

# **Workforce Strategy Partners Programme**

**Mapping of current workforce and consultation with counselling staff and young people using counselling services in Young People's Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services (YIACS)**



# Acknowledgements

A big thank you is due to all the young people, service managers and practitioners who contributed their time and views to the Counselling Workforce Development project.

## Publishers note

We have attempted to ensure that this report is up to date and accurate. However, in a constantly changing field there will inevitably be changes in organisations before you get this publication.



# Preface

Over the past few decades counselling services for young people have been a well-defined part of youth service provision. This was most recently expressed in the shape of the 'Youth Service Pledge' set out in Resourcing Excellent Youth Services. While this commitment did not always translate into the delivery of services in all areas of the country, it did offer an important benchmark for provision.



Yet after several decades of development, the place of counselling in the current policy context is vague - absent in the drive for improved information, advice and guidance services and fleetingly referenced in the Targeted Youth Support guidance. Little wonder then that despite a growing body of evidence about the contribution counselling makes to improving young people's mental and emotional health, youth counselling services continue to struggle to maintain their services.

With no visible policy commitment and frequently located in local voluntary services, there is a real risk that the workforce and training needs of youth counselling services will be overlooked in the current re-shaping of local services for young people. This report is a much welcome attempt to capture better evidence of the needs of youth counsellors with the aim of raising awareness of the needs of this part of the youth sector.

This report offers some important evidence about the needs of youth counsellors and their value to young people. It has been made possible through funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council and Youth Access is very grateful for this contribution and the recognition it bestows on the needs of this sector.

The report has relied on the efforts and contribution of a large number of people - the reports' authors and Youth Access staff, but most importantly on Youth Access' members and some of the young people using their services. We are very grateful to them for their willingness to be involved in this project. We hope they will find this report captures their experience and that the actions and recommendations Youth Access has drawn together reflects their aspirations for the future.

**Barbara Rayment**  
**Director Youth Access**

**youth**  
**ACCESS**  
to information, advice and counselling

# Youth Access Recommendations and Actions

On the basis of the findings from the survey with counselling managers and practitioners, consultation with young people and the contribution of various Youth Access members and young people at a seminar, Youth Access has drawn together the following actions and recommendations:

## Recommendations to policy makers

- Central government to develop national policy to secure the provision of counselling to young people.
- Central government to strengthen its national guidance to Children Trusts to ensure that PCTs and CAMHS jointly plan and commission the provision of youth counselling services
- Central government to develop more explicit guidance for local authorities, CAMHS and Adult Mental Health Services about meeting the mental and emotional health needs of 16-25 year olds to enable their access to community-based youth counselling provision
- Local policymakers to ensure and improve their inclusion of the voluntary sector in local strategies for integrated working. This must acknowledge the values and principles of the VCS and be rooted in a better understanding of the needs of services designed for young people aged 13 -19 and some up to 25 year olds.
- Local policymakers to better integrate youth counsellors in the voluntary and community sectors in the development of Targeted Youth Support and ensure that their specific skills are harnessed and developed for the benefit of young people.

## Recommendations to commissioners

- Commissioners to ensure their practice properly adheres to the principles and practices set out in the Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework, particularly ensuring they secure the voice of different service users and the VCS in shaping local service provision.
- Children Trust, PCT and CAMHS' commissioners to work more effectively together to plan and secure counselling provision

- Joint commissioning to ensure the workforce and training needs of the VCS including counsellors are effectively recognised in contracts and agreements
- Local service commissioning and funding to reflect the real costs of providing services to young people, including making sure there is an appropriate mix and number of paid and volunteer counsellors to meet demand

### **Recommendations to CWDC**

- To use the findings of this report to inform the Youth Workforce Reform programme and enable the needs of the youth counselling workforce to be better reflected in national and local strategies and the future funding of the youth workforce
- To examine how the continuing professional needs of the voluntary youth sector, including youth counsellors can be better supported in the development of national and local programmes of training
- To support improvements in the access and design of local programmes for integrated working, safeguarding and the CAF to enable a better fit with the needs of a voluntary youth sector working with 13-19 and some up to 25 year olds with complex and multiple needs
- To examine how to support better access to training programmes on mental and emotional health issues, that takes account of generalist, as well as specialist practitioners such as youth counsellors

### **Recommendations to Higher Education providers of counselling**

- To offer the option of counselling training focused on the theory, knowledge and skills of working with young people to re-dress the balance of programmes, which largely focused on the adult population
- To work with the employers and representative bodies of youth counselling services to ensure that training remains in touch with the complex needs of young people typically presenting within youth counselling services.
- To establish access to bursaries to enable a more diverse counselling workforce reflective of the different communities of young people to become professionally trained and available in local services

## **Actions for Youth Access**

To secure funding and resources to:

- Design and develop a national programme of induction training for local providers of youth counselling. The programme to cover
  - the management of counselling practice to meet YA standards
  - the core practice and principles of effective work with young people
- Develop a national strategy to roll out the induction programme through for example developing local youth counselling providers to become regional/sub-regional centres of excellence
- Develop a national programme of Continuing Professional Development specific to the needs of youth counsellors with good local access for practitioners. The programme to also include different ways to support young people in counselling such as through the use of peer support groups
- As part of the development of national programmes of training, to explore and pilot various training delivery methods such as e-learning
- To produce a video by and for young people explaining what counselling is, how it works, what it offers and what counselling is like for young people in the specific setting of Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS).
- To support the design and development of a national module for counselling training for implementation within HEIs that secures a balance between theoretical and practical approaches. The module to include for example: the legislation impacting on young people; the skills needed to engage young people; working across agencies and in multi-disciplinary teams; working with complex needs; cross-cultural and trans-cultural counselling; working with LGBT young people, refugees and asylum seekers and those experiencing domestic violence.

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# Executive summary

## Overview

This report presents the main themes that have emerged from the following:

- Analysis of postal questionnaires distributed by Youth Access to counselling services managers and to counsellors working in a sample of counselling services based in Young People's Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services (YIACS)<sup>1</sup> from across all regions of England.
- Five consultation meetings with young people using voluntary and youth sector services in YIACS.
- A national seminar which was attended by a cross section of counselling service managers, practitioners and young people from counselling services based in YIACS, who received the postal questionnaires.

Information gathering from YIACS and consultations with young people took place over a three month period April – June 2008. In total, data were gathered from:

- 42 counselling service managers (return rate of 46%, based on a sample of 92 managers from Youth Access member agencies (YIACS), identified as currently providing counselling services to young people.
- 27 counselling service managers from YIACS were approached to complete the service manager's questionnaire and to distribute practitioner questionnaires to their paid and unpaid counselling staff (27 agencies, based on a random allocation across all 9 government office regions of England). 21 of the 27 manager's returned questionnaires.

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<sup>1</sup> YIACS provide a combination of services in one-stop-shop settings including information, advice, counselling, outreach and support services (drop-in, befriending, informal support and sexual health).

- 145 counsellors (a return rate of 64%, based on a distribution of 226 questionnaires across the random sample of 21 YIACS).
- 23 young people from 5 YIACS.

### ***Key themes***

The information gathered has covered a wide range of issues about the provision and delivery of counselling services for young people in YIACS-type settings. These include: the views of young people about the value and importance of counselling; the experience and training qualifications of the staff who provide these services; the expertise of the counselling service managers; the training needs of this part of the workforce; their suggestions for what training they would like and also how counselling services could be improved, and the difficulties, including funding pressures, that can affect the capacity of voluntary sector services and can impede its development and involvement in integrated working processes.

The wide range of counselling services – spanning quite large services with highly qualified staff groups through to services with only 1 or 2 members of staff with far fewer qualifications – and the diversity of the counselling workforce in terms of the types of qualifications that people hold, or their past work experiences, has been clearly apparent. Alongside this, the (continuing) key role played by volunteers and counselling students on placement has also been evident. Without such volunteers and trainees, many counselling services could not operate – and shortages of staff have been identified as one reason behind the long waiting lists some YIACS find they are increasingly forced to operate.

The importance of volunteer and trainee counsellors in this sector, however, also raises a number of fundamental questions about the training, supervision and continuing professional development of counsellors – not least when considered against the very high level of complex need, including mental health needs, presented by many of the young people using these

counselling services. From the data gathered, it is clear that there are difficulties for many counsellors and their managers in terms of:

- Being able to access, and afford, (both in terms of money and time), locally provided training that is specifically focused on the needs and issues presented by young people.
- The focus of many counselling training courses being overwhelmingly on the adult population, with limited attention to the theory, knowledge and skills required for working with young people (including multi-agency collaborative working).
- Being able to find training courses that are suitably in-depth on specialist topics such as attachment issues, working with young refugees and eating disorders in young people.

### ***Selected statistics from the postal survey of counselling service manager and of counsellors***

These provide an overall profile of the current voluntary and youth sector counselling workforce in YIACS-type settings across England and include the following findings:

- In the data submitted from counsellors, 48% of the counselling workforce in the sample were working in an unpaid/voluntary capacity or were students on placement.
- In the data supplied by counselling service managers, (42 additional counselling services) this figure is even higher – 36% of the counselling staff reported to be working in a paid capacity, 44% were volunteers and 20% were students.
- 75% of counselling service managers reported holding a counselling degree or diploma, 33% hold a postgraduate counselling qualification and 16% a counselling supervision qualification. 5% reported no counselling qualifications.

- Whilst 73% of the counsellor respondents noted that they had a counselling specific qualification, 12.5% reported qualifications in other areas such as family therapy.
- Broken down to combine degree and diploma qualifications, the analysis indicated that 81% of the counsellors have such qualifications but 9% have no qualifications at that level.
- 35% of counselling service managers are aged 30 to 40 years, 32% are aged 40 to 50 years and 22% are aged over 50. 77% reported their ethnicity as 'White UK'.
- 36% of the counsellors fall within the age band 40 to 50 years; 28% within the band 30 to 40 years and 26% are aged 50 and over. The majority also described themselves as 'White UK' (61%); the next largest groups were Caribbean (7%) and European (3%).

Both the counselling service managers and counsellors highlighted the need for more training that is specific to the needs of young people, and also for action at a national level to address the variability and difficulties in accessing appropriate training (including the lack of consistency in what college counselling courses cover).

Counselling staff indicated that, in particular, they wanted more training on the following: self-harm (12%); issues to do with abuse (12%); eating disorders (11%); drugs and alcohol problems (10%) and working with challenging behaviour (10%).

Other training needs identified through the postal questionnaires included working with attachment difficulties and loss; ethics and confidentiality when working with young people under 16 and safeguarding in counselling settings.

## ***Findings from the consultation with young people***

23 young people who had been involved with 5 of the youth counselling services included in the postal survey contributed their time and views. They met in person with two of the consultants working on the Cwd project with the conversations covering a wide range of issues. All reported very positively of their experiences of counselling and a variety of suggestions for improving youth counselling services were made.

A striking feature was the huge range and complexity of problems that young people presented to youth counselling services in YIACS. This clearly raises the issue of the training and skills youth counsellors need to possess, also their ability to work collaboratively when this is needed – and at the most basic level, in terms of managing risk, their awareness and access to the most up-to-date safeguarding protocols in their local area.

The young people consulted highlighted that they liked the following:

- A choice of times when they could see a counsellor and a choice of counsellor.
- A clear description about what would happen in counselling and information about confidentiality.
- Informal initial assessment and reviews.
- An open ended number of sessions and a generally flexible approach.

All considered that the counselling service had been well explained to them initially and that issues of confidentiality had been well explained. They liked counsellors who gave practical advice, worked at their pace and let them stay in control, were uncritical, helped them work things out for themselves, and were responsive.

They also highlighted the importance of continuity of staff and of the one-to-one relationship offered by this form of intervention; they compared this favourably to the non-appointment drop-ins at colleges where they might see a different person each time. None raised any concerns about the age, gender or ethnicity of the counsellor they had seen.

## ***Key issues raised in the consultation seminar***

Many of the participants who attended the seminar convened to discuss the survey findings reiterated the concerns noted above about gaps and difficulties accessing training specific to the needs of children and young people.

The seminar highlighted very mixed experiences, and generally limited involvement to date, of voluntary and youth sector counselling services in CAF processes and protocols to develop integrated ways of working.

## ***Recommendations***

The information gathered from the different activities undertaken in this project provide a number of important suggestions for addressing the current gaps and limitations in the training that is available to youth counsellors, alongside ideas for improving young people's access to counselling provision and raising awareness of the youth counselling sector more generally. Addressing these issues will, collectively, make an important contribution to developing to capacity of this section of the children and young people's workforce.

### **Training for youth counsellors:**

1. There should be some form of nationally recognised training in youth counselling – possibly not as a separate qualification but as a core module within existing college training courses. This module should provide training on many of the topics identified in the survey undertaken for this project of the current counselling workforce.
2. Such a module could – and probably should – be developed and delivered via a national organisation such as Youth Access with the necessary specialist knowledge and skills for delivering such training.

3. In addition to providing training on the issues and needs relevant to young people, counselling training needs to move away from being “so theoretical” and to provide a more balanced practical approach to the reality of delivering counselling to young people – for example, the skills for engaging young people, working across agencies and with a wide range of needs (i.e. often complex needs, mental health, homelessness, self harm and the impact of violence).

4. Many college-based training courses are seen by current counselling service managers and youth counsellors as being out of touch with the complex needs now typically presented by young people using counselling services. To address this, it is recommended that actions to promote a regular dialogue between the providers of counselling training and those actually delivering youth counselling services need to be taken. This could include promoting good practice such as colleges holding open days to meet with counselling providers and college staff visiting local counselling services in order to explore what is needed in terms of counsellor knowledge and expertise.

5. Funding needs to be made available to support the local delivery of free training to youth counsellors with regard to their CPD needs. The role of a national organisation supporting the local roll-out of such training warrants further consideration in ensuring a consistency of quality across the country.

6. Different models of training and staff supervision and support should be explored, including e-learning and peer support resources.

### **Improving young people’s access to youth counselling:**

7. It is recommended that a programme of awareness-raising across other agencies and professional groups (e.g. GPs, CAMHS) be developed. This will

also allow these staff groups to more actively support the young people they might refer on for counselling.

8. From the information gathered it is apparent that funding constraints have affected the provision of youth counselling services in a number of important ways including both the capacity of services to recruit more counsellors and also, to advertise or promote the services offered. Limited funding is also likely to lie behind much of the reliance on volunteers and trainees, and the difficulties in staff accessing the training they require for working with young people. Only if the youth counselling sector is resourced (funded) properly will it be possible to realise some of the other recommendations aimed at building capacity in the sector and driving up levels of staff training and skills.

9. Other suggestions for improving young people's access to counselling provision include the development of mobile services and extending the range of venues from where counselling can be delivered. Again such developments pose funding implications.

**Integrated working:**

10. Findings from the project suggest that there is a need for further training of youth counselling staff alongside activity to raise awareness and understanding of what youth counselling can offer young people, as a part of promoting their emotional wellbeing and positive mental health.

# 1. Introduction

## *Summary of the project*

The Counselling Workforce Development project (CwdP) was set up with the aim of supporting Youth Access to develop the youth counselling workforce in the context of wider reforms that are impacting on the development of youth services, particularly in the local delivery of targeted and specialist services.

The aim of the work has been to gather up-to-date information about the current counselling workforce, their needs, concerns and aspirations for the delivery of high quality youth counselling provision – alongside information about young people’s experiences of counselling – to inform the development of a national strategy for youth counselling. Such a strategy will include recommendations and actions for Youth Access and local providers and will help to improve the capacity of the youth counselling workforce to make an effective and sustainable contribution to wider service and workforce reforms at both national and local levels.

Specific objectives of the project included:

- To improve understanding of the current profile of the paid and volunteer youth counselling workforce and the benefits and barriers to their engagement in local integrated working arrangements.
- To develop evidence about young people’s perceptions of youth counsellors and how they meet their needs.
- To develop national and local recommendations to enable voluntary sector youth counselling agencies to improve their training and workforce planning and to strengthen their position in targeted and specialist commissioning activities, including CAMHS commissioning.

## ***The importance of counselling for young people in voluntary and youth sector settings***

Promoting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in the UK is a key aim of the current national policy agenda – as illustrated in the recent publication of the Children’s Plan by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF 2007) where the first chapter sets out the intention to:

*“review Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to see how universal, mainstream and specialist support services can be improved for the growing number of children and young people with mental health needs.”*

Within this policy context, the use of psychological therapies has attracted increased interest, with psychological therapies being known to be effective for treating many mental health conditions and preferable to drug treatments for people under the age of 18. <sup>2</sup>

The term ‘psychological therapies’ covers many different ways of working including psychodynamic, art-based, drama-based, group analysis and systemic approaches. Counselling can fall within any of these. <sup>3</sup>

The important role played by counselling services based in voluntary and youth sector settings and other support services for young people has been highlighted in a wide number of reports over the last decade. These include works by national third sector organisations such Youth Access, the Mental Health Foundation and YoungMinds, and also by government departments

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<sup>2</sup> Bird, A. (2007) *We Need to Talk: The case for psychological therapy on the NHS*. London: Mental health Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Street, C. (2008) ‘Counselling services for young people’ *Highlight no 239* London: National Children’s Bureau.

such as the then named Social Exclusion Unit <sup>4</sup> and the DfES. <sup>5</sup> A prominent theme within many of these reports is the ability of these services to engage with young people who may not approach statutory health services; their ability to be flexible and responsive to need; their accessibility; their expertise in working with particular groups, and the particular strengths of operating out of non-stigmatising and approachable community-based settings. <sup>6</sup>

### ***A 'hidden' part of the children and young people's workforce?***

Youth counselling services have grown up in England over the last 30+ years. Historically the majority have provided their services through significant numbers of volunteer counsellors. The size of an agency, its funding and the numbers of paid staff and supervisors, can vary considerably – so too, the hours worked by counsellors, their training and experience.

Poor awareness of the skills and qualifications of youth counsellors has been identified as lying behind some of the problems youth agencies have encountered in developing partnership working with other agencies such as CAMHS, and also in accessing funding under joint planning arrangements. The lack of secure, longer-term funding has often had quite serious consequences for youth counsellors not only in terms of what is actually provided, but also in terms of their ability to afford training for staff – be this delivered in-house or purchased from elsewhere.

The government vision for the children and young people's workforce is set out in *Building Brighter Futures: next steps for the children's workforce* (DCSF, 2008). Amongst the aims set out, it is noted that everyone who works with children and young people should have:

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<sup>4</sup> Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs*. London: ODPM.

<sup>5</sup> DfES (2005) *Engaging the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Children's Trusts*.

<sup>6</sup> Street, C. (2007) *Commissioning counselling services for young people – a guide for commissioners*. London: Youth Access.

*"high quality and up-to-date skills, knowledge and practice, including an understanding of child and adolescent development, in order to deliver world class levels of service which respond to the needs of all children and young people, including the most vulnerable or disadvantaged."*

In delivering this vision, it will therefore be crucial to pay due attention to the training needs of the youth counselling workforce. As noted in the previous section, the important contribution that is clearly made by the youth counselling sector in engaging with, and supporting young people with emotional and mental health needs is increasingly recognised. However, what is now needed is action to build and sustain capacity within the sector, which should include greater security of funding alongside improving access to the range of training deemed necessary for all who work with children and young people with emotional and mental health needs.

The plans for integrated working, the changes to commissioning structures and the possibility of regulation of counsellors, all in different ways pose challenges for the youth counselling sector – but also opportunities to raise understanding of what youth counsellors can offer and to help them to forge partnerships with other agencies working with children and young people.

It is hoped that the information contained in this report, which provides an up-to-date profile of the youth counselling workforce plus analysis of the training and expertise held by current counsellors and their managers will contribute to this debate.

### ***This report***

The report that follows is made up of four main sections. The next chapter presents the data gathered from the postal questionnaires completed by counselling service managers. This is followed by the returns from the questionnaire sent to counsellors. In Chapter 4, the views of the young people consulted in the Cwd project are outlined. The final chapter

summarises the prominent themes of the consultation seminar held with counselling staff and young people in June 2008.



## **2. Analysis of questionnaires completed by counselling services managers**

### ***Overview of information gathered***

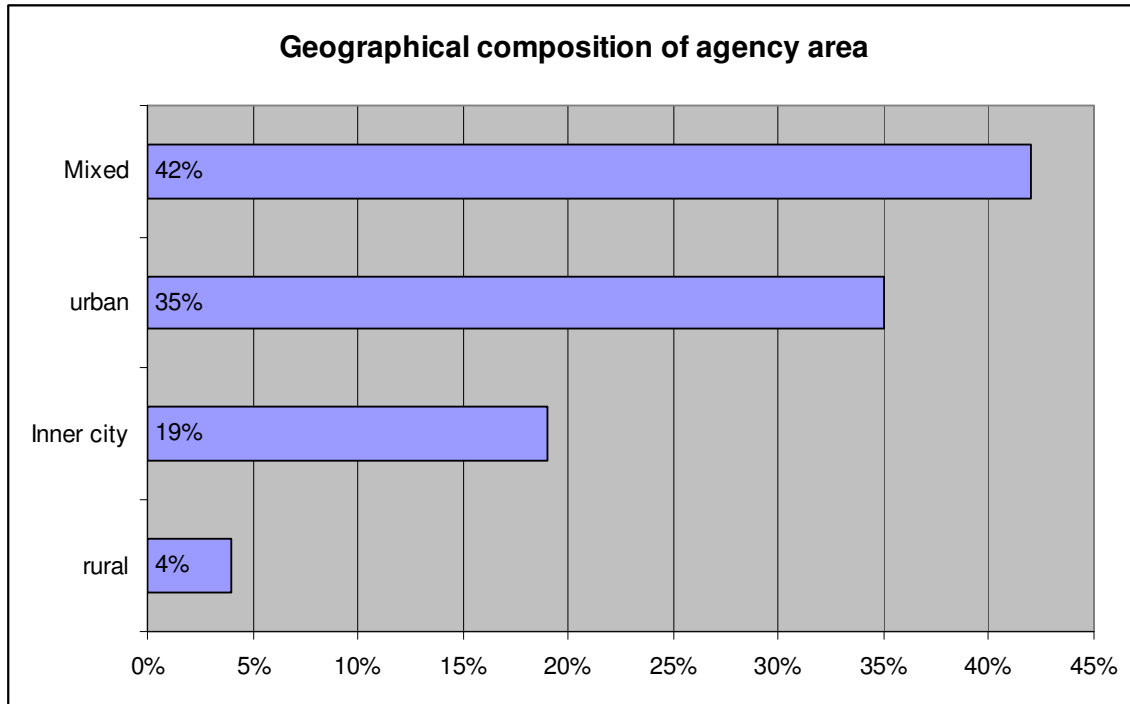
The information gathered through the postal questionnaire to counselling service managers covered a wide range of issues including the types of counselling offered by their agency, the reasons why young people are referred to counselling and also their suggestions for what sort of training youth counsellors would like in the future.

The data that follows is broadly divided as follows – firstly information about the actual workforce is presented; this is followed by information about the counselling currently offered and then information about training and supervision.

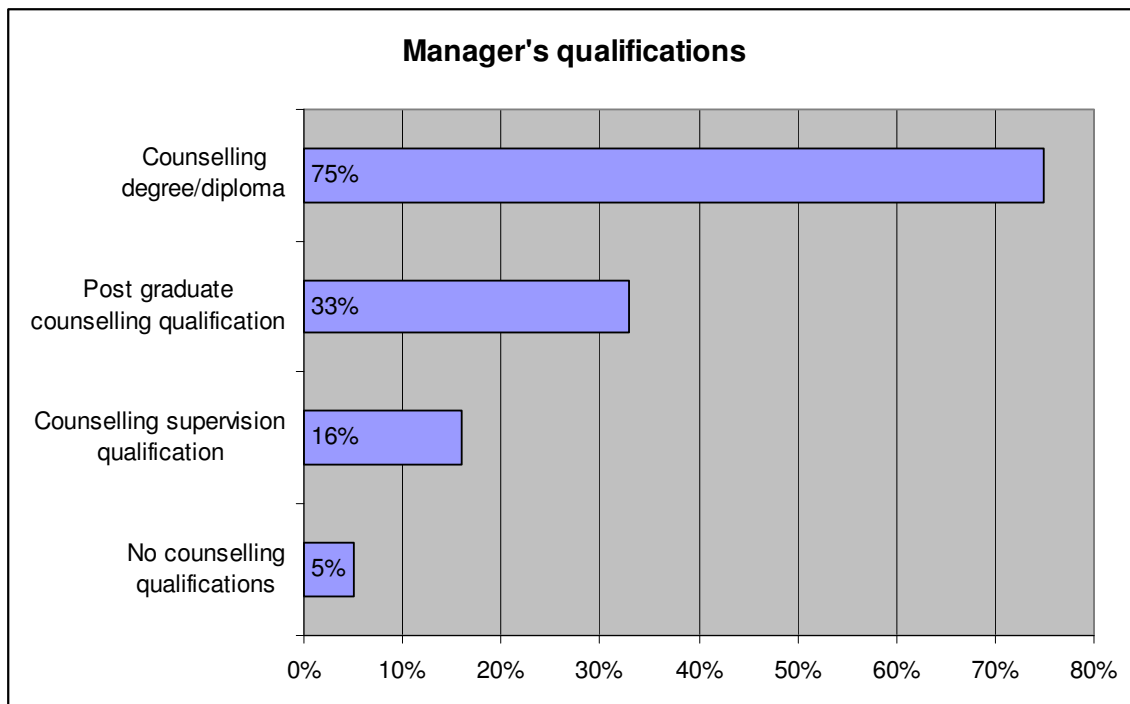
Please note that some of the figures in this chapter do not correspond to the figures given for counsellors in the next chapter. This is likely to be due to the fact that different agencies were involved in the two postal surveys. Some errors and/or gaps in completed questionnaires were also noted.

### ***Location of services***

Information from counselling service managers was collected from services located in the following settings:



### ***Qualifications and Experience of Counselling Service Managers***



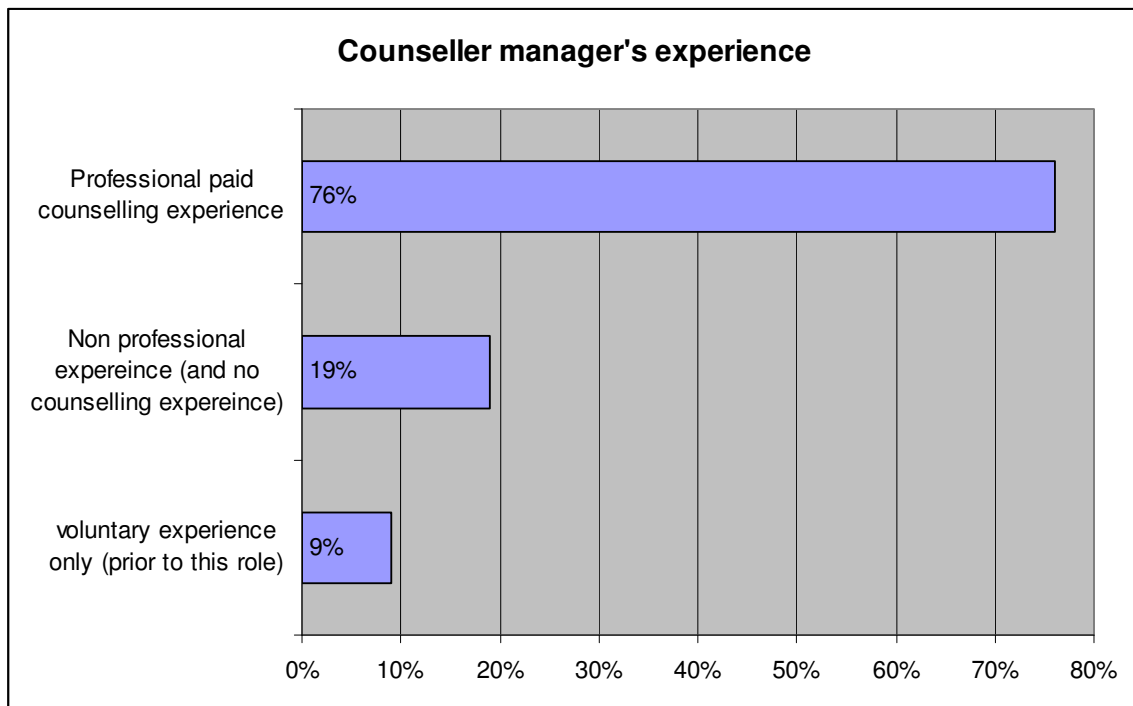
The types of qualification included degrees in therapeutic counselling, training in psychotherapy, in family therapy, psychoanalysis and in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

Various management and coaching qualifications were also noted including a certificate in the management of voluntary organisations.

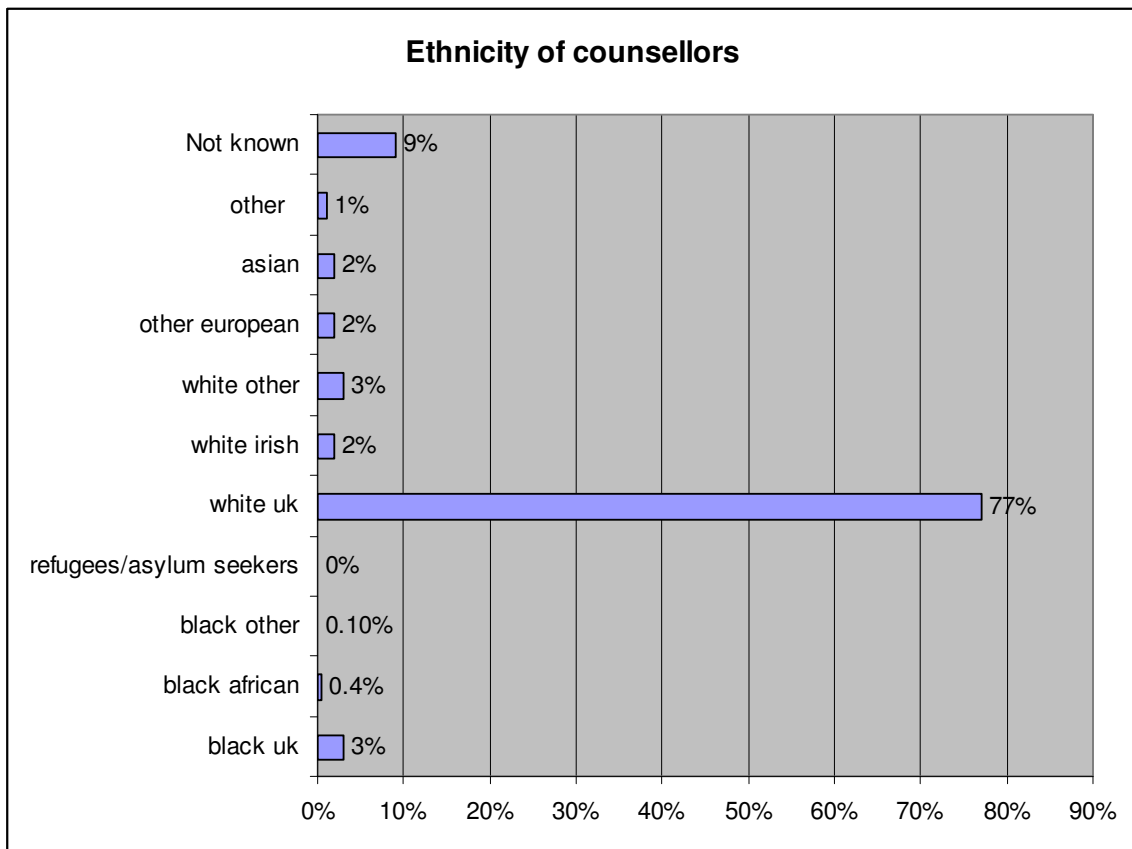
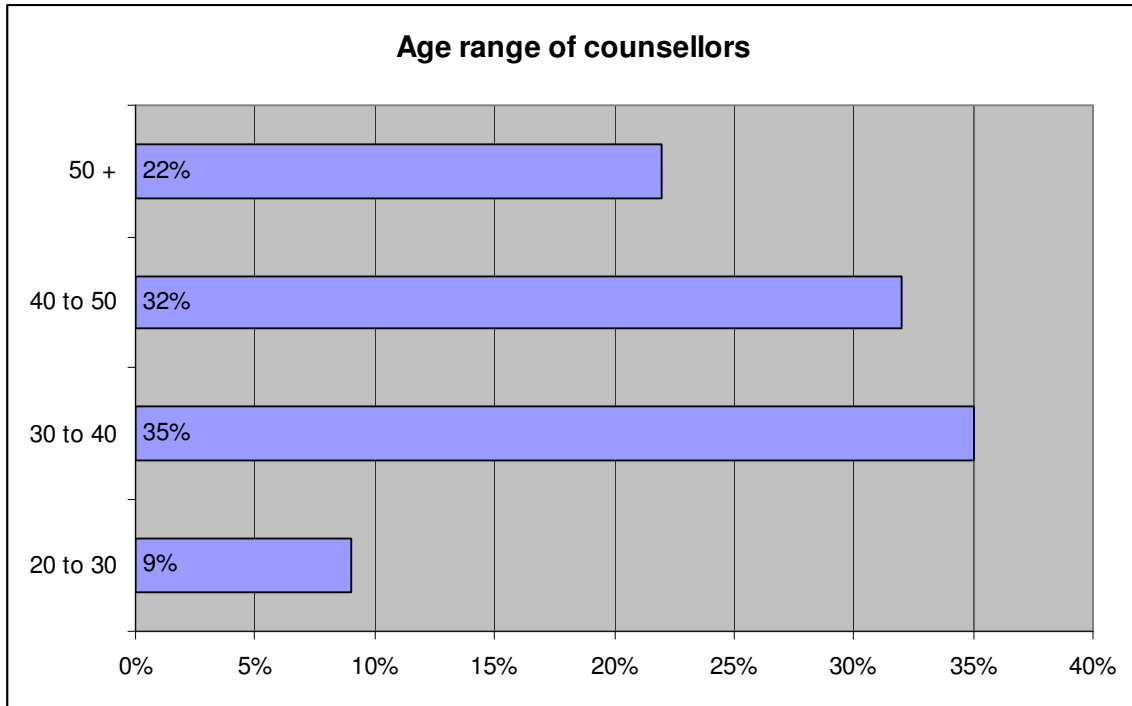
Undergraduate degrees and diplomas covered a variety of subjects including person-centred counselling and childcare.

With regard to relevant work experience with young people, the following were given:

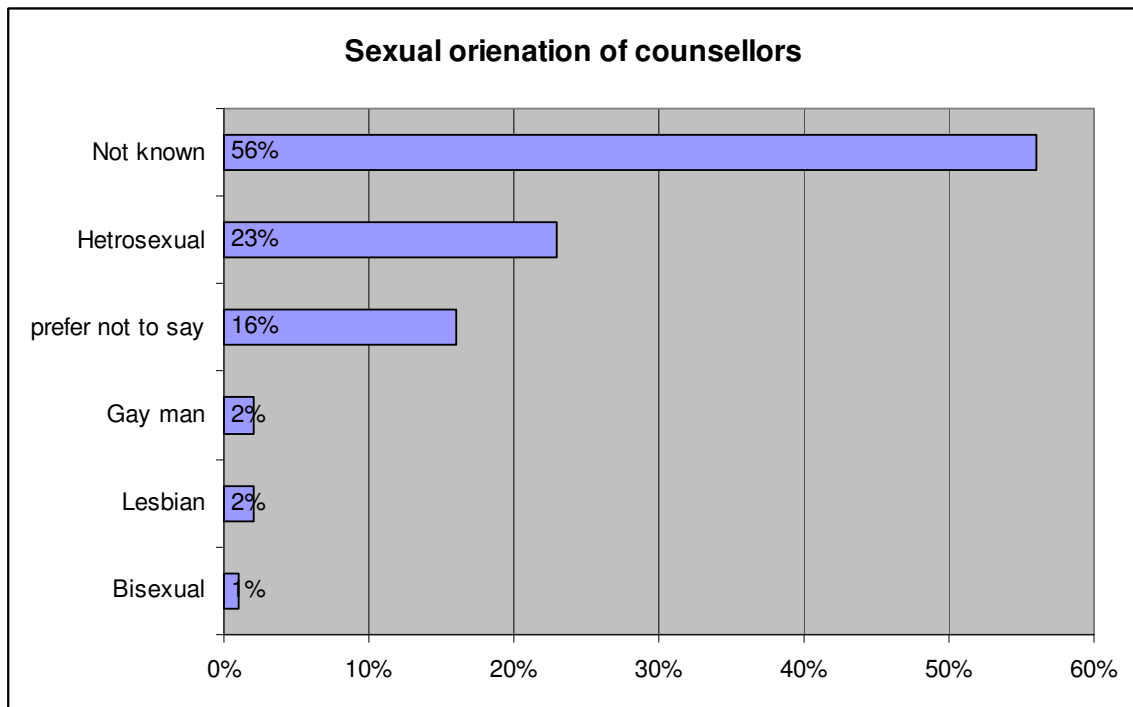
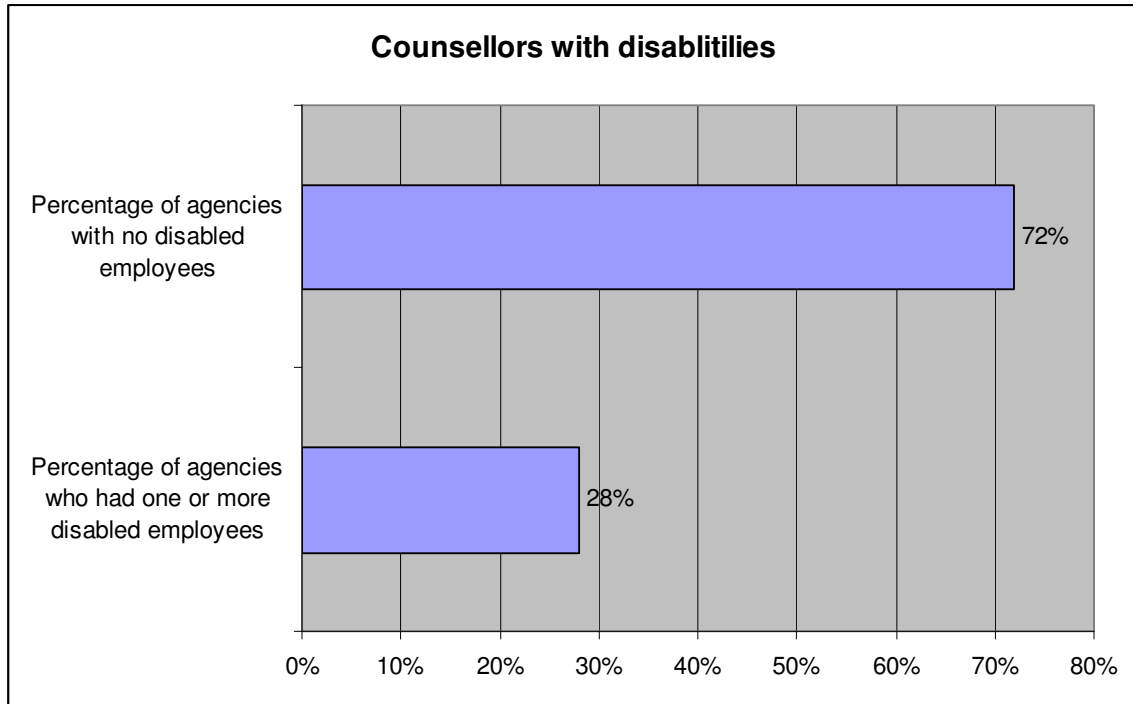
- Work in a youth club
- Foster carer
- Work in a homeless support centre
- Work as a drugs officer
- Registered child minder
- Bereavement care



## Age and ethnicity



## Disability and sexual orientation

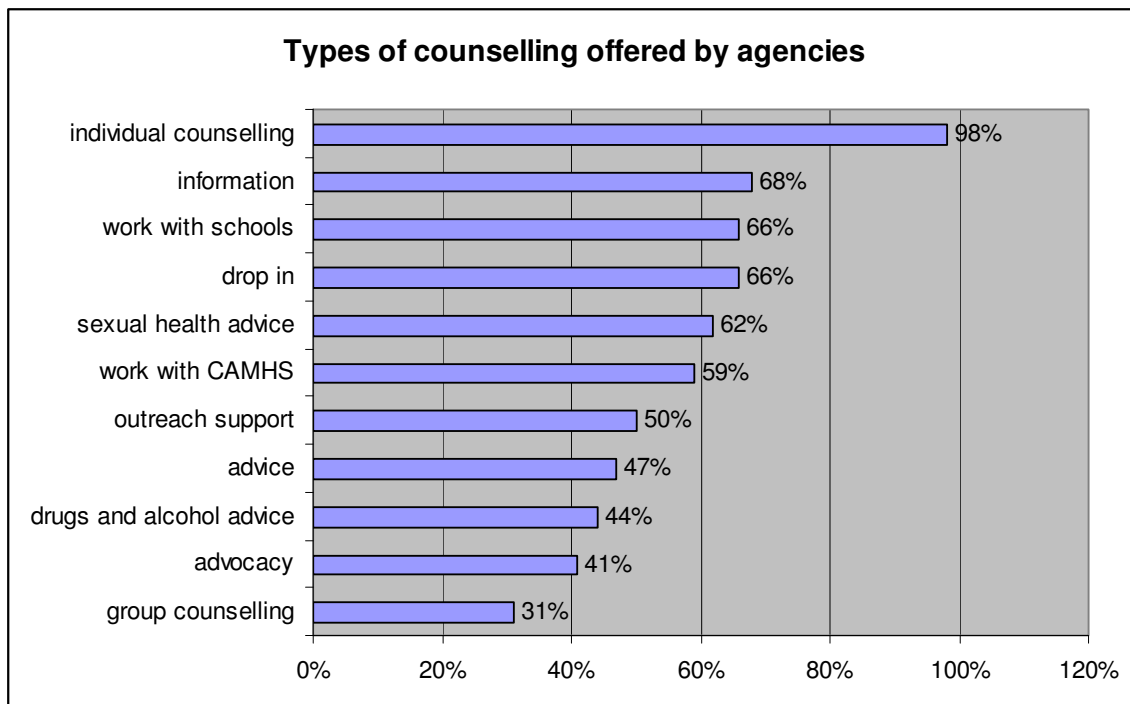


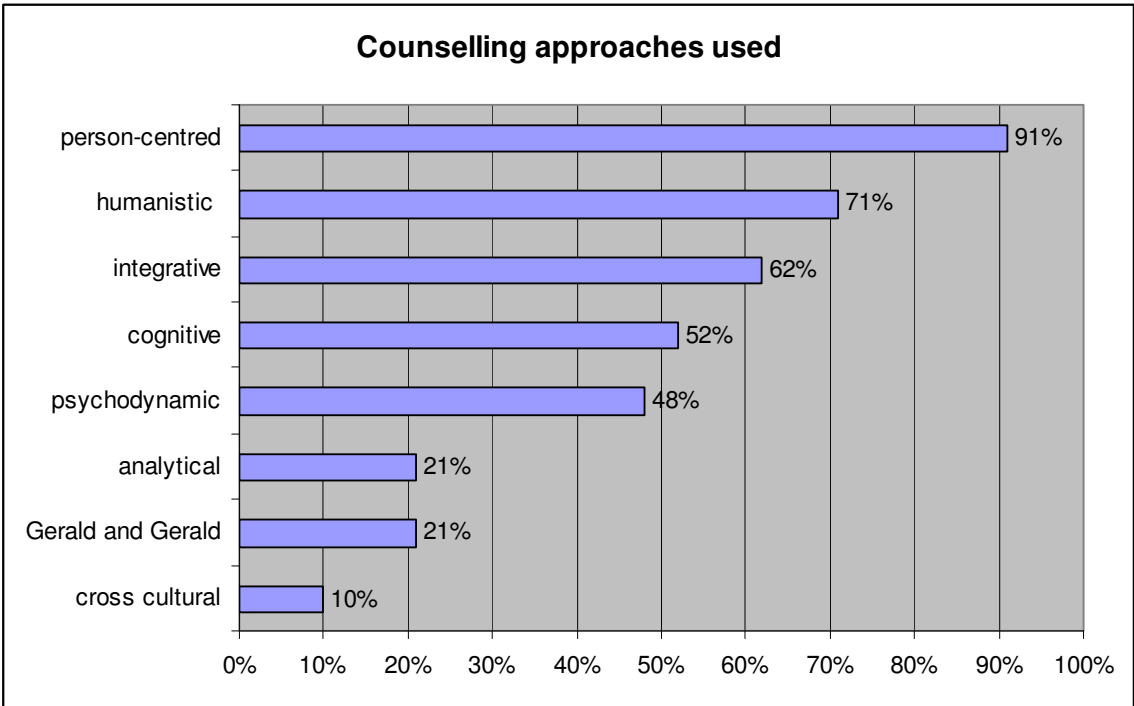
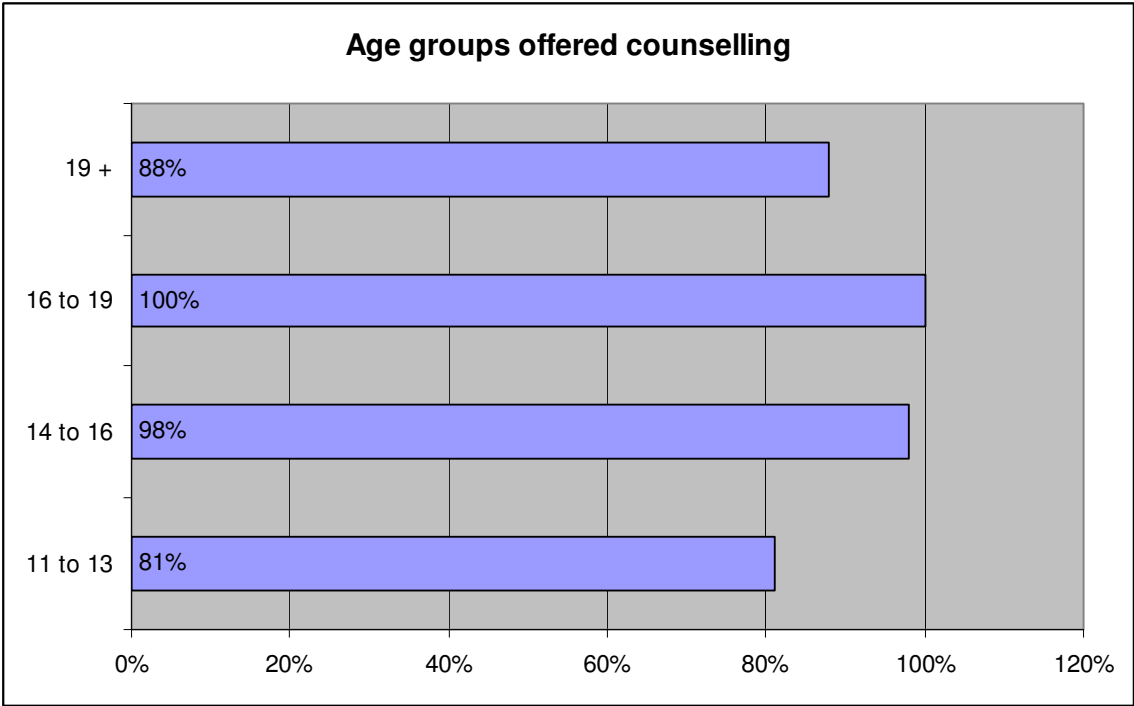
## ***Types of counselling offered, age range receiving counselling, counselling approaches and reasons for offering young people counselling***

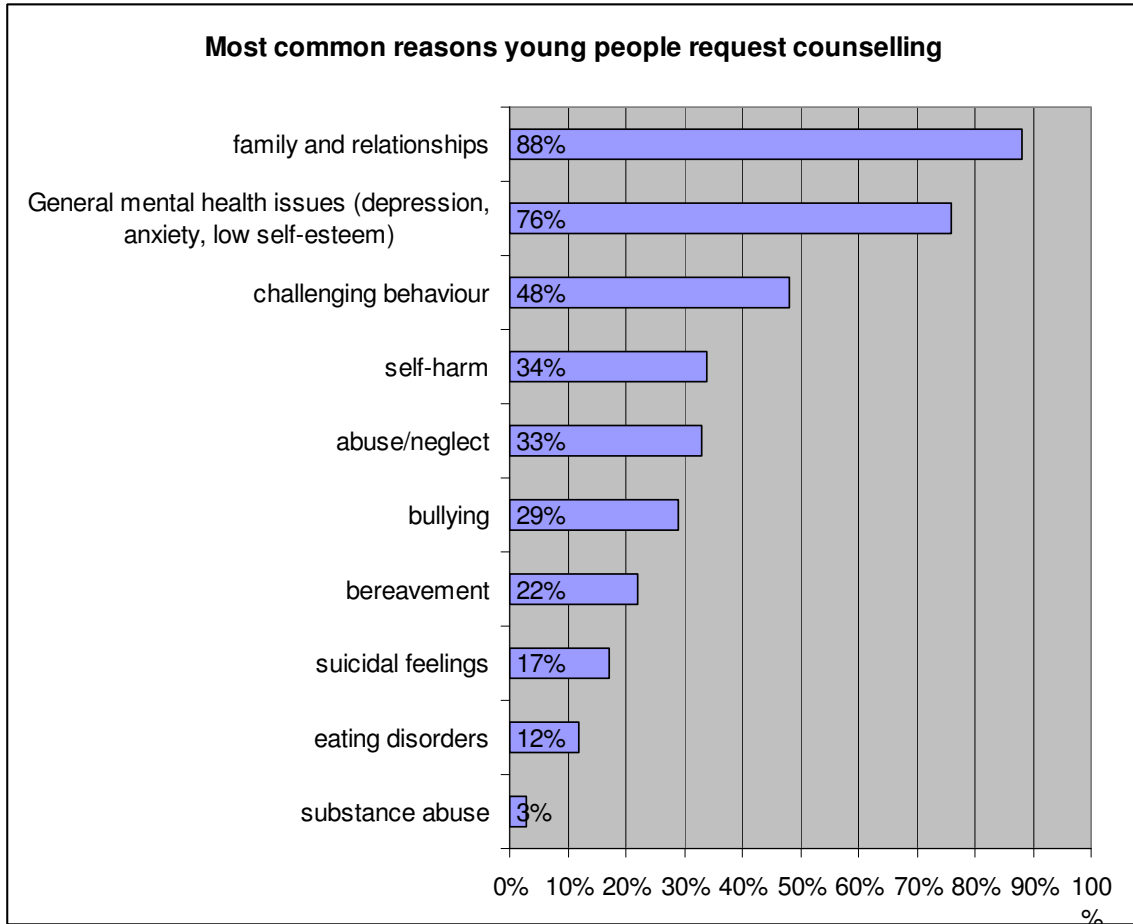
The following illustrates the diversity of support offered to young people by youth counselling services. In addition to the services listed below (areas of provision most frequently reported), a number of services reported providing: art therapy; team building (based on Myers Briggs); mentor training; work to understand and challenge racism.

Of particular importance given the current policy initiatives supporting partnership working, is the finding that 59% of respondents mentioned work with CAMHS.

With regard to the age range offered counselling, it is also important to note the number of agencies working with 11-13 year olds (81%) and those under 16 (98%). This emphasises the importance of counselling staff being trained in, or able to access, training about the needs of children and adolescents and also such matters as safeguarding procedures, use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and other processes for supporting integrated working across the children's workforce.







### ***Training in relation to young people***

Counselling service managers were asked about the training their agency offered on topics relevant to the needs of children and young people; they were also asked about what training they had themselves received.

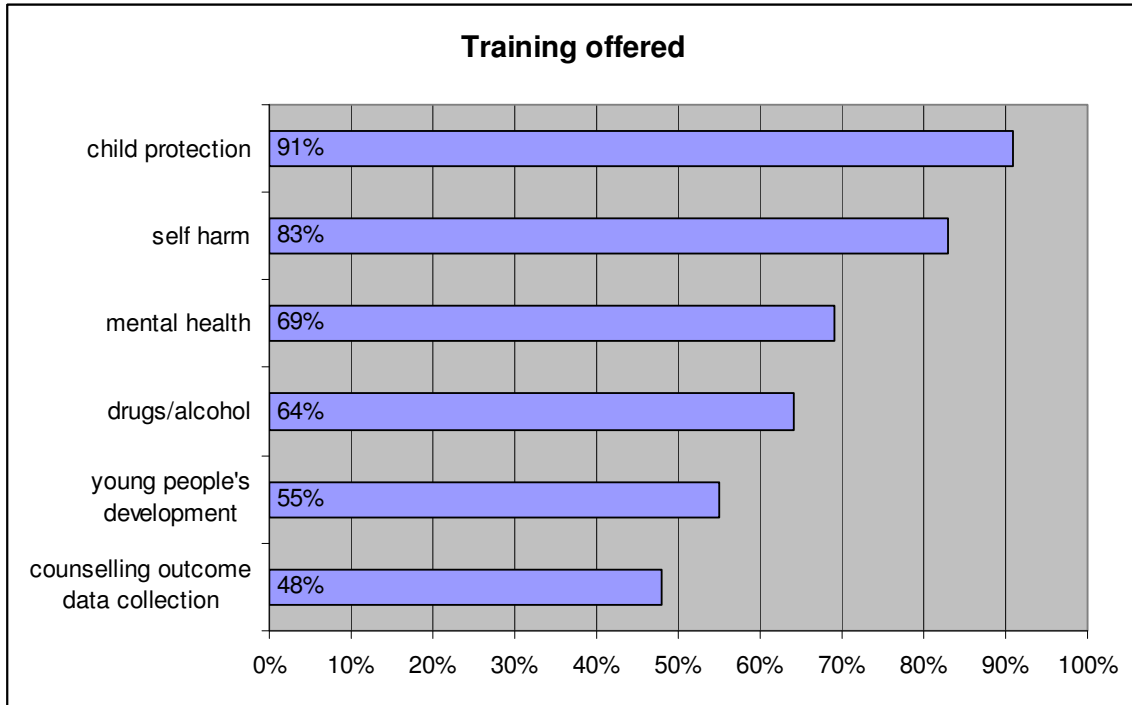
Considerable variability across agencies was apparent in that some agencies clearly offer a range of training whereas others reported very little. Likewise, some managers had attended a number of courses in comparison to other reporting no or little recent training (in the last five years).

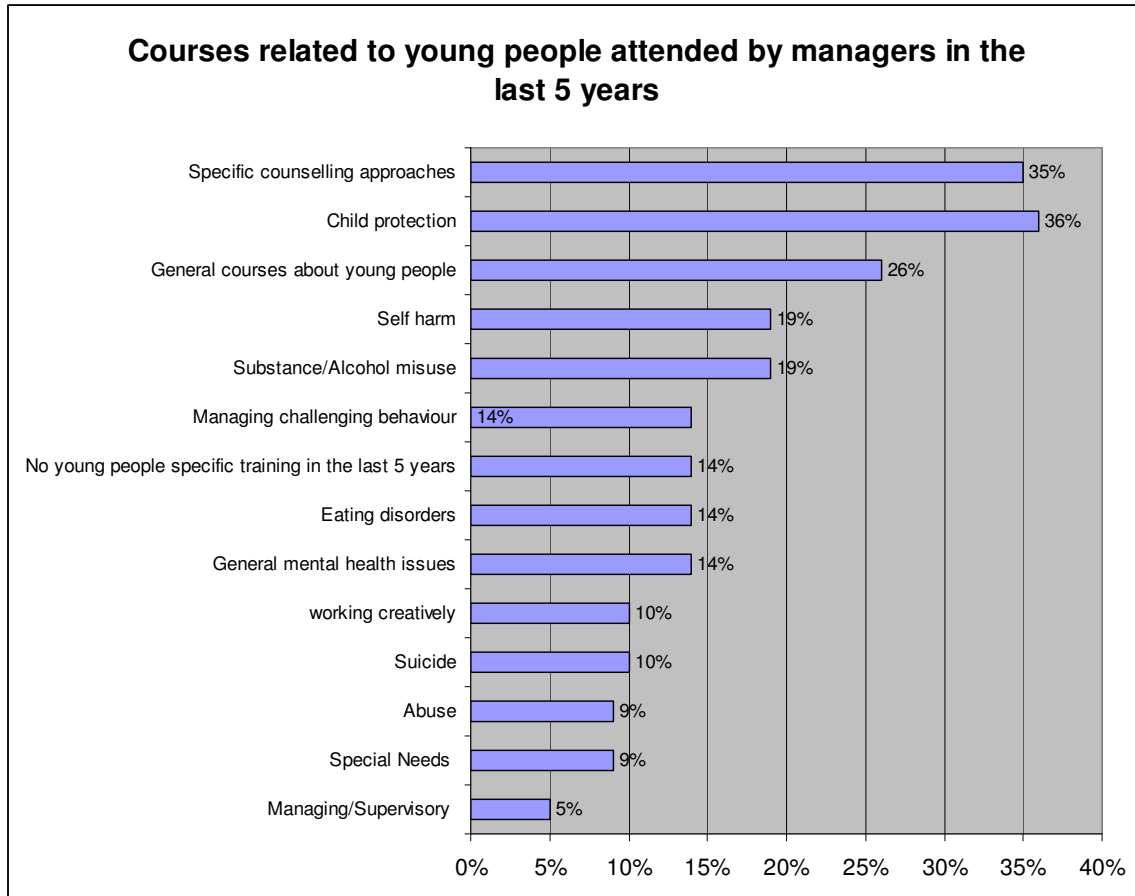
88% of agencies reported offering some training as a part of continuing professional development (CPD) and 62% that some training was offered as part of the routine induction of new staff.

In terms of who provided training, the following were mentioned:

- BACP conferences
- Education conferences
- Youth Access
- Local CAMHS

The data collected did not allow analysis of exactly how much training was involved in the different topics identified – however, information from counsellors given in the next chapter, reveals that the actual amount of training can be very limited.





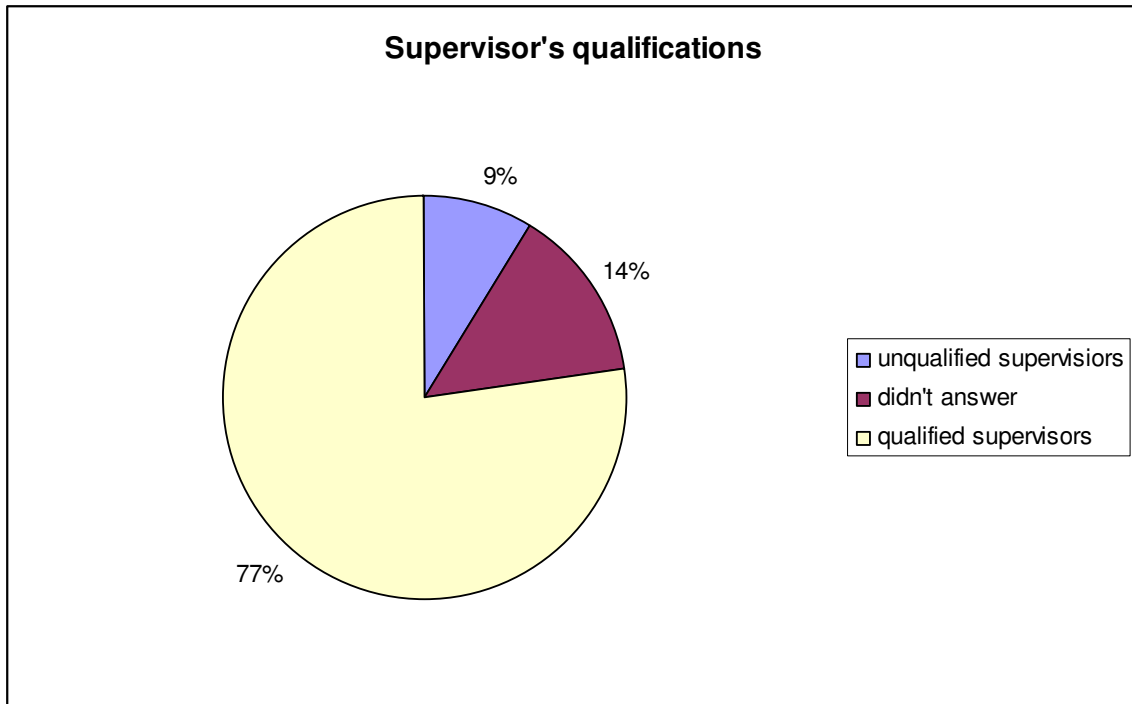
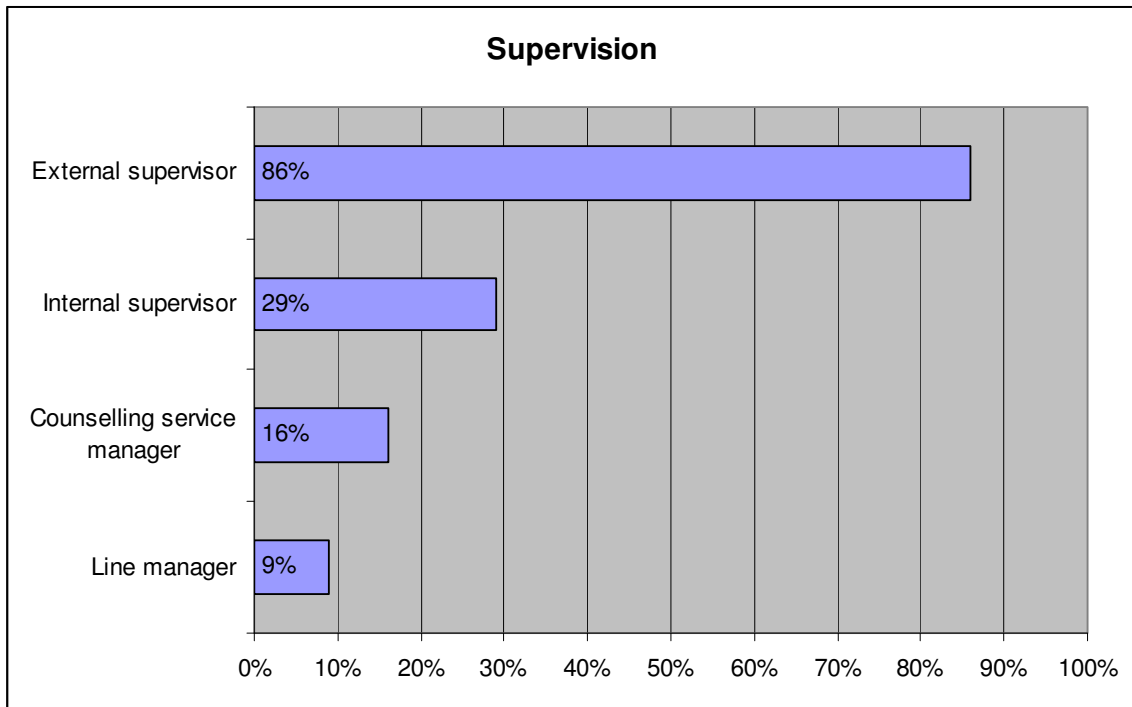
### ***Training gaps***

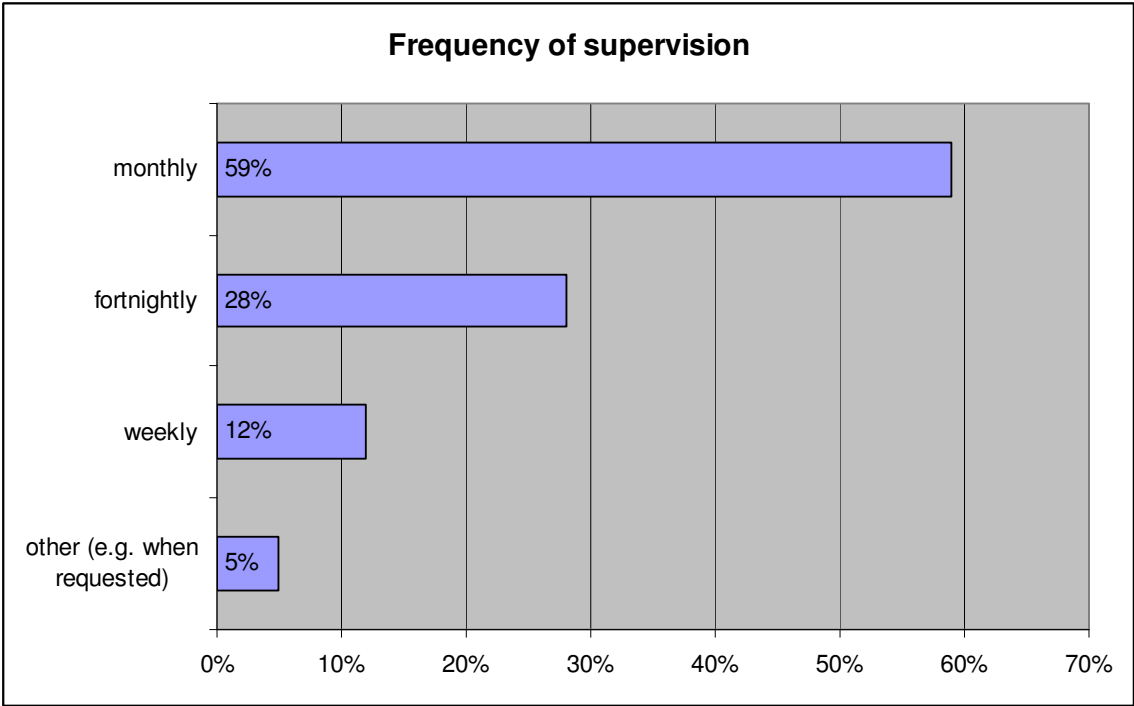
The counselling service managers identified a wide range of topics including:

- Attachment issues and attachment theories
- Trans-cultural counselling
- Skills for engaging with young people
- Autism and ASD
- Working with young refugees and asylum seekers
- Working with gay, lesbian and bisexual young people
- Safeguarding in counselling settings
- Multi-agency working
- Ways to work more creatively
- Boundaries and ending the counselling process

They also highlighted the need for more affordable post-qualification training courses; that often counselling courses/training do not include working with children and young people and are very adult-focused. Geography is also a problem – it appears that many courses are located within London or its vicinity. For part-time staff, having to travel some considerable distance to attend a course is problematic for both them in terms of cost and for their agency in terms of the time required for them to be away from work in order to attend a course.

## Supervision





# 3. Analysis of questionnaire returns from counselling staff

## *Overview*

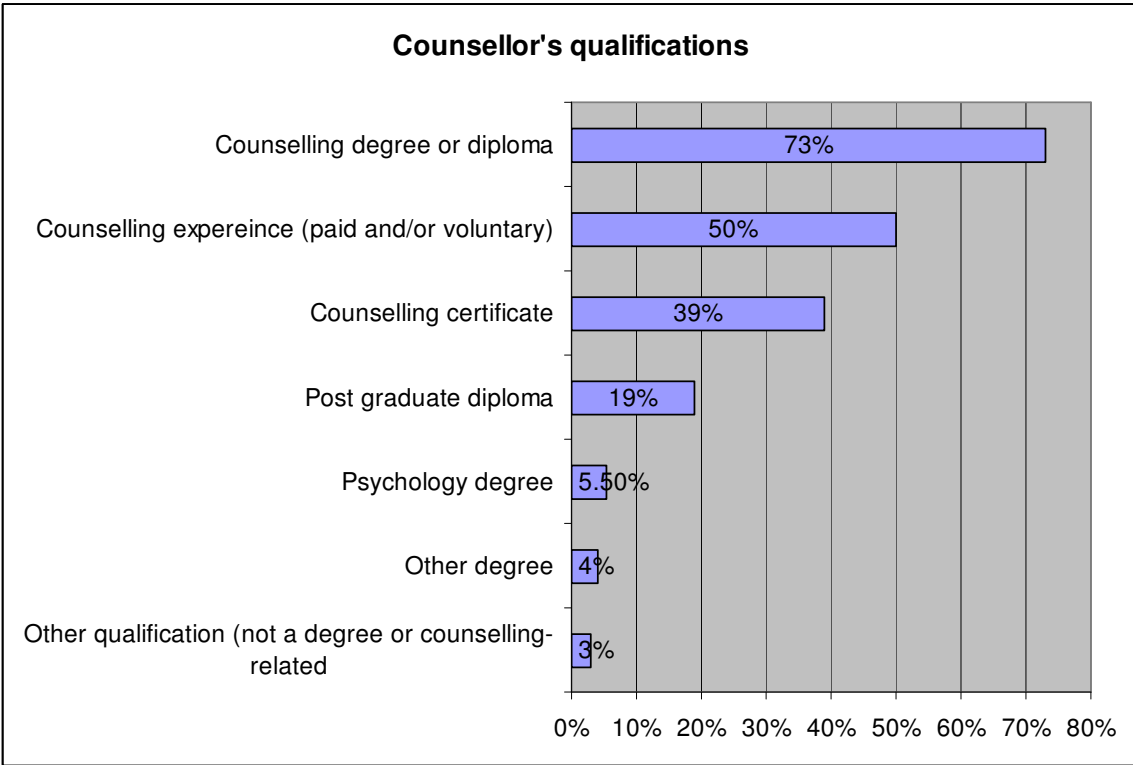
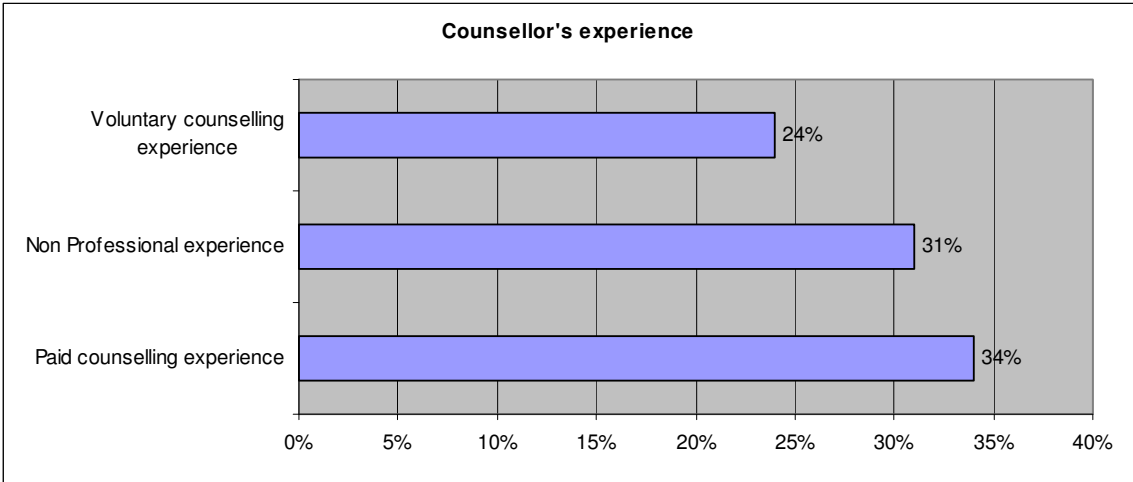
From the information gathered via the postal questionnaires, it is apparent that the range of counsellors work experience is very wide, with many of the respondents noting that their experiences included teaching, youth work, foster caring and also their experiences as parents.

Analysis of the data reveals some important features of the current counselling workforce, especially when considered against the complex needs often presented by young people using youth counselling services. Bearing in mind the earlier points noted about the government's vision for the children's workforce, certain aspects of the counselling workforce need particular attention including:

- That currently, 9% hold no specific counselling qualifications, although they may have a qualification in an allied subject such as childcare, psychology and psychotherapy.
- The sparsity, or in some cases complete lack, of training specific to children and young people reported by a number of counsellors.
- The skills and training needs identified by counsellors themselves.

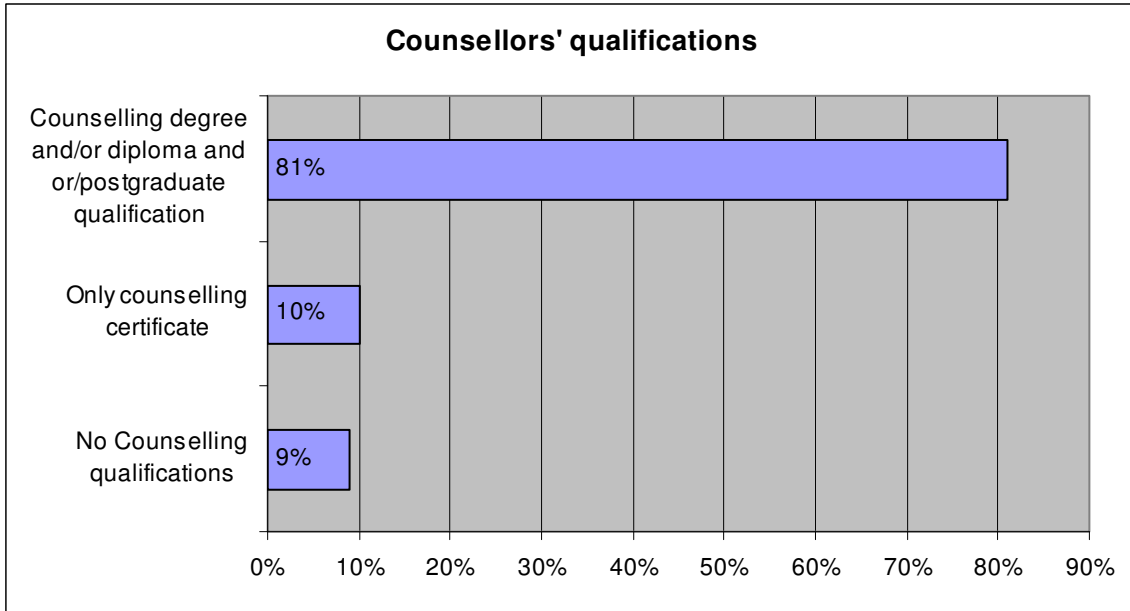
This chapter follows the format of the previous chapter in first of all providing a profile of the current counsellor workforce in terms of counsellor experience and training; data then outlines the types of counselling offered and any restrictions on this. The final sections of the chapter focus on training, supervision and counsellor suggestions for improving the provision of youth counselling.

The chart below summarises the work experience of current counsellors in relation to counselling:

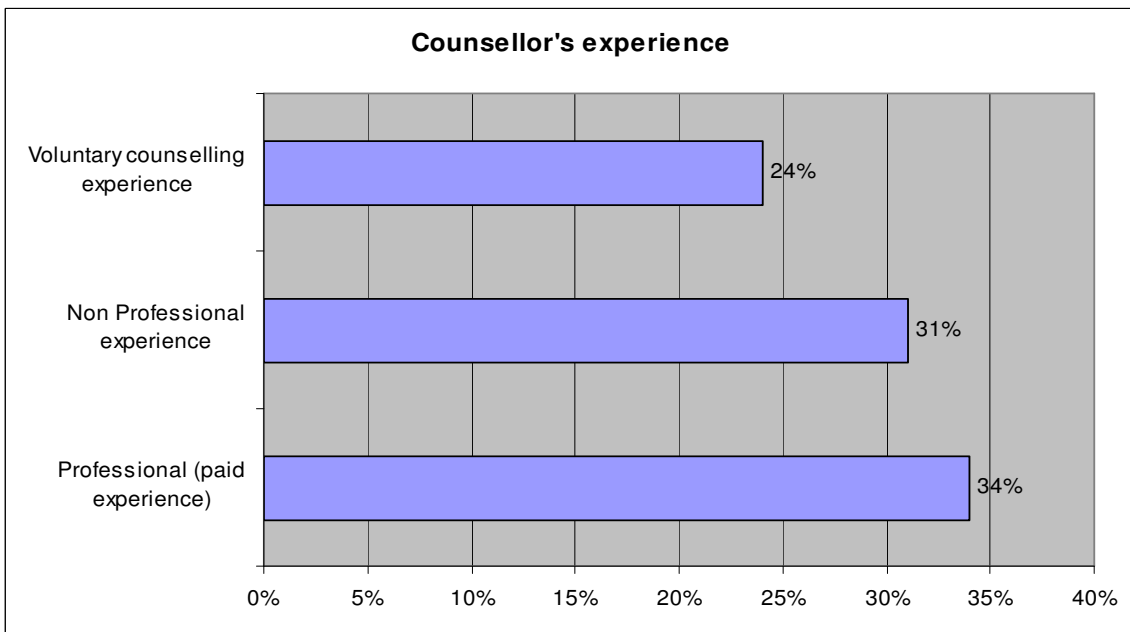


Please note: in the table above, as a number of counsellors had several qualifications and varieties of experience, percentages do not add up to 100.

Comparison of staff qualifications on basis of comparing those holding some form of counselling qualification versus those with no qualification is shown below:



***Counsellor's experience***



Counsellors reported a variety of different qualifications and experiences ranging from experiences with their own children to a vast amount of counselling work in a range of settings. Many counsellors came from backgrounds such as teaching and youth work.

Non professional included the following:

- Being a parent
- Foster carer
- Nursing

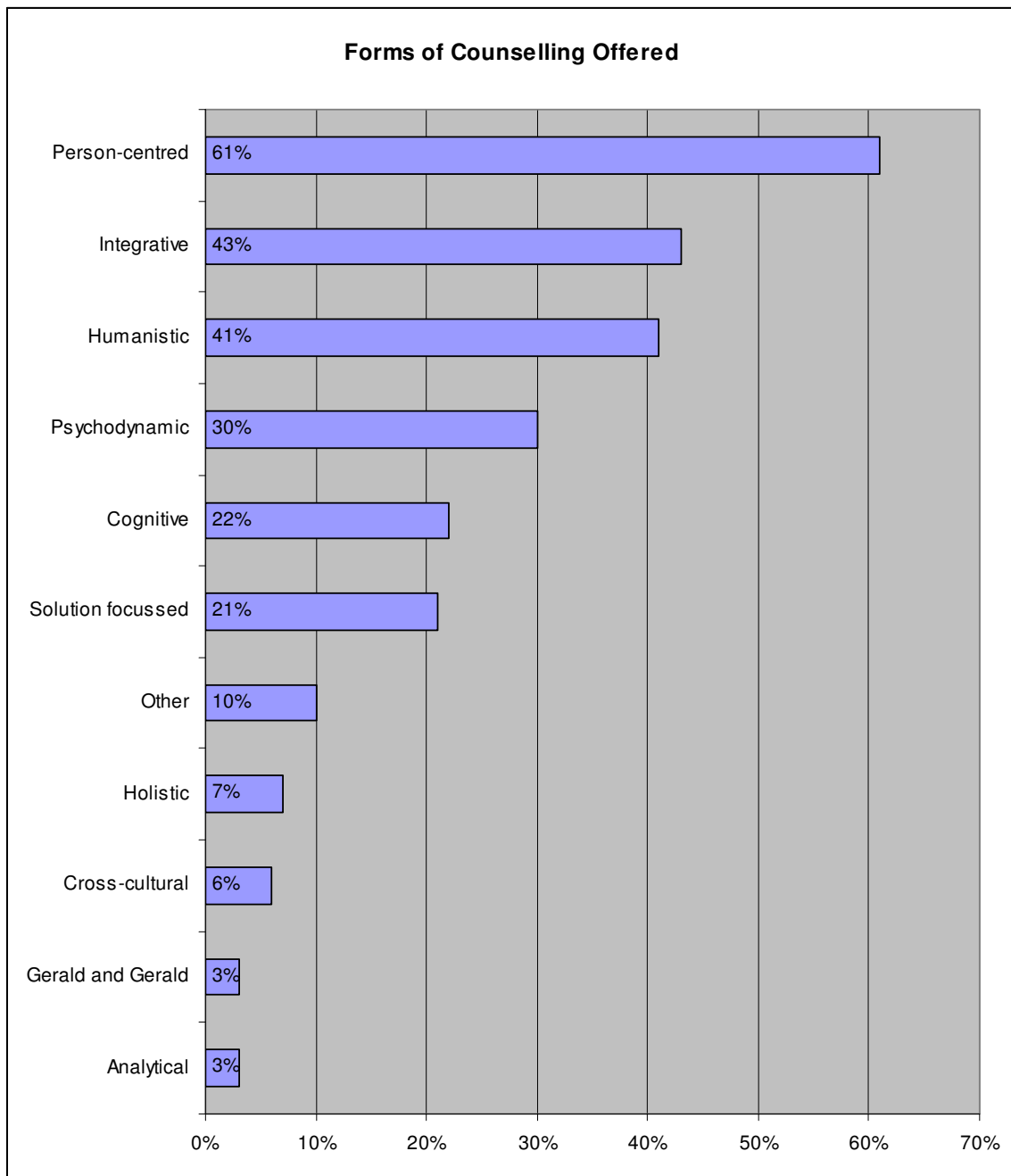
- Teaching and/or work in schools

Professional counselling experience:

- Telephone counselling
- Youth counselling
- Therapy with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties



## ***Types of counselling offered***



## ***Length of time and restrictions on counselling offered***

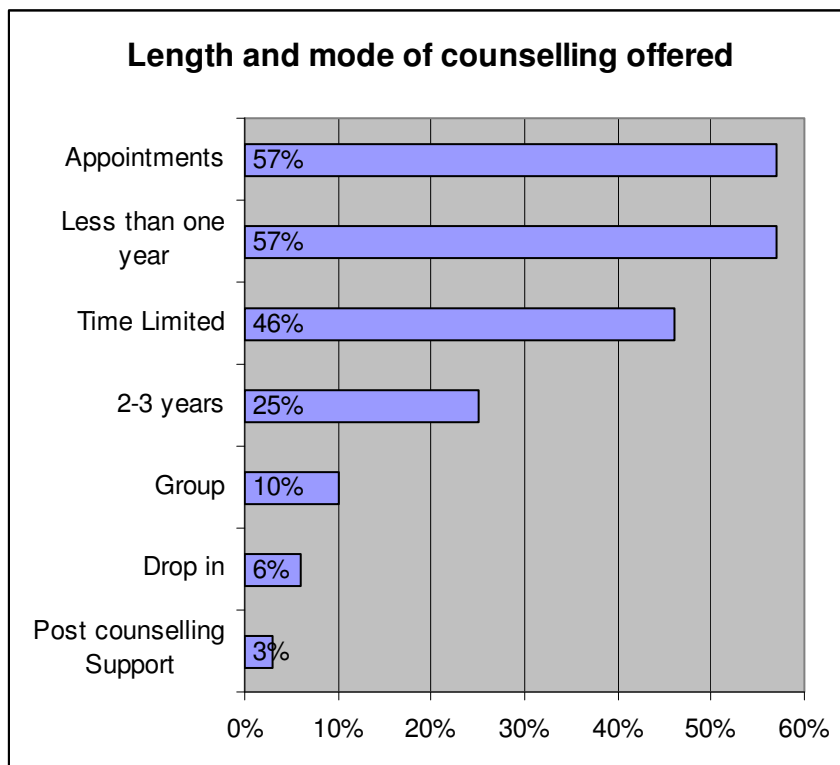
The questionnaire for counselling practitioners aimed to gather information about how long counselling is typically offered to young people, and crucially, given the high numbers of volunteers and students in the current youth counselling workforce, what restrictions may be in place in terms of who they see and the types of needs and difficulties they are able to work with.

The information gathered indicates that in most agencies, counselling is offered on an appointment basis, and often for less than one year – although for a significant number, the counselling may last 2-3 years.

In terms of any restrictions placed on who actually offers counselling to young people, whilst many did not reply to this question, 31% of respondents indicated that their agency did have some restrictions in place, on the basis of the following:

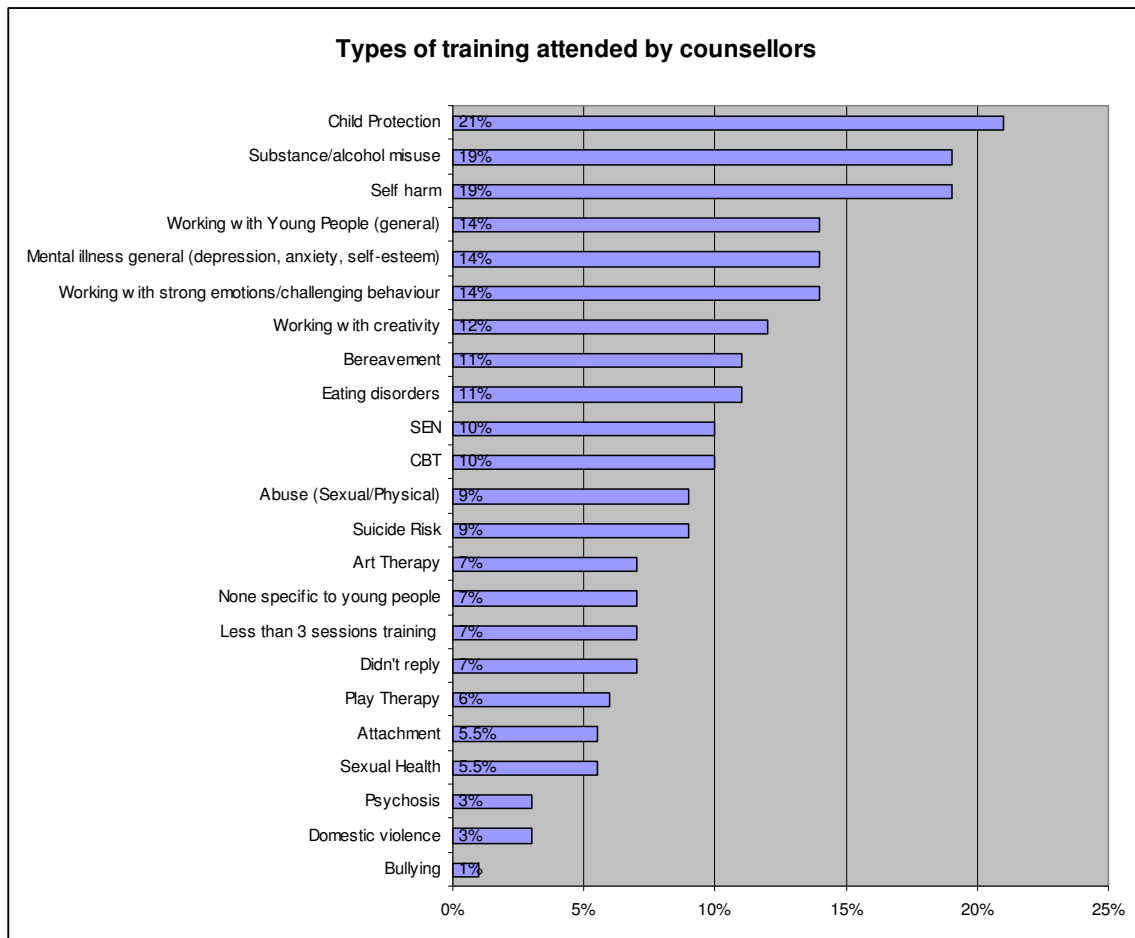
- Vulnerability of the client – for example, trainees/unqualified volunteers not allowed to offer counselling to clients with serious needs such as self-harm (19% of agencies with restrictions in place).
- Age of client – for example, that trainees could not work with young people aged under 16 (86% of agencies).

Crucially, there were some indications that restrictions were not always clear or adhered to due to pressures within counselling agencies.



## Training attended by counsellors

The information supplied in the postal questionnaires completed by counselling practitioners reveals the wide range of topics counsellors had received training on. However, a small number had received no training or less than three days of training since qualifying. However, a small number had received no training or less than three days of training in the last five years.



The sparsity of training received is illustrated by the following quotes from counsellors, in response to the question:

*"In the past five years, what training have you received about working with young people"*

"One morning on diploma course" (Student counsellor)

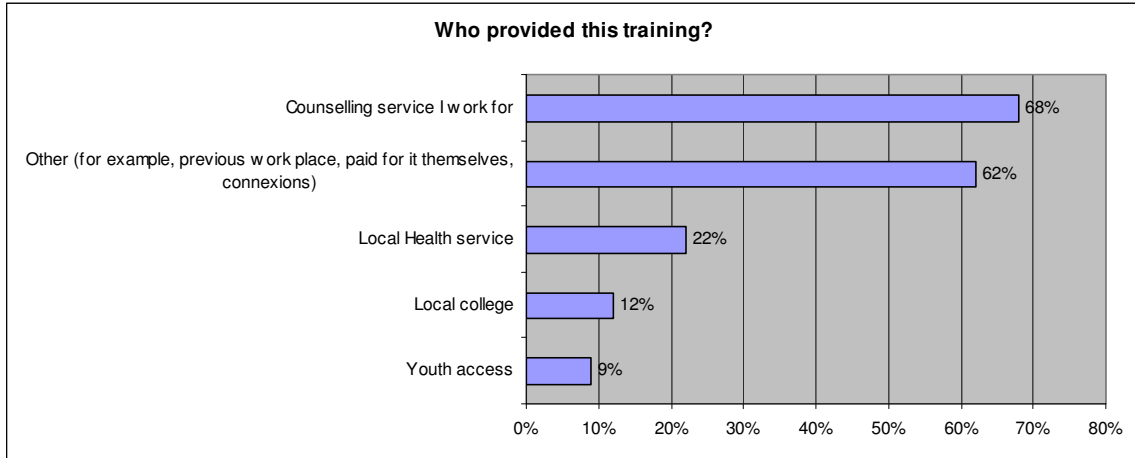
"None specifically aimed at counselling young people..." (student counsellor)

“Lots of reading. Have personal experience with young people” (Student counsellor)

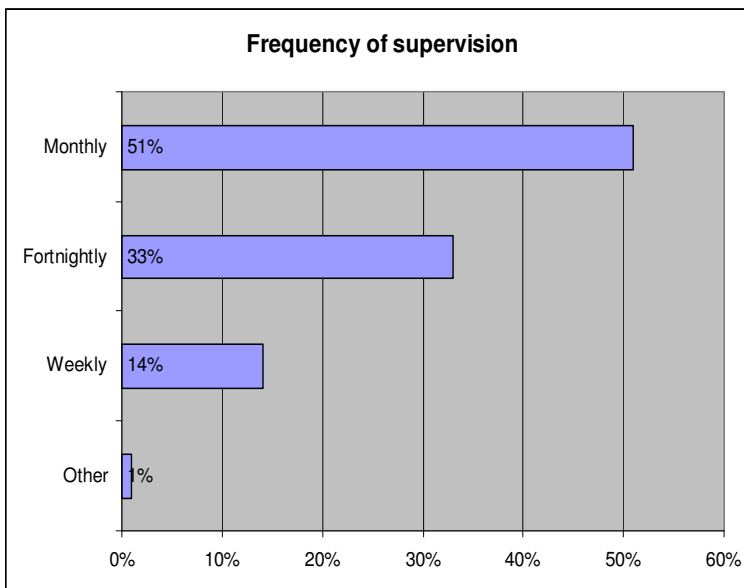
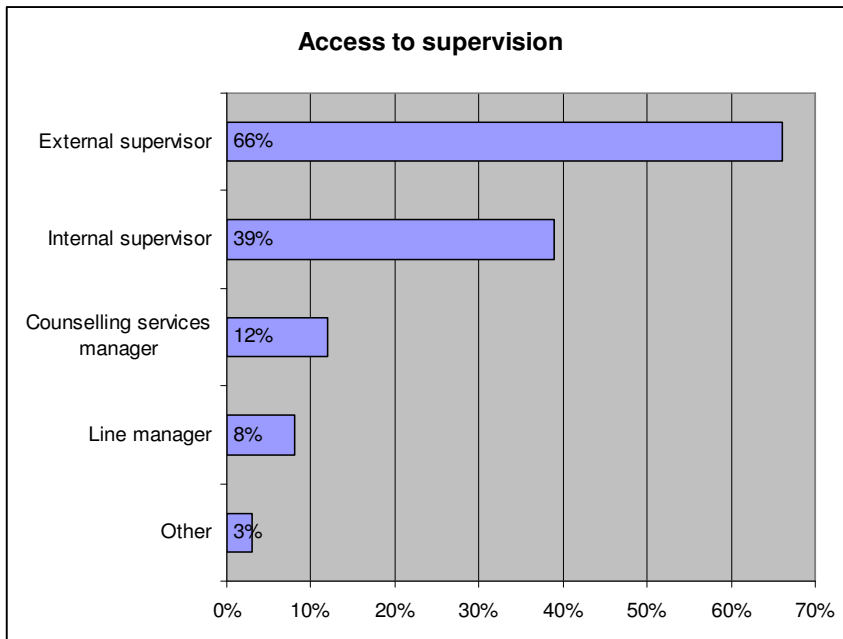
“2 day training course” (Paid Counsellor)

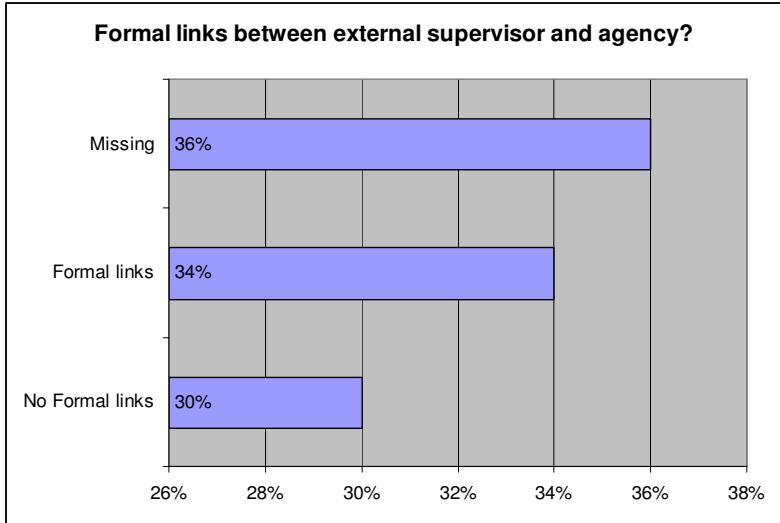
“1/2 day course on working with children” (Volunteer counsellor)

In terms of who provided training for counsellors, it appears that in-house training is important:



## ***Supervision and support of counselling staff***

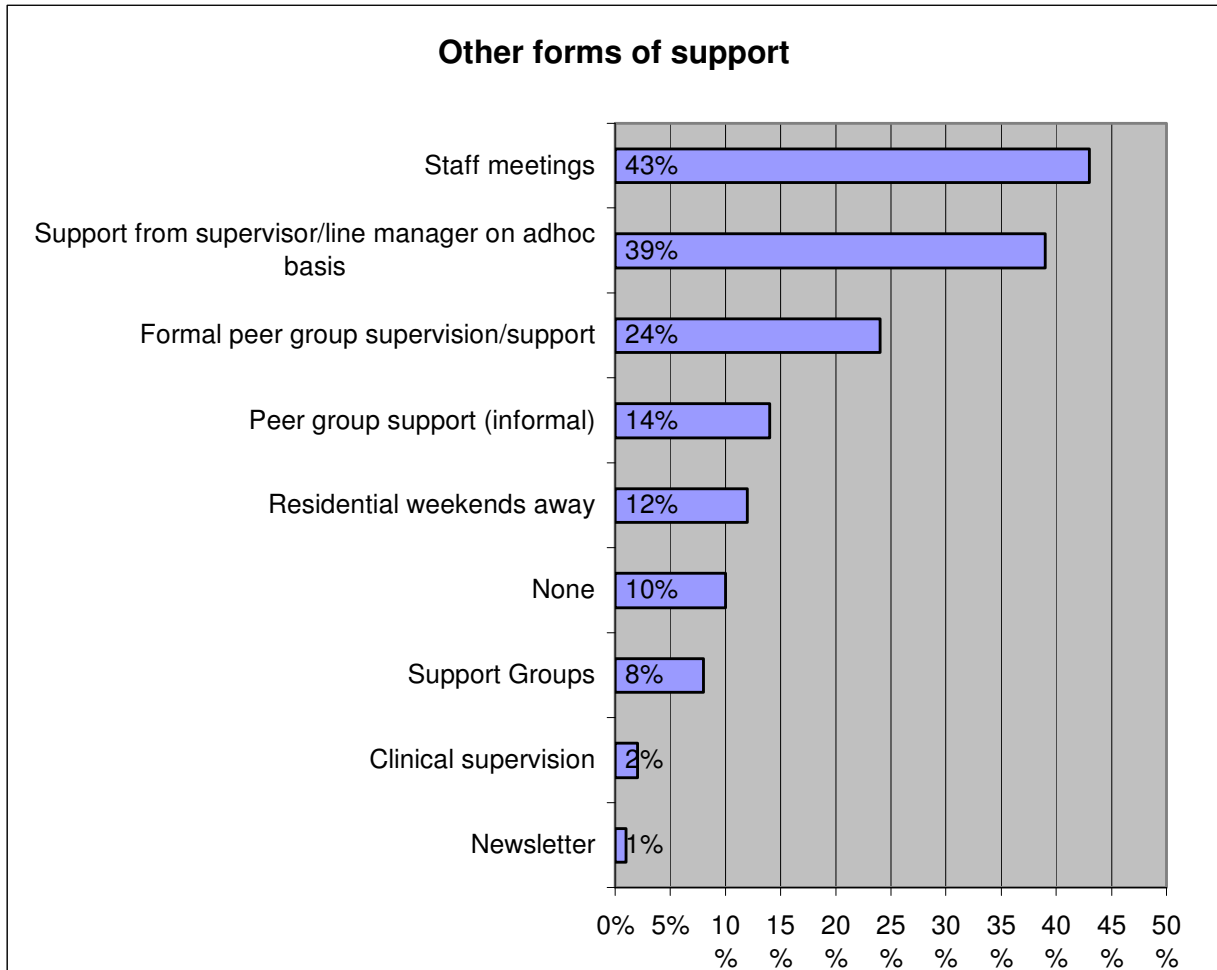




With regards to the support to counsellors offered by agencies, this varied considerably across agencies and included various arrangements for peer support and also team away days – for example:

“Peer supervision meetings with other volunteer counsellors. Weekly group supervision meetings with all counsellors. Supervision from line manager when needed” (Volunteer Counsellor)

“Student counsellors meetings, staff meetings and group supervision every other week” (Student Counsellor)



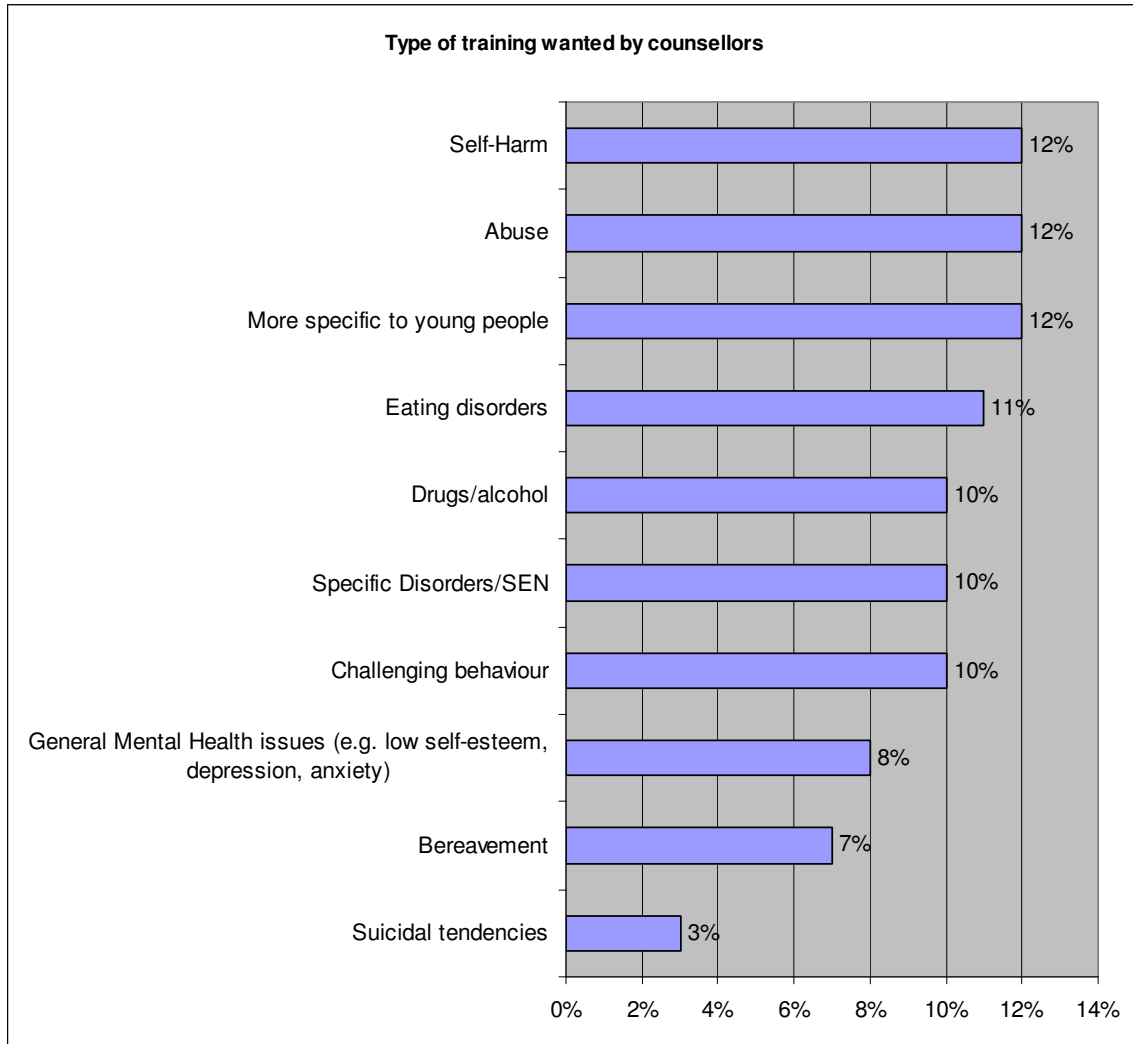
### ***Training needs***

A variety of suggestions were noted:

“Local courses specifically working with young people. Attachment, working practice/ethics/confidentiality with under 16’s.” (Paid Counsellor)

“Working with young people experiencing abuse. Loss and bereavement, separation and divorce, self-harm” (Paid Counsellor)

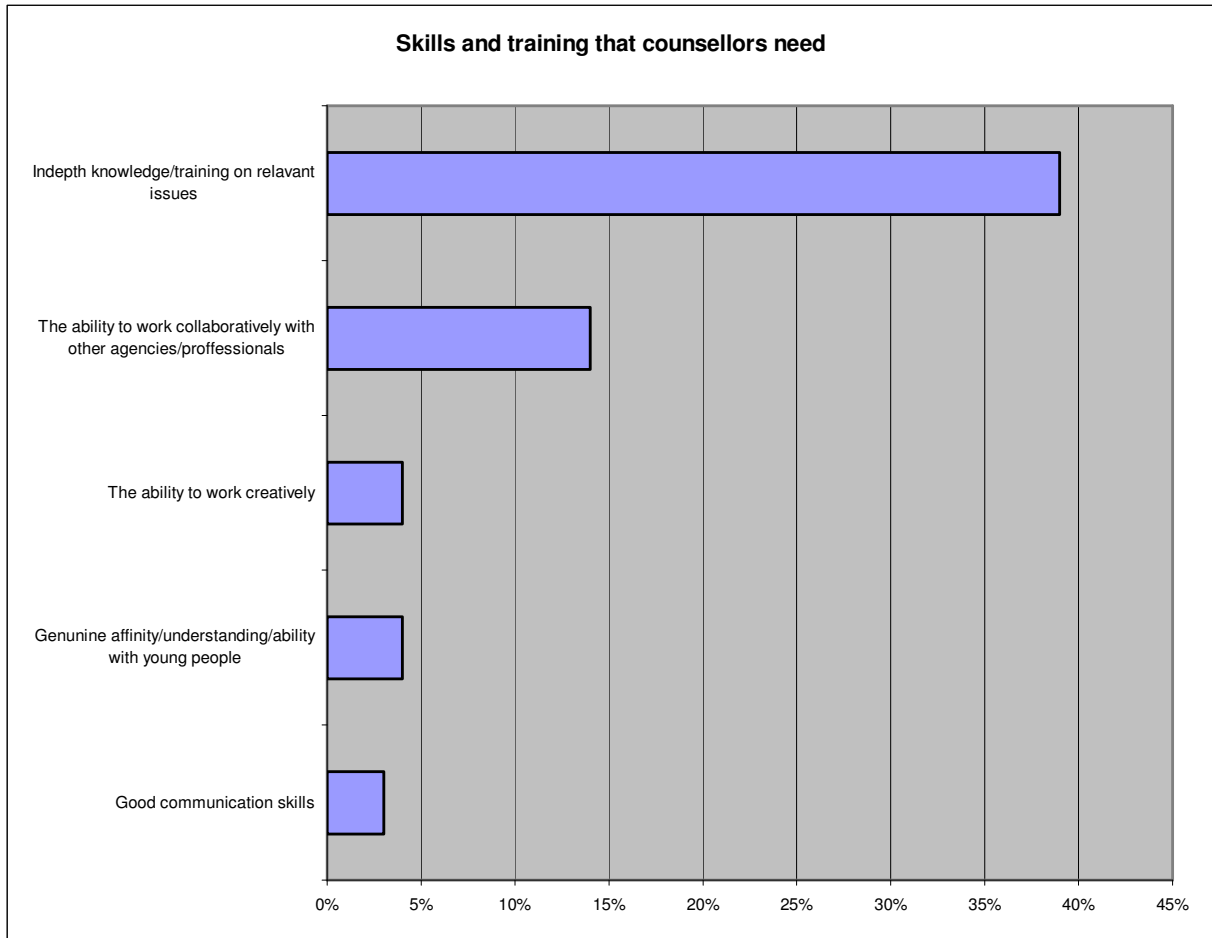
“I do not possess a qualification specifically for working with young people, nor have I attended much in the way of training exclusively directed at counsellors working with young people’s issues. I believe more emphasis should be placed on both of these.” (Paid Counsellor)



### ***Skills needed by counsellors***

A wide range of skills were identified including:

- How to communicate across agencies and to work collaboratively.
- Good communication skills.
- Working flexibly.
- The ability to work with a wide range of physical and emotional developmental stages and also language development.
- Ability to work with the chaos that some adolescents and some settings present – including the skills to set and hold boundaries.



### ***Suggestions for improving counselling provision in the voluntary sector***

The following quotes from counsellors illustrate some of the suggestions made:

“We need adequate and guaranteed funding. Our funding is year to year so we cannot plan anything. Need sufficient funding for management - manager, administrator, counselling manager. Also funding for training to enable counsellors to travel or bring trainers in-house” (Paid Counsellor)

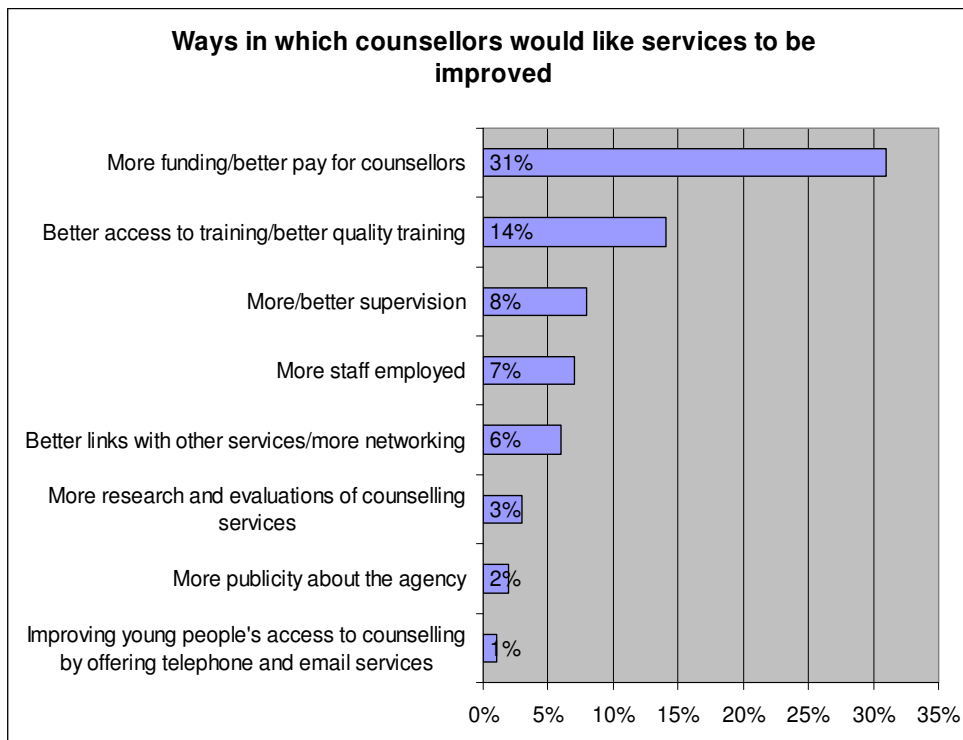
“Telephone counselling service for young people to access in crisis situations (when referrals are made it can be a long time before they are seen and assessed)” (Paid Counsellor)

“Improved coordination and links with other services. The latter providing (i.e. open days/mornings) to explain their services and meet counsellors providing links etc.” (Paid Counsellor)

“Strong links with NHS services such as GPs, CAMHS and primary care counselling. These links need to be maintained through regular face-to face contact.” (Paid Counsellor)

“ Improving access to counselling for young people - maximising modalities of communication, for example, texting/SM, email, phone, drop-in, referral, website.” (Paid Counsellor)

“More promotional activity, better public information, public awareness campaign to raise profile of counselling.” (Paid Counsellor)



### ***Other points about training***

- Various concerns were noted by student counsellors that any time spent counselling under 16s does not count towards their diploma.
- This problem is illustrated by the following quotes from two students:  
  
“For my training only 20% of my clients can be under 18.” (Student Counsellor) and “50% of my clients must be over 16.” (Student counsellor)
- Some worries were also noted about colleges putting students into placements too early on in their training.

## **4. Information gathered from young people**

### ***Projects and young people involved***

23 young people who had been involved with 5 of the youth counselling services included in the postal survey contributed their time and views. They met in person with two of the consultants working on the CwdP, with the conversations covering a wide range of issues. All reported very positively of their experiences of counselling and a variety of suggestions for improving youth counselling services were made.

A striking feature was the huge range and complexity of problems that young people presented to youth counselling services. This clearly raises the issue of the training and skills youth counsellors need to possess, also their ability to work collaboratively when this is needed – and at the most basic level, in terms of managing risk, their awareness and access to the most up-to-date safeguarding protocols in their local area.

### ***Finding and getting a counselling service***

- Young people obtained information from a range of sources including family, friends, other agencies, and publicity material e.g. leaflets.
- In 4 out of the 5 services, young people could self refer.
- Most young people said they were anxious about counselling and making the first contact.
- They liked friendly, welcoming staff and a pleasant building.
- They disliked waiting lists, but said that this was easier to cope with if one of the staff telephoned them regularly or if there was a drop-in they could use whilst waiting for counselling to start.

### ***Counselling services***

Young people liked having:

- A choice of times when they could see a counsellor and a choice of counsellor.
- A clear description about what would happen in counselling and information about confidentiality.
- Informal initial assessment and reviews.
- An open ended number of sessions and a generally flexible approach.

All of the young people consulted considered that the counselling service had been well explained to them initially and that issues of confidentiality had been well explained.

Young people's views of counsellors:

- Mostly young people reported very positive experiences and better than that with other professionals in other services.
- Young people liked counsellors who gave practical advice, worked at their pace and let them stay in control, were uncritical, helped them work things out for themselves, and were responsive.
- The young people highlighted the importance of continuity of staff and of the one-to-one relationship offered by this form of intervention; they compared this favourably to the non-appointment drop-ins at colleges where they might see a different person each time.
- None raised any concerns about the age, gender or ethnicity of the counsellor they had seen.

The benefits of counselling were described as a process that:

- Helped people grow and gain confidence
- Helped people develop problem solving skills and understand things differently
- Helped with improving the practical things in life e.g. going to college
- Prevented over-reliance on family and friends – several mentioned the importance of the non-involvement of their family (when requested) and a wish not to burden their families.
- Most would recommend youth counselling to a friend.

### ***Suggestions about what would improve the service or help keep it good***

- More publicity about the projects and about the benefits of counselling
- Increased the numbers of counsellors and accommodation so that the waiting list time could be reduced.
- Young people preferred flexibility about the frequency of appointments and the length of sessions.
- Those who had a follow up support group valued it, some others thought they would like the opportunity for group discussions, and some would like the option to spend more time in the project.
- Some mentioned the importance of recruiting counsellors who liked and were comfortable with young people.
- Some mentioned the importance of the flexibility to keep attending beyond 25 years, (the usual upper age limit), and the importance of the continuation of a free service.

### ***Concerns noted***

Several young people mentioned limits being imposed on the number of counselling sessions they were offered due to general pressures on the counselling agency (including to reduce waiting list times).

## **5. Where the counselling workforce fits with other staff working with young people – findings from the seminar**

### ***Overview***

In addition to the postal questionnaires and the consultation meetings with young people, a national seminar was convened in London on 30.6.08. Staff and young people from the youth counselling services that had taken part in either the survey and or one of the young people's consultation meetings were invited to attend to discuss the early analysis of the information that had been gathered.

Through small group, roundtable discussions, a range of issues to do with integrated working processes were also explored, with participants being asked to share their views on:

- What an 'ideal' training programme for youth counsellors might look like.
- How access to training could be improved for counselling staff.
- How supervision arrangements within youth counselling services could be strengthened.
- Whether time limited approaches to counselling work for young people.
- What could be done to improve young people's access to youth counselling services.

In the course of discussing these issues, the participants raised concerns about both the focus and quality of many existing counselling courses; they commented on the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in their local area and also their ability to access local safeguarding and inter-agency training. Young people also responded to a question specific to them asking how counsellors could help young people to feel less anxious to access counselling.

### ***Training***

A variety of comments were noted with regard to existing college courses for counsellors:

- There was widespread agreement about the gaps in training identified through the postal surveys and also the concerns noted about the

focus of many college counselling training courses (adult-focused and with little specific to the needs of children and young people).

- Inconsistencies between different colleges in terms of what is covered were highlighted – also concerns that because college courses are expensive, there is pressure on students to get out into placements as soon as they can and to seek paid counselling work at the earliest opportunity, often with only the most basic skills in place. Also as a result of the pressure to fill places on college counselling courses, some take people who do not really have the appropriate skills or personality for a career in counselling.
- From the various comments noted, it appears that many youth counselling services are left having to try to equip staff with the requisite skills and knowledge for working with young people themselves – either through induction programmes, requiring people to work as a general young people’s advisor first and, where funding allowed, by sending staff on training courses.
- Examples were also given of agencies running their own weekend and evening training sessions for staff – although a number commented that such arrangements are really only feasible in the larger voluntary and youth sector agencies.

In addressing the inconsistencies and limitations in existing counselling training, the following were suggested:

- There should be some form of nationally recognised training in youth counselling – possibly not as a separate qualification but as a core module within existing college training courses.
- Such a module could – and probably should – be developed and delivered via a national organisation with the necessary specialist knowledge and skills for delivering such training.
- In addition to providing training on the issues and needs relevant to young people, counselling training needs to move away from being “so theoretical” and to provide a more practical approach to the reality of delivering counselling to young people – for example, the skills for engaging young people, working across agencies and with a wide range of needs.
- Addressing the cross-cultural dimension of counselling young people was highlighted as important, also for counsellors to be able to access training on developmental issues and up-to-date information about the legislation that is relevant to the provision of services for young people.
- Part of the problem with current college-based training was seen as many colleges being out of touch with the complex needs now typically presented by those referred to counselling; to address this, it was suggested that colleges should be encouraged to hold open days to meet with counselling providers and/or that college staff should visit

local counselling services in order to explore what their needs are in terms of staff skills and expertise.

With regard to CPD, the importance of access to free, locally delivered training was emphasised, alongside a variety of comments about the importance of counselling supervisors being suitably qualified and also able to access high quality training appropriate to their level of experience.

### ***Improving access to training***

- The need for locally delivered training was emphasised in a number of the small table discussions.
- There was support for Youth Access developing a centralised content of CPD type courses and to then roll this out via a network of locally accessible training.
- It was suggested that different models of training could be explored including e-learning resources.

### ***Strengthening supervision***

- Improving the access of counselling service managers to supervision training was noted, also that there is a need more generally to provide training on 'management of practice' issues such as case recording, undertaking and recording assessment, sharing information across agencies and confidentiality/data protection requirements.
- Funding pressures on agencies were widely recognised to lie behind some of the difficulties of providing regular supervision to counsellors – especially in smaller agencies where the service manager may also work as a counsellor.

### ***The use of time limited counselling approaches***

- From the information gathered, it appears that many counselling services have experimented with some form of time limit – however, in several of the small group discussions, it was highlighted that the complexity of needs typically presented by young people referred for counselling often meant that longer-term counselling was required.
- Many of the seminar participants saw the benefit of having some form of agreed time period for counselling in terms of monitoring and reviewing progress and in keeping work focused – however, the importance of flexible provision responsive to a young person's needs was emphasised.
- In terms of short-term work, it was also noted that this could prove difficult given the time needed to establish a relationship of trust with

a young person. On the other hand, it was also suggested that some young people prefer the offer of short-term work – they know how long they will be offered a service for and that “it’s not going to go on forever...”

### ***Improving young people’s access to counselling***

Suggestions included:

- Advertisements, presentations and information in settings used by young people including for example, youth clubs, schools, colleges, leisure space and websites – also more written information, in clear and simple non-jargonistic language, for young people to take away giving contact information.
- A video made by young people explaining what counselling is, how it works, what it offers and what is required of young people was also widely supported.
- Funding for services to allow them to recruit more counsellors and thereby reduce waiting times.
- Programme of awareness raising across other agencies and professional groups (e.g. GPs, CAMHS) who can then more actively support the young people they might refer on for counselling.
- Taster sessions – to allow young people to try out counselling to see if it is for them.
- Mobile provision – especially in rural and outlying areas of the country.

In terms of actual day-to-day practice of counselling services, it was also noted that it was helpful if the service made contact with a young person prior to a first appointment to check all was well, that they had the information they needed – this could be by text, email or phone.

Similar suggestions were given by the young people in answer to the question about what counsellors could do to allay any anxieties of young people referred for counselling. Additional points included:

- Making spaces used for counselling look modern and contemporary, with private space and a discreet entrance.
- Provision of leaflets for young people explaining such matters as confidentiality and information sharing.
- Developing peer support.
- Using young-person friendly language in all communications.

### ***Involvement in local Common Assessment Framework (CAF) protocols***

- Many of those attending the seminar indicated little or no involvement in the CAF processes in their local area with some noting that it felt “just like another level of bureaucracy”; several noted that they felt excluded from the process by the statutory services in their area.

- Others suggested that it was “too early to say” but that indications were that it would make little difference to their day to day work.
- The need for more training on this and on information sharing and recording was reiterated.

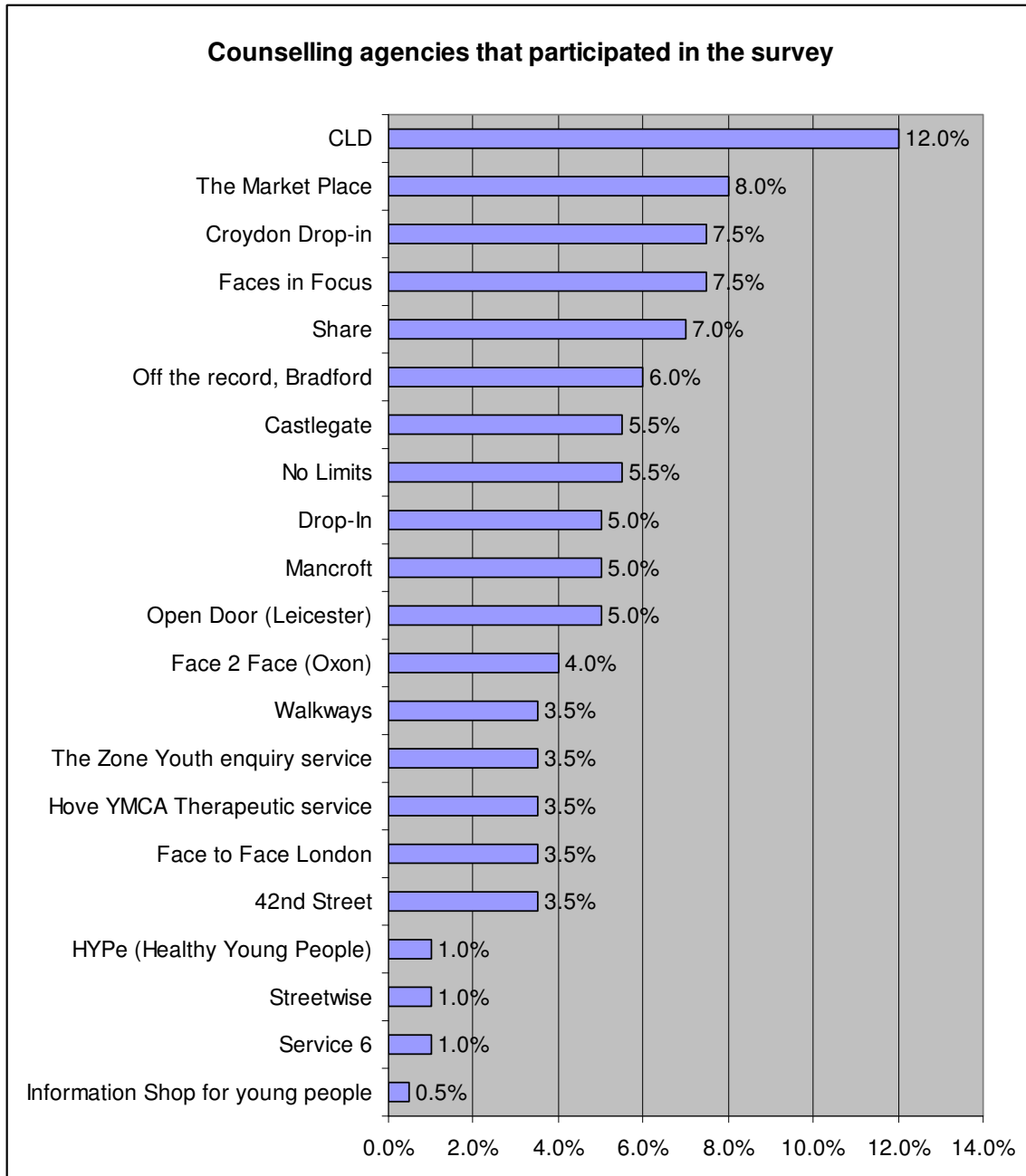
### ***Access to safeguarding training and local protocols to support integrated working***

- Again the information gathered through the seminar indicated little consistent progress in ensuring that all counsellors in voluntary sector agencies are able to access safeguarding training or were involved in processes to develop integrated working.
- From the information gathered, it would appear that approximately two thirds of the seminar participants had attended some form of safeguarding training – however, such training when it was available, was noted to be infrequent and often not sufficiently related to counselling issues.
- With regard to integrated working, it was suggested that working relationships across agencies often still rely on personal relationships established between professionals and that there is still a general lack of understanding of different professional roles and responsibilities.
- In addition, many of the clients seen by voluntary sector counselling agencies fall in the age group 16-25 and there can be difficulties in terms of inconsistencies in age limits within statutory services (notably CAMHS and adult mental health services). It was also noted that whilst many services recognise the need to work with this age group, this does not appear to have been translated into any commitment to make available funding and resources.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: Counselling practitioners surveyed in the YIACS snapshot Survey of counselling practitioners

145 counsellors from 21 YIACS returned postal questionnaires



## **Appendix 1.1 Survey of counselling service managers participating in the practitioner snapshot**

21 counselling service managers' from YIACS identified in the above table returned postal questionnaires from the snapshot sample which included both managers and counselling practitioners.



## **APPENDIX 2: Survey of counselling service managers**

42 managers from YIACS returned postal questionnaires (from the manager only sample); they were from the following YIACS:

ARC  
Bedford Open Door  
Brandon Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy  
Catholic Children's Society  
Central Youth  
Chelsea Bus Stop  
Coulsdon College  
Eye to Eye Youth Counselling  
Heads Together Youth Counselling  
Horsham Youth Counselling service  
INFO  
It's Your Choice  
Jersey Youth Service  
Kettering Youth Information and Counselling  
Link Counselling and Information Service  
Moving On Project  
No 5 Youth Counselling and Information  
Off Centre  
Off Centre Counselling Service  
Off the Record Hampshire  
Off the Record Croydon  
Off the Record/Richmond Youth Partnership  
Open Door Grays, Essex  
Open Door Eastbourne  
Relate Rugby and North East Warwickshire  
Rephael House  
Sheffield YMCA  
Shetland Youth Information Service  
Signpost and YEIS  
Suffolk County Council Youth and Connexions Service  
The Haven  
The Junction  
The What? Centre  
Way In (Chiltern Youth Matters)  
Young Adults Advice and Support Project (YASP)  
Young Concern trust  
Young Devon  
Youth Enquiry Service  
Youth Information Service  
Youthreach  
Youthstart

### **Appendix 3: Face to face consultation with service user groups**

23 young people from 5 youth counselling agencies contributed to the face to face consultations; they were from the following YIACS:

CastleGate York  
CLD Hereford  
Croydon Drop-in  
Mancroft Advice Project Norwich  
No-Limits Southampton

Thanks to Emma McManus of Young Voice for her assistance with the postal questionnaires.



## **Appendix 4: National seminar consultation**

Eight young people, thirty managers and counselling practitioners from YIACS, three project consultants and eight YA staff attended the national consultation seminar at NCVO on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008; they were from:

CastleGate York  
Face2Face Witney  
Drop-in Cheshunt  
Drop-in Croydon  
LINK Counselling & Information Service Uxbridge  
No 5 Youth Counselling & Information Reading  
No limits Southampton  
Off Centre Hackney  
Off The Record Bradford  
Outside in Counselling Wrexham  
Rephael House Barnet  
Share Counselling - Youth Cornwall  
Signpost & Youth Enquiry Service Watford  
Streetwise Newcastle upon Tyne  
Visyon Congleton  
Way In Chesham  
YASP Manchester  
Young Concern Trust Harlow  
Young Devon  
Youth Enquiry Service High Wycombe  
Youthreach Greenwich  
331 Young People's Centre Barnet

Youth Access – eight staff  
CydP consultants – three staff

# Workforce Strategy Partners Programme

**Mapping of current  
workforce and  
consultation with  
counselling staff and  
young people using  
counselling services in  
Young People's  
Information, Advice,  
Counselling and Support  
Services (YIACS)**



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