

Minutes of Register Advisory Panel

Friday 28th June

Meeting Time 2pm – 5pm

Attendance (Online – Zoom)

Catherine Clarke Solicitor (England & Wales) (CC) – Chair RAP

Doreen Rowland OBE (DR) Independent

Fiona Stevenson (FS) Independent

Tim Warren (TW) Independent

Kathy Spooner (KS) ACC CEO

Sue Monckton-Rickett (SMR) ACC Chair

Dr Heather Churchill (HC) Professional

Dr Charlotte Johnson (CJ) – Independent (prospective panel member)

Sarah Palmer, ACC Deputy Registrar

Rev. Tony Ruddle, ACC Board Representative.

Apologies

Gillian Stuart, Head of Membership Services and Registrar

1. Opening prayer

SMR led the opening prayer, addressing the current uncertainties in the wider world with a reflection from Bishop Oscar Romero to offer reassurance that we can't do/solve everything – but we can do what we are asked to do well. We are the workers and not the master builder, the ministers and not the messiahs.

2. Welcome and apologies

CC welcomed CJ to the meeting as a prospective member and explained the purpose of RAP both as a 'critical friend' of ACC with respect to the management of ACC's accredited register of counsellors, and an oversight body which seeks to ensure that ACC are working to satisfy the various standards and polices mandated by the Professional Standards Authority. Panel members introduced themselves to CJ with a summary of their background/expertise.

Conflict of interests

HC declared a potential conflict of interest with reference to a complaint raised by a third party to ACC about an organisation that HC was involved in, and therefore would absent herself from the meeting if the complaint were discussed.

As stated at the previous meeting HC is also developing SCoPEd B training with a colleague at Waverley Abbey College which will be delivered for the first time at ACC's National Conference in September.

3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

4.1 **The minutes of the meeting** were agreed with some minor amendments.

4.2 In matters arising:

CC asked whether there had been any response to the advert in Spring Accord for membership of RAP. KS stated that there had been none.

CC asked about the Beta version of the new SCoPEd B accreditation and what the status was with the change control request that had gone to the PSA relating to the introduction of the Beta version. KS said that the change request had expanded by the PSA to cover the SCoPEd implementation itself and to apply to all partners, so there had been no formal response to ACC introducing *this* new accreditation version. However, the PSA had confirmed to us that the change control process is not intended to, nor does not, inhibit an accredited register introducing a change. It may, however, lead to recommendations or conditions that ACC will need to respond to when the assessment process is completed. KS believes that the change control process for the SCoPEd partners will take some time to conclude, and as ACC need to implement SCoPEd by January 2027, we needed to launch the Beta Accreditation.

CC stated that the in next proposed meeting date of the 27th September was no longer possible for her to make and requested that the panel agree an alternative date.

5 Professional Standards Authority & Standards Update.

5.1 **New/changed standards.** KS reported that as far as she is aware there have been no changes to any standards published or proposed since the panel last met.

5.2 **Full renewal assessment.** ACC have been subject to a full renewal assessment process in March/April which resulted in a considerable amount of work pulling together the evidence required for an assessment as to whether ACC continue to meet the standards.

The good news in that ACC heard this week that our accredited register has been renewed. There are five conditions associated with the renewal. There are a couple of these that KS/SMR cannot understand and others that we need clarification on – so KS has submitted a written response highlighting areas of contention and putting forward suggestions as to proposals that could meet the condition or recommendations. The condition that is most troubling is the apparent requirement to publish individual registrants' qualifications that allowed them to be on the register. No other register is doing this on an individual registrant basis, rather they publish as we do the individuals membership grade and separately on their website there is a description of what someone needs to achieve to acquire that membership grade.

SMR read out from the email from the PSA's accreditation team, the panels comments, were are encouraging

“Overall, the panel was really impressed with the documentation, the information that was

submitted for re-accreditation and also made comments in the areas which have been improved since the last assessment, for example, complaints, congratulations and very well done.”

CC extended congratulations on behalf of all the panel, and that it is a testament to the teams hard-work, resilience and strength over the last few years to have achieved this result. This is especially the case regarding the panel’s comments on the complaints process and the improvements that SMR has introduced in the light of some very difficult cases.

5.3 Notification of Change (NOC) process update.

For the benefit of CJ CC invited KS to give the background to the ongoing Notification of Change process being managed by the PSA on the implementation of SCoPEd framework. KS explained that as a result of adopting the SCoPEd framework which sets out minimum standards and competencies for counselling and psychotherapy practice, ACC and other partners needed to make changes to accreditation processes to ensure that they explicitly referenced the appropriate column of the SCoPEd framework. In March 2023 ACC submitted a NOC for the new accreditation process (the first from the partnership) and this resulted in the PSA asking ACC a series of questions about SCoPEd in general. These were questions better directed to the whole partnership which resulted in a meeting in December 2023 between the SCoPEd Board and the head of the PSA accreditation team. KS current understanding is that the PSA are progressing this NOC and have issued a Share Your Experience process. This is in effect a public process where people can record what they think about the SCoPEd project.

5.4 New routes to accreditation.

KS presented ACC’s introduction of new routes to accreditation for members who take the opportunity to attend a SCoPEd B competency training being developed and delivered by Waverley Abbey College. Due to timescales associated with the planned running of the training at ACC’s conference in September and the impact on ACC resources because of the new system and full renewal assessment it has not been possible to consult with RAP prior to introducing the new routes.

KS explained that the SCoPEd framework allowed new routes to progression through the profession, which is an important anticipated benefit from an EDI perspective. The columns represent progression of skills (competence) and experience based on qualifications and experience. ACC’s previous routes to accreditation relied only on an internal assessment process. This was the same with the comparable membership bodies: BACP and NCPS. In contrast the BPC and UKCP allow entry into columns B and C through education and training. The new routes allow ACC to consider higher level qualifications and training as well as experience to be taken into account in the accreditation process for those who can evidence the SCoPEd B training.

KS reported that ACC is also planning to introduce a senior accredited membership grade (column C) initially as a recognition route only, that is for members of ACC who have achieved this grade with a SCoPEd partner.

DR asked why ACC had chosen the word ‘senior’. It has connotations of age as well as enhanced competence. KS explained that the category ‘senior accredited’ was recognised within the profession – so it was a choice made because of custom and practice.

HC raised a question about qualification levels, which might especially apply to supervision qualifications. What is being referenced to accredit the level of training achieved by applicants for the new routes? KS explained that there was an area that was had variable applications in the SCoPEd partnership – so the answer was not straightforward. We have the HE/FE levels (which TR helpfully supplied an information chart in the chat). However professional membership bodies also accredited course as being level 4/5/6/7 as did standards organisations such as CPCAB, AIM on OCN of which only CPCAB is a specialist counselling training accrediting body. There was

discussion amongst the panel as to the challenges this presents when attempting to establish an 'even playing field' for students and trainees. Also, there was a question raised by the Panel about the PSA's role in this and what was the basis for them accepting levels of training 'awarded' by the professional bodies themselves. HC brought the discussion to a close, acknowledging that without an objective qualifications framework it is challenging to know how to deal well with all the variation.

HC asked if there was interest in the new routes and the SCoPEd B 'top up' training. SP reported that there had been a flurry of emails into the office wanting to know more – but it was too early to know how many will opt to do the training.

SMR reported that notwithstanding the challenges, the new routes had been subject to ACC's 'spin the wheel' tool and had been discussed and agreed by the Board.

CC praised the ACC for the innovative nature of this approach.

5.5. New manager of the PSA accredited registers accreditation team.

Melanie Venables has been promoted and Osama (Os) Ammar has been appointed as her replacement. KS has contacted Os with a welcoming email and an invitation to hold a meeting with ACC at some point to find out about or organisation.

6 RAP Policies

CC requested that CJ be sent the Declaration of Interests form

7 ACC Update

7.1 New System

KS reported that the new system had been running well, however there was a design issue with the renewal form which had resulted in some frustration and annoyance for renewing members. ACC have invested in a change to separate what is needed for renewal and what can be updated at any point in the year. This has now gone live.

7.2 Opportunities in the NHS.

In recent meetings with the NHS psychological professions, it was reported that there was funding set aside in the autumn statement for mental provision in terms of recruitment to NHS talking therapies and to extend the amount of sessions on offer for patients. KS initiated a meeting between the SCoPEd partnership and Adrian Whittington, who is Head of the Psychological Professions network – to ensure that partners understood the opportunity this might offer members. The opportunity will be for B and C therapists to employed in NHS Talking therapies (formally IAPT). There will be no recognition for prior learning – so those recruited will need to undergo the required NHS training. There is a particular need for couples' counsellors.

The panel commented that these developments highlight the value of the SCoPEd framework in that it is being taken up by the NHS in their recruitment policies. Importantly also the NHS need well trained counsellors and psychotherapists.

7.3 SCoPEd Framework and PSA standards.

KS had noticed 2 new applications for accredited registers which make reference to counselling and psychotherapy, but not to compliance with SCoPEd framework. When raised directly with the PSA's accreditation team, the suggestion was that she should contact the applicants to discuss. KS had agreed with SCoPEd partners that there should be a meeting with the PSA to see what scope there is within their purposes to embed SCoPEd as a standard for counselling and psychotherapy membership bodies.

8 ACC Counselling Update (to include regulation & wider Profession)

8.1 Risk Register Review

As some panel members had not been able to access the documents and as the version that had been placed in the shared drive was not completed (it has questions and comments), the Panel determined to review the risk register as the main agenda item for the September meeting,

CC suggested that the Panel approach the task in order of the severity of the residual risk score.

DR asked whether the risk register was standard across all the registers. KS said that the structure was – and the PSA were prescriptive about some risks, for example the risk associated with false memory syndrome.

CC suggested that the Panel considers the recent history of complaints when reviewing items 5 and 6 – relating to ethics, autonomy of the client and dual relationships etc, to ensure that ACC have properly taken account of issues arising from complaints.

KS cautioned that the PSA's accreditation team will want an explanation of any changes to the risk ratings, therefore it will be important to capture the rationale.

HC reported that in some studies undertaken by the BACP dual roles was a prominent cause of complaints. She also has references to research papers that suggest that dual roles are prominent causes of concerns and complaints in counselling undertaken by Christians.

DR asked whether it would be wise also to consider the queries and ethical concerns that are commonly raised by members – as this could also point to risks associated with practice.

8.2 Registrar update

ACC's registrar is on extended leave. The risks of not having a Register during this time have been considered by the Board who have given a clear direction that no new projects are taken on by the ACC team. SP will continue as the deputy registrar, with KS able to cover the registrar role.

8.3 Membership stats.

KS reported that ACC have not managed to produce membership stats as we had previously to the panel. We can report that the registered membership is remaining at circa 950. We are continuing to pick up new members, and also more enquiries about other membership types and enquiries about advertising on the website.

9 Complaints (+ issues arising from)

SMR/KS

SMR presented a report on complaints. To date there have been no complaints that reach the threshold for investigation, rather concerns that can be explored through conversations.

The Panel agreed that the concerns were important but were presented low risk and were suitable for the approach that ACC is taking.

As a response to their 'Share your Experience' process the PSA had received comment from a former registrant who was removed from the register because of a complaint being made against him. He had complained that ACC's processes were not appropriate, and he thought the outcomes were too punitive and he'd felt his appeal had not been properly dealt with. SMR

submitted details of the complaint and appeal process to the PSA, and there have been no further questions raised.

10 Practice Reviews

SP reported on practice reviews. The team have begun to issue CPD certificates for 3 hours for completed reviews. There remains a fear response when emails about practice reviews are received by members, and the team have tried to address these fears in the tone and information on the email. ACC recognise that it would be helpful for members and their supervisors if we were to produce a digital/video recording describing the process and its purpose. This is on the to do list.

Panel members agreed that this was an important consideration and invited ACC to also consider holding forums for supervisors about the practice review process.

SP reported that in terms of numbers ACC have issued 15 practice reviews, will be issuing another 15 shortly and another 15 in September. One factor to consider is that when members are thinking about retirement, receiving a practice review can tip them into that decision. This means that we might have a shortfall in numbers of members called for review this year, which means issuing more in November/December.

The panel agreed that there could be no adjustment for age when issuing reviews.

CC asked whether the practice review could be used in addition to the randomised 'audit' for example people returning from a practice break. SJ explained that there were various reasons that people went on practice break and not all may be suitable for a practice review. However, this was something ACC wanted to do for anyone who had come into membership through an equivalence decision.

SJ reported that ACC have received no applications for accreditation with the new Beta version. A members' forum was held for anyone considering accreditation and the team can do this again when we have the resource to do it.

Practice breaks

DR asked about the information submitted by a member requesting a practice break and how ACC stored and used this information. SJ explained that members applied for a practice break and provided a reason for this (for example maternity, illness, bereavement, sabbatical etc). ACC capture this information because it helps us when the team communicates with a member on a break, that is we can be attentive to the reason for the break. It might also influence whether there is a case for a reduced fee. The team would not want to introduce a 'prefer not to say', because the reason for the break could be significant for a member's fitness to practice. ACC do not refuse practice breaks; we record details and send follow up mails when a break is due to end. This is where its helpful to know whether someone had been travelling or were suffering from a serious illness.

Panel members were curious about how members returned from practice break. SJ referred the panel to the Practice Break guidelines which set out advice, for example to plan to review with the members supervisor and to develop a plan to return etc. Panel members were reassured that the guidelines re-enforced the requirement for a member to work with their supervisor when planning a return to work.

The information about the practice break, including the reason for it, are held on ACC's IT system, viewable by the team and ACC assessors..

11 Risks to ACC & Register

There were no further items to discuss.

12 Process Issues Changes (Registration, Audit, Accreditation, Complaints etc.)

There were no further items to discuss.

13 Standards & Policy Issues and Changes (CPD, Supervision, Insurance, Practice Break etc)

There were no further items to discuss.

14 RAP Standing Items / Concerns

CC introduced the discussion about recruitment. SMR has approached someone, who is having a think about whether she would want to be involved. CC will find information provided previously about where panel members could be recruited.

15 Public Engagement

SMR reported on wider engagement, which included a meeting with the Scottish Government as a result of ACC's response to their consultation on a Banning Conversion Practices legislation; and from one of the political editors of the Times for a comment on UKCP leaving the MOU.

SMR had also been invited for a couple of interviews on Trans World radio on mental health and young people and mental health and benefits.

16 AOB

The date of the next meeting was agreed to be on the 4th October

TR thanked the panel on behalf of the Board for all the work that the panel does in support of ACC.

Dates of next meetings

4th October, 2pm (Zoom)

13 December 2024, 1pm lunch, 2pm meeting (in person) - TBC