



Coaching comes of age

With the launch of a competence framework for dual-trained practitioners, the future looks bright for therapeutic coaching, says **Catherine Jackson**

Described famously by Michael Carroll back in 2003 as ‘the new kid on the block’,¹ therapeutic coaching could be said to have, finally, precisely 20 years later, come of age, with the publication by BACP of a framework of coaching competences for dual-trained practitioners – therapists who also coach. The competence framework establishes an important foundation for further development of what a growing number of practitioners see as a model of talking therapy fit for the 21st century – one that brings the benefits of both coaching and counselling, offering the depth of therapy along with a focus on clients’ personal strengths and potential to thrive despite challenging circumstances. Arguably too, the competences signal that the therapeutic profession has finally caught up with the vanguard of a vibrant movement of practitioners who have long been pioneering new ways of bringing the

benefits of both approaches to their work with clients.

Says Carolyn Mumby, Chair of BACP Coaching from 2019 to 2022: ‘With the launch of the competences, we now have an agreed sense of what it looks like to be a therapeutic coach, what it looks like to integrate coaching and counselling, and what you need to think about when you are offering an integrated practice that is different from when you are offering them separately. We have a clearer definition of when therapists are qualified to also call themselves a coach, and what skills gaps need to be filled before therapists can include coaching in their offering.’

The competences are much anticipated and very welcome, says Linda Aspey, founding Chair of BACP Coaching: ‘We were talking about the potential role of competences 13 years ago when we launched the coaching division, as we knew there were practical and ethical issues for therapists wanting to move into or blend their work with coaching – what additional knowledge,

skills and experiences they might need and what they might need from their professional body to guide them.’

Part of the challenge of developing the competences is that coaching, like counselling, takes many forms along a wide spectrum, from life coaching through to what is usually termed executive or leadership coaching, working with high-end leaders and organisations to help improve business performance. The boundary between coaching and therapy is also ‘disputed territory’, according to David Britten, an external consultant who worked with BACP Professional Standards to develop the competences framework and user guide. Britten is a qualified psychotherapist who subsequently trained in coaching and coaching supervision, and also taught at the York St John University for 13 years. ‘It is generally agreed that coaching is a largely future-orientated process that enables people to identify where they want to get to in their working and/or personal lives, why they want to get

there, and how best to navigate a route to their destinations. Therapy is generally seen as essentially concerned with relieving distress – healing emotional wounds, resolving inner conflicts, changing unhelpful habits of thought and behaviour, fashioning new narratives, and thereby enabling people to live without chronic or acute psychological pain. What coaching and (most) therapies have in common is a belief in each person’s ability, given the right circumstances, to live a constructive life and to continue developing across the lifespan,’ he says.

However, he says, an increasing number of coaches have come to recognise that coaching can sometimes achieve significant and lasting change, but for some clients the changes can be less lasting if not built on the psychological foundations of the kind that therapy can provide. ‘This is where therapeutic coaching comes in. It has coaching’s orientation to the present and future and its emphasis on nurturing strengths and values in shaping a working or personal life that is fuller than the current one. It provides the space found in therapy for deeper exploration of the self than is generally found in coaching. Integrating the two provides an authentic and ethical way to work at emotional depth and be able to sit with the process when needed but also inject forward momentum and open the horizons to the future when it is appropriate to the situation.’

It is perhaps this dynamic tension between forward motion and excavation of the past that dual practitioners find so energising and refreshing. Says Britten: ‘One of my reasons for moving into coaching was that I felt there were aspects of therapeutic culture that tended to be overly focused on deficit, problems, wounds, and sometimes what a client needs is help to locate an energy that is forward directed and see the extent to which the solution already exists in the present, rather than having to excavate the self and/or the past to find the magic key.’ In this, he points out, coaching is very similar to solution-focused therapy.

This creative dynamic is fully recognised in the BACP competence framework, says Britten: ‘Therapists are already trained in relational skills and personal awareness – the personal development work. For coaches that is often missing. Coaches I work with often don’t know how to deal with difficult stuff when it comes up. They haven’t done that aspect of therapeutic training – exploring your own stuff and how it can get in the way or help, how you can be pulled in by a client’s stuff, and how to manage that – the dynamics of the helping encounter. It is a key area where coaches are going to need training if they are to move into dual practice. A lot feel out of their depth, and therapeutic training gives them much more understanding of themselves and the interpersonal process.’

But the competences also recognise an important flip side, he argues: ‘Moving from therapy to coaching requires engagement in a different kind of personal development. To be able to resonate with and respond to the full range of client experiences, practitioners need to be as experientially familiar with more positive experiences – excitement, joy, success, fulfilment, mastery of self and environment, for example. Practitioners need to have an experiential, as well as a theoretical, awareness that there is often more growth to be fostered by nurturing strengths, qualities and values than by working to address limitations, and the competences address this requirement too.’

Mumby agrees – she has made the shift completely from therapist to coach,

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working with leaders in organisations and with individuals, and loves the energy that coaching brings to her work. ‘But my therapy background really informs my work and brings an additional richness to the coaching,’ she says. ‘I think we are seeing a journey towards integration that has been happening in counselling for some time and is now happening among coaches wanting to be more psychologically informed.’

Leadership coach Hetty Einzig started her training journey in transpersonal psychology and psychosynthesis. ‘I took the therapeutic depth and knowledge and the idea of the transpersonal with its much more systemic approach into the coaching world and never looked back,’ she says. ‘My therapy training has enhanced my coaching. I really enjoy bringing to it that additional depth and an understanding about the “darker” side. I am not a fan of pure performance coaching – I don’t think it enhances our experience of work or life or our capacity as human beings making contributions on this earth.’

And what does coaching bring to therapy? ‘A lot,’ she says. ‘It brings an emphasis on how we translate understanding into action – it says even if we can only make very small actions or changes, we can make them; we are not just victims of our past.’

Relevance

Coaching makes therapy practice more relevant, believes Gill Fennings-Monkman MBE, who chaired BACP Coaching from 2014 to 2017 and served on its executive committee for many years. ‘It gives you a skill set people are looking for. It reflects changes in the way the world is going and opens up a whole other landscape of work for the psychologically aware practitioner where that psychological blueprint is required.’

Trained initially as a humanistic integrative therapist, Fennings-Monkman moved into coaching via a European Community-funded project (for which she was awarded her MBE) working with women in the deprived, ethnically diverse London borough

of Tower Hamlets, helping them establish themselves in self-employment. 'I thought, what do people with money use to help people advance? They use coaching and also NLP. So I devised a plan to develop and offer coaching. Over 10 years we helped women to establish 3,700 businesses in the borough. Through the coaching they could envisage a different future and make it happen. You saw women become emancipated, grow in confidence. If they hit a barrier the coaching helped them over it and they could move on.'

There is increasing recognition too that the historic division between coaching and counselling has narrowed, she says: 'Coaches used to be told not to work with people's distress. The coaching world has had to embrace the reality that, if a client presents during coaching with some kind of emotional crisis or breakdown, you can't just shut them down. Without psychotherapeutic training, the best you can do is hold that person and encourage them to think about seeking therapy.'

Jo Birch, a founding member of BACP Coaching's executive committee and its Chair from 2012 to 2014, points out that the coaching professional bodies are also increasingly fostering a more psychologically minded approach to the work. 'The field is moving towards wanting to increase psychological understanding. Clients are bringing emotional aspects of their lives to coaching and coaches don't want to say "I can't go there"; they are wanting to know how to hold clients in the moment and what they might draw on to do so safely. Bringing multiple approaches together isn't about making anyone lesser than; it's about amplifying everything in the system. We need to be able to bring the zing of coaching and the ability to hold someone and work in depth with psychotherapy.'

Social impact

Another significant feature of the BACP competences is their recognition of the wider world around the client, be that organisation, community or political

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system. They explicitly require of the therapeutic coach the ability to assess their client through a wider lens, looking beyond individual dysfunction, damage and internal blocks: 'They stress that the coach needs to be able to listen for and help the client to identify aspects of the social, economic and political contexts that influence, constrain or enable ways of thinking and acting,' says Britten. 'Coaches working with clients in organisational settings might use the term "system" instead of "context" here. Whatever terminology is used, the key point is that coaches are able to foster their clients' awareness of relevant cultural, political, economic, legal and/or technical aspects of their situation.'

Mumby was behind the launch, with former BACP President David Weaver's backing, of a special interest group for Coaching for Social Impact within BACP Coaching. This began with a series of events around the UK, followed up with articles in *Coaching Today* and *Therapy Today*, and interviews with key players in community-based coaching, now on BACP Coaching's webpages. 'We talked with different people working with various minoritised groups and began to see the potential impact of coaching with those communities because practitioners were looking for the strengths in people; they were taking a systemic approach; they were understanding that difficulty doesn't just reside within the individual and that they are very much impacted by the system they are in,' says Mumby. 'In working with communities, we are asking the same scoping questions as in any

coaching encounter: "What do you want to change?", "How do you want to change?", "How do you want to make change happen?" I think coaching has the flexibility to do that.'

Certainly it worked with Fennings-Monkman's community of women entrepreneurs in Tower Hamlets. Britten also contributed a case study to the *Coaching for Social Impact* report,² describing a project he ran with a group of clients with long-term mental health problems at York Mind. The project was based on the 'recovery star' used in mental health services to help users identify and work towards goals.

'Coaching is generally seen to be appropriate for people who are basically functioning OK. If there isn't some presence of hope, a will to engage in a future-orientated process, then asking people what their goals are could be seen as almost cruel. But some of the clients in the project really benefited because the coaching process validated those parts of them that were not damaged and helped them to reclaim agency, even in the face of some really difficult circumstances.'

'In this way, this project debunked the idea that coaching should be the preserve of people who are already functioning well and not experiencing serious distress,' he argues. 'That some of the York Mind coaching clients experienced healing through the coaching suggests that, contrary to the beliefs of many or most therapists, healing doesn't necessarily require prolonged exploration of problems and their origins. To me, it seems increasingly clear that the tension between therapeutic and coaching ways of working holds a creative energy that dual-trained practitioners are ideally placed to harness.'

This feature of coaching may partly explain why coaching may be more accessible than therapy to people from black and brown communities, says Val Watson, Deputy Chair of BACP Coaching. First counsellor, then coach, and now offering both in private practice, Watson is also involved in the Coaching for Social Impact initiative.

Making it work

'I was doing solely psychodynamic work and I had some frustrations with that - at times the work felt quite withholding, and I felt my practice would really benefit from the introduction of some coaching practices. I then trained in strategic coaching, which is very dynamic. I could see the benefits of taking into account developments in neuroscientific research in my client work, which I think coaching taps into. Science has helped us understand much more about neuroplasticity and how people can develop new neural pathways throughout the lifespan - research that is relatively recent and was not available to Freud when he was pioneering psychodynamic theory and practice. I know that querying Freud's development of his work is controversial to some, but the profession cannot shy away from new ways of thinking based on emerging research.'

Gemma Levitas, coach-therapist

'For me, the UEL Integrated Counselling and Coaching master's ticked all the boxes. If you have training in counselling and coaching, you start with the individual and find out what needs addressing and then just turn to your toolbox and use the relevant skills from either discipline. You don't need to draw a line and I think it's irrelevant; increasingly I see an overlap in how people practise. The graduates from this course are in a way pioneers - what's available to us in terms of appropriately qualified supervision and CPD hasn't really kept pace. We are fortunate in that our cohort has largely kept in touch post-qualification and we offer each other some peer support. I would hope the competences lead to more practical advice and guidance from BACP to help me develop my work, which I'd certainly welcome. The profession needs to be more open to the new.'

Emmanuel Rollings-Kamara, integrative therapist, counsellor and coach

She says the coaching approach resonates with black and brown peoples' faith practices and does not have the stigma of mental illness associated with counselling: 'It's seen as advice-giving and mentoring, and it's focused, going somewhere. It fits with the tradition of seeking wisdom from elders.'

Watson works with community groups, often of black people, helping them identify and work towards their goals together, using coaching techniques. 'When I am working with communities, I always start with their values, not just their goals - with their environment, values, history, and then look at how that feeds into what their goals are as a group, how they arrive at those goals and how they relate with

each other within the group. How do we find ourselves here? What does that mean in terms of the larger environment we are in? What does that feel like? And recognising that this plays a part in how they advocate for themselves, work as a team or group, their chances of meeting with hostility or failure and what they might feel about that.'

A climate change activist herself, Aspey sees an emerging role for coaching in supporting political campaigning. 'Coaches have lots of relevant skill sets for working with individuals and groups, such as dealing with the realities of change, flexibility, facilitation skills and an understanding of group dynamics,' she points out. She is part of a team of therapist-coaches who offer one-to-one and

group emotional and psychological support for climate activists, based on Joanna Macy's 'The Work that Reconnects', known also as 'Active Hope' (www.workthatreconnects.org). Aspey also runs climate cafés where people - often total strangers - come together to share how they are feeling about the state of the world. Both of these initiatives aim to provide a space where people can acknowledge their grief and move from a state of anxiety, depression, rage or overwhelm to one of agency and hope. 'Building communities is key,' says Aspey. 'We meet people who have had a lonely awakening to the reality of climate change and are horrified by the future they see facing us. They need something that supports their mental wellbeing, reduces isolation and helps them to function day to day or enables them to take part in activism without burning out. Most express deep relief from being with people who "get it".' She says having a blend of coaching and therapy skills has helped her both to hold these often highly emotionally charged spaces and also to spot when an individual needs more in-depth work and support.

Mumby also thinks there is vast opportunity for therapeutic coaching in schools, working with children and young people. 'We need to get programmes of coaching and psychoeducation into schools to help young people navigate their way through this new world. Coaching brings a lot of potential to make young people's experience of the world better in a proactive way.'

Training

Britten's ambition for the competences framework to lead to more and better training for dual practitioners is shared widely by these pioneers. BACP is already working on a training curriculum for qualified therapists who want to integrate coaching into their practice. Specialist coach training for qualified therapists is limited, but there are a number of established courses, including those offered by Animas, Fusion and the Rowan Consultancy. ▶

One of the first courses was developed eight years ago by Mumby and international executive coach Dr Trish Turner. 'Therapist to Coach' is designed to take qualified counsellors to postgraduate senior coaching practitioner level, mapped against the EMCC Global competences. Turner qualified and practised for many years as an executive coach before training in counselling when she realised she was applying counselling theory and techniques in her work without consciously naming them as such. 'Coaching has moved very much away from the old-school performance coaching, or transactional coaching. These days people bring their whole selves to coaching, and we understand that their past will influence where they are now and how they go forward,' she says.

Participants decide for themselves if they are going to integrate, have two separate practices or draw from across their coaching and counselling skills. 'Perhaps the most important part is on ethics - how are you going to describe what you do in a way that is transparent and honest, and how clear are you about where your boundaries are? You have to be clear if you are going to practise therapeutic coaching,' Turner says.

The demand for training is evident - the only master's-level course currently on offer, the University of East London's (UEL) MSc in Integrated Counselling and Coaching, is heavily oversubscribed.

'Some online trainings are driven by money, not quality. That is why a BACP initiative to produce a training curriculum is essential'

This year they had around 300 applicants for 48 places. Developed by Nash Popovic, the course teaches the Personal Consultancy model he developed with Debra Jinks.³

'The course subscribes to so-called demarcated integration,' says Popovic. 'I use a cocktail party analogy. There is blended integration, which is like a gin and tonic - the ingredients are mixed up and you can't separate them. In CBT, for example, nobody separates the behavioural from the cognitive part; they are blended into one approach. What we do in Personal Consultancy is more like drinking tequila - the tequila, lime and salt are all used, but one after another, not together at the same time. In the same way, our trainees learn to use counselling and coaching skills with the same client but not at the same time. At certain stages of the client's journey, particularly in the early sessions, we use mostly counselling skills; then, at later stages, we may use coaching skills. To get the client from where they are to where they want to be, you need to be able to look 'under the bonnet' and see what the internal barriers and conflicts are that prevent them moving forward, and help them resolve them, using the relevant skills. We start with the relational, intra-psyche initially, to establish the therapeutic relationship, and then we use coaching skills to enable the client to make concrete, visible changes in life out there.'

The MSc is only available at UEL at the moment, and Popovic very much wants to see more such trainings available, whether based on this or other models of integration: 'We don't want all our eggs in one basket,' he says. He worries about the quality of many trainings on offer - it was the 'shabby training' in coaching that impelled him to attempt to do better with the UEL course. 'Some online trainings are driven by money, not quality. That is why a BACP initiative to produce a training curriculum is essential,' he says.

Next steps

Lucy Myers, current Chair of BACP Coaching, has the job of building on the

foundations the competences provide. She believes this way of working is 'evolving to meet new needs arising from the challenges of recent years - the pandemic, globalisation, issues around diversity, equity and inclusion, the conversations that need to be had inside and outside organisations, and the normalisation of talking about mental health issues'.

She also believes more and more people are needing the combined approach of coaching and therapy: 'They need practitioners who are able to hold a certain amount of emotional distress while also helping them move positively and actively towards something they want to achieve. This is the space for us to be able to step in and offer our skills.'

It's a space we'll all be watching, now the 'new kid' has come of age. ■

- BACP's *Coaching competence framework* and *Coaching competence user guide* can be found at: bit.ly/3IA6Lpd
- For resources and information on coaching for counsellors, see www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-divisions/bacp-coaching

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About the author

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