

# Regulation of Psychotherapists and Counsellors

**The HPC Council met on 10 December 2009 to review the responses to the consultation on the recommendations of the Psychotherapists and Counsellors Professional Liaison Group. It has concluded that there are no specific issues that would prevent psychotherapists and counsellors from coming into the system of independent statutory regulation operated by the HPC. The Council is confident that it can accommodate the regulatory needs of these practitioners.**

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Government stated in the 2007 White Paper 'Trust Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century' that it intends to introduce statutory regulation for psychotherapists and counsellors. Therefore the HPC was not asked by Government to look at whether the profession should be statutorily regulated, but instead at how they should be regulated.

The HPC set up a working group of stakeholders, known as a Professional Liaison Group or 'PLG' to consider and make recommendations to the Council about how psychotherapists and counsellors might be regulated, in light of the conclusions made in the White Paper. The HPC held a public consultation on the PLG recommendations which ran for three months in 2009. The consultation received more than 1,000 responses, the majority from individual practitioners in the field as well as from service users, charities and professional bodies. The responses revealed a range of different views to be taken into account in considering the most appropriate way forward

The Council approached the task by considering four regulatory 'building blocks' and looked at: how the Register could be structured; which professional titles should be protected; what standards of proficiency (SOPs) would be appropriate; and what standards of education and training (SETs) would be appropriate.

This work was intended to be a feasibility study rather than to produce final drafts of either SOPs or SETs. Further work and consultation on those standards will need to be conducted after government has finalised any regulatory proposals in the form of a Section 60 Order.

The purpose of statutory regulation is to protect the public. Statutory regulation will protect members of the public by setting standards, protecting commonly recognised professional titles and providing a way in which complaints can be dealt with fairly and appropriately.

At the moment, a psychotherapist or counsellor who is removed from the membership of their professional body for any reason can simply continue in practice without there being any legal means for preventing potential harm to members of the public. The protection of titles mean that someone who is 'struck off' the Register is unable to continue using the title related to their profession and could be prosecuted if they do so. The HPC strongly believes that safeguarding professional titles is an important way in which statutory regulation protects members of the public, improving upon a voluntary system in which such titles can continue to be used without any means of redress.

The HPC is confident that, as a multi-professional regulator and given its experience and approach to regulation, it is well placed to regulate psychotherapists and counsellors should it be instructed to do so. The HPC has a strong track record in bringing new professions into regulation and currently regulates arts therapists, including arts psychotherapists. It also recently took on practitioner psychologists and has successfully integrated them onto the Register.

The HPC agrees with Government that the regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors is important for the protection of the public. The final decision about the statutory regulation of these groups ultimately rests with Government, however.

10 December 2009