

SECTION 32: SOURCES OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

While training is usually an exciting and stimulating experience, it can also be challenging and sometimes stressful. It is common for trainees to go through periods when they feel overwhelmed or upset. Making a judgment about when to seek support is not always easy; especially because these periods of stress can be fairly transient, and in some ways learning to manage them is part of the learning process. Equally, mental health professionals can be reluctant to seek help because they somehow feel that they should be able to cope by themselves, even when they know that they are finding this a challenge.

Deciding when a problem needs to be addressed is not easy, but the Course aims to ensure that trainees can seek advice and support in a reasonably timely manner. We also hope that the ethos of the Course counters any sense of stigma attached to mental health problems in trainees or in staff – after all, if we are true to the values of our own profession we should accept our own potential vulnerability, and be open to taking appropriate steps when we know that we are not managing as well as we might.

This section includes information about:

- a) Trainee Wellbeing and Supporting and Valuing Lived Experience of Mental Health Difficulties in Training
- b) Support systems offered by the Course (including the Personal Advisor Schemes)
- c) Support systems offered by UCL, and
- d) Support systems offered by external organisations

TRAINEE WELLBEING AND SUPPORTING AND VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES IN TRAINING

Developing skills in self-care and wellbeing are an important competence for all trainees. We want to draw your attention to the 2020 BPS/DCP guidance ‘Supporting and valuing lived experience of mental health difficulties in clinical psychology training’ which is the Appendix to this section of the Handbook. We encourage you to read through this guidance which has the following key aims/principles:

- Guidance for the training community to increase the likelihood that trainees with mental health difficulties will be supported
- Recognition that mental health difficulties are common among mental health professionals and those in training
- Challenge silence, stigma and shame
- Create a culture of compassion and openness
- Normalizing and valuing stance
- Knowing when to ask for help and doing so is a sign of professional competence
- Provide good practice examples and information about multiple sources of support for trainees and trainers

Placement supervisors also receive this 2020 BPS/DCP guidance with placement letters. An important part of the supervisory relationship is ensuring that self-care and wellbeing are discussed within supervision. The BPS accreditation standards state that individual supervision should provide “opportunities to discuss personal issues, professional development, overall workload and organisational difficulties as well as ongoing case work.” The standards also state that “Supervisors should be sensitive to, and prepared to discuss, personal issues that arise for trainees in the course of their work.”

SUPPORT SYSTEMS WITHIN THE COURSE

Course Tutor

Each trainee is assigned a Course Tutor. The tutor's role is holistic – not only to support and advise on academic and clinical matters, but also to monitor and support personal/professional development.

The Course is keen that trainees maintain regular contact with their tutor, and that they see their relationship with the tutor as supportive. For this reason there are timetabled 'tutor slots' throughout the year which ensure that trainees meet with their tutor on a regular basis. The content of these meetings varies according to need, but usually includes discussion of academic progress and forthcoming work, experience of clinical placements and supervision, progress with research, and issues related to personal/professional development. Our intent is that the relationship between tutor and trainee is such that these meetings can also include discussion of any personal matters that are impacting on the trainee's experience of the course.

In addition to timetabled tutor slots, there is more formal discussion of progress and development at the 'developmental review', which takes place annually.

Trainees are free to contact their Course Tutor at any time, especially if there are any pressing matters that are causing concern. Access is not restricted to timetabled slots.

Mid Placement Review (MPR) visitor

Each trainee is assigned an MPR placement visitor who visits their placement and undertakes the Mid Placement Review. Often - but not always – the MPR visitor is the trainee's course tutor.

The role of the MPR visitor is to review progress in the placement and trainee development within it, and to help supervisors and trainees problem-solve if any there are any difficulties with the placement. More details of the MPR process can be found in the Section 13 of this handbook.

Research Co-ordinators

Each year group has a Research Co-ordinator who assists trainees in choosing the area for the Major Research Project, finding a supervisor, and so on (more details can be found in Section 19 of this handbook which gives details of the Major Research Project).

PERSONAL ADVISOR SCHEMES

Background

The primary role of the advisor is to provide a stable and continuous external professional focus for the trainee throughout the three years of training. Hopefully advisors will help support their trainee's professional development by acting as an independent 'sounding board', offering a regular opportunity to discuss and review their experiences on the course and to place these into a broader perspective. The advisor will develop knowledge and understanding of the trainee's background, ongoing experience of the course, and aspirations for the future. They also offer more general support, and (if the trainee wishes) can act an advocate, supporting the trainee in managing problems which arise in relation to academic or clinical aspects of the course. However, meetings are not 'therapy' and advisors are not therapists; although it is very likely that personal issues will be discussed in meetings, the emphasis should be on professional matters.

Procedure

Trainees are invited to look through the list of current Personal Advisors (held by Fran Brady, Senior Clinical Tutor) to select someone that they think might be a good fit. We recommend that trainees make contact with a personal advisor to arrange an initial meeting to discuss the IPA process and what they hope to get from their contact. It can be useful to discuss mutual conceptions of the personal advisor relationship at the outset, how the trainee would like to use the contact and where boundaries will be drawn. If, following this meeting, both the trainee and personal advisor agree that it is a good arrangement and agree to continue meeting, the trainee should inform the IPA list holder to update the folder.

The plan is for meetings to continue throughout training. How frequently visits take place is for the trainee and advisor to decide, though for the contact to be meaningful at least two visits a year seems sensible.

Meetings are confidential; the advisor will not be involved at any stage in the trainee's supervision, and there is no direct feedback between advisors and the Course. If an advisor acted as an advocate for the trainee, this would only take place at the trainee's request.

Practical Arrangements

The timing and venue for meetings are left to the trainee and advisor to negotiate. For convenience, some pairs have met at the advisor's home, while others meet in the workplace. Meetings may be from 1-2 hours duration. Trainees are entitled to take time from their placements or study time to meet with their personal advisors.

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Additional Sources of Support

LGBT and black and ethnic minority trainees

We value diversity within our trainee cohort, but we recognise that sometimes 'difference' can be an important issue during training, and can impact on the training experience. This isn't inevitable, but we think it is better to recognise the possibility that some trainees might want support around this (and to offer this) rather than to deny this possibility and offer nothing.

The IPA scheme is a possible resource for trainees who may wish to address particular issues relating to parenting/caring responsibilities, sexuality or to ethnicity in relation to their training. **All personal advisors indicate on their resume whether they have a particular interest and/or competences to act as an advisor in each of these areas.**

The scheme aims to offer a private space to reflect on any issues relating to sexuality or ethnicity which may be impacting on trainees. Although trainees may want to discuss issues of concern, it would be a shame if advisors were purely seen in a 'troubleshooting' role. Trainees should also feel free to use the experience and expertise of advisors more widely to help with personal and professional development. The role of personal advisors is to offer support, advice and advocacy as appropriate; not to provide personal therapy.

Useful areas of discussion might include:

- Negotiating the overlap between personal and professional lives
- Feeling unique within a training peer group and making decisions about how much or how little to say about one's sexuality or ethnicity
- Feelings of isolation within peer group, placement setting and the profession of clinical psychology
- The impact of working with clients and staff within a predominantly white or European culture, or a culture of assumed heterosexuality
- Working in systems and with colleagues who may have conflicting personal values and theoretical frameworks for thinking about ethnicity or homosexuality
- The importance of hearing the experiences of qualified clinical psychologists who come from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, or are lesbian, gay and bisexual

Parents and carers support scheme

Trainees who are parents or carers may experience training rather differently from their peers, particularly because it can be hard to balance the demands of training with the demands of these roles. For this reason it is helpful for trainees to have access to a forum for sharing experiences.

A number of personal advisors have indicated an interest and willingness to make themselves available for parent/carer trainees who may wish to discuss the sort of issues noted above. Trainees are encouraged to contact specific advisors if they think that this would be helpful.

If you have any queries about support for trainees, either talk to your course tutor or to Fran Brady (Senior Clinical Tutor).

Policy for the IPA system

- a) The scheme should operate in a way that ensures continuity, confidentiality and impartiality.
- b) The personal advisor for any particular trainee will not act as a clinical supervisor to that trainee at any time.
- c) Advisors should meet at least two times per year. Regular contact should be scheduled, rather than waiting for problems to arise.
- d) The clinical trainee may additionally request to see their advisor at any time, and advisors should attempt to respond to such a request within a short period of time.
- e) Contact between the advisor and the trainee will remain entirely confidential, including details of the time and content of meetings.
- f) Trainees or advisors who consider that the pairing is unsatisfactory and wish to change should approach the co-ordinator of the scheme. The trainee will be assigned a new advisor.
- g) Where an issue appears to have reached an impasse, and all attempts to settle the matter directly with the trainee have failed, clinical and academic supervisors may approach a trainee's advisor in order to request or prompt some help in mediating the problem. Such an approach can only be made on the understanding that the advisor acts primarily as an advocate for the trainee, and can only be involved with the trainee's consent.

Involving the advisor in appeals and disputes

Where a trainee feels that he/she has been dealt with unfairly by the course in any respect, the trainee may request that the advisor becomes involved as an advocate.

This policy is not intended to replace, or in any way alter, any policies currently operated in University College London, or in specific Health Authorities, regarding disciplinary or appeals procedures. Disputes will normally be dealt with in the first instance by the trainee directly. The advisor will only become involved at the trainee's request and after appropriate attempts by the trainee to resolve the problem.

Student Psychological Services

The service offers a range of interventions, including brief CBT. Recognising the fact that trainees are full-time employees the service tries to be flexible when offering appointments (for example, by scheduling these early in the day or in the evening).

Details of the service can be found at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/student-psychological-services/index_home

Online support

There is an online mutual support group for UCL students at www.ucl.ac.uk/support-pages

Support for trainees with disabilities and/or special needs

UCL and Departmental policy is to offer appropriate support to trainees who have disabilities or special needs. This usually means finding the best way to adapt working conditions or the working environment to meet the trainee's needs.

The term 'special needs' covers a wide range of difficulties – for example, those which relate to academic work (such as dyslexia), or disabilities which restrict travel, or which make it important that placements include appropriate access and working conditions. Trainees should feel free to discuss any special needs with Course Tutors early in the course so that (where applicable) special provision can be considered and arranged.

UCL Disability Services offers a range of services – more information can be found at: www.ucl.ac.uk/disability

Careers information and guidance

Careers advice is given throughout the course. Each trainee follows a mix of compulsory and elective placements, and their 'training plan' will usually relate to their plans for post-qualification employment. Emerging ideas about employment are usually discussed with the Course Tutor (and especially at development reviews). In the third year there is one session of formal teaching, which covers the process of applying for jobs (making applications, writing CV's and interviewing technique).

Because there is such a close link between training and employment most careers advice is given on an individual basis by Course Tutors. However, trainees can make use of facilities offered by the Career Advisory Service (www.ucl.ac.uk/careers).

Graduate School

Details of support offered by the Graduate School (including Faculty Office, Dean of Students, and Advisors to Women) can be found on the website: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate-study>

Seeking psychological therapy and psychiatric support while on the Course

There are two common reasons for seeking therapy while on the Course:

- a) Some trainees feel personal therapy would help them to understand themselves better, and hence be more effective as psychologists. Their aim is not to resolve specific problems or symptoms but to have the opportunity to reflect at a more general level.
- b) Some trainees experience psychological difficulties, which interfere with their personal or professional functioning. For these individuals the motivation for seeking therapy (alone or in conjunction with more medically based interventions) is because their problems are affecting their personal and professional lives in a significant manner.

Whatever the motivation for therapy, the Course will try to help put trainees in touch with relevant individuals or organisations.

Trainees who are experiencing a mental health problem, which affects their capacity to undertake the course, and especially their capacity to undertake clinical work, are strongly encouraged to talk to a member of the Course team - hopefully their Course Tutor. Although we understand the reluctance of trainees to reveal problems to members of the Course, we can use our professional contacts to try to locate the most appropriate therapist - not always an easy task for individual trainees, especially if they are already feeling distressed.

Sometimes trainees might be best served by a standard NHS mental health referral through their GP. This will certainly be the case if their problem is more appropriately addressed by a combination of psychological therapy and medication, or by medication alone.

Potential sources of therapy for trainees

Psychodynamic therapies

The British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC) maintains a register of accredited psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, Jungian analysts and DIT practitioners:

www.bpc.org.uk/

The following organisations also offer consultations and different kinds of psychodynamic therapies:

1. The British Psychotherapy Foundation: www.britishpsychotherapyfoundation.org.uk

Also offers low fee intensive psychotherapy, psychoanalysis or Jungian analysis to those who are on low incomes. There tend to be a limited number of places available:

www.britishpsychotherapyfoundation.org.uk/therapy/low-fee-intensive-therapy

2. WPF Therapy: www.wpf.org.uk. Offers low cost/sliding scale time-limited and long-term psychodynamic psychotherapy and group therapy.
3. Camden Psychotherapy Unit: www.cpu-london.com/. Offers low fee (or free) short-term and long-term psychodynamic psychotherapy and group therapy.
4. The London Clinic of the Institute of Psychoanalysis: www.psychoanalysis.org.uk/iopa-clinics/low-fee-scheme. Following a consultation, offers a low-fee, five times weekly psychoanalysis for a minimum of two years.
5. The Society of Analytical Psychology: www.thesap.org.uk/therapy-services/consultation-service/. Offers consultations for Jungian psychotherapy and analysis.

6. The Institute of Group Analysis: www.groupanalysis.org. Specialises in group therapy but can also offer individual, couple and family therapy. Offers an informal telephone discussion and will then put you in touch with a therapist for an initial consultation.

CBT

The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) maintain a register of accredited CBT therapists on their website: www.cbtregisteruk.com

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT)

The Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy maintain a register of accredited CAT therapists: www.acat.me.uk/page/how+can+i+get+to+see+a+cat+therapist

Services for sexual minorities

Pink Therapy have a directory of therapists who work with gender and sexual diversity clients from an affirmative standpoint: www.pinktherapy.com

London Friend (www.londonfriend.org.uk) is an LGBT mental health and wellbeing charity. They offer counselling and support to LGBT people and for those who may be questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. They also offer social and support groups in central London which provide a safe space for people to come together to discuss a range of issues affecting them, including coming out and questions about sexuality.

Switchboard (www.switchboard.lgbt) is an LGBT+ helpline, which listens to all kinds of calls. Examples of the things they can help with include:

- Information about support groups for someone who thinks they are trans or nonbinary.
- Support for a man who has been a victim of homophobic abuse, but has previously had a bad experience going to the police.
- Contact details for an LGBT-friendly therapist.
- Times and places for a local bisexual social group.