

Honorary President: Richard Holloway  
Chair: Dorothy Smith  
Chief Executive: Brian Magee

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**Public consultation**  
**Proposed regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists**  
**under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005**

**The response of COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) to the above proposed regulation.**

As Scotland's professional body for counselling and psychotherapy, we are pleased to submit our response on two of the issues that the Minister would like addressed. Our response is given below under the headings of these two issues. Please see our website for information on our work in Scotland. [www.cosca.org.uk](http://www.cosca.org.uk)

- **Whether the professions of counsellor and/or psychotherapist ought to be subject to State regulation.**

**COSCA's Response:**

State regulation should be considered only if the above professions have been risk assessed as warranting it in the interests of public protection. In the consultation document, evidence of the above risk assessment is not apparent.

Robust and transparent procedures should, therefore, be implemented to carry out the above risk assessment prior to proceeding with the introduction of a statutory regulatory system. Depending on the level of risk identified via this exercise, the full range of regulatory systems should then be explored including voluntary systems of registration.

In the UK, the accredited registers programme run by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care is a very good example of such a voluntary system. I can confirm that the COSCA Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists has been accredited by PSA under the above programme, and that we can offer positive feedback on our experience of operating under this programme.

- **The appropriate level of qualifications to be set for future applicants for registration having regard to the QI Awards standards**

**COSCA's Response:**

Historically, in Scotland, few counselling / psychotherapy training courses lead to an academic qualification, and fewer still led to the award of a degree. In recent times this has gradually changed whereby some courses do now lead to academic qualifications.

It is COSCA's current view that the mere academic validation of courses is not, in itself, a 'kite-mark' nor a necessary or indeed practical, requirement to demonstrate fitness to practice. Therefore, COSCA has set professional rather than academic educational and training standards that enable its registrants to practise competently and safely in the fields of counselling and psychotherapy. Our experience over the last 20 years reassures us that this is a risk-based and proportionate approach to the preparation of the professions, acknowledging the need to put the interests of clients and the general public first. This levelling of training and qualifications has been fully accepted by PSA under its accredited registers programme.

The danger of setting the level of qualification at a particular academic level is that it can prevent and exclude individuals from practising as counsellors and psychotherapists who did not or cannot meet this academic requirement, but who may otherwise be excellent practitioners and who are more than able to meet the above professional standards set.

Many of the counselling organisations in Scotland provide access to counselling via trained volunteer counsellors who have not completed academically approved training programmes. This highly valued provision would be seriously threatened in the event that the level of qualification was set too high for them to enter or continue to work as counsellors. In Scotland, we have set the level of training for counsellors working in member organisations of COSCA at a lower level than those counsellors who work in independent practice. This is because we strongly believe that the organisational structures can support them to work effectively with clients, albeit within their scope of practice. A large proportion of the public in Scotland rely on these counsellors working within our member organisations to deliver accessible and, when possible, free at the point of delivery counselling services.

So, I urge the Department of Health to fully consider the impact of state regulation and a non-inclusive approach to the level of qualification on the continuation of the provision of access to counselling and psychotherapy by counselling organisations to those who need it most across the Republic of Ireland.

Brian Magee  
Chief Executive  
COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland)  
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