

National Counselling Society

Standards of Training and Education for Accredited Courses

2020

Introduction

The NCS accredits courses that meet its Training Standards and provides core practitioner training in counselling and/or psychotherapy, equipping graduates to work with adult clients who present with a range of commonly encountered issues. Accredited training must contain a substantial component of in-the-room or synchronous online teaching, as opposed to purely asynchronous online tuition/distance learning.

Successful completion of an NCS Accredited course is one of the routes to becoming an Accredited Member and to being accepted on to the Society's Accredited Register. Accredited courses must meet the standards set out in this document.

In setting its minimum standards, the Society seeks to adopt a flexible and holistic approach that considers the wide range of experience, style, and training of practitioners in this field.

Our procedures look at quality as well as quantity and recognize that a blend of learning experiences is involved in becoming a reflective practitioner of counselling.

In devising these Standards, The Society has consulted:

- QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy 2013
- ISBN 978 1 84979 777 1 www.qaa.ac.uk
- Skills For Health Competencies for Psychological Therapies PT01-PT49
<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/about-us/competences%10national-occupational-standards/>
- Competence Frameworks for the Delivery and Supervision of Psychological Therapies
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/CORE/competence_frameworks.htm

Accredited courses must also show that they meet the particular requirements appropriate to their own model and scope of training. They should provide appropriate learning outcomes to demonstrate this.

The Standards

1. Course Quality

Training must incorporate and be informed by:

- Respect for the client's autonomy, cultural differences and rights.
- Practitioner awareness of the limits of their level of competence and the vulnerability of the client.
- Awareness of the importance of personal development, supervision and CPD
- The protection of students' and tutors' rights to free speech

Trainees should be enabled to become safe, competent and ethical practitioners who can:

- maintain professional boundaries
- use professional supervision
- develop skills in ethical decision making

2. Course content

Training must include a balance of theory and practice.

Theoretical study must include awareness of:

- Human growth and development
- Psychological theories concerning:
 - How psychological problems develop
 - The process of therapeutic change
 - The importance of the therapeutic relationship
- Ethics and the law including, but not limited to:
 - Legal limits to confidentiality
 - Safeguarding
 - Use of Code of Ethical Practice
 - Contracting
 - Working within levels of competence and managing referrals
 - Use of Supervision

- Psychopathology
 - Limitations and advantages of the medical model
 - Overview of various mental illnesses - mild, moderate to serious and chronic, including both psychotic and non-psychotic diagnoses
 - Basic elements of psychopharmacology - drugs commonly used in treatment.
- The value of research
- Equality and Diversity including but not limited to: Gender/ Gender identity, Age, Ethnicity, Nationality, Ethnic origin, Culture, Class, Ability, Sexual orientation, Religion, Beliefs, Spirituality

Skills training must address:

Generic practical skills including those of:

- Relationship building
- Communication
- Assessment
- Formulation
- Psychotherapeutic strategies and interventions
- Reflective practice
- Monitoring, evaluation and research.
- Recognising the importance of equality, diversity and difference and understanding and managing their impact on the therapeutic relationship
- Specialist skills appropriate to the core theoretical model of the course.

(Ref: QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy 2013 pp.4-5)

3. Coherence and cohesion

The training course must take the form of a coherent programme which allows for the integration over time of students' theoretical knowledge, personal development and practical experience.

The programme must be at minimum Level 4 on the Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) or equivalent as demonstrated to the Society's satisfaction.

The duration of the programme must be at least equal to the Total Qualification Time set by the Awarding Body for a qualification at the relevant Level.

Appropriate Learning Outcomes must be published and made available.

4. Teaching, Learning and Contact hours

The number, qualifications and availability of teaching staff must be sufficient to ensure that students are enabled to become competent, ethically sound practitioners of counselling.

5. Assessment

Trainees must be regularly assessed, by both formative and summative assessments, in terms of their:

- Developing theoretical and practical knowledge
- Competence to practice counselling in an ethically sound manner
- Ability to manage the therapeutic process and its effects on both client and counsellor

Appropriate Assessment Criteria must be published and made available.

A suitable qualified External Examiner must be involved in monitoring assessment.

Procedures must be in place to suspend and support trainees found to be incompetent, incapable or ethically unsound.

6. Supervised Practice/Placement

Trainees should experience at least 100 hours of clinical experience with clients in a formally supervised placement. Clients must first be assessed as suitable for work with students. Training providers must also satisfy themselves that students are ready for work with real clients in placement and that there is an appropriate written agreement with the agency in place. It must be made explicit where the clinical responsibility for the client work is held. Private practice or an arrangement whereby students find their own clients is not acceptable. The placement must be integral to the course, and examples of client work must be taken to the course for assessment.

7. Personal growth and development

The programme must contain opportunities for experiential learning about self and others. This should support trainees in managing and making use of their own experience within the therapeutic relationship.

8. Ethics and policies

Training providers must have in place and publish:

- A satisfactory Complaints Procedure.

A suitable Independent Complaints Reviewer (ICR) must be in place to support any requests made to review a complaint. An ICR would be defined as someone who was not otherwise directly associated with the trainer (not a tutor, lecturer, employee or business owner) but whom the trainer could compensate for their duties.

- A satisfactory Equality/Diversity policy

Training Providers agree to be subject to the Society's own [Code of Ethics](#) and [Complaints Procedures](#).

9. Philosophy of training

The training organisation should provide a statement of its particular approach to and ethos of the vocation of counselling and the training of practitioners.

November 2020 - Covid19 Addendum for:

Guidance for training providers regarding transition to “in the room” therapy

Please note that ‘in the room’ competency is a condition of accreditation. It is important that you read the attached guidance when considering how you will ensure this competency is incorporated within your training.

**This guidance is in addition to our other coronavirus information.*

With no clear end to the pandemic in sight, we are aware that some students may reach the end of their core practitioner training without any face to face, ‘in the room’ experience with clients. For the purposes of this guidance we will refer to this method of working as ‘in the room’.

We recognize that providers and students have had to adapt their way of working extraordinarily quickly, and that a great deal of valuable learning has taken place where online and telephone work

is concerned. We want to help both training providers and students continue with training and placements as safely and effectively as possible.

We recognize that there is a range of views regarding the differences between traditional in the room counselling and psychotherapy and that provided live via telephone or online via platforms such as Zoom. We feel that some provision should be made for ensuring that students and graduates are fully supported to be able to commence or resume in the room therapy.

This guidance offers recommendations and considerations to ensure that students are confident and competent to work in the room with clients on completion of their training.

It is a condition of registration that a counsellor can practice in the room.

Our underlying principles for training are to support providers in:

- being as flexible as possible while maintaining standards
- acting in the best interest of both students and clients
- ensuring students are competent in online or phone work with additional basic training where necessary
- being flexible and exercising extension policies where appropriate to enable students to complete their 100 placement hours
- ensuring students can sufficiently support clients when transitioning from in the room to remote working, and back (when safe to do so.)
- ensuring students with no in the room client experience are competent to work in this way

Training providers should carry out an assessment to ensure that students who are likely to have completed all of their 100 placement hours remotely are competent to work in the room before they complete their studies.

Suggested options for ways in which this assessment could be done include:

1. Specific criteria within a supervisor's report

The student's supervisor could be well placed to understand their ability to work in the room and be given set criteria appropriate to the individual training model to cover in their report. This could constitute good evidence that the student was able to practice in the room.

AND/OR

2. A written assessment devised by the provider

For all cohorts qualifying during the pandemic period, regardless of which option courses choose, we recommend providing students with confirmation that they have been assessed as competent to work in the room with clients. This will help to prevent any issues when the student wishes to apply

for registration, as to gain access to the Society's register does require the ability to work with clients in the room.

Assessment should enable the student to show an understanding of the differences between working in the room and online or over the phone, and in particular:

- an understanding of the therapeutic relationship when the full range of sensory experience is involved
- an understanding of the contextual and practical considerations of working in the room

The following topics are not prescriptive and are intended as guidance regarding what assessors should be looking for. Providers will have their own expertise to bring to this task.

The therapeutic relationship

When the full range of sensory experience is available, the counsellor can pay attention to the client's overall presentation, including

- posture, dress, smell
- skin tone and breathing patterns
- body language and subtle nonverbal clues

all of which can provide further information about the client and their lifestyle and may influence the process and interventions chosen.

The counsellor should also consider:

- their own body language and non-verbal cues and how these may be interpreted or perceived by the client
- how working in the room can influence the emotional impact of the work on the counsellor
- changes to the power balance as compared to working remotely, for example the client may feel they have more power when online or over the phone, whilst in the room they may feel they have less or vice versa
- the impact on the level of challenge; for example, does the trainee feel as safe to challenge the client when working in the room or conversely, are they more challenging? Do they feel more or less able to take risks in the room?
- the disinhibition effect and the potential for increased or decreased disclosure depending on the client

Contextual and practical considerations

When working in the room the counsellor bears the responsibility for arranging and maintaining the setting and environment. They need to consider:

- contracting awareness of any differences regarding confidentiality and other ethical and professional boundaries when working in the room
- negotiating the physical space, for example positioning of seating
- preparing the room after other counsellors or if the room has been used for other purposes
- the provision of waiting areas
- managing interaction outside the room on the way to a session
- working with disturbance, noise and interruptions by others using the building or counselling rooms
- changes to the consulting room between sessions
- decreased flexibility in the timing and frequency of sessions
- awareness of risk and risk assessment when working in the room, including safety considerations when lone working
- opportunities for more spontaneous and creative interventions in the room, for example use of art materials, chair work

AND/OR

3. A peer counselling model

Students conduct a number of in the room sessions of 50 minutes with the same volunteer client, including a tutor observation of at least one live or recorded session.

Additional guidance if the peer counselling assessment model is used

It is important that:

- sessions are not 'skills practice' but are formally contracted sessions
- the sessions are in addition to the core 100 placement hours required for registration
- peer clients come from a different training cohort if possible; student 'clients' from the same cohort may be used if this is the only option necessary.
- the limitations of the counselling being offered are made clear and agreed with the peer 'client'
- social distancing measures are observed