



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte  
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh  
Regulating Health +  
Social Care Professionals

Health and Social Care Professionals Council

# Public Stakeholder Consultation Council Framework Standards of Proficiency and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Council Framework Pre-Registration Requirements: The Basics</b>	<b>4</b>
What are Council Framework Documents?	4
What are the Standards of Proficiency?	4
What are the Standards of Proficiency used for?	5
What is the Criteria for Education and Training Programmes?	6
What is the Criteria for Education and Training Programmes used for?	6
Relationship between the Standards and Criteria	7
How are Council's Framework pre-registration education and training requirements used?	7
<b>Chapter 2: Council's Approach to the Review Process</b>	<b>8</b>
How was this review undertaken?	8
<b>Chapter 3: Principles-Based Regulation</b>	<b>11</b>
Choosing a Regulatory Model	11
What is Principles-Based Regulation?	11
Why adopt a Principles-Based Approach?	12
<b>Chapter 4: Standards of Proficiency: What's Changed?</b>	<b>13</b>
Structure of the revised Framework Standards of Proficiency	13
Language: Reflecting Holistic Practice	14
Language: Active Verbs	14
<b>Chapter 5: Draft Revised Criteria for Education and Training Programmes: What's Changed?</b>	<b>15</b>
Revised Structure	15
What is each Criterion looking for?	16
Understanding the Outcome for each Criterion	16
Language: Clarity and Consistency	17
<b>Consultation: Have Your Say</b>	<b>18</b>

# Introduction

CORU is Ireland's multi-profession health and social care regulator. Our role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence through the statutory registration of professionals practising the professions designated in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). CORU is comprised of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and 12 Registration Boards.

While each health and social care profession we regulate has its own distinct professional character and identity, there are areas of commonality across them. As such, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council sets what are known as Framework documents which are adopted by each Registration Board and tailored to reflect and meet the needs of each profession.

One area that Council establishes Framework documents for is the setting of pre-registration education and training requirements: the threshold professional standards future registrants are expected to demonstrate on entry to the register to ensure safe and effective care and the criteria that education providers seeking approval for professional programmes are expected to meet.

In its most recent *Statement of Strategy, 2022-2026*, Council committed to:



## Strategic Priority 5:

We will anchor our regulatory interventions in evidence informed research and insights

### Strategic Priority 5.2:

Review our education standards, codes and guidance to reflect changing contexts of practice, professional practice and emerging evidence and research; and

### Strategic Priority 5.3:

Review our Criteria for Education and Training Programmes and our processes for approval and monitoring education and training programmes for entry to our registers.

Working towards meeting these strategic priorities, Council undertook an extensive review and revision process during 2022 and 2023 that combined reviewing contemporary evidence-informed academic literature with an understanding of contemporary health and social care practice in Ireland, along with engagement with national and international regulatory and education quality assurance experts and focused engagement with key users of the documents, including service users.

Council has prepared draft revised Framework Standards of Proficiency and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes and has launched a public consultation on these draft documents.

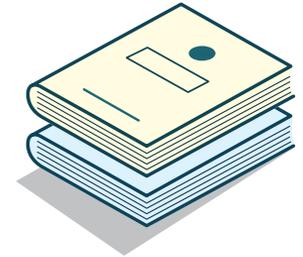
This public consultation is an opportunity for all stakeholders to provide feedback to Council on these drafts as it works towards finalising both Framework documents.

This eBook resource aims to support stakeholders in engaging with this consultation process by providing detail around the background and context to the review process and identifying the key changes proposed by Council to its Framework documents.



# Chapter 1

## Council Framework Pre-Registration Requirements: The Basics



### What are Council Framework Documents?

As a multi-professional regulator, CORU currently has responsibility for the statutory regulation of 12 health and social care professions

While each profession has its own distinct character, practice and identity, there are naturally areas of commonality across them. For example, the ability to be able to communicate effectively with service users or work with colleagues across different disciplines in the delivery of high quality, service user centred care or treatment are required of all health and social care professionals.

Reflecting this, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council establishes what are known as *Framework* documents which capture these areas of commonality.

One of the areas where Council establishes *Framework* documents is in the setting of pre-registration education and training requirements.

These requirements are divided into two documents:

- *Framework Standards of Proficiency*; and
- *Framework Criteria for Education and Training Programmes*

### What are the Standards of Proficiency?

*Standards of Proficiency* articulate the threshold knowledge, skills and professional attributes which are required of all entrants to the professional register. This means that the standards are set at the entry level of competence needed to enable a person to practise autonomously and safely and, in so doing, keep the public safe. They are comprised of:

- **Knowledge Based Requirements:** describe the elements of theoretical or learned knowledge required for the safe practice of the profession; and
- **Skills Based Requirements:** describe the practical or skills-based application of knowledge and learning.

The *Standards* form a foundational pillar in CORU's regulatory system. It works together with the *Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics* and *Continuing Professional Development* – both of which all registrants must adhere to – to ensure the safe practice of practitioners and, through this, ensure the protection of the public.

## Key Regulatory Pillars



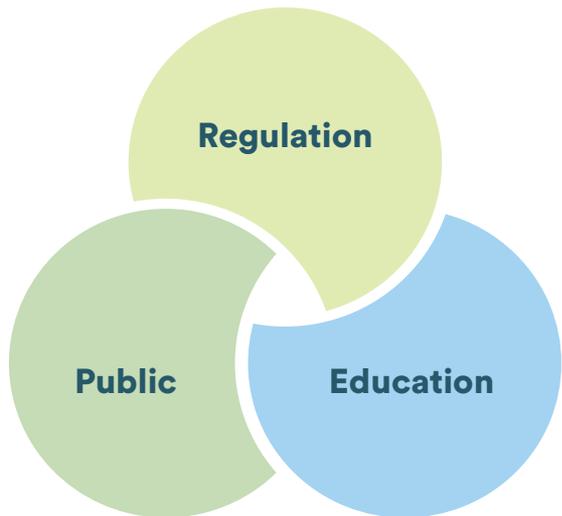
Standards of  
proficiency



Code of professional  
conduct and ethics



Continuing Professional  
Development



## What are the Standards of Proficiency used for?

The standards are used in three principal settings:

- **Regulation:** they set the minimum level of knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required to enter the professional register. All applicants – from Ireland and internationally – must demonstrate achievement of **all** the standards as part of the registration process.
- **Education:** education providers that prepare students to practise the profession upon graduation – and seek approval for their programmes from the Registration Board – use the standards to design their education and training programmes.
- **Public:** the standards help the public understand the threshold level of service they can expect from a registered health and social care professional.

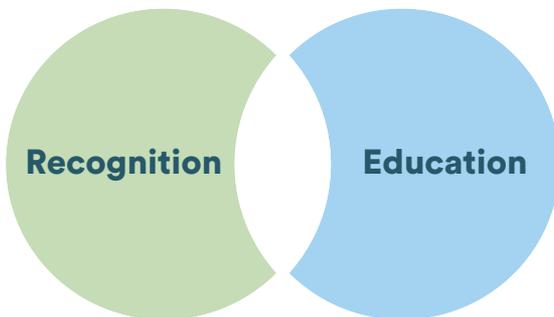
## What is the Criteria for Education and Training Programmes?

The *Criteria for Education and Training Programmes* identify the design and management requirements that an education provider must meet in order to ensure that its programme can consistently produce graduates that meet the *Standards of Proficiency*.

By ensuring that an education and training programme meets the *Criteria*, an education provider is demonstrating there are satisfactory systems and mechanisms in place to ensure students graduating from the programme have achieved the knowledge, skills and professional attributes required to practise proficiently, safely and autonomously upon entry to a professional register.

### What is the Criteria used for?

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## What is the Criteria for Education and Training Programmes used for?

The *Criteria* is used in two settings:

- **Education:** education providers seeking approval for their education programmes must demonstrate to a Registration Board how it meets all the *Criteria*. It must meet these requirements in order to evidence how it ensures each student who completes the programme has achieved the *Standards of Proficiency*; and
- **Recognition of International Applications:** there are two specific criteria concerning the Level of Qualification for Entry to the Register and the total number of practice placement hours completed during the course of training that are used by Registration Boards in assessing qualifications held by an international applicant.

## Relationship between the Standards and Criteria

The *Standards* and the *Criteria* work together to ensure the training of future graduates prepares competent professionals ready for professional practice. In placing a robust quality assurance process around an education programme that ensures the achievement of the *Standards*, there can be confidence that future graduates emerge from a programme prepared for safe and autonomous practice.

## How are Council's Framework pre-registration education and training requirements used?

Each Registration Board sets its own Standards and Criteria. These are established through a two-stage process through which the Board:

- **Stage One:** adopts Council's Framework Standards and Framework Criteria; and
- **Stage Two:** tailors both documents to reflect the identity and practice of the profession.

In this way the pre-registration education and training requirements for each profession encompass what is common across all health and social care professions and what is specific to each profession.



# Chapter 2

## Council's Approach to the Review Process

Council's review of its pre-registration education and training requirements addresses three distinct, but interrelated components:

- changes in health and social care delivery;
- developments in curriculum and assessment design; and
- regulatory trends and practice.

Each of these areas is constantly changing and, as such, it is vital that future health and social care professionals are prepared to practise safely and effectively in this evolving environment.

It is for this reason that Council reviews its *Framework Standards* and *Criteria* on a cyclical basis, usually between every 5 and 7 years. Council previously updated both Framework documents in 2015.

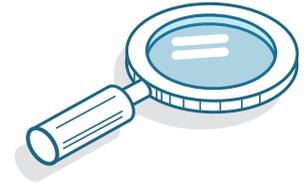
### How was this review undertaken?

Recognising the rapid and significant changes across the health and social care, educational and regulatory sectors, Council has been keen to ensure that the views of all key stakeholders have been sought and included as part of ensuring an open, transparent and collaborative research process.

### This process included:

- a review of contemporary evidence-informed academic literature, including the identification of international trends in pre-registration education and training requirements;
- a review of comparator international framework standards and criteria for health and social care professionals;
- engagement with national and international health and social care regulators;
- issuing questionnaires to registrants and service users;
- facilitated focus groups with all stakeholder groups who use the *Standards*; and
- holding structured interviews with key stakeholder groups who use the *Criteria*.

Through this process, Council identified the following key issues that shaped its approach to its revision and review of both the *Framework Standards* and *Framework Criteria*.



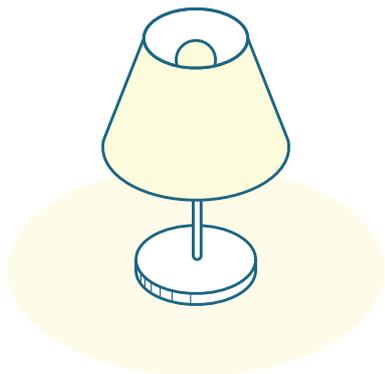
# 1 Responding to Changes in Health and Social Care Practice

The implementation of Sláintecare, is driving significant transformation in the delivery of health and social care services through the transition towards primary and community-based care models nationwide. The skills, knowledge and professional attributes of future health and social care professionals will play an essential role in the implementation of Sláintecare.

Reflecting on the role of future registrants in this evolving environment, Council considered the key areas of knowledge and skills to support its implementation.

- **Role of the Service User in the Delivery of Care:** ensuring that future practitioners recognise the central role the service user has in relation to the care they receive, emphasising the concepts of transparency, open disclosure, human rights and informed consent.

- **Digital Transformation and Social Media:** ensuring that future professionals have the skills, flexibility and adaptability to use new technological solutions in service delivery and can recognise and manage how social media impacts professional practice and conduct.
- **Interprofessional Practice:** fostering an understanding of interdisciplinary working and the ability to work with other professionals in delivering safe and effective care for service users.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** ensuring that future practitioners are able to critically assess the context and circumstances presented to them, analysing complex information in order to make effective decisions in the best interests of service users.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** ensuring that future practitioners are prepared to work in an increasingly multicultural society and work sensitively and inclusively with people and groups made up of diverse social, racial or ethnic backgrounds and identities.



## 2 Responding to Changes in Education

The design of curricula and assessment strategies in third level education have increasingly moved towards articulating *Learning Outcomes*, which focus on *what a student should know, understand and be able to do as a result of completing a process of learning*.

This regulatory approach shifts learning from a sometimes rigid and prescriptive process that can, as a result, lack creativity in its delivery, towards recognising teaching and learning in a holistic way, placing emphasis on the skills, knowledge and competence of the student following the learning process, allowing for flexibility in how a student is able to demonstrate this learning.

## 3 Regulatory Information and the Prevention of Harm

An increasingly important focus in regulatory practice is considering how best to use the information that a regulator has – in particular, complaints and fitness to practise data – to help identify trends and attempt to intervene to prevent harms from happening. This is what is known as *upstream regulation*.

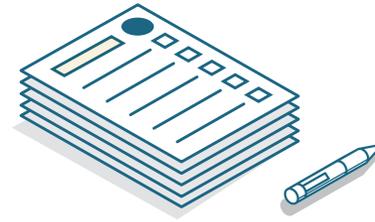
Characterised as a preventive approach, it offers a way through which mitigations against common complaints can be built into the education and training of future practitioners.

The adoption of this approach by Council reflects its concern in establishing and promoting public protection at the earliest opportunity, ensuring that it – in as far as it can – prevents harm to the public.



# Chapter 3

## Principles-Based Regulation



Considering the rapid and ever-evolving changes in both the health and social care and educational environments, and international trends in professional regulation, Council made the decision to modify its approach around how it articulated its pre-registration education and training requirements.

### Choosing a Regulatory Model

There are two overarching regulatory approaches in articulating pre-registration education and training requirements:

- **Rules Based Regulation:** which focuses on prescribing rigid requirements that identify the *inputs* required to achieve a particular standard (i.e. identifying **how** something is achieved); and
- **Principles Based Regulation:** which focuses on identifying the higher-level *output* of learning (i.e. **what** an applicant to the register is able to do).

Council previously, in its 2015 Framework, used a *hybrid* model, combining both the rules and principles-based approaches.

In its revised Framework *Standards and Criteria*, Council has taken the decision to use, in as far as possible, **the principles-based regulatory model**.

### What is Principles-Based Regulation?

Principles-based regulation is concerned with articulating high-level regulatory standards that shift focus from the process by which the standard is met (the how) to the desired **outcome** of the standard (the what).

In setting these high-level outcomes, principles-based regulation clearly defines and articulates concrete statements of achievement which must be met.

It allows the regulator to set the standard while also allowing for flexibility in demonstrating how this standard is achieved.

# Why adopt a Principles-Based Approach?

## Flexibility and Autonomy for Education Providers

In articulating the outcome of learning, education providers are able to find the most efficient way to achieving this. This facilitates innovation and creativity in how education and training programmes are designed and delivered.

## Formation of the Proficient Professional

Shifting emphasis from *how* to *what* is to be achieved, principles-based regulation focuses on the progressive formation of students who are able to adapt to evolving circumstances and understand their profession and practice holistically.

## Regulatory Agility

By virtue of its flexibility, principles-based regulation is agile and allows scope to respond to emerging changes and developments in the practice of health and social care. In this way, pre-registration education requirements do not run the risk of going 'out of date'.

## Alignment with the Code

There is a connection between the pre-registration and post-registration phases of a registrant's professional journey. The current *Framework Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics* articulates post-registration standards as principles. Adopting the same regulatory framework for pre-registration standards allows for greater alignment between these key regulatory pillars.

## Streamlining and Clarity

A principles-based approach, by focusing on the high-level outcome required removes duplication of requirements and allows for clearer articulation of requirements.

# Chapter 4

## Standards of Proficiency: What's Changed?

### Structure of the revised Framework Standards of Proficiency

The revised draft *Framework Standards* retains the same five domain structure as the current *Framework Standards*.

Under each domain, the standards are now streamlined and are articulated as principles-based requirements focusing on the outcome of learning – what a graduate must be able to do in order to practise safely.

The revised standards capture the professional knowledge, skills and behaviours needed of future practitioners entering professional life, working in a rapidly changing health and social care landscape.

### Structure of the Framework Standards



## Language: Reflecting Holistic Practice

Articulated as principles-based, each revised standard is structured to highlight the inherent relationship between knowledge and skill in professional practice. Each standard statement is articulated to encompass the *three key components* of the learning that a future registrant must have for safe practice, demonstrating the holistic nature of a professional's practice:

- the **knowledge** element required to meet the standard;
- the **skill** element that flows from the application of this knowledge; and
- the **values and professional behaviours** that underpin the delivery of safe and effective practice.



## Language: Active Verbs

The revised *Standards* are articulated using **active verbs**, which can be more easily and clearly assessed in terms of student achievement.

This emphasises the shift in principles-based regulation towards focusing on the outcome of a student's learning and which, when all the standards are taken together, identifies a proficient professional ready for practice.



# Chapter 5

## Draft Revised Criteria for Education and Training Programmes: What's Changed?

### Revised Structure

Council has revised the Criteria structure and reduced the existing six criteria into four, by thematically organising the various functions and elements required to design, deliver and manage an education and training programme.

Most noticeable is the removal of a distinct practice placement criterion. Instead, practice education requirements have been integrated into the revised criterion on how the programme is designed and delivered and the criterion concerned with programme management and quality assurance processes. This highlights and emphasises the role of practice education as an integrated and essential component of curriculum design and assessment.



## What is each Criterion looking for?

- **Criterion 1: Level of Qualification** is concerned with the level on the National Framework of Qualifications that the programme must be designed to meet.
- **Criterion 2: Programme Design and Delivery** is concerned with how the programme is designed (i.e. that it is evidence informed, that the *Standards of Proficiency* are embedded, that there are opportunities for interprofessional learning) and how this designed programme is delivered (i.e. the mechanisms and structures in place to deliver the curriculum)
- **Criterion 3: Assessment** is concerned with the assessment strategies and methods used to assess whether a student has achieved the *Standards of Proficiency*
- **Criterion 4: Programme Governance, Management and Quality Assurance** is concerned with the overarching institutional and programme level structures in place that ensure the ongoing quality assurance of the programme.

## Understanding the Outcome for each Criterion

In order to assist users of the criteria with understanding the objective of each overarching criterion, a clear '*criterion statement*' has been introduced. This statement explains at a broad level what the overall, intended outcome of the criterion is.

### Criterion One

The level of the programme is sufficient to deliver the standards of proficiency

### Criterion Two

Programme design and delivery enable students to achieve the standards of proficiency

### Criterion Three

Assessment is fair, valid and reliable to ensure successful students meet the standards of proficiency

### Criterion Four

Programme governance, management and quality assurance processes are effective in delivering a sustainable, high quality programme

## Language: Clarity and Consistency

To ensure greater clarity for users, the revised *Criteria* has been drafted to:

- **Remove ambiguous language** such as ‘should’;
- ensure that **language** such as ‘appropriate’, ‘effective’, ‘mechanism’ and ‘process’ is **used clearly and consistently**;
- consistently **refer to the *Standards of Proficiency*** highlighting and emphasising the role the *Criteria* has in ensuring there are appropriate systems in place to ensure students’ consistent achievement of the *Standards*;
- **reduce the length and complexity of criteria** by adopting a principles-based articulation of requirements, where appropriate and possible;
- **reduce duplication** through the revised structure and adoption of a principles-based approach; and
- include the provision of a **revised and updated glossary** to support understanding of the criteria.





Have  
your say!

## Stakeholder Consultation

**Council's draft Framework Standards of Proficiency and draft Criteria for Education and Training Programmes are available to access on [www.coru.ie](http://www.coru.ie)**

You can access the consultation questionnaires and all relevant information on the CORU website: [www.coru.ie](http://www.coru.ie)

The consultations are open for feedback from **19 February 2024 until 10 May 2024**