

Psychotherapists and Counsellors Professional Liaison Group (PLG)  
15 December 2010

Standards of proficiency for counsellors

Executive summary and recommendations

### **Introduction**

At the meeting on 19 October 2010, the group agreed that the meeting originally planned for November 2010 should be cancelled in order to allow for ongoing work taking place at professional body level to continue looking at standards of proficiency. This work was to include stakeholders in psychotherapy and in counselling undertaking work to put together standards of proficiency.

The standards produced are based on the model developed by the Psychological Professions Alliance Group (PPAG) and discussed at the last meeting. This model involves the suggestion that a 'level 5 counsellor' and a 'level 7 counsellor' might be meaningfully differentiated in the structure of the Register with a 'level 7 counsellor / level 7 psychotherapist' identified separately. It was also suggested that a counsellor and psychotherapist at level 7 might also be differentiated from each other.

For a summary of the suggested models and previous discussion, please see the paper 'Differentiation, standards of proficiency and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register' included in the papers at this meeting. Section 8 of that paper in particular outlines some of the overarching considerations for discussion about the structure of the Register and the standards of proficiency.

### **Standards of proficiency**

The attached standards have been produced for counsellors at level 5; and at level 7. Standards for psychotherapists at level 7 have been separately developed and are also included on the papers at this meeting. It is understood that work has not yet been undertaken in relation to the contention that 'a level 7 differentiation' between psychotherapists and counsellors is necessary, desirable or possible.

The standards have been drafted against the 15 revised generic standards suggested in a recent HPC consultation (please see papers to note at this meeting). The responses to the consultation are currently being analysed and therefore these standards may be subject to change.

**Please note that these standards are draft and represent a work in progress.** They therefore represent a draft for discussion rather than a finalised set of standards that necessarily have the full agreement of those involved. In addition, work has not yet been undertaken to compare the two drafts which, amongst other things, would help identify whether there are any standards which might usefully be removed or made common across psychotherapists and counsellors.

## **Questions**

The overarching questions included in the paper referred to on the previous page that are particularly relevant here are:

- Whether the proposed structure(s) would reflect current practice and education and therefore be meaningful for the public; practitioners; education providers; service providers; and other interested parties.
- Whether the proposed standards of proficiency adequately support the proposed structure, including whether there are sufficient differences expressed between standards for different titles, clearly demonstrating that differentiation is both possible and necessary.
- Whether the standards of proficiency proposed reflect the threshold level required for safe and practice and therefore public protection; are consistent with the content of the majority of pre-registration education and training; and are written in a language appropriate for entry to the Register.

Some specific questions on these standards might include:

- In relation to the second bullet point above, whether there are sufficient, meaningful differences between the standards suggested for level 5 and level 7 counsellors so as to justify that differentiation at this level is necessary for public protection (as opposed to one entry point to registration which could be exceeded).
- In relation to the standards themselves, whether there are standards which can be usefully expressed as common both to 'level 5 counsellors' and 'level 7 counsellors'.

## **Outcomes**

By the end of the group's final meeting in February 2011 it is intended that the group should attempt to agree and make recommendations to the HPC Council about all the areas within its terms of reference. The decisions / conclusions to be made and included in those recommendations relevant to this area are as follows:

- To agree in principle, as far as possible, the draft standards of proficiency (recognising that further work and further iterations are likely to be necessary and that a consultation would be held prior to the opening of any statutory register to shape the standards further).
- To agree the structure of the Register including agreeing whether the Register should differentiate between psychotherapists and counsellors and in the ways described in the paper 'Differentiation, structure of the Register and threshold level of qualification for entry', included in the papers at this meeting.
- To agree in principle the threshold level or levels for entry to the Register (recognising that this will be subject to future consideration in light of the finalised standards and subject to a consultation held prior to the opening of any statutory register).

### **Decision**

This paper is for discussion.

### **Background information**

Please note that the standards attached have been developed by a group of stakeholders in the counselling field and the HPC has not made any direct comment on them during their development. The HPC is very grateful for the time, effort and energy of all those involved in developing these standards for discussion at this meeting.

### **Resource implications**

None

### **Financial implications**

None

### **Appendices**

None

### **Date of paper**

2 December 2010

## **Draft Standards of Proficiency Counsellor (Level 5 )**

A registrant counsellor must:

### **1. Be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice**

- i. Be able to contract clearly and appropriately with the client
- ii. Be able to recognise and work safely with common mental health problems, psychological difficulties and obstacles to well-being and make referrals when appropriate
- iii. Be able to establish, manage and end therapeutic relationships and make decisions in the face of known fears, risks and uncertainty
- iv. Be able to recognise when further intervention is inappropriate or unlikely to be helpful
- v. Be able to assess and manage levels of potential risk for the client and others and take appropriate action
- vi. Be able to take account of the client's capacity for self-determination and ability to reflect on his / her psychological functioning and refer as necessary
- vii. Recognise that specialised knowledge, skills and specific ethical and legal considerations around safeguarding and child protection are required when undertaking work with children and young people.

### **2. Be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession**

- i. Be able to maintain the ethical principles of counselling
- ii. Be able to maintain the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship throughout the work
- iii. Be aware of potential conflict of interest issues when working with clients
- iv. Be able to reflect on and respond appropriately to ethical dilemmas

### **3. Be able to maintain fitness to practice**

- i. Understand the importance of maintaining own health and psychological well-being
- ii. Be able to recognise own disturbance or distress and develop appropriate self-support and self-care strategies

- iii. Be able to recognise own personal needs and find ways of ensuring that these are met outside the therapeutic relationship
- iv. Be able to identify and implement a programme for continuing professional development
- v. Consult with other professionals on a regular basis

**4. Be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement**

- i. Be able to appraise the client's ability to benefit from the type of counselling offered

**5. Be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner**

- i. Be aware of and respond appropriately to the effect of own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours when working as a counsellor

**6. Be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice**

- i. Understand the role of the counsellor within the broader social and cultural context
- ii. Be able to personalise practice to take account of the circumstances of individual clients and their needs in relation to issues of diversity
- iii. Be aware of the impact of non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by culture, age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status

**7. Be able to maintain confidentiality**

- i. Understand the importance and therapeutic benefits of confidentiality
- ii. Maintain the principles of confidentiality
- iii. Understand and manage the limits and challenges of confidentiality in counselling work

**8. Be able to communicate effectively**

- i. Be able to communicate in English to the standard equivalent to level 8 of the International English Testing System with no element below 7.5
- ii. Understand the need to use an appropriate interpreter to assist service users whose first language is not English, wherever possible

- iii. Be able to communicate with a wide range of clients in a manner appropriate to individual need, adapting practice as necessary to individual circumstances
- iv. Be able to communicate effectively with other professionals particularly when collaborating over client care
- v. Be able to communicate effectively with clients whose first language is not English, either directly or through the use of an interpreter

**9. Be able to work appropriately with others**

- i. Be able to use appropriate formulations when communicating with other professionals about the client and the therapeutic work

**10. Be able to maintain records appropriately**

- i. Be able to manage ethical and legal boundaries of record keeping in counselling work

**11. Be able to reflect on and review practice**

- i. Demonstrate self awareness through the use of personal therapy and / or other chosen activities that encourage personal development and reflective practice
- ii. Use and review feedback from counselling supervision, other professionals and clients on therapeutic process
- iii. To be open and transparent in supervision enabling honest scrutiny of practice

**12. Be able to assure the quality of their practice**

- i. Be able to gather information, including qualitative and quantitative data that helps to evaluate the responses of the client to their care
- ii. Understand the importance of counselling supervision and use it to address professional and developmental needs
- iii. Be able to use counselling supervision to support and enhance professional judgement
- iv. Be familiar with and able to use formal and informal methods of quality assurance in relation to practice

**13. Be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice**

- i. Be able to understand and use therapeutic skills and interventions consistent with underpinning theoretical framework showing empathy for client experience, needs and aspirations

- ii. Be able to use research findings to inform counselling practice
- iii. Be able to consistently integrate a coherent and theoretically informed body of knowledge into practice
- iv. Be able to recognise and work therapeutically with life transitions and developmental challenges
- v. Be able to recognise and work therapeutically with common mental health problems, psychological difficulties and obstacles to the well-being
- vi. Understand the range of psychological services and interventions available to clients

**14. Understand key concepts of the bodies of knowledge which are relevant to their profession**

- i. Use a coherent assessment strategy to assess individual clients and their needs
- ii. Understand the inter-relationship between physical and psychological health
- iii. Understand the common mental health problems and obstacles to psychological health and well-being
- iv. Understand and apply theories of the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process to inform practice
- v. Understand social and cultural contexts and their implications for practice
- vi. Use understanding of relationships across the lifespan to inform practice
- vii. Use understanding of theories of human development to inform practice
- viii. Recognise and respond to the dynamics of power and authority in the therapeutic relationship.
- ix. Understand the generic factors that contribute to therapeutic change
- x. Be able to use a theory of therapeutic change to inform practice
- xi. Understand models and purposes of counselling supervision and how to use it effectively

**15. Be able to establish and maintain a safe practice environment**

## **Draft Standards of Proficiency - Counsellor (Level 7)**

A registrant counsellor must:

### **1. Be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice**

- i. Be able to contract clearly and appropriately with the client
- ii. Be able to recognise and work safely with common mental health problems, psychological difficulties and obstacles to well-being and make referrals when appropriate
- iii. Be able to establish, manage and end therapeutic relationships and make decisions in the face of known fears, risks and uncertainty
- iv. Be able to recognise when further intervention is inappropriate or unlikely to be helpful
- v. Be able to assess and manage levels of potential risk for the client and others and take appropriate action
- vi. Be able to take account of the client's capacity for self-determination and ability to reflect on his / her psychological functioning and refer as necessary
- vii. Recognise that specialised knowledge, skills and specific ethical and legal considerations around safeguarding and child protection are required when undertaking work with children and young people.
- viii. Be able to recognise and identify psychological difficulties and judge the appropriateness of psychological therapy as an effective response
- ix. Be able to understand and work with a full range of psychological difficulties from mild to complex, severe/disabling/grave/distressing/unrelenting (wording to be decided) and enduring psychological difficulties and their origins
- x. Be able to assess and engage in complex therapeutic relationships and to recognise and take action when they become non-therapeutic
- xi. Be able to engage and work collaboratively with other relevant professionals to ensure safe and effective practice with the client

- xii. Be able to assess the effectiveness of different therapies for the client presentation and make recommendations based on evidence
- xiii. Be able to draw on appropriate personal and professional networks to support work with complex and enduring psychological difficulties and their origins

## **2. Be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession**

- i. Be able to maintain the ethical principles of counselling
- ii. Be able to maintain the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship throughout the work
- iii. Be aware of potential conflict of interest issues when working with clients
- iv. Be able to reflect on and respond appropriately to ethical dilemmas
- v. Have a clear understanding of legal and ethical problems commonly faced in therapeutic work and be able to make considered and independent judgements about practice in relation to these
- vi. Be able to manage and respond to complex ethical situations arising from work with clients with complex presentations

## **3. Be able to maintain fitness to practice**

- i. Understand the importance of maintaining own health and psychological well-being
- ii. Be able to recognise own disturbance or distress and develop appropriate self-support and self-care strategies
- iii. Be able to recognise own personal needs and find ways of ensuring that these are met outside the therapeutic relationship
- iv. Be able to identify and implement a programme for continuing professional development
- v. Consult with other professionals on a regular basis

**4. Be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement**

- i. Be able to appraise the client's ability to benefit from the type of counselling offered
- ii. Be able to make clinical judgements on complex presentations in the absence of complete information
- iii. Be able to use existing knowledge creatively in response to individual client presentations and adapt theory to practice on a case by case basis
- iv. Be able to make independent judgements on the appropriate therapeutic work/treatment/intervention (wording to be decided) and to continually review these judgements in the light of new evidence, adjusting the work accordingly

**5. Be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner**

- i. Be aware of and respond appropriately to the effect of own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours when working as a counsellor
- ii. Be able to critically appraise counselling theory in relation to new developments and understandings in anti-discriminatory practice
- iii. Be able to make personalised assessments of need in relation to counselling practice with marginalised groups
- iv. Be able to integrate a clear understanding of anti-discriminatory practice with counselling theory and apply this to individual client circumstances, reflecting on the counsellor's own position in relation to the work being undertaken

## **6. Be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice**

- i. Understand the role of the counsellor within the broader social and cultural context
- ii. Be able to personalise practice to take account of the circumstances of individual clients and their needs in relation to issues of diversity
- iii. Be aware of the impact of non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by culture, age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status
- iv. Be able to show a critical awareness of the history of ideas, the cultural context and social and political theories that inform and impact on the practice of counselling
- v. Demonstrate a critical awareness of current counselling and psychological theories in relation to equality and diversity issues and be able to address and redress inadequacies in these areas both in theory and practice

## **7. Be able to maintain confidentiality**

- i. Understand the importance and therapeutic benefits of confidentiality
- ii. Maintain the principles of confidentiality
- iii. Understand and manage the limits and challenges of confidentiality in counselling work
- iv. Be able to critically evaluate, interpret and respond appropriately to the ethical complexities of confidentiality in counselling contexts
- v. Be able to maintain the ethical principle of confidentiality in complex situations using independent professional judgement
- vi. Understand the legal principle of the common law duty of confidence underpinning confidentiality within the context of counselling (to be confirmed)

## **8. Be able to communicate effectively**

- i. Be able to communicate in English to the standard equivalent to level 8 of the International English Testing System with no element below 7.5
- ii. Understand the need to use an appropriate interpreter to assist service users whose first language is not English, wherever possible
- iii. Be able to critically reflect on and manage issues relating to working with third party or others present
- iv. Be able to communicate with a wide range of clients in a manner appropriate to individual need, adapting practice as necessary to individual circumstances
- v. Be able to communicate effectively with other professionals particularly when collaborating over client care
- vi. Be able to communicate effectively with clients whose first language is not English, either directly or through the use of an interpreter

## **9. Be able to work appropriately with others**

- i. Be able to use appropriate formulations when communicating with other professionals about the client and the therapeutic work
- ii. Be able to use appropriate formulations of complex, severe/disabling/grave/distressing/unrelenting (wording to be decided) and enduring psychological difficulties when communicating with other professionals about the client and therapeutic work
- iii. To be able to lead collaboration with other professionals over client care when appropriate
- iv. To make independent judgements over the involvement of others in work with a client and proactively involve them when in the best interests of the client

**10. Be able to maintain records appropriately**

- i. Be able to manage ethical boundaries and legal aspects of record keeping in counselling work

**11. Be able to reflect on and review practice**

- i. Demonstrate self awareness through the use of personal therapy and / or other chosen activities that encourage personal development and reflective practice
- ii. Use and review feedback from counselling supervision, other professionals and clients on therapeutic process
- iii. Be able to be self-critical and reflect both independently and with others about own professional practice
- iv. To be open and transparent in supervision enabling honest scrutiny of practice
- v. To be able to articulate the theoretical grounding for practice decisions and reflect on their efficacy

**12. Be able to assure the quality of their practice**

- i. Be able to gather information, including qualitative and quantitative data that helps to evaluate the responses of the client to their care
- ii. Understand the importance of counselling supervision and use it to address professional and developmental needs
- iii. Be able to use counselling supervision to support and enhance professional judgement
- iv. Be able to work collaboratively in counselling supervision to enhance professional judgement and therapeutic work, including work with complex and enduring psychological difficulties
- v. Be able to monitor and evaluate the quality of practice and contribute to the generation of data for quality assurance and improvement programmes using the information to improve practice
- vi. Be familiar with and able to use formal and informal methods of quality assurance in relation to practice

**13. Be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice**

- i. Be able to understand and use therapeutic skills and interventions consistent with underpinning theoretical framework showing empathy for client experience, needs and aspirations
- ii. Be able to use research findings to inform counselling practice
- iii. Be able to consistently integrate a coherent and theoretically informed body of knowledge into practice
- iv. Be able to recognise and work therapeutically with life transitions and developmental challenges
- v. Be able to recognise and work therapeutically with common mental health problems, psychological difficulties and obstacles to well-being
- vi. Understand the range of psychological services and interventions available to clients
- vii. Be able to apply research findings to the critical evaluation of practice
- viii. Be able to critically evaluate a range of research methodologies
- ix. Be able to conduct own research using appropriate methodology
- x. Critically analyse and apply theoretically informed bodies of knowledge
- xi. Be able to conceptualise complex presenting problems by integrating assessment within a coherent framework of psychological theory and evidence, which incorporates interpersonal, societal, cultural and biological factors
- xii. Be able to reflect on complex and sometimes contradictory information in order to clearly articulate and work therapeutically with complex, grave/disabling/unrelenting/severe and enduring psychological difficulties and their origins
- xiii. Be able to consider competing hypotheses in understanding and responding to a client
- xiv. Be able to work reflexively using a coherent body of knowledge

- xv. Be able to integrate relevant knowledge into an appropriate therapeutic plan for each client and to be able to alter this plan in the light of new evidence as it arises using professional judgement

**14. Understand key concepts of the bodies of knowledge which are relevant to their profession**

- i. Use a coherent assessment strategy to assess individual clients and their needs
- ii. Understand the inter-relationship between physical and psychological health
- iii. Understand the common mental health problems and obstacles to psychological health and well-being
- iv. Understand and apply theories of the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process to inform practice
- v. Understand social and cultural contexts and their implications for practice
- vi. Use understanding of relationships across the lifespan to inform practice
- vii. Use understanding of theories of human development to inform practice
- viii. Recognise and respond to the dynamics of power and authority in the therapeutic relationship.
- ix. Understand the generic factors that contribute to therapeutic change
- x. Be able to use a theory of therapeutic change to inform practice
- xi. Understand models and purposes of counselling supervision and how to use it effectively
- xii. Understand and apply a range of, approaches to assessment in order to inform complex case formulation
- xiii. Understand complex, severe/disabling/grave/distressing/unrelenting (wording to be decided) and enduring mental health and psychological difficulties and their impact on psychological health and well-being
- xiv. Be able to deepen and consolidate critical understanding of theoretical frameworks and test these against the demands of clinical practice

- xv. Be able to critically evaluate theories of human development to inform practice
- xvi. Be able to critically evaluate theories of therapeutic change to inform practice
- xvii. Understand the individual and social conceptualisations of psychopathology and psychological health and wellbeing in order to inform practice
- xviii. Critically analyse, interpret and manage the dynamics of power and authority in the therapeutic context

**15. Be able to establish and maintain a safe practice environment**

DRAFT - WORK IN PROGRESS