

Psychotherapists and Counsellors Professional Liaison Group (PLG)
26 and 27 May 2009

Client groups

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

At its meeting on 28 and 29 January 2009, the PLG discussed the structure of the Register and protected titles, including some responses to the Call for Ideas calling for the Register to differentiate between those qualified to work with children and young people and those qualified to work with adults.

The Group agreed that this was a topic for discussion that might be revisited in light of subsequent discussion.

The attached paper briefly summarises the arguments put forward in this area and summarises the Group's previous discussion on this topic.

Decision

The PLG is invited to discuss the attached paper.

The PLG is additionally reminded to bear in mind the potential equality and diversity implications of any recommendations it may make. This includes considering the extent to which any recommendations would have an adverse impact on some groups compared to others.

Background information

- Structure of the Register and protected titles, considered by the PLG on 28 and 29 January 2009
www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/professionalliaisongroups/psychotherapistscounsellors_archive/index.asp?id=442

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None

Appendices

None

Date of paper

18 May 2009

Client groups

1. Introduction

This paper outlines arguments put forward about differentiating in the structure of the Register between those qualified to work with different client groups, particularly those qualified to work with children and young people and those qualified to work with adults.

This topic was first discussed at the PLG's meeting on 28 and 29 January 2009.

2. Responses to the Call for Ideas

A small number of respondents said that the Register should be structured to differentiate between practitioners who were qualified to work with different client groups, in particular those that were qualified to work with adults and those who were qualified to work with children and young people.

The Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP) said that it was important that these groups should be differentiated in the Register. They argued that the Register should 'enable members of the public to distinguish the different levels of specialism, and the nature of training'. The British Association of Play Therapists similarly argued that separate standards should be produced for practitioners working with adults and those working with children and young people, in order to provide the public and professionals alike with information about who was qualified to work with certain client groups.

The UKCP appended their standards of education and training for child psychotherapists to their response.

3. Previous discussion

The minutes of the Group's meeting on 28 and 29 January 2009 record the following discussion on this topic:

'The Group noted that a number of professional bodies had submitted responses which argued that the Register should enable members of the public to distinguish the different levels of specialism and the nature of training and that separate standards should be produced for practitioners working with adults and those working with children and young people.

The Group felt that, in principle, it would not be helpful for the public to structure the information in the way suggested, as this would make the Register overly complex. In discussion, the following points were made:

- the HPC's register did not currently indicate if a professional was qualified to work with vulnerable people, children or young people;
- employers were likely to be best placed to decide if a practitioner was able to work with a particular client group;
- training to work with client groups could either be pre-registration or post-registration. It was suggested that specialisation in a particular client group might be recognised by an annotation to the Register;

- there were a range of client groups (such as people with learning disabilities and people with eating disorders) which could also be recognised as protected titles;
- a member expressed a view that, historically, child psychotherapy had been recognised as a profession under the Whitley Council. Other members of the Group pointed out this had applied solely within the NHS and had not been for the purposes of statutory regulation or public protection;
- individuals regulated by the HPC were expected to use their own professional judgement about their scope of practice and whether they were practising safely and effectively;
- there was a trend away from delineation by client group and for professionals to work in a multi-professional environment;
- it was possible that the standards of proficiency might include requirements for understanding and knowledge of working with client groups;
- professionals should be able to deal with a range of equality and diversity issues and comply with legislative requirements relating to vulnerable groups; and
- notwithstanding the HPC's decision on whether to protect the title, it was likely that the title of child psychotherapist would continue to be widely used.

The Group agreed that its working approach would be that the Register should not differentiate to specifically identify practitioners qualified to work with children and young people. The Group agreed that this subject might be re-visited in light of subsequent discussion on education and training.' (*Psychotherapists and Counsellors PLG, 28 and 29 January 2009, 5.22 and 5.23*).

3. Child psychotherapists

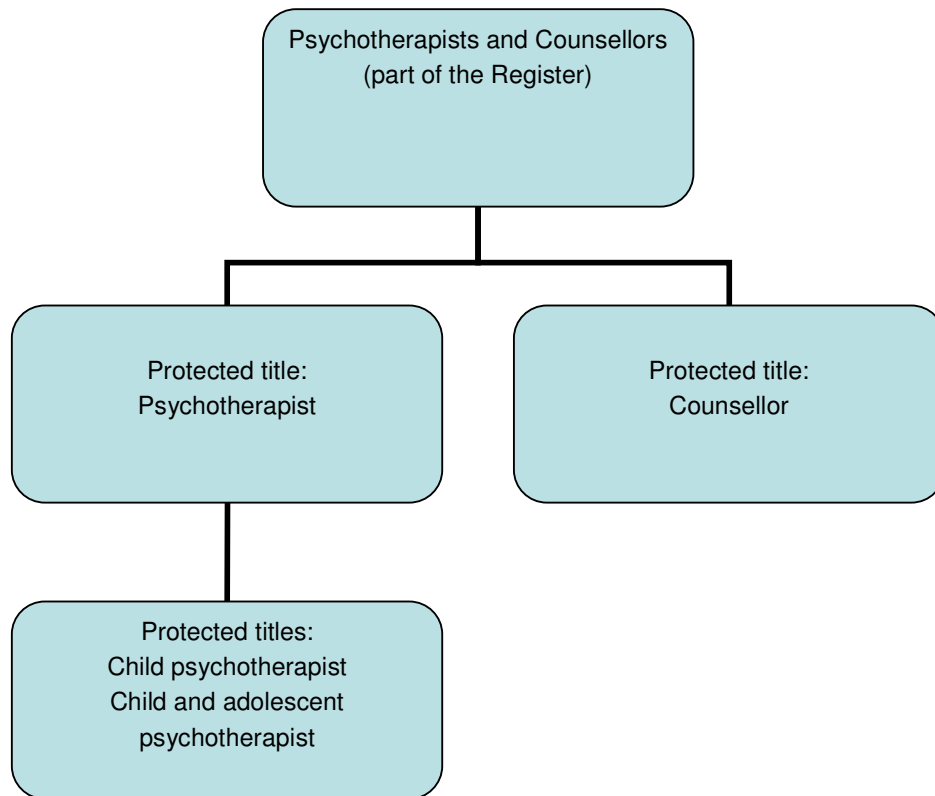
The Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP) accredits trainings in child and adolescent psychotherapy and is the designated authority for the recognition of the qualifications of child and adolescent psychotherapists from European Union countries who wish to work in the United Kingdom.

In their response to the Call for Ideas, the ACP asked that there should be two distinct sections in the Register to denote those qualified to work with adults and those qualified to work with children, young people and their parents and carers. They asked that the title 'child and adolescent psychotherapist' be protected alongside other titles specifically for work with children, for example, 'psychoanalytic child psychotherapist'.

The arguments put forward for specific recognition of child and adolescent psychotherapists in the structure of the Register include:

- Differentiation in the Register would better protect the public by recognising the specialist skills and competencies necessary to work with children and young people and the different skills and competencies necessary to work with adults.
- Parents and carers would be better able to make safe and informed choices by being able to identify those qualified to work with children and young people.
- Differentiation would prevent professionals with no training in child work from presenting themselves as registered to work with children.
- A failure to differentiate would lead to ethical and disciplinary issues. If there is no differentiation differences between training would become blurred and public protection would be lost, in this case, children.

The diagram below provides an illustration what the structure of the Register would look like if there was further differentiation with associated protected titles.



4. Youth counsellors

Youth Access, a national membership organisation for young peoples' information, advice, counselling and support services have argued that consideration should also be given to separate recognition of the role and title of 'youth counsellor'. Youth counsellors work in a variety of different settings and deliver counselling services tailored to the needs of young people.

Youth Access argues that consideration should be given to protecting the title 'youth counsellor' because there are a distinctive set of skills and knowledge required to work with young people. They also argue that it is consistent with wider Government policy around the reform of a youth workforce lead by the Children's Workforce Development Council. Youth Access argue that not reflecting this role within the structure of the Register will disregard the youth counselling workforce and diminish the work of youth counsellors with consequences for the training of practitioners in the longer term.

5. Discussion

The Group may wish to consider the following additional points in its discussion on this topic.

5.1 The existing HPC Register

The existing HPC Register does not differentiate between registrants on the basis of client group. For example, the Register of speech and language therapists does not differentiate between those who work with children and young people, and those who work with adults.

However, in these professions, there is not an explicit link between pre-registration education and training that delivers specialist competencies to equip registrants for work with specific client groups.

5.2 Titles

Differentiating in titles between those qualified to work with children and young people and adults would rely upon being able to clearly describe and differentiate between the threshold standards required for safe and effective practice. There would need to be an explicit link between those standards and education and training programmes that deliver those standards.

Any such approach would also rely upon being able to easily identify those practitioners who use those titles.

5.3 Information available on the Register

One argument put forward about differentiation relates to the Register providing information to enable informed choices to be made. It is important to note that the HPC Register provides a means by which someone can check if the practitioner they propose to see or employee is registered and has therefore met the regulator's standards. It does not provide a means by which members of the public can find further information about an individual's background, area of practice or (normally) any additional qualifications or experience.

In some of the existing professions regulated by the HPC, professional bodies and associations often provide a service by which members of the public can find information about registrants who specialise in work with a particular client group

or condition in their area. For example, the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Private Practice (ASLTIP) provides a facility by which members of the public can find practitioners in their area who have a specific interest or specialism in certain areas or with certain client groups. This is one role that professional bodies sometimes perform, in helping to promote the services of their members to members of the public.

Discussion with stakeholders in this area has suggested that it may be helpful to produce guidance for practitioners and others about the use of titles that denote theoretical approaches or specialist skills to work with specific client groups. It has also been suggested that the HPC might play an increased role in signposting parents, carers and other service users to sources of further information about practitioners and the professions.

5.4 Fitness to practise and fitness for purpose

In the event that the Register was not structured to specifically identify those qualified to work with children and/or young people, employers (and others) could still make their own requirements as to the experience and qualifications of a registrant before being satisfied that they were suitable for a particular role.

There is a contrast between the role of the regulator in publishing a Register for those who are fit to practise, and the role of others in making decisions about fitness for purpose (i.e. suitability for a particular role or ability to meet certain needs).

5.5 Protection of title

The HPC, in keeping with most of the other professional regulators, regulates by protection of title. It is important to note that even if one of the suggested titles was protected, this would not legally prevent someone from working with children, young people, their parents and carers, as long as they did not use a protected title to which they were not entitled.

However, all registrants, including any who held any 'specialist title' would be bound by the requirement to only practise in those areas in which they have appropriate education and training, experience and supervision and to ensure that they represent their qualifications, experience and the services they offer in a fair and accurate way.¹

6. Decision

The PLG is invited to discuss this paper.

¹ HPC Standards of conduct, performance and ethics, paragraphs 6 and 14