

Introducing AUCC

For readers new to this journal, the Association for University and College Counselling (AUCC) is a professional body that aims to promote student counselling as an integral part of the educational process of institutions of further and higher education, through the establishment and development of counselling services linked with supportive networks both within and without the institution

What AUCC does

As a professional organisation, AUCC provides services to support its members. It aims to promote and foster good practice within counselling services, and to further the education and training of counselling service staff. It aims to further the study of counselling through research and the dissemination of knowledge, and to foster contact with other professional bodies in sympathy with its aims.

AUCC also acts as a resource to institutions wishing to set up a professional counselling service, and aims to promote and evaluate good counselling practice in institutions of further and higher education. AUCC provides information and advice to members, institutions and interested parties, and aims to raise public awareness of the role of counselling in achieving the objectives of an educational establishment. To this end, AUCC hosts and supports a number of services, sub-committees and special interest groups.

How to join AUCC

Membership of AUCC is open to all who have an interest in student counselling. Individual full membership is open to those whose work is, or has been, to provide a structured counselling facility in institutions of post-compulsory education, or to researchers, trainers or supervisors of counsellors in such institutions. Associate membership is open to those who are not eligible for full membership and who meet one of the following descriptions:

- Use counselling skills in non-counselling roles within post-compulsory education.
- Offer a structured counselling facility to students, albeit outside the latter's education institution.
- Are engaged in a relevant course of study.
- Have an interest in student counselling.

As the AUCC is a division of BACP, members are required first to join BACP. All members of BACP may join AUCC for an additional £35 per year. Organisational membership costs £105 per year. Subscription to the Journal is also available at £30. Further details available from Gemma Green, AUCC administrator: tel 0870 443 5170, gemma.green@bacp.co.uk

The benefits of membership

Membership of AUCC confers access to the wide variety of services and activities undertaken by and within numerous sub-committees and special interest groups. Benefits of membership include:

- Quarterly copies of the AUCC Journal – normally 24 pages per issue of useful, relevant information.
- Advice to members on professional and ethical issues through the Advisory Service.
- Information for employers on good counselling practice and appropriate working conditions.
- Quality standards for the profession and support for BACP's service accreditation application.
- Information on research activity and summary of the annual national survey into counselling in further and higher education.
- Representation of members on relevant working parties and committees.
- A popular annual training conference with reduced fees and bursaries for members.
- Promotion of the professional identity of counsellors and psychotherapists in post-compulsory education, eg through media liaison and the public information website (www.studentcounselling.org) developed by HUCS
- Regional training events relevant to CPD requirements.
- Numerous day conferences and workshops organised by subcommittees and special interest groups.
- Access to mailbase networks including those for special interest groups such as FE counsellors, staff counsellors or heads of university counselling services.
- Robust support for professional networks including promotion of regional groups and networks.
- A general website (www.aucc.uk.com) with separate members' area, and links to other useful websites.

AUCC news

Executive committee

- AUCC past chair John Cowley was elected deputy chair of BACP at the September AGM.
- Chair elect Les McMinn is leading the work to put into action the AUCC 'Fit for the Future' strategy, reported in the last Journal.
- Chair Dave Berger has been attending meetings of the advisory group to the Foster Review of Further Education. The completed review is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/fereview.
- As part of the committee's aim to develop links with European colleagues, executive committee member Elizabeth Jordan took up an invitation to attend the conference and AGM of the Irish Association of University and College Counsellors (IAUCC) in September. The Irish and northern Irish counsellors were very interested to hear how AUCC had been addressing similar issues, such as mental health. This has led to further discussion and ideas about making affiliations with such groups.

Research

- The research sub-committee has been reviewing and evaluating production of the successful AUCC Annual Survey. An article summarising the results of the consultation will be appearing in the February issue of the Journal.
- For the 2003/4 academic year a slightly broader survey than usual will be conducted, for which questionnaires will be distributed in due course.
- The group is also looking at what evaluation tools can be developed or recommended for practitioners to monitor, audit and evaluate their services.

Further education

- The 'Counsellors-in-FE' mailbase is actively used and provides support, exchange of good practice and sharing of concerns for counsellors in the sector.
- Regional FE groups and forums are also very active and the FE sub-committee encourages them to keep it informed of any issues, trends, themes and ideas that

come up in general, or in response to discussions on the mailbase.

- The committee is meeting during November to review and consolidate its activities during the year and to plan how it will re-form under the new AUCC structures.

Heads of University Counselling Services

- HUCS members continue to be active locally and nationally, with correspondence on the HUCS mailbase indicating that demands on counselling centre resources continue to be high. One of the responses reflected in the correspondence is that more universities are developing group-based interventions with a variety of creative formats.
- HUCS continues to be represented on a number of larger national projects including the Universities UK work on student mental wellbeing, the National Inquiry into Self Harm in Young People, the Studentsinmind project and the student suicide (RaPSS) project.

Studentsinmind is a national student charity which will be launching a wide range of services with a new website in 2006 – these include signposting students to appropriate sources of help, translators, a 'survivor' board, and art, music and poetry online platforms. All student volunteers welcome – see www.studentsinmind.org.uk for more information.

- Hopefully many of you will also have seen the excellent new student depression website which was jointly developed by HUCS and the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust – if you haven't seen it yet have a look at www.studentdepression.org. We have also been working closely with AMOSSHE and the NUS to build stronger links with these two important groups.

Staff counselling

- The staff counselling special interest group is working on a paper looking at preventative work that staff counsellors

can do in their universities, and is adapting and updating a 'defender' pack for staff counselling services under threat.

- The group is contributing to a training day for staff dealing with death or suicide in the workplace being organised for April/May next year by sister division the Association for Counselling at Work.
- There are several vacancies on the staff SIG committee, which meets three times a year in London. Anyone interested should contact chair Nicola Benson at nbenson@glam.ac.uk

Advisory Service

- The Advisory Service has developed a workshop for counselling services or other work teams called 'Thinking under fire – how to keep thinking alive in the midst of demands, dramas, and crises'. See next page for more details of the workshop and how to contact the service if you wish to make use of this offer.
- The Advisory Service is looking to recruit new members who are experienced HE or FE counsellors. Please contact Anne-Marie Bradley at a.bradley@arts.ac.uk for further details.

Conference

- With the 2005 AUCC conference a sell-out success, the conference committee is hard at work investigating themes and venues for the 2006 conference.

Death notice – Jane Bradby

Jane Bradby, an early member of the then Association for Student Counselling, died earlier this year aged 83 and her funeral was held at Salisbury Cathedral on 20 September. Jane worked as a student counsellor at North East London Polytechnic (that became University of East London) retiring in 1988. She trained for this work as one of Ellen Noonan's first cohort of students at Birkbeck. During her professional life she was a member of the ASC Executive and worked on the conference sub-committee. A memorial service is planned in a few months.

Thinking under fire

– an Advisory Service workshop

The AUCC Advisory Service, a working group of experienced practitioners, offers advice to counselling services and line managers of counselling services on a wide range of ethical and practical issues. At the 2005 AUCC conference, committee members Irene Pugh and Anne-Marie Bradley offered a workshop imparting some of the philosophy behind their approach to the task – that of helping to 'keep thinking alive' in the midst of demands, dramas and crises.

Participants had the opportunity to experience a hypothetical scenario illustrating some of the typical issues brought to the Advisory Service. They were asked to imagine that a new head of student services at their institution requested a meeting to 'get to know the most important things about the service', but moved swiftly into imposing a series of changes. These included being required to 'book' from a pool of uniform rooms shared with other services; matching the 'efficiency' of other student services by seeing at least six clients each a day; and increasing the number of 'drop-in' sessions so that tutors could send over students with mental health problems.

Participants could, in this way, experience what it felt like for them to be 'under fire', and to observe their own responses as powerful feelings flooded in. When we are under stress, or faced with shocking or upsetting news, the first thing that deserts us is the capacity to think, as we become flooded with primitive anxiety about our very survival. However, participants were also able to experience how, after the initial shock and anger, it is possible to regain the capacity to think. By separating thinking from feeling, and using the feelings as important 'data' about the situation to inform thinking and decision making, they could avoid being overwhelmed, driven or paralysed by the feelings.

This process mirrors what takes place in the counselling room, where the counsellor helps the client get in touch

with and name feelings, making sense of their emotional experience by being able to bear to think about it and therefore process it.

The well-known theorist of groups, Wilfred Bion¹, said that there are two main tendencies in the life of a group. The first is the tendency to work on the primary task of the group, which he termed 'work group mentality'; the second is the unconscious tendency to avoid work on the primary task, which he termed 'basic assumption mentality'. These two opposing tendencies can be thought of as the wish to face and work with reality and the wish to avoid it.

Behaviour based in 'basic assumption mentality' takes three forms:

■ Dependency

In the dependency form, the group behaves as if its primary task is to provide for the satisfaction of the needs and wishes of its members. The leader is asked to protect or look after the group, but not to face them with the demands of the group's real purpose. Change is vigorously resisted.

■ Pairing

Here a group might put their collective and unconscious faith in a future event to solve everything. The group behaves as if a pairing or coupling between two members of the group, or between the leader and an external person, will bring salvation. In this way of being the group is entirely focused on the future, but as a defence against present difficulties. The group is not interested in grappling with current difficulties but only in sustaining a vague sense of hope that a brighter future is on its way.

■ Fight or flight

This basic assumption holds that there is a danger or enemy that should either be attacked or fled from. Groups in the grip of this mentality may spend a lot of time protesting angrily without actually planning any specific action to deal with the perceived threat to their service. This is why a group that is functioning

well and is 'on task' is in a much better position to respond to change or a perceived threat.

For a work group to be effective, there needs to be a facing of reality, tolerance of frustration, recognition of differences and a willingness to learn from experience. When things are going well, it is a good time to take stock and give the group a 'health check'. We can ask ourselves: 'Are we an effective work group, focused on the primary task, or has the primary task been replaced with an 'as if' primary task (as if the primary task has become the continuation of the group as an end in itself and at all costs). A healthy well-functioning work group is in a much better position to respond to change and is less likely to be overwhelmed and to lose its thinking or critical capacity.

Often, as members of the Advisory Service, our task is to act as a container for the anxieties of the enquirer, and help them face up to the possibility of being unable to change things as they would like. Sometimes the difficulty or threat can be overcome, but sometimes not, which is painful. What is possible, though, is to keep hold of a sense of having some power to affect one's own experience, rather than feeling stuck in the role of silenced victim. ■

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The Advisory Service is happy to offer this workshop or similar ones to interested staff groups. For further details, or advice about any aspect of your work, contact the Advisory Service chair, Irene Pugh: irenelinden@waitrose.com tel: 01908 684406. See also the text of a leaflet accompanying the workshop, on p47.

Reference

1 Bion W. Experiences in groups and other papers. Routledge; 1968.

When alarm bells ring – a step-by-step approach

Anne-Marie Bradley and Irene Pugh

FEEL

REACTION

Give space for feelings
 Get in touch with the feelings
outrage, anxiety, fear, anger, resignation, sorrow, 'not again', weariness, anger, panic, helplessness, confusion
 What are the feelings about?
 Make conscious what is going on
 Connect with a safe, contained environment to express your/your team's feelings

THINK

RESPONSE

Begin to marshal your thoughts
 What are the issues here?
Institutional
 Identify what different people's needs are
 Why now? What is the subtext?
 What's really going on?
 Management, at what level?
 Finance/college reputation /risk/power bases/government agenda/needs of students
 Other team's professional needs
 Your shortcomings/failure to get your message across
Client issues
 Legal
 Ethical
 What is the counsellor's responsibility to the client? Why? Reference?
 What are the possible courses of action?
 What could be the consequences of each?

EXPLORE ISSUES

HOLD DECISION-MAKING

IDENTIFY

STAY CONSCIOUS

REVIEW

Use your sources of support
Internal
 Evidence
 Data
 Allies
External
 Therapist
 Supervisor
 Advisory
 Union
 Realistically, what are the options?
 What are the consequences of each?
 What are the pros and cons of each?
 Where are you, personally, in this?

DISCUSS

DISIDENTIFY

NEGOTIATION

Decide the best way of presenting your perspective
 Marshall your arguments – a letter, a paper
 Take time to decide who to speak to, in what forum?
 In what you write, demonstrate your understanding of the college/management perspective
 Show what you can do to help solve the problem they have identified
 Explain the issues you have: avoid saying things like 'because of confidentiality'. Describe the effect on clients/prospective clients.
 Throughout, hold on to the fact that what is going on is not about you personally (even though it may feel as if it is, and even though you will have questioned your own actions and motives)
 Stay focused on the primary task

ENGAGE 'THE HEART'S MIND'

WHAT NOW?

DECISION

Which arguments weigh heaviest?
 What can you live with?
 What is the best that can be achieved?
 Can you live with that?
 How can you take ownership of any decision made?

REFLECTION

What have you learned?
 What could have been pre-empted?
 What would you do differently another time?
 How does your practice or policy need to change?
 What fences need to be mended?
 Have you taken full account of the effects on you and your team of the 'crises'?
 How are you looking after yourself?

The Thinking under fire workshop helps participants to approach difficult situations step by step, taking time to notice and understand their initial reaction before moving into a more detailed exploration of their response, reviewing the situation in full before moving towards a less personal negotiation, then weighing decisions carefully and finally reflecting on what can be learnt from the whole process. The steps set out above are adapted from a leaflet accompanying the workshop and available from the Advisory Service. See previous page for details.