

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR

SOCIETIES COUNCIL MEETING: JULY 2014

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 **Monday July 28th, 2014** in the King Edward V11 Room, Oxford and Cambridge Club in London.

The meeting assembled 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, and this involves attending and observing at least one Societies meeting per year.

The meeting was chaired by the Societies Chief Executive, Liz McElligott. Other members present included: Gerry Willmore, Chair of the Professional Standards Committee; Freya Bottomley, Membership Services and Marketing Manager; three Lay Council Members were also in attendance. Apologies had been received from Dr Chris Forester (Chair of the Societies); Vicky Parkinson (Societies Administrative Manager); Lucy Wightman (Deputy CEO), and Faith Clark (Lay Council Member).

As with my previous attendance at a Societies Council Meeting, the first impression of the meeting is its professionalism; this is generated, in no small part, by the splendid venue and environment of the Oxford and Cambridge Club; more importantly, it is crystal clear that members of the Council Meeting take their roles seriously, along the business agenda which is considered of paramount importance in the monitoring of the progress and the concerns of both Societies. The Council is very much aware of its accountability to the Registrants of the Societies, and to upholding the principles and values upon which the Societies are founded.

Following the welcome by the Chair to the new Societies' Council members, everyone provided a very helpful brief personal introduction and information of their professional background.

The initial business on the agenda came from the Chair of the Societies, Dr Chris Forester; he tabled a proposal that Gerry Willmore, currently the Chair of the Professional Standards Committee, be appointed as the Deputy Chair of the Societies. This was in recognition of the work that had been undertaken and achieved by Mr Willmore in the area professional standards and a range of other responsibilities.

There was discussion of this proposal and recognition of the growing contribution that has been made to the Societies by Mr Willmore. The Council unanimously approved the proposal.

There followed a presentation and Report from the Professional Standards Committee Chair, Gerry Willmore. To assist with the work of the Professional Standards Committee, it is anticipated that a new (Lay) Committee Member will be appointed in the Autumn of 2014. The Chair of the Professional Standards Committee reported on the positive impact of achieving AVR status. This recognition has resulted in different organisations approaching the Societies for information about membership, both individual and organisational. This Committee also carries responsibility for training providers who have achieved accreditation of their academic programmes with the Societies, and the Chair has been able to visit some of these providers over the preceding year, to assess their training provision and to verify that they are meeting the academic and ethical demands of the Societies.

Other Awarding Bodies, and Training Providers have expressed an interest in the accreditation process of the Societies since achieving AVR status and recognition.

This Report was adopted by the Council members.

Chief Executive, Liz McElligott provided a brief report on behalf of the Society Admin Manager Vicky Parkinson. This gave an insight into the working mechanics of the Societies. It included an overview of the administration team, and the strengthening of the computers and IT support structures, and the regular training updates on technology developments for all the staff. There was also a helpful discussion focussing on membership figures – which continue to grow healthily – and how the Societies differentiate between registrants and non-registrants.

This Report was adopted by the Council members.

The Council Meeting included a comprehensive overview of developments from the Chief Executive, Liz McElligott.

In particular, the Council recorded the successful achievement of the annual review of both Societies AVR status. The Council acknowledged and recorded the role of the Chief Executive in maintaining and developing the national profile of the Societies.

As part of the developmental work of the Societies, the Council was advised that a new Deputy Chief Executive, Lucy Wightman, had been appointed. She will have responsibility for audits and Registers for both Societies. The auditing of the work of the Societies is constantly under scrutiny, and it was helpful to hear that the Societies are constantly looking at ways of reviewing, revising and developing the audit procedures. It was acknowledged that the Independent Assessor has a key role in this process.

The Chief Executive also made Council members aware of the concerns and complaints that have been received by the Societies during 2013-2014. The Council was advised that the Societies will review their current Complaints procedures, and Eimear McAllister, the Societies Lay Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee, will be an essential part of this process. The Societies are constantly looking at the renewing, reviewing and updating of policies and procedures to ensure that standards are maintained.

The CEO also made the Council aware that there was a plan to review and update the Societies existing *Conflict of Interest Policies* and related processes and procedures.

This Report was adopted by the Council Members.

The Independent Assessor and other Council members welcomed the opportunity of meeting with the newly appointed Marketing and Membership Services Manager, Freya Bottomley, who presented a report on the development of this important area of the Societies work. This included information on the expanding coverage and elevated profile of the Societies on social media; it was encouraging to hear that there was increasing interest in the work of the Societies from members of the public, and many organisations engaging in disciplines covered by both Societies.

The Council was informed of the CPD programme; there has been a good response numerically to these regional meetings, and more are being planned for 2015.

The Council was also informed that the Societies have a stand at the Labour Party Conference in September, 2014 and Camexpo in October, 2014.

The Independent Assessor understands the rationale for the contact with political groups and parties – particularly, in light of the next General Election in May 2015.

This Report was unanimously adopted by the Council members.

The post-lunch session of the Council Meeting included a fascinating insight into the work and processes of the Professional Standards Authority, provided by Mr Rick Borges, the Professional Standards Authority AVR Accreditation Manager. As the official observer, it was encouraging to perceive the close relationship that has emerged between the Societies and the PSA.

The Council heard that the PSA has existed since 2003, having previously been called the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE). The Accreditation Manager informed the Council Members of the close links with NHS England, and its recognition within the new commissioning developments; in addition, he made the Council aware of the international interest in the AVR scheme.

The Council was also informed of the consultation with private health care insurers on how to recognise and reimburse treatments from practitioners who are on an AVR register. It was interesting to hear that the PSA is currently talking to Comic Relief to help build recognition of the AVR scheme, and the AVR/PSA website is currently being developed to assist public clarity.

The question was raised as to the oversight of PSA itself – who is it accountable to? Mr Borges explained that the PSA reports to the Parliament's Health and Select Committee, and they are funded by the Department of Health.

The Council discussed the current fee structure, being aware of affordability towards smaller organisations. Mr Borges indicated that this was unlikely to change, though there is a cluster model that is available to smaller organisations, and it may be possible for some smaller organisation to discuss financial assistance with the Department of Health.

The clarification from Mr Borges of the workings of the PSA was welcomed by the Council members as it had helped to answer a number of questions previously tabled.

Independent Assessor's comments:

At the last Council Meeting attended by the Independent Assessor in July 2013, the following proposals were made:

- *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.*
- *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.*

The Independent Assessor can confirm that all this has been complied with.

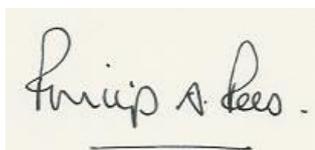
In addition, at the same 2013 meeting, it was acknowledged that, following recommendations from the Independent Assessor, remained outstanding:

- *Written policy document on firewalling (to be approved by Council)*
- *Life membership and retirement policies to be implemented*
- *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*

- *'Approved' course to be replaced with 'Quality Checked' level*

The Independent Assessor can confirm that these recommendations have now been implemented. The Independent Assessor requested in the 2014 Council Meeting that his (2013) proposal about the Societies arranging random clinic visits be reconsidered, and agreed that this can be discussed when he makes a site visit to the new Societies Offices in the Autumn of 2014.

The conclusion of the Independent Assessor is that the Societies Council Meeting upholds the principles and ethical values of both Societies, and this has been reflected in the tabling and adoption of the various Reports received during the meeting. 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 continues to meet the demands of the Professional Standards Authority and, at the same time, addresses the requirements of Members and Registrants and those who come under the umbrella influence of both Societies.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature reads "Phillip A. Rees" in a cursive script. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Dr Phillip A Rees **BA(Hons), PhD(Psychology), DipCPC, DipPTSC, CertSuper, MISMA, FColIT, FRSA**

Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit,
National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society