BACP Workplace membership

Kevin Friery and **Rick Hughes** reflect on the findings

Earlier this year, ACW, as it was then, invited its members to complete a survey. The purpose was to find out more about the needs and wants of members to help the division better offer what is sought.

An online questionnaire was promoted in two issues of *Counselling at Work* and also via the e-bulletin. Sixty-three people completed the survey, representing about eight per cent of the total membership. This is a lower response rate than we would have wanted but reflects the demands on people's time

The gender split of respondents was 30.16 per cent male and 69.84 per cent female, which broadly corresponds to the BACP membership demographic.

How old are you?

When we profile the age range of respondents (*figure 1*), it was interesting to note that we had no responses from people below the age of 30. This reflects previous workplace divisional surveys where we found that the entry age range for workplace counsellors often seems to be older than for other sectors, perhaps suggesting that workplace counsellors start counselling in other sectors first or come into the profession as a result of a career change later on in their lives. The many skills of a workplace counsellor places a unique set of demands on them and perhaps this is reflected in the way that such practitioners develop into workplace counselling rather than it being an entry level job.

Twenty-five respondents – just under 40 per cent of those who completed the survey – are in the 50-59 age group. Just under 75 per cent of the respondents were aged 50-plus. If this is representative of workplace counselling practitioners, perhaps it is worth exploring whether we, as a division, can attract younger counsellors into this sector, maybe by supporting the student community or at least offering more workplace counselling modules into generic counselling courses.

Where do you live?

When we asked where people lived, we received a fairly representative response, with south east England predominating (*figure 2*). We did not receive any responses from Northern Ireland or Ireland. The Scottish and Welsh responses follow the traditional 10 per cent and five per cent of the UK total figures, and we had two responses in 'other' locations. It is not clear whether these 'other' respondents reside overseas or in UK locations perceived as not being included in the location options.

Your job function

A range of different job functions was revealed (*figure 3*) with 56 per cent working as a workplace counsellor for EAP, referred or private clients. This suggests a large proportion who might work freelance or privately and reflects how they may be dependent on external or private referrals. Some 15 per cent seem to work for a core function such as human resources, people management or occupational health. A further 15 per cent are employed by EAPs or counselling service providers, which highlights the size of this market. While 63 respondents completed the questionaire, 108 different workplace functions were selected, suggesting that some members felt several functions applied to them.

Do you belong?

When asked whether they were members of ACW (now BACP Workplace), over 95 per cent of respondents said they were. Of those who were not members, one ticked 'it's too expensive', another selected 'BACP membership meets my needs', and a third person felt other associations met their needs.

Divisional benefits

In terms of the benefits that respondents said they enjoyed from divisional membership, the majority (93 per cent) felt the *Counselling at Work* journal was a benefit to them (*figure 4*, page 4). Next equal at 39 per cent were being connected to the workplace division of BACP, and the e-bulletin. The e-bulletin is a relatively new initiative by BACP Workplace and one that other divisions are keen to emulate. The purpose here is to offer insights and updates about developments in the sector and also to promote forthcoming events that might be more time sensitive than a quarterly journal can accommodate.

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survey 2009

Guidelines for workplace counselling

BACP and BACP Workplace jointly produced *Guidelines for counselling in the workplace* a couple of years ago, yet only 66.6 per cent had read it. Of all respondents, about 60 per cent felt the guidelines were either 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'. No one considered the guidelines to be 'not useful' or 'not useful at all'. The rest hadn't read it or had no comment.

   Figure 5 (page 4) shows which sections of the guidelines respondents found most useful. The most popular section related to 'counsellor standards and accountability', suggesting that respondents value the importance attached to this area. As BACP and BACP Workplace campaign heavily to enhance standards and identify best practice, it is heartening to see respondents rating this well. 'Issues about confidentiality' was the next most popular section. The BACP information helpdesk and BACP Workplace receive queries from members on a frequent basis and many of these focus on issues surrounding confidentiality (and ethical issues). The next two most popular sections covered 'the benefits of counselling provision' and 'evaluating and auditing a counselling service'. It is possible by the nature of these sections that those who found these most useful were organisational staff who need to demonstrate the value of the service, ie by showing the 'benefits' or how they are 'evaluated'. A total of 186 votes were cast in this section suggesting that the 63 respondents found more than one section useful. From a questionnaire design perspective it might have been more useful to ask respondents to rate only their favourite section and this might have encouraged a greater differentiation.

Counselling at Work

As the journal has been rated as the most useful benefit of divisional benefit, we wanted to explore what readers enjoyed most about it. *Figure 6* (page 4) suggests that 85 per cent of respondents enjoyed 'articles about workplace counselling plus ethical issues'; and, as the journal for workplace counselling, we'd be worried if the percentage was much lower. The next most popular theme related to articles about 'different workplace
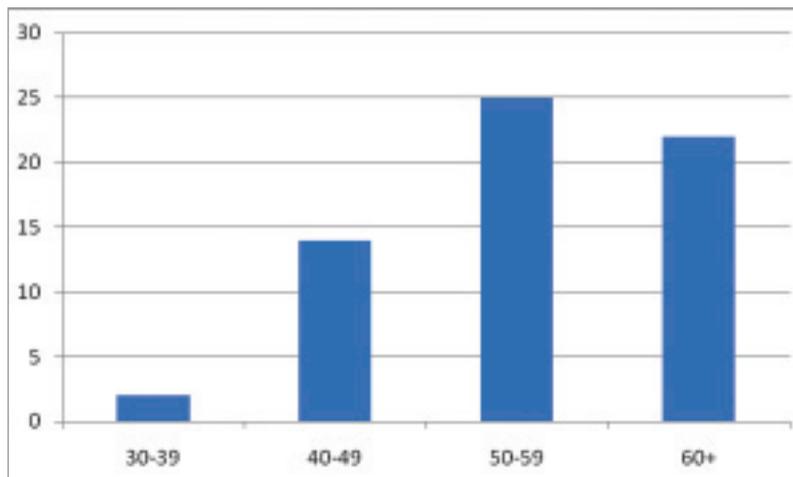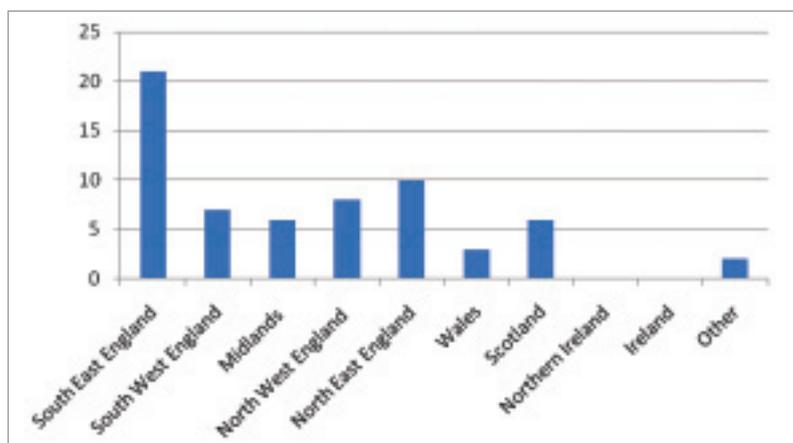

Figure 1. Age breakdown of membership (n63)

Figure 2. Geographical breakdown of members (n63)

- Workplace counsellor for EAPs and/or external counselling service providers only
- Workplace counsellor for both referred clients and private practice
- Part-time workplace counsellor
- Human Resources, Personnel or People Management
- Occupational Health
- Other organisational function
- I'm employed by an EAP or counselling service provider
- I have an interest in workplace counselling only but am not a practitioner

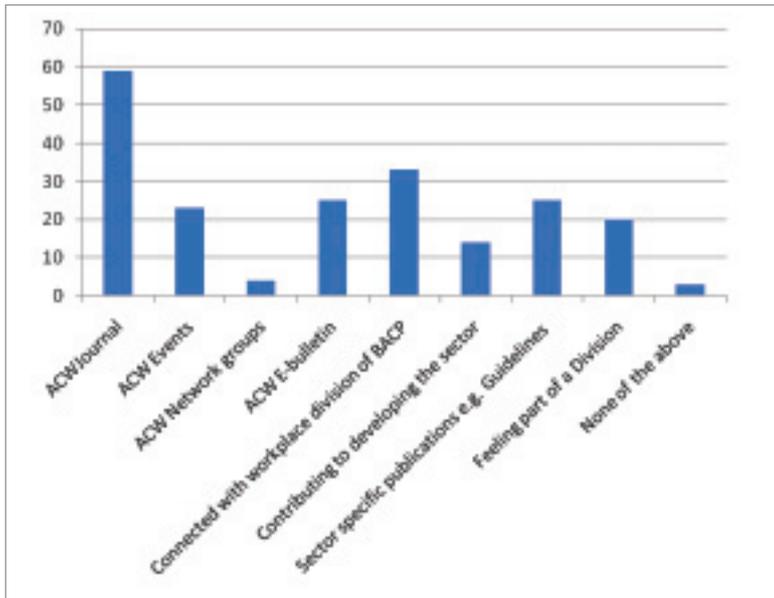Figure 3. Work functions and roles (n108)

Figure 4. What are the benefits you enjoy from membership of ACW (now BACP Workplace)?
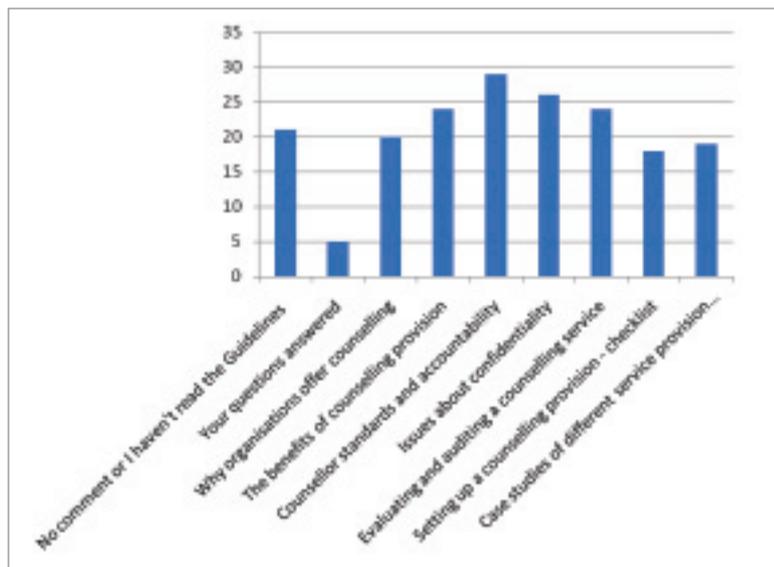

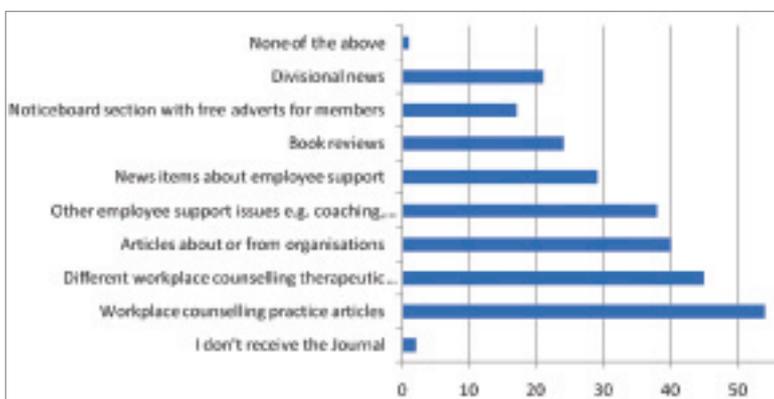*Figure 5. Which sections of the Guidelines did you find useful? (n186)*

Figure 6. What do you enjoy reading in Counselling at Work? *(n271)*

counselling therapeutic approaches' as voted for by 45 respondents or 71 per cent of the total. This reflects the many different therapeutic approaches used by workplace practitioners and where many counsellors work along integrative lines, utilising a range of approaches in their toolkit. Respondents enjoy 'articles about and from organisations'. Workplace providers usually recognise the need for workplace counsellors to understand the inner workings of corporate life, so we try to introduce this dimension to offer this insight. The next interest is for 'other employee support issues, such as coaching, mentoring, mediation' and where we see workplace counsellors engaged in a range of activities above and beyond counselling, the enthusiasm to read about 'other' support issues reflects this. The 63 respondents voted with 271 choices which suggests they enjoy more than one core theme.

Are you accredited?
In the next question, we asked whether respondents were BACP accredited. *Figure 7* reveals that 53 per cent of respondents were accredited. The three other questions sought to understand where along the accreditation continuum, respondents sat. Just over 30 per cent say they are either currently applying or intend to do so. 15 per cent or nine respondents say they have no intention to seek accreditation. In view of forthcoming regulation, it would be interesting to know the reason why these nine respondents are choosing not to seek accreditation.

Challenges in your work
The next question asked about the issues regarded as presenting challenges in your work (*figure 8*). Out of the 63 respondents, we received 174 votes, suggesting some respondents faced more than one challenge. The questionnaire listed a range of issues that we felt reflected typical challenges for the workplace counsellor and in so doing we appreciate this was a finite listing. The spread was relatively even, though 'finding appropriate and affordable CPD/training' ranked as the most pressing challenge. This was followed equally by 'regulation' (11 per cent or 20 respondents), 'challenges related to the three-cornered contract', and 'ethical concerns'. Clearly in a simple tick box questionnaire we do not get the benefit of finding out the reasons behind the responses and making inferences can be difficult and possibly misleading. It is interesting, however, to note that the least rated challenge was 'future prospects seem limited', suggesting that this is perhaps a positive reflection on the security of jobs in the profession.

Networking

BACP Workplace is keen to support regional and special interest networks so that members can meet, learn from and network with each other. As these networks are facilitated by volunteers, we appreciate that there is a limit to how much time and effort can be put into managing these networks. The next question asked whether you attend a BACP Workplace network group and if not, why not.

Figure 9 gives a sense of the popularity of the network events, albeit among our respondents who only comprised some eight per cent of the total divisional membership. Five per cent of respondents did attend some network group. Just under 40 per cent tell us there is no such group in their area. Twenty per cent say they do not have time to attend and 10 per cent do not see the benefit of attending. Twenty-five per cent of respondents voted 'none of the above', which suggests there might be other reasons for non-attendance.

We also asked those who wanted a network in their area but did not have one, where they would like one. The following locations were listed: Sheffield, Germany, West Yorkshire, North Norfolk, South Yorkshire, Ebbw Vale, Scotland, Hampshire, Cheshire (x3), Canterbury, Stevenage, South Kent, London, Surrey and Farnham. A couple of respondents had tried to contact their local network without any success, so we will look into this as a priority.

Specialist theme areas for networks included an interest in eating disorders, counselling skills (x2), clinical management, NHS staff, Christian NGO, pastoral, psychosocial, debriefing and counselling support, remote management, team dynamics, support in complex relief environments, and stress prevention.

If any of these respondents or readers share a geographical or interest theme and would like to see whether there are other like-minded BACP Workplace members in their area, please feel free to post an advertisement in the *Counselling at Work* Noticeboard section (page 30) – there is no charge for members.

The BACP Workplace website

Recognising that more information and communication comes via the internet, we asked what members would want from a future BACP Workplace website. All BACP divisional websites are being redeveloped to conform to the BACP website template – and the BACP Workplace website was recently revamped. In future, we hope to add extra features, and answers to this question will help steer us in the right direction.
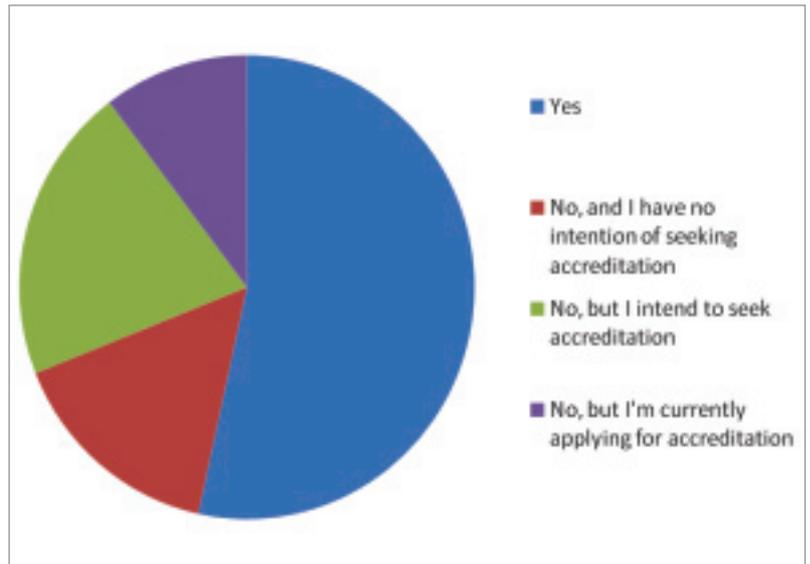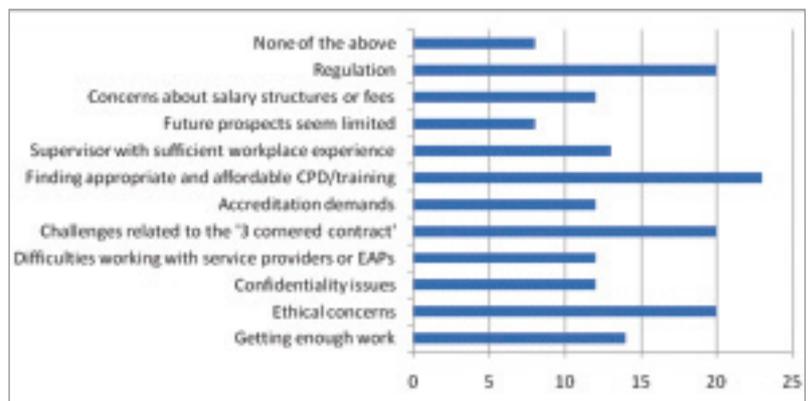

Figure 7. Are you BACP accredited?

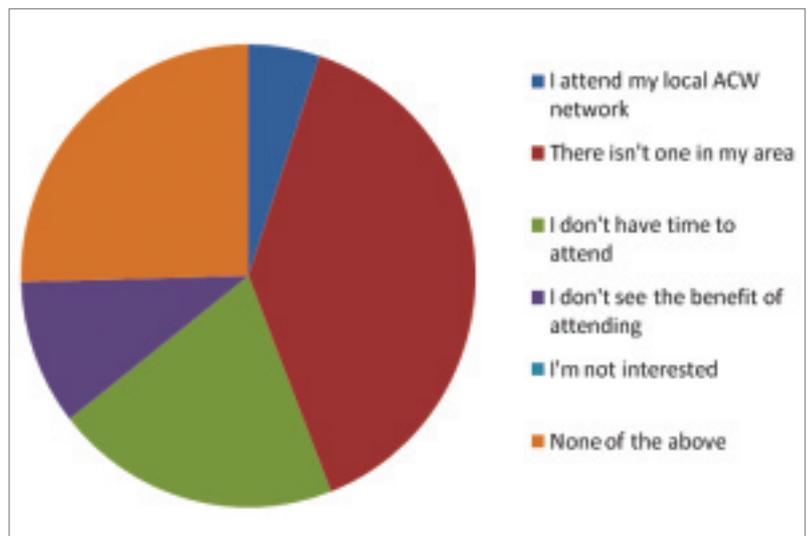*Figure 8. What are the issues that present you with challenges in your work?*

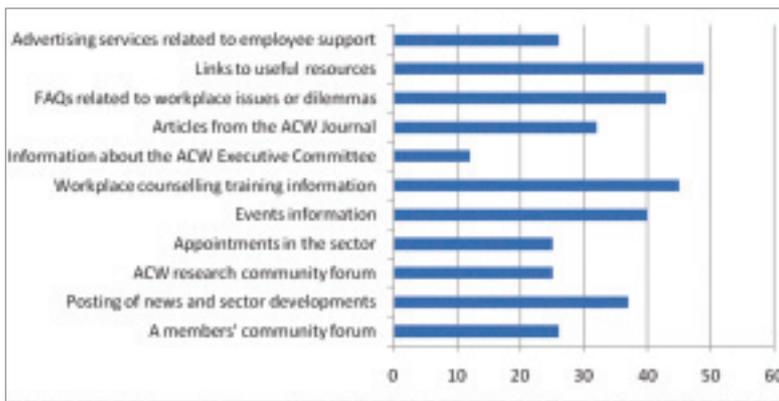*Figure 9. Do you attend a BACP Workplace network and if not, why not?*

Figure 10. What would you like in a future BACP Workplace website? (n360)
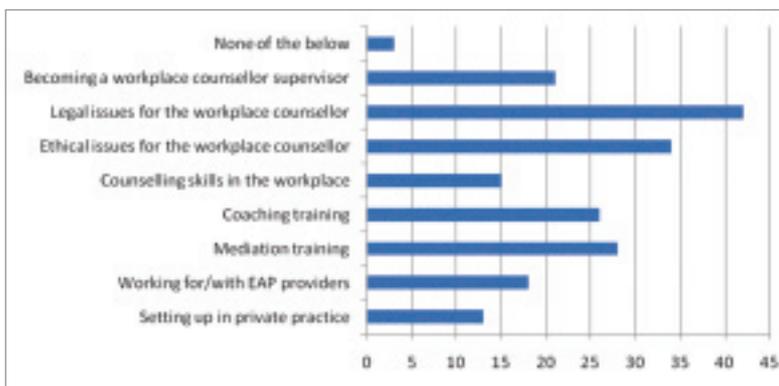

Figure 11. Preferred topics for future workplace training (n200)

Figure 10 shows what issues or areas respondents would like in a new BACP Workplace website. Three hundred and sixty votes were made by our 63 respondents suggesting enthusiasm for several new website additions. The most popular, as voted for by 77 per cent of respondents, was 'links to related resources'. Then we had 'workplace counselling training information', which reflects the challenges raised above about not finding enough CPD or training opportunities. BACP is currently mapping out counselling training provision in the UK and we hope to get a sector overview in due course. In third place we had 'FAQs related to workplace issues or dilemmas'. BACP Workplace has been exploring adding this feature but where this does not replicate the information sheets available via the BACP information department. 'Events information' came next and we now have a dedicated events section on the BACP Workplace website. Prior to the recent revamping, the events information had been somewhat out of date. 'Posting of news and sector developments' came next. Currently we diseminate this material via the e-bulletin as an exclusive benefit to members.

If we post this on the website without member password-protected access, then it ceases to be an exclusive benefit. However, we appreciate the balance between informing the wider community against offering services only for members who pay their subscription. Next in line, we had 'articles from the ACW journal' which we do have available for all who access the website. The website addition that received the fewest votes related to 'information about the ACW executive committee'. Perhaps fortuitously, in this issue of the journal we have profiles of the executive committee members, specifically so you can get a sense of their background, skills and interests. Please do get in touch with any of them as required.

Workplace training
It was highlighted earlier that respondents wanted more training opportunities and felt there was insufficient information about this available. The next question sought to find out the areas of workplace training that respondents might want. *Figure 11* highlights the topic areas. Two hundred votes were cast by the 63 respondents suggesting several favoured themes. The most popular (66 per cent of the total), related to 'legal issues for the workplace counsellor', followed by 'ethical issues' (53 per cent). This highlights the value that respondents put on counselling standards and practice issues. 'Mediation' and 'coaching' training seem more popular than 'counselling skills training' which suggests that our respondents are keen to expand their repertoire of employee support skills options.

Further guidelines
After the success of *Guidelines for counselling in the workplace*, which offered a generic overview of issues relating to workplace counselling service provision, BACP Workplace wanted to assess demand for future guidelines. The most enthusiastic response (71 per cent of respondents) was for trauma support/critical incident management guidelines. BACP Workplace is currently drafting a trio of guidelines within this topic. Sixty-three per cent wanted guidelines on ethical issues for the workplace counsellor and just over 50 per cent of respondents would like guidelines on mediation. A total of 187 votes was cast by the 63 respondents (*figure 12)*.

What should we champion?
The BACP Workplace executive committee comprises unpaid volunteers who juggle their commitments with their day jobs. However, in collaboration with BACP, the division seeks to champion as many 'causes' as possible, whether

through the BACP media department or via BACP Workplace events. The penultimate question asked which issues BACP Workplace should champion in future. *Figure 13* provides the results: 344 votes were cast by the 63 respondents and the relatively even spread shows that pretty much all the options offered seem to be relevant or important.

The most popular issue, as voted for by 79 per cent of the respondents, was 'best practice for workplace counselling', and this reflects the earlier enthusiasm for standards and best practice within the profession. The least preferred issue to champion was 'bullying and harassment', which might be because, with a recent conference on this topic, BACP Workplace has given this theme comprehensive coverage. However, 60 per cent still voted for 'bullying and harassment'.

Membership: value for money?

The final question sought to find out the degree to which respondents regarded membership of BACP Workplace as value for money. As *figure 14* demonstrates, six people did not respond to this question. Of those who did, 25 per cent (14 people) regarded membership as 'excellent value for money, just over 53 per cent (30 respondents) felt it represented 'a lot of value for money', and 21 per cent considered it offered 'a little value for money'. BACP Workplace aims to give 100 per cent value for money and we will take note of the hopes and aspirations of the respondents to work towards increasing member value in the future.

The future

As with so many surveys, we are left with as many questions as answers. There are some key milestones on the road ahead and probably the most significant is registration, but there are others such as criminal records clearance, the role of volunteering in counselling, the career path for counsellors who want to specialise, money (what clients pay and what counsellors are paid), and several other issues. The challenge for counsellors is to engage with these and to influence their profession while understanding that we are all subject to the decisions of government and can sometimes find ourselves required to do things we would rather not have to do. This, to some extent, seems to be the conflict that lies behind the accreditation/registration stance of some counsellors – although it is controversial, registration will happen and counselling will be a protected title, so that those who choose not to register will lose their professional identity. BACP Workplace will continue to work to inform and support members in this arena.
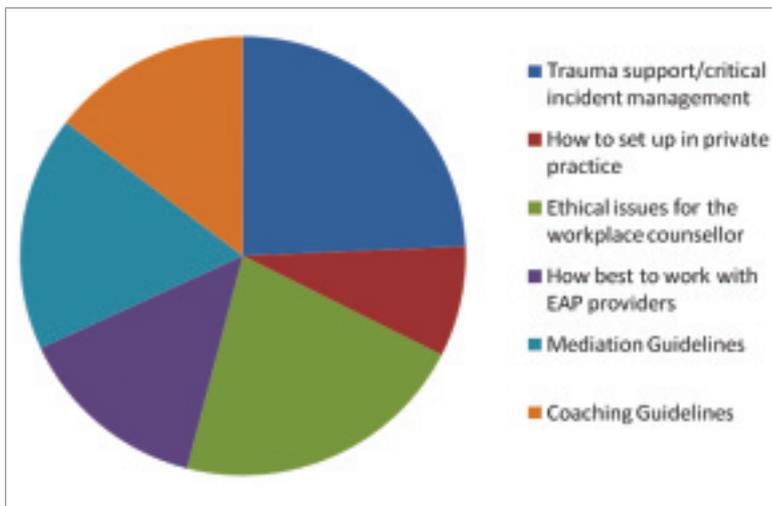

Figure 12. Potential topics for future BACP Workplace guidelines
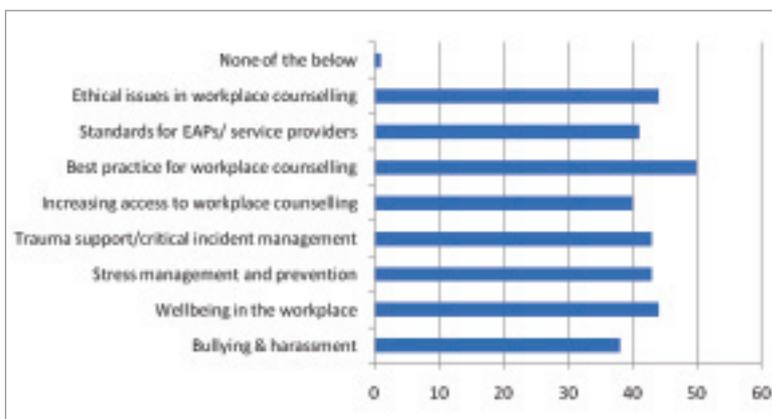

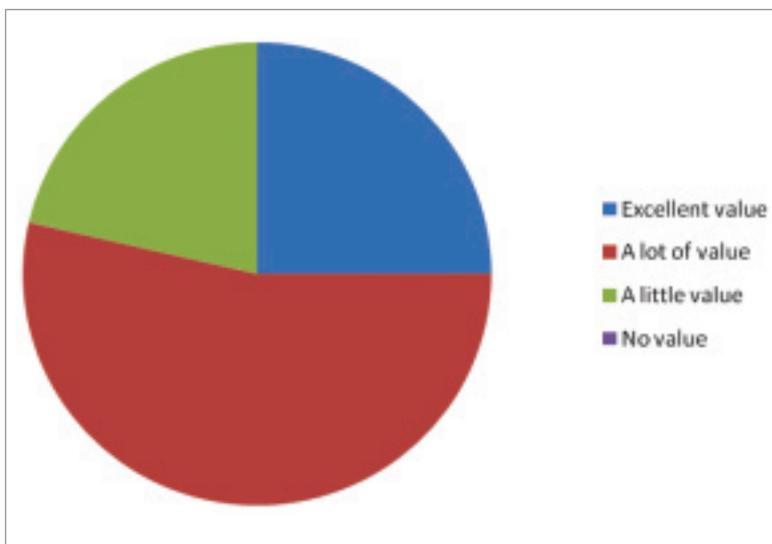Figure 13. Which issues should BACP Workplace champion in the future? (n344)

Figure 14. BACP Workplace value for money (n56)

Two of the questions we did not ask were about therapeutic and delivery models. We are increasingly finding that counselling is presented as something that is delivered in six sessions, and of course there is enormous controversy about the marketing of CBT as the therapy of choice. We would encourage members to engage in the debate, to consider how best to provide a therapeutic service and how to use evidence effectively. The question, discussed extensively at the 2009 BACP annual conference, is how best to create practice-based evidence.

We asked respondents for individual comments and received a large number of very positive messages. We do not have space here to cover them all but BACP Workplace will take heed of each and every one and action them where we can.

Comments made (which we have ensured cannot be attributed to any individual) include:

I'm glad this questionnaire has given me the opportunity to communicate with ACW. I'll look forward to developments! Thanks.

This questionnaire does not invite members' comments on the division's governance.

I think that there should be no additional charge to be a member of BACP Workplace. Could it be part of the BACP membership package?

Journal receipt too infrequent.

The ACW magazine seems to be printed on very expensive glossy paper. Could more modest/less environmentally damaging paper be used instead?

I have benefited from strong support by ACW. It's good to know there was someone there to help me when I needed it. Thank you.

My approaching retirement means that activity in this field will decrease. I want to put on record how valuable I feel the journal, the workshops etc are and have been as a way of keeping in touch with the world of counselling at work. I have felt supported and nourished by various personnel and events. My very best wishes for the future.

I would like to see BACP Workplace providing more of a link between companies and practitioners: conferences seem to be mainly attended by practitioners.

I found it useful to review my membership of ACW using these questions and I am aware that the direction of my work might benefit from a review at this time!

Thank you to all who responded to this questionnaire. Surveys such as these are always limited in what they can achieve but we hope that this will help influence the work of BACP Workplace for its members. ∎

Workplace haras

Dr Michael Walton looks at the motives

Harassment at work remains a significant problem and, in its various guises, threatens the wellbeing of those affected, and the integrity and internal equilibrium of an organisation. It seeks to capitalise on, and possibly magnify, organisational power differentials in order to gain an advantage over others for personal or organisational exploitation and, perhaps, gratification. The power differential exploited can be derived from differing levels of organisational status as well from the differing influencing styles and behaviour.

But is harassment at work inevitable? Is it part and parcel of organisational life and thus something, albeit unwanted, to be expected – and worked with – rather than seen as an aberration of a person's behaviour or evidence that they are socially and psychologically flawed in some way? If so, then presumably the perpetrator logically harasses their 'target' with a purposeful intent, seeking to secure some personal advantage. In which case harassment behaviour should be construed not as antisocial, disturbed or possibly psychotic, but as logical, focused and intentional.

By their actions the perpetrator may well be viewed as powerful and '*bad*' and the 'victim' or 'target' as less powerful but '*good*'. Dichotomous descriptors – such as perpetrator/victim, good/bad, right/wrong, target/targeted – may be convenient ways of describing such relationships, but they simplify rather than elucidate the complexity and complicated nature of the relationships, motives and behaviours involved[1].

Conventionally the assumption is likely to be that such dysfunctional relationships are primarily examples of personalities-in-combat, a contest with winners and losers, and a competition perhaps of egos – yet such descriptions may give too little attention to the wider organisational context in which the harassment is occurring and which may have prompted it in the first place!

Contextual prompts?

So what if such workplace harassment is as much a product of the *operational context* as a product of a dysfunctional interaction between two egos? What if the primary cause of harassment behaviour could be traced back to the organisational context rather than solely based on features of personality alone? For example, organisational contexts that