

Strategic priorities

With UKCP psychotherapist and Chair Syed Azmatullah

Azmat:

Hello. In this podcast, I'd like to convey to our members some of the plans that we are proposing regarding strategic priorities for the next few years. I'd like to say that these are draft plans because in order to finalise them, we are inviting your input. This is part of our top-down, bottom-up approach to ensure our plans include proposals that really help with the everyday work of our members. As you know, UKCP is a regulator of standards to be achieved and maintained by our members. In recent years, since we joined the Professional Standards Authority, regulatory standards have been the main strategic focus. But as so often happens when regulatory minded people are in the driving seat, the rules and regulations seem to take on a life of their own, and other aspects of why we are here get sidelined. But UKCP is also here to support our members with their everyday work and challenges related to practice. Being a charity focused on improving mental health for the public, doesn't just mean enforcing regulatory standards. It also means supporting members to become more able to deliver an excellent service. To do this, we really need to live the idea of being a member-led organisation. And we need to rebalance our strategic efforts so that members feel supported and engaged in developing our profession. To become a member-led organisation, we need to develop the opportunities for the membership to express their needs, their hopes, their aspirations, and really listen to what is being expressed. So, we are asking our ten modality colleges to rebalance their activities to not only focus on standards and regulation, but become involved in working with their members to develop our plans together. So, effectively, we are proposing an organisational-wide strategic planning process, which will involve consultation with the membership in college meetings and in the members' forum. And we will modify the members' forum so that there is a separate type of forum for individual members, and for organisational members, and for students and trainees, so that they can all share together matters of their common interest. And members of the Board will be present in these discussions to take on board what is being said. We also envisage having special interest groups forming within colleges and within members' forum to develop specific ideas such as new ways to deliver psychotherapy in context specific settings, or to facilitate working internationally, for example. I believe if we work together in this way, we can be much bolder and braver, more outspoken in our charitable mission to make mental health and emotional wellbeing a human right. We must work together as one organisation, united and resolute in our mission, both internally and externally, to place psychotherapists centre stage, as a way of cultivating mental health and wellbeing. In order to do this, we must be clearly recognised as a charity, led by our membership, who are eligible to vote and casting their votes in all elections for senior volunteer officers of UKCP.

Those officers should receive appropriate leadership development and support. We need to develop what we call the One UKCP operating model, uniting our diversity of modalities around our common values, interests and aspirations. Talking about diversity, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion taskforce proposed an action plan at the end of 2021. I can now tell you that a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee is being reestablished as I speak. The new committee will work internally, and also with other organisations to challenge systemic barriers to accessing mental health support and training. We must ensure that UKCP is an accessible, inclusive and supportive organisation for all, regardless of background. We also wish to develop further strategic alliances with partners to improve funding for bursaries and research, and to improve access to training and mental health familiarisation, and spread the awareness of the value of psychotherapy across different sectors. Regarding research, we need to conduct research necessary to give us credibility with all of these different organisations with whom we seek influence. Our Research Working Group, comprising of practitioners, policy and academic experts, have already hosted a series of engagement and training events, as well as establishing research partnerships and funded member scholarships. We will explore forming a network with local communities of practice across the country to support practitioner research as an integral part of evolving our professional practice. Together, we intend to elaborate a comprehensive research strategy and detailed activity programme. We would really like to encourage members to engage in these research activities. Now, the pandemic saw big shifts towards online working and therefore the possibility to work across borders. We know that there is a threat from unregulated therapists from other countries working with clients in the UK, and we need to continue to protect the public effectively. So, we are now considering reestablishing an international committee. This will include forming a centre of expertise to advise on the rules around cross-border working, including training issues, looking at the whole area of working with overseas clients and refugees, and considering how we interact with other professional organisations globally. In our post-pandemic world, we really need to ask ourselves whether the ways in which we deliver psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling are optimum for client groups of all ages. We need to consider delivering therapy according to the context of people's lives. A new delivery special interest group will seek to identify the ever-evolving potential of technology. We would like to engage with you to bring innovation to psychotherapeutic delivery and engagement approaches. Last but not least, we know that the climate emergency is having a damaging effect on mental health with the effects felt most acutely by those who already experience oppression and disadvantage. We will review all aspects of our operation, bottom-up and top-down to explore how we can minimise our impact on the planet for the wellbeing of both the planet and the public. We hope that you will find some of these ambitious strategic initiatives interesting and engaging, and I very much look forward to discussing your thoughts and suggestions in the forthcoming months. Only together can we make these plans a reality.