
News release

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HPC publishes conclusions on the proposed statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors

The Health Professions Council (HPC) has today published its conclusions from a public consultation on the potential statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors for the Secretary of State for Health. The consultation ran for a three month period and incorporated recommendations made by the Psychotherapists and Counsellors Professional Liaison Group (PLG) and the HPC Council.

Also published today is a second document outlining the preliminary conclusions that can be made at this stage about the potential regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors.

In the 2007 White Paper on the future of health regulation, the Department of Health stated that psychotherapists and counsellors should be regulated by the HPC, subject to consultation and legislative approval. The HPC was then instructed by government to examine how that could be done.

Having reviewed the responses to the consultation, the HPC has concluded that if the decision is taken to proceed with statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors, then:

- one additional Part of the Register should be established for “Psychotherapists and Counsellors” and these titles should be protected;
- modalities should not be reflected in the structure of the Register;
- the HPC should adopt the approach to dual registration;
- the inclusion of names in the HPC register from other eligible registers should be performed by means of a three-stage process; and
- the ‘grandparenting’ period for those professions should be three years.

In addition, the HPC has concluded that any further consideration of draft standards of proficiency for psychotherapists and counsellors should be deferred until the Council has concluded the current review of its existing generic standards.

The consultation received over 1,000 responses, the majority from individual practitioners in the field as well as from service users, charities and professional bodies. The responses revealed a range of different views to be taken into account in considering the most appropriate way forward.

The work that the Council has undertaken since the White Paper , including the ‘Call for Ideas’, the work of the PLG and the recent consultation and has not identified any specific issues that would prevent psychotherapists and counsellors from coming into the system of independent statutory regulation operated by the HPC.

Marc Seale, HPC’s Chief Executive, commented:

“Based on the work undertaken to date, the HPC is confident that its systems can accommodate the regulatory needs of psychotherapists and counsellors. Statutory regulation would seek to enhance public protection by protecting commonly recognised professional titles and providing a fair and appropriate complaints system. It would also seek to protect the professionals by removing incompetent and unethical practitioners from practising and potentially harming the public, and thus reducing damage to the industry’s reputation.”

The 2007 Government White Paper contained a clear statement of policy that (subject to consultation and legislative approval) psychotherapists and counsellors would be regulated by the HPC, the task therefore was limited to examining the practicalities of implementing that policy.

The Council approached the task by examining four regulatory ‘building blocks’ and looked at how the Register could be structured, professional titles to be protected, Standards of proficiency (SOPs); and Standards of education and training (SETs).

The work was not intended to produce final drafts of either SOPs or SETs but was a feasibility study. Therefore further work and consultation on those standards will need to be conducted after the Government has finalised any regulatory proposals in the form of a Section 60 Order.

HPC Chair, Anna van der Gaag, commented:

“We are confident that as a multi-professional regulator and given our experience and approach to regulation we are well placed to regulate psychotherapists and counsellors. The HPC currently regulates arts therapists, including arts psychotherapists and recently took on practitioner psychologists and has successfully integrated them onto the Register.”

The HPC agrees with government that the regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors is important for the protection of the public. Of course, the final decision about the statutory regulation of these groups ultimately rests with Government.

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Notes to editors:

1. In February 2007, the Government published its White Paper on the future of regulation, ‘Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century’. The White Paper recommended that, subject to legislative approval, psychotherapists and counsellors should be regulated by the HPC, and that this group should be a priority for future regulation.

2. In summer 2008 in anticipation of the draft legislation being laid, the HPC undertook a 'call for ideas' to explore possible arrangements for how psychotherapists and counsellors might be regulated. The call for ideas provided stakeholders with a chance to put forward their ideas on a number of topics, including how the Register should be structured, which titles should be protected and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register.

3. Following on from the 'call for ideas' the HPC established a Professional Liaison Group (PLG), which is a working group made up of external stakeholders with professional expertise that provide advice to the Council. The PLG has made recommendations to the HPC Council, on issues relevant to the statutory regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors. The work of the PLG informs the recommendations of the Council to the Secretary of State for Health and to ministers in the devolved administrations,

4. The Health Professions Council is an independent, UK-wide health regulator set up by the Health Professions Order (2001). The HPC keeps a register for fourteen different health professions and only registers people who meet the standards it sets for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health. The HPC will take action against health professionals who do not meet these standards or who use a protected title illegally.

5. The HPC currently regulates the following 14 professions. Each of these professions has one or more 'protected titles'. Anyone who uses one of these titles must register with the HPC. To see the full list of protected titles please see: www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/protectedtitles/

Arts therapists
Biomedical scientists
Chiropodists / podiatrists
Clinical scientists
Dietitians
Occupational therapists
Operating department practitioners
Orthoptists
Paramedics
Physiotherapists
Practitioner psychologists
Prosthetists / orthotists
Radiographers
Speech and language therapists