

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Paper No CPF/18/23

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM

Agenda Item 10

3 October 2018

OPTIONS FOR APPROVAL/ACCREDITATION OF FdSc COUNSELLING

To consider a paper on the options for Approval Accreditation of FdSc Counselling.

**ACTION**

For discussion.

### **Options for Approval/Accreditation of FdSc Counselling**

**Background:** The FdSc Counselling has, since 2015/16 been accredited by the National Counselling Society (NCS), as has the PGDip/MSc Counselling and Therapeutic Communication with Professional Practice delivered in UUJ.

In 2014, when the current course was revalidated, Ulster was engaged in negotiations with the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP), in order that the FdSc would be accredited by them. This was desirable because the BACP was and remains generally regarded as the gold standard professional body for counselling and currently holds the largest membership of any counselling/psychotherapy professional body in the UK (approx. 10 times that of the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology). However, at that time several challenges to course accreditation existed, including the model of payment and issues around quality assurance across the FE colleges. Despite much work by Ulster, these could not be overcome with the (then) BACP management team. When negotiation ended, Ulster approached the NCS and accreditation was achieved with them.

NCS course accreditation, means that students who graduate from the FdSc Counselling, are regarded by the NCS as fit to practice counselling and are eligible to apply for NCS registration and accreditation at the point of graduation. This Body and its accreditation is slowly becoming more widely recognised in the UK and since 2017 has been acknowledged by NHS as acceptable accreditation for counsellors employed in NHS. However challenges exist for our students:

- NCS is widely compared (unfavourably) with BACP.
- The vast majority of FdSc and PGDip students (who are free to choose their professional body), select to take out student membership of BACP, not NCS.
- The vast majority of Ulster approved supervisors with whom students work throughout placement, are accredited with the BACP (RegMBACPaccred).
- Much of the course materials, good practice guide and ethical framework which informs teaching is based around BACP, as NCS do not have comprehensive materials, or those that exist follow BACP's.
- Placement providers in border areas are refusing to take Ulster students with NCS membership, being unfamiliar with NCS and demanding students have BACP membership (since reciprocal recognition exists with Irish Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, IACP).

#### **Issue for consideration:**

In January 2018 a meeting was held with BACP (at their request), in UUJ, attended by the Counselling team at Ulster, the new BACP Head of Professional Standards, Fiona Ballantine Dykes, Steven Mulligan, Four Nations Policy and Management Lead and Caryl Sibbett, Deputy Chair of the BACP Board of Governors (and recently appointed CD of MSc Art Therapy, Ulster). Fiona introduced a new route for *Course Approval* which they hoped we would interest us. The model or this approved route is as follows:

- No set up fee.
- Per capital fee for each student built into the training fee (£25 per student currently)
- Responsibility for QA by awarding body (Ulster) as per existing operating mechanisms.
- Primary relationship with Ulster and annual course review with Ulster – not FE Colleges.

Possible advantages of this proposal:

- NI Counselling industry hold BACP in high regard and a relationship with BACP going forward would be advantageous for Ulster Counselling and our Students.
- Whilst regulation of counselling may still be some way off (RoI is working on this currently), it is likely that BACP will be central to any discussion/development.
- BACP has reciprocal recognition with IACP, which is directly advantageous to students working in border areas.
- Course approval would contain built in fitness to practice (called Certificate of Proficiency by BACP), which would promote employability.
- Achieving BACP approval would mean Ulster was the only BACP approved course in NI, impacting recruitment positively.
- The FE College CDs and tutors would be supportive of BACP approval for their courses and see that as an attractive element in recruitment.
- Initial discussion with student body at FPM visits indicates many students would welcome BACP course approval.

Possible disadvantages of this proposal:

- Course approval is not accreditation – and students would need to evidence 450 hours practice to be eligible to apply for BACP accreditation.
- BACP dis-inclined to approve a course currently accredited by NCS – they are pushing for sole relationship with Ulster. Removing accreditation to gain BACP approval of the course would be a backward and risky step, which *may* have direct implications on employability for students and contrasts with Ulster’s position that courses should seek maximum accreditation.

**Current position:**

We have >500 students across the region undertaking FdSc Counselling – more than any other region in the UK, according to BACP. So our participation is attractive to them, as they try to improve their profile across four nations.

Using this leverage, I have explored a) the possibility that BACP might reduce the requirement of hours towards accreditation for students undertaking an approved route – which they are prepared to consider.

b) the need of our students to have choice across professional bodies – which they acknowledge is an important issue.

c) That joint accreditation (NCS) and Approval (BACP) would be our preferred option, and an advantage for our students to assist employability – BACP would like an exclusive arrangement with Ulster.

**Options:**

1. Do nothing, staying with NCS accreditation
2. Pursue joint accred/approval
3. Go with BACP for revalidated course.

**Current plan:**

- Consult the CP Forum for advice/guidance.
- Clarify courses with existing multiple accreditations at Ulster to demonstrate precedence.

- Following discussion with Janet Alleyne, ask FE Colleges (via HE Co-ordinator) to canvass views from the student body re BACP Course Approval.
- Seek Associate Dean's and HoS perspective/guidance and craft a response.

**My Question:** What am I missing – and what are your thoughts please?

Thank you

Paula Brogan

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