



Minutes of Societies Council Meeting

Wednesday 7th of October 2020

Via Zoom

In attendance:

Chris Forester (Societies Chair)
Meg Nunn (CEO Societies)
Elaine Lighten (Societies Communications Manager)
Jacqui Gumbrell (Societies Training Standards Assistant)
Amy Bristow (Societies Head of Membership Services)
Jyles Robillard-Day (Societies Assistant CEO)
Samantha Hurdley (Societies Public Protection Officer)
Rob Kidd (Lay Council Member)
Ros Wright (Lay Council Member)
Phil Rees (Independent Assessor)

Apologies:

Kate Mahoney (Societies Head of Professional Standards)
Freya Bottomley (Societies Deputy CEO)

The meeting was opened, and all were welcomed to the meeting. Thanks were given to all for attending.

It was confirmed by all that there were no declarations or conflicts of interest.

The minutes of the last Council Meeting were agreed by the Council, with no changes to make and no questions.

Report from the CEO

The new CEO, Meg Nunn, opened the meeting by discussing the change in leadership. In November last year our previous CEO, Vicky Parkinson, left the Society. This meant that Meg stepped into the Acting CEO role, having been covering in the Deputy CEO role while Freya Bottomley was on Maternity leave, and was covering both roles from November 2019 until Freya's return in February 2020. Meg was appointed CEO in a permanent capacity from the 1st of March 2020, due to her handling of the role throughout her time as Acting CEO.

Unfortunately, due to the major upheaval in the Societies from the end of 2019/beginning of 2020, the subsequent Covid-19 Public Health Crisis, internal staffing issues, and the lack of uptake with regards to our advertisements for Lay Council Members, this is the first Council Meeting in 2020. We do intend to hold a further meeting in December 2020 so that we at least have two meetings this year.

The Professional Standards Authority review is still ongoing, due to Covid-19 having a significant impact on the PSA themselves. We have had some questions from our Annual Reaccreditation form that we submitted in April, and they're due to go back before the 14th of October.

We attached a copy of the Targeted Review questions for the Council to review.

We have no concerns about any of the questions raised, and so we're confident that the re-accreditation will go through successfully. We'll hopefully be able to update again at the next Council Meeting.

Due to the changes at the Society with the CEO leaving, and Deputy CEO working on a part-time basis, we have recruited two new roles to develop areas of the business that were previously part of the portfolio for the CEO and Deputy CEO: Assistant CEO, and Communications Manager. We have also recruited a Head of Private Practice to support our members who are self-employed and working in their own practices.

The Deputy CEO role now deals with organisational memberships and partnerships, and is currently two days a week with a view to increasing at Freya's pace.

The Assistant CEO role will be covered more in-depth by Jyles later on, but covers political issues, blocks to recognition for our members.

The Communications Manager role is looking after and enhancing our social media, our newsletter (which has been transformed into a monthly magazine), and other guidance as produced by our Head of Private Practice.

The Head of Private Practice works one day a week currently, and produces documents and guidance to support our members, based on primary research through questionnaires and direct conversations.

We have published a framework for counselling Children and Young People, which is an excellent document intended to support those who work with clients which you can find here:

<http://cm.nationalcounsellingsociety.org/books/jlcx> This was a great deal of work and a labour of love by our Ambassador for Children and Young People, Kate Day.

Our new websites for both Societies are now live and mostly working; there have been some teething issues, but members are now able to manage their memberships online, our Membership Services team are working from one system to manage members instead of two, and many administrative processes have been cut down. We are also planning further work to streamline the administrative processes even further, by allowing members to apply online and have instant access to the Members' Area of the website.

We're currently undergoing a review of our Membership Fees, including the removal of an administration fee, and allowing members to pay monthly via direct debit. The idea is to make membership costs more accessible to all, especially those on a low income, and to make them more manageable from an administrative perspective. We are modelling projections on how any changes may impact the cash flow of the Society, and would welcome any input if the Council have any thoughts on this. More information will be provided about this at the next meeting when we have finalised the changes.

The recruitment of new Lay Council Members is still ongoing from the last Council Meeting, but Meg has an interview booked in with a prospective Council Member, and more applications to review. We are hopeful that we will have a full complement of Lay Members by the next meeting in December.

The SCoPEd project, a joint project between three other Counselling & Psychotherapy Accredited Registers (BACP, UKCP, and BPC), is already having an effect on the counselling landscape despite not having been formally launched. It's framed as a mapping exercise, looking at the abilities and competencies of counsellors and psychotherapists in order to more easily explain and sell counselling and psychotherapy to employers, such as the NHS etc. [REDACTED]

We have applied to the Professional Standards Authority to add a number of new titles to our Register: Person Centred Experiential Therapist; Children & Young Persons Therapist; Life Coach; Psychosexual, Relationship and Couple Therapists. This is in response to the increasing medicalisation of counselling and psychotherapy and the looming threat of statutory regulation, as we want practitioners to be able to still have access to an Accredited Register should the title of Counsellor or Psychotherapist become overly medicalised or regulated. It also allows for recognition of specialisations in particular fields. We're aware that there are more and other specialisations, so these are just a starting point.

Our membership levels have grown significantly since the last Council Meeting, which has represented a significant challenge to the Societies to meet the demand with such a small team, and with the significant interruption of Covid-19. We're so delighted to be able to say that our members are giving us very positive feedback, however, and we're hopeful for what the future will bring when we are able to leverage more technology to streamline our administrative processes even further, leaving the Membership Services team to continue doing what they're best at – providing an excellent service to our members.

Report from the Head of Membership Services

There have been a number of changes over the past year within the department. Firstly, the name of Administration Department has changed following consultation with our contracted HR company. The focus for the Administration Team was primarily admin orientated however, due to an increase in individuals joining the Societies', to maintain our excellent reputation and continued growth, a high-quality customer service and support was required.

Following implementation of more automated and streamlined processes a restructure was adopted. This resulted in the Administration Team becoming the Membership Services Team. The structure of the Administration Team was previously the Administration Manager, the Administration Team leader, and two Administrators.

The changes enacted with the restructure now provides for a Head of Membership Services, a Membership Services Team Leader, two Permanent Membership Services Officers, and one Temporary Membership Services Officer.

Due to staff changes, two Membership Services Officers, Natalie and Katy, were recruited in late May. The decision was recently made to have a Temporary Membership Services Officer, Julie, who started with the Societies' at the end of September for 6 months with the potential of the post becoming a permanent role.

Following discussions held in early 2020 linked to the Covid-19 public health crisis and lockdown, we changed our paper-based application forms to electronic forms. Following extensive research and testing, we are currently using third party software which enables a number of template forms. A link is then available on our websites for applicants to download and complete the relevant form. These are then automatically sent to the Membership Services Team to process and the applicant can download a copy. The forms are much more accessible to prospective applicants and prevents a loss of paperwork or being lost in transit. For those without internet access we are still able to send out paper forms.

The forms have also enabled us to move away from bank standing orders and utilise our 3rd party Direct Debit software. As we have more control over Direct Debit payments we can easily see if instructions are cancelled and amend instructions on behalf of our members which we couldn't do before with standing orders. This should result in less payment issues such as overpayments, members not cancelling their standing orders and bank errors.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

At the start of the current pandemic, the Head of Membership Services started to record monthly figures with membership totals including the net growth and loss of members each month. She also record daily figures for all emails received, applications received and application awaiting assessment. This has provided more direction for the team to prioritise different tasks due to demand.

[REDACTED]

The Council did not have any questions for the Head of Membership Services.

The Chair shared his gratitude to the Membership Services team, who have done a wonderful job supporting members throughout the pandemic in spite of their own personal upheaval, increased workload, and tech issues.

Report from the Deputy CEO

The Deputy CEO has attended many key meetings, events and discussions since she has returned from maternity leave in February this year, now working two days per week.

The Deputy CEO has attended 3 meetings of the Diversity and Inclusion Coalition so far this year. We helped set up this coalition for Diversity and Inclusion which has members from across the profession, including Place2be who now Chair the meetings. We are working together to improve diversity in the counselling profession which includes increasing/improving cultural diversity in training.

[Redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Additional areas that the Assistant CEO is working on is supporting the committees with the Deputy CEO; there is already a Chair in place for the Northern Ireland Committee. The aim of committee is as a networking tool for members to link up, which, if it goes well we'll roll out to other regions.

The Assistant CEO is also in contact with one of our Ambassadors for the Hypnotherapy Society, working on a document about the benefits of hypnotherapy to share with EAPs.

The Chair gave thanks to the Assistant CEO for jumping with both feet into a difficult role. He acknowledged that it can be disheartening, with the NCS facing a closed shop and monopolistic practice. It is good to have that role being taken care of by someone who can focus on it full time, rather than it just being one element of the CEO's portfolio.

Ros Wright asked about a current area of sensitivity with Transgender issues; is this an issue for the counselling members. The CEO replied that it certainly is a sensitive issue that evokes many strong feelings, as we are seeing on Social Media and in the news, but that we work closely with our Ambassador Dominic Davies of Pink Therapy on these issues, and have published Good Practice Guidance on working with Gender and Sexual Relationship Diversity, including a list of resources that will help members to learn more about the topic.

There were no other questions from the Council.

Report from the Public Protection Officer

Since the last panel meeting, the Public Protection Officer has moved from the UK and has been working remotely. She will sadly be leaving the Society at the beginning of November.

Between February 2020 – May 2020 no complaints and few concerns were received. This is unprecedented within the PPO's time in the role and directly in line with the difficulties around pandemic shutdown faced by the UK. The wide 'in it together survival mode' mentality may have impacted this lack of contact regarding complaints specifically.

During this time the PPO spent some time assisting membership team with general enquiries as it was an extremely busy time for them.

Thus far there has been only one complaint which directly relates to the pandemic situation. This was a specific 'no contact from counsellor' issue. The Society chose to step in immediately to ensure welfare. Following this the complaint was withdrawn as satisfactory forward plan was arranged.

Our members have faced huge changes in proactively adjusting their working arrangements and we believe it is a testament to them that they managed this situation so well that clients have felt supported and held.

The Society has issued updates to the Code of Ethics to assist members navigate recent changes to work arrangements in line with government advice.

Duty of Candour and whistleblowing safeguarding guidance is now detailed on our websites.

Members of the Complaints panel have stepped down recently citing current pandemic situation and self-care needs as priority. Feedback has been invited and new member recruitment is beginning.

Details of the current snapshot in with regard to Complaints were shared with the Council.

The Council had no questions for the Public Protection Officer.

The Chair gave thanks to the PPO for the work she has done over the past few years, noting that it is the most challenging role in the Societies because of the issues it deals with. The Chair shared that the PPO had done a sterling job during her time in the role, and that we are very grateful.

Report from the Head of Professional Standards

The report was given by the Training Standards Assistant, as the Head of Professional Standards had to give her apologies for this meeting.

[REDACTED]

Since September 2019 we have had numerous expressions of interest for course recognition from both new and existing training providers. We continue to develop relationships with these interested parties and offer support and guidance with regards to the application process.

Due to changes in course criteria; unsatisfactory management of course delivery and/or significant/continual breaches of T&Cs we have revoked course recognition [REDACTED]

Jacqui Gumbrell took over the responsibility of the 2020 CPD calendar last year and liaised with all tutors and venues to compile a calendar of events for members of both Societies. With the Covid-19 situation she had to cancel all Face to Face events from March and worked with tutors to plan online training. This was initially for four months but later applied to the whole year. Online CPD has proved extremely popular and enabled members from all parts of the country to attend events that they may not have been able to attend in person. Many events sold out as soon as invitations were sent and as they were online we were able to offer multiple dates for the most popular courses.

There were 50 online events run between 30th March and 30th September. Prior to lockdown there were 17 Face to Face events held in 2020. We have another 35 events left on the calendar for this year.

Planning for the 2021 calendar has already begun with the contacting of all interested tutors. Events for at least the first quarter of the year will be online with Face to Face training being reintroduced as and when guidelines allow. Going forward the calendar will consist of a combination of online and Face to Face events.

Jacqui has updated and expanded upon existing CPD procedures including starting a CPD manual for training and reference purposes.

Between the 1st of September 2019 and the 30th of September 2020, we have run 65 face to face courses and 50 online courses, serving a total number of 1032 attendees.

[REDACTED]

The Council had no questions for the Head of Professional Standards.

Report from the Communications Manager

Elaine Lighten was recently employed as the Society's Communications Manager, having previously worked in Membership Services. She merged from Membership Services in early July 2020, making a move to Communications Manager full-time in August 2020.

Since August 2020, the Communications Manager's main focus has been on taking the Societies' monthly newsletters and creating a more visually appealing and interactive online magazine. These are published once per month for each Society, with the NCS' magazine published on the 1st of each month, and the HS' magazine being published on the 15th of each month. So far, we have published two editions of the NCS' magazine, Counselling Matters, and one edition of the HS' magazine, Hypnotherapy Here & Now.

Both magazines have been popular with members; we have received positive feedback from both and regularly receive content submissions from members directly. We have also begun advertising within the magazine, generating some additional revenue. [REDACTED]

The Communications Manager has also been taking care of our social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. We have had regular engagement on posts, as well as steady growth, [REDACTED]

The goal with the Societies' social media is to increase growth and engagement, as well as become more collaborative with our recognised organisations and training providers.

Other projects that the Communications Manager has been working on include transforming documents into user friendly, flipbook formats. The most notable document has been TIPP – Setting Up in Private Practice, which has received great feedback with additional publications planned for the future from our Head of Private Practice. Other documents include our CYP framework and our communications guidance.

The Communications Manager has also been working on our counsellingcpd.org website, liaising with an outsourced web developer to fix bot issues and get the website running faster, with great success. We have recently published a course on Working with Eating Disorders, that is due to be promoted shortly.

The long-term goal for the Communications Manager is to be more collaborative, engaging and interactive with our members, via the magazine, social media and guides. She wants to encompass our slogan of being 'member led' in the future work that she does.

The Chair noted that the Communications Manager has done a great job on the new magazines; members love them. Moving from a long, scrolling newsletter format has been an ambition for the Societies for such a long time, and we're delighted to see it in place.

The Council had no questions for the Communications Manager.

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Ros Wright noted that most counselling is now being done via the telephone or online, and asked if there were any extra demands being placed on counsellors. The CEO noted that there certainly were extra demands, and we saw this through the significant additional contact we received from our members, especially at the outset of the pandemic and during lockdown.

Ros Wright asked how much of our mission is to try and get more publicity for counselling itself, with people in dire need of counselling during Covid; the stress must be enormous, so it's likely that people would turn to counsellors. The CEO explained that we did launch an initiative at the beginning of lockdown with regard to Counselling for Key Workers, which was initially taken up well, but with the subsequent flood of similar services especially those provided through the NHS it was effectively drowned out. However, we have also sat on a Mental Health Roundtable along with Sir Norman Lamb and Dr Rosena Allin-Khan in which we were able to highlight the importance of support from counsellors and using the workforce that we have in place already.

The CEO wanted to extend thanks to the Public Protection Officer for her hard work over the years at the Society, and for the wonderful work she has done in reshaping our complaints process. The Public Protection Officer was offered Fellowship of the Society as recognition for her contribution to the profession.