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MOVING INTO INDEPENDENT PRACTICE – A NON-EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE FOR EPs

Please note: This does not constitute standalone guidance, and readers may wish to seek more comprehensive advice from either the British Psychological Society, the Association of Educational Psychologists, or another source. Aspen Psychology Services Ltd. will not be liable for any acts or omissions of the practitioner.

If you are thinking of moving into independent practice, you may find the following checklist and questions helpful:

Professional Indemnity Insurance

You will need to arrange your own professional indemnity insurance to cover the provision of psychological services.

Registration with the Information Commissioner's Office

As you will be holding and managing confidential information, you will need to register with the ICO. There is a fee for this.

Data Protection & file storage

You will need to ensure that you are aware of, and have regard to, your responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You will need a lockable filing cabinet at home for storing any paper records, will need to obtain an encrypted password-protected flash drive for electronic files (or secure cloud storage with, ideally, two-factor authentication), and will need to have clear protocols for how you manage information.

Disclosure and Barring Service

When does your last DBS check expire? You may need to arrange for an organization to carry out a new one on your behalf. The British Psychological Society is one route for this.

Supervision

How will you arrange supervision? The British Psychological Society does not specify an exact figure, but notes that the supervision should be “proportionate to the nature and amount of work undertaken.”

Support networks

Being an independent practitioner can present many practical and emotional challenges, and you will not come into contact with other colleagues as frequently. What support networks will you establish to help you?

Trading

Will you operate as a sole trader or set up a limited company? If setting up as a company, will you set up a Social Enterprise or a Community Interest Company? You may wish to seek advice from an Accountant and websites offering information on the respective options on this point.

Payment

How will your clients pay you? Will you ask for payment (or a part of it) in advance, or invoice afterwards?

Accounts

Will you prepare your own accounts and tax returns, or will you enlist the services of an accountant? Either way, you will need mechanisms/software so that you can keep track of your income and expenditure.

Resources

What assessment tools and other equipment will you need in order to be able to carry out your functions?

Costs

What will it cost you to set up as an independent practitioner? What rate will you need to charge clients, taking into consideration the fact that you cannot engage in paid work across all hours?

Consent

How will you obtain informed consent from clients for your involvement?

Written reports

How will you present your casework documentation? Will you have a logo and/or letterhead? What will it be? What address will be visible on your reports? Do you want this to be your home address? If you set up a limited company, the registered company address will be visible to anyone who does an internet search for your company.

Marketing

Who are your target clients? How will you reach them?

Pension

You may wish to consult with an Accountant or Independent Financial Advisor about your pension arrangements.

Work-life balance

Working independently can enable you to manage your diary in a way that suits you. At the same time, it is hard work; as well as the actual casework, there are the added demands of e.g. contracting, negotiating, invoicing, administration, tracking finances, business development, etc.

Ethical trading

The BPS/DECP has a freely-downloadable resource on this theme. Just visit the BPS online store and search for 'Ethical trading'.