

Principal Examiner's Report

For centre staff



AIM Awards Level 4 Diploma in Counselling Practice

June 2016

Report on the Examination

Introduction

111 scripts were received from 15 centres. The question paper was designed to test the candidate's:

- knowledge and understanding of ONE of the three main approaches to counselling and how this theoretical understanding will influence their counselling practice

The relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria are shown below:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
The learner will:	The learner can:
1. Understand key concepts of the chosen core theoretical model	1.1. Summarise the key concepts of the core theoretical model 1.2. Evaluate the key interventions of the core theoretical model 1.3. Develop self-awareness in relation to the core theoretical model
2. Understand the strengths and limitations of the chosen core theoretical model	2.1. Summarise the key strengths of the core theoretical model 2.2. Summarise the key limitations of the core theoretical model
3. Understand the process and practice of counselling within the core theoretical model	3.1. Evaluate the skills required to establish the counselling relationship within the core theoretical model 3.2. Evaluate the skills required for developing and sustaining the counselling relationship within the core theoretical model 3.3. Evaluate the skills required for reviewing and concluding the counselling relationship within the core theoretical model
4. Understand the importance of supervision in counselling practice	4.1. Analyse how supervision helps to monitor, support and challenge ethical practice 4.2. Explain the key benefits of the supervisor-supervisee relationship

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	4.3. Evaluate the contribution of supervision to the client-counsellor relationship
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Questions were focused on, though not entirely limited to, the Indicative Content found in the Qualification Specification.

Distribution of Marks against Questions

The style of the paper was the same as in previous series – a client scenario followed by questions. The paper contained a total of 4 questions and the mark distribution against the assessment criteria is shown below:

Question	Number of Marks	Criteria Covered
1	12	1.1, 1.2, 21.1,2.2
2a	9	1.1, 1.2, 21.1,2.2
2b	12	
3	9	3.1
4a	9	3.2
4b	9	3.3
Total	60	

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.

The vast majority of candidates succeeded in attempting all the questions in the time available.

There were a few instances of where word processing was used, rather than handwriting, where there was no evidence that approval for this had been obtained. In addition, there were a few instances where lack of legibility may have disadvantaged a candidate.

Question 1

Candidates who scored highly in this question set about choosing 3 interventions, naming them and carefully explaining how they would help (or not) with the situation that was presented with Douglas. In some instances, there was evidence that candidates had pre-prepared an answer to the questions set in January (some went as far to use the name of the client in that series: William) and repeated these in this

examination. Obviously these answers were, at best, too general to be worthy of higher scores and at worst, too tangential. The largest area of confusion seemed to be created by candidates not understanding the concept of an intervention as something a counsellor might say or do. In Person-Centred answers, those that chose to write about any of the 6 necessary and sufficient conditions did very well but some candidates were confused by more general theoretical ideas e.g. hierarchy of needs, actualising tendency and locus of evaluation. Candidates who are writing from Clarkson's 5 relationship model need to understand the differences between the phases of the relationship as a conceptual framework for therapeutic encounters and counsellor interventions. A person to person relationship, for example, is not an intervention in its own right – the question was asking candidates to say how they might facilitate this aspect of the model.

Question 2

(2a) Here, it was particularly important that candidates understood the value of reflection and reflexivity and follow the task set i.e. to identify their *own* thoughts or feelings that might be of interest or concern. These would be thoughts or feelings that a counsellor would want to discuss in supervision. The task was not to describe in theoretical terms the supervision process as many candidates did, but to explain having identified the thoughts etc. how these might impinge on the counselling. Good answers picked out that as the first Diploma student in the service, there might be considerable pressure to 'get it right' potentially jeopardising the client's autonomy. Others identified that Lisa's behaviour and the implied threat to Douglas' job could add similar pressure with similar consequences. The best way to approach this question is for candidates to take a moment to reflect on the scenario and imagine themselves in that counsellor's seat. Sadly, some got confused and started discussing strategies for addressing Lisa's behaviour and others misunderstood the situation and spent a long time discussing irrelevant safeguarding concerns.

(2b) The key ethical dilemma here was that of promoting the autonomy of Douglas principally because he had not chosen to come to counselling voluntarily. There were also some sophisticated debates about how the implied threat of the loss of his job might compromise this as well as influence counsellor behaviour in manipulating a "successful outcome" – acknowledging in some cases that for Douglas this might indeed be the end of his employment with the Local Authority. Some candidates chose other ethical principles that were perhaps not so to the fore e.g. beneficence and non-maleficence – as long as the case was logically argued with close reference to the actual situation the examiner awarded credit. Poor answers were characterised by definitions of the ethical principles. As this is an open book examination, no credit was awarded for what amounts to copying from source material in the examination.

IMPORTANT NOTE for those centres who use the BACP's Ethical Framework, it is expected that candidates will make reference to the latest version (2016) in all future examinations.

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Question 3

On the whole, this question was better answered than Question 2. Good answers were clear about the core theoretical model they were working from in the first 2 sentences and addressed the fact that the therapeutic alliance was probably quite fragile due to the foreshortened first session and gave clear strategies for dealing with the information from Lisa. The examiners credited answers that suggested informing Douglas about the contact from Lisa and its contents; equally those answers that suggested not mentioning these intrusions into the therapeutic space were also credited. In both cases, as long as the rationale was clear, marks were awarded. Poor answers were characterised by rather general descriptions about how specific counselling skills would be applied; over long explanations of the contracting process and contract terms; and, extemporising beyond the scenario.

Far too many answers showed evidence of judgmental assumptions on the part of candidates e.g. that Douglas was not prepared to engage with the counselling process because he left early (missing or ignoring the fact that he was sent within half an hour of the first telephone call and had no prior notice that a session might last 50 minutes to an hour). Another common example was that he preferred socialising and going out to concentrating on his work. One candidate went as far as to suggest he was basically lazy!

Question 4

(4a) Unsurprisingly those candidates that gave a good answer to Question 3 were able to develop this to show how they thought the relationship might develop around three key areas from the scenario. This was easier if the candidates had decided to reveal the information from Lisa though even those that chose not to could describe some good ideas about what might happen. Poor answers were simply a repeat of the answer to Question 3. In a very few cases, the suggestions were worrying e.g. contacting Lisa to have a conversation with her about her behaviour without the client's knowledge or consent.

(4b) At lower levels in this suite of qualifications (and its predecessors), it is fairly common for candidates to have a good, if not very good grasp of the ending process. It therefore came as a surprise to the examiners that this question was not answered well on the whole.

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Recommendations

Centres are recommended to:

Encourage candidates to try and imagine themselves in the role of counsellor to the client in the scenario as if they were about to **embark on practice with this client** and respond from this vantage point.

Remind candidates that whilst the format of the paper will be the same, a client scenario followed questions, the questions can and will vary. Prepared answers to previous examinations are unlikely to be helpful (or successful). Close reference to the client and the presenting issues in the scenario is essential for success.

Ensure that permission is obtained, and evidence of this provided, for the use of scribes or word processing in the examination.

Encourage candidates to make every effort to write in a legible fashion, difficult though this can be under exam conditions.

When teaching Person-Centred theory, encourage students to gain an understanding of the necessary and sufficient conditions that goes beyond simply being able to list the 3 best known.

Make sure that candidates are using the most up to date version of the ethical framework or code used on the course.