



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE HEARING OF TUESDAY 30TH MAY 2023

Cathaoirleach and members of the Committee,

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to come here today to discuss the topic of Professional Accreditation of Higher Education (HE) courses with specific reference to Health and Social Care Professions (HSCP).

I am Fiona O Byrne and I am the Principal Officer with responsibility for Higher Education Policy and Reform in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is responsible for the policy, funding and governance framework for the tertiary education, research and innovation system, which includes higher education and further education providers.

Higher Education Institutions provide a supply of graduates into health and social care professions and have demonstrated that they are keen to work with relevant regulators to accredit their programmes and enable the registration of graduates with regulators upon completion of their programmes.

In line with their legislatively underpinned autonomy, Higher Education Institutions are responsible for their own day-to-day management and operational affairs, including the management of academic affairs and course provision. The accreditation of courses with the relevant regulatory authorities is a matter for individual institutions in line with this autonomy.

The Department of Health has responsibility for development of regulatory policy for healthcare professionals as well as the governance of CORU and the professions designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The Department of Health is also responsible for developing policy approaches for the future regulation of those health and social care professions which are currently unregulated. Governance and oversight of the health regulators such as the Irish Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) and the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) are under the remit of the Minister for Health.

CORU is Ireland's independent health regulator with a distinct statutory remit 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 sets the standards and competences that health and social care professionals must meet and is responsible for ensuring that the relevant educational bodies deliver qualifications that prepare professionals to provide safe and appropriate care.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science fully supports the regulation of professions as regulation gives confidence to the public and the profession that there is an appropriate mechanism to ensure fitness to practice and the protection of the most vulnerable in society.

The issues resulting from a withdrawn accreditation application in Summer 2022 have brought a renewed focus on professional accreditation processes and has highlighted areas where processes must be strengthened, where greater engagement and coordination are required, and where more transparency must be provided for students.

Through strengthened engagement between the Department of Health, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, CORU, QQI and higher education institutions these matters have been taken forward over the intervening period and remain a focus of engagement.

Higher Education Institutions have a responsibility to communicate clearly and transparently with their students in relation to the accreditation status of their programmes. In September 2022, Department officials wrote to providers of Social Care programmes in publicly funded institutions reiterating the need for institutions

to communicate their position in relation to their accreditation status to all current students.

Institutions were also asked to ensure that anywhere information in relation to these courses is presented, including websites, clearly reflects the accreditation status so that students were aware of what their position would be in terms of professional registration in advance of applying to and at the end of any course.

The Department understands that a significant majority of social care programmes have now completed the CORU process and have been successfully accredited. The remaining small number of programmes are continuing through the process. The Department also understands that these remaining programme providers are actively engaging with CORU around their applications and moving through the process in a timely way.

The Department is continuing to engage with the Department of Health and the higher education sector as these final programmes move through the accreditation process.

Thank you, and I am happy to assist the Committee in its considerations.

ENDS