



Regulation of Psychologists in Ireland: Preliminary Assessment

Submission by: The Psychological Society of Ireland

Submission to: The CORU Expert Advisory Group on the Regulation of Psychologists

Submitted: 19 December 2023

At the core of this submission is The Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI) endorsement of the necessity to establish clear threshold competencies for practitioners entering the professional register. This, PSI asserts, is fundamental to ensuring the safety and professional competence of practitioners.

PSI aligns itself with several key contextual considerations highlighted by the Expert Advisory Group:

1. **Regulation:** The acknowledgment that regulation exists along a 'continuum' and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be universally applicable. PSI appreciates the flexibility inherent in recognising this continuum.
2. **Psychology-Specific Dynamics:** Recognising the nuances of the psychology profession is crucial for effective regulation. PSI acknowledges the unique challenges associated with service delivery, workforce requirements, evolving professional pathways, and the dynamics of the field.

With these considerations in mind, PSI welcomes the Expert Advisory Group's commitment to seeking input from PSI, as the national learned and professional body representing psychology which brings extensive expertise and lived experiences and significant insights to the regulatory discourse.

Regulatory Scope

CORU, the PSRB, and the Department of Health have publicly emphasised their commitment to regulating the profession through the protection of the title 'psychologist'. PSI aligns with this perspective, recommending that protecting the title be the primary objective to avoid undermining public protection.

Acknowledging CORU's current dual approach to regulation – protecting the title as well as certain individual specialisms (clinical, counselling, and educational), PSI reiterates that a one-size-fits-all approach won't deliver the core objectives of protecting the public and the professional title. The chartership model, facilitated by PSI, may be a viable option that allows for the recognition of specialisms while safeguarding the term 'psychologist.'

Pathways into the Profession

Entry-level pathways into the profession are a crucial aspect of regulation. PSI advocates for three routes, each conferring entitlement to use the title 'psychologist.' These routes are aligned with the currently specified routes for chartered membership of the PSI.

- I. The Doctoral Professional Qualification (NFQ Level 10) Route
- II. The Doctoral Research Qualification (NFQ Level 10) Route
- III. The Masters Professional Qualification (NFQ Level 9) Route together with Supervised Work Experience in Psychology

Should CORU choose the chartership model as an entry-level requirement, additional recommendations are made to uphold high standards of professional practice:

1. Chartered psychologists should provide a statement of commitment to a professional code of ethics.
2. Chartered psychologists must work within the defined scope of practice of their psychology discipline/qualification, operating within the limits of their competence in applying a distinct body of knowledge.
3. Chartered psychologists should engage in practice supervision appropriate to the delivery of services within the scope of their psychology discipline/qualification.
4. Chartered psychologists are encouraged to participate in ongoing professional learning and development to maintain and enhance their competence in delivering psychological services to the public.

Specialisms

Recognising and articulating specialisms is essential for public protection and meeting diverse needs. PSI, with its 11 specialist Divisions, exemplifies the diversity of the profession and the associated competencies. These Divisions contribute to knowledge-sharing, professional development, and upholding standards essential for exemplary delivery of specific psychology disciplines.

The chartership model, utilised by PSI, establishes specific levels of education, qualification, supervised practice, and independent experience for each specialism. These guidelines can inform future standards and be incorporated as amendments to existing requirements for the designated profession of psychologist.

Health and Social Care

As articulated by CORU, the primary objective of regulation is to protect the public *receiving health and social care services*. For psychology disciplines outside health or social care, inclusion on the register depends on the register's development. Provisions should be made to allow the use of the term 'psychologist' for disciplines outside traditional health or social care. Emerging specialisms, often rooted

in research-based programs, should be accommodated to ensure continued professional development. This would 'future proof' CORU's regulation of the profession and allow for emerging specialisms, which may include elements of health or social care practice, to develop from research-based programmes.

Public Safety

The submission asserts the shared responsibility of PSI and CORU to address public misconceptions and understanding of competent psychological services. PSI plans to deliver a national public awareness and education campaign in 2024 to inform the public about pathways to PSI Chartership, emphasising competency and proficiency and hope that its messaging can be aligned with CORU for clarity.

ENDS