harriet Mortimer proposed adding the content into the magazine and asking Members what they think might be good ways to use the information.

The update from the **Head of Membership Services** was postponed for this meeting as Camilla Firth was unfortunately unable to attend at the last minute due to a personal emergency – all of the updates and the questions for the Council will be held over until the August Council Meeting.

The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the **Deputy Chief Executive**. The Deputy Chief Executive asked the Council if they had any feedback on the role description she had put together for the Ambassador position.

Rob Kidd suggested being clear on the time commitment expected of the Ambassadors, and planning an annual appraisal. We need to make sure they're getting what they want from the post, that they're supported, that they're staying on message. Perhaps we would want to check in with them more frequently than annually, but he would recommend an individual yearly appraisal. We would want to define the timeframe with the Ambassadors, be as flexible as possible, clear about what we are expecting them to do acknowledging that it might vary from one to the next.

Tina Russell advised that there may be some tension from the role descriptions in that they could be read as an employee – we would need to specify that it's a voluntary Ambassador role. Where there's reference to spreading the word of the Societies we might want to elaborate on that, for example by referencing some ways they can do that, adding in things like Social Media etc. Make it clear that we wouldn't want someone to only do one particular aspect of the role. Tina offered to send an email to demonstrate to the Deputy Chief Executive to show how she would approach it – her organisation has over 1400 volunteers, and there are different approaches depending on the type of role. They have also just developed a volunteer statement of principles based on the Nolan principles. She noted that we can fall back on our Code of Ethics when it comes to how they work within the role, but that we would want to have an enhanced level of accountability there as well.

Ted Sangster remarked that he feels the structure is sound. Ambassadors provide value in the networks they have access to – there's value in having a common briefing, while the whole message might not be relevant to all of them. Quarterly meetings develop a sense of togetherness and community between Ambassadors. We should encourage them to give feedback about any reactions they get as part of their work, which will mean that more ideas are stimulated.

Harriet Mortimer talked about us creating some LinkedIn groups for the Ambassadors – we could get them to add information to the LinkedIn group themselves for us then to share onwards. It would also function as networking for the Ambassadors, which might be a draw for them.

The Deputy Chief Executive then asked the Council if there is anything more they feel we should be doing as a professional association to better support our members and members of the public with regard to the work we're doing around diversity and inclusion.

Tina Russell suggested that we do a survey, and also wanted to check that we're in the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Special Interest Group (EDI SIG) for PARN. Harriet Mortimer advised that the next meeting for the EDI SIG on 19th of May is all about data collection, so if we have any questions about that we could ask about how to really use the data that we're getting. We could send questions in to Lily at PARN and she can ask the panellists. Harriet advised that there'll be a second meeting about this topic, too.

The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the **Assistant CEO**, who asked the Council if they had any support or guidance on overcoming restrictive employment practices, as this is a current focus for the Assistant CEO. This is in situations where, for example, membership of a particular organisation is required as opposed to an organisation looking at the level of training and skills of the applicant.

Tina Russell advised that her organisation still have this problem, even though ██ is over 100 years old. ██ themselves haven't made any progress in terms of support to stop it, but one thing that has proven to be very powerful is to refer to organisations that do already support their membership; put it into a competitive space. Allowing people to say, for example, "I can see that Sainsburys will pay for my membership and take me through qualification routes"; directly contacting advertisers for vacancies; not publishing any adverts where they simply put CIPD qualified or not referring to it at all. Ultimately employers need to have that reassurance that they're doing

CPD, that they're aligned to a code; broadcast that you do have quite an interaction with Registrants – reinforce that relationship that Registrants have with NCS.

[REDACTED]

The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the **Ethics Officer**, who asked the Council for their input as to an appropriate job title for the role, as we have found that the title Ethics Officer is leading to some confusion amongst our members, with the Ethics Officer receiving enquiries that do not relate to the parameters of her job role.

Tina Russell advised that we consider the title of Professional Conduct Officer, or Professional Conduct and Ethics officer as that is Tina's title. One of the ideas put forward by the Ethics Officer - Case Manager - implies that you're leading and responsible for investigations, which may not be correct, and Conduct and Compliance Officer definitely has connotations within financial services that we may not wish to bring in to the Societies.

Harriet noted that, from a client perspective, if she had an issue she wanted to bring, Professional Conduct Officer is more clear about what to expect. Case Manager, Complaint Officer, or Conduct and Compliance Officer aren't as clear.

Kate Mahoney, Head of Professional Standards, noted that we should be careful that people don't confuse professional standards and professional conduct.

Ros Wright reflected that a Professional Conduct department is the same across many different professional bodies, and that the word 'conduct' in there is the important part.

The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the **Head of Professional Standards**.

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The Head of Professional Standards asked the Council if they had any advice or consideration for ███████████ ██ ██ ████████████████████████████████████

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The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the **Communications Manager**, who noted that ███████ ██ ██ ██ ██

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The Council had the opportunity to discuss the update from the Business Operations Manager, who will shortly be ██ The Business Operations Manager asked the Council if anyone had any experience of rolling out software like this, or a situation where people would be required to work in a different way, and if they had any guidance or suggestions.

Rob Kidd wanted to understand whether all of the people involved shared enthusiasm for a new way of working. He noted that a good first step would be to assess how the team feel about it. It might be that they're all excited about the change, but some could find it scary or unsettling, even if they find the new software straightforward. It's worth letting them know that it's a big change. ███ so we can see it in action elsewhere, and finding out how other people have experienced that change. Rob advised that if someone is more tech savvy in the group it will be worth recruiting them to be your champion and to do some testing. He added that we would want to run the new system in parallel to the old one, check for any errors and obvious shortcomings, and get the 'champion' to validate that it's working as it should be. If launching the new software doesn't go well then we would lose our one opportunity to say that this will make the team's life better. We would also want to get whole group involved in discussions around how to personalise it, and give them an opportunity to have a say in how it is set up. He added that having everyone participate should be really powerful.

Rob also wanted to add that that if we're iterating how we roll out the software, then we should find a method for people to submit feedback, and ensure that it's acted upon. We need to make it clear how people can voice concerns or suggest changes. ████████████████████████████████████ in terms of things people often raise as challenging, or things that are often tweaked. When communicating with the team, we should be clear on why some things are fixed and some are variable.

Tina Russell advised that we should prioritise or triage requests for change, and that responsibility should lie with the Business Operations Manager instead of the person making the request. If someone has to wait for a change then ultimately it proves the need for that change. If there's a suitable workaround then it proves that the change is not wholly needed – it would be a nice-to-have, as opposed to a needed change.

Harriet Mortimer reflected on ███ ████████████████████████████████ She was aware that some people use it more than others, and reflected that this can come from fear of not understanding something. She advised that if we can implement a good training package around the new software, and institute a weekly survey asking how people feel about using it to gauge whether it's getting better over time, we would avoid people skirting around the issue and avoiding using the new software.

Ted Sangster spoke about introducing new system within ███████ which ran in parallel with their existing system, underwent significant testing, and then had feedback to the project manager who then made tweaks. At that point they then advised and trained all of the staff. Ted agreed with Rob's idea of a champion which could help in introducing the software to the rest of the team.

Tina added that there's something beneficial about building people's confidence in new software – we could look at giving the team an area that they're responsible for, and they can then train others in the team on it.

The Business Operations Manager advised ███████████████████████████████████████
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In terms of **any other business,** the Council asked that we standardise all of our reports, as currently they are all in very different formats, and put names on, instead of just someone's job title.

We will share the organisation chart with the Council so that they have a good idea of who is who.

The Council advised that they are very happy with new format of Council Meetings, and that the new way of doing things with regard to sending around reports a week in advance has worked well.

The next Council Meeting is scheduled for the 4th of August 2021.