

Counsellor/Psychotherapist Accreditation Scheme

‘To demonstrate the capacity for independent, competent, ethical practice’

Applying for Accreditation - Criterion 8

Reflective Practice, Criterion 8: Knowledge and Understanding

Introduction

In Criterion 8 you are required to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding by describing your way of working as a counsellor/psychotherapist. It is here that you tell us about your rationale for practice, what place your self-awareness as a practitioner has within your way of working and your understanding of issues of difference and equality. This paper aims to address each of these sub-criteria in turn and explain what the assessor team are looking for in your application.

Format

You have a word count of 1,400 words for Criterion 8. As with the other reflective practice criteria, Criterion 8 is broken down into 3 sub-criteria - 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3.

You may choose to write to each of these sub-criteria separately under headings or to address all of Criterion 8 in one go. Whichever format you choose, you must reference each of the sub-criteria clearly so that the assessors can see exactly where you are providing evidence for each. We want you to be successful in your application and so it is helpful to the assessors to be directed by you to where the evidence for each sub-criterion sits. Conversely, the over use of referencing can have the opposite effect. For example, if you write a paragraph and then reference all three of the sub-criteria after it, then this won't provide a clear indication that you have understood the criteria.

Criterion 8: Knowledge and Understanding

8.1 Describe a rationale for your client work with reference to the theory / theories that inform all your practice

Describe a rationale for your client work with reference to the theory / theories that inform all your practice. Experience tells us that when asked to 'describe your rationale' many applicants become concerned about articulating their approach.

Although in Criterion 8 you are being asked to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding, it is important for you to know that the assessors are not looking for an academic piece of work. What you are being asked to do is describe in your own words, what it is that you do and why you do it, with all of your different client groups. Of course this will need some explanation of the different theories that underpin your practice to show your conceptual understanding of your approach, but we do not require a lengthy account of each theory.

After having been qualified for some time, your approach is likely to have developed since your initial training through your experience as a counsellor/psychotherapist, CPD and any additional training. Although your past training is relevant and important, what we are most interested in is how you practice today. You may have been trained in and work within one theoretical orientation, or your practice may incorporate several different approaches. In either scenario, your rationale - and thus, your way of working - is unique to you.

The most common reasons for being deferred on this criterion include firstly, not providing a clear link between your way of working and the theory that informs your approach. In contrast, applicants can get too hung up on the theory and neglect to tell us what types of interventions they use with their clients and why. Another common error is when applicants whose rationale is based on different theories fail to explain how they bring these approaches together to form a consistent way of working. An example of this might be when an applicant says something like 'my core approach is Person Centred but I also use CBT techniques when appropriate'.

This type of statement falls down on two counts. One, because it does not explain how these two very different approaches are brought together to make a coherent whole and two, because it does not explain what 'when appropriate' actually means. What is 'appropriate' to one practitioner may be quite different to another. Another example is when applicants tell us that they have a 'toolkit' of different techniques and approaches without saying what these are, what theories underpin them and why they might use them.

The variety of theories and techniques is not an issue for accreditation, but what is important it is that you tell us how any differences between them are reconciled and what your rationale is for using a particular approach/intervention. Many counsellors/psychotherapists describe themselves as being 'Integrative', drawing on a range of theories and approaches. If this applies to you, you may find it helpful to start making a list of the different words that are connected to your way of working. For example, such a list might include 'core conditions, self-actualisation, non-directive, transference, scaling, parent, adult, child, negative automatic thoughts and maintenance cycle'. In this case, the therapist would need to consider the different theories that underpin these concepts and how they sit together - and with - his/her main theoretical base. The applicant would need to provide an explanation in their application of what prompts their use of interventions from these different approaches and how they bring them together to form a coherent approach.

8.1 Describe a rationale for your client work with reference to the theory / theories that inform all your practice - *continued*

The other important point to remember when writing your rationale is to consider all of the different client groups that you work with. For instance, if you work with individual adults and also with children and young people, your way of working with these different groups is likely to differ in some ways. Likewise, if you work with couples, families and/or groups or if you practice in both short-term and long-term settings, you may modify your approach to fit the specific needs of certain client groups. Within this, you also need to consider any alternative mediums by which you provide counselling such as telephone counselling or any forms of online working, and also any impact that the counselling context/setting in which you practice may have on your way of working. In your rationale you need to tell us how you adapt your approach for your different client groups. This may include some of the particular considerations that impact on your way of working with these client groups. So for example, in the case of working with children and young people, different developmental stages may inform your approach and/or use of interventions.

To get started, it may help you to sit with a colleague and describe your client groups and explain your ways of working with them. Your colleague can help you to crystallise the articulation of your approach by prompting you and asking questions for further clarification.

Alternatively, talking into a recording device may help you in the early stages of writing. Do remember when writing that the use of theory words and jargon are only useful if their meaning is made clear. In addition, you are not required to include quotes from literature sources or provide a bibliography.

8.2 Describe the place of your self-awareness within your way of working

As an extension of 8.1, criterion 8.2 asks you to explain how you use yourself within the therapeutic relationship. What is important here is that you show an awareness of your own process and describe how you work safely without your own reactions and experiences getting in the way. Within this, you will need to make reference to your rationale as described in 8.1. This may include the use of specific terms that relate to self-awareness that are consistent with your theoretical approach. Some words that are commonly used here include congruence, immediacy, reflexivity, projection, transference and countertransference. These types of words may be used to describe the nature and importance of your self-awareness and of how you observe and understand your use of self during the therapeutic process. It is important to note here that this list of words is not prescriptive and that the use of such terms is not a requirement. What we very much want to read about is in your own words, how you see the role of your own self-awareness in your way of working.

8.3 Describe how issues of difference and equality impact upon the therapeutic relationship

In criterion 8.3 you are being asked to show your understanding of the impact that issues of difference and equality can have on the therapeutic relationship and how you consider these in your work. You will need to explain in your application how you, in a general sense, address such issues in your thinking and way of working.

What we don't require here is a long list of a range of different issues with accompanying statements such as 'I have lots of experience of working with difference' or 'I treat everyone the same'. Nor do we want an example of some work you did with a client who was different from you as we are looking for evidence of your awareness in relation to all of your clients. What is needed here is an explanation of how you consider both explicit and implicit issues of difference and equality in your work, and in particular, those that are relevant to your area of practice. For example, some issues are visible such as age, gender, race and physical disability.

Others may be audible like language or perhaps invisible in the case of social class or religion. Your submission might consider the balance of power in the counselling relationship and of how you seek to address this in your practice.

You might also include how clients might see themselves in relation to the world and to you. Consideration of the similarities between you and your clients might also feature and how you guard against over identification.

To ensure consistency in your accreditation submission, it is important here to consider the all of the different client groups with whom you practice and the different contexts/settings in which counselling takes place. So for example, a middle class male counsellor who works with predominately female children and young people within a deprived area may pay particular attention to age, gender, language, class and culture and to how these issues can potentially get in the way of the work if left unattended.

Conclusion

Remember, for Criterion 8 we do not require case material, as Criterion 9 provides an opportunity for you to illustrate your way of working in practice. What we require for 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3 is an overview of your approach for all of your practice and the different client groups that you work with.

We look forward to receiving your application.

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