

STH Professional Development Forum Notes, 10th December 2024, 12 attendees

Topics: Acknowledgement of work achieved in 2024, Role definitions, Practice Standards

Chair: Ben Thomas, Thrive Notetaker: Emma Martindale, Trellis

Update and Intro, Ben Thomas, Thrive

Ben welcomed all and referred everyone to the agenda for this evening's discussion topics.

As we are at the end of the year it is a good time to reflect on work completed in 2024:

- The Code of Ethics draft is available on the Trellis website and we thank those who have completed the survey and provided feedback. Please do continue to feedback. Code of Ethics available here: [Professional Development | Trellis](#). Survey link for feedback: [Code of Ethics for STH Practitioners](#). A thank you to Christina Hughes Nind for leading this work.
- Routes to registration – Emma Martindale has been working on this and an update will be available on the Trellis website as the comments from the previous forum are incorporated.
- Practice Standards – lots of work completed with working groups and feedback from colleagues. Close to having a final draft to share and consult on.

Now we have these core documents close to being finalised, we are much closer to having a register and the registration processes which will now need to be developed. For the initial register we need a process for applications, process for appeals and complaints, role descriptions, and volunteer roles for processing applications: reviewing panel, panel for appeals (this is a standard register approach). The register will then be available to allow us to test the appetite and the processes, and to move the Association towards having all the protocols and processes that Professional Standards Authority approval requires.

Other areas of work:

- Core Competencies of an STH practitioner and guidance around this to support applicants to the register.
- Funding – still working towards identifying a way to fund the above work, trusts and grants have not been successful, major donors have also not been fruitful so far, we could look at government funding but this is likely to be very challenging. We could approach organisations working in the STH field, and may need to look to registration fees/potential crowdfunding. Many other professional associations and registers are reliant on application fees to cover their small staff and admin costs, rather than donations or trust/grant funding.

Emma thanked everyone who has attended forums and has been in touch to offer their support, feedback, and time. We will be in touch in 2025 as we finalise the next areas of focus and working groups.

Role Definitions, Fiona Thackeray, Trellis

Fiona outlined the role definitions currently used in the UK Association for Social and Therapeutic Horticulture Standards of Practice, the AHTA Horticultural Therapist (HT), and AHTA Therapeutic Horticulture Practitioner (THP) definitions (see forum film for further detail). She invited Forum members to comment on the sufficiency or omissions of these definitions.

Sally Hammill – should we include something more about defined goals. Fiona suggested that this could include assessment and outcomes – assessing these over time to gauge progress.

Helen – might it be helpful to include that a practitioner is working within goals and mission of the organisation as per AHTA. In terms of working with groups – practitioners may not always be able to include time for individual assessment, goals and outcomes and the main focus should be benefit to clients.

Bex (in chat) what about structured, outcome-focussed horticultural/ nature-based activities/interventions?

Anna Baker Cresswell (in chat) When people ask me what is HT, I always hark back to THRIVE's 1999 definition which refers to clinically defined goals. Is there a reason why you have avoided making reference to the word refer? It's very good and hope I'm not heading around the buoy again..!

Bex (in chat) or ...the use of person-centred, structured, outcome-focussed, horticultural activities to support individuals, with a defined need, to improve their wellbeing; by therapeutically working towards specific goals in a plant rich or natural environment within a predictably positive cohesive group which provides social benefits.

Garron Dorr – a registered HT from Maine, USA, asked about requirements for registration – Fiona directed him to the Routes to Registration document on the Trellis Professional Development page (this document is in draft form and will be consulted on next year).

Clare Farley – can we use a monitoring of progress instead of/as well as defining goals. Clare gave the example of improved motivation. Would “paid and trained professional” be appropriate to add to highlight these elements. Discussion followed that not all practitioners are paid, but should be trained and meet professional competencies.

Leila added that our work involves planned activities that are different from nature connection – we facilitate the activities for people’s wellbeing. Clare Farley (in chat): Facilitation and bringing people to engage through activities with nature.

Bex – we could also use “structured activity”, instead of “help” could we use “support” and make the statement more empowering. Sally Hammill added that “facilitate” may also be appropriate.

Sally Hammill suggested that we not use “intervention” as there was push back on this due to it feeling medical/relating to occupational therapy.

Helen (in chat) - I agree with changing help to empower.

Clare Farley (in chat) - Activities is more friendly than intervention.

Leila (in chat) - Unfortunately, sometimes the word "activity" is taken like doing something to entertain people.

Clare Farley (in chat) - Yes I can see that problem with activity. May be structured tasks?

Bex (in chat) - structured therapeutic activities?

Fiona (in chat) - Service or programme are alternatives we sometimes use.

Fiona thanked everyone for their feedback and will incorporate this into a further draft definition.

Practice Standards, Ben Thomas, Thrive

Ben has been chairing a working group looking at Practice Standards. Discussing the ways that STH Practitioners should behave, and provide a high quality and standard level of service. There are sections including Client Needs, Horticulture, Programme Aims/Objectives, Working Environment. It has been challenging to find language that covers the range of client groups and employment approach e.g. some people work freelance, others in NHS, others in charity and so on. This may impact how each person sees the role of the practitioner, how they go about their work, and what their responsibilities are.

Key Question: where is it the responsibility of the employer/host organisation, or the individual practitioner. Organisations are not signing up to practice standards.

Ben shared one standard worded in three different ways, to demonstrate and stimulate discussion:

1. We will gain knowledge from clients and referral partners to ensure there is a clear understanding of client need and suitability for its programmes.
2. The project seeks to gain knowledge from clients and referral partners to ensure there is a clear understanding of client need and suitability for its programmes.
3. We will utilise knowledge from clients and referral partners to ensure there is a clear understanding of client need and suitability for its programmes.

Bex: thinking about professional curiosity we should continue to gather information about the client as our work with them progresses.

Sally Hammill: would the third option allow us to not over commit – practitioners may not always be able to gather this information.

Anna Baker Cresswell (in chat): Is there an assumption that practitioners are employed by the organisation where the programme is being delivered? I am aware of practitioners who deliver HT in care homes etc as self-employed.

Ben: this resonates with our experience in terms of levels information provided by referrers or at the start of a client attending a programme.

Fiona suggested that we could split the clause under this standard into two elements: practitioners commit to finding out more about the clients, and also finding out more about the policies of the organisation.

Ben: we could pull out some of the standards which are typically organisation responsibilities, and have a statement around those who are self-employed and those working in organisations.

Clare Farley: after hearing this discussion I feel that the first option is most appropriate but we can add caveats/statements around those who are self-employed/working for an organisation.

Bex: could registrants be provided with support e.g. assessment and referral documents. Ben: this could come from other support organisations or from the Association – to be discussed.

Final summary from Ben: Thank you to everyone. Please do complete the survey with regard to the Code of Ethics. At the last meeting we discussed increasing the use of Working Groups, and reducing the forums, so our plan for next year is to hold two forums as follows:

Next forum dates for 2025: 8th April & 7th October 6.30 – 8pm – links are now available on the Trellis page: [Professional Development | Trellis](#)