



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Stáinte  
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +  
Social Care Professionals

## Opening Statement by Ginny Hanrahan, Registrar

Health and Social Care Professionals Council, CORU

to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher *Education*, Research, Innovation and Science

Thank you Chair,

CORU is Ireland's first multi-profession health regulator. Our role and legislative mandate is to **protect the public** by regulating the work of the designated health and social care professions.

How do we protect the public? By setting the **minimum threshold** for the professional standards that members of each profession must meet in order to practice in Ireland. This protects the public by ensuring that CORU's registered health and social care professionals – who are often providing care to the most vulnerable in our society - meet the standards that are required to provide safe and effective care. Only those professionals who meet these standards may register with CORU and use their protected title.

The first register opened by CORU was the Social Workers Register in 2011 and since that time a further 11 professions have been regulated. Today over 25,000 health and social care professionals are regulated by CORU. A new register for Social Care Workers will open in November of this year and the Minister for Health has also designated five further professions. Once all 17 professions are regulated some 40,000 professionals will be regulated.

Many of these professions had not been regulated previously and the work undertaken to introduce regulation should not be underestimated. Our success can be seen in the delivery of safe services by over 25,000 health and social care professionals and in the growing demand from other profession to be regulated by CORU.

### Education Approval

One of the most important ways we protect the public is by ensuring that the education bodies deliver qualifications that prepare professionals to provide safe and appropriate care.

CORU has a statutory role to approve and monitor education and training programmes, which has a separate purpose to academic validation. Our approval ensures that graduates have the knowledge skill and competence to provide safe care. For each profession we draft education and training standards. This establishes the **minimum** standards of education required to ensure that a graduate will be able to provide safe and appropriate care.

Our process is robust. It is a strong lever to ensure compliance with the threshold standards:

- We hold a public consultation giving all stakeholders, including educators, the opportunity to give feedback on the proposed standards developed by the registration board.
- Once these standards are finalised the education providers can apply to CORU for programme approval.
- Our process is to assess and monitor how programmes are **actually** being delivered. We don't rely on what is set out in a prospectus. We examine the *reality* of a programme, answering the question 'will these graduates be skilled to provide safe care to the public?'
- This assessment by an expert panel, includes meeting with educators, placement providers and students, to confirm that the standards are being delivered
- Where a programme meets the standards it is approved and a new by-law will be made. Graduates from that programme will be eligible to apply for entry to the CORU register.

- Where deficits are identified we work with the education provider to assist them in addressing these.
- I understand the desire of education providers to have certainty from the outset. But this is contrary to public safety. To approve courses based on a proposal rather than reality transfers the risk from the education provider to patients or service users.
- It is the responsibility of each education provider to ensure their programmes meet the minimum standards. It is their responsibility to ensure their students get the required training. Above all else they have a responsibility to the patients and service users who will be in the care of their graduates.
- Education providers also have a duty to be transparent and keep students informed of the status of their programmes. This must include before students enrol.

CORU has approved 73 education and training programmes. 30 of these have been for the social care workers, whose register will open in November. Due to the collaborative approach we take with Education Providers, we have never refused to approve a programme.

Changing demographics and the evolving needs of our health system mean Ireland needs to educate more health and social care professionals. In the last two years, CORU has approved 12 new programmes and received expressions of interest relating to 11 others. Our approval processes ensure that each new programme delivers desperately needed graduates with suitable qualifications to safely provide care.

Where concerns arise and it becomes apparent there are serious deficits which cannot be rectified, we engage with the educator providers, QQI and others in *their* duty to ensure learners are protected.

It is worth restating that the standards of education CORU set are the minimum standards appropriate to ensure public safety. It is critical to the protection of the public that CORU's pre-registration education and training requirements are met.

I was appointed CEO of CORU in 2008. For the past 15 years I have dedicated my professional life to establishing a system of multi-profession regulation that works. Today is my final day, I officially retire from CORU this evening. I am immensely proud of what the organisation has achieved since our establishment, to protect the public. Our work in education is among the highlights of that work.

What has become very apparent to me is the importance of providing access to training and education for all members of our society. In the multicultural Ireland of 2023, our health and social care professionals should reflect the communities they serve. Inequities regarding access to education and training impacts those from diverse backgrounds the most. In particular, the growth in post-graduate programmes is a concern given their cost which puts them outside the reach of many. Our educators have the opportunity to change this, and I respectfully suggest that it is important that they do so. I am happy to share further views on this with the committee.

I thank the Committee for their time and look forward to your questions.

Ends.

## **APPENDIX – ABOUT CORU**

### **CORU currently regulates the following professions:**

- Dietitians
- Dispensing Opticians
- Medical Scientists
- Occupational Therapists
- Optometrists
- Physiotherapists and Physical Therapists
- Podiatrists/Chiropodists
- Radiographers
- Radiation Therapists
- Social Workers
- Speech and Language Therapists

### **Designated professions with Boards in Place:**

- Counsellors
- Psychologists
- Psychotherapists
- Social Care Workers (Register opening November 2023)

### **Designated professions due to be regulated in the future:**

- Clinical Biochemists
- Orthoptists

### **Further information of CORU's procedures:**

- [About Approval and Monitoring](https://coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/education/about-approval-and-monitoring/)  
(<https://coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/education/about-approval-and-monitoring/>)
- [About Criteria and Standards of Proficiency](https://coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/education/criteria-and-standards-of-proficiency/)  
(<https://coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals/education/criteria-and-standards-of-proficiency/>)