

This document outlines what the SCoPEd project is, and how it relates to counselling and psychotherapy in the UK. This document was written for #TherapistsConnect.

### **1. What is SCoPEd?**

SCoPEd stands for Scope of Practice and Education. It is a project currently being undertaken by three membership bodies (MBs) in counselling and psychotherapy (C&P). The stated purpose of the project is to set/map out some of the different training routes (ways to enter the profession) and competences of practitioners in the C&P field.

### **2. What is a Membership Body (MB)?**

Membership bodies are professional institutions, sometimes charities or hybrids between a business and a charity. MBs are joined by counsellors/psychotherapists to demonstrate their qualified status and show commitment to ethical practice. Each MB holds a register that is accredited by the [Professional Standards Authority](#). There are currently 11 membership bodies within C&P, each with a different specialism or approach to the industry. Some practitioners belong to more than one body and may move from one to another for various reasons. The 11 bodies are detailed on the [PSA website](#). Trainees are encouraged to join during their studies and as they qualify and enter practice. Membership bodies offer support with working in the field, continued professional development (CPD), an ethical code or framework, and also a route for clients to seek out qualified therapists as well as complain if there has been an issue with a practitioner.

### **3. Who is running SCoPEd?**

SCoPEd is being run by a collaboration of three different MBs for counsellors and psychotherapists. The three MBs in the collaboration are The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists ([BACP](#)), which is the biggest MB of the 11 with just under 50,000 members. BACP are joined by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy ([UKCP](#)) with over 10,000 and the British Psychoanalytic Council ([BPC](#)) with about 1,500 members. The research teams completing this project are made up of members of these membership bodies, within a Technical Group and an Expert Reference Group (ERG). The SCoPEd team also has an independent chair and an independent data analyst. More information about the people working in SCoPEd is available in the latest [methodologies document](#) (July 2020, Appendix i, Page 10)

### **4. How is the framework being put together?**

SCoPEd has been put together using an “[evidence-based approach](#)” (specifically that of [Roth and Pilling \(2008\)](#)). Evidence-based research is an approach which emphasises the practical application of findings of the best available current research evidence. In terms of SCoPEd, the research has mainly involved looking for the competences required at different levels of training and practice by examining documents such as existing competence frameworks and training course curriculums. The collaboration of MBs have then used this ‘evidence’ to compose a framework document setting out the competences required at different ‘entry points’ to the C&P professions.

### **5. What does the framework look like?**

The framework has multiple documents including a methodology document and FAQ pages. The framework of training/competency has three columns which set out different levels of Counselling and Psychotherapy practice/training/competence. These are labelled A, B and C but formerly had different titles. Columns A and C broadly align with the training and entry requirements for, respectively, the BACP and UKCP registers, plus BACP's 'accredited' level of membership in column B. Pertinent to students, the authors of SCoPEd state that the columns broadly relate to the training and entry requirements for the three MB's registers. It is important to note for those recently qualifying, this iteration of SCoPEd (Version 2), states that it goes beyond entry levels and will allow progressive routes along and between the columns (i.e. from A to B and B to C etc.) However, the detail of how this would work in practice is not laid out in the framework (there are, instead, some [case studies](#) that seek to illustrate how this might work). You can view the whole framework by opening the document via any of the three MBs linked here: [BACP](#) / [UKCP](#) / [BPC](#) and also the accessible version hosted on the BACP website [here](#).

## 6. Why do some people criticise the framework?

Some of the issues highlighted with the SCoPEd project include the methodology. There has been criticism of the methods used to complete the research that the framework is based on because it is based on approaches/sectors (e.g. CBT practice in the NHS/IAPT) that are seen as inappropriate for the field SCoPEd is attempting to map. The openly stated absence of ethical considerations relating to the methodologies used and the potential impact of the project after consultation also concerns critics. Whilst the SCoPEd document signposts some intention for improving access to services, jobs and training provision, without a robust plan for the outcome, the project is seen by some to be without a clear agenda.

There are issues highlighted around the document showing a tiered hierarchy of competency (with "counsellors" at the bottom and "psychotherapists" at the top) within a field that is, as it stands, without such hierarchy in any official sense. As there is no legal distinction between counselling and psychotherapy (neither title is legally protected in the UK) and the difference between counselling and psychotherapy is highly contentious among therapists themselves, some practitioners are concerned that SCoPEd could create an artificial and hierarchical differentiation. This could have implications for the industry that are, as yet, unknown but which critics claim are likely to be detrimental, particularly to those identifying as "counsellors" because their work could be said to have been downgraded.

There has been criticism of the approach to collecting information used in SCoPEd because Counselling and Psychotherapy is such a broad field. There are many different types (modalities) of therapy (see, for example [BACPs page on this](#)) and some see the framework as incapable of representing the diversity of the whole profession fairly without it becoming more generic and involving all of the MBs that hold accredited registers with the PSA, some of which have so far been excluded (see Q2). Many believe that the current iteration favours particular modalities, philosophical

viewpoints and trainings and therefore is not representative. For example, the use of medicalised terminology and references to working with the “unconscious”, specifically within Columns B and C, has suggested to some that the project favours psychoanalytic approaches to talking therapy, which, as critics have pointed out, were overrepresented on the team responsible for the framework (the Expert Reference Group).

Many also feel that the columns to which certain competencies are currently mapped does not represent the real-world experience of counsellors and psychotherapists. With this in mind it is also then of concern that inequality is an issue due to the nature of training routes represented in the current iteration of the framework. For example, some critics have highlighted issues for marginalised groups accessing the “higher” levels of training, which are much more expensive, due to socioeconomic issues. This could negatively impact the diversity of the field.

**7. What is the current plan for the framework if/when it is adopted?**

The framework is currently in the second consultation stage. Members of the MBs who form the collaboration have been sent questionnaires to contribute to the consultation. There is no definite outline for the next steps beyond the information included in the framework document. There is also no strict timeline for when the second consultation results will be published or for what will happen next.

**8. How might this affect me as a student/trainee?**

It is currently unclear how trainees will be affected by SCoPEd. Although the stated aims of the project are to improve quality of training provision and make employment more widely available for qualified therapists, this could be dependent on what type of course you have undertaken or are currently undertaking. We hope you find some of the above considerations useful in finding out more about this.

**9. Where can I find out more about SCoPEd?**

There is lots to read about the project on the membership body websites – I’ve included the links to these in the description below. You can also visit the Therapists Connect website (included below) for some signposting to various articles both for and against SCoPEd. [BACP](#) / [UKCP](#) / [BPC](#)

**10. How can I have a say as a trainee?**

As a trainee it is important that you feel you can have your say. All trainees on core training courses (e.g. L4 diplomas, foundation degrees, MSc courses etc) are entitled to join a membership body as a student/trainee member. It is up to any trainee/qualified therapist to choose their own MB. As a student/trainee member of a MB you will then be able to communicate with your MB to have your voice heard. It is important that all members of our MBs have their voice heard to make sure consultations are engaged with effectively.

This document was written by [Bill Woods](#) for #TherapistsConnect.

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