

Strictly Private and Confidential

**CORU SANCTION HEARING HELD PURSUANT TO SECTION 66 OF THE HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS ACT 2005 ("THE ACT")**

Name of Registrant: Anna Marie Stack Rivas

Registrant in Attendance: No

Registration Board: Physiotherapist Registration Board

Register: Physiotherapist

Registration No: PT031856

Date of Meeting: 18 June 2026 & 25 June 2026

Legal Assessor: Brian Storan BL

Appearances:

For the Registrar: Hannah Unger, Solicitor, FieldFisher Solicitors

For the Registrant: Registrant not in attendance

DECISION OF COUNCIL

The decision of the Council having carefully considered all of the material facts before it; having carefully considered submissions made by Ms Unger on behalf of the Registrar; and having carefully considered the report of the committee of inquiry dated 21 April 2026, Council has decided to direct the board to impose on the Registrant, the following disciplinary sanctions:

- I. Censure;
- II. The attachment of conditions to her registration [*that the Registrant shall refrain from holding herself out as a healthcare professional/physiotherapist when expressing views in public in relation to the efficacy and/or necessity of public health guidelines, including but not limited to the efficacy and/or necessity of vaccinations*]; and,
- III. The suspension of her registration for a period which will end upon the presentation of evidence of compliance with the condition [that she attends an approved course in *Ethics and Professionalism for Healthcare Professionals*.]

REASONS:

Decision to proceed in the absence of the Registrant:

The Council carefully considered all of the materials before it, including the history of the

Registrant's lack of meaningful engagement with the process at the committee stage; a careful consideration of evidence that the Registrant was suitably notified of the Council meeting; and evidence that the Registrant had opportunities both to attend the hearing before the Council and to provide any submissions to the Council. The Council was satisfied that the Registrant was properly served with notice and had voluntarily absented herself.

Following those careful considerations, the Council was satisfied that it was necessary and appropriate to proceed with the hearing in the absence of the Registrant because of the Council's pressing function to sufficiently protect the public, uphold the standards of the profession and maintain public confidence in the profession and its regulations.

Decision on directing sanction:

The Council carefully considered the report of the Professional Conduct Committee dated 21 April 2026, all the materials before it and the submissions on behalf of the Registrar.

The Council considers it necessary and appropriate to increase the sanction recommended by the Committee. The repeat nature of the conduct in question and the Registrant's demonstrable lack of insight are amongst the factors taken into account

The Council carefully considered and took into account the overarching objective of protecting members of the public, the public interest in maintaining confidence in the profession, the seriousness of the applicant's misconduct and the issue of proportionality.

The Council thus carefully considered the report of the committee and all of the other materials before it in its decision on the appropriate sanction which achieves those objectives, whilst bearing in mind the need for a sanction to be fair and proportionate and no more punitive than is necessary. The Council also acknowledges that the primary purpose of sanction is not to punish the Registrant but recognises that imposing sanction may and is likely to have a punitive effect.

The Council gave careful and sustained consideration to the constitutional protection of freedom of expression throughout its deliberations. However, in identifying herself as a health care worker at the time and in the context of her statements the Registrant spoke from a position of authority on healthcare matters and thereby elevated the purported reliability and trustworthiness of her public statements. In light of the scientific consensus, the Council endorses the Committee's findings that her statements were misinformed, misleading, alarmist, reckless and potentially dangerous in that the Registrant identified herself as a healthcare worker in seeking to influence members of the public to reject public health and vaccine guidelines and thereby placed the public at risk.

The Council considered that sanction should reflect the serious view taken of the conduct in question, so as to deter the Registrant from repeating the conduct. The Council also considered that the appropriate sanction should be sufficiently condign to reflect the gravity of the conduct and to underscore its seriousness to other members of the profession.

In its decision on directing sanction, the Council adopted an incremental, graduated approach pursuant to section 66(1) of the 2005 Act (as amended). The Council commenced its deliberations by considering the least permitted sanction on censure pursuant to section 66 and thereafter proceeded through the list of sanctions until the Council found the sanctions that it considered most proportionate to the conduct in question, having regard to all relevant matters.

Following the adoption of that graduated approach, the Council again reconsidered all of the circumstances, including the Committee's report and recommendations so as to afford the Registrant as much leniency as possible.

The Council considers its decision on directing the augmented sanction of conditional suspension, coupled with censure with conditions are necessary and appropriate so as to maintain the integrity of the profession and to allow the public to have confidence both in the profession and the disciplinary processes governing the profession.

In this regard the Council had regard to proportionality and the sanction guidelines.

Even affording every allowance for the mitigating factors, taken both individually and cumulatively and affording the Registrant as much leniency as possible in the circumstances, given the repeated underlying conduct and the findings made by the Committee, the Council is satisfied that the Committee's recommended sanction of censure coupled with a condition that she refrain from referencing her professional background whilst expressing views in public as the efficacy and/or necessity of public health guidelines relating to Covid-19 would not be sufficient to protect the public, uphold public confidence in the profession, including its disciplinary processes, or reassure the public as to the professional standards to be upheld. Nor would it be sufficient to deter the Registrant or other members of the profession from engaging in conduct similar to that underlying the findings in this case.

The Council is satisfied that only conditional suspension and the attachment of particular conditions to the Registrant's registration is the appropriate sanction, coupled with a censure. This is necessary and appropriate to mark the Council's serious disapproval of the Registrant's conduct and the findings made by the Committee.

The Council is satisfied that conditional suspension combined with the attachment of conditions to registration, coupled with censure are the necessary and proportionate sanctions.

A factor in the Council's consideration that conditional suspension is necessary arises from the Registrant's failure to comply with her previous undertaking to complete a course in ethics and professionalism; an aggravating factor which was not apparent before the Committee of Inquiry.

The terms of the conditional suspension, attachment of conditions to registration and censure are designed to protect the public, ensure that the Registrant can return to practice and ensure that the conduct underlying the findings is not repeated.

The Council considers the directed sanctions to be necessary so as to deter the Registrant or other members of the profession from engaging in conduct similar to that underlying the findings in this case.

The Council further considers the increased sanction of suspension to be unavoidably necessary for the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and its regulatory processes.

The Council had regard to following background circumstances:

Aggravating factors:

- (i) The Registrant made the statements the subject of the allegations at a time when she was already the subject of a complaint to CORU for making similar statements in public.
- (ii) The complaints were not confined to an isolated incident.
- (iii) The Registrant expressly indicated her awareness, at the time of making the statements, that she was crossing the boundary between her private and professional life.

- (iv) There is no evidence of any insight on the part of the Registrant into her conduct. This is demonstrable by her failure to engage with CORU or the disciplinary process in a meaningful way.
- (v) Findings were made against the Registrant in respect of an earlier similar complaint in *complaint C245*. The Registrant was censured and conditions attached. Those included a condition that the Registrant undergo a course or courses on professionalism and ethics. That relevant previous undertaking was accepted on 9 April 2021. There were materials before the Council to demonstrate that the Registrant has not completed a relevant course on professionalism and ethics.
- (vi) The Registrant carefully avoided describing herself as a physiotherapist or HSE employee when she made the relevant statements; however, she identified herself as a healthcare professional.

Mitigating factors:

- (vii) The complaints, while inquired into separately, were made by the same now deceased Complainant. The complaints were not made by a patient of the Registrant or her employer. The complaints relate to very similar conduct and could have been considered together.
- (viii) There is no suggestion that the Registrant is anything other than competent in her practice as a physiotherapist.
- (ix) The passing of time since the particular healthcare guidelines associated with the COVID 19 pandemic were in effect and the absence of further complaints against the Registrant in the intervening period.

Decision to depart from the Committee's recommendations:

Overall, the Council considers that its decision on directing sanction is necessary, appropriate and proportionate so as to maintain public confidence in the profession and the regulatory process, to uphold the standards of the profession of physiotherapy and so as to protect the public.

The departure from the sanction recommended by the Committee is necessary, appropriate and proportionate given the repeat nature of the offending and the Registrant's demonstrated lack of insight.

The Registrant demonstrated a degree of contempt for the professional regulatory process as was illustrated by remarks made in the context of the complaint in Case C-366, where stated:

"Hi Everybody. I'm delighted to speak although I'll probably be struck off after this. I want to talk about informed consent which is very lacking right now in our health system and it actually disgusts me... I worked in the healthcare system for over 20 years. I used to be a healthcare assistant.... I've spoken a few times and my registration board don't like what I'm saying. ..."

The Council considers that the conscious, repeat nature of the offending conduct in the teeth of the previous censure and attachment of conditions on registration, and in careful consideration of all of the background circumstances, requires an increase on the sanction recommended by the Committee.

In the context of the previous, similar complaint against the Registrant, Council had considered that a course in *Ethics and Professionalism for Healthcare Professionals* would provide the Registrant an opportunity to explore and understand the impact of her behaviours, the Code of Conduct for the profession and requirements of ethical considerations in professional practice. Council considers that this requirement is still pertinent and would form a basis for the development of the Registrant's insight.

The Council thus considers that the increased sanction of conditional suspension for a period up until the Registrant provides evidence of completion of an appropriately certified course in *Ethics and Professionalism for Healthcare Professionals* is necessary so as to maintain public confidence in the profession and the regulatory process and so that the Registrant can have the opportunity to fulfil the undertaking previously provided, and develop insight into her conduct and its impact on the profession.

Decision on publication in the public interest:

Having carefully considered the issue of the publication of the transcripts of the proceedings of the Committee of inquiry, the Council considers it necessary and appropriate to publish appropriately redacted transcripts.

Having carefully considered the issue of the publication of the report of the Committee, the Council considers it necessary and appropriate to publish an appropriately redacted report.

The Council considers that publication is necessary in the public interest to maintain transparency, to foster public confidence in the regulatory process, and to demonstrate the careful and thorough procedures followed throughout the inquiry.

The Council further considers that publication is necessary in the public interest to demonstrate the consistent, constructive and thorough steps taken to engage with the Registrant throughout the disciplinary process.

The Council considers that publication could manifestly illustrate the Registrant's lack of insight, lack of regard for and failure to engage with the professional regulatory process.

The publication of transcripts could also facilitate an illustration of the Registrant's perspective as set out in her written submission, to the Committee.

Out of respect for the deceased, the Council considers it appropriate to initialise the deceased Complainant's name as [REDACTED] throughout the published materials.



Mo Flynn, Chairperson

Date: 02/07/2026

