



**STRATEGIC  
PLAN  
2017-2020**







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Collette Mayers, Mark O'Callaghan, Moira Sharkey, Marina Sweeney, Vincent Byrne, Ejiro Ogbevoen, Ann McDonald, Catherine Roebuck Shane Twomey and Committee members.



## Message from The Cathaoirleach

Dear Members,

The document you are about to read is the result of many voluntary hours put in by several committed volunteers over a year of engagement with the process of building a new direction for IACP as a professional accreditation and representative body within the global changes affecting the profession. The challenge for the Board was to pursue the modernisation of IACP in preparation for these changes while attending to the responsibilities and legal obligations brought about by the establishment of the Charities Regulator in October 2014 under the Charities Act 2009 and the revision of company law in Ireland brought about by the Companies Act 2014.

It was essential and mandatory that any new Strategic Plan for IACP held the line with regard to the impact of legislation and looming regulation. As the previous strategic plan (2014 to 2017) came to an end it became incumbent on the Board to take a serious review of where the organisation was and to plot its journey to the future. In 2015, members reported being disenfranchised and serious questions were raised as to the relevance of the organisation within the profession. A “Behaviour and Attitudes” survey showed up a number of issues for our members and the Board, also members, who had similar concerns. It became clear at an early stage that the organisation had major changes to undergo to continue to be relevant in today’s professional health care environment. The Board kept itself informed of the plans of the Department of Health and CORU and what they would likely require from the profession in regulation. It was decided to bring in professional support to facilitate a voluntary Board in developing a deliverable and relevant purpose for the association. The Board took over a year and many hundreds of voluntary hours by each director, unprecedented by any Board or Executive Committee in IACP history.

The Plan took shape on the base of “A member’s journey”. The Board engaged with the staff and its sub committees to review its work in progress and to check its relevance to the needs of our members. It was considered prudent to wait for the appointment of a CEO, the person to be tasked to deliver the implementation of the Plan on behalf of the Board. This brought completion to the document in December 2016 and finally being approved by the Board in January 2017. Upon approval, work immediately began to resource the staff and the organisation in phase 1 of the Plan and to facilitate the building of foundations for the future.

Work on the implementation of the Plan is well underway and on target by this present Board of 6 months. It is important that this work continues with those committed to a future vision for our organisation. The Board recognises that change is difficult for some, but like any professional body or business, growth requires change to exist in a modern professional environment. So, it is with pleasure, that I invite you to read the IACP “Strategy 2017 to 2020, A Member Journey”. I trust you will find the impact on building the profession, to where it deserves to be, will be evident throughout.

I would like to thank our staff, the members of the Board’s sub-committees, and my fellow Directors (past and present) who gave their valuable time as self-employed and employed professionals to assist in the development of this document for our members. I would also like to thank all those members who support the changes that they are experiencing in the rollout of professional CPD and the contact they now experience in coming into contact with our National Office.

**Eugene McHugh, Cathaoirleach**

September 2017

# Executive Summary

The IACP has been in existence developing, accrediting and raising professional standards since 1981.

IACP currently has in excess of 4,200 members and is the largest member and representative organisation in the Republic of Ireland for counsellors and psychotherapists. Following a review of the Strategic Plan (2014 – 2017) the Board engaged in a review of the purpose of IACP and subsequently proposed a revised Purpose Statement for the organisation which it presented to the Annual General Meeting of the company in April 2016. At the heart of the new purpose is the Member Journey and it is IACP's intention to provide members with the supports they need along that journey from Pre-student through to Accredited Practitioner.

IACP accredits and regulates the majority of practicing accredited counsellors and psychotherapists in Ireland. a rigorous accreditation process has been developed over the years and now includes a formal Garda vetting process and professional development activities. The process is designed to protect the public and members. The public can be certain that members of IACP are qualified and experienced and attend clinical supervision. IACP members can promote themselves in the confidence that they are offering a proven and credible professional service. Areas of improvement have been identified with regard to creating programmes to assist members in career development and raising the wider awareness of the value of counselling and psychotherapy.

This 3-year strategic plan covering the years 2017 to 2020 will be a time of change for members and the organisation. The Irish Government has commenced a process aimed at regulating the profession and registering practitioners. Regulation is a Darwinian process for organisations; those that adapt survive and thrive and those who do not perish. There are many challenges that IACP will face in this time period, but these can be seen as opportunities as well. The strategy outlines a range of specific key actions that the Board of Directors has identified as important. Some are making improvements about current activities while others are about new activities that are compatible with our purpose statement. This strategy document outlines a series of organisational reforms and sets out structures to align the organisational structure with the key pillars outlined in the strategy. When implemented, the strategy and its key actions will contribute to making IACP and the profession stronger by 2020 and more in line with the process of regulation.

# IACP Purpose Statement

**‘Members working together to achieve excellence in practice, career development and wider awareness of the value of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy’.**

# Key Aims

The key aims in the next 3 years?

1. Continuous improvement of current accreditation process and professional standards.
2. To assist members to develop their personal and professional careers.
3. To engage with the Government and regulators (CORU) to ensure that registration and regulation is a sensible, coherent and easy process for members to comply with.
4. When registration commences, take full advantage of the benefits for IACP and members and have full recognition within our full mental-healthcare system; private, public and voluntary.

# The Strategy – Overview

*“Members working together to achieve excellence in practice, career development and wider awareness of the value of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy”.*

The purpose statement clearly identifies 3 pillars; excellence in standards, career development and raising awareness of the benefits of therapy. The imminent possibility of regulation requires attention; IACP must participate and influence the process to the best of its abilities. A final pillar relates to the resourcing of the strategy and the implementation of the key actions within it. Thus, the strategy for 2017-2020 has in effect 5 key pillars:

**Pillar 1:** Members working together to achieve excellence of practice.

**Pillar 2:** Members working together to advance career development.

**Pillar 3:** Members working together to raise the wider awareness of the value of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy.

**Pillar 4:** Influencing the process of statutory regulation.

**Pillar 5:** Resourcing and delivery of the strategy.

The Pillars are interlinked as regulation will establish a minimum framework and a register of accredited practitioners. This in turn will establish a minimum standard of practice and lay the foundations for higher standards for specialisms. Both then contribute to raising the awareness of the public that there is a register of credible professionals which may remove unregistered persons from practice. The process can create more opportunities for career development for those on the register and create more opportunities for self-employed counsellors and psychotherapists. The IACP does considerable work in the areas relating to Pillar 1; annual re-accreditation, Garda vetting, supervision and CPD. There is scope for improvement in this Pillar, but there appears to be greater scope for the organisation in regard to career development and raising the awareness of the value of therapy. These objectives would add greatly to the ‘value proposition’ offered to members and in fact allow for greater involvement and engagement by the membership generally. The following outlines the rationale for the key actions within the strategy.

# Rationale for the Strategy and the 5 Pillars

## **Pillar 1 - Members working together to achieve excellence in practice.**

Rationale: Accreditation is the most important aspect for members who wish to practice. There have been improvements in our current policies and procedures in 2016. There is a need for continuous improvement in accreditation policies and procedures to ensure the highest standards are being attained and IACP accreditation has real value for members and the general public. The more robust IACP policies and procedures are, the stronger is the case for the entire IACP register of members to be accepted by CORU if regulation occurs. Having robust procedures is one thing, but communicating them effectively to members, other healthcare professionals and the general public is equally important. The 'member journey' outlines the individual's progression from Pre-student member to Accredited Practitioner. Explaining the member journey and the steps required to progress through it are important to help students, educators, members, supervisors, regulators, other healthcare professionals and the general public understand the quality of the accreditation offered and the safeguarding of standards and the public interest by IACP. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and training is also important to maintain professional standards and proficiency and improving the standard of CPD/training is important within the review of standards.

## **Pillar 2 - Members working together to advance career development**

Rationale: Career development is a key interest for members. Be it working in the private, public or community and voluntary sector members aspire to help those seeking their services, but also make a living. Too few members are currently able to make an independent living as a counsellor or psychotherapist. IACP cannot solve this problem directly, but it can provide a range of training and support services to assist members in developing their careers.

## **Pillar 3 - Members working together to raise the awareness of the value of professional counselling and psychotherapy**

Rationale: Individual members can have an impact on their local communities and society, 4,200 members working together can make a real impact. In order to achieve the maximum impact IACP can really only pick one key issue to influence at a time. However, selecting the right issue requires consultation with the membership. Raising public awareness is important as the more members of the general public who understand the benefit that they can accrue from counselling, the more people will

access the services of members. Raising awareness needs to be carefully defined as ‘increasing the number of people who have tried counselling/ psychotherapy and are willing to access services in the future’ thus increasing the ‘market size’ available for members. It may also involve the willingness of people to access counselling more often to address their needs. Research is another way to raise awareness and developing a research programme would greatly assist in adding gravitas to the work of our members. Increasing the volume of evidence-based research over time adds credibility both to the profession and to practitioners.

#### **Pillar 4 - Influencing the process of statutory regulation and registration**

Rationale: The Department of Health published a public consultation on the potential regulation of counselling and psychotherapy in the Republic of Ireland in September 2016. The submission deadline was 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016. IACP made a formal submission to the Department under this call. This may be the first step in a process of regulating the sector under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. This will be a process that may take 3 years before the registration date, but the process of negotiating with the Government and CORU (the public agency responsible under the 2005 Act) will commence quickly and influencing the drafting of a statutory instrument and subsequent regulations will be important for IACP. *Grand Parenting* is a process where the Government accepts certain previous qualifications which may be of less recognised levels than those required of new entrants. Negotiations around which qualifications may be accepted and the value of the additional hours during pre-accreditation and subsequent hours worked and CPD done will determine the level of disruption to IACP members as a result of registration. IACP will also seek to develop and offer programmes to assist members upskill and attain the necessary minimum qualifications required by CORU.

#### **Pillar 5 - Resourcing and implementing of the strategy**

Rationale: The previous sections have outlined a range of new and existing activities that IACP wishes to engage in and progress by the end of this strategy in late 2019. IACP currently has at its disposal a considerable wealth of resources to support it achieve these goals. It has considerable membership and many members volunteer of their time to serve on Board of Directors, sub groups, regional committees and other fora. IACP has a full-time management and staff at its resources and a considerable amount of good will. It also has the position of being the largest member body in the country for counselling and psychotherapy and considerable weight in its position. The key will be the effective use of these resources and targeting resources on to the high-priority activities and minimising any ‘mission drift’.

# The 5 Pillars of the IACP 2017-2020 Strategy

Based upon the purpose statement: 'Members working together to achieve excellence in practice, career development and wider awareness of the value of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy'.



# The IACP Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020 and Key Actions

## *Pillar 1: Members working together to achieve excellence in practice.*

IACP members are the strength of the organisation. At the heart of the new vision is the Member Journey and the intention is to provide members with the supports they need along that journey from Pre-student through to Accredited Practitioner. The Board spent considerable time in defining the member journey in 2016 and the stages from Pre-student to Student Member to Pre-Accredited Member and then on to Accredited Member and Accredited Practitioner as key in member's career development. IACP has an obligation to ensure that the internal procedures are coherent whilst maintaining the highest standards supporting both the Purpose Statement and following the member journey. The current accreditation processes are robust and work well. However, like all processes, these needs to be reviewed and improved as circumstances change. IACP is committed to doing this by continuing to assist and inform members at the current membership level and on how to progress to the next level. Currently, IACP accredits members at different levels, as well as, supervisors and certain third-level programmes. IACP is committed to ensuring that all accreditation procedures and processes are robust and kept up to date and to the highest standard as set down by the Board of Directors. This is an ongoing process and will appear in all annual Programmes of Activity (POA).

### **Excellence in practice is the culmination of a number of processes:**

- **Supervision** is a key element with regard to professional competence and personal learning and improvement. IACP continues to commit itself to ensuring the highest standard of supervision for all its members and will work with supervisors and training providers to ensure that high-quality supervision is present for all membership categories.
- **Garda Vetting** is another process that IACP takes seriously. Within the life of this strategy all members in practice will have undergone a formal process of Garda vetting. This gives confidence to clients, service providers and the general public with regard to accessing counselling and psychotherapy services from IACP members. IACP is committed to ensuring that this process is rigorous and maintained.
- **Continuous Professional/Personal Development (CPD) and Training** are key for not only accessing skills, but also with regard to up-skilling

and maintaining an up to date knowledge of current practice and new therapies. IACP commits itself to improve the quantity and access to CPD and training programmes for its members over the lifetime of the strategy. Notwithstanding the imminent arrival of regulation and the likely CPD requirements of the Regulator on registered members, IACP commits itself to provide CPD and training opportunities to a very high level that will not just allow members to meet these requirements, but also provide additional programmes to ensure the improvement of the standard needed to achieve 'excellence in practice'.

- **Membership grades** will be reviewed to ensure compliance with any new regulatory requirements and reflect the feedback from members to ensure that they meet the needs of members in practice.

### ***Pillar 2: Members working together to advance career development.***

There is great scope to provide a wider range of services to members within career development as distinct from professional development. Activities within this Pillar will focus not on professional competencies, but practical skills to promote career/business development. Within this there are 4 themes identified:

- **Development of a student engagement programme.** Students are the future of the profession and more needs to be done to engage with them at an early stage. Running workshops on career progression, building a network of student members and introducing them to IACP members who may be potential student placements or future professional colleagues should be normal activities for the Association. Initially, connecting with the student members and delivering some initial workshops should then lead to a forum of student members seeking their input, needs and opinions. This should then advise the student engagement programme going forward.
- **Development of an enterprise support programme to support self-employed counsellors and psychotherapists.** Most members in practice are self-employed counsellors and psychotherapists whether registered as a sole trader or through a limited company. Many become self-employed by default; they want to practice their skills, but with few jobs available to them, they become self-employed. The business development skills and experience tends to be quite low. This is not unusual in many sectors where self-employment is prevalent. IACP will commit itself during the life of the strategy to develop and run a range of programmes aimed at helping members in self-employment to develop their business skill set. This would focus on talks and other resources reflecting on the services available, busi-

ness planning, marketing, tax compliance and other services aimed at helping them expand their customer base and increase revenue as a result. Helping members to work together to build better offerings, write tenders and raise their brand awareness are essential to create a sustainable profession.

- **Development of a programme to support counsellors and psychotherapists working in the broad public sector.** Many members work for public or publicly-funded organisations, educational institutions, charities and voluntary bodies. These members' needs are different from those in self-employment and a forum of such members can be created and consulted on the development of activities to meet their career development needs.
- **Development of a mentoring programme to utilise the expertise of senior and retired members relating to personal and professional development.** Mentoring is recognised as one of the most valuable services offered to clients. IACP wants to build a panel of retired and experienced members who are willing to act as mentors. The panel should be able to guide and assist members on career development for both self-employed and members employed within organisations.

### ***Pillar 3: Members working together to raise the awareness of the value of professional counselling and psychotherapy.***

Individually, members can only make a certain amount of difference to society, but combined, 4,200 members can make a significant difference. The IACP has a clear internal mission regarding excellence in practice, but have not defined an external mission and this Pillar addresses these issues. The outcome of the activities under this pillar will result in more people willing to use counselling and psychotherapy which not only has societal value, but also increases the number of clients (both in the private and public sectors) and the total revenue expended on services annually:

- **Developing a societal mission.** Key to this pillar is a consultation process with the membership to define what societal mission IACP should aim to achieve. Once the consultation process has concluded then a draft report will be sent to the Board of Directors for consideration. Once a plan is devised actions will be defined within the annual programme of activity to achieve the goals set out.
- **Developing a strategy of raising public awareness.** Raising awareness within the general public, but also within other healthcare professionals in a complicated process: starting with defining the message and

the specific target groups to receive the message through to finding the appropriate channels of communication and testing the effectiveness of the message. In short, it involves development of a comprehensive communications strategy covering public relations, publicity, brand awareness, sector awareness and marketing. This is a supporting strategy as it communicates the other key actions, but a coherent communications strategy is essential to raising awareness of IACP and the value of professional counselling and psychotherapy.

- **Developing a strategy of member engagement with internal and external events.** This strand of the strategy will examine the types of events we engage in to progress the aims of this Pillar. Information stands have value, but giving the general public ‘experience’ of the value of therapy and de-mystifying the process of counselling has more value. Creating events where members actually engage directly with the general public and offer ‘taster’ clinics at large events can be considered. Once developed, these activities can create a platform for delivering the aim of raising the profile of counselling and psychotherapy and its value.

#### ***Pillar 4: Influencing the process of statutory regulation and registration.***

The Department of Health initiated a consultation process in 2016 regarding the regulation of counselling and psychotherapy. The closing date for submission was 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and IACP made a formal submission to the Department. It is highly likely that the Department of Health will continue with the process of regulation under the auspices of The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The process will likely involve establishing a ‘working group’ to develop the details of the statutory instrument which will then report to the Minister probably by end 2018. Once the statutory instrument is signed by the Minister for Health then a set period of time will be given before registration and practitioners will have to comply with the necessary requirements for registration by that date. There will probably be a 2-year window between signing the statutory instrument and registration.

In that time IACP will work to ensure that all accredited members and practitioners are ready for registration. ‘Grand Parenting’ is a term that describes the leeway that regulators have during the pre-registration date to accept certain qualifications and credentials that experienced persons may have that are equivalent to the minimum standards required of new entrants to the profession. IACP will be heavily involved in grand-parenting activities through negotiations with the Department of Health and CORU (the public agency which administers other professions regulated under the 2005 Act) to define which previous qualifications

would be acceptable when combined with the register of accreditation kept by the organisation. In parallel, IACP will run programmes to assist those who need to take remedial action to upskill or upgrade qualifications to the newly agreed minimum standard. Grand parenting activities will be an important aspect of IACP's work during the duration of this strategy.

The other important aspect for the IACP is to agree the organisation's approach to negotiations regarding regulation. This will cover the establishment of 'red lines', the identification of appropriate forms of influencing and also the types of activities that might cause reputational damage.

### ***Pillar 5: Resourcing the strategy***

Any strategy requires resources to implement. IACP has considerable resources at its disposal; 4,200 members, a committed Board of Directors, specialist sub- committees and working groups, regional committees, a professional staff and management, its own Head Office and financial resources. Many other organisations might envy the resources at the organisations disposal, but the strategy can only be truly effective if these resources are targeted and used in the right way. The following is a review of the resources and structures at IACP's disposal and how they can be harnessed effectively to achieve the outcomes defined in the first four pillars.

- **Board of Directors reforms:** the current Board of Directors has put in considerable time and effort into reviewing of its procedures and progressing with the principles outlined in The Governance Code. Formal processes need to be adopted for a range of subjects and this will require internal consultation and review.
- **Sub-committee and sub-Board reforms:** the number and structure of the current voluntary members' sub-committees and working groups need review and reform. The sub-Board structure should include consultative committees working for the Board of Directors dealing with specific areas of work and be reflective of the 5 Pillars of the strategy. Thus, the Board of Directors will commence a review of the sub-group structures to align with the 5 Pillars of the strategy.
- **Regional Group reforms:** at present the Regional Committees primarily see their role as organising a number of CPD and social events during the year. Regional Committees should have a wider remit and be a forum for the members in their region and a platform for two-way communication between the member and the national organisation. The Regional Committees may arrange local interest groups for members, policy discussion groups and other fora to allow them

fully engage within IACP. The information generated by these initiatives will be communicated to national level through the proposed Member Care, Communications and other channels envisaged by the Strategic Plan.

- **Staff restructuring:** the Board of Directors has initiated a process on organisational review in late 2016, due to commence in early 2017 after the ratification by the Board of Directors of this strategy, resulting in restructuring the Head Office resources to realign and be consistent with the 5 strategic pillars.
- **Financial resources:** the budgeting process and financial reporting systems will be reviewed to ensure that they are in line with the new strategy and that adequate resources are expended in the appropriate manner. The objective of the Board of Directors is to generate a small surplus annually and to invest reserves to maximise the rate of return and secure the long-term future in the interests of the members.





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