

AIM Awards Level 4 Counselling Practicum June 2016

Report on the Examination

Introduction

91 scripts were received from 11 centres. The question paper was designed to enable candidates to record and evaluate 50 hours of their own counselling practice through a study of supervised practice.

The relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria are shown below:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
The learner will:	The learner can:
Understand working within legal and ethical requirements as a counselling practitioner	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a professional ethical framework and its application to counselling practice Respond effectively to complex client issues and ethical dilemmas Describe the key professional issues arising in the counselling placement
Understand the key professional issues arising in the counselling placement	Demonstrate the use of counselling supervision Evaluate the effects of using counselling supervision on own practice
Understand how developing self-awareness can contribute as a counselling practitioner	Evaluate how developing self-awareness can contribute to the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship and process

Distribution of Marks against Questions

Evidence had to be presented for each assessment criterion and these were graded as PASS or REFER. All assessment criteria had to attract a PASS grade for this assessment to PASS overall.

Markers Comments and Feedback

Overall, the standards achieved by candidates in this examination were considered by the examiners to be relatively high compared to previous series and to comparable tests held elsewhere. There was evidence to show that candidates were working to the brief set out in the briefing paper. All candidates should be made aware that the level descriptors for Level 4 require that they:

- have practical, theoretical or technical knowledge and understanding of a subject or field of work to address problems
- can analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas
- have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work
- can identify, adapt and use appropriate cognitive and practical skills to inform actions and address problem
- can review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results

The examiners were looking for evidence of these qualities in the written work and not simply retelling the client's 'story' or quoting large 'chunks' of the BACP Ethical Framework. Candidates should have realised that they were expected to write at first year undergraduate level to succeed.

One of the major problems with weaker (and therefore, REFERRED studies) was a lack of organisation and clarity. Often the core theoretical model had to be guessed by the examiner using core theoretical concepts as a guide and the lack of sub headings that matched the assessment criteria made it difficult to see where evidence was located. It is the candidates' responsibility to demonstrate to the examiner where assessment criteria have been met, cutting out sub headings to allow for more words in the narrative is a false economy.

A: Describe the key professional issues arising in the counselling placement

There were five obvious potential ways of providing evidence that this assessment criterion had been met:

- Legal and ethical requirements
- Ethical decision making
- Counselling, confidentiality and the law
- Use of supervision
- Developing self-awareness

The examiners however allowed credit for other relevant examples. In the best work, candidates were able to focus on one of the above and specifically explain how it related to the subject of the study. General and vague descriptions that could apply to ANY client should have been avoided.

B: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a professional ethical framework and its application to counselling practice

Here, the examiners were looking for a description and explanation of 3 or 4 examples of the principles, qualities or undertakings contained in an ethical framework or code. Emphasis should have been placed on how these were relevant to particular client work under discussion and with some attempt to evaluate their usefulness. Very good answers focused on the ethical issues of working with the client who was the subject of the study whilst others were rather more general. Long quotations from professional body documents should be avoided.

C: Respond effectively to complex client issues and ethical dilemmas

In this area, the examiners expected that the candidate would identify clearly what was particularly challenging about their client's presentation, their relationship, or any ethical dilemma which arose or could readily have done so; or indeed any combination of these features. After identifying the features of the counselling for discussion, candidates were expected to give a coherent account of attempts to respond constructively, with examples of choice of interventions, rationale for so doing, and apparent effectiveness. As above, answers that could apply to any client did not reach the standard required for a PASS.

D: Demonstrate the use of counselling supervision and evaluate the effects of using counselling supervision on own practice

Some candidates discussed the effective use of supervision and/or other support mechanisms to enable them to work effectively with the client who was the subject of the study. However, more could have been developed in this area to secure a PASS. Many answers were characterised by a description of what the trainee counsellor told their supervisor or how supportive the supervisee/supervisor relationship was. What is required here is how matters discussed in supervision translate back into work with the client.

F: Evaluate how developing self-awareness can contribute to the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship and process

Most candidates demonstrated a good level of self-awareness and gave examples of how it affected the counselling relationship. In weaker answers, the emphasis was on client 'story' rather than their own efforts as the counsellor. Many were unable to link their own actions to client outcome.

Recommendations

Centres are recommended to:

Encourage candidates to provide more analysis and less description in the finished work. Examiners are looking for clear, coherent, and consistent analysis of the client work which goes beyond simple description.

Remind candidates that judicious use of quotations is a mark of scholarly endeavour. Good evidence of reading and research can be demonstrated through the use of paraphrasing rather than direct quotation.

Remind candidates that the examiners are looking for *knowledge* and *understanding* (not simply inserting the principles) of an Ethical Framework together with the ability to correctly relate this to their client.

Encourage candidates to provide more evidence of counselling supervision and its effect upon the candidates work with clients rather than a description of the client narrative discussed with supervisor.

Make sure that candidates are using the most up to date version of the ethical framework or code used on the course. [e.g. BACP Ethical Framework 2016]

IMPORTANT from January 2017 onwards, all candidates will be **required** to use the AIM Awards template for this assessment. Any work submitted to AIM Awards that is not presented on the template **will be returned to centres unmarked.**