



## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR**

This Report has been compiled 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 administrative and management hub of the Societies in Arundel, West Sussex on Tuesday August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

The Report is focussed on three particular areas:

- The Purpose of the Visit
- The Content of the Visit
- The Outcome and Conclusions of the Visit

### **The Purpose of the Visit**

This was to fulfil the commitment made at a meeting of the Societies Governance and Audit Committee which met on Wednesday February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in London, 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 on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013; this meeting was also in London.

The original decision was that the visit would take place in June 2013; however, it was not possible to meet this scheduled date because the project of implementing a new CRM system took longer than anticipated. An alternative date was formally arranged for Tuesday August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

A primary function of the visit 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. In order to complete this process, and form the basis of this Report, the Independent Assessor was able to meet with members of the administrative team, and access to all relevant files and documentation was agreed.

An additional reason for the visit of the Independent Assessor was to ensure that the Societies guarantee and ensure accountability to 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 whole day was dedicated to discussing with key office-holders their roles and responsibilities, and to observe them at work.

The first part of the day involved working with Ms Liz McElligott who is the Chief Executive/Registrar of the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society. This crucial role includes upholding 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 falls within the remit of the Chief Executive.

The past few months have been dedicated to the achievement of Accredited Voluntary Register (AVR) status through the Professional Standards Authority (PSA), and the Chief Executive/Registrar has been totally involved in the lengthy and exacting process of achieving the AVR status. This has now been achieved, and provides the NCS and NHS with a large footprint on the therapy map. To date, there are only a small number of Professional Bodies who have achieved this status, and such status accords both kudos and credibility to both Societies.

The Chief Executive has been responsible for implementing the recommendations of the PSA Panel which were necessary in order to receive AVR status, and to oversee a range of Action Points which will be revisited in 12 months time in order to preserve that status. The Chief Executive will also work closely with the Independent Assessor in ensuring the delineation of roles,

especially between the role of Chief Executive and Public Protection Officer. The Chief Executive will also co-operate with the Independent Assessor in monitoring the decisions made by the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee.

The Chief Executive ensures that standards are maintained with regard to Registrants of the Societies, and works closely to ensure that standards of training provided by other organisations and accepted by the Societies are maintained - for the purposes of accreditation and AVR status. In addition, the Chief Executive shoulders the responsibility of contacts with the public, Registrants and Prospective Members and training bodies; this involves close liaison and management of the members of staff in the national office.

The second part of the day was spent talking and observing Katie Spendiff, who is the Membership Services Manager, and has been with the Societies since February 2013. She has brought into this role a very wide range of management skills and abilities. This includes marketing and event management combined with competencies in education and social media. Her role involves:

- Managing enquiries to the Societies from members and potential members
- Marketing
- CPD events
- Advertising
- Social media

She specifically shoulders responsibility for the social interaction between members and the Societies. In her role, she has helped to develop marketing and advertising - i.e. publicity leaflets - and arranged events to promote the Societies; e.g. Exhibition Stand at the Labour Party Conference in September 2013. The Membership Services Manager has the crucial role of maintaining and developing the process of communication between the Societies and Registrants.

This role also carries the important role of enabling members to become aware of all the benefits of membership - such as, CPD events, Professional Insurance, regular Newsletters, eligibility for membership of the Royal Society for Public Health.

In addition to the important role Membership Services Manager there are two other highly motivated and competent people who share the administrative side of the work. Vicky Parkinson and Victoria Stibbs field daily enquiries from members and potential members. Vicky Parkinson as Senior Administrator oversees the membership of the Societies; there has been a 20% increase in the membership of the Societies in the past twelve months (2012-2013). Victoria Stibbs also brings a range of skills to her administrative role within the Societies, and works 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.

### **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.

- **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 voice on the work of the Societies, whether established members of the Societies or potential members; corporate bodies and organisations; professional bodies in the world of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, or educational/awarding bodies seeking information about accreditation status.
- **Competence.** Members of the Societies bring a collective range of skills and abilities to the varying roles from Chief Executive to members of the Administrative Team. This has enabled the development of strong marketing and advertising strategies, including the Societies website; saturation of the internet with excellent advertising; evolving CPD programmes of learning throughout 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 requirements. The collective competencies also ensure

quality of management and administration in addition to the dissemination of very high

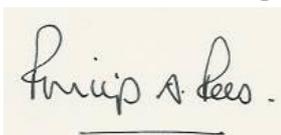
- **Commitment.** The visit of the Independent Assessor was designed to provide an impartial overview of the Societies; how they function; how they work to maintain the principles of the Societies, and how they can effectively communicate this to interested parties. There is strong leadership within the Societies, and solid collegiality. The commitment to the Societies is clearly evident, and the team at this administrative hub continually, it seems, strive to develop the work and reputation of the Societies through developing knowledge and understanding of the therapeutic world and enhancing the important principles and policies of an emerging and growing professional body.
- **Collective Responsibility.** One factor was 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 therapeutic community of the United Kingdom. The recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, and the achievement of AVR Register status will not lead, in the view of the Independent Assessor, to complacency. There is recognition of the responsibility in maintaining the principles and values of the Societies; meeting the needs of its members; maintaining its professional status; overseeing complaints and public protection and growing into an important player in the therapeutic community.

There is also recognition within the Societies team that nothing is 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. This knowledge will undoubtedly keep the Societies aware and challenged on how others perceive them, and are committed to maintaining the standards and principles of a Professional Body seeking to represent a large and growing cohort of therapists.

The purpose of this Report has been to provide a realistic overview of the work of the Societies as observed during the Independent Assessor's site visit, and to highlight good practice. 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 highlighted or apparent. However, in view of the rapidly expanding work of the Societies - the substantial increase in membership during the past twelve months, for example - it is recommended that the Societies consider increasing staffing levels to manage the increased work-load and also to look for larger, more appropriate office accommodation. The first part of this recommendation is based on the observation that the Societies have excellent staff who communicate effectively and consistently with enquiries and enquirers; this effectiveness may be jeopardised if current members of staff leave or are absent for reasons of sickness. The point here is that there appears to be too few people trying to administer a rapidly expanding area of work. The second part of the recommendation - regarding premises/office accommodation - is to recognise the importance for key members of staff, such as the Chief Executive, to have a dedicated office. This will ensure confidentiality, as well as provide meeting and syndicate rooms which are currently not available. This final part of the Report is based on personal perception, and is not intended as a negative criticism; it is considered important to the public perception, credibility and reputation of the Societies.

The author presents and commends this Report as representing the findings of a comprehensive and extensive analysis of the Societies work established during the visit undertaken in August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

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## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR**

This Report represents the observations of the Independent Assessor's attendance at the Society Council Meeting of the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society, held on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013 in the King Edward V11 Room, Oxford and Cambridge Club in London. The meeting convened at 11-00a.m. and concluded at 3-00p.m. The role of the Independent Assessor is to be part of the overall Governance and Audit oversight of the Societies.

The meeting was chaired by the Societies Chair, Dr Chris Forester. Other members present included Liz McElligott, Society Chief Executive; Gerry Wilmore, Chair of the Professional Standards Committee, together with Lay Council Members and Administrative staff.

First impression of the meeting was its professionalism; this was generated in part by the venue and environment but, more importantly, by the fact that members of the Council Meeting take their roles seriously. The Council is very much aware of its accountability to the Registrants of the Societies, and to upholding the principles upon which the Societies are founded.

The initial part of the Meeting focused on the achievement of AVR status following accreditation by the Professional Standards Authority. This was notified to the Societies on May 21, 2013. It was highlighted that the PSA had presented Learning Points, Instructions and Conditions around the decision to recognise the Societies. These included:

- Publishing the minutes of meetings and the non-confidential parts of the Independent Assessor's Reports on Societies website to improve transparency and openness.
- Procedures to be in place to recruit Council Members in the future
- Monitoring system to ensure standards of training provided by other organisations and accepted by the Societies.
- Societies to support individuals who are unable to put complaints in writing.

The above was discussed and approved by the Council.

In addition, the Council agreed that:

- The Societies will request a report from the Independent Assessor on decisions made by the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee. This Report to be submitted to the PSA at annual review of accreditation.
- Societies are to request a report from the Independent Assessor on the progress of appointment and work of Public Protection Officer.
- Societies to communicate and explain different grades of membership.
- Societies must ensure that only Registrants make use of the AVR logo and additional benefits of accreditation.
- Societies must publish all cases and sanctions against registrant's following a professional conduct hearing on its website and on the Registrant's entry in the Register.
- The Societies are to request a report from Independent Assessor on the application of the new complaints procedure in future cases. To be submitted at annual review of accreditation.

There was further discussion around the PSA's Panel Discussion on the requirements of accreditation. This involves instructions to be implemented by the given timeframe. This was considered in depth, and there was commitment to meeting all the presented demands within the timeframe stipulated.

There was also discussion the PSA's feedback on Conflict of Interest query. As a result, the Societies now insist on office-holders signing a declaration of interest, or none.

Following discussion on the developing marketing activities and a growth in the Societies total membership over the past year, the Council then considered the Independent Assessor's Report following the appointment, and a meeting held in the same venue in March 2013.

Outstanding actions still to be implemented include:

- Written policy document on firewalling ( to be approved by Council)
- Life membership and retirement policies to be implemented
- CPD verifiability and accountability framework to be created by the Professional Standards Committee; for approval in the Autumn Council Meeting.
- CRB (Now DBS) check policy to be clear on website and in other documents.
- Websites to have greater clarity of function and distinction between member and registrant explicit on website.
- NCS Points system to be re-evaluated and phased out
- Independent Assessor to make a site visit at Administration Offices. Planned for August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013

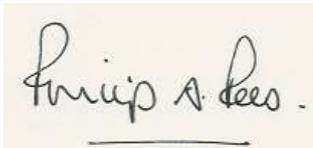
There was discussion and commitment to the implementation of these actions by the Council.

It was acknowledged that some Independent Assessor's recommendations had already been implemented:

- CPD hours to 30 hours across both Societies
- Client hotline to be installed
- Facebook Groups no longer used.
- Public Protection Officer and Chief Executive roles to become separate.

The Chair of the Professional Standard's Committee presented his report which focused on the identity of membership within the Societies and the distinction between 'Member' and 'Registrant'.

The view of the Independent Assessor is that the Societies Council Meeting upholds the principles and ethical values of both Societies, The Council Meeting also provides a forum for comprehensive discussion involving highly qualified and motivated members, on the work and reputation of the Societies, and how it must continue to meet the demands of the Professional Standards Authority and, at the same time, meet the requirements of Registrants and those who will come under the umbrella influence of both Societies.

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## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR – OVERSEEING COMPLAINTS PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES (1)**

This Report has been prepared for the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society by Dr Phillip A Rees, Independent Assessor to both Societies with responsibility for Governance and Audit.

Throughout the Report references to the ‘Societies’ are inclusive references to both the National Counselling Society and The National Hypnotherapy Society.

A series of three reports have been requested by the Professional Standards Authority on the Complaints Processes as they sit within the Governance of the Societies. This is the first of the three Reports and responds to the Professional Standards Authority’s directive that:

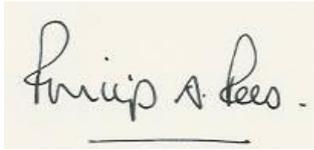
*“The Societies are to request a Report from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee (an Independent Assessor) on decisions made by the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee and the Committee itself in relation to complaints to ensure that they were fair, independent and had no evidence that interests, other than public interest, were affecting the decisions. This Report is to be submitted to the Authority at annual review of accreditation.”*

From personal research into the workings and philosophy of the Societies, it is clear that there has always been a concern for those who are connected directly or indirectly to the Societies. This has included Registrants, Training Bodies and those who come under the guidance and influence of the practitioners who are Registrants with the Societies. The Societies strive to ensure ‘fitness to practice’ from its Registrants and recognise the duty of care for those who may be therapeutically treated by Registrants. The hallmarks, therefore, of the Societies have always been around Protection, Accountability and Safeguarding. The current Complaints Procedure was established in 2012, and was created in collaboration with Jonathan Coe of *the Clinic for Boundaries Study*.

The Societies full complaints procedures and information can be accessed on the website at:

<http://nationalcounsellingsociety.org/listening-to-clients/policies/>

To ensure that the procedures and protocol are correctly and robustly applied, the Societies discuss the Protocol at the regular Societies Council meetings. It was from this executive group that the Societies structure was developed to include a *Public Protection Officer*, and a *Professional Conducts Committee*. The role of the Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit is to reinforce the necessity of independent officers to guarantee fairness and accountability. Concerns around this had been raised at a meeting in London of Societies officials, who were meeting with the Independent Assessor on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 following his appointment. The background to this was the identification of a potential conflict of interest in the dual role of the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee combined with being a lay member of the Societies Council. The Chair, Eimear McAllister, in a report to the Societies Council recognised the conflict of interest in terms of: *“as a member of the Council I would be concerned with the best interests of the Societies, while as a member of the Professional Conduct Committee I should be concerned only with ensuring a fair enquiry is conducted into allegations of wrongdoing against Registrants of the Societies.”* Identifying this potential conflict of interest the Chair summarily resigned from her lay role on the Societies, in order to fairly and independently discharge her responsibilities with the Professional Conduct Committee. As Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit, I now believe that this has removed any concern around conflict of interest for the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee. It was also identified that an additional Council member, Wayne Bateman was a member both on the Societies Council and the Professional Conduct Committee. This has now been resolved as Wayne has remained as a lay member of the Council, but has resigned from the Professional Conducts Committee. This reinforced the change in the Societies governance, as discussed in the Societies Council meeting in July 2013, that conflict of interest should be avoided in the interest of accountability, safeguarding and fairness. The role of the Independent Assessor is to oversee this and guarantee that governance policy has been implemented. I am content that this has been achieved. To underscore my confidence that this has been maintained, I received a Report from the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 relating to the single complaint that has been received in the past twelve months. This clearly indicates the fairness of the judgement of the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee without any prejudice evident. The Complaints Procedures of the Societies are executively managed by the Societies Council, and internally applied by both the Public Protection Officer and the Professional Conduct Committee. Externally, the Societies governance on the Complaints Protocol is carefully monitored by the Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit. (See Fig 1 attached)

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**February 2014**



## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR – OVERSEEING COMPLAINTS PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES (2)**

This Report has been prepared for the National Counselling Society and the National Hypnotherapy Society by Dr Phillip A Rees, Independent Assessor to both Societies with responsibility for Governance and Audit.

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A series of three reports have been requested by the Professional Standards Authority on the Complaints Processes as they sit within the Governance of the Societies. This is the second of the three Reports and responds to the Professional Standards Authority’s directive that:

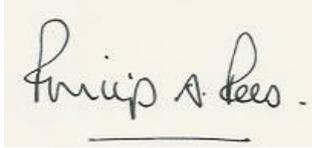
*“The Societies are to request a Report from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee (an Independent Assessor) on progress of appointment and work of the Public Protection Officer. This Report is to be submitted to the Authority at annual review of accreditation.”*

At a meeting of Societies officials with the newly appointed Independent Assessor on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the latter highlighted the potential conflict of interest for the current Public Protection Officer, who also held the position of Chief Executive. In the interest of independent governance, these roles needed to be separated as quickly as possible. It was recognised that holding both a CEO post and Public Protection

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Officer would cloud independent decision making when the interests of the Societies are also of paramount importance. This was resolved very quickly, and Faye Blackwell was appointed in 2013 as the Public Protection Officer. As Independent Assessor, I subsequently received a Report from the Public Protection Officer which indicated that there had only been one substantive complaint in the last year, where additional advice was requested from the Professional Conduct Committee. (For the protocol of managing Complaints, please see *Fig 2* attached).

As Independent Assessor, I am content that the requirements of the Professional Standards Authority have been complied with, and Societies governance now safeguards the separation, and independence, of the Public Protection Officer from any other executive role within the Societies.

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**February 2014**



## **REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR – OVERSEEING COMPLAINTS PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES (3)**

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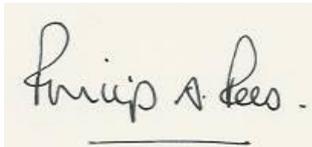
A series of three reports have been requested by the Professional Standards Authority on the Complaints Processes as they locate within the Governance of the Societies. This is the third of the three Reports and responds to the Professional Standards Authority’s directive that:

*“The Societies are to request a Report from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee (an Independent Assessor) on the application of the new complaints procedures in future cases. This Report is to be submitted to the Authority at annual review of accreditation.”*

The application of the Complaints Procedure is set out on the attached *Figure 2*. This charts the pathway of a Complaint, from the time when it is received by the Administration Team to the decision on whether it should go Tier 1 route or Tier 2. The former will normally mean that there are no serious Public Protection issues, and the decision may be finalised by the Public Protections Officer. If unsure, the complaint can be referred to the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee, and an outcome of this could be that it is referred to the ‘*Fitness to Practice*’ panel. A more serious complaint would involve Public Protection issues, and be referred through the Tier 2 route. This will automatically bring into play the Professional Conduct Committee, and invariably the ‘*Fitness to Practice*’ panel. At the conclusion of any investigation of the complaint, the decision will be conveyed to the Public Protection Officer who will convey final decision to the Complainant. This is a very comprehensive and safe process, and ensures accountability. As Independent Assessor, I am satisfied that the process – as highlighted in Fig 2 – has been closely adhered to. In the past twelve months, there has only been one substantive complaint. This did require liaison between the Public Protection Officer and the

Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee. As Independent Assessor, whose role guarantees compliance to Societies governance, I received from the Public Protection Officer all the relevant paperwork pertaining to the complaint. In addition, I received a Report from the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee who made a recommendation on the final outcome of the complaint.

The protocol (as delineated in Fig 2) closely follows the Societies Complaints Procedures established in 2012, and accessed through the Societies website. Current procedures demonstrate the efficacy of this complaints policy, and how it adheres closely to the built in premises of the Complaints Procedures of Protection, Accountability and Safeguarding. As Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit, I am satisfied and content that established policies are being closely adhered to and implemented via the established internal Officers who manage complaints, and that the Societies are provided with an independent safety net through the work of the Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit.

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**Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit February 2014**