



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Health and Social Care Professionals Council Statement of Strategy 2022 – 2026: Implementation Review

An Chomhairle um Ghairmithe Sláinte agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh
Health and Social Care Professionals Council



Introduction

This paper provides a high-level analysis of the key deliverables achieved in advancing the strategic priorities set out in the current Statement of Strategy 2022–2026 as we approach the end of its five-year period.

Strategic Priority 1: We will progress regulation of the six remaining designated professions

Significant progress has been made in advancing the regulation of the remaining professions during the lifetime of the statement of strategy.

The Social Care Workers Registration Board opened its register in 2023, with the transitional period for the profession closing on 30 November 2025. To manage the anticipated high volume of applications, CORU implemented a series of initiatives. Application processing was outsourced, supported and overseen by a dedicated team within CORU. A new registrant management system was procured, tested, and successfully implemented for the opening of the Social Care Workers' Register. For the first time, CORU successfully procured and delivered the Assessment of Professional Competence for existing practitioners during the transitional period. In addition, an extensive communications campaign encouraged members of the profession to apply to the register during the transitional period. By the end of November 2025 over 21,000 applications had been received, with over 30 percent of applicants already registered.

The Psychologists Registration Board has made substantial progress toward introducing regulation for the profession. The Board has adopted a two-phase approach, with registers for clinical, counselling, and educational psychologists opening, subject to legislative amendments expected in 2027. Work on the longer-term priority of regulating and protecting the title 'psychologist' is also advancing. A series of stakeholder engagement sessions on draft principle-based standards of proficiency for psychologists have been held in recent months and a public consultation on these standards is planned for later in 2026. This consultation will be a key step in progressing regulation of the broader profession and enabling protection of the title 'psychologist'.

The Counsellors and Psychotherapists Registration Board has made significant progress in advancing regulation for its professions. Following extensive research, the Board recommended to the Department of Health titles to be protected and identified qualifications suitable for grandparenting existing practitioners. In 2025, the Board published its Standards of Proficiency and Criteria for Education and Training



Programmes for both professions, making Ireland the first country to establish distinct regulatory standards for each. To support implementation, the Board agreed to allow education providers four years to align their programmes with these requirements before seeking regulatory approval. The Education Quality Assurance Unit has begun engaging with providers to inform them of the programme approval process.

The transitional period for the Podiatrists Registration Board closed in March 2023. The title 'podiatrist' is now a protected title, with 'chiropodist' also recognised as a protected variant. Almost all applications submitted during the grandparenting period have been processed, with only a small number remaining for repeat assessments of professional competence or pending appeals. This milestone represents a significant achievement for the profession, many of whose members work in private practice.

The complexities involved in applying the framework of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to clinical biochemists and orthoptists have been explored and recommendations made as to a viable approach, subject to legislative amendments, for establishing regulation for these two professions.

Strategic Priority 2. We will ensure regulation protects the public and supports health and social care professionals

CORU has prioritised improving efficiencies to ensure the timely registration of health and social care professionals. A range of enhanced applicant support measures was introduced, including clearer website guidance, live and recorded webinars, extended phone line hours, and proactive follow-up with applicants seeking recognition where further information was required. Weekly reviews by the Registrar now enable prompt decision-making. The Commonly Aligned Standards system has also been expanded across most professions, streamlining the recognition process for international qualifications that align with national standards.

CORU has continued to grow its registers significantly, increasing by more than 15,000 health and social care professionals - from 22,866 in 2021 to 38,779 by the end of April 2026. CORU is now the second-largest health and social care professional regulator in Ireland. Looking ahead to the remainder of 2026 and into 2027, there is expected to be unprecedented growth as applications from social care workers submitted before the close of the transitional period are processed.

A targeted initiative was launched to address outstanding applications initiated during the transitional period for medical scientists, physical therapists, physiotherapists, and podiatrists. This initiative focused on engaging applicants who wished to proceed with registration and closing applications for those who no longer intended to pursue it. To date, this project has resulted in the registration of over 500 applicants and marked the



successful implementation of CORU's first closure policy for registration and recognition applications.

During this process, CORU encountered challenges in securing external providers to deliver Assessments of Professional Competence (AoPCs) where required. To overcome this, CORU engaged directly with assessors to deliver assessments in-house, enabling applicants awaiting decisions to progress. Additionally, for the first time, AoPCs were offered to applicants to the social care workers register during the transitional period.

CORU has also actively supported the development of alternative pathways into health and social care professions. A key milestone was achieved when University College Cork (UCC), in partnership with Cork College of FET, launched a new transition pathway into the second year of its approved social work programme. Furthermore, UCC, as part of a consortium supported by the National Apprenticeship Office, introduced an apprenticeship pathway to an approved social worker qualification. UCC and Munster Technological University successfully applied for and received approval of a new apprenticeship pathway leading to a social care worker qualification.

Work has also advanced to support enhanced practice for regulated professions. The Physiotherapists Registration Board successfully established a new 'referrer' division of the register, enabling appropriately qualified physiotherapists to refer for diagnostic procedures involving ionising radiation. This work included setting standards, reviewing education programme, and launching public consultations on the necessary bye-laws to enable the division of its register which was launched by the Minister for Health in 2025.

Strategic Priority 3. We will build our organisational capabilities while evolving a sustainable regulatory model

CORU continued to explore how regulatory processes can remain effective and proportionate into the future. Following a review of data highlighting the positive impact on application timelines of the operational changes to the registration and recognition processes, Council agreed to review the direction of the sustainable regulation project and consider next steps. To guide the future direction of this work, an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) comprised of international regulatory experts has been convened and supporting the EAG in its work is an important part of CORU's work in 2026.

CORU has made significant progress in advancing its digital transformation agenda. A key milestone was the successful launch of CORU's new integrated registration system. By the end of November 2024, all existing registers and live applications were transferred to a single integrated system. This now provides for a streamlined process



for the recognition of international qualifications and registration applications, which had previously been managed on two separate IT systems. The new registrant portal will support further improvements in processing times and enhanced user experience, as well as a new system to support audits of registrants continuing professional development.

Other functions of the organisation have also been successfully digitised. The first online election for professional members of a registration board took place in 2024, with a further three registration boards holding their elections online in 2025. In all cases, a higher percentage of registrants voted in the elections, indicating how digitisation is enabling better engagement with the professions. In the Legal and Fitness to Practise department, CORU migrated its case management system to a cloud-based platform, modernising infrastructure and enhancing data security and recovery. This will further enable agile and proactive regulatory operations.

The Education Quality Assurance Unit has introduced a number of initiatives and policies. New guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was issued to assist education providers in demonstrating how alternative learning pathways can meet required standards. In addition, CORU launched a new Programme Approval and Monitoring Policy which provides greater clarity for education providers and key stakeholders, introduced increased flexibility in processes and, for the first time, established an annual reporting process. This will allow Registration Boards gain improved oversight of developments in the education and training of the health and social care graduates, as well as tracking of anticipated new graduates' applications to registers.

CORU developed a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy, which was introduced ahead of the 2024 audits for radiographers, dietitians and speech and language therapists. The policy aims to enhance transparency for registrants selected for audit and to support Registration Boards in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. In addition, registrants can now submit their CPD records online using the new registrant management system.

Guidance on practice placements was also published highlighting the innovations in supporting students to attain standards of proficiency in non-traditional placement sites. CORU and National Health and Social Care Professionals Office, HSE jointly published guidance on adapting digital competencies and standards for health and social care students and learners.

Strategic Priority 4. We will increase awareness of our role to the public we protect and the professionals we regulate



CORU has made significant strides in raising public awareness and deepening engagement with professionals, key stakeholders and the wider public. CORU has taken part in major public events (including the National Ploughing Championships and Higher Options) to engage face-to-face with the public. Public interest in CORU's core services, such as checking the register and applying for recognition of international qualifications or registration, reached record highs. Website and social media growth reflect a stronger awareness of CORU's role in protecting service users and maintaining high professional standards.

There were initiatives across the organisation to simplify information, modernise application processes and improve guidance resources. To support the next generation of registrants, a communications campaign was launched to encourage early applications from graduates of approved programmes. Tailored information leaflets were developed, including a specific guide for social care workers registering through the new registrant management system. Webinars have been held to provide guidance to applicants applying for registration and recognition. These efforts enhanced accessibility and supported CORU's broader goal of demystifying regulation and encouraging public and professional confidence.

CORU has significantly strengthened its engagement with professional representative bodies and unions. The CEO meets regularly with the professional bodies from all of the regulated professions and representatives from CORU attend their annual conferences, where possible. CORU hosts biannual meetings of the Health and Social Care CPD Officers' Network, and attends national conferences, such as the Health and Social Care Professionals Conference facilitated by the HSE.

There has been extensive engagement with the professions of psychology, counselling and psychotherapy over the last two years as the respective Registration Boards progress towards opening their registers, and further engagement is planned.

CORU has also focused on improving communication and engagement between our registration boards, committees and Council. Biannual Chairs events have been initiated so that all internal stakeholders can be kept up-to-date with key strategic initiatives overseen by Council. In 2025 and 2026, CORU hosted an event for all members of registration boards, Council and its committees featuring invited speakers on important regulatory developments, and this will continue to be arranged annually.

In 2025, CORU published its first *State of the Register* report. The data captured in the report was made possible by the digital transformation projects described above. These reports will provide insights that are valuable for CORU and the wider health and social care system and highlight the importance of CORU's role in protecting the public and supporting safe, professional care.



In June 2026, CORU launched *Regulatory Essentials*, a suite of educational resources (short, accessible video explainers supported by more detailed factsheets), covering key aspects of statutory regulation. Topics include an overview of statutory regulation, the different types of regulatory standards, and targeted guidance on principles-based standards and their application within education and training programmes.

Strategic Priority 5. We will anchor our regulatory interventions in evidence informed research and insights

An extensive review of Council's Framework Standards of Proficiency and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes was undertaken. Draft framework documents were developed in close collaboration with external experts in education, quality assurance, and regulation. These drafts were issued for a 12-week public consultation, which included focus groups with a range of stakeholder groups, including service users and patients. Feedback from this process informed further revisions by the Education Committee, which subsequently recommended both documents to Council. The revised Standards of Proficiency and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes were approved by Council in early 2025, and resources were developed to support education providers in understanding these new requirements before commencing roll out to Boards in 2026.

In 2025, Council also approved guidance for employers and registrants on the delegation of tasks. This guidance was requested in response to the growing use of assistant roles across regulated professions. A draft was developed following an extensive review of similar guidance published in Ireland and internationally. Drafts were shared with employers and professional bodies for comment, and their feedback was incorporated before final approval by Council. The guidance was published on the CORU website, and further guidance on additional topics will be developed over the next four years.

Also in 2025, CORU issued guidance to registrants on their obligations under new legislation and national policy regarding open disclosure, as part of its compliance reporting to the National Patient Safety Office within the Department of Health.

The review of Council's Framework Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics also commenced. Research was commissioned to examine codes of conduct published by comparable regulators in Ireland and internationally, as well as emerging issues and trends in health and social care and fitness-to-practise complaints. An expert group was established in July 2025 to review the Framework Code, informed by this research. The group is progressing towards finalising a revised draft of the Framework Code which will be issued for public consultation in early 2027.



Finally, external research was commissioned to provide a detailed analysis of trends in complaints and fitness to practice inquiries. CORU intends to publish emerging themes identified through this research in 2026. This will inform further guidance for registrants as part of CORU's commitment to upstream regulation and prevention of harms to the public.

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