ANNUAL REPORT

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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 11th, 2017**





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 at19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on Wednesday October 11th, 2017.

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 have been significant and strategic personnel changes at the Societies combined with an expansion of services to service users, and a growth and development in the numbers of members and registrants. These changes are all outlined within this Report.

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 Societies CEO, Deputy Chief Executive and the new Head of professional Standards, and was provided with open access to all relevant files and documentation.

An additional reason for the annual visit of the Independent Assessor is to reinforce the Societies commitment to the principle of transparency and 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**

A considerable part of the visit was spent with Vicky Parkinson who was appointed as CEO to the Societies in 2016. The CEO has been with the Societies for over seven years. 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 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 NCS and NHS retain a large footprint on the 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. An example of this, within the current year, has been the review of the Code Of Ethics..

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 Chair of the Professional Standards Committee.

The Chief Executive ensures that standards are maintained *vis a 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 bodies; this involves close liaison with and management of the members of staff in the national office.

To achieve the day-today management and administration of the Societies business, there is a dynamic administrative team consisting of Marion Dickinson, Lauren Kelly, Sarah Comber and Antonia Voice. The Administrative team processes general enquiries, student applications, membership and Registrant applications. The Independent Assessor can confidently report that the Societies have a very strong administrative team, who collectively present a wide range of skills and competencies, 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. There is a general air of excitement about expansion and growth. To reiterate comments above, however, no-one underestimates the importance of commitment to high standards and quality service provision. There is also 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.

In discussions with the CEO on what has changed and gone well, since the last IA visit, the following changes and developments were highlighted:

1. The most important point for recognition is that Registration with the PSA has been renewed.
2. Growth in CPD courses – in the past year there have been over 40 around the country.
3. Continued Growth of Membership.
4. New Website has been warmly received by members, registrants and enquirers.
5. The last year has seen the launching of three new online CPD courses – Counselling Skills for Healthcare Professionals, Supporting Patients and their Families with Bereavement and Loss, and Supporting patients with Low Self-Esteem and Lack of Self-Confidence. There has been a very promising take-up of these online courses, and it is anticipated that other online courses will follow.
6. There is ongoing development and review of Specialist Practice Areas such as: Children and Young People, Supervision, Online Therapy, Gender and Equality. Karen Connolly, a leading practitioner with Children and Young People has also been commissioned to write 10 Good Practice Documents.
7. Continuing growth and development of services to Members, Registrants and Service Users.
8. There has been an exponential growth in Training Centre(s) Accreditation with the NCS.
9. Recognition of the Society has improved – in the areas of training, consultation and support for the counselling professions; a good example of this has been the Public Health Agency (PHA) in Northern Ireland, who have moved from ignoring the Society to maintaining ongoing contact.
10. NHS – improving profile for the Society.

One important area of discussion between the IA and CEO was the Code of Ethics Revision 2017

The National Counselling Society Code of Ethics has remained essentially unchanged for many years, and has served its purpose very effectively. However, there have been a number of significant changes in the way that counsellors and therapists work in recent years, combined with the establishing of the Professional Standards Authority who oversee the voluntary regulation of healthcare professional associations, and the continuing growth of the Society.

In the light of these changes it was felt that it was important to take a fresh look at the Code of Ethics and seek to make them clearer and specific, and ensure their relevance to the current therapeutic requirements. Fundamentally, the principles of the code of ethics remain unchanged, though wording has been revised to provide greater clarity. Over a period of some months a consultation process ensued, beginning with the CEO and then rolled out to Fellows, inviting them to indicate what changes they would like to see. There has been discussions with leading professionals such as Michael Jacobs, and key organisations such as *Pink Therapy*, to develop a new, updated Code of Ethics. This has now been circulated for comment and consideration amongst the Members and Registrants of the Society, and the deadline for responses is December 8th, 2017.

It is intended that, when all the comments have been collated, they will be reviewed by senior staff and council. It is anticipated that the new code will come into effect in the new year of 2018, with a hopeful publication date of January 1st, 2018.

A very helpful and informative discussion took place between the Independent Assessor and Freya Bottomley, the Deputy Chief Executive. Since her appointment as Deputy Chief Executive in May 2015 she has continued to consolidate and enhance the profile of the work of the Societies.  This has included the expansion and development of training, CPD, online courses, networking and national Exhibitions. In additional to the Labour Party Conference Exhibition in September 2017, the Societies were also present and highly profiled at an NHS national Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham in May 2017. The role of the Deputy CEO is also crucial in maintaining the public profile of the Societies, in its promotion to the professions and in support of the CEO. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that an indication of the growing influence of the Societies is that more and more organisations and corporate bodies are contacting the Societies, for advice and guidance and support. Deputy Chief Executive also reported that social media was making a huge impact upon the profile of the work of the Societies, with substantial numbers of hits on social media pages. It was also reported that there had been growing contacts with the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) – who have accessed some of the online training programmes – and Mates in Mind/British Safety Council. The overview is one of growing development and broadening of the profile of the Societies.

Since the last site visit by the IA, new and significant appointments have been made by the Society. Samantha Hurdley has been appointed as Public Protections Officer managing and overseeing complaints, and has been in post for six months (at the time of the site visit). Unfortunately, due to other commitments, the Public Protections Officer was not available at the time of the IA’s visit. However, a Skype call is planned as soon as possible to discuss how the PPO understands her role and responsibilities, and a separate Report on the Complaints Procedures will be submitted by the Independent Assessor.

Kate Mahoney has been appointed as Head of Professional Standards, and began her work with the Society on May 17th, 2017. This role 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.

Kate Mahoney is very well qualified to manage these responsibilities, and brings a wealth of experience and boundless energy to the role, as discovered by the IA in an extended discussion with her at the time of the Site Visit. Having qualified as a Counsellor, and having worked with CRUSE Bereavement Care, in addition to similar work within a school, she also has a psychology background and has worked in sensitive areas of care, such as Oncology. Significantly, she has a background of maintaining standards and training within McLaren Autos which included involvement in the field of F1 Motor Sport.

From the Society’s perspective, she has already made a huge impact on the workings of Professional Standards, and is committed to extending the impact of the Society upon the world of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

As indicated above, part of her role 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 queries about training information, combined with considering complex membership applications.

Time was given to considering what the new Head of Professional Standards identified as ‘Successes’ and ‘Disappointments’ since her appointment.

In the former area, the HoPS highlighted the continuing growth of the Societies’ influence within Northern Ireland. In addition, there has been a streamlining of application processes, and these have become more organized and rigorous. Disappointingly, she sometimes feels that there has not been enough time to complete all the tasks, ideas and planning – the 3 days a week role is based at the Society’s Head Office in Worthing which has enabled links with the administrative staff to be addressed more immediately than was previously possible, when the Head of Professional Standards did not work on site and was usually only able to visit once or twice a month.

**The Outcome and Conclusions of the 2017 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 last Annual Report(2016):

* **Communication.** There are 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 across to all members of the Administrative Team, and now extended through the appointment of a new Public Protection Officer, and Head of Professional Standards, both located in Worthing.. This is contributing to the 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) 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 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 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 an important 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, and to highlight good practice and identify any areas for improvement. 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.

It is important to record that all objective and action points from the 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 ascertained during the visit of the Independent Assessor to the National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society on Wednesday October 11th, 2017.



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