

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR

SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 2016

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 of the Societies at 19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on October 11th-12th, 2016.

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 was convened on Wednesday 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 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, there have been significant 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. In addition, the CPD programme has been consolidated. 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 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 two day visit to the Societies was dedicated to discussing with key office-holders their roles and responsibilities, and to explore how these are maintaining and consolidating the ethical and professional standards of the Societies.

A considerable part of the visit was spent with Vicky Parkinson who, after the retirement of the previous CEO Liz McElligott, had been appointed as interim CEO and shortly before the site visit by the Independent Assessor had been appointed as the substantive CEO to the Societies; the new CEO has been with the Societies for over six years. The considerable input and influence of the previous CEO has not been completely lost as she has retained involvement as a Consultant to 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 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). Through its recognition by the Professional Standards Authority the NCS and HS retain a large footprint on the therapy map. There are a growing number of Professional Bodies who have achieved Accredited Register status with the PSA, and, for the Societies, such status accords both kudos and credibility to both Societies. However, it does not accept 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 in order to preserve the PSA status. The Chief Executive works closely with the Independent Assessor in ensuring the delineation of roles, especially between the role of 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 with regard to Registrants of the Societies, and works closely to ensure that the standards and quality of training provided by other 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.

There have been other personnel changes since the previous IA visit. Freya Bottomley, who joined the Societies in May 2014, and had previously held the post of Marketing and Membership Services Manager, was appointed Deputy CEO in May 2015. Her vast experience in the Health and Care Sector enhance important areas of the Societies expansion and development such as training, CPD, networking and national Exhibitions. In addition to the Labour Party Conference Exhibition in September 2016, the Societies were also present and highly profiled at an NHS national exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham in May 2016. 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.

Further staff changes have included the following:

Wendy Martin as a dedicated Public Protections Officer managing and overseeing complaints.

Megan Nunn was appointed to the role of Administration Manager in February 2016 and offers a wide experience of Administration and Data Processing combined with an excellent knowledge of Software. This is a crucial role, also, and includes the day to day workings and mechanics of the two Societies, i.e.

- i) Responsibility for the Administrative Team
- ii) Appraisals
- iii) Monitoring holiday entitlements for all staff
- iv) Payment of invoices.
- v) Developing new member's packs for both Societies – including the dissemination of information which will benefit all Registrants and interested parties.

To achieve all of this there is an admin team consisting of Marion Dickinson, Lauren Kelly, Caroline Jowett and Antonia Voice have been appointed to the Administration team. The Independent Assessor is able to report that the Societies have a very strong administrative team, who present a wide range of skills and competencies, and commitment to the ethos of the Societies, 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. 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 been able to increase the quality of service that the Societies provide.

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

- i) Associate Members – what was previously designated Associate membership has been renamed to Companion membership; this describes someone who has no previous counselling training, and who wishes to be a member of the NCS not connected with

counselling practice. The grade of Associate membership now requires that members are enrolled on a Level 4 Diploma course that will lead towards Registration. Companion or Associate members are not placed on the register.

- ii) Accessibility – Braille and audio versions of the Membership Application Form and Complaints Form have been created to afford greater accessibility to potential new members and to members of the general public.
- iii) Weekly Complaints Updates – The Public Protection Officer sends a weekly overview of complaints.
- iv) Welcome Letters and Information Packs have been re-designed.
- v) Growth of Membership – in the six month period prior to the IA visit there had been a 9% growth in membership.
- vi) New Website – this has been redesigned.
- vii) Growth and Development of Services to Members, Registrants and Service Users.
- viii) Growth in Training Centre(s) Accreditation.

There was also discussion between the CEO and the IA around an area that can still change and improve, notwithstanding current successes and growth:

- i) Public and organisational recognition of the Societies. Growth is acknowledged in terms of Membership; however, it is also accepted that there are professional areas which still need to be confronted. To assist with this, a new TV Commercial has been commissioned and will be broadcast in the not too distant future. This remains a priority.

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 and reiteration of my conclusions to the last Annual Report:

- **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 and Registrants of the Societies or potential members and Registrants; 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 all members of the Administrative Team. This is enabling 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 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 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.

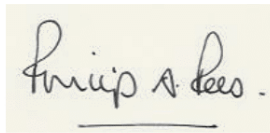
There is also recognition within the Societies team that nothing is ever perfect. There is always room for improvement, and changes are inevitable in all areas of marketing, advertising, communication and the promotion of all that the Societies stand for. The Societies recognise that there is no room 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 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, other than those highlighted within this Report by the Societies themselves.

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

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 October 11th-12th, 2016.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature reads "Phillip A. Rees" with a horizontal line underneath.

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