

# IACP Members' Survey 2018 Summary Report

*The Voice of Ireland's Largest Counselling and Psychotherapy Association*



*Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*



RESEARCH  
& INSIGHT

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*Report prepared by Dr Ellen Kelly, IACP Research Officer, based on analysis and presentation of survey results by Larry Ryan and Rachael Joyce - Behaviour and Attitudes Research & Insight House.*



# Foreword

## Ray Henry and Lisa Molloy

On behalf of everyone at IACP we would like to thank the members for their support and engagement during this research. We're extremely grateful to the members who took time out of their busy schedules to complete it. Indeed, one of the most inspiring and uplifting elements of this research is knowing that the IACP has an extremely engaged membership. With more than a quarter of all members completing the survey – unusual for this type of research – we will be able to use these highly representative insights to inform the future strategic direction of the organisation. Our membership is actively helping us to shape the future and we'd like you to know that we are listening to your voice.

We'd like to thank our Research Officer, Dr Ellen Kelly for her hard work in creating the survey and collating the resulting information for this report. Within these pages lie some very illuminating findings that we know will be of interest to the IACP membership and beyond.

We'd also like to thank B&A for hosting the survey and providing us with the excellent analysis on which this report is based. We are, as ever, extremely happy with the standard of work, objectivity and professionalism that B&A display.

We hope you enjoy the report and that you take as much away from our research as we have.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Henry".

**Mr Ray Henry**  
Cathaoirleach

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Molloy".

**Ms Lisa Molloy**  
Chief Executive Officer

## Introduction and Context

The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy is the largest representative body in this area in Ireland - with a current membership body of almost four and a half thousand - and with professional standards of excellence in the field. In a bid to maintain and to continually improve on these standards, IACP members are invited to participate in research. The voice of the members is all important in shaping the future of the IACP as well as in helping to effect change that will better serve the public as counselling and psychotherapy increasingly become an integral part of mental healthcare provision in Ireland.

The IACP Members' Survey 2018 had a very impressive response rate which strongly indicates that the association has a highly engaged member body. All members (4,200 at the time of the fieldwork) were invited to participate in the research and 1,076 did so. Such a high completion rate is unusual for membership surveys – a 6-10% rate being more typical. With over a quarter of members fully answering the survey it can be concluded that IACP members are both engaged and committed - willing to give of their time for the betterment of the association, the profession and the general public. Highly representative insights can be gleaned from this research and the report that follows summarises the key areas of interest about the membership and their work as well as how the IACP can help members in the future as they progress within the profession.

## Research Approach

This research was undertaken in order to gain insights into the IACP member body with a view to helping to shape the future of the association. Previous members' surveys were carried out in 2013 and 2015. In 2018, a questionnaire was developed which included some key areas from the former surveys for longitudinal tracking purposes. New areas were also introduced for the first time. Consultation about areas for question development took place with IACP staff, management and the Board. The IACP Research Officer liaised with B&A in furthering the development of the questions. Finally, IACP Board members volunteered to participate in the pilot stage of this research – to check the smooth running of the survey. No difficulties were detected during the pilot stage of this research.

The survey is quantitative in the main. However, many open-ended questions were included which proved most valuable in areas to do with suggestions for improvements. The open-ended questions were coded into categories by B&A.

Each member was sent an invitation to participate in the research by IACP head office in early October 2018. Individual links to the survey were included and B&A carried out the coding and analysis of the responses. Research participants were given the option to be included in a 5 prize draw on completion of the survey, administered by B&A also. The survey was live for four weeks and reminders about participation were sent out to all members by e-mail on a weekly basis. Following data collection, detailed analysis was carried out by B&A and this was presented to the Board and IACP management.

Areas and topics included in this research were:

- IACP members and their work (demographics, education, membership category, work description, online counselling/psychotherapy, challenges, rewards)
- Membership services/benefits, accreditation and supervision
- Communication, website and publications
- Organisational profile, education and research
- Attitudes towards Counselling/psychotherapy and the Future

## Highlights

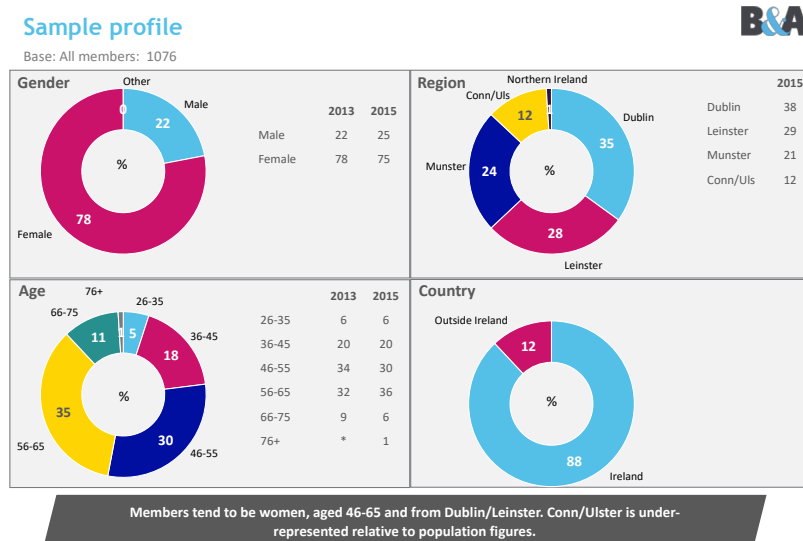
1. **It is evident that the IACP has an engaged member body, with a very impressive 1076 members completing the survey – allowing for highly representative insights.**
2. **A substantial majority (96%) say they find their work as a counsellor/psychotherapist totally or largely rewarding – unusually high in the context of overall national job satisfaction levels.**
3. **Across all groups, members are highly satisfied with the supervision they receive. Satisfaction levels with accreditation processes are also high and have increased markedly since 2015.**
4. **A notable 90% of members have additional training in suicide prevention – up from previous years. An average of 17% of clients present with suicidal ideation.**
5. **Online counselling is practiced by 10% of membership. Out of those who do not offer it, 31% would like to be able to and 31 % are unsure. Members perceive clear benefits and challenges with this form of therapeutic work.**
6. **Most say they would ideally like to be working in private practice, and this is indeed where most members are actually working. There are fewer working for a statutory body, in a group practice and for a school or college than would ideally like to be.**
7. **A large majority of the members believe they charge a reasonable rate for clients and a smaller majority believe what they charge is reasonable for themselves. Getting enough work and making a living is the top work-related challenge for the members with 1 in 4 mentioning this.**
8. **Members who use the IACP website rate the various facilities consistently highly. Publications are considered to be highly interesting by a large majority – especially the Irish Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy at 90%.**
9. **Satisfaction with the IACP's national profile is high with two-thirds of the membership considering it excellent, very good or good – a marked increase on previous years.**
10. **9 out of 10 members agree with State regulation and the majority believe it will have a positive impact on the profession as a whole, and on themselves as professionals.**

## Summary of Key Findings

### i) Sample Profile

Women make up more than three-quarters of the IACP membership. Members are most likely to be aged between 46-65 (65%) and to be from Dublin or Leinster (63%). The membership is highly educated with three quarters holding either a primary degree or a post-graduate diploma/Master's degree. A further 3% hold a PhD. 12% of members are from outside Ireland.

Most are members of the IACP only (66%) with a third simultaneously being members of other associations (IAHIP, PSI and BACP being the top three). More than half are long term members of 6-20+ years (57%). A third have been members for between 2-5 years. Almost a tenth of the membership can offer counselling/psychotherapy in a foreign language.

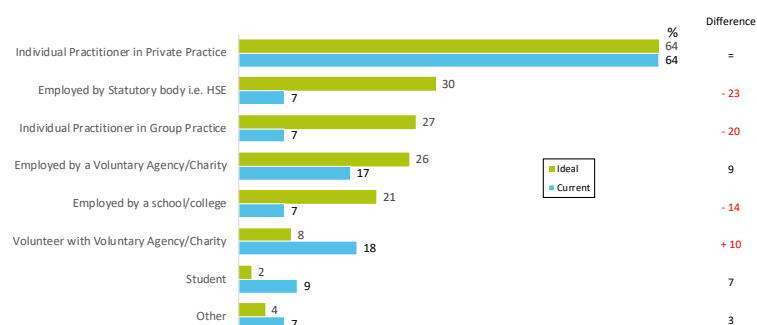


### ii) Work Profile

Currently 3 out of 5 members work in private practice and this is consistent with previous years. Over a third either volunteer with or are employed by a voluntary agency or charity - consistent with previous years. 7% work for a statutory body such as the HSE which is consistent with 2015 and a further 7% work in a school or college – an increase from 2015 of 4%. Most say that their ideal work situation would be in private practice. More would ideally like to be working for a statutory body, in a group practice or a for school/college than is currently the case. There are also more members volunteering than would ideally like to be. 30% say they would ideally like to work for a statutory agency such as the HSE, while a similar proportion say they would not be eligible to do so. Holding a primary degree in psychology or human sciences is part of the current eligibility criteria for such employment. However, the majority (57%) think that they would meet these criteria while 11% do not know whether they would or not.

#### Current vs Ideal work situation

Base: All members: 1076



Most say their ideal work situation is to be in private practice. There are fewer working for a statutory body, group practice and school/college, and indeed more volunteering, than would ideally like to be.

30% describe their work as full-time while 70% say they are part-time. This is consistent with previous years. Men, those aged 46-55, accredited supervisors and those with 11+ years membership are more likely to work full time. A notable proportion (45%) would ideally like to work between 10-20 hours a week which is an increase from 2015.

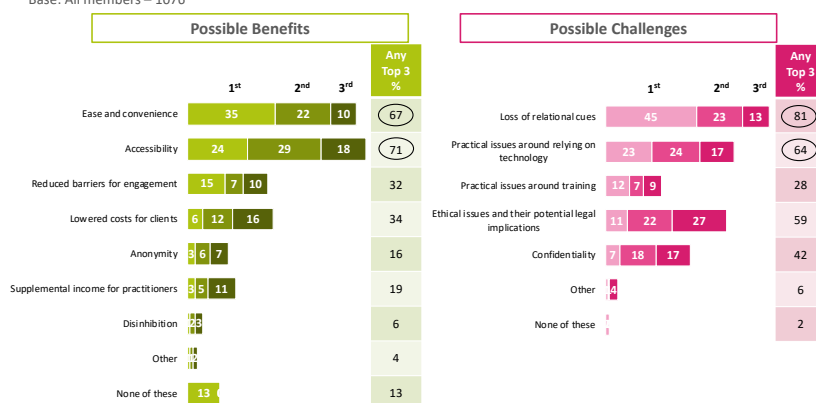
Outside of seeing clients, giving talks to groups is the most common form of work for members. Managing a practice, providing supervision, mentoring and co-ordinating clients are also notable aspects of members' work. While the majority of members do not work outside counselling/psychotherapy, 45% do. These are most likely to be students (81%) and pre-accredited members (66%) and they are most likely to work in education or youth/community work.

## Online Counselling/psychotherapy

10% of the membership currently offer online counselling/psychotherapy. Male members are more likely than female members to offer it. Out of those who do not currently offer online counselling/psychotherapy 31% would like to and 38% would not like to. The remainder (31%) are undecided. Out of those who would like to offer it and don't the most common reason for not currently doing so is that they do not feel they have the right training.

### Offering online Counselling/Psychotherapy

Base: All members – 1076



While ease, convenience and accessibility are particularly recognized as possible benefits of online delivery – members are most concerned about the possible loss of relational cues and practical issues with technology. There are also concerns training, ethics and confidentiality.

While ease, convenience and accessibility were particularly recognised as possible benefits to offering online counselling/psychotherapy, the loss of relational cues and practical issues with the use of technology were the most highly reported as possible barriers.

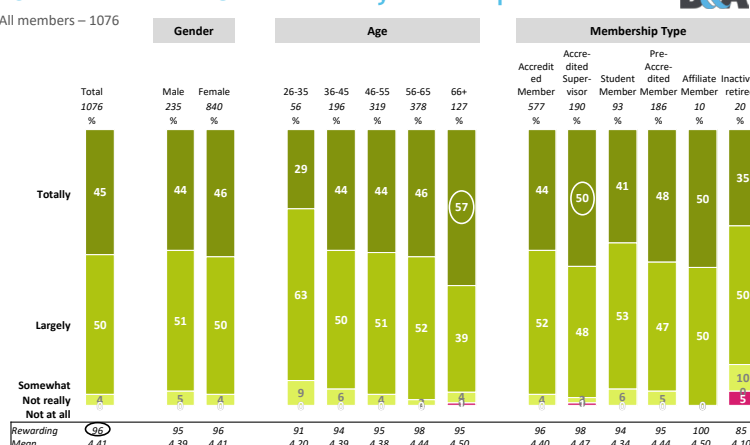
## Job satisfaction and challenges

An open-ended question about the challenges of working as a counsellor/psychotherapist shows a broad range of issues – the most common being making a living (28%) and getting enough work (21%). However, when asked about how rewarding counselling/psychotherapy work is 96% say they find it either totally or largely rewarding. This percentage stands out as being extremely high. Those aged 66+ and supervisors find their work the most rewarding. A 2016 Qualtrics global study found that more Irish people are dissatisfied with their job (51.2%) than those who are “extremely or moderately satisfied” (48.8%). ([https://www.qualtrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Global\\_Attitudes.pdf](https://www.qualtrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Global_Attitudes.pdf))

The very high satisfaction rate of 96% reported amongst Irish counsellors/psychotherapists is thus unusual within a national job satisfaction context.

### Job Satisfaction as a Counsellor/Psychotherapist

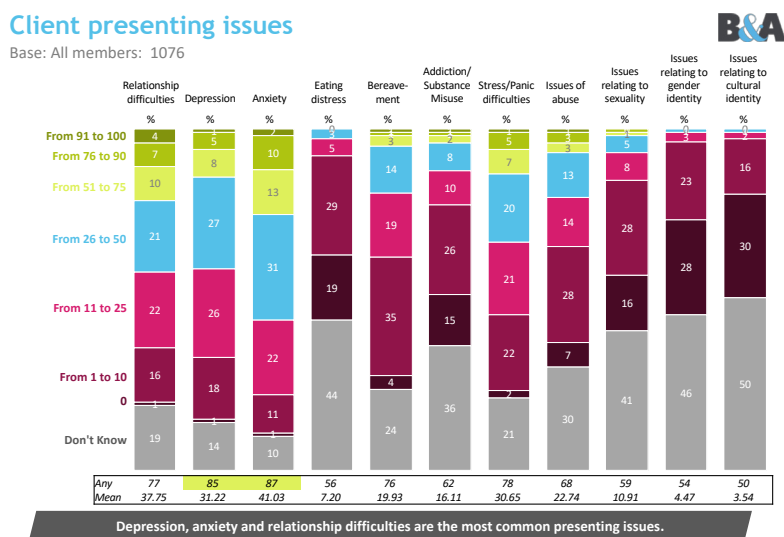
Base: All members – 1076



The vast majority (96%) say they find their work as a Counsellor/Psychotherapist rewarding. Those aged 66+ and supervisors find the work most rewarding.

### iii) Client Profile

Adults are the most common client group seen by members (94%) while adolescents are seen by just over a third of members and couples are seen by just under a third. Families, groups and children are also seen – by 10% or less. Out of those working with children/adolescents just under half have a specific additional qualification for this.



#### Client presenting issues

Anxiety, depression and relationship difficulties are the most common presenting client issues. Supervisors work with the broadest range of client presenting issues. Men are most likely to work with those presenting with addiction/substance use issues, while the under 35s are more likely to work with those experiencing relationship difficulties, anxiety or issues relating to cultural identity. Those with more than 20 years of membership, those working full-time and those working for the HSE work with a broader range of presenting issues.

9 out of 10 members have seen clients with suicidal ideation. Out of these, the majority indicate the percentage of their client base presenting with this issue to be between 1-10%. The average number of those presenting with suicidal ideation is 17% of the client base. 90% of members have specific training in the area of suicide prevention which is well up from previous years (77% in 2013; 83% in 2015).

Client fees have increased and the average number of clients and client hours are also up from 2013/2015. Most members now charge between €41-€60 per session with the average being €53. Corresponding figures for 2013 and 2015 were €44.00 and €44.36 respectively. Men, accredited supervisors and those with 20+ years of membership charge the highest fees. The majority believe they charge a reasonable rate for clients (82%). Out of those who do not believe they charge a reasonable rate (younger members, students, pre-accredited members) the most common reasons are being unable to meet costs or make a living and the service being undervalued. A smaller majority believe they charge a reasonable rate for themselves (60%) but a notable proportion do not (28%) – again for the same reasons.

#### Client fees and referrals

The average number of clients and client hours are up from 2013 and 2015. Mean client numbers in 2018 were 25.83 (21 in 2013; 21.65 in 2015) and mean client hours were 33.61 (28 in 2013; 30.48 in 2015). The majority (56%) see between 1-20 clients per month – most of these (33%) completing between 11-20 hours. Half of all members say they do a proportion of unpaid work, most under 20 hours. Just over a half of members (51%) are against unpaid work to build accreditation hours. Men, under 35s, students and pre-accredited members are the most against this.

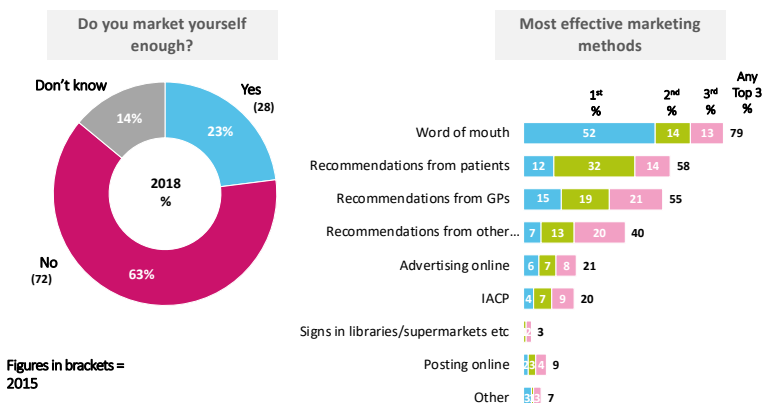
Word of mouth referrals are the greatest client source for members, followed by referrals from GPs and other organisations. 29% say they get referrals from the online directory on the IACP website and a further 13% say they get referrals from the IACP. Most sources of referral are growing compared with previous years.



## Marketing/Promotional Activities

### Marketing/Promotional Activities

Base: All members: 1076



Word of mouth is also the most effective marketing method for members, followed by recommendations from a variety of sources. However, only 23% of members believe they market themselves enough.

Almost two thirds of practitioners believe that they do not market themselves enough with almost a quarter believing that they do. Word of mouth and recommendations from a variety of sources are the believed to be the most effective forms of marketing.

## iv) Continuous Professional Development

**Practice-related events:** There is high interest in counselling/psychotherapy and the law practice-related events – an increase from previous years. This is followed closely by an interest in how to set up in private practice. An overall interest in marketing/PR events is considered to be low – especially when considering the above chart. Pre-accredited members are most interested in how to set up in private practice and marketing/PR related events. Self-care and child protection/children first guidelines were also of general interest to members – and to accredited supervisors in particular.

**Specific client-groups:** Demand for CPD in relation to victims of abuse is the highest area of interest – similar to previous years. There is considerable interest in CPD in areas such as working with children and adolescents and working with couples and LGBTQI. Counselling older people and supporting carers was also a significant area of interest.

**Specific client-issues:** Addiction and anxiety come out as the top first mentions for CPD in the area of learning about client issues. Anger, family responses to suicide, sexuality and self-harm are also areas of considerable interest for members.

**Skill-based techniques/approaches:** There is most interest in the area of CPD in relation to trauma followed by body work. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) was the third most cited area of interest followed by Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing (EMDR). Students are the most likely to look for skill-based techniques/approaches in a range of areas.

Overall, there is high demand (87%) for the IACP to offer free CPD workshops/webinars online, particularly amongst younger student members and those employed by schools/colleges.

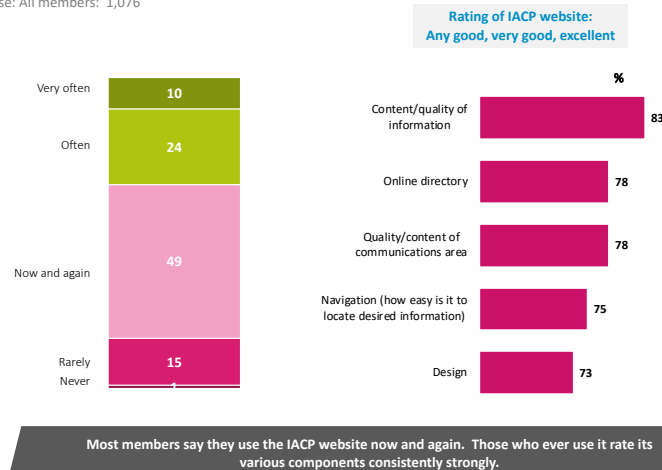


## v) Communication – IACP Website, Publications

### Engagement

#### Engagement with IACP website

Base: All members: 1,076



Almost half of the members visit the IACP website now and again and over a third of members visit it often or very often. The various components of the website are rated consistently strongly. Suggestions for improvement centre around layout, design and navigability.

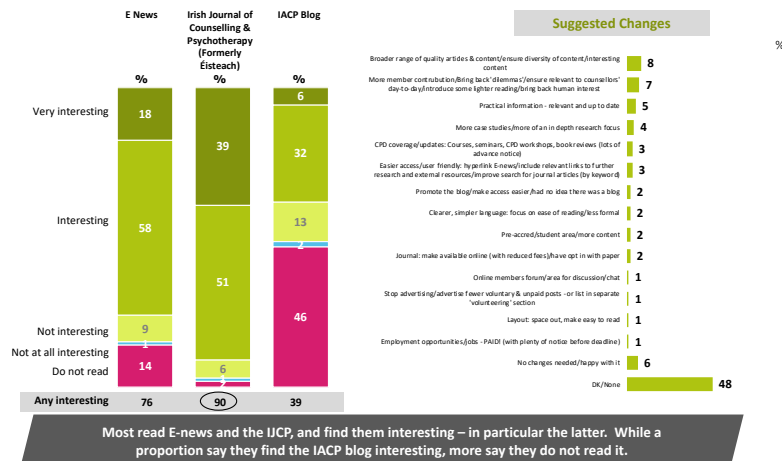
The Members' Area of the website (for members only with personal login) hosts areas designed to help and to inform members. Overall, the IACP publication *the Irish Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* was considered the most helpful item, followed by Head Office Updates. When considering what is significant for different groups – aside from the overall figures - the research points to students finding the Research Corner to be the most helpful area. Accredited members and accredited supervisors find Edit Your Profile helpful. Pre-accredited members find the Research Corner followed by GDPR FAQs to be particularly helpful.

When asked about what else they might like to see in the Members' Area, the majority had no suggestions (58%). For those who did, CPD related elements were mentioned the most. A suggestion of access to online peer support or an online peer forum was the second most mentioned, along with a Q&A area.

### Publications

#### IACP Publications

Base: All members: 1076



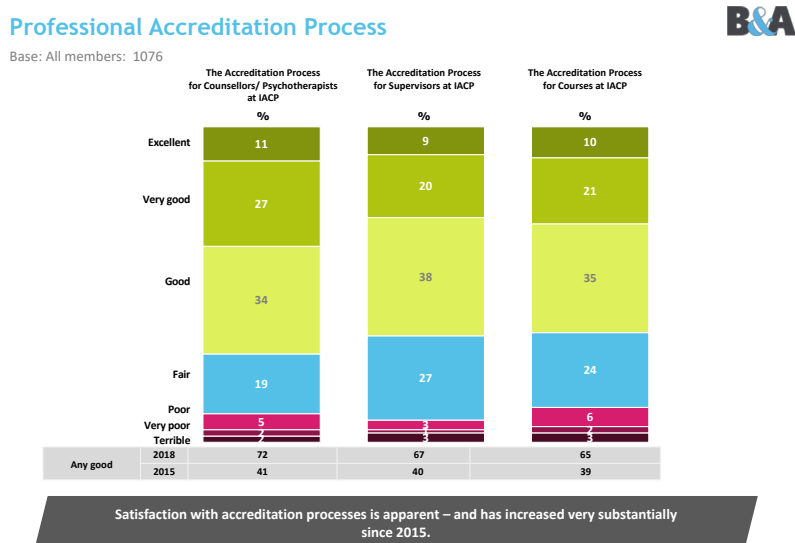
*The Irish Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* was rated as very interesting or interesting by a very substantial majority - 90% of the membership. The e-news was rated as very interesting or interesting by 76% of the membership. However, while 39% find the blog interesting, 46% say they do not read it at all and a further 15% do not find it interesting.

Most did not have any suggestions for improvement in the publications area (54%). Out of those who did the top suggestions were for a broader range of quality articles/content, to have more members’ contributions, to ensure content relevance for day to day counselling/psychotherapy and to have practical information which is relevant and up to date.

## vi) Membership Benefits, the Accreditation Process and Supervision

There is an overall increase in the numbers of those availing of IACP membership benefits. Top amongst them, and similar to previous years, are the free seminars (60%; 47% in 2015) followed by regional workshops (45%; 37% in 2015) and online directory listing (33% - accredited members only; 27% in 2015). A quarter of the membership are availing of regional networking events.

Satisfaction with the various accreditation processes has increased very substantially since the last survey. Almost three-quarters now find the accreditation process for counsellors/psychotherapists as good, very good or excellent – this was two-fifths in 2015.



Relative to other groups, students and pre-accredited members are less satisfied with the accreditation process. Most did not have any suggested changes to the accreditation process. Out of those who did, suggestions were in the area of simplification.

In line with previous years, most members have only one supervisor (68%) while almost a quarter have 2 supervisors and over a fifth have three or more supervisors. 7 out of 10 members pay sixty euros or more for supervision sessions with an overall average of 60.04 – equivalent to 2013/2015. Members’ supervisors are largely accredited with IACP, IAHIP and BACP (90%) and out of the other 10% PSI is the most often mentioned. Across all groups members are highly satisfied with the supervision they receive – with 51% saying it is excellent and a further 33% saying that it is very good. Students are somewhat less likely to rate their satisfaction levels as excellent.

Continuing with personal therapy after training and accreditation is highly valued overall by 70% of members with a further quarter valuing it somewhat. Newer student members are the most likely to view it as important.

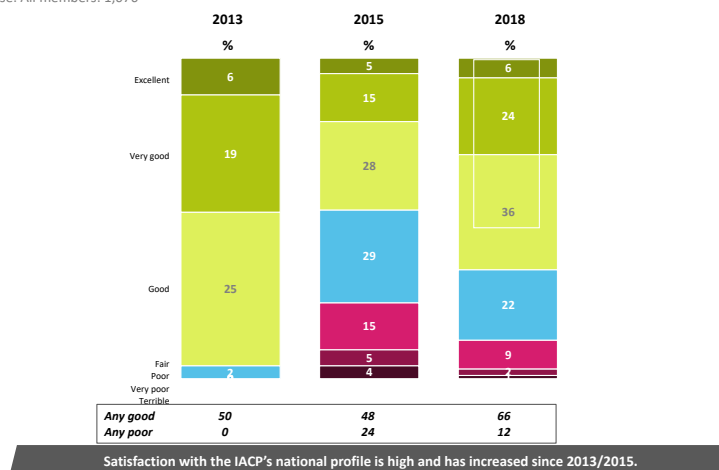
## vii) Organisational Profile

### Awareness and Satisfaction

Over half of the membership (54%) is aware (somewhat, largely or totally) of recent IACP lobbying activities in the area of introducing talk therapies in primary care for those with mild to moderate depression. Older members, affiliate members and accredited supervisors are the most likely to be aware.

#### Satisfaction with IACP's National profile

Base: All members: 1,076



Satisfaction with IACP's national profile is high and has increased since 2013/2015. 66% rate their satisfaction as good, very good or excellent (compared with 48% in 2015) and a further 22% rate it as fair. 12% rate it as poor. Students and older members are the most satisfied with the IACP's national profile. It is uniformly strong however.

Attendance at national/regional events and media articles/press releases are the most recognised of the IACP's promotional methods. Suggestions for improvements in this area – to further IACP promotional activity – include increasing media presence especially during holidays and times of difficulty/stress.

## viii) Research and Education

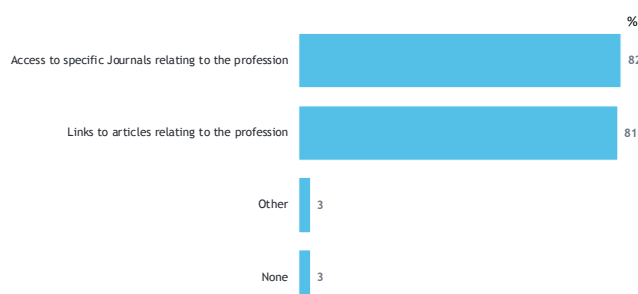
Suggestions for IACP to become involved with different areas of research were varied. While 4 in 10 had no suggestions, those who did mentioned areas such as outcome/efficacy of different types of counselling short/long term; ethics and the therapeutic relationship; mental health research; research in the area of children and adolescents; counselling provisions in the health system; public access to counselling.

Public attitudes towards and awareness of mental health/counselling and state funding for talk therapies were also suggested areas – and these are areas that the IACP is currently carrying out research into.

Four-fifths of the membership would welcome additional educational materials to be made available to them – such as access to specific journals relating to the profession and links to articles relating to the profession

#### Demand for educational materials

Base: All members: 1,076

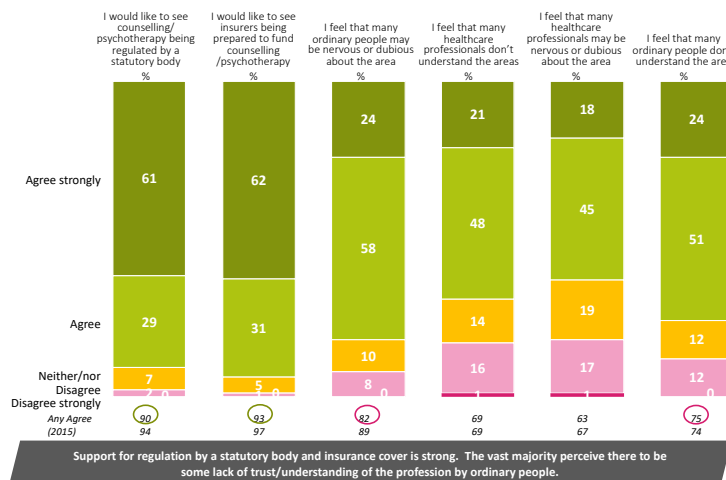


There is also clear demand for access to journals and links to articles.

## ix) Perceptions of Counselling/psychotherapy

### Attitudes to Counselling & Psychotherapy

Base: All members: 1,076

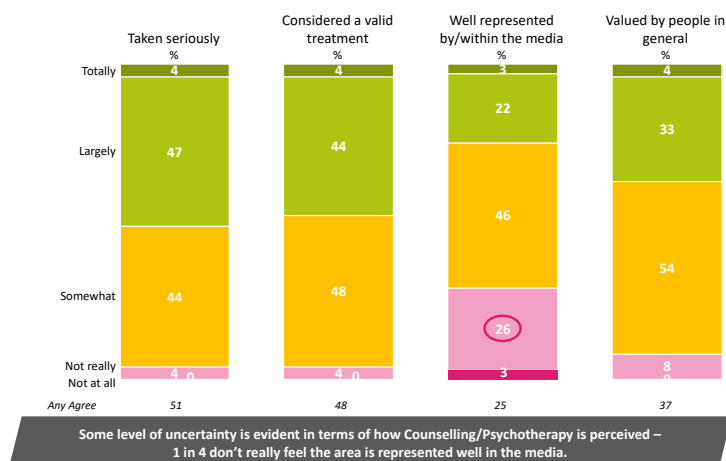


There is a significant perception amongst members that the area of counselling/psychotherapy is little understood by most ordinary people (75%) and that people may be nervous or dubious about the area (81%). Younger students are most likely to perceive a lack of trust/understanding of the profession by the public. Levels of understanding of counselling/psychotherapy amongst healthcare professionals is also perceived to be low (69%) and the majority of members also agree that healthcare professionals may be nervous or dubious about the area (63%).

There is strong support for State regulation amongst members (90%) and also for insurers funding counselling/psychotherapy (93%).

### Perceptions of Counselling/Psychotherapy

Base: All members: 1,076



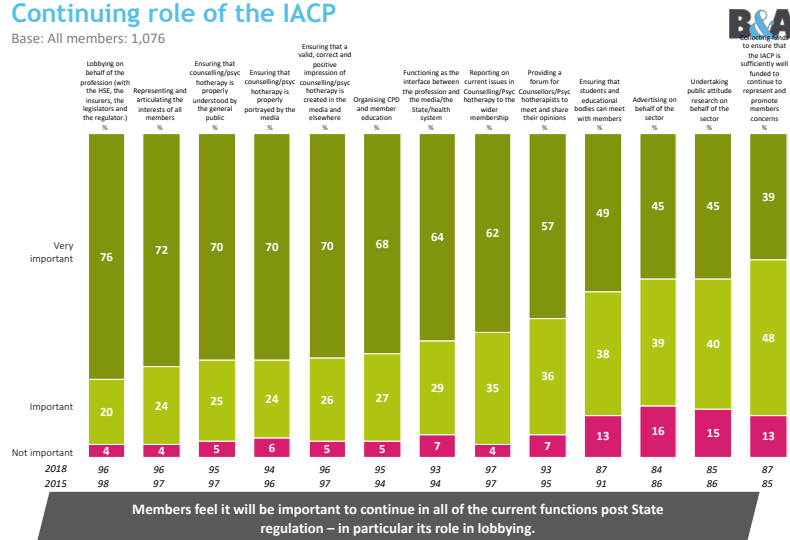
More than half think that counselling/psychotherapy is generally taken seriously and almost half think that it is considered a valid treatment. However there is some level of uncertainty here also with similar percentages saying that it is only somewhat taken seriously or considered a valid treatment. Only a quarter think that the area is well represented in the media and more than a quarter don't really feel that it is. Older members and supervisors are more likely to be of the view that counselling/psychotherapy is perceived positively.

## x) State Regulation and the Future

The IACP is primarily seen by members to function as a representative body and a regulatory body. While 90% agree with state regulation, two-thirds of members consider themselves to be strongly in favour of it. A further fifth are also in favour whereas 7% are neither for nor against it. Members believe that state regulation will have a positive impact on the profession as a whole (86%) and on themselves as professionals (77%).

### Continuing role of the IACP

Base: All members: 1,076

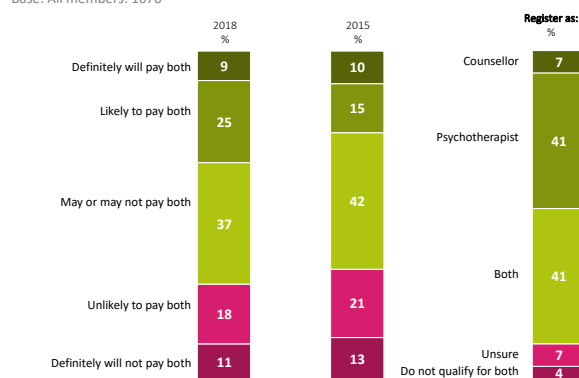


Members believe it will be important for the IACP to continue with all of its current functions post state regulation. In particular, members are highly interested in the IACP role of lobbying on behalf of the profession and representing and articulating the interests of all members (96%) and ensuring that counselling/psychotherapy is properly understood by the general public (95%) and properly portrayed in the media (94%).

A third of members intend to pay both IACP membership and the State Registration fee (up from 2015) and more than a third say that they may or may not pay both

### State regulation & membership/registration

Base: All members: 1076



34% of members say they intend to pay both their IACP & state registration fees post regulation (up from 2015) – however, there is still a notable proportion who say they may or may not pay both. An equal proportion say they will register as both a counsellor and psychotherapist as those who say they will register as a psychotherapist only. A minority say they will register as a counsellor only.

41% intend to register as both counsellor and psychotherapist and 41% intend to register as psychotherapist. Only 7% intend to register as counsellor while a further 7% are unsure.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This research strongly indicates that Ireland's largest association for counselling and psychotherapy has a very engaged and committed membership, comprising of people who find their work rewarding – even if some are finding it difficult to make a living out of it. The research tells us that while the membership is highly educated, the desire to continue to learn is a key feature. A high level of commitment to continuing with personal therapy, even after qualification and accreditation, is also evident. This further indicates a desire amongst members to continue to learn and to be the best practitioners they can be.

The enormous response rate for this research – with 1,076 members completing it – was very welcome and is unusually high. Other association members' surveys tend to get between 6-10% so it is unprecedented to have more than a quarter of the membership complete the survey. As well as speaking of a very engaged, committed membership, this research offers highly representative insights.

There have been significant improvements in satisfaction levels in many areas since the last survey. However, many opportunities exist for the IACP, as highlighted by this research, to assist members further in key areas. One such area is in helping members to promote themselves. Only 23% market themselves enough in their own view. When we consider that the most challenging aspect of working as a counsellor/psychotherapist is making a living, the area of marketing needs attention. There is also a challenge to help members to get more focused on setting up a practice. Another opportunity exists in the area of online counselling/psychotherapy – boosting comfort levels in this area through appropriate training and other supports.

Satisfaction with IACP's national profile is high and has increased considerably since the last research. Satisfaction with accreditation processes is also high and has increased markedly since the last survey. Younger students and pre-accredited members who are going through accreditation processes are slightly less satisfied with them – some members suggest that further simplification is required. Satisfaction with supervision is consistently high across all groups.

Opportunities also exist in the area of engaging the membership further with the website as most say they visit it only now and again. Those who do visit rate the various facilities consistently highly. However, findings indicate that a review of web-site design, navigability and some of the content could be undertaken with a view to improving it. While IACP publications are highly read and very favourably viewed – especially the ICJP - there is an opportunity to review and consider changing the IACP blog, with most saying that they either do not read it or do not find it interesting. Offering free online CPD workshops/webinars and providing access to other journals relating to the profession are areas for further development also.

Members are asking the IACP to create more opportunities to engage with the media with a view to promoting a better understanding of the profession. 1 in 4 members don't really feel counselling/psychotherapy is represented well in the media currently. There is also an opportunity in this to enhance members' awareness of the IACP's lobbying activity around talk therapies in primary care – while the majority are aware (54%) a significant minority are not.

96% say that they find their work rewarding. This very high percentage is an unusual finding in any field, including the health field. Another global study tells us that more Irish people are dissatisfied with their job than those who are satisfied. The fact that many members do not have the amount of work they need, and yet still report their work to be either totally or largely rewarding, says a lot about the commitment of the membership to their profession.

Members are highly in favour of State Regulation, with 90% agreeing with it. There is a strong belief that it will impact positively on the profession as a whole and on themselves as professionals. Opportunities exist for the IACP to help members to navigate this change and to continue to act as a representative and advocacy body post-regulation. Members believe it will be important for the IACP to continue with all of its current functions post-regulation. Of particular significance to members are the IACP roles of lobbying on behalf of the profession, representing and articulating the interests of all members and ensuring that counselling/psychotherapy is properly understood by the general public as well as properly portrayed in the media.

Overall this research strongly indicates that the highly engaged and committed members of the IACP value the association and the work that is carried out on their behalf. The findings point to the IACP being very effective as an organisation and that it is small changes to some areas, as outlined above, that are called for. There have been substantial increases in satisfaction levels in many key areas since the last surveys. This research points to the IACP continuing to do what it is doing, and doing more of it – with valuable suggestions for enhancement in key areas of activity.



*Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy*

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