

Open Letter to the SCoPED Membership Bodies from Members of the Person-Centred Counselling & Psychotherapy Community

April 2023

Context

SCoPED has been formally adopted by all the professional organisations involved, including the three largest membership bodies in the UK (BACP, UKCP and NCS), and the project now turns to the question of implementation. For those of us in the person-centred approach who have long critiqued both the framework and the organisational processes around it, and have serious ongoing concerns about the potential outcomes (PCG, 2020), this is a disappointing moment. Despite our best efforts, little of any substance has changed in the structure of the framework since the first iteration and all our principal concerns remain:

1. *The impacts on equality, diversity and inclusion in the counselling and psychotherapy profession of adopting a simplistic hierarchical structure based on initial training – a structure which cements and entrenches existing inequalities in the field.*

The inability of the SCoPED organisations to provide sufficient meaningful data on EDI to the Impact Assessment speaks volumes about how seriously it took these concerns until compelled to address them by the assessment process. The proposed ‘gateways’ between levels are still vague, unspecified and fraught with the same issues of exclusion and elitism, while SCoPED’s likely impact on the training market will only exacerbate the inaccessibility of the top tier(s) of the framework.

2. *The poorly evidenced return to differentiating ‘counselling’ and ‘psychotherapy’, with ‘psychotherapy’ positioned as the more competent and skilled activity.*

‘Counsellors’ and ‘counselling services’ are often found undertaking some of the most complex work in the field and the BACP itself found no evidence for differentiation as recently as the late 2000s, yet under SCoPED ‘counselling’ has been demoted to a position of inferior competence.

Within the person-centred approach, counselling and psychotherapy are considered indistinguishable (e.g. Rogers, 1942; Thorne, 1999) but hierarchical differentiation effectively downgrades person-centred therapy, an approach that for historical, political and organisational reasons (Rogers, 2019) rather than issues of competence, depth or evidence-based effectiveness, is mostly practiced in the UK under the title of ‘counselling’.

3. *Hierarchical differentiation flies in the face of decades of therapy research studies and meta-analyses, which do not find psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis and their attendant training norms – that so dominate the top tier of the SCoPED framework – to be in any way superior in helping clients or in producing more competent practitioners to person-centred therapy, which finds its differing training culture mapped onto the lower two tiers despite being solidly evidence-based (e.g. Cooper, Watson & Hölldampf, 2010; Elliott et al, 2013; Murphy & Joseph, 2016).*

This creates the absurd injustice that under SCoPEd a new graduate of, for example, a psychotherapy programme approved by the British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC) is *automatically* deemed more competent (dropping straight into the top level ‘C’) than a humanistic ‘counsellor’ who could never have afforded such a course but has accumulated years of experience: working in a range of settings with diverse client groups; supervising and managing other therapists; engaging in varied personal and professional development; teaching on counselling and psychotherapy training courses; undertaking research; contributing to the profession in a variety of other ways; and yet still finds themselves in column ‘A’ or ‘B’.

Such an injustice is not only wrong on principle, but is also confusing, misleading and potentially harmful to clients, who may be persuaded by SCoPEd’s claims of differing ‘competence’ that, in our example above, the newly trained BPC graduate is inherently more safe and effective than the experienced humanistic counsellor. We note here that there is no evidence that graduates of trainings leading directly into column ‘C’ are less likely to harm clients through professional malpractice.

4. *The notable exclusion of person-centred voices in the important developmental stages of the framework and the dominance of psychoanalytic views, e.g. in the make-up of the Expert Reference Group, even after it was minimally expanded, which have distorted the project’s direction.*

Here we contrast the role of the British Psychoanalytic Council, which in SCoPEd has enjoyed a prominence and influence disproportionate to its number of members, with the role of the much larger National Counselling Society, which was initially excluded from the project until a draft framework was already in place.

5. *The framework’s capitulation to the fading notion that therapy will forever be an extension of medicine and healthcare, with their medicalised systematising of human experience and manualisation of psychological ‘treatment’.*

The leading edges of counselling, psychotherapy and psychology are moving away from medicalisation (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018; Sanders & Tolan, 2023), yet SCoPEd takes a step back towards it. As person-centred therapists, we cannot sign up to the framework’s delegitimising of the ‘third force’ in psychology, the humanistic approaches, which have pioneered radically de-medicalised theory and practice since the middle of the twentieth century.

6. *The single-minded commitment to a methodology derived directly from the manualisation of CBT for the IAPT project (Roth & Pilling, 2008).*

In SCoPEd, this methodology relied on a narrow and self-referential range of evidence and ignored all other research into practitioner effectiveness and client outcomes (Murphy, 2019), with the result being that the framework grossly misrepresents the reality of practice on the ground.

7. *The divisiveness of the project, which has talked a great deal about listening to members’ concerns but at every turn has sought to dispute, rebuff, ignore or, in some cases, silence critique and dissent (e.g. by not publishing members’ letters in organisational journals).*

‘Listening exercises’ and ‘consultations’ have not led to any substantive change in the trajectory of the project or the structure of the framework itself and it has since

emerged that efforts to question the project, temper its excesses and address its failings by senior figures in BACP, such as the former Deputy Chair who recently resigned over the issue (Golding, 2023), have been blocked.

A Way Forward

For us, these are not the characteristics of a project that embodies the values of counselling and psychotherapy. We believe SCoPED to be too flawed to impose on the field as a whole. We understand that there are complex issues around training, practice and the future of therapy, but we do not find SCoPED to be a convincing solution to the challenges we face, or even the right path on the way to a solution.

So we are calling on the membership bodies to respect and acknowledge the rights and needs of members who do *not* wish their practices to be aligned with SCoPED. We ask that we are not forced to adopt the framework by being assigned a title and position in the columns against our will.

We value our membership organisations as diverse collectives of professionals and do not want to be forced out of these organisations in order to retain our integrity. While some may choose this path to leave (and there are legitimate forms of professional accountability away from the PSA registers), for many this simply isn't viable due to the requirements of the job market – therapists need to earn a living and being on a PSA register is increasingly seen as a necessity for employment.

The recent Impact Assessment recommends, '[a]n important space can remain for those therapists who are unconvinced of SCoPED's desirability if the framework is taken forward.' (Eastside Primetimers, 2022, p.3). In this spirit of inclusiveness and constructive engagement, we call on the SCoPED organisations to create a professional home for the substantial number of therapists in their memberships, which the NCS member vote suggests could be as high as 46%, who do not see their work and identities reflected accurately in the framework.

- **We ask that each organisation develop within their PSA-approved registers an opt-in membership category that is not aligned with the SCoPED framework's columns.**

We would welcome discussion on the practicalities of such a membership track, how it is defined, the standards of entry, accessibility for new and existing practitioner members and so on. We believe this proposal to be a creative, inclusive and growth-promoting response to an issue that has deeply divided the field, threatens to be intractable, and has already consumed too much time and energy for all those involved, including both the SCoPED bodies and the many therapists, academics, activists and organisations who have attempted to call the project to account.

Therapy is inherently concerned with internal and external conflicts, as well as issues of power, identity, difference and diversity. Therapeutic work untangles externally imposed singular truths and welcomes multiplicity in thought, feeling and being; respectfully holding the tensions this can create. Whatever our concerns, we understand that the leaders of the SCoPED project believe in their framework and that a portion of members will be content to be mapped onto its tiered practitioner categories. We call on these organisations to

respectfully include those of us who experience the framework very differently, not just with words but in action – valuing our ethical, congruent and engaged participation by welcoming us into new membership categories on the PSA registers that are not mapped onto the SCoPEd framework’s columns and titles.

Signed

The Person-Centred Association (tPCA)

United Kingdom Person-Centred Experiential (UKPCE)

Dr Peter Blundell (letter co-author), BACP Registered Member, NCS Accredited, Senior Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University

Rhianna Broadway, BACP Registered, Primary Tutor/Lecturer, Dip/MSc Contemporary Person-Centred Psychotherapy & Applications, Metanoia

Dr Rose Cameron, Edinburgh University

Dr Shun Chen, BACP Accredited, School of Education, University of Aberdeen

Sally Chisholm, BACP Registered, Programme Director for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Keele University

Lesley Dougan, BACP Accredited, NCS Senior Accredited, Programme Lead MA in Counselling and Psychotherapy Practice, Liverpool John Moores University

Dr Richard Doyle, BACP Registered, Assistant Professor, School of Education, University of Nottingham

Sam Driscoll, BACP Registered

Dr Irene Dudley-Swarbrick, Senior Lecturer, Edge Hill University

Dr Ivan Ellingham, HCPC & British Psychological Society Chartered Counselling Psychologist

Dr Gergana Ganeva, BACP Registered, HCPC, BAAT, CPsychol, Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Edge Hill University

Dr Jeff Harrison, BACP Accredited, Senior Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University

Sheila Haugh, UKCP Registered, Director of Studies, Dip/MSc Contemporary Person-Centred Psychotherapy and Applications, Metanoia

Jen Holland, BACP Registered, Assistant Professor, School of Education, University of Nottingham

Professor Stephen Joseph, British Psychological Society, School of Education, University of Nottingham

Janet Mowat, BACP Accredited, Practice placement coordinator, University of Aberdeen

Professor David Murphy (letter co-author), School of Education, University of Nottingham, Independent Practitioners Network (IPN)

Amber Parkinson, BACP Registered, Senior Lecturer, Edge Hill University

Dr Urszula Plust, NCS Accredited, School of Education, Human Flourishing Research Centre, University of Nottingham

Dr LJ Potter, NCS, School of Health, Science and Wellbeing, Staffordshire University

Dr Sue Price, NCS Accredited

Dr Gillian Proctor, University of Leeds

Andy Rogers (letter co-author), BACP Registered Member, Alliance for Counselling & Psychotherapy, IPN

Federica Savoré, BACP Registered, MCOSCA, Teaching Assistant, University of Aberdeen

Dr Susan Stephen, COSCA Accredited, Lecturer, University of Strathclyde

Janet Tolan (letter co-author), BACP Fellow, NCS Senior Accredited

Dr Kathleen Vandenberg, BACP Registered, Senior Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University

Graham Westwell, BACP Registered, Senior Lecturer, Edge Hill University

Paula J Williams MSc, NCS Fellow

References

- Cooper, M., Watson, J. C., & Hölldampf, D. (2010). *Person-Centered And Experiential Therapies Work: A Review Of The Research On Counseling, Psychotherapy And Related Practices*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
- Eastside Primetimers (2022). Final Report on the Impact Assessment of the SCoPEd Framework. Retrieved 02/03/2023 here: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/16980/final-report-on-the-impact-assessment-of-the-scoped-framework-december-2022.pdf>
- Elliott, R., Watson, J., Greenberg, L.S., Timulak, L., & Freire, E. (2013). 'Research on humanistic-experiential psychotherapies'. In M.J. Lambert (Ed.), *Bergin & Garfield's Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change* (6th ed.) (pp. 495-538). New York: Wiley.
- Golding, M. (2023). BACP Resignation Statement Feb 23. Linked In post. Retrieved 02/03/2023 here: <https://shorturl.at/bgDFT>
- Johnstone, L. & Boyle, M. with Cromby, J., Dillon, J., Harper, D., Kinderman, P., Longden, E., Pilgrim, D. & Read, J. (2018). *The Power Threat Meaning Framework: Towards the identification of patterns in emotional distress, unusual experiences and troubled or troubling behaviour, as an alternative to functional psychiatric diagnosis*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.
- Murphy, D. (2019). The Questionable Evidence Base of SCoPEd. Blog retrieved 02/03/2023 here: <https://allianceblogs.wordpress.com/2019/01/31/the-questionable-evidence-base-of-scoped/>

- Murphy, D., & Joseph, S. (2016). Person-centered therapy: Past, present, and future orientations. In D. J. Cain, K. Keenan, & S. Rubin (Eds.), *Humanistic Psychotherapies: Handbook of Research and Practice, Second Edition* (pp. 185 - 219). Washington: APA.
- PCG (The Person-Centred Group). 'SCoPEd: Insufficient and Incongruent - An open letter to BACP'. Retrieved 02/03/2023 here: <https://allianceblogs.wordpress.com/2020/10/16/open-letter-person-centred-calls-on-bacp-to-halt-scoped/>
- Rogers, A. (2019). Maps, Languages & Lost Continents: Person-Centred Therapy And The SCoPEd Project. Blog retrieved 02/03/2023 here: <https://allianceblogs.wordpress.com/2019/07/31/maps-person-centred-therapy-scoped/>
- Rogers, C. (1942). *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice* (p. 4). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Roth, A. D., & Pilling, S. (2008). Using an evidence based methodology to identify the competences required to deliver effective cognitive and behavioural therapy for depression and anxiety disorders. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 36, pp. 129-147.
- Sanders, P., & Tolan, J. (eds) (2023). *People Not Pathology: Freeing Therapy From The Medical Model*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
- Thorne, B. (1999). 'Psychotherapy and counselling are indistinguishable' (pp. 225-232) in Feltham, C. *Controversies in Psychotherapy and Counselling*. London: Sage.