

– that's been purely optional for people to complete. We need to move this forward and, as EAP providers, engage counsellors to seek more information on their intervention that can enable EAPs to better track and manage cases and ultimately provide better reporting options to organisations.

Increasingly, purchasers of EAP services are looking for evidence of return on their investment so an increased focus on services and practice that delivers measurable value, necessitating effective and innovative service delivery, will be beneficial for all parties.

What opportunities are there for UK EAPA and BACP Workplace to work together?

Whilst we have separate identities as organisations, there are a number of opportunities, I think, for UK EAPA and BACP Workplace to work together closely in the future. This might be on supporting learning and professional development across both industries or working together to promote and campaign for key issues, such as the current tax relief campaign.

An increasing number of counsellors and psychotherapists are contacting UK EAPA to seek work with EAP providers so it's clear that many BACP Workplace members recognise the professional opportunities that exist within the EAP industry. Whilst there is no requirement to be a member of UK EAPA in order to provide counselling or psychotherapy services, a significant group of individual practitioners are choosing to do so. These individuals are keen to demonstrate their commitment to the work of EAPs and as a result are in a strong position to be recruited to individual provider networks.

By 2020, stress-related disorders will become the second leading cause of worldwide disabilities and health expenditures, behind only heart disease according to the World Health Organisation, and in the UK the amount of stress-related absence grows year on year. Looking forward, UK EAPA envisages partnering with organisations like BACP Workplace to develop initiatives and provide research to help tackle these issues.

With the large growth in EAP contracts over recent years, the number of counsellors engaged in EAP is now at an all-time high. EAPA is currently looking at ways that we can support both our corporate and individual members with common application and membership benefits.

For more information on UK EAPA or to access any of its free EAP resources, go to www.eapa.org.uk ■

BACP Research

John McLeod, a member of the BACP Research Committee, gives advice on how to submit a paper

Following my article about workplace counselling in the summer issue of *Counselling at Work*¹, as a BACP Research Committee member I wanted to describe the decision-making process around submissions to the BACP Research Conference.

I have been involved in the annual Research Conference since it began in the 1990s. The first four conferences were organised by Sue Wheeler and myself and as it developed in size BACP took on the running of the event. As a counselling researcher, research supervisor, and user of research as a means of informing my therapy practice, the Research Conference has always been important to me. It is a place where I can meet other people with similar interests, and learn about their projects and ideas. I think that one of the strengths of counselling and psychotherapy research in the UK lies in its acceptance of methodological pluralism – there is a broad agreement that all kinds of research methodologies have a role to play, from randomised controlled trials to autoethnography. The Research Conference reflects this open-minded approach, and has always found space for a wide range of different types of studies. The conference has also followed a policy of encouraging contributions from researchers at all levels of experience, from undergraduate and master's students doing their first piece of research, through to international research leaders.

The BACP Conference is held in May each year and BACP invites a 'co-host' to join in collaboratively hosting the event; the co-host might be an academic institution or a sister organisation, like SPR this year. Anyone wishing to offer a paper, workshop or poster to the conference is required to submit a proposal in the previous November. The dates for these events are published in *Therapy Today*, and on the research pages of the BACP website (www.bacp.co.uk), well in advance. Last November we received 104 proposals in total, in the form of 350-word abstracts submitted on a standard pro forma. Each of these proposals was anonymised, then reviewed by a team of four experienced researchers, who independently used a rating scale to evaluate each abstract; the criteria for rating is clearly given on each submission form. Ratings were collated and time was spent discussing any instances of disagreement between reviewers at

Conference

a face-to-face meeting. The review panel included a member of the co-host organisation and academics who are involved with BACP and who attend the conference every year. They fully understand and are open to the merits of different methodologies, and have a good feel for what is likely to be of interest to conference delegates. This year, the review process resulted in 80 submissions being accepted outright (some of these required minor amendments), 13 being accepted with an offer to present the research in the form of a poster rather than a paper (of which, seven declined the invitation), with four submissions not being accepted for the conference. Feedback was provided to those contributors whose submissions needed further work, or were not accepted, and there were some situations in which the contributors appealed against the recommendation of the reviewers, and further dialogue occurred. Subsequently, the decision was made to include a PhD student in the panel in future, who, together with a different co-host representative each year, will ensure a continuous flow of members of the review panel.

Why is this procedure adopted? Why are Research Conference submissions subjected to rigorous peer review procedures? There are basically two reasons why this process is followed. First, independent peer reviews are used by all research journals, including *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* and the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, to maintain the quality of articles that are published, and to ensure that papers are accepted on the basis of merit rather than because of the reputation of the researcher or the fact that he or she is a friend or colleague of the editor. The use of peer review is therefore essential as a way of supporting the external credibility and reputation of the research conference. The second reason for employing a rigorous quality control process is that delegates at the conference are routinely invited to evaluate the presentations they attend, and quite often give low ratings to certain papers. Conference participants get frustrated and annoyed if they turn up to listen to a paper or view a poster and then discover that it is not what they expected, or is just not a good piece of work. The peer review procedure therefore plays a vital role in ensuring that people who attend the conference get good value for money and are not wasting their time.



HEMERA/THINKSTOCK

‘The Research Conference has always been important to me. It is a place where I can meet other people with similar interests, and learn about their projects and ideas’

Why are some conference submissions accepted, while others are turned down? There are four factors that are regularly associated with submissions that need to be revised or are rejected:

- *The abstract is not clear enough.* Sometimes, it is hard for reviewers who are reading an abstract to ascertain the aims of the study, the characteristics of participants, the methods used to collect and analyse data, and the eventual findings. If you are in doubt about how to write an abstract, it can be helpful to access the research pages on the BACP website, where you will find examples of successful abstracts from previous years. The abstract needs to be written in a specific format, which has been developed so that the ‘story’ of a research project can be explained as clearly and succinctly as possible. In my experience, abstracts that diverge from this format are rarely satisfactory because they tend to omit essential pieces of information.

- *The study is not about counselling and psychotherapy.* There are some very good research reports that are not accepted for the conference because they do not directly address counselling issues. These are studies that read as if they would be better placed in an education, social work or health psychology conference. Clearly, there is a great deal of valuable research that takes place at

the interface between counselling and these other disciplines. However, people attend the BACP Research Conference because they are interested in counselling and psychotherapy – if your study is interdisciplinary then you need to make sure that your abstract highlights the counselling dimension of what you have done.

■ *The presentation or workshop is not about research.* Sometimes, people submit proposals to the Research Conference to present papers or facilitate workshops that seem very interesting and useful, but are not actually about research. The Research Conference is intended primarily to provide an arena for discussion of reports of research, and secondarily as a forum for discussing methodological issues in research. For example, some of my own research has focused on narrative processes in therapy. I have facilitated several workshops on 'being sensitive to narrative processes in therapy' (and similar titles). These workshops have been informed by research, but do not involve looking at the details of how this research was carried out. As a result, the BACP Research Conference is not an appropriate outlet for these workshops; I therefore need to find somewhere else to offer these papers.

■ *The study is not complete.* Occasionally, at the point of submitting an abstract in November, a researcher or research team may not have completed their study. This creates a problem for reviewers. At the conference, papers that report on incomplete studies can be highly disappointing for members of the audience who sit through them. In general, conference participants are not all that interested in learning about the rationale for a study, or why certain methods were chosen – what they want to know is what the study actually produced in terms of reliable knowledge. When an abstract describes an incomplete study, therefore, the review panel will usually want to go back to the applicant to check whether a sufficiently complete set of findings will in fact be ready by the start of the following May.

In my experience, these are the main reasons why some submissions are questioned by the review panel. Proposals for workshops are reviewed in a similar vein. A workshop is allocated 60 minutes, which is a substantial block of time within the overall length of the conference (delegates could attend two papers, or view 10 posters within this time period) so it is essential to be very sure that the topic being covered actually requires a full workshop of 60 minutes.

On occasion, the reviewers feel that a paper would be better suited to a poster format and the presenter may be given the opportunity to offer their work in the form of a poster rather than a

spoken paper. In my view, there are many advantages to presenting a poster. For example, at least 90 per cent of conference delegates will view a poster and have the opportunity to interact with the presenter, whereas only around 20 per cent of delegates are likely to attend a paper (there are four or five parallel strands at any one time with papers and workshops running concurrently). Posters are therefore an excellent means of making contact with other conference participants who may have a strong interest in your work.

Guidelines for submitting a conference abstract are available on the research area of the BACP website, and the research office is open to responding to any queries raised by potential presenters on how to interpret these instructions. If you are considering submitting a proposal, it is important to look carefully at these guidelines, study previous examples of successful abstracts, and ask experienced colleagues or mentors for feedback on an early draft of your proposal. The review panel has a lot of (unpaid) work to do, and does not have time to decipher the meaning of idiosyncratically written abstracts. In my view, every master's dissertation should be worthy of presentation at the conference, and each PhD student should have something new to offer during each year of their research. I would personally like to see a lot more papers being submitted to the conference.

I am particularly concerned that we don't 'lose' research that is being undertaken within the BACP divisional membership. I reiterate from my previous piece in *Counselling at Work*, that there is insufficient evidence to guide policy and practice around the key issues and choices faced by practitioners, service users or purchasers. The panel would value submissions from PhD and master's students, representing the wealth of varied research activity within BACP Workplace members; indeed, all BACP Workplace members undertaking research should consider submitting their work to the conference.

This article has therefore been constructed in a spirit of encouragement and welcome, in the hope that a more detailed understanding of how the decision procedure operates, and the factors that are taken into account, will make it easier for colleagues to participate in an annual event that is consistently rewarding and stimulating for anyone interested in research.

For more information about submitting a paper, please visit www.bacp.co.uk/research ■

Reference

1 McLeod J. Research on workplace counselling: an invitation to dialogue. *Counselling at Work*. 2011; 73:2-4.

