

Accreditation Procedures in Psychotherapy

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Case studies and examinations were originally conceptualised as procedures for cross checking the adequacy or standards of trainers and supervisors. This was to minimise the likelihood of closed systems developing without check or recourse. It is contextually not the candidate who goes to examination to be passed or failed. It is also not the candidate's case study which is passed or deferred. It is actually and essentially and correctly the judgement of his or her colleagues, supervisors, sponsors, endorsers, recommenders and trainers which is — and I think should be — at stake. These are the senior qualified professionals who have grown to know the candidate's work over a considerable period of time and who recommend that the candidate is ready to do the examination. It is their judgement, their supervision and their training which is being evaluated by their professional peers and sometimes an external examiner. That was the original intention.

The examination had been conceptualised as a rite of passage where candidates already considered up to standard by their supervisors, peers and themselves used the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience in conversation with sen-

ior colleagues. No one-hour exam by three or four people who have never met the candidate before can give a fair, just or valid judgement on his or her competence, ethics or theoretical base in a given discipline. There are few if any academic institutions which still use such an outdated procedure. Most take into account aspects of course work throughout a person's whole period of study or training in order to assess their finals — not a one-off, stress-filled, fate-deciding interrogation by strangers. If this is how exams, dissertations or case studies are experienced by candidates, then the original intention, spirit and soul of the process has been lost.

Any 'deferment' should reflect not so much on the candidate as on their trainer/supervisors, or on the soundness of the exam process itself. The objective of admission to the body of qualified therapists does not have to be via this kind of examination. Many organisations do not require this kind of examination. This does not mean that their criteria are more stringent, in fact better. But they may be very different. They may be more varied — for example someone's ongoing practice reports over a longer period of time, case studies of a more personal and expe-

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riential nature (even poetry) and many other significant indicators of competence, standards, conscientiousness and ethical practice.

It is essential for the healthy development of psychotherapy (if there could be such a thing) that trainee psychotherapists know and understand their choices, options and all possible relevant aspects of their investment in their professional futures. We all know the goalposts keep changing. We may need to wonder why? The objective of people doing case studies or examinations used to be admission to the body of qualified therapists. Nowadays in Britain this tends to be associated with registration with the UKCP. It is understandable that the UKCP should be accused of secrecy, scarcity and lack of information, and become the subject of scaremongering and the implication that some of its organisations are rather less respectable, acceptable or admirable. However, these ideas are against everything we have spent years building for in the UKCP. Registration as a psychotherapist is an individual registration which can be accomplished through membership of any one or more member organisations. There are many membership organisations which do not require the kind of case study and examination which are mandatory in others. It is not necessary to have done training primarily or solely with one organisation or one supervisor. Indeed, having supervision and education from none but the same group of mutually approving supervisors or trainers creates potentially pernicious closed systems, restricts choice and freedom and fosters the very infantilisation of

which so many trainees complain.

Before you commit yourself to any kind of training, taught programmes, case study or exam procedures which might turn out to be unnecessary, uncongenial or unhelpful, it could be valuable for you to seek out some independent consultation, to help you review your professional requirements, case study or exam implications, choices and options for registration. There can be very great differences indeed. There are even very senior and respected members of the psychotherapy profession who have rejected the principles and values of the UKCP and who have formed an alternative — the Independent Therapists' Network. Whether this body will thrive, destruct or transform, no one knows as yet.

Finally one should enquire whether it is appropriate, beneficial or right for trainee psychotherapists to place the assessment of their competence completely in the hands of others. When a person is truly competent at their profession, their competence includes their confidence in their own judgement — they are aware of the criteria for competency and can apply them to themselves. This inner kind of confidence and competence may need to be informed by some external locus of evaluation, but must not be determined by it, because where a practitioner actually 'passes' their competency exam should be in the inner chambers of the heart and in the true experiences of the consulting room — the evidence of their own senses with their clients. These are precious times for one's conscience, values and life choices, professionally, organisationally and personally.