AIM Awards Level 3 Certificate in Counselling
June 2018 Series

Introduction

176 scripts were received from 12 Centres. The question paper was designed to test candidates':

- Knowledge and understanding of the three main approaches to counselling and the theorists that underpin most counselling practice

- Awareness of the strengths and limitations of the main approaches

The relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria are shown below:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
1. Understand the key concepts in the main approaches to counselling	1.1. Explain the view taken of the development and perpetuation of psychological problems as seen by each of the approaches 1.2. Distinguish between the nature and process of therapeutic change as seen by each of the approaches 1.3. Summarise the key therapeutic interventions typical of each of the approaches
2. Understand the strengths and limitations of the main approaches to counselling	2.1. Explain the key strengths for each of the approaches 2.2. Explain the key limitations for each of the approaches

Questions were focussed on, though not entirely limited to, the Indicative Content to be found in the Qualification Specification.

Distribution of marks against questions

The paper contained a total of 20 questions. It was divided into 2 sections.

A total of 40 marks was available.

Section A contained:

No. of Questions	Criterion Covered
6	1.1
5	1.2
4	1.3

Questions in Section A: required candidates to decide whether a statement was true or false, or to select the correct answer from a given range of options. This gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their awareness of a range of key concepts in the main approaches to counselling, as described in standard texts.

Section B contained 5 longer questions, each concerned with Criteria 2.1 and 2.2. These questions presented candidates with a brief statement or scenario. Candidates were invited to show their understanding of theory in a number of ways. One question asked how a counsellor using 2 specific approaches might work with the given scenario. In another question candidates were asked to identify which of the 3 main approaches seemed most

relevant to a given statement and to explain their response. The ability to identify potential strengths and limitations of the approaches, both generally and in particular contexts, was tested.

The style and structure of the paper was very similar to those in use since January 2016 and available on the website.

Comments

Overall, the standards achieved by candidates in this examination were considered by the examiners to be rather higher than those in previous series and in comparable tests held elsewhere. On this occasion, there were some exceptionally strong responses, with one candidate achieving 100%.

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

Although examiners are experienced in reading a wide range of handwriting styles, there were a few instances where lack of legibility may have disadvantaged a candidate.

Section A

Where the short questions in Section A were concerned, most candidates succeeded in giving the correct response to over 80% of the questions.

Of the questions which were least successfully answered, the following are worthy of mention:

Q14: 67% of candidates did not know that contact boundary disturbances are a key concept in the Humanistic approach (they are an essential aspect of Gestalt theory)

Q15: 56% of candidates did not know that minimal self disclosure is an important way of working when using a Psychodynamic approach.

Section B

Questions 16 and 17 invited the candidate to describe how a counsellor using 2 specific approaches might work with the given scenario, and to identify possible strengths and weaknesses within those approaches.

These questions were overall well answered, the most successful candidates being able to make convincing links between the scenario and relevant theoretical concepts.

Question 18 asked candidates to give and explain 3 examples of possible limitations of psychodynamic counselling. This question was often well answered.

Where this was not the case, it was often because candidates tended to take an overly rigid or exaggerated view of what the approach traditionally prioritises or emphasises.

Question 19 asked candidates to identify which of the 3 main approaches best fits the description, taken from a standard text, *"It is easier to use this approach when the client's difficulties can be readily defined as problems to be solved. Its emphasis on self-help may be a challenge"*. 98% of candidates identified this as CBT and most went on in question 20 to give a reasonably convincing explanation of their choice.

The longer questions in Section B, as might be expected, produced a wider range of quality of response than did those in Section A. Those candidates who did well managed to answer the actual question posed, and to connect their answer specifically to the scenario or definition provided. Less successful candidates tended to write a general account of what they knew about an approach, for example by listing the core conditions.

The belief that humanistic counsellors are expressly forbidden to ask questions about the client's past experience or to explore it in any way was less in evidence than hitherto. It was noticeable that many candidates had the impression that a psychodynamic counsellor would only ever be interested in a client's childhood and would ignore a client's current life and relationships. Transference, as experienced by the client, was often confused with the counsellor's experience of countertransference or projective identification.

Nevertheless, the standard of teaching where the psychodynamic approach in particular was concerned seems overall to have been better than is often the case.

Recommendations

Encourage candidates to read the question carefully.

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

Some centres, when teaching person-centred theory, could still usefully encourage students to understand that humanistic theory does not forbid counsellors from being curious about their clients' past experiences, for example about how conditions of worth may have arisen, or how needs may not have been met.

Centres could usefully encourage candidates to see 'strengths and weaknesses' of theories as a question of emphasis rather than in terms of stark and polarised differences.