



Statutory regulation and public protection

What is statutory regulation and what is its purpose?

In brief ...

Regulation plays a crucial role in safeguarding the public and ensuring trust in health and social care services. In Ireland, CORU is the statutory regulator responsible for overseeing a range of health and social care professions.

This fact sheet explains:

- ▶ What regulation is
- ▶ How harm is understood in a regulatory context
- ▶ What is statutory regulation
- ▶ The concept of right touch regulation
- ▶ CORU's role and statutory functions
- ▶ How CORU differs from professional bodies

This resource is designed to support the public, students, employers, and registrants in understanding the purpose, value, and scope of professional regulation.



What Is Regulation?

Regulation is the system through which rules, standards, and requirements are set and enforced to ensure safe, effective, and ethical practice. Its overarching purpose is to protect the interests of the public by mitigating risks of harm, particularly where individuals may be vulnerable or reliant on professional expertise.

Regulation works by:

- ▶ Setting clear rules and expectations
- ▶ Monitoring compliance
- ▶ Influencing behaviour through standards, guidance, and accountability
- ▶ Taking action where standards are not met

Regulators are organisations established, typically in law, to deliver regulatory functions within the scope of their legislation. They build public trust and confidence by upholding the standards required for safe and effective service delivery. Put simply, regulation aims to keep people safe.



Sets clear rules and expectations



Monitors Compliance



Influences behaviour through standards, guidance and accountability



Takes action where standards are not met



Why Regulation Matters

When a professional does not meet the standards expected of them, it can have real consequences for the people who rely on their care and support. These harms can affect individuals directly, but they can also impact services and public confidence in the profession more widely.

Regulators aim to prevent harm, or reduce the risk of it occurring, by setting the minimum and most proportionate standards needed to keep the public safe. This balanced approach ensures that requirements protect the public without creating unnecessary barriers. Understanding the types of harm that can arise when standards are not met helps explain why regulation plays such an important role in maintaining safety and trust.

When professional standards fall short, the impact can be seen in various ways, including:

- ▶ Effects on a person's wellbeing, such as feeling unsafe, distressed, or receiving care that does not meet expected levels of quality or professionalism.
- ▶ Disruption to services, including delays, mistakes, or inconsistent care that impacts someone's experience or outcomes.
- ▶ Reduced confidence in the profession, where an individual's poor practice affects how the public views the wider professional group.
- ▶ Practical or financial inconvenience, such as needing additional appointments or experiencing avoidable costs due to poor quality practice.

Recognising these potential harms highlights why strong, fair, and proportionate **professional standards**, and **effective regulation**, are essential for protecting the public and maintaining trust in health and social care professions.



What Is Statutory Regulation?

Statutory regulation means regulation that is established in law. It is not optional and not based on custom, tradition, or self regulation. It is legally binding and enforces mandatory requirements for practice.

A statutory regulator's powers come directly from law, rather than from membership or voluntary professional codes or rules.

Understanding CORU and its regulatory remit

CORU is Ireland's statutory regulator for health and social care professionals. It was established under the *Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended)*, which sets out how regulation works and which professions fall under its remit.

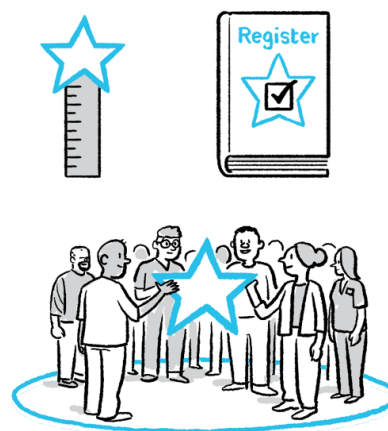
Under this legislation, CORU is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and 12 Registration Boards, each Board being responsible for one or multiple of the professions named in our Act. Together, they form the regulatory system that ensures professionals entering and practising within these professions are appropriately qualified, competent, and committed to high standards.

CORU's primary purpose is to protect the public. To achieve this, it promotes high standards of professional conduct, education, training, and ongoing competence.



It maintains statutory registers of practitioners who have met these standards, and only those who are registered may use the protected professional titles associated with their profession. This gives the public reassurance that anyone on CORU's Registers has demonstrated the qualifications and professional behaviours required for safe and effective practice.

CORU's authority comes directly from primary legislation, which makes it different from systems based on custom, guidance, or voluntary self regulation. CORU's regulatory powers must be exercised in line with the principles of fairness, proportionality and transparency. These principles align with the concept of Right Touch Regulation and ensure that decisions are made consistently, transparently, and with the public interest at their core.



What Is Right Touch Regulation?

Right touch regulation is an approach developed by the [Professional Standards Authority \(PSA\)](#) to help regulators make clear, fair, and proportionate decisions about managing risks of harm. It is built on the idea that regulation should use no more intervention than necessary, but no less than is needed to keep the public safe. This means finding the right balance, avoiding both *under* regulation, where risks are not adequately controlled, and *over* regulation, which can create unnecessary burden without improving safety.

At its core, right touch regulation focuses on **proportionality, effectiveness, and evidence based reasoning**. It encourages regulators to be transparent in how decisions are made, to act consistently, and to base actions on a clear understanding of the risks involved. The approach also recognises that regulation must be flexible enough to adapt to new information, developments, and emerging risks.

Right touch regulation is guided by six principles:

- ▶ **Proportionate** – taking only the level of action needed to manage risk.

- ▶ **Consistent** – applying standards and decisions in a fair and predictable way.
- ▶ **Targeted** – focusing regulatory effort where it is most needed.
- ▶ **Transparent** – being open about how and why decisions are made.
- ▶ **Accountable** – taking responsibility for decisions and their impacts.
- ▶ **Agile** – adapting to change and responding to new risks effectively.

Together, these principles help CORU ensure that decisions are fair, balanced, and clearly focused on protecting the public.



What are CORU's Statutory Functions

CORU's regulatory functions are set out in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). These functions ensure that the professions CORU regulates operate to high standards of education, training, conduct, and ongoing competence. Each function plays an important role in protecting the public and supporting confidence in the quality and safety of health and social care professionals in Ireland.



Setting Standards

Each Board sets two types of regulatory standards:

Standards of Proficiency articulate the knowledge and skills required for entry to each profession's register. These standards ensure every new registrant can practise safely from the first day of practice.

Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics

outlines how registrants must behave in their work, ensuring they act safely, ethically and in the best interests of the public. These standards guide day to day professional practice.

Maintaining Statutory Registers

CORU maintains public Registers of professionals who have met the required standards. Only those listed on these Registers may use protected professional titles and legally work in their profession.

Approving Qualifications and Education Programmes

Registration Boards set the education quality assurance requirements and assess and approve the qualifications needed for entry to a register, ensuring that graduates have been trained to the standard required by law.

Assessing Fitness to Practise

When concerns arise about a registrant's conduct, competence, or health, CORU investigates through a legally established fitness to practise process and may impose conditions, suspend, or remove a registrant to protect the public.

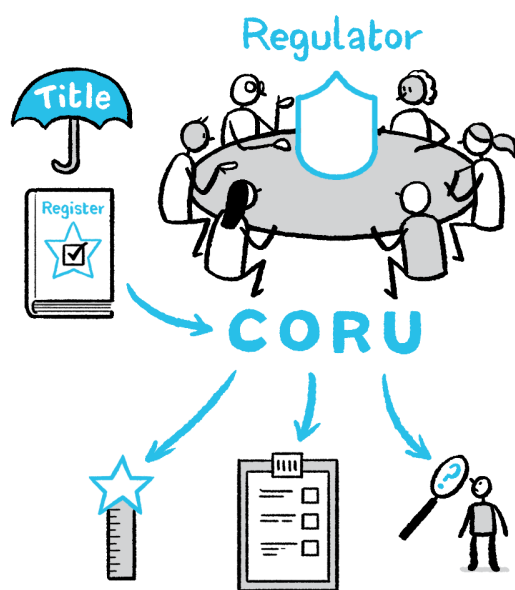


Protecting Professional Titles

CORU has the legal authority to take action if someone uses a protected title without being registered or practises in a regulated profession without meeting statutory requirements. This helps prevent the public from being misled.

Together, these regulatory functions create a strong, transparent system that protects the public and promotes confidence in the professions CORU regulates.

By setting clear standards, ensuring accountability, and supporting safe entry into practice, CORU helps ensure that health and social care professions in Ireland remain safe, trustworthy, and of high quality.



How is CORU different from a professional body?

As a statutory regulator, CORU's mandate is grounded solely in public protection. Our role is to ensure that registrants meet, maintain, and uphold the standards necessary for safe and effective practice. This is distinct from the role of professional bodies, which are voluntary membership organisations that exist to develop and promote a profession and to support their members. Both play important roles within the wider professional landscape, but their purposes, functions, and accountabilities differ.

Professional bodies typically focus on advancing their profession, supporting practitioners, and promoting professional development. Statutory regulators, such as CORU, by contrast, are legally established to protect the public by ensuring that professionals operate safely, ethically, and to defined standards.

Clarifying these differences helps the public, employers, and practitioners understand the complementary, but not interchangeable, role each plays.

CORU, Statutory Regulator	Professional Body
Registration for designated professionals is mandatory.	Membership of a professional body is optional.
"Registrants" refer to those registered and regulated by CORU.	"Member" refers to those whose association acts to supports the professional body.
Registrants are legally required to register to practise and must meet and maintain statutory requirements to use protected titles.	Members choose to be part of developing and promoting the profession with a professional body.
CORU is accountable to the Minster for Health.	Professional bodies are accountable to their members.
An independent public body established in law to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training, and competence.	Promotes and works on behalf of its members and the enhancement of a profession.

Has the following functions	May have the following functions
Sets requirements, standards and guidelines that registrants must follow to ensure safe and ethical practice in the public interest.	Represents the profession at local and national levels to ensure that the sector is recognised and respected.
May audit or assess registrants' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but does not provide training or professional development activities.	Works to provide members with professional learning and development opportunities.
Investigates complaints about registrants, unauthorised practice and title violations, and taking action where required.	May negotiate professional indemnity and public liability insurance for members in private practice.

Resources

- ▶ [The Health and Social Care Professionals Act](#)
- ▶ [General FAQs about CORU](#)
- ▶ [Professional Standards Authority: Right Touch Regulation](#)
- ▶ [Regulatory Essentials Guidance and Resources Videos and Factsheets](#)

Got Questions? Get in touch

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