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PATHWAYS TO BECOMING A COUNSELLOR or PSYCHOTHERAPIST

Introduction

COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland) is Scotland's professional body for counselling and psychotherapy.

This leaflet provides information on how to become a counsellor or psychotherapist. It is aimed at those who are beginning to think about embarking on training in counseling skills or counselling/psychotherapy. In particular, this leaflet:

- invites you to consider the setting(s) in which you would like to work as a counsellor or psychotherapist
- explains some of the training pathways or routes that you can take to become a counsellor or psychotherapist, and possible funding sources
- advises on employment opportunities
- provides a list of useful contacts.

Workplaces of Counsellors and Psychotherapists

Counsellors and psychotherapists work in a range of different settings in organisations and independent practice across the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors. The questions below are offered to help you consider the setting(s) that you would like to work in. The answers to these questions will help to determine the level of training and experience you will need to practice ethically.

Question 1: Do you want to use counselling skills in your present work?

Some people may wish to learn to use counselling skills or a counselling approach within their current work. Social workers, care and health workers, advice and guidance workers, teachers and pastoral care workers are examples of workforces in which counselling skills are used. With further training in counselling these skills can be extended into a career in counselling/psychotherapy.

Question 2: Do you want to work as a counsellor or psychotherapist within an organisation?

There are many opportunities in Scotland to work as a counsellor/psychotherapist in an organisation. Counselling organisations work at local and national levels and across the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors. Counsellors and psychotherapists are engaged by these organisations in paid and volunteer capacities. Working within an organisation has many advantages:

- most organisations offer specialist training e.g. in relationship or alcohol counselling
- some organisations provide training at no cost to the counsellor in training
- all organisations provide practice opportunities and a support structure
- most organisations provide opportunities for continued training and development
- many organisations provide counselling/psychotherapy supervision at no cost to the counsellor/psychotherapist
- some organisations have an internal system of accreditation of counsellors/psychotherapists
- all organisations that are members of COSCA operate within an agreed code of practice

Question 3: Do you want to work as a volunteer counsellor/psychotherapist?

Working as a volunteer counsellor/psychotherapists can be a very rewarding and enriching experience, with very positive outcomes for clients. Most counselling services expect a basic number of volunteer hours per week and some services may pay for additional hours at a sessional rate.

Some counselling organisations offer free training while others charge the full or partial training fee. A range of Scottish organisations offering training and practice opportunities to volunteer counsellors/psychotherapists are listed in the useful contacts section at the end of this leaflet.

There are many local projects that offer opportunities for volunteer counsellors, but these may have limited resources to provide training for the volunteers. In such cases you should complete the COSCA 120 hour training programme in counselling skills (www.cosca.org.uk - Courses – Counselling Skills), take advantage of training and development opportunities whenever possible and ensure that high quality support is provided for your helping work.

Local counselling organisations can be identified by accessing the COSCA Directory of voluntary sector counselling organisations - www.cosca.org.uk – Find a Counsellor. Volunteer Scotland's database of volunteering opportunities can also help you identify your local vacancies. www.volunteerscotland.org.uk

Most national organisations maintain a system of internal accreditation, supervision of counselling practice and continued professional development for their counsellors/psychotherapists. Many other organisations welcome voluntary input from qualified counsellors but may not have the same resources to train, supervise and accredit their workers.

Volunteer counsellors/psychotherapists working within organisations often embark upon additional training to help them develop counselling/psychotherapy into a full or part-time career.

Question 4: Do you want to become an independent counsellor/psychotherapist with your own clients?

People wishing to establish a career in counselling/psychotherapy as an employee and/or work in independent practice with their own clients would typically gain professional training that would allow them to practice ethically and to become professionally accredited with a national organisation such as COSCA (see COSCA's website under accreditation/counsellor). COSCA expects this training to be at the level of a COSCA diploma in counselling/psychotherapy (see below under training for further details).

Training Courses in Counselling Skills and Counselling

First Stage of Training: Counselling Skills

If you wish to train to become a counsellor or psychotherapist and have no training or experience in counselling/psychotherapy, COSCA advises that that you first complete the COSCA Counselling Skills Course (120 hours). This course has 40 SCQF credits at SCQF level 8. It trains people to use counselling skills in a wide variety of contexts. This is also the training recommended by COSCA for people using a counselling approach in the support part of their work.

For further information on this course, please see the course outline on www.cosca.org.uk – Find a Training Course – Counselling Skills. For a list of COSCA Validated Courses please see www.cosca.org.uk – Find a Training Course.

Second Stage of Training: Counselling and Psychotherapy

Counsellors and psychotherapists who work in a paid or volunteer capacity for an organisation that is a member of COSCA are expected to have successfully completed a programme of integrated core training in counselling (minimum of 150 contact hours) approved and/or delivered by an Organisational Member of COSCA for the training of its counsellors. Individuals who have completed this training also need to be currently practising as a counsellor with the organisation that trained them, or a similar Organisational Member of COSCA, and have their training and current involvement in counselling practice endorsed by that organisation.

COSCA expects counsellors and psychotherapists who work as independent practitioners to have successfully completed a diploma in counselling consisting of at least 400 hours of tutor/student contact and 100 hours of supervised practice with actual clients. The ratio of supervision:client hours on COSCA validated diploma courses is 1:6. Please see our list of COSCA validated diploma providers on our website under Find a Training Course - diploma. www.cosca.org.uk You can make contact directly with providers of your choice regarding costs, delivery times, selection etc

Funding Counselling/Psychotherapy Training

The cost of training to become a counsellor or psychotherapist is a considerable commitment. The average fees for the COSCA Counselling Skills Course is circa £1,200. The fees for a diploma in counselling range from £4000 to £8,000 depending on the training provider. Fees vary across providers, and so it is worthwhile contacting providers directly regarding the fees charged.

Scottish Government funding is not generally available for counselling/psychotherapy training. Some students have employers or charitable organisations willing to award a training grant to meet or help toward the cost of training. However, most students on counselling skills and counselling courses cover the costs or their fees from their own income.

Potential Sources of Funding are:

- Access or hardship loans available from training organisations
- Bursaries from colleges or local councils
- Educational trusts and endowments. The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) has a register of Scottish Trusts and will search its register for you if you fill in form REE1. <https://www.saas.gov.uk/forms/ree1.pdf>
- You can also check the following publications normally available at libraries and find out more about the range of sources of funding at <https://www.gov.uk/funding-for-postgraduate-study>

The Directory of Grant Making Trusts
Charities Digest
The Grants Register
Scholarships Abroad

- Information on sources of funding from grant awarding bodies can be found at: <http://www.sheilafraser.co.uk/news/funding-training-and-development>
- Sponsorships and scholarships from industrial organisations and government – details from Jobcentre Plus. <https://www.gov.uk/search?q=scholarships>
- Career development loans – managed by the government through high street banks. <https://www.gov.uk/career-development-loans/overview>
- **Disability and Carers Service** – if you have dependent children or have a disability, you or your partner may be able to apply for financial help with your studies. Check with the Disability and Carers Service. http://www.saas.gov.uk/forms_and_guides/dsa.htm
- **Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)**-Participants on COSCA validated courses may be eligible to apply for an Individual Training Account (ITA 200). These accounts give eligible participants up to £200 towards the cost of a course. Applicants need to meet a range of conditions to be eligible including not having a degree, having earnings under a stipulated amount and the course being recognised under the ITA scheme. Please see Skills Development Scotland's website and Colleges in Scotland <http://CollegesinScotland.ac.uk>, for the eligibility criteria and an application form. www.myworldofwork.co.uk
- **Funding from the Students Awards Agency Scotland** - eligible part-time and full-time students can apply for funding for course fees from the Students Awards

Agency Scotland (SAAS). The eligibility criteria and an application form can be found on the SAAS website (www.saas.gov.uk).

Employment Opportunities

Employment opportunities for counsellors/psychotherapists do exist. However, there appears to be more trained counsellors/psychotherapists than there are paid posts available. Counsellors/psychotherapists trained to diploma level typically may find employment in:

- Voluntary sector projects
- The healthcare sector, for example, as a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist
- Higher and further education particularly in student counselling/psychotherapy
- Community education especially youth work
- Projects involved with counselling young people of school age
- Social work projects such as drug and alcohol projects
- Independent counselling/psychotherapy organisations
- Industrial settings through employee assistance programmes

Job vacancies are advertised every Friday and Sunday in the Scotsman and Herald newspapers. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations weekly publishes its newspaper, Third Force New and its Good Moves website has a regularly up-dated list of voluntary sector vacancies. www.goodmoves.org.uk The Big Issue carries an appointments section advertising posts available in the voluntary sector.

Average salary: Skills Development Scotland provide the following information as a guide to the average salary of a counsellor in Scotland

'Actual pay rates may vary, depending on: where you work, the size of the company or organisation you work for, and the demand for the job. Starting salaries for counsellors are in the range £18,000 to £27,000 a year. Experienced counsellors can earn up to £30,000 a year and managers of agencies or projects can earn £40,000 or more. If you are self-employed, you charge a fee for each session with a client, which can be between £35 to £50 an hour. You may not have a regular income. Counsellors working for the NHS start on Band 5 of the Agenda for Change pay scale (April 2010), currently £21,176 to £27,534 a year. Specialist counsellors earn up to £40,157 and counsellor consultants can earn up to £46,621 a year.'

Membership of COSCA - Why Join COSCA?

While a student on a counselling skills or counselling course, individuals can apply to join COSCA as student members.

Once they have successfully completed the training in counselling skills, they can apply to join COSCA as a Counselling Skills member. If you are continuing your counselling training, the more appropriate category of membership would be to remain as a Student member.

On completion of the training as a counsellor/psychotherapists, you can apply to join COSCA as a Counsellor Member (Organisations) or Counsellor Member.

Please see our Membership Information Leaflet on our website: www.cosca.org.uk – Join Us – Individual Membership.

Useful Contacts:

COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) www.cosca.org.uk	01786 475140
Relationships Scotland www.relationships-scotland.org.uk	0845 119 2020
Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland www.crusescotland.org.uk	01738 444178
Skills Development Scotland www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk	0141 285 6000
The Spark www.thespark.org.uk	0141 222 2166
Student Awards Agency Scotland www.saas.gov.uk	0300 555 0505
Volunteer Scotland www.volunteerscotland.org.uk	01786 479593

Other useful information available from COSCA 's website: www.cosca.org.uk

- Directory of COSCA Validated Counselling Skills Courses
- Directory of COSCA Validated Diploma in Counselling Courses
- Accreditation as a Counsellor/Psychotherapist
- COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice