

AIM Awards Level 4 Diploma in Counselling Practice January 2017

Report on the Examination

Introduction

29 scripts were received from 9 centres. The question paper was designed to test 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 |

| LEARNING OUTCOMES | ASSESSMENT CRITERIA |
|---|---|
| The learner will: | The learner can: |
| 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 4.3. Evaluate the contribution of supervision to the client-counsellor relationship |

The style of the paper was the same as in previous series – client scenario followed by questions. Questions were focused on, though not entirely limited to, the Indicative Content to be found in the Qualification Specification.

The paper contained a total of 4 questions and the mark distribution against the assessment criteria is shown below.

Distribution of Marks against Questions

| Question | Number of marks | Criteria Covered |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1a | 12 | 4.1, 4.2 |
| 1b | 12 | 4.3 |
| 2 | 9 | 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 |
| 3a | 9 | 3.1 |
| 3b | 3 | 1.3 |
| 4a | 9 | 3.2 |
| 4b | 9 | 3.3 |
| Total | 63 | |

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.

Question 1

1a: Candidates who scored highly in this questions set about choosing concrete issues gleaned from the scenario and explaining why these issues would be taken to supervision. Most of the answers were rather general and not related to the scenario. Some were so general they could be applied to any scenario. It is important that candidates understand that in this examination the answers must contain detailed reference to the situation. They must attempt to put themselves in the shoes of the counsellor.

1b: It is particularly important that candidates understand the value of reflection and reflexivity and follow the task set i.e. to identify how they would expect the relationship with Martina to be influenced by supervision. The task was not to describe in theoretical terms the supervision process but to explain having identified the major issues in this scenario how these might impinge on the counselling relationship. The better answers explored in some detail how features in the scenario e.g. how referral to a young person's service might be facilitated; the sexual issues raised in this situation might generate thoughts and feelings in the counsellor that may need to be surfaced in supervision.

Question 2

Candidates who scored highly in this question set about choosing three interventions, naming them and then carefully explaining how they would help (or not) with the situation that was presented with Martina. In some instances, there was evidence that candidates had pre-prepared an answer to the questions set in June 2016 (some went as far to use the name of the client in that series) 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. In person-centred answers, those that chose to write about any of the six necessary and sufficient conditions did very well but some candidates merely defined these and missed an opportunity to gain higher marks because they did not discuss the strengths and limitations.

Question 3

3a: This question was designed to elicit candidates understanding of forming and building a working therapeutic relationship. There was a clear distinction in candidates' answers determined by the approach they had studied. Candidates whose chose core theoretical model was CBT were focussed on forming a working alliance and could identify the steps need to achieve this. On the whole, person-centred answers offered definitions of the six necessary and sufficient conditions (often an exact repeat of the answer given to question 2). 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.

3b: This question elicited some surprisingly poor answers and if these were an accurate description of how a first session might be conducted would be highly unlikely to lead to a second! Here candidates were asked to state in simple terms how they might answer the basic question: what is counselling? The examiners anticipated that candidates would be well prepared to explain counselling in language that a client might understand, but were disappointed.

Question 4

4a: Many answers showed evidence of judgmental assumptions on the part of candidates focusing on her lies, and that an innocent man might be serving a jail sentence. These same candidates also got carried away with safeguarding concerns and addressing the problem of the flashbacks. Only one candidate read the scenario carefully enough to identify that the early sexual abuse was a copycat story from the newspaper that Martina used to access the counselling service as she was desperate for help. It is important that candidates do not vicariously introduce the word safeguarding and think about in the context of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. It is worrying to note that candidates who are about to embark on practice apparently understand so little about the law and about young people's rights to confidentiality. Martina, at 16, is not technically an adult but she is at the age of consent for sexual activity. There may be some concern involved but that does not make it a safeguarding issue per se. Professional decision should abide by the principle that the welfare of the young person is paramount. The impending homelessness of Martina should the sexual liaison become more public seems not to have been a factor in candidates thinking.

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.

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, 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 of them.

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