

Counselling placements: a trainee's guide

**Good Practice in Action 090
Fact Sheet**

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T: 01455 883300 **E:** bacp@bacp.co.uk **www.bacp.co.uk**

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Design by Steers McGillan Eves.

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Context

This resource is one of a suite prepared by BACP to enable members to engage with BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*.

Using Fact Sheet resources

BACP members have a contractual commitment to work in accordance with the current *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. The Fact Sheet resources are not contractually binding on members but are intended to support practitioners by providing general information on principles and policy applicable at the time of publication, in the context of the core ethical principles, values and personal moral qualities of BACP.

Specific issues in practice will vary depending on clients, particular models of working, the context of the work and the kind of therapeutic intervention provided. As specific issues arising from work with clients are often complex, BACP always recommends discussion of practice dilemmas with a supervisor and/or consulting a suitably qualified and experienced legal or other relevant practitioner.

In this resource, the word 'therapist' is used to mean specifically counsellors and psychotherapists and 'therapy' to mean specifically counselling and psychotherapy. Trainer to mean any organisation providing counselling training and placement provider to describe an organisation providing placements for trainees on counselling training placements and trainee any student undertaking a qualification level counselling course.

Introduction

This resource is one of three relating to the consideration of placements within the counselling professions. This particular resource is intended to support trainees through the process of finding and setting up a suitable placement, and it outlines some of the factors the trainee may need to consider.

Having a work-based placement offers you as a trainee the opportunity to integrate the theory you have learnt into practice. Good work-based placements will allow you to grow in knowledge and experience, whilst ensuring the safety of your clients. In order to complete your client hours, you will require support and encouragement from staff. The staff form part of a network which consists of the trainee, supervisor, manager and tutors from the college.

1 Setting up the placement

As a trainee, you are generally responsible for identifying and securing a counselling placement, although the teaching team at your college should also offer support in this process. Many colleges hold a register of organisations offering suitable placements. It is your training provider's responsibility for approving placements.

You will be expected to make initial contact with the placement provider and you should approach this with the same preparation that you would if you were applying for paid employment. Therefore, the placement provider would normally expect that you would provide a CV which includes information about your qualifications, work experience, and any clinical experience you might have. The placement provider might also require you as the trainee to complete an application form and to attend an interview.

2 Criteria for appropriate placements

Placement providers should be evaluated by the quality of the learning experience they offer and the safety they provide both to their clients and trainees. The placement provider aims should include preparing you to work with adult clients presenting with mild or moderate problems. If the placement provider works with specialist issues, or particular client groups, you will need to check with your course provider, who sometimes specify the client groups that you will be able to work with.

You will also need to ensure that you are considered 'competent' to work with that particular group, for example if the placement is with children and young people, additional skills and training will be needed in addition to the core training on a generic course.

For more information about placements with children and young people, see: www.bacp.co.uk/membership/organisational-membership/course-accreditation/student-placements-with-children-and-young-people

The criteria that may be helpful for you in determining the suitability of placements are:

- the placement should be within a counselling service with established administrative and organisational systems, policies and support structures for counselling staff and trainee counsellors

- the counselling that trainees undertake in the placement should be contracted and normally face-to-face counselling placement providers select clients for trainees in order to provide a good match between the presenting problem for the client and the trainee's level of competence. Pre-assessment of clients by the placement provider is desirable
- placement providers are required to meet appropriate Health and Safety criteria. You should never be expected to work alone or unsupported while on placement
- you should also consider the requirements of your course in terms of clinical hours, and how much time you are able to commit per week. Especially if you are considering undertaking more than one placement
- supervision – you are committed to 'reviewing [y]our work with clients in supervision' (*Ethical Framework*, Commitment 6c). Some placement providers provide a supervisor, others may expect you to find your own supervisor.
- If you are going to be working in a specialist field (with children and young people for example) then you will need a supervisor who is also competent to work with this client group. If you have to find your own supervisor it is important to clarify who will pay for the supervision and ensure that the supervisor is willing to collaborate both with your training course and the placement provider (see the *Ethical Framework*, Good Practice, point 66 for more information). You can find out more about what you might look for in a supervisor within Good Practice in Action 008 *How to choose a supervisor*.

3 Before the placement starts

It is good practice to meet with your placement provider prior to starting your placement in order to set goals for the placement and to make arrangements in respect of hours worked, and how supervision will be provided.

You should also have the opportunity at this time to discuss with the placement provider their expectations regarding additional training, or your learning whilst on placement and also any learning outcomes identified by your college.

You might also want to raise any particular areas of work in which you have an interest in developing. Within some organisations, you may also have opportunities to participate in the operation of that organisation whilst you are on placement.

Good placement providers will be committed to equality, diversity and inclusion within placement opportunities and should work with you in respect of reasonable adjustments that may be needed.

Once you have had a formal offer of a placement with a suitable organisation, it is important that there is a written agreement in place between you, the placement provider, the supervisor and the college so that all parties are clear about the roles and responsibilities each has.

You are committed through the *Ethical Framework* to be watchful of any incompatibilities between these agreements and seek appropriate support if needed to ensure they are compatible. See the *Ethical Framework*, Good Practice, point 83b for more information.

4 Ethical Framework

Trainees who are student members of BACP, or who are undertaking a BACP Accredited course are required to understand and work in accordance with BACP's *Ethical Framework*. You can find this document, and additional resources at: www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions. The six ethical commitments at the beginning of the publication provide a good summary of all the points that follow. You can download this summary as a separate document if this is helpful.

5 Policies/trainee handbook

The placement should provide you with a handbook, or information which outlines the service, the service's policies and the service's expectations of trainees on placement. These are sometimes held in the administration area, so be sure to ask your line manager or administrator for a copy or sight of them.

6 Accountability for the counselling work

Trainees are committed to 'collaborating with their trainers, placement providers, supervisors and other professional advisers to provide services to their clients that satisfy professional standards...' (*Ethical Framework*, Good Practice, point 83b) and they also have a personal responsibility to ensure that when they are working as practitioners, that their work '... satisfies minimum professional standards...' (Good Practice, point 83b).

Placement providers have a responsibility for the people that access their services and for trainees on placement, and are required to have:

- procedures in place for assessing the quality of their trainees' work and for assessing risk
- the correct level of indemnity insurance to cover the work of trainees on placement
- registered with the Information Commissioner's Office in respect of data protection
- offer appropriate line management and supervision for your placement. You will need to ensure that the placement provider is offering the correct amount of supervision in respect of your course's requirements and BACP policies (more information about supervision can be found within Good Practice in Action resource 054 *Introduction to supervision* and 008 *How to choose a supervisor*). If this is not the case, you may need to check with the placement provider whether they can offer more supervision, or agree to you working with an external supervisor in addition to what is offered
- provide suitable induction training so that you have information about the service the placement providers offer to clients, and that you are clear about your roles and responsibilities, and what to do if there is a difficulty, or you need additional support.

The role of the training provider is to:

- provide learning and training opportunities which prepare trainees for practice – placements are an intrinsic part of this learning
- ensure that you are competent to work with clients prior to your placement starting
- collaborate and communicate with trainees and placement providers to ensure the placement is suitable, and that trainees have the opportunity to discuss any practice related difficulties (see *Ethical Framework* Good Practice, point 80).

You will also have responsibilities in respect of undertaking a placement, both practical and ethical by ensuring that you:

- are well prepared for what the placement provider requires
- have adequate supervision that is independent of line management
- collaborate with both your training and placement provider plus your supervisor to ensure that your work with clients satisfies professional standards
- be open and honest with your trainer, placement provider and supervisor(s) about all issues relevant to your training, supervision and professional practice.

See *Ethical Framework*, Good Practice, points 81-83 for more information and Good Practice in Action resources at: www.bacp.co.uk/gpia.

7 Full disclosure of trainee status

BACP requires that all trainees on practitioner-qualifying courses working with clients inform clients (or ensure that clients have been informed) that they are trainees. You will need to discuss with your placement provider how this could be done. Some placement organisations give this information when the client first contacts them, or during an assessment session. Other organisations prefer the trainee to discuss this with the client when you first meet. Your supervisor can support you in preparing to do this

8 Client assessment

It is usually best practice that clients referred to trainee counsellors are first assessed by the placement provider's more experienced staff. This allows the trainee to be matched with clients based on the level of complexity and risk of the case. As you progress in your studies, and get more experienced and confident, the placement provider may allow a trainee nearing the end of their training to gain experience in assessments or working with more complex clients.

All placement providers should have clinical risk management policies and procedures in place, and all trainees should be trained in these before starting their clinical work.

9 Consent for use of session material for training purposes

Before using any client material for training purposes, you need to think carefully about a client's suitability, and the process of gaining informed consent from both the placement provider and your client to use session material within training. 'Putting clients first' is the first Commitment shown in the *Ethical Framework*, and the client's needs come before yours as a trainee.

How you choose client material should be done in consultation with your supervisor(s), and the placement provider when appropriate. Where a placement provider has concerns about the recording of client sessions this should be discussed with the placement supervisor or manager and also your training provider.

Informed consent must be sought from the client for each use of client information (e.g. recording, use in presentations, use in written reports), and you need to be clear with the client why you are wanting to use their material, and what you will be doing with the information gathered, who will see it/listen to it, how it is stored, and how long it will be kept, how their privacy will be maintained.

You should know and follow the new data protection guidelines with respect to keeping client information. You can find out more about privacy and data protection in Good Practice in Action 105 *The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* and on the BACP website FAQs GDPR at: www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/contact-us/gdpr or on the Information Commissioner's website: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr>.

10 Collaboration between training course, placement provider and supervisor

It is important for both you, and your clients that there is a clear understanding, of how you, your supervisor, placement and training provider will collaborate to ensure that your work with clients satisfies professional standards, and that you feel supported in your work. It is important that the arrangements for this collaboration are agreed in advance of your working with clients, and that there is ongoing, consistent and effective communication between all parties. This means that if a problem or something unexpected were to arise then all parties would be clear on how to proceed.

Ethical practice, appropriate supervision, health and safety issues as well as clinical competence are important issues for the client's and your own safety and for the good standing of the placement and training providers. Most courses will require your supervisor or placement provider to write a report on your progress as part of your assessed course work.

11 Ending a placement

You will know when you start your placement how long the placement will last for. It is important for your clients' wellbeing that where possible, they are aware of any planned endings, so that they can prepare for them. Placement providers will usually have a clear process for you to follow at the end of your placement and will work with you to ensure timely endings for your clients. It is important to consult with your supervisor, the placement provider and training provider to ensure you, and your clients are prepared and ready for endings.

The end of your placement should enable you to reflect with your supervisor, trainer and the placement provider, on your achievements, and review what information needs to be included in any reports.

Of course, sometimes unplanned endings will occur because of unforeseen circumstances, in this kind of situation the placement provider will need to ensure that they have policies and processes in place that mean the clients are appropriately supported and reallocated. It is important if you end your placement prematurely that you update your training provider and your supervisor. See the *Ethical Framework*, Good Practice, points 38-42, and Good Practice in Action 072 *Unplanned endings*, for more information about endings.

12 Corona virus student placement guidelines

Each placement provider should make an individual assessment of each student's competence to transition their face-to-face placement work to an online or phone-based alternative, for the duration of the pandemic. Once Government guidelines permit, face-to-face placements and teaching should resume in this way.

It is important that trainers and placement providers ensure that their students are well supported during this period. Students also have the right to decline to work in this way without jeopardising either their placement or training.

Placement and training hours accrued remotely during the pandemic will count towards the hours required for registration and accreditation. Students are advised to check insurance where relevant to ensure that cover is extended for practising virtually. When face-to-face training and client work return it is important to check that the insurance providers cover face-to-face appointments during the pandemic. For further guidance on training during the pandemic please refer to the guidelines by the Government and BACP.

Summary

- as a trainee you should be supported by your training provider to secure an appropriate work-based placement
- this process could involve you submitting a CV and completing the placement's application process, which would usually include an interview
- there should be compatible agreements between the trainee, the supervisor and the training and placement providers and the trainee should have received a suitable induction
- the placement provider should provide the trainee with the experience of working as part of a counselling service and an opportunity to work with a range of clients of an appropriate complexity. It is the responsibility of the placement provider, trainee and training provider to ensure the trainee has supervision (independent of line management) with a qualified experienced supervisor and a chance to develop the range of skills and attitudes required of a counsellor.

About the author

Dr Carys Williams is a counselling psychotherapist and medical doctor based in Buckhurst Hill (West Essex) and Central London. She has had seven years of training in counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatry with children, adolescents and adults and she has been practising for eight years as a counselling psychotherapist.

She has worked as a doctor in the NHS in a range of specialities with both children and adults. With respect to psychotherapy she has worked with clients in schools, in universities, in the NHS and in the private sector. She is the founder of the counselling charity 16 to 25 Support which is based in West Oxfordshire. She also supervises therapists and health professionals from the NHS and within the private sector.

Carys is registered with the GMC, Royal College of Psychiatrists and The National Counselling Society and she abides by BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*.

References

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