

ANNUAL REPORT

The National Counselling Society and
Hypnotherapy Society

Presented by Dr. Phillip A Rees

BA(Hons), ThD, PhD(Psychology), DipCPC, DipPTSC, CertSuper, MISMA, FRSPH, FCIEA, FColIT, FRSA

Independent Assessor for Governance and Audit

National Counselling Society and National Hypnotherapy Society

INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR REPORT FOLLOWING VIRTUAL SITE VISIT ON JANUARY 26th, 2021



This Report is presented by Dr. Phillip A. Rees, Independent Assessor responsible for Governance and Audit within the National Counselling Society and Hypnotherapy Society. The Report is the written outcome of a virtual visit/contact with the national administrative and management hub of the Societies at 19 Grafton Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1QT on Tuesday January 26th, 2021. Originally, this on-site annual visit had been planned for October 2020, and then November/December 2020 but, due to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the arrangements for the visit were delayed until early 2021. Following national lockdown on January 4th, 2021 it was decided that, to comply with government guidelines, the visit/contact should go ahead virtually, and the January 26th, 2021 date was agreed.

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 decision made at a meeting of the Societies Governance and Audit Committee 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 identified the importance of regular visits (Annually) to the Societies head offices as a means of supporting and monitoring the foundational procedures, combined with underscoring the 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 has been a change of Chief Executive Officer combined with the challenges of delivering the Societies range of Services during the COVID-19 crisis. The primary function of the virtual visit, as on previous on-site 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 Chief Executive arranged an agenda of meetings for the Independent Assessor between 10.30am and 3.00pm on January 26th, 2021. This included conversations with:

Meg Moss - CEO

Camilla Firth and Pauline Munday - Membership Services

Kate Mahoney - Head of Professional (Training) Standards

Jacqui Gumbrell - Training Standards Assistant/CPD Co-ordinator.

Amy Bristow - Business Operations
Elaine Lighten - Communications
Jyles Robillard-Day - Assistant CEO

Due to changing personnel, there was no meeting or Report from the Public Protection Officer. As this carries a separate Report, it is anticipated that a meeting will be arranged, virtually, in the near future, or await a further site visit from the Independent Assessor to fulfil this requirement.

A principal reason for the annual visit of the Independent Assessor is to reinforce the Societies commitment to the standards of transparency and accountability towards members, registrants, service users and the Professional Standards Authority, through regular and ongoing assessment and analysis of administrative and management systems and processes.

The Content of the Visit

Content of the virtual visit/contact involved conversations with personnel from Membership Services, Training Standards and CPD, Business Operations, Communications and concluded with conversations with CEO and Assistant CEO.

(Virtual) Meeting with Camilla Firth, Head of Membership Services and Pauline Munday Membership Services Team Leader.

Membership Services act as a front door to the services of the National Counselling Society. To achieve this day-today management and administration of the Societies business, there is a strong administrative team currently led by Camilla Firth, Head of Membership Services and Pauline Munday, Membership Services Team Leader, assisted by 3 Membership Services Officers. The Independent Assessor is pleased to record the important contribution that Membership Services make to the smooth running of the Societies. There has been some streamlining of the Membership Services structure and provision in the past year and this has further improved the service provision to Members, Registrants, Training Providers and Organisations and to the wider Counselling and Hypnotherapy sectors.

Membership Services audits general enquiries, student applications, membership and Registrant applications in addition to the processing of payments. The Administration team meet regularly together to share any concerns, questions or pressures that may emanate from the counselling and hypnotherapy sectors, and these are generally relayed to the team through members, registrants and service users.

The following are changes and developments which have been a response to the COVID-19 public health crisis and government guidelines around lockdown:

1. A change from paper-based applications for Membership to electronic forms. A link is available on the NCS website for applicants to download and complete all relevant forms. These are uploaded automatically to Membership Services team to process. This prevents postal applications being lost in transit. However, for those without internet access, Membership Services can still provide paper applications. This new approach has greatly improved the time

that it takes to process applications, and storage of all the applications is now electronic and negates the need for paper filing and is, therefore, more confidential and secure.

2. From the beginning of the pandemic restrictions, Membership Services started to record monthly Membership totals including net growth and loss each month. In addition, there was a record kept of all emails received, applications received and applications awaiting assessment. This allows more direction for the Membership Services Team to prioritise different tasks, as required.

The Independent Assessor can confidently report that the Societies have an excellent Membership Services Team, who collectively provide a wide range of skills and levels of competency, and not a little commitment to the ethos of the Societies, and work to ensure that good communication is preserved between the Societies and the Registrants, and the wider therapeutic communities and service users. Membership Services also 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 consolidation of the Societies. To reiterate comments above, however, no-one underestimates the importance of commitment to high standards and quality service provision. The view of the Independent Assessor is that the Membership Services Team achieves its aim of being the front door to the Societies, and in no small part contributes to the increase in the quality of services that the Societies provide.

(Virtual) Meeting with Kate Mahoney, Head of Professional Standards.

The Head of Professional Standards carries the responsibilities of overseeing and advising on the following:

- Policy and procedures of applications
- Individual members' audits
- Training provider audits
- Government and regulation issues
- Relations with other professional associations

The brief of the Professional Standards Committee is to review and update the Society's internal processes and procedures where professional standards are concerned and maintain an awareness of all external issues that may impact upon the profession of counselling and psychotherapy.

The Professional Standards Manager has an influential impact on the reputation and development of Professional Standards and remains committed to extending the reputation of the Society upon training, and, in particular, accredited training, within the sector of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

The role of the Professional Standards Manager is also to consider the delivery of recognized courses by Training Providers. This involves examination of course content and the assessment process. An important, if not crucial, part of the role is to maintain and extend/develop standards. This involves fielding

questions about training information, combined with considering complex membership applications. As with membership of the Societies, there is an exponential growth of recognized and accredited training providers.

The last twelve months have been very challenging for Training Standards as they have worked to support training providers meet the demands of online learning with the added complexities around virtual assessment of learning. Many training providers now talk about blended learning: Training Standards have also been involved in developing the understanding of Synchronistic Tutoring - working at enabling teaching staff to develop their roles from simply teaching online to tutoring online and being involved in all aspects of the group learning process; that is, involvement in role-play, in the classroom discussions and presentations, essays and reflective learning and exploring the transition between levels and qualifications.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

In addition to the above, the involvement and influence of the Society is extending in different sectors and with a growing number of training providers.

1. Over the past twelve months, there has been an increase in the number of training providers combined with the recognition of new courses - these include Quality Checked and Advanced Specialist training courses. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There are other new training providers in the pipeline who are seeking recognition of their courses.

2. [REDACTED]
3. There has been very positive and affirming feedback from Training Providers during the COVID lockdown period with appreciative comments on the support received from the Society and, in particular, from the Head of Professional and Training Standards and the Training Standards Assistant/CPD Co-coordinator.
4. Over the past year there has been a number of colleges and training providers who have expressed an interest in NCS training recognition. This indicates the growing influence of the NCS in both private and public sectors.

3. The Training Standards Assistant/CPD Co-ordinator, Jacqui Gumbrell, has been with the Society for two years and works 4 days each week - 2 days on Training Standards and 2 days on CPD. Jacqui assumed responsibility for the 2020 CPD calendar in 2019 and liaised with all tutors and venues to design a comprehensive calendar of events for members of both Societies. These events were

impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions, and all face-to-face events were cancelled and transferred to online training. This has resulted in a positive response and many courses have been sold out as soon as invitations were circulated online. These have enabled participants from across the country to attend events which they may not have been able to attend if only face-to-face attendance were offered. [REDACTED]

The calendar of 2021 events will be a blending of online and face-to-face events. Online events only will be delivered during the first quarter of 2021 with the hope that face-to-face events will be introduced as government guidelines allow. [REDACTED]

The Independent Assessor acknowledges that, through the leadership of the Head of Professional Standards and Training Standards Assistant together with the Professional Standards Committee, Professional Standards remains fundamental to the credibility and accountability of the work of the Societies and recognizes its importance to the overall effectiveness of the work of the Societies.

(Virtual) Meeting with Amy Bristow, Business Operations Manager.

Amy Bristow was appointed to the role of Business Operations Manager in January 2021 having previously held the posts of Head of Membership Services from June 2020 and Office Manager from May 2019. Amy had previously worked at the NCS between 2014 and 2015 as a Society Administrator. Previous external experience includes that of Litigation Executive with a firm of Solicitors and Senior Case Administrator with Sussex Police.

The responsibilities for the new Business Operations Manager include:

- (i) Overseeing Accounts
- (ii) Monitoring and Development of Websites
- (iii) Vari-Desk Platform
- (iv) Consideration of an online Chat facility
- (v) Liaison with CEO
- (vi) Regular weekly meetings with other staff members.

The Societies are fortunate to have someone in post who has a sound working knowledge of the NCS and, at the same time, brings a range of skills and experience from previous employment sectors. The principal role for the new Business Operations Manager is to bring together and streamline systems of working that may have previously been disjointed.

(Virtual) Meeting with Elaine Lighten (Societies Communication Manager)

Elaine Lighten was appointed to the role of Societies Communication Manager in August 2020, having previously worked in Membership Services.

Since August 2020, the Communication Manager's main role and focus has been the development of the Societies' monthly magazines and creating a visually appealing and interactive online magazine. The format of the new publications is more in the form of a Journal than a Newsletter and is being favourably received by the Membership. The Independent Assessor has heard very positive comments and feedback from Members and Registrants, and Training Organisations, who receive the new publications. The NCS publication is called 'Counselling Matters' and is published on the 1st of each month and the Hypnotherapy publication, called 'Hypnotherapy Today' is published on the 15th of the month.

The Communication Manager is also tasked with the responsibility of developing social media on Twitter, FaceBook and LinkedIn. There has been a steady increase and growth of those engaging in social media and the total number of those using these platforms is now over 47.000. The goal is to increase growth and engagement with the social media platforms in addition to developing closer collaboration with recognized organisations and training providers. Other projects include transforming documents into the more friendly, flipbook formats as well as developmental work on the Societies website to ensure that everything runs faster. This will be of particular benefit with new online courses produced by the Societies.

This role is an exciting and developing one, and has a manager who is eager to extend an even greater collaboration - engaging and interactive - with Members, Registrants and Organisations/Training Providers using monthly publications, social media and training guides. The aim of the Communications Manager is to enhance the 'Member Led' slogan of the Societies in her current role and future development plans.

(Virtual) Meeting with Jyles Robillard-Day (Societies Assistant CEO)

The role of Assistant CEO was created on August 1st, 2020. The new appointee, Jyles Robillard-Day brings a wealth of experience from the commercial sector with additional management and advocacy skills.

The primary role of the Assistant CEO is to identify and challenge unjust barriers to employment for NCS members; to develop the recognition of the NCS in the wider sectors; to monitor Parliamentary debates and to liaise with MP's accordingly; to monitor competitors and to assess opinions from within the counselling professional bodies and to take a lead role in the SCoPED debate and discussions. Barriers to employment have been identified in EAP's, Private Sector, Public Sector and Third Sector.

[REDACTED]

A further role is one of advocacy within educational establishments, at FE or HE/Universities to ensure that students are made aware of the choice of professional bodies membership which will include the NCS.

[REDACTED]

The Assistant CEO recognizes that the remit of the new role is a wide one and will involve supporting various committees with the Deputy CEO and focusing on important issues as they are become highlighted [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Assistant CEO has joined the NCS at a challenging time for the Societies and the wider therapy community. Confronting the ‘closed shop’ and monopolistic practices of various organisations is a challenging prospect. However, the NCS has appointed someone to this new role who brings professional and robust skills and wide employment experience, who will focus on the above from a full-time perspective rather than leaving these challenges as just one element within the wider portfolio of the NCS.

(Virtual) Meeting with Meg Moss, Chief Executive Officer.

Meg Moss was appointed as the substantive CEO with the Societies from March 1st, 2020 having held the Acting CEO role since November 2020, following the departure of the previous CEO, and having covered the Deputy CEO role whilst that post-holder was on maternity leave, prior to that. The CEO brings to her new role, knowledge and experience of the Societies from her work within the NCS over a number of years. There was also a sense of a ‘Baptism of Fire’ as the new CEO engaged with her new role at a time of the COVID-19 restrictions and changing patterns of work for both the team at NCS Head Office and also for all the Members, Registrants and Training Providers of the Societies. The new CEO has approached her new role with rigor and determination in addressing the range of issues which have created some upheaval for the Societies and to the wider Counselling and Hypnotherapy communities as a result of the Public Health crisis.

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 and, in addition, to addressing the needs of Registrants and prospective Registrants. The maintenance of ethical and professional standards and quality of services also 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). As a result of recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, the Societies retain a large footprint on the national therapy map. There are a growing number of Professional Bodies who have achieved AR status with the PSA, and this recognition and status accords both kudos and credibility to both Societies. However, neither accepts 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 any PSA Action Points to preserve the PSA status, whenever and wherever they may be required. The Chief Executive works closely with the Independent Assessor in ensuring that the auditing and governance of the Societies remains of paramount importance in terms of public recognition and accountability.

The Chief Executive ensures that standards are maintained *vis-à-vis* Registrants of the Societies and works closely to ensure that the standards and quality of training provided by external training 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 providers; this involves close liaison with all members of staff in the national office.

All of the above would have been a challenge to anyone appointed to the role of the CEO, and this has been additionally challenged by the pandemic crisis over the past year. The structures of the Societies have been addressed to enable the CEO to focus and prioritise on developmental areas for the Societies. The range of responsibilities overseen by the CEO is now shared with the Deputy CEO and the newly created role of Assistant CEO.

A range of important areas were considered, in reviewing what had changed over the past twelve months. This included discussions on the challenges and problems that need to be addressed. An important area for discussion has been recent consultation with the PSA regarding the future recognition of Professional Bodies.

Other areas which have been part of the remit of the CEO in the past year have included:

- (i) Changing structures of NCS management and administration.
- (ii) New Framework for Counselling Children and Young People.
- (iii) Development of the new Websites for the Societies.
- (iv) Reviewing of Membership Fees
- (v) SCoPED project and the way it is impacting upon the counselling landscape.
- (vi) Continued growth of membership within the Societies.
- (vii) Reviewing the barriers to recognition and Accreditation status for both the NCS in particular and Members and Registrants in general.

The above highlights the influence of the CEO in underscoring the involvement and influence of the Society within the professional sectors and the growth of its collaboration with all Healthcare Professionals, combined with the challenges that continue to face the NCS. The NCS is fortunate to have

a CEO who provides experience, dedication and commitment to the upholding of Standards and to the ongoing growth and development of the Societies.

The Outcome and Conclusions of the 2021 Virtual Visit/Contact

The Independent Assessor visits the Societies offices on an annual basis to ensure that an objective view of the work of the Societies can be guaranteed, and to ensure that transparency and accountability are clearly evidenced, and to ratify the demands of quality assurance. The following comments and observations echo and consolidate the conclusions proffered in the previous Annual Report (2019), given the unusual circumstances brought about as a result of the pandemic health crisis:

- **Communication.** There is continuing and excellent communication processes in place to ensure that enquirers speak with members of a team who are able to provide a constant, consistent and knowledgeable voice on the work of the Societies; this includes established members and Registrants of the Societies, potential members and Registrants, corporate bodies and organisations, professional bodies in the world of counselling, psychology, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, and educational/awarding bodies seeking information about accreditation status. The Independent Assessor's conclusion is 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, Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant CEO, Head of Professional and Training Standards/CPD, Membership Services, Business Manager, Communications Manager and includes all members of the Membership Team. This is contributing to the ongoing 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 Magazines. There is sound knowledge and understanding of the Societies, and all its policies including Complaints and the DBS and GDPR requirements. The collective competencies also ensure quality of management and administration in addition to the dissemination of accurate information. This virtual visit also echoed the ongoing commitment to quality and standards. Quality assurance underpins and reinforces the governance work of the Societies, and underscores good practice.
- **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 dedicated 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.

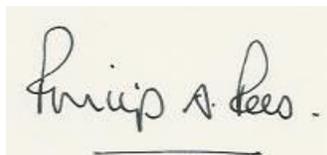
- **Collective Responsibility.** One factor was again outstanding during the virtual visit of the Independent Assessor to the Societies, and that is the clear intention to continue growing and developing as a major player in the professional therapeutic community of the United Kingdom, and beyond. The recognition by the Professional Standards Authority, and the achievement and maintenance of AR Register status will not lead, however, 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 a leading player in the therapeutic arena.

There is also awareness that nothing is ever perfect, and that there is always room for improvement. Changes are inevitable in all areas of marketing, advertising, communication and the promotion of all that the Societies represents. The Societies recognise that there is no room for complacency. The visit by the Independent Assessor concludes that the Societies remain 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 virtual site visit/contact on January 26th, 2021 and to highlight good practice and identify areas for development and improvement. At the same time, the intention is 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.

It is important to also record that all objective and action points from any previous Independent Assessor Report have been achieved.

The Independent Assessor presents and commends this Report as representing the comprehensive findings of an extensive analysis of the Societies work considered during the virtual visit/contact of the Independent Assessor with the National Counselling Society and Hypnotherapy Society on Tuesday January 26th, 2021.

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

Dr. Phillip A Rees BA(Hons),ThD, PhD(Psychology), DipCPC, DipPTSC, CertSuper, MISMA, FRSPH, FCollT, FCIEA, FRSA
Independent Assessor

Registered MBACP Senior Accredited Counsellor/Psychotherapist
Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors
Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health
Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts
Fellow of the College of Teachers