



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Health and Social Care
Professionals Council

Statement of Strategy

2022 - 2026



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Introduction

CORU is Ireland's multi-professional health and social care regulator. Our role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence through statutory registration of health and social care professionals.

We were established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). CORU is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards, one for each profession named in our Act. We currently regulate approximately 20,000 health and social care professionals.

Registration Boards have been established and registers opened for the following professions.

- Dietitians
- Dispensing Opticians
- Medical Scientists
- Occupational Therapists
- Optometrists
- Physical Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Podiatrists
- Radiographers
- Radiation Therapists
- Social Workers
- Speech and Language Therapists

Registration Boards have also been established for Counsellors, Psychologists, Psychotherapists and Social Care Workers and we are working to open registers for these professions. The other professions that will be regulated are Clinical Biochemists and Orthoptists, though a Registration Board has not been appointed by the Minister for Health for these two professions as yet.

We will continue to progress opening registers for the remaining professions designated in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended) in this Statement of Strategy. As registers are established for remaining professions, our regulated health and social care professional registrants will grow to over 35,000.

Our Statement of Strategy 2022 - 2026 continues to build on achievements of CORU's previous statements of strategy.

Our Strategy 2022 - 2026

Purpose



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 statutory registration of health and social care professionals.

Aim



To promote high professional standards to deliver quality health and social care services and ensure public protection.



We will progress regulation of the six remaining designated professions



We will ensure regulation protects the public and supports health and social care professionals



We will build our organisational capabilities while evolving a sustainable regulatory model



We will increase awareness of our role to the public we protect and the professionals we regulate



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

← Delivering on our legislative functions →

Foreword



Mo Flynn
Chairperson,
Health and Social Care Professionals Council

CORU is playing an important role in protecting the public by setting up and maintaining new regulatory systems for the State's health and social care professions.

The importance of this work cannot be underestimated. The level of accountability and transparency demanded of health and social care professionals by patients, service users and the wider public has increased significantly in the years since CORU's establishment. This is to be welcomed as it encourages the professions to consistently deliver the highest standards of care, thereby ensuring greater protection of the public.

My priority, and that of Council, is to work with the Department of Health, the Registration Boards, our Chief Executive Officer and the Executive team to build a sustainable regulatory model that protects the public by supporting health and social care professionals dedicated to operating to the highest standards. We will further protect the public by imposing sanctions on those found guilty of poor professional performance or professional misconduct.

In 2017, CORU regulated 9,000 professionals. Today we regulate over 20,000 and will regulate over 35,000 professionals when all registers are opened for the designated professions. This growth is not without its challenges but the experience of the organisation in building new regulatory systems will be invaluable in managing our growth in the future. Our ongoing engagement with the public, registrants and other stakeholders has also given us a greater understanding of the value we provide and where we can enhance our operations further.

In looking ahead to the next five years in our organisation we must also anticipate changes in the external environment in which we operate. COVID-19 has changed, almost overnight, how health and social care services are delivered in Ireland and has shone a light on the need for robust community-based health and social care services working in partnership with acute services. Health and social care professionals have been redeployed, have taken on new roles and many are delivering diagnostic and treatment services in the community. However, the pandemic has also resulted in many vulnerable children and adults not receiving the care services they need, leading to ever-growing waiting lists. This will put added pressures on already stretched services in the future and it is essential that careful consideration is given to meeting the demands for community-based health and social care services as we move forward.

Future regulation must also be considered within the context of an ageing population, increasing numbers of people with disabilities living in the community and their changing care demands. Independent living generates demand for health and social care services necessitating new models of support and changing practices. While many older people and people with disabilities are living healthy lives, there are those who are among the most vulnerable in our society, needing greater levels of protection. This too will inform the regulation of designated professions.

As we develop a sustainable regulatory model we must be focused on ‘Right Touch Regulation’, always ensuring that regulation is proportionate, consistent, targeted, accountable and agile. But first and foremost, regulation must protect the public.

This Statement of Strategy 2022 – 2026, and the delivery of our strategic priorities, will ensure that CORU is an organisation that is responsive to these challenges and remains focused on our statutory duty to protect the public, while also being mindful of the impact of regulation on the professional. It ensures that we remain fit for purpose as Ireland’s only multi-profession regulator. Underpinning this Statement of Strategy is a commitment to continue our digital transformation programme so that we deliver on our remit in a sustainable and cost-effective way for all our stakeholders.

We cannot deliver sustainable regulation and protect the public without adequate funding. Our legislation requires that we are self-funded and Council and the Executive have consistently worked to achieve this. These efforts have been hindered by the setting of fees, as part of successive National Wage Agreements, at a level which do not cover the cost of regulation. As a result, we remain reliant on continued exchequer funding. Over the period of this Statement of Strategy we will be seeking to restore the independence of Council to set Registration and Renewal fees.

This Statement of Strategy 2022 – 2026 will guide our corporate planning as we deliver on our comprehensive and ambitious programme of work over the next five years. I wish to express my thanks to my colleagues on Council, the Registration Boards and to the staff of CORU, for their contribution to the development of this Statement of Strategy. I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the contribution of registrants, employers, professional bodies, patient advocacy groups, education providers and unions who participated in our consultation and shared their views as we formulated this strategy. I would also like to thank them for their continued support in advancing our regulatory agenda for the benefit of all Ireland’s citizens.

We also wish to thank the Minister for Health and his Department for their support and we appreciate their ongoing commitment and engagement in joining with CORU on its regulatory journey.

Finally, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the many health and social care professionals who have been at the frontline in our country’s response to the current pandemic. The codes of Professional Conduct and Ethics have never been more important in guiding their work and I want to acknowledge their commitment to their patients and service users in very difficult and stressful times.



Mo Flynn,
Chairperson
Health and Social Care
Professionals Council



Ginny Hanrahan Chief Executive Officer, CORU

CORU's mission is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional education, conduct, training and competence among CORU registrants, as outlined in our legislation, the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (the Act) (as amended).

As an organisation we are continually challenging ourselves to develop and strengthen our processes, systems and governance structures so that we achieve this mission efficiently and effectively.

Our Statement of Strategy 2017 - 2021 challenged us and is a strong foundation with many achievements for us to build upon. Perhaps most notably is that over the past four years CORU has grown to regulate over 20,000 health and social care professionals from twelve different professions.

We will progress five key strategic priorities over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy 2022 - 2026:

- **We will progress regulation of the six remaining designated professions**
- **We will ensure regulation protects the public and supports health and social care professionals**
- **We will build our organisational capabilities while evolving a sustainable regulatory model**
- **We will increase awareness of our role to the public we protect and the professionals we regulate**
- **We will anchor our regulatory interventions in evidence informed research and insights**

A digital transformation of our organisation will be central to achieving these priorities. As we scale our activities and continue to open new registers for designated professions, our most significant investment will be in the implementation of a new registration and recognition system. We will also be investing in online and digital solutions in Education, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Fitness to Practise which will allow more streamlined engagement with our stakeholders.

We will support our staff implementing new ways of working with training and development and we will continue to work within a culture of continuous improvement. Our values – Accountability, Respect and Fairness, Openness and Transparency, High Performance, Pride and Commitment and Enrichment - will continue to be reflected throughout our operations and our engagement with the public, registrants and all stakeholders.

It is very important that all our stakeholders – the general public, service users, our designated professions, the Minister for Health, the Department of Health, other relevant Governmental Departments, employers, educators, patient advocates and the wider health and social care services – have confidence in CORU. This Statement of Strategy 2022 – 2026 will help to reinforce their confidence by providing us with a robust and transparent framework in which to deliver our services and engage with all our stakeholders. Our primary focus will be to enhance the public's knowledge and experience of CORU, so they can readily access our services to check the professional registers or to make a complaint.

We hold our registrants to account through the statutory Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for their professions and through the monitoring of their involvement in continuing professional development. CORU believes that engagement in the practice of one's profession through continuous learning and ensuring one maintains resilience leads to the delivery of safer services to the public. This work also ensures the highest standards of skills and qualifications across a multidisciplinary workforce, which is one of the key ways we can have a direct impact to ensure the public have a positive and safe experience in Ireland's health and social care services.

I want to take this occasion to thank the CORU registrants who have continued to provide a high standard of care in difficult and changing circumstances, and who responded to the pandemic with agility and adaptability to meet the demands placed on the health and social care services.

In a rapidly evolving health and social care environment, as a regulator, we must remain agile so that all our actions are focused on protecting the public, while at the same time supporting registrants with risk-based, but right touch regulation. As an organisation we demonstrated our ability to respond quickly to the challenges of the pandemic and I thank our committed staff led by the senior management team, who have ensured that our operations continued uninterrupted by the move to remote working. I am very proud to lead this team of dedicated professionals.

I would also thank our Chairperson and all the members of Council, Registration Boards and Committees, who are all volunteers, for their support for the Executive team; our assessors and reviewers of education programmes and qualifications as well as our Preliminary Proceedings, Appeals and Fitness to Practise Committees. I particularly wish to acknowledge the work of the Professional Regulatory Unit in the Department of Health who have worked in partnership with CORU to advance our work.

We look forward to implementing the strategy developed by Council which sets out the roadmap for CORU over the next five years as we continue to protect the public and we implement robust regulation of Ireland's designated health and social care professions.



Ginny Hanrahan,
Chief Executive Officer and Registrar
CORU

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision, Mission and Values continue to hold true and underpin our Statement of Strategy 2022-2026, as well as our day to day activities that serve to protect the public.

Vision: CORU has the confidence and recognition of both the public and health and social care professionals in its processes and standards of regulation.

Mission: To protect the public by promoting high standards of professional education, conduct, training and competence amongst registrants of the designated professions.



Values: CORU seeks to reflect a set of values that underpin and support the way it works and interacts with all its stakeholders. Our values are central to the fulfilment of our mission and vision.

Accountability for our processes, decisions and our professional conduct.

Respect and Fairness in our interactions with the public, professionals and other stakeholders.

Openness and Transparency in our communications and dealings with the public and the professionals.

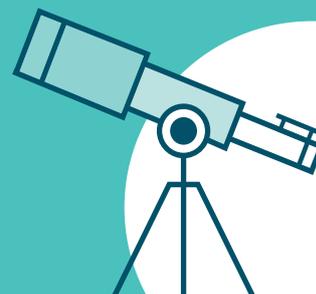
High Performance Levels as an organisation in terms of overall effectiveness, value for money, efficiency of operations and governance.

Pride and Commitment in delivering appropriate outcomes relating to safety and standards for the public and professionals concerned.

Enrichment of our sector by demonstrating leadership, positivity and a quality and evidence-based orientation to our work and engagement with stakeholders.

Looking Back

Achievements under our 2017 – 2021 Statement of Strategy



It is appropriate that we reflect on achievements and progress in our past Statement of Strategy 2017 - 2021 as it informs our strategic priorities in this statement of strategy.

Objective 1

Deliver on our current legislative requirements

We are committed to delivery of our current legislative requirements by continuing to establish Registration Boards and open registers for professions designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended).

Registration Boards and registrants 2016 to 2020



We opened the Register for Medical Scientists on 31 March 2019 and the Register for Podiatrists on 31 March 2021. The Social Care Workers Registration Board and Psychologists Registration Board were appointed in 2015 and 2017 respectively, and work is progressing in preparation for opening their respective registers.

The Registration Board for Counsellors and Psychotherapists was appointed in 2019 and has commenced its work towards regulating these professions. The Registration Boards for Orthoptists and Clinical Biochemists have yet to be appointed by the Minister for Health.

As each Registration Board is appointed we develop and implement standards for entry to the register.

We have maintained growing registers for Dietitians/Dieticians, Dispensing Opticians, Medical Scientists, Occupational Therapists, Optometrists, Physical Therapists, Physiotherapists, Radiographers, Radiation Therapists, Social Workers and Speech and Language Therapists/Speech Therapists. By the end of 2020 there were over 20,000 health and social care professionals registered with CORU.

We have commenced the approval and monitoring of education and training programmes and have provided a recognition route to the registers for graduates with qualifications awarded outside the state.

We have conducted CPD Audits for Social Workers, Radiographers, Radiation Therapists, Dietitians and Speech and Language Therapists in 2017, 2018 and 2020. Our CPD scheme has been reviewed, updated and approved by all Boards. Currently, 19,851 registrants have been notified of their CPD audit period, with Medical Scientists commencing their audit period in March 2021.

We manage complaints through our fitness to practise processes on an ongoing basis and continue to provide our services to registered professions. We held our first public fitness to practise hearings and enforcement of protection of title proceedings. In 2018, we successfully prosecuted two offenses relating to the sale of spectacles and contact lenses, and in 2020, we secured two convictions for the misuse of professional titles.

Year	Fitness to practise complaints	Enforcement complaints	Appeals of registration/recognition decisions
2017	33	19	13
2018	30	23	22
2019	56	34	14
2020	44	25	19



Objective 2

Deliver on our targeted regulatory outcomes through a sustainable Regulatory Model

We continue to build a sustainable model of regulation as we scale up our activities. Sustainability has two aspects for us. Firstly, an economic aspect - where funding and staff numbers are limited we continually strive for efficient and effective means of addressing risks to service user safety. The second aspect of sustainability is responsiveness – how we ensure that our activities, systems and processes respond to new developments to protect the public.

We reviewed our current governance model, with a view to enhanced efficiencies and greater agility to respond to emerging issues. A comprehensive report outlining Council's view on a sustainable model for multi-profession regulation was submitted to the Minister for Health in 2018 for consideration.

We continue to liaise closely with the Department of Health on sustainable regulation and the next phase of our development.

We have delivered significant innovations and advances, for example, we have developed an online portal for recognition of international qualifications. This has been developed, tested and is currently being implemented. An online facility for education providers as part of the approval and monitoring process is in test phase. A CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system is currently being developed for Secretariat support to Registration Boards and Council. In addition, we are piloting digital systems to facilitate virtual fitness to practise/appeals hearings.

Significant investment in our IT solutions has seen all Registration Boards and Council move to paperless meetings. We also moved to remote working in response to the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining critical business functions.

We continue to be alert to opportunities for shared services and to review our operations and processes with a view to developing more streamlined and efficient ways of working.

We engage actively in responding to research, data, risk analysis and feedback with the goal of continuous improvement of what we do and how we do it.



We continue to be alert to opportunities for shared services and to review our operations and processes with a view to developing more streamlined and efficient ways of working.

Objective 3

Deliver greater clarity in our communications

We have implemented a multi-year communications plan to enhance clarity and understanding of our regulatory model and role among key stakeholders. We have expanded our communication channels and developed a targeted communications plan to reach more stakeholder groups.

This included:

- The distribution of information leaflets to over 2,000 GPs and 1,100 Practice Nurses reaching an estimated audience of 1.2 million stakeholders per month.
- A radio advertising campaign on both national and regional radio stations. The 2018 advertisement is estimated to have reached 54.7% of all adults in Ireland, with the average person hearing the advert 7 times over the course of the campaign.
- In 2020, our public information campaign channels were expanded. We developed an online advertising campaign aimed at reaching a younger target audience.
- A targeted public information campaign on the dangers of Halloween Novelty Contact Lenses which are illegal for sale in Ireland. CORU regulates the dispensing of contact lenses. The campaign in 2017 reached a verified audience of 980,000 through online and print media. Subsequent campaigns in 2018 and 2019 were targeted at a younger demographic and were covered in a wide variety of national and regional online and print publications.
- The issuing of press releases to media outlets including national and regional newspapers, radio stations and trade media.
- Targeted communications to health and social care professionals via the CORU newsletter and website.



A new website was designed and launched in 2019. This was a significant undertaking and included developing video on demand content to help users access information quickly and seamlessly.

The website continues to be the primary source of information for the public, registrants, education providers and all stakeholders. It is constantly reviewed and updated to ensure user accessibility and to provide up to date and relevant content.

We have also established a social media presence providing us with a stronger platform for engagement with stakeholders. Our primary channels are on Twitter and YouTube and our followers continue to grow as we publish content of interest to stakeholders.

Objective 4

Maintain our focus on good governance practices

Good corporate governance practices remain a priority for CORU. We maintained this focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the agile adoption of remote working and virtual meetings, to maintain critical business functions.

We have published Council minutes available to the public on our website, in line with Council policy.

A full review of the CORU Risk Management Policy was completed in 2019. Risk is a permanent item on the Council agenda and regular relevant updates are provided to Council as well as to the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee.

We reviewed our finance policies in 2018 and improved financial procedures have been implemented and are continuously monitored. Monthly meetings take place with the Department of Health, however financial sustainability is a concern due to the current fee levels and budget constraints being applied to State Agencies.

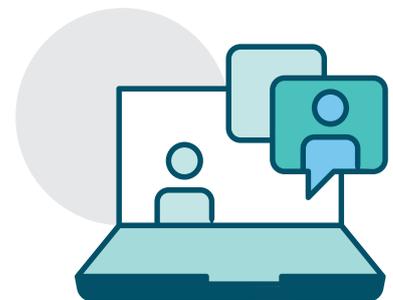
We continue to invest in the training of Council, Registration Boards and Committee members to develop skills.

Council also participates in an annual self-assessment and evaluation, in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. Recommendations arising are actioned by the Executive, as required.

We are continuously working to optimise the number, frequency and agendas of governance meetings but ultimately our current regulatory model dictates the frequency of such meetings. Additional delegations to the CEO/Registrar have been approved by Council and Registration Boards, to assist with workload at meetings.

We will respond to, and prepare for, any planned reforms to the regulatory environment in Ireland, should this arise.

We maintained this focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the agile adoption of remote working and virtual meetings, to maintain critical business functions.



Objective 5

Attract, retain and grow our talent pool and knowledge

We have grown staff numbers from 45 in 2016 to 64 in 2021 and our Executive remain dedicated to achieving our strategic objectives.

We continue to be conscious of the imperative to provide staff with a safe and respectful place to work where they are empowered to deliver their objectives and contribute to the development of the organisation.

We work hard to promote a respectful culture and to keep staff members informed of developments through one to one meetings with team members, regular departmental meetings, as well as quarterly organisation wide meetings.

We review, and revise as necessary, the competency and skill mix of staff, business partners and members to ensure we are fully focused on the present and emerging challenges facing the regulation of health and social care professions in Ireland.

We continue to provide our staff with the clarity of objectives they require to do their jobs effectively through one-to-one and departmental meetings.

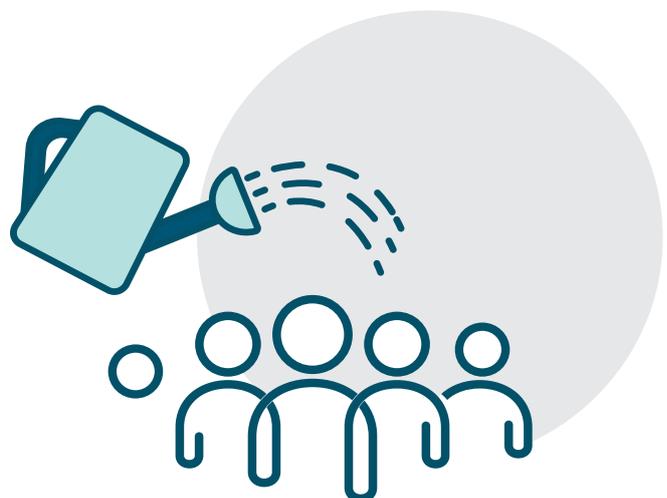
We deliver an extensive programme of training for staff, Council, Committee and Registration Board members, assessors and reviewers.

We have a very clear employee/resource value proposition to attract and retain staff (full-time and other) emphasising flexible working arrangements, training and development opportunities and a strong employer brand.

We continue to implement training aimed at building on our existing knowledge management practices.

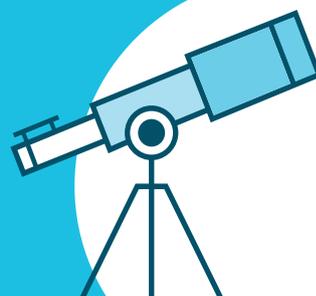
Our staff Wellbeing group continue to promote a healthy and green work environment as part of their terms of reference. A variety of charity, promotional and awareness raising initiatives are rolled out throughout each year.

We review our workforce plan annually, with a specific focus on ensuring that we have the resources to deliver a professional service to those with whom we engage.



Looking Forward

Our Operating Environment



In developing our Statement of Strategy 2022 - 2026, we reflected on how our strategic direction may be influenced and shaped by external factors and, as such, it was essential to explore the environment in which we currently operate to anticipate how our regulatory model needs to respond.

Population Demographic Changes

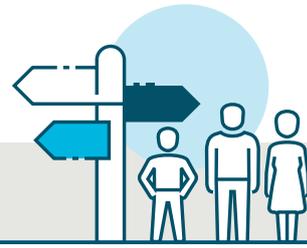


An ageing population and changing care demands are impacting health and social care provision in Ireland. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) projects that one in six of the Irish population will be aged over 65 by 2030, with a 32 – 37% increase in demand for inpatient beds and a 23 – 28% increase in day patient cases projected. In addition, physiotherapy visits are anticipated to increase by 24 – 30%, occupational therapy visits by 33 – 38% and demand for home care packages by 44 – 66%. This is reflected by the increasing demand for all health and social care professions.

Epidemiological trends, lifestyle risk factors and changes in socio-economic trends may also impact on population health outcomes. In addition, a reduction in birth rate, an increase in mental health problems, in non-communicable diseases, and in risk of rapid communicable disease spread as well as in prescriptive and non-prescriptive drug use will impact future health and social care provision.

Changing population demographics as outlined will result in **increased demands on health and social care services and in turn labour market requirements.**

Labour Mobility and Migration



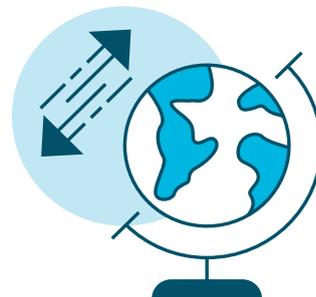
The European Commission estimate a shortfall of around one million health workers within the EU in 2020. The Department of Health highlight that emerging and accelerating global and regional shortages of healthcare professionals present a significant strategic risk to the effective functioning of the Irish health system. A shortfall in the health and social care labour force is likely to be reflected in an **increase in labour mobility and migration to meet growing demands**.

This trend is already evidenced by increasing overseas recruitment campaigns of internationally qualified professionals by statutory bodies. This is also reflected in the growing number of recognition of international qualification applications received year-on-year by CORU.

Internationally, regulatory trends indicate that older professionals with qualifications gained outside the jurisdiction, whose first language is not that of the country of residence and who are practising in isolation, are of most concern with regards to maintaining competence and/or being subject to complaint. Health profession regulators, both in Ireland and beyond, have initiated approaches to **support internationally qualified registrants** to understand national, ethical, social, legal and professional aspects of practice.

With diversification of the population, health and social care professionals must also be skilled in cultural competence to ensure effective support for service users and to reduce possible racial and ethnic disparities in the health and social care system.

Increasingly, regulators are adopting standards with regard to understanding the **diversity** of its registrants and their patients and service users and of others who interact with the regulator to ensure its processes do not impose inappropriate barriers or otherwise disadvantage people. All public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. In addition, the programme for government for public sector reform aims to increase the proportion of public and civil servants from ethnic minority backgrounds.



A shortfall in the health and social care labour force is likely to be reflected in an increase in labour mobility and migration to meet growing demands.

Health and Social Care Service Provision



Sláintecare's strategic priority is the provision of an integrated health care model, with a focus on provision of early intervention/care through inter-disciplinary community based teams. Changes in the nature and context of services will influence future skills and competences required by health and social care professionals, with increased focus on professionals working to the 'top of their license'. The professional would therefore work to the full extent of his/her education and training, rather than spending time on tasks that could effectively be carried out by others. The shift towards provision of care in the community and at home, and an increased emphasis on inter-disciplinary working and shared team responsibility will likely see an increased demand, and **evolving roles**, for health and social care professionals.

Professionals will be required to work across health and social care settings and support integrated models of care provision.

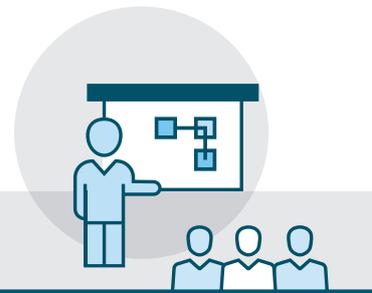
Health and social care service provision is also informed by other **Government policies** and strategies, such as those relating to children, mental health and justice. It is essential that standards for entry to practice and beyond continue to evolve in line with these changes. The shift from individual professional to shared team responsibility is also likely to impact complexity of fitness to practise complaints where issues regarding individual, team or service responsibility are likely to be to the fore.

Strategic Workforce Planning



Government policy aims to plan, build and support a health and social care workforce to deliver a programme of reform of the Irish health and social care system. One of Sláintecare's key programmes is workforce planning. It has been highlighted that data gaps have an impact on the development of the demand and capacity model to plan future service delivery. This also has implications for other Government departments' workforce planning strategies for health and social care professionals.

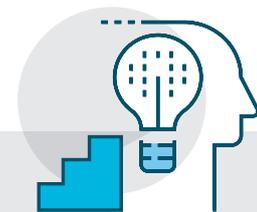
Increased recruitment, retention and utilisation of the skill mix of health and social care staff is a critical enabler of an effective healthcare system. **Strategic workforce planning for health and social care services requires data that is relevant and easily accessible.** Increasingly regulators, both national and international, are focused on gathering and providing data to Government to assist in workforce planning in support of public safety outcomes.



Changes in Education

Within the education sector, there is an increasing trend towards international partnerships and delivery of trans-jurisdictional education programmes. This has implications for CORU whose responsibility is to approve and monitor pre-registration professional education programmes in the Irish jurisdiction. The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated a rapid shift to blended learning and access to traditional practice/clinical placements has been a significant challenge.

There is an increasing trend towards delivery of co-awarded qualifications between Irish and British Universities, likely driven by the UK's decision to leave the European Union. This is a rapidly evolving area that warrants ongoing monitoring.



Technological Advances

Technological advances are rapidly evolving in health and social care services. Increased automation means that some tasks or roles may become redundant in time, whilst new areas of practice may emerge. In addition, advances in the use of assistive technology and artificial intelligence are likely to influence future health and social care provision. Registrants will increasingly **be required to be digitally proficient and able to use these new technologies in an ethical, safe and responsible manner.**

In addition, the use of web-based technology to deliver **services online** (for example, telehealth) is increasing. This allows for long-distance patient and clinician contact, care, advice, reminders, education, intervention, monitoring, and remote admissions. Whilst technology advances are broadly welcomed, it is not without risk.

COVID-19 focused attention on this issue, with many professionals required to source online technologies to deliver support and intervention, even though concerns regarding the security of online platforms were expressed. New challenges emerge with regard to monitoring safety and quality, as well as regulation of online services by professionals or services, outside the jurisdiction, delivered to service users in Ireland (for example, online counselling/psychotherapy services).



Trends in regulation

Right touch regulation, the concept of applying **the minimum regulatory force required to achieve the desired result is gaining traction internationally**. There is heightened awareness of the burden of regulation and the need to choose the appropriate and proportionate instrument for managing the risk. The principles that underpin a right-touch approach are that **regulation is proportionate, consistent, targeted, accountable and agile**.

This is reflected in the EU Directive of the European Parliament that will require a proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions by EU member states. The aim is to adopt a risk based regulatory approach that ensures labour mobility within the EU.

There is increasing **emphasis on preventing** professional misconduct or poor professional performance through paying greater attention to education standards, codes of conduct and ethics, continuing professional development, workforce development and better complaints systems to identify issues as early as possible. The aim is to address performance issues before they arise rather than dealing with them in the context of fitness to practise cases when the damage has already been done.



Legislation

The Regulated Professions (Health and Social Care) (Amendment) Act 2020 amends the five health professional regulatory Acts, in particular in relation to fitness to practise and registration. The relevant health and social care regulators must implement required changes resulting from this amendment.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, lays a statutory obligation on all public bodies in performing their functions to have regard to the need to, eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment for staff and to persons to whom it provides services and protect the human rights of staff and service users. The legislation requires the public body, having regard to its function, purpose, size and resources available to

assess, address and report on actions arising to ensure human rights and equality for employees and those using its services.

It is also likely that the Directive 2005/36/EC (as amended in 2013/55/EU), which enables the free movement of professionals within the EU will be reviewed in the coming five years. This in turn may lead to a requirement for Irish health and social care regulators to update their rules and policies, and may also require changes to our primary legislation. While CORU apply the same principles of the EU Directive to non-EU applicants for recognition of qualifications, the implications of Brexit must be closely monitored and responded to.



The COVID-19 global pandemic changed, almost overnight, how health and social care services are delivered in Ireland, placing unprecedented pressure on many services. Those working in, and returning to, frontline health and social care services are critical to the continuing provision of care during this pandemic. Health and social care professionals rose to this challenge and have continued to strive to deliver safe and effective services throughout the crisis.

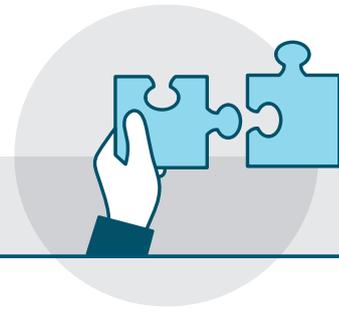
However, the redeployment of health and social care professionals, the cancellation of non-emergency procedures, as required, as well as challenges in delivery of community care services has impacted all, but in particular the most vulnerable, many of whom were unable to access services during the pandemic.

Undoubtedly, the impact of COVID-19 has lasting and long-term implications for health and social care service delivery, with increased waiting lists likely to contribute to delayed assessment, early intervention and care services. In addition, professionals themselves face greater risk of contracting the virus, increased stress and risk of burn out.

COVID-19 highlighted the need for greater agility with regard to our legislation and governance structures to respond in a time of crisis. Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 was required to facilitate temporary registration for those returning to frontline practice, amongst other emergency provisions.

It is also recognised that a possible global economic recession, alongside increased government borrowing to fund critical health and social services due to COVID-19, will likely have serious implications in the coming years with regard to public spending and the budgets of public sector bodies.

Internal Environment



CORU has established advanced regulatory management expertise, and in particular, benefited from the strong commitment of members of Registration Boards and Council to delivering on our statutory duty to protect the public. We have developed and continuously refined our key processes and systems, which has helped establish CORU's reputation as an effective and efficient regulator. This has been supported by an increase in staff numbers, the commitment and resilience of staff, as well as an effective IT infrastructure to facilitate the work of Boards and Council.

In particular, technological solutions served well in maintaining critical functions during the restrictions required due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This National Health Emergency highlighted the strength of our regulatory pillars including our Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics that facilitated deployment of registrants into new environments and our flexible Continuing Professional Development approach as registrants continued to meet CPD requirements.

However, we also recognise that CORU faces a number of challenges, not least its continuing reliance on government funding, though it had been envisaged that CORU would be self-funded by charging fees.

We are not yet at 'steady state' as we continue to work to open registers for new professions. Demands on our organisation continue to grow with six remaining professions designated within the 2005 Act to be regulated, complaints increasing in line with public awareness of CORU and the CPD scheme to be implemented for over 20,000 registrants.

Our complex governance structures, as well as the constraints of legislation, limits our agility to respond to rapid changes in the health and social care sector. The **need for greater agility** has been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many other public sector bodies, we have experienced staff turnover with loss of key knowledge and experience of our regulatory processes. This has been further impacted by recruitment challenges likely associated with staff grades.

We continue to open registers for new professions, whilst recognising that we have encountered **increasing complexities** amongst those professions. It is recognised that with these complexities, there is an increasing burden on Boards when undertaking the necessary foundational work before their registers can open.

Despite these challenges, we envisage significant opportunities as we continue to evolve and expand in the coming years. In the ten years since opening our first register, we have gained significant experience of regulatory administration.

We also continue to work in partnership with the Department of Health towards achieving a sustainable model of regulation. This includes consideration of our current governance model, as well as a viable financial strategy that takes account of our expanding and future requirements.

We also continue to identify opportunities for enhanced efficiencies, including further digitisation of our processes and systems. We have developed strong networks with both national and international regulators, sharing insights/expertise on our regulatory model, while being cognisant of emerging trends in the national and international regulatory environment.

Conclusion

In examining our operating environment, both external and internal, we have identified five key strategic priorities. These strategic priorities recognise that as we expand, we continue to evolve our regulatory approaches to ensure we deliver on our statutory duty to protect the public.

Key Strategic Priorities

CORU's role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence through statutory registration of health and social care professionals. As we continue to evolve our regulatory approaches and interventions, our statutory duty to protect the public remains our central concern and underpins our Statement of Strategy.

To deliver on our Statement of Strategy, we have identified five key strategic priorities we will progress over the next five years.





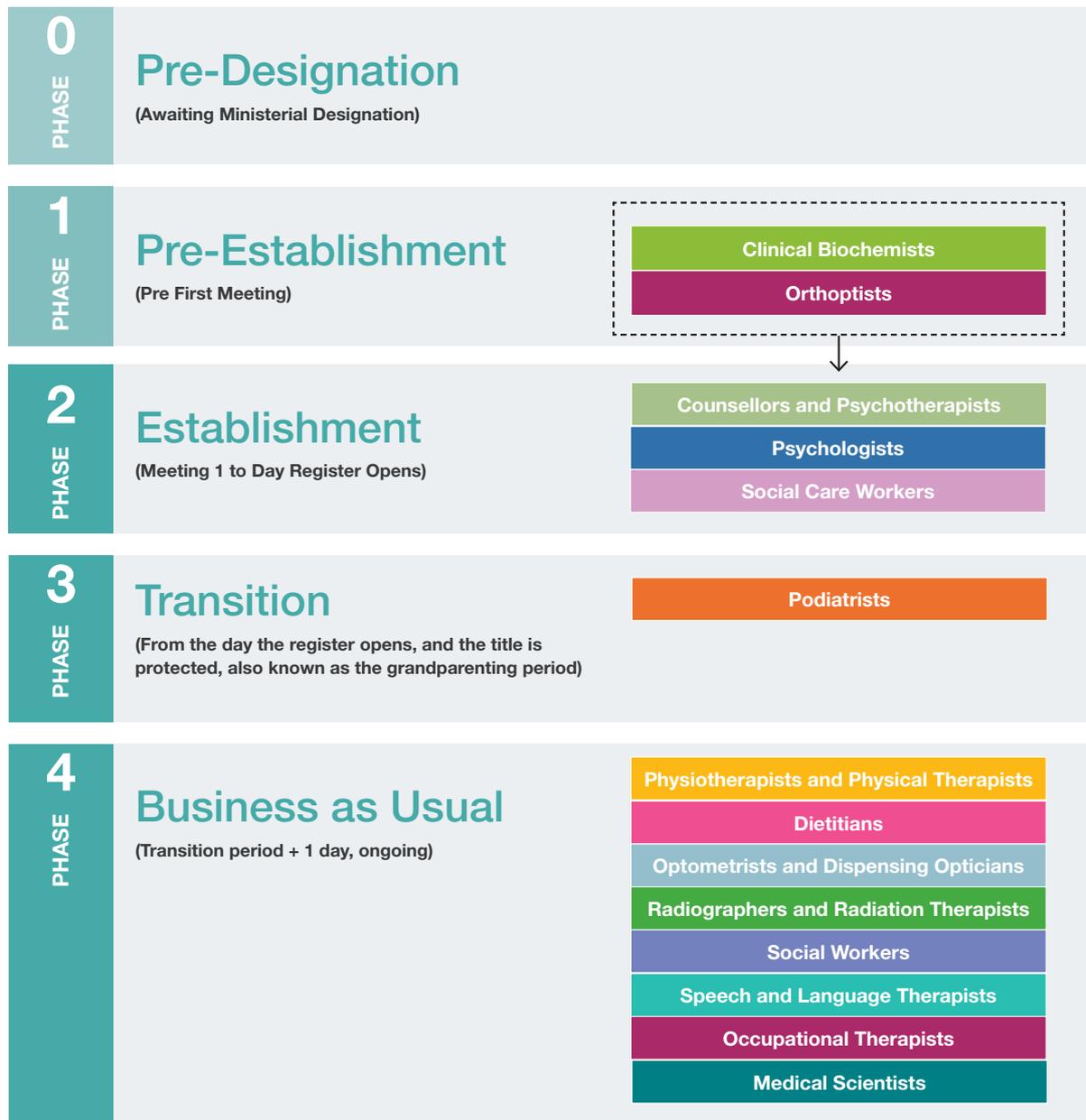
Strategic Priority 1:

We will progress regulation of the six remaining designated professions

Our key priority remains opening registers for professions designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended).

We have opened registers for eleven of the seventeen professions designated in our legislation and are committed over the lifetime of this statement of strategy to progress opening registers for the six remaining professions.

We have established Registration Boards for Counsellors, Psychotherapists, Psychologists and Social Care Workers, each working to progress opening registers for their profession. We will also liaise with the Minister and the Department of Health regarding the regulation of Clinical Biochemists and Orthoptists to **progress opening registers for these professions.**



We recognise that the opening of registers for designated professions is dependent on the Minister for Health establishing Registration Boards. We are committed to working to progress opening registers for the remaining professions, including Clinical Biochemists and Orthoptists.

We appreciate the need to balance readiness of a profession for statutory regulation and delivering on our statutory obligation to protect the public. Registration Boards, when appointed, must undertake vital work to establish the correct standards that will assure public protection. We continue to listen to and engage with the professions to ensure that this necessary foundational work is undertaken to progress opening registers for designated professions.

We will do this while continuing to provide our services to professions with established registers. We have successfully leveraged digital solutions and automated, where possible, to streamline our processes. We will continue to build on this success in delivering services for our established registers.

We aim to achieve this strategic priority through the following actions as Registration Boards move through the phases to open their registers

- 1.1 Undertake the necessary preparatory work to progress opening and maintaining registers for designated professions.**

- 1.2 Develop and implement standards for entry to registers.**

- 1.3 Commence the approval and monitoring of education and training programmes.**

- 1.4 Provide a recognition route to registers (when open) for graduates with qualifications gained outside the State.**

- 1.5 Implement mandatory Continuing Professional Development.**

- 1.6 Field and manage complaints (including Fitness to Practise activities) and enforce protection of title(s).**



Strategic Priority 2:

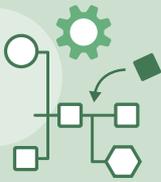
We will ensure regulation protects the public and supports health and social care professionals

A growing body of evidence highlights that encouraging and supporting registrants in their practice has a greater impact on service user safety than just dealing with the small percentage of registrants that are subject to complaint.

We will continue to protect the public by managing complaints against the few. However, to ensure that regulation protects the public and supports registrants in their practice, **we will better focus on our resources on prevention of problems in the first instance.**

We will achieve this strategic priority through the following actions

- 2.1 Increasingly shift our focus and resources to supporting all our registrants to deliver safe service user outcomes.
- 2.2 Engage with our stakeholders to achieve a better understanding of the experiences of people who interact with us and how we provide value and protection of the public.
- 2.3 Build our capacity in the areas of policy development, research, knowledge management and process review.
- 2.4 Review, research and implement a variety of methodologies to enhance registrants' engagement with regulatory codes, guidance, standards and supports to deliver safe service user outcomes.
- 2.5 Engage with our educational partners, other healthcare regulators, employers, professional associations and other key stakeholders to ensure that education standards evolve in line with changing needs of the public, service delivery models and the expanding role of health and social care professionals. This includes encouraging a focus on inter-professional learning to deliver integrated care and enhance service user outcomes.
- 2.6 Actively contribute to and collaborate with relevant bodies, such as the Health and Social Care Regulators Forum, to explore and contribute to the need for a common framework to shape how we regulate healthcare in Ireland.
- 2.7 Be prepared for and implement any legislative reforms, including the Health and Social Care Amendment Bill 2019, the Directive 2005/36/EC (as amended 2013/55/EU) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.



Strategic Priority 3:

We will build organisational capacity while evolving a more sustainable regulatory model

To ensure we are successful in achieving our strategic direction we will continue to build our organisational capacity and to evolve a more sustainable regulatory model.

This will require reform of our current regulatory model ensuring an appropriate governance and funding structure is in place. It also requires achieving greater efficiencies through increased digitisation and new ways of working and being prepared to respond to legislative reform.

We will achieve this strategic priority through the following actions

- 3.1 Plan and work towards designing a sustainable model of regulation, jointly with the Department of Health.
- 3.2 Explore further opportunities to improve efficiencies available within our current legislation, including increasing functions delegated to the CEO and/or their officials.
- 3.3 Review our current legislation regulating health and social care professionals and recommend changes to achieve a sustainable model of regulation.
- 3.4 Proactively review the structures of our organisation to allow for effective and efficient delivery of our legislative remit while building organisational agility, cross-working and a culture of ongoing change and improvement.
- 3.5 Undertake a review of our current and future funding requirements, have defined a sustainable funding model and continue to work towards achieving this.
- 3.6 Develop our workforce plan to recruit, retain, develop, align and support a skilled and knowledgeable team required to deliver on CORU's strategic priorities.
- 3.7 Review our business processes to ensure we are operating as cost-effectively as possible, including exploring opportunities to share resources and costs with other public bodies.
- 3.8 Plan and implement a transformative digital strategy to enable enhanced digitisation and new ways of working, including
 - replace the current registration system being cognisant of timelines for opening new registers and peaks in application processing,
 - implement an online facility for education providers as part of the programme approval and monitoring process and a CRM system for secretariat support to Boards and Council,
 - implement a digital solution and automate, where appropriate, Continuing Professional Development audits and Board election processes,
 - better leverage use of technology to facilitate off-site/remote working and to conduct Fitness to Practise/Appeals hearings, meetings and engagement with key stakeholders, as appropriate.



Strategic Priority 4:

We will increase awareness of our role to the public we protect and the professionals we regulate

We have made significant strides over the last five years to enhance the public's understanding, not only of the role of CORU, but also of the professions we regulate.

We have encouraged registrants to identify as CORU registered professionals, implemented public awareness campaigns and enhanced our messaging through our newsletter, social media and website.

We will continue to build on this success over the next five years. **We will promote awareness, not only of the role of CORU, but also the value of our regulated health and social care professionals and their contribution to safe and effective service delivery.**

We will achieve this strategic priority through the following actions

- 4.1** Undertake a situational awareness (baseline) survey to establish understanding of CORU's role and awareness of the value of regulation which will inform targeted communications strategy.
- 4.2** Deliver a public awareness campaign to enhance recognition of the value of regulation for the public, for registrants and to other stakeholders.
- 4.3** Enhance communication and engagement with Higher Education Institutes and health and social care students in understanding CORU's legislative remit and opportunities to engage with and consult on standards, codes and guidance.
- 4.4** Develop and deliver a communications plan targeting students of health and social care professional programmes to prepare for entering practice of a regulated profession.
- 4.5** Identify, harness and utilise CORU's expertise to contribute to key policy debates, from a regulatory perspective, including evolving models of service delivery and professionals expanding scope of practice.



Strategic Priority 5:

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

Regulation is ever evolving, as is health and social care service delivery and professional practice. **To ensure that our regulatory pillars remain appropriate and relevant to protect the public, we will anchor our regulatory interventions in evidence informed research and insights.**

OUR REGULATORY PILLARS

Standard of Proficiency

Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics

Continuing Professional Development

We will achieve this strategic priority through the following actions

- 5.1** Monitor regulatory best practice standards and insights, both nationally and internationally and ensure evidence informed regulatory interventions that target risk to public protection.
- 5.2** Review our education standards, codes and guidance to reflect changing contexts of practice, professional practice and emerging evidence/research.
- 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.
- 5.4** Manage and support the challenges arising from the Brexit process, as they relate to our regulatory remit, including the recognition of UK-gained qualifications, free movement considerations and facilitation of cross border healthcare.
- 5.5** Share insights from our data with our registrants and other stakeholders to protect the public, prevent harm, support our registrants and inform public policy (including incorporating learnings from complaints and fitness to practise reports).
- 5.6** Share data on our registers, in line with GDPR and other legislative requirements, to assist health and social care service workforce planning activities.

Strategic results

CORU will have achieved its strategic priorities when:

- ✓ We have reviewed our standards, codes and guidance to ensure these are appropriate to changing contexts of practice, professional practice and emerging evidence/research.
- ✓ We have reviewed the Criteria for Education and Training Programmes and our processes for approving and monitoring education and training programmes.
- ✓ We have progressed a sustainable model of regulation that allows greater agility to respond to changing contexts of practice and service delivery.
- ✓ We have identified a sustainable funding model that assures adequate resources to meet our statutory duty to protect the public and continue to work towards achieving this.
- ✓ We have implemented recommendations arising from a review of our organisational structures.
- ✓ We retain and attract a skilled and competent workforce to deliver on our strategic priorities.
- ✓ We have enhanced understanding of our role and the value of regulation for public protection and the professions we regulate.
- ✓ We are seen as being open, transparent and fair in our dealings with all stakeholders.
- ✓ We consult, contribute to and inform relevant health and social care policy.
- ✓ We see improved outcomes arising from proportionate evidence informed regulatory interventions.
- ✓ We have implemented a transformative digital strategy that enables new ways of working and enhanced user experience by the public, registrants and other stakeholders.
- ✓ We are recognised as a key contributor to inform health and social care workforce planning for the delivery of safe and effective services that ensure protection of the public.

Appendix 1

Public Consultation Process

On 15 September 2020, CORU launched a public consultation seeking submissions, comments and feedback on its draft Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2025. The draft Statement of Strategy was published on our website and was available to anyone who visited the site.

An email with a link to this survey was sent to a targeted list of over 1800 stakeholders including patient advocate groups, Government departments, trade unions, professional associations, education providers, other regulators and other key stakeholders. All registrants who have opted in to receive updates from CORU were invited by email to participate in the consultation process.

Notice of the public consultation was also issued via CORU's newsletter and social media Twitter account.

In addition, consultation meetings were facilitated with a range of internal and external stakeholders including:

- Registration Boards for the designated professions
- CORU Executive
- Trade Unions
- Professional bodies/associations
- Education provider's representative bodies

People participated in the consultation process in a number of ways:

1. By completing an online consultation survey
2. By written submission via email or
3. By attending meetings and workshops to give feedback

The public consultation was open for nine weeks and closed on 18 November 2020.

Overview of responses to consultation

Source	
Online survey ¹	807
Written submissions via email	135
Briefing and consultation meetings – verbal feedback	26

1 Note: not all respondents answered all questions in the survey

Written submissions were received by email on behalf of the following groups, institutions and organisations:

- Association of Eye Care Providers of Ireland
- Association for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in Ireland (APPI)
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Department of Education and Skills
- Enable Ireland
- Heads of Physiotherapy programmes at University College Dublin, University of Limerick, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork
- Irish Academy of Audiology (IAA),
- Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists
- Irish Association of Relationship Mentors (IARM)
- Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP)
- Medical Scientists Registration Board
- National Health and Social Care Professions Office, HSE
- Osteopathic Council of Ireland
- Podiatrists Registration Board
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Speech and Language Therapists Registration Board
- School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork
- School of Law, Languages and Social Sciences, TU Dublin
- Social Care Workers Registration Board
- Union of Students of Ireland

Written submissions were also received from 112 individuals who often identified as members of one of the above associations or bodies.



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

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