



Psychotherapy and Counselling Union (PCU) The Psychotherapy and Counselling Union: Standing up for therapists and therapy.

Why should I join a Union?

We offer **support to individual members** encountering difficulties in their workplaces, training, or with Membership Bodies (e.g. with client complaints). There are many issues where counsellors and psychotherapists need to act as a group to improve our situation, along with the need to campaign collectively for recognition of the role and value of therapy in society.

Collective campaigning:

Many issues require our collective campaigning, for example:

Training: discrimination, lack of diversity and out-of-pocket expenses whilst on placements, closure of courses.

PCU is currently running active campaigns on challenging the implementation of SCoPEd, pay and conditions for school counsellors and increased funding for school counselling services, a fair deal for EAP workers, with other campaigns in the pipeline.

Employment opportunities: terms and conditions of employment, the substitution of counselling services with manualised short-term and wellbeing approaches, insecure funding of third sector services, reliance on volunteers and students on placements to provide services. The Employee Assistance Programmes that pay low fees or, in some cases reducing session fees. The lack of a pay scale for school counsellors. Poor employment opportunities because of the lack of recognition of what counselling and psychotherapy is and what it offers.

Membership Bodies: complaints procedure, lack of democracy and transparency.

How can counsellors and psychotherapists have a Union, most of us are self-employed?

Many counsellors and psychotherapists are self-employed, but an increasing number are employed on at least a part-time basis or are working without pay for organisations as trainees or volunteers. Many chose self-employment due to of the lack of paid opportunities, because the enforced practices do not align with what they believe to be ethical practice, or because employers require two-years post qualifying experience or to be accredited.

Working as a self-employed practitioner can be a very isolating occupation; this is a reason to come together as a group, for mutual support. There is a general trend toward unionisation for people who don't have a collective workplace. The issues they face, and the ways of organising will be different.

Should we not just join a large Union, or perhaps the PCU should become a part of a larger one?

Not surprisingly, existing unions don't have much understanding of therapy and our needs as practitioners. Although there are exceptions, many people report that union reps have not been able to understand and help with problems revolving around therapy-specific themes, like confidentiality and clinical supervision.

I'm not very political, so I'm worried about the Union acting politically on my behalf.

One of our core activities is supporting our individual members in difficulties with employers, training institutions and Membership Bodies. However, we find that it's not possible to draw a boundary between individual and collective issues; specific disputes happen in the context of wider social structures, including political decisions. Any campaigning initiatives which happen in or on behalf of the PCU are open to discussion by the membership, and we take care to provide ways for this to happen through our regional branches, forums, discussion lists and our democratic structures. Policy is made in collaboration with members at our AGM and in General Meetings.

I'd like a traditional Union focused on workplace issues.

We feel that we are offering as much of this as is possible, given the circumstances in which practitioners work, which are very different from the industrial context in which the Union movement arose. We find though, like other unions, that the issues and problems faced by the modern workforce requires new ways of thinking and acting.

Doesn't my membership Body cover what you are offering?

NO! Bodies like BACP and UKCP are both prosecutors and judges in complaints procedures. They acknowledge that they cannot also act as defenders and supporters for the practitioner being complained about. Also, their public campaigns take into account their wish to stay on the right side of governments, trainers and service providers, they cannot speak out clearly in support of therapy and therapists. The Union has one clear function, ***to stand up for therapists and therapy.***

Both BACP and UKCP have now formally recognised that PCU is entitled to support members in complaints processes.