

UKCP Chair and Trustee Elections 2025 – Questions for written responses

Pippa Donovan – chair candidate

1. Should the government introduce statutory regulation, to what extent do you think it will a) protect the public, b) boost the perception of psychotherapy as a robust discipline, and c) lead to more opportunities for psychotherapeutic professionals?

UKCP operates under the PSA Accredited Registers Scheme, which remains the current regulatory framework for psychotherapists and counsellors in the UK. While not a form of statutory regulation, it provides a government-backed quality mark, offering a level of public protection. We have already set out the terms of reference for a working group on statutory regulation so that we can fully understand the implications for us. We know that we are one of a few professions the government is interested in regarding regulation. Campaigners will seek to ensure heightened public awareness and that it moves up the government's agenda, so we need to be prepared; the incoming UKCP Chair will inherit this project. I believe that statutory regulation could offer greater protection to the public in that individuals removed from a register can no longer set themselves up in practice, and it could boost the perception of psychotherapy as a robust profession and therefore lead to more opportunities for psychotherapists. The unseen risks we need to guard against could be lowering standards (lowest common denominator) and potentially reducing the choice of psychotherapy to the public, as not all modalities may fit the mould.

We must review all options, consult with the membership on preferred approaches, and propose solutions for the membership to vote on.

2. How will candidates ensure that the UKCP has the diversity necessary for good therapy to exist?

First, what do we mean by diversity? Race, sexual orientation, gender identity, neurodiversity, socio-economic status, and geographical location are elements of diversity that we consider at UKCP. Ultimately, individuals want to find a therapist who meets their needs and with whom they can build a relationship. Our last membership survey indicated that 75% of the membership identified as white, 75% as aged 45 plus, 75% as women, 13 % as having a disability and a London-centric population. We know that we are not a diverse organisation. The EDI-BIDDE initiative addresses this within the organisation and the profession. This will mean greater collaboration with the 75 training organisations within UKCP to survey policies and training, and then collectively develop plans to address disparity. Our progress will be communicated to members in the annual impact report. We will also monitor our recruitment, policy development and succession plan within the organisation.

As with all our work, we need to examine the evidence on EDI initiatives to determine what works and what does not, so we operate from an evidence-informed perspective.

3. The board presented the UKCP three-year strategy to members at the end of last year. How do you propose to support the organisation to deliver on that strategy?

The board's three-year strategy launched at the end of last year involved a 6-month member engagement process including seminars, thought pieces and surveys. The strategy highlights our three-year ambitions underpinned by "pillars": voice, quality, members, and organisation, reflecting the different components of our work, supported by an annual plan and budget. We will introduce an impact report at the end of the year so members can see how well we have performed in alignment with the overarching objectives. We will review progress each year, set next year's plan and budget, and communicate to the membership.

I also want to speak to an often-overlooked part of the strategy: the values of the organisation: Integrity, innovation, informed by data and evidence, pluralism of the modalities, inquisitiveness and courage, inclusion, collaboration and reflection. These need to come alive to address how we work and care for ourselves and each other in colleges, committees and working groups. Culture change alongside strategy deployment is key. I want the Board of Trustees to lead the way, beginning with a dialogue on how we want to work together, build trust, and set expectations of behaviour and mechanisms of support within the organisation.

It has been a bruising year for everyone, and I want us to learn to better care for each other in our responsible roles.

4. What would be your strategy for raising the profile of UKCP?

We need to establish an insight and influencing policy. I want us to develop a more coherent plan about the following: i) the issues vital to us as a member-informed organisation and ii) how we engage with others to influence. As a smaller member organisation in the sector, to maximise influence, we choose to work in coalition on specific themes such as the Climate Minds Coalition, and the AI collation, to bring together like-minded organisations to a common aim or working with sector partners on setting up an All-Party Parliamentary Policy Group on Talking Therapies.

Storytelling via different channels, such as press, print, social media, and podcasts, is key. We have been successful in the past with this aspect of profile raising, but we need to refresh this format moving forward. There is power in "showing, not telling" the value of psychotherapy to individuals and society.

The chair has a professional leadership role in external affairs and external sector relationships built with key partners. As with all approaches to influencing, we must reinforce key messages about evidence-informed practice, plurality of modalities, and professional standards.

The UKCP name needs to equal excellence to the public.

5. What is your view of SCoPEd and its impact on the psychotherapy profession?

I have a favourable view of SCoPEd. The public deserves transparency about the different levels of training standards across the counselling and psychotherapy professions, presented in a coherent framework. The joint professional membership work on SCoPEd is good for the sector, and we need to continue to build those key working relationships to ensure that the voices of counselling and psychotherapy are amplified. UKCP, however, must not rest on its laurels. As part of our continuing professional standards work, we need to move forward and confirm our pathway from column B to C so that psychotherapeutic counsellors can continue their journey to become registered psychotherapists if they choose to. While working in partnership, we still need to differentiate ourselves by our standards of training, continuing professional development, and commitment to ethical practice.

6. How would you ensure the safety, well-being and rights of trans and other gender non-conforming UKCP members and members of the public?

The safety of all our UKCP members and members of the public seeking support from our practitioners is paramount. During the MOU debate, I read every letter from members, and the letters that concerned me the most were those who feared for their safety if we withdrew from the MOU. We are responsible for setting an environment and culture where informed debate and discussion can happen on various issues so members can safely explore their perspective, share learning and deepen their ethical practice. This culture setting starts with the Board of Trustees and needs to move through the committees and college structures. We are reviewing the constitution, policies, and procedures this year, and we can do more to strengthen our expectations of culture and behaviour.

7. How can psychotherapy training environments (teaching and placement settings) foster a multi-partisan approach that encourages diverse perspectives, critical thinking, and open exploration without fear of judgement or exclusion while balancing the need for psychological safety and mutual respect?

This is a similar answer to the above. Still, the need to ensure we achieve this in training environments is heightened; practitioners are beginning their professional journey and will want to explore various issues. Setting expectations, managing boundaries, and focusing on reflective, ethical practice are key to fostering a multipartisan approach.

8. How would the candidates balance their own views on social and other issues with the pluralistic stance of UKCP?

Our pluralistic stance is a principle on which we were founded, and it is still one of our core strengths. We work hard to articulate what unites us beyond modalities, coalescing around key and common themes that matter to the public. If elected, I would reinforce key messages about evidence-informed practice and high professional standards, ensuring that

the UKCP name equals excellence to the public and that practitioners are proud to belong to UKCP.

9. What's your strategy for growing the membership and income for UKCP?

We need to continue to settle and build the organisation, diversify income and growth, and increase our offer and support to members. As a lean organisation, we always balance priorities, but we can do more to support members, such as growing regional relationships and fostering more local connections. We can support the development of special interest groups, toolkits, though pieces, research events (including the Annual Research Conference) and develop webinars on key areas of interest, which we have already started to do in the strategy development process. The UKCP Annual Conference is now relaunched, and my aim, if elected, would be to continue to develop it as a central event in the UKCP calendar. We need to accelerate the pace of this work now.

10. Strategy Pillar 1: 'addressing any identified disparities for those who are being trained, those who complete training and those who access training'. The major disparity lies in the massive personal cost of training, which excludes a lot of people. What kind of action do you envisage to address this disparity?

I agree that socio-economic factors are a key barrier to training for many people. I support "earn whilst you learn", such as the NHS pathways project, which we are leading on behalf of NHS Talking Therapies. The feedback we have received from trainees is that it has provided them with a route into the profession that they would never previously have been able to afford. I am keen to explore ideas around payments for trainees aligned to levels of training, and we need to develop better offers of support to members once qualified in activities that support independent practice, such as website construction, writing, and all forms of communication so that they can position their practice better.