



Information on Training

Information Sheet

Revised September 2007

This leaflet is intended for individuals who are considering undertaking training in family therapy and systemic practice. For employers and others, it provides an overview of what kind of training a potential employee would need to have undertaken.

INTRODUCTION

Family therapy (also called systemic psychotherapy) is one of the modalities of psychotherapy recognised by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). It places an emphasis on the importance of relationships and often works with couples, families and other relationship groups. It recognises the way in which social interactions shape a person's life and addresses these relationships both directly and indirectly. The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (together with several family therapy training institutes) is a member of the UKCP and accredited training courses are designed so that successful graduates are eligible for registration with UKCP.

Systemic practice refers to professional practice within a systemic framework. Someone who has completed part of the four-year training may be referred to as a 'systemic practitioner'. Many professionals undertake this part of the training to enhance their own professional practice.

The training to become a family therapist is based on the assumption that students have already trained in and had experience in another relevant profession. To qualify as a family therapist it is necessary to undertake the four-year part-time training at Foundation, Intermediate and Qualifying levels.

THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILY THERAPY IN RELATION TO TRAINING

The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (AFT) was founded in 1975 and one of its key aims is to promote excellence in training. One of its main committees is the CRED Committee (the Committee for the Accreditation and Development of Family Therapy Training) which sets training standards, operates a system for course accreditation and supports the development of training across the UK. If courses are accredited by CRED, students can be assured that they meet all requirements.

Information on training and course requirements can be found in *The Blue Book*, available from the AFT Executive Officer at the address overleaf.

Foundation Level

This is usually a part-time course, lasting for one academic year, consisting of a theoretical input and teaching in small and larger groups. There is a strong emphasis on active learning and there will usually be opportunities to work in pairs and small groups, and to

be involved in role play and other experiential exercises. Admission requirements at this level will vary slightly from course to course. Some courses will only accept students who have a prior training in a relevant profession, currently psychology, social work, psychiatry, teaching and nursing. Other courses may accept a wider group of applicants but it may be difficult for some students without a prior professional training or current practice base to continue further with their training because of the additional requirements at Intermediate and Qualifying levels.

There is a formal assessment and successful students may continue to the Intermediate level of training.

Intermediate Level

This level is also usually part-time and lasts for one academic year. There is a continuation of theoretical input and opportunities to process ideas in small groups. This year also places a firm emphasis on the application of theoretical ideas to practice and clinical work. Students are required to undertake a minimum of 50 hours of systemic practice during the year. It is important that potential applicants ensure that they have the opportunity to do this. This is usually done as part of employment but some students find it necessary to secure placements to fulfill these requirements. Some courses may demand additional hours of clinical experience.

There is a formal assessment and successful students can apply to go on to the next level.

Qualifying Level

This is usually completed part-time over two academic years and must be at postgraduate level. Successful completion of an Intermediate level training is one of the admission requirements. There are also academic requirements to be met, such as a good undergraduate degree. Applicants will also attend selection interviews which assess readiness for training.

Students at this level will be required to do at least 200 hours work-based systemic practice over the period of the course. They will usually have a prior relevant professional training in one of the helping professions. Courses operate an APEL system (accreditation of prior experience and learning) to determine exceptions. It is important to enquire of specific courses if you are unsure whether or not you meet requirements.

Courses have the following components:

- Theoretical teaching
- Personal and professional development – at present there is no requirement for students to undertake personal therapy although many do so. In a systemic training there is a strong emphasis on small group experience to explore the interaction between the personal and professional. Students are required to be open to and participate in such explorations of, for example, their own family of origin and key influences in their lives.
- Live supervised clinical practice within a small supervision group, led by an appropriately qualified supervisor. Generally, this uses video link and often a one-way screen to allow the supervisor

and other team members to observe sessions. A substantial part of the learning is from participation as a group member. The whole group is involved in the discussions about clients and the work being done. Some groups will operate as a reflecting team and share ideas and reflections directly with the family.

- Research teaching
- Discussion of work-based clinical practice (200 hours)

Because of the active clinical component, courses are very demanding. There is a heavy assessment schedule. In order to successfully complete the course, students will have to demonstrate both academic and practice competence. The latter is often assessed through reports from clinical supervisors and other teachers, and a clinical portfolio together with a formal presentation to a panel. In order to qualify students will have to demonstrate a level of competence appropriate to independent practice.

SOME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can I find out if training as a family therapist is right for me?

It is advisable to read an introductory text in family therapy and/or attend one of the many workshops and conferences available. Many Foundation level courses welcome students to complete the first year, as a way of finding out about the systemic approach and the training in detail. Many institutes and universities have open days where you can find out more. A list of accredited courses can be obtained from the AFT Executive Officer, see below, or visit our website <aft.org.uk>

Will there be any jobs as a family therapist at the end of training?

Although some qualified family therapists may work in private practice, there is a strong tradition of employment in the NHS, social services and the voluntary sector. Some graduates find opportunities to do family therapy within their original profession, while others seek designated family therapy posts. These continue to increase and develop, with the majority still within child and family mental health services within the NHS. Posts usually have a strong field of applicants and there are still many more trained family therapists than posts available.

What if I do not have a first degree or previous professional training?

You should discuss this with the individual courses. For exceptional applicants, courses may take into account previous experience and decide whether or not it is sufficient to enable applicants to be accepted on a training course. It is important to check requirements for moving on to further levels of training. It will be necessary to have the required practice experience.

What if I do not have current opportunities to fulfil the practice requirements?

The majority of students will be in relevant employment while undertaking the training. However, some students may have to find their own placements. Although some courses give assistance, it is important to be clear about the detailed requirements when approaching agencies and departments about the possibility of a clinical attachment. There may be a small charge if you are offered a placement. It is important to agree a contract for any placement negotiated.

Where can I find out about courses?

Please contact the AFT Administrator to receive an up-to-date list of accredited courses and those in the process of accreditation and re-accreditation.

All Qualifying level courses are affiliated to academic institutions and they will often have websites as well as written information. All courses will send information on request.

How do I choose the course for me?

Geographical location will usually be a deciding factor. The training is organised so that after one level is completed it is usually possible to move to another institute (or equivalent) if this becomes more convenient. You can usually take a study break between levels of training.

Some courses are larger than others, some have a particular theoretical leaning, and some courses are more firmly based in a health service setting or in the voluntary sector. Qualifying level training, in particular, is a huge investment in both time and money and it is worth investigating various courses before making a decision.

What is the financial cost and can I get any financial support?

The cost of courses varies. Foundation level courses are generally between £800 and £1,000. Intermediate courses are slightly more expensive and qualifying courses cost about £3,500 per year. Some students are supported by their employers, receiving all or part of the cost. Sometimes they may only be given the study leave to do the course. There are a few charities who give small amounts of money, and social workers applying for courses which are also accredited under the social work post-qualifying framework are entitled to a small grant which covers the cost of registration for that award. Please apply to your local PQ consortium for further details.

After qualification is there further training I can do?

To maintain registration with the UKCP, psychotherapists have to fulfil continued professional development requirements. This includes ongoing supervision/consultation and attendance at training events. Many family therapists go on to train as supervisors and *The Red Book* (available from the AFT Executive Officer) outlines requirements for accreditation as supervisors. Some institutes in partnership with universities also run clinical doctorate programmes.

A FINAL WORD

Over the past 30 years or so professionals in the helping professions have discovered the value of a systemic training in developing their own practice and helping clients to make positive changes in their lives. The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (AFT) offers reassurance about the quality of trainings on offer. If you have questions which have not been answered by this leaflet or *The Blue Book*, please contact the AFT Executive Officer, Sue Kennedy, who will find the best person to answer your enquiry. Membership of AFT is open to all those interested in family therapy and systemic practice. Membership includes an excellent journal and a lively professional magazine. This would be another way of checking if this is the field for you. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact Sue Kennedy.

The Chair of the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC) welcomes general feedback and suggestions on Information Sheets and can be contacted via Sue Kennedy, AFT Executive Officer, 7 Executive Suite, St James Court, Wilderspool Causeway, Warrington WA4 6PS. Tel: 01925 444414 Email: s.kennedy@aft.org.uk. AFT is a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England, No. 3018026. Registered Charity No. 1063639. Registered office is the administrative office, as above.