



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Counsellors and
Psychotherapists
Registration Board

Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board

Standards of Proficiency for Counsellors

Bord Chlárúcháin na gComhairleoirí agus na Síciteiripeoirí
Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board

About this Document

CORU is Ireland's multi-profession health and social care regulator. The role of CORU 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.

CORU was set up under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). It is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards, one for each profession named in our Act.

This document sets out the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board's Standards of Proficiency for Counsellors.

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- ▶ Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board Criteria for Education and Training Programmes for Counsellors
- ▶ Programme Information Guidelines for Education and Training Providers

Freedom of Information and Data Protection

The Health and Social Care Professionals Council is subject to the Freedom of Information and its records are subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act, 2004.

Any personal data received by CORU will be used for the purpose of programme approval and monitoring and shared with those involved in these processes.

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Introduction

The Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005 (HSCP Act 2005) provides for the establishment of Registration Boards to establish and maintain registers for a range of health and social care professions. Entry onto the register allows a person to use the title of that profession. This system of statutory registration is fundamental to the delivery of quality and accountability in the provision of professional services. The objective of the statutory registration system is to protect, guide and inform the public by ensuring that health and social care professionals are properly regulated and qualified for the job whether they work in the public or private sectors or are self-employed.

The object of the Registration Board is to protect the public by fostering high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among registrants of that profession (HSCP Act, 2005: Section 27(1)(as amended)). To this end the Act makes provision for:

- ▶ The approval of education and training programmes (HSCP Act, 2005: Section 48)
- ▶ Monitoring the continuing suitability of education and training programmes (HSCP Act, 2005: Section 49).

Regulatory approval of a programme by a Registration Board is distinct from academic accreditation. Academic accreditation is based on the suitability of a programme for the award of a qualification. Regulatory approval is a judgment as to whether a programme associated with a given qualification consistently and effectively prepares graduates for entry into register of that profession. To receive approval a programme must demonstrate that it meets the requirements of the Registration Board. There are two types of requirements:

Criteria for education and training programmes

- ▶ the criteria specify the requirements for the design, organisation and management of a programme to ensure that it can consistently and effectively produce graduates who meet the standards of proficiency

Standards of proficiency

- ▶ the standards of proficiency specify the threshold skills and abilities required for entry to the register

Standards of Proficiency

The Standards of Proficiency detail the skills and abilities that individuals must possess in order to enter the register. They are the threshold standards deemed necessary by the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board at the level of entry to practice. They are not standards for practice after entry to the register, rather they offer a snapshot of the standards at entry to the register.

This document sets out the standards of proficiency for counsellors under five domains:

1. Professional Autonomy and Accountability
2. Communication, Collaborative Practice and Teamworking
3. Safety and Quality
4. Professional Development
5. Professional Knowledge and Skills

Criteria for Education and Training Programmes

The Criteria for Education and Training Programmes is used to ensure that a programme has a system in place to consistently and effectively produce graduates who meet the Standards of Proficiency for entry to the register. The criteria sets out the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board's requirements for the way education and training programmes are designed, organised and managed.

Approval and Monitoring of Programmes

Approved programmes are those which meet all of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board's criteria and ensure that all students who successfully complete the programme meet all of the required standards of proficiency.

A programme which meets the required criteria and standards of proficiency for entry to the register is granted approval and the qualification associated with the programme is listed on the Approved Qualifications Bye-Law as one of the entry criteria to the register. Graduates possessing an approved qualification are eligible to apply for entry to the profession's register. The programme will then be subject to monitoring.

Failure to demonstrate that the programme meets the criteria for programmes and the standards of proficiency, either during approval or subsequent monitoring, will mean that the programme is not approved. Students graduating from a non-approved programme are not eligible to apply for entry to the profession's register.

Supporting CORU documentation

This document should be considered in conjunction with the following documentation:

- ▶ Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board Criteria for Education and Training Programmes for Counsellors
- ▶ Programme Information Guidelines for Education and Training Providers

1. Professional Autonomy and Accountability

Graduates will:

1. Be able to practise safely and effectively within the legal, ethical and practice boundaries of the profession
2. Be able to identify the limits of their practice and know when to seek advice and additional expertise or refer to another professional
3. Be able to act in the best interest of service users at all times with due regard to their will and preference
4. Be aware of current guidelines and legislation relating to candour and disclosure
5. Respect and uphold the rights, dignity and autonomy of every service user including their role in the diagnostic, therapeutic and social care process
6. Be able to exercise a professional duty of care
7. Understand what is required of them by the Registration Board and be familiar with the provisions of the current Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for the profession issued by the Registration Board
8. Recognise the importance of practising in a non-discriminatory, culturally sensitive way and acknowledge and respect the differences in beliefs and cultural practices of individuals or groups
9. Understand the role of policies and systems to protect the health, safety, welfare, equality and dignity of service users, staff and volunteers
10. Understand and respect the confidentiality of service users and use information only for the purpose for which it was given
11. Understand confidentiality in the context of the team setting
12. Understand and be able to apply the limits of the concept of confidentiality particularly in relation to child protection, vulnerable adults and elder abuse
13. Be aware of current data protection, freedom of information and other legislation relevant to the profession and be able to access new and emerging legislation
14. Be able to recognise and manage the potential conflict that can arise between confidentiality and whistle-blowing
15. Be able to gain informed consent to carry out assessments or provide treatment/ interventions and document evidence that consent has been obtained
16. Be aware of current legislation and guidelines related to informed consent for individuals with lack of capacity

17. Recognise personal responsibility and professional accountability for one's actions and be able to justify professional decisions made
18. Be able to take responsibility for managing one's own workload as appropriate
19. Understand the principles of professional decision-making and be able to make informed decisions within the context of competing demands including those relating to ethical conflicts and available resources
20. Be aware of and be able to take responsibility for managing one's own health and wellbeing

2. Communication, Collaborative Practice and Teamworking

Graduates will:

1. Be able to communicate diagnosis/assessment and/or treatment/management options in a way that can be understood by the service user
2. Be able to modify and adapt communication methods and styles, including verbal and non-verbal methods to suit the individual service users considering issues of language, culture, beliefs and health and/or social care needs
3. Recognise service users as active participants in their health and social care and be able to support service users in communicating their health and/or social care needs, choices and concerns
4. Understand the need to empower service users to manage their well-being where possible and recognise the need to provide advice to the service user on self-treatment, where appropriate
5. Be able to recognise when the services of a professional translator are required
6. Be able to produce clear, concise, accurate and objective documentation
7. Be able to apply digital literacy skills and communication technologies appropriate to the profession
8. Be aware of and comply with local/national documentation standards including, for example, terminology, signature requirements
9. Be able to express professional, informed and considered opinions to service users, health professionals and others e.g. carers, relatives in varied practice settings and contexts and within the boundaries of confidentiality
10. Understand and be able to recognise the impact of effective leadership and management on practice
11. Understand and be able to discuss the principles of effective conflict management
12. Understand the need to work in partnership with service users, their relatives/ carers and other professionals in planning and evaluating goals, treatments and interventions
13. Understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships as both an independent practitioner and collaboratively as a member of a team
14. Understand the role and impact of effective interdisciplinary team working in meeting service user needs and be able to effectively contribute to decision- making within a team setting
15. Understand the role of relationships with professional colleagues and other workers in service delivery and the need to create professional relationships based on mutual respect and trust

3. Safety and Quality

Graduates will:

1. Be able to gather all appropriate background information relevant to the service user's health and social care needs
2. Be able to justify the selection of and implement appropriate assessment techniques and be able to undertake and record a thorough, sensitive and detailed assessment, relevant to what is necessary for the safe practice of counselling.
3. Be able to determine the appropriate tests/assessments required and undertake/arrange these tests
4. Be able to analyse and critically evaluate the information collected in the assessment process
5. Be able to demonstrate sound logical reasoning and problem solving skills to determine appropriate problem lists, action plans and goals
6. Be able to demonstrate an evidence-informed approach to professional decision-making, adapting practice to the needs of the service user and draw on appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make professional judgments
7. Be able to prioritise and maintain the safety of both service users and those involved in their care
8. Be able to evaluate intervention plans using appropriate tools and recognised performance/outcome measures along with service user responses to the interventions. Revise the plans as necessary and where appropriate, in conjunction with the service user
9. Understand the need to monitor, evaluate and/or audit the quality of practice and be able to critically evaluate one's own practice against evidence-based standards and implement improvements based on the findings of these audits and reviews
10. Be able to recognise important risk factors and implement risk management strategies; be able to make reasoned decisions and/or provide guidance to others to initiate, continue, modify or cease interventions, techniques or courses of action and record decisions and concerns
11. Understand the principles of quality assurance and quality improvement
12. Be able to carry out and document a risk analysis and implement effective risk management controls and strategies; be able to clearly communicate any identified risk, adverse events or near misses in line with current legislation/guidelines
13. Be able to comply with relevant and current health and safety legislation and guidelines
14. Be able to establish safe environments for practice which minimises risks to service users, those treating them and others, including the use of infection prevention and control strategies

4. Professional Development

Graduates will:

1. Be able to engage in and take responsibility for professional development
2. Understand the need to demonstrate evidence of ongoing continuing professional development and education, be aware of professional regulation requirements and understand the benefits of continuing professional development to professional practice
3. Be able to evaluate and reflect critically on own professional practice to identify learning and development needs; be able to select appropriate learning activities to achieve professional development goals and be able to integrate new knowledge and skills into professional practice
4. Understand and recognise the impact of personal values and life experience on professional practice and be able to manage this impact appropriately
5. Understand the importance of and be able to seek professional development, supervision, feedback and peer review opportunities in order to continuously improve practice
6. Understand the importance of participation in performance management activities for effective service delivery

5. Professional Knowledge and Skills

Graduates will:

1. Know, understand and apply the key concepts of the domains of knowledge which are relevant to the profession
2. Demonstrate a critical understanding of relevant biological sciences, human development, social and behavioural sciences and other related sciences, together with a knowledge of health and wellbeing, disease, disorder and dysfunction
3. Know and understand the principles and applications of scientific enquiry, including the evaluation of treatment/intervention efficacy, the research process and evidence-informed practice
4. Demonstrate skills in evidence-informed practice, including translation of theory, concepts and methods to clinical/professional practice
5. Be able to identify and understand the impact of organisational, community and societal structures, systems and culture on health and social care provision
6. Demonstrate safe and effective implementation of practical, technical and clinical skills
7. Demonstrate ability to participate in or lead clinical, academic or practice-based research
8. Know the basic principles of effective teaching and learning, mentoring and supervision
9. Work therapeutically with mild to moderate psychological issues in order to target and address an identified presenting issue
10. Know and be able to recognise in service user presentations the continuum of mental wellbeing from mild to severe and complex psychological distress in order to identify service user suitability for the therapeutic intervention(s) offered
11. Know and be able to apply in practice the different stages of human development and behaviour, recognising its impact on the presenting psychological issue
12. Know and be able to evaluate a range of therapeutic frameworks that underpin and inform counselling practice
13. Be able to appraise the benefits of and differences between individual, couple, group and family counselling to identify appropriate intervention pathways
14. Be able to appraise theories and research on mental health and wellbeing and use these to develop and implement improved treatment approaches

15. Be able to understand the impact and implications of pharmacological use on service users
16. Be able to establish, build and maintain a therapeutic relationship with a service user safely and ethically, recognising and managing professional and ethical boundaries
17. Be able to appropriately communicate the role and responsibilities of the counsellor in the therapeutic relationship
18. Identify and apply an appropriate structured intervention to target and address an identified presenting psychological issue
19. Be able to assess service user readiness and suitability for the intervention offered
20. Be able to collaborate with the service user to set specific aims to target and address the identified presenting psychological issue and recontract aims and timeframes as necessary
21. Monitor the compatibility of the counselling intervention with the ongoing service user presentation, assess if a referral to another professional or service is appropriate and identify suitable referral pathways
22. Be able to evaluate service user progress against agreed counselling aims and collaboratively with the service user agree when to conclude the therapeutic relationship, ensuring this is achieved in a safe and ethical manner
23. Be able to refer to another professional or service where appropriate
24. Apply counselling skills – including listening skills, rapport and trust building – to establish and develop a therapeutic relationship in order to facilitate service user engagement with the agreed counselling aims
25. Be able to apply counselling skills to convey empathetic understanding of and compassion for the service user's perspective
26. Be able to identify and apply knowledge of intersecting psychological factors – including diversity – in service user presentations, recognising their impact on well-being, and work in an inclusive, sensitive and non-discriminatory manner
27. Be able to recognise and manage the dynamics of power and authority as experienced in the therapeutic relationship
28. Be able to demonstrate awareness of the impact of trauma on psychological functioning and integrate this awareness to inform practice
29. Be able to recognise trauma in service user presentations and know the potential for harm in exploring trauma within the parameters of a counselling relationship
30. Be able to demonstrate knowledge of crisis presentations and be able to work therapeutically with people experiencing crisis

31. Be able to identify and evaluate potential risk of suicide, self-harm or harm to others, implement a safety plan to support the service user and others and escalate as appropriate
32. Be able to critically reflect on the role of the counsellor in the therapeutic process and manage personal involvement in, and contribution to, the process of counselling
33. Be able to recognise personal emotional responses, vicarious trauma and the need to develop effective self-care strategies and burnout prevention
34. Be able to critically reflect on the necessity of engaging in clinical supervision to support, sustain and improve practice
35. Be able to know and critically reflect on the presence of conscious and unconscious dynamics in clinical supervision
36. Be able to demonstrate skill in the technologies and communication methods required for the delivery of counselling in a virtual setting and apply these therapeutically and safely while protecting service user privacy and confidentiality
37. Have a critical awareness of the need for organisation and resource management in a variety of settings, including private practice
38. Be able to write concise, accurate and relevant notes and records which articulate and justify professional decisions made
39. Be able to critically appraise local and national guidelines and policies appropriate to the profession

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