

*Irish Association  
for Counselling  
and Psychotherapy*

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021 - 2025





# IACP Mission Statement

We are dedicated to promoting and advancing the profession of Counselling and Psychotherapy. We will achieve this through the promotion and provision of high-quality education, training, research and professional development, by raising awareness of the value and benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy and by supporting members to work to the highest possible standards, for the benefit and the protection of individuals seeking therapy.



# FOREWORD

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## Chair and CEO message – Strategic Plan 2021-2025



The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) plays an important role in maintaining and improving the standards of Counselling and Psychotherapy in Ireland. We are responsible for the accreditation of programmes of education, setting standards for practicing counsellors and psychotherapists, supporting our members in achieving and exceeding these standards, advocating for increased access to and investment in the profession and for promoting the benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy. We do this through an energetic and highly engaged community of counsellors and psychotherapists, volunteer members, staff, stakeholders, educators, and policy makers.

The organisation has changed significantly in the past 40 years and we continue to adapt and flex to ensure we maintain our relevance to the profession as well as to wider society. We will need to continue to change to meet an increasingly challenging external environment. This document explains how we intend to do that and how we aim to realise our six key strategic objectives that we believe will define our future success. The IACP Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 sets out our vision, strategic objectives, strategic approach, and key indicators of success. It details a careful approach to initiatives and actions that will drive this strategy forward. The associated effect will improve our relevance, influence, diversity, service offering and impact.

This Strategic Plan has been arrived at through an in-depth consultation process involving our members, IACP Subcommittees and Regional Committees, the Board of Directors and staff which helped us to test and refine our ideas. We express our sincere thanks to all of those who contributed to the development of this new vision for the IACP.

The organisational business plan that will be based on the strategic document, will include specific goals with a delivery plan. The IACP Business Plan will be overseen by the CEO and the Board of Directors who will receive ongoing operational reports on the implementation of the IACP Strategic Objectives. IACP Members are presented with an update at each AGM regarding the IACP strategic activities in the past year.

While our organisation adapts to the complex world around us, some things won't change. We will maintain our commitment to supporting and celebrating the dedication of our volunteer members who make an invaluable contribution to this organisation as well as to the wider profession.

We will also continue to work hard to build further on our reputation and to retain the confidence of the profession, educational institutions, the media, government, the public and all the organisations we work with. It is only by working together in a collaborative way that we will be able to realise our vision which is "The IACP will be a vibrant, leading and highly respected professional body and that Counselling and Psychotherapy will play an integral role in the Irish healthcare system".

### **IACP Strategic Plan – COVID-19 Pandemic**

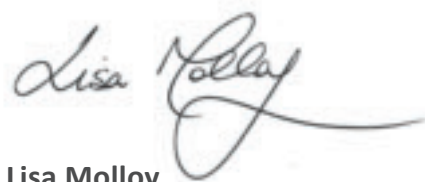
The COVID-19 global pandemic changed, practically overnight, how health services are delivered in Ireland. Those working in, and returning to, frontline health and social care services are critical to the continuing provision of care during this pandemic. As part of this critical response, counsellors and psychotherapists have met this challenge head-on and our members have continued to deliver safe and effective services throughout this crisis. COVID-19 highlighted the need for greater agility in the delivery of both face-to-face and on-line services and the IACP responded rapidly with a range of member supports including training, guidance and resources.

Good corporate governance practices remain a priority for the IACP. We will maintain this focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the agile adoption of remote working and virtual meetings to maintain critical business functions.

We have been obliged to invest in IT solutions as we moved to remote working to respond to COVID-19. This Strategic Plan will be underpinned by a continued focus on opportunities to review our operations and processes as part of our on-going response to the challenges of the pandemic.



**Bernie Hackett**  
Cathaoirleach, IACP



**Lisa Molloy**  
Chief Executive, IACP

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# INTRODUCTION

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*Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy is the largest Counselling and Psychotherapy Association in Ireland.*

## Scope

In developing this Strategic Plan, the IACP focused on:

- The role of IACP in maintaining the highest professional standards of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- The changing societal and economic environment
- The changes expected in relation to Regulation
- Revised Vision for Change and other national healthcare policy and legislation
- The evolving delivery of mental health services
- The professionalism of our members
- The value of Counselling and Psychotherapy

This new Strategic Plan covering the years 2021 to 2025 will be a time of change and opportunity for members and the organisation. The Irish Government has commenced a process aimed at regulating the profession and establishing the Registration Board for Counselling and Psychotherapy. The strategy outlines a range of specific key actions that the Board of Directors has identified as important in parallel with the ongoing regulatory process.

This strategy document outlines several developments that are planned for the upcoming years and several new objectives that will add value to IACP Membership. When implemented, the strategy and its key actions will contribute to making IACP and the profession stronger by 2025 and support IACP Members in making a smooth transition to State regulation.

# ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

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## About

Our Association was established forty years ago in 1981, to identify, develop and maintain professional standards of excellence in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Our work promotes best practice and the development of the profession as well as informing and safeguarding the public who access our members services. As a registered Charity (CHY 6615) representing over 4,500 members, we are the largest Counselling and Psychotherapy Association in Ireland.

## What we do

We are a link between those who are looking for Counselling and Psychotherapy and those who provide Counselling and Psychotherapy. Also, we provide information and set and maintain practice and training standards. We represent Counselling and Psychotherapy at both national and international level. Much of our work involves developing high standards in the profession of Counselling and Psychotherapy. The IACP has established a comprehensive Code of Ethics and Practice. IACP also partners with other National and International Counselling and Psychotherapy Associations to advance the development of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

## Vision

The IACP is a vibrant, leading and highly respected professional body, which will continue to promote Counselling and Psychotherapy as an integral part of the Irish healthcare system.

## Mission

The IACP dedicates itself to promoting and advancing the profession of Counselling and Psychotherapy. We will continue to achieve this through the promotion and provision of high-quality education, training and professional development, by raising awareness of the value and benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy and by supporting members to work to the highest possible standards, for the service and the protection of individuals seeking therapy.



## Values

The underlying values which guide the work of IACP are as follows:

- act with Integrity and work Professionally and Ethically
- encourage and embrace equality, diversity, and inclusion
- value the IACP community
- set high standards for the organisation/our members
- operate in a trustworthy, respectful and transparent manner
- commitment to excellence in our work

## Methodology

The six objectives of the strategy are the product of an engagement with IACP Members, Board of Directors, IACP Committees and Staff.

IACP is confident that it has developed a robust strategy to achieve its mission and advance towards achieving its long-term vision. We will establish our annual business plan and align it to these strategic objectives with measurable indicative timescales, deliverables, and outputs.

In January 2020, the IACP Board of Directors appointed the Strategic Plan Working Group, including Board Members, CEO, Staff and Management representatives. The group organised a member survey to seek Members' views on strategic objectives for the upcoming years. Strategic themes emerged from this member survey but also from the IACP research and engagements with the IACP Board of Directors, Regional Committees and Sub-Committees and as a result of an in-depth analysis of the outcomes of the previous Strategic Plans. The preparation of the plan involved a significant level of evaluation of the challenges and opportunities that currently face the Counselling and Psychotherapy profession in Ireland.

We are pleased and confident that we identified key strategic objectives which will drive the work of the IACP in upcoming years facing the upcoming regulation of the profession.

## Vision

The IACP is a vibrant, leading and highly respected professional body, which will continue to promote Counselling and Psychotherapy as an integral part of the Irish healthcare system.



# IACP STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2021 - 2025

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# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective I

*Strong representation of IACP Members by effective lobbying strategies and engagement with key IACP stakeholders.*

### Key indicators

Achievement of the objective will be measured using the following key indicators:

- Promotion of Counselling and Psychotherapy to the public through strong media representation and social media campaigns
- Promote opportunities for members in private practice through active lobbying activities seeking increased accessibility to members' services, and by raising awareness of the benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Lobbying government to call for increased investment in Counselling and Psychotherapy services
- Active engagement with employers regarding job opportunities and recruitment criteria to be inclusive of IACP members
- Continue to communicate with insurance providers regarding the cover for the services of IACP Members
- Active engagement and collaboration with other professional bodies and similar organisations both nationally and internationally

### Strategic approach

We will bolster our Communications function to continue to raise the profile of the IACP with the Irish Public via focused media campaigns and positive messaging. We will continue to promote a culture of acceptance for Counselling and Psychotherapy in Irish society through positive strategic media messaging. We will continue to build relationships with elected officials, senior civil servants, and government bodies relevant to the IACP, such as the Departments of Health, Education, and Finance and the HSE. We will increase opportunities for members, both in private practice and employed, through the active lobbying activities and by raising awareness of the benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy. We will continue to lobby and advocate in the interests of the IACP, and its members.

We will engage with employers regarding recruitment criteria and job opportunities for our members in established counsellor/psychotherapist posts. We will actively engage with similar organisations to promote mental health - specifically Counselling and Psychotherapy - and explore opportunities for the recruitment of IACP members within these organisations. We will also continue to call for insurance providers to cover the services of IACP members under their schemes.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective 2

*Ensure Development and Provision of high-quality Training, Education and CPD reflecting members' needs.*

### Key indicators

Achievement of the objective will be measured using the following key indicators:

- Delivery of high quality Online CPD courses and webinars reflecting members' needs and interests
- Delivery of free and paid high quality IACP workshops, live streamed and/or in person as appropriate
- New training strategies and initiatives to match the training needs of IACP members, including inclusion of a blended approach
- Strong support of all membership categories through national workshops, events, networking opportunities and forums, live streamed and/or in person as appropriate

### Strategic approach

IACP's mission states the commitment to promoting and advancing the profession of Counselling and Psychotherapy. We will continue to achieve this through the promotion and provision of high-quality education, training, and professional development, both online and in person as appropriate. IACP reviews the content of planned CPD and regularly seeks feedback from the membership on the most sought-after topics in Counselling and Psychotherapy. We commit to providing relevant, engaging and practice-friendly knowledge and therapy insights through the Irish Journal of Counselling & Psychotherapy. We have seen a large increase in members availing of online training, both free and paid since we commenced the provision of online CPD at the beginning of the Pandemic. We will continue to provide and expand the online space to make the participation widely accessible to Members. IACP's strength lies in the work of our volunteers and regional committees, who dedicate their time to organise workshops, networking events and training nationally. We will continue with this rich regional engagement and support of all member categories to stay connected and advance their Counselling and Psychotherapy competencies and skills.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective 3

### *Ensure Development of IACP Research Strategy and Activities.*

Research can be defined as ‘a systematic process of critical enquiry leading to valid propositions and conclusions that are communicated to interested others,’ (McLeod, 2015, p 2).

The IACP values research and is committed to engaging formally with it to help to shape the future direction of the organisation, to raise the profile and enhance the development of the profession and to contribute to public policy making. To this end the IACP will continue to conduct Member Surveys and General Public Surveys in 2021-2025.

In line with the IACP’s strategic objective of furthering a commitment to research, an IACP Research Committee has been formed. The rationale of this Committee is to aid the promotion of evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in the Counselling and Psychotherapy profession to the benefit of the practitioners and the public, as well as to develop strategic thinking about IACP research policy and activity. An IACP Research Strategy document, in line with overall IACP strategy 2021-2025, will be also available.

### Key indicators

- Advise on research issues and policies relating to research in Counselling and Psychotherapy and the mental health field
- Identify and address research challenges that members encounter
- Synthesise knowledge and disseminate research findings to encourage public debate, member practice and education about Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Develop new and existing resources relating to IACP research strategy, policy, and the code of ethics
- Create and cultivate research networks both nationally and internationally and form links with other relevant committees
- Advise on the standard of research education for accredited courses and encourage greater emphasis on research in training and training in research
- Encourage and embed a research culture within IACP and the Profession
- Develop a specific research agenda annually

## Strategic approach

To promote and encourage IACP members in their Counselling and Psychotherapy research throughout 2021-2025 the IACP will:

- Provide access to EBSCO research database and Psychology e-Book collection on a continuous basis
- Provide notifications of research related matters in the Research Corner of the eNews and the Research Corner of the Members Area
- Facilitate members to place a call for participants for their research
- Have a research presence at IACP events as well as research specific events
- Award an annual Bursary to a member who is carrying out Doctoral Research in line with the strategic aims of the organisation
- Recognise excellence in research by providing an award for a published article which is deemed to be an outstanding contribution to the field of Counselling and Psychotherapy

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective 4

*Provide Highest Quality Service and Professional Standards.*

### Key indicators

Achievement of the objective will be measured using the following key indicators:

- Review of current policies and standards and processes to reflect developments and changes within the operating environment
- Review the education and professional development standards with educational institutions
- Review of the IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for IACP Practitioners and IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for IACP Supervisors
- Maintain high professional supervision standards for the IACP
- Establishment of the Ethical Advisor service
- Implementation of the revised Complaints Process

### Strategic approach

IACP is committed to supporting members to work to the highest possible standards, for the benefit of the service and the protection of individuals seeking therapy.

Since 1981, the IACP's mission is to promote the highest professional standards for Irish therapists and excel by the introduction of ongoing improvements to our processes, by ongoing review of current policies, criteria, and guidelines. This is all to support IACP Members with clear and consistent information and allow for compliance requirements to be met in the most efficient way. As Members are aware, many of our processes in the last few years were moved online, including some of our application forms. We will continue the process of development of online application forms, creation of editable PDF forms, which will all improve member experience.

IACP will review the IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for IACP Practitioners and IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for IACP Supervisors to ensure the most updated ethical guidance for our Members. The IACP Ethics Committee will review both Codes to support Members to work ethically.



The IACP will continue to uphold the highest professional standards in supervision. IACP Supervisors will be supported by the provision of relevant CPD, including the support of the IACP Supervisors Forum Organising Committee and Supervision Committee to further develop the role of the Supervisor.

Also, Members have access to an Ethical Advisor, who is the first point of contact regarding particularly complex queries that may require further consultation with the Ethics Committee.

We are also committed to upholding the highest standards which has been achieved by having robust Complaints Procedures in place. The purpose of the Complaints Procedures is to provide for the processing of complaints regarding an infringement of the Code of Ethics and Practice on the part of an IACP Accredited Member or Pre-Accredited Member. A comprehensive review of these procedures was carried out in 2020 and the revised procedures were implemented in March 2021.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective 5

*Embrace the IACP Community and nurture Member Connection.*

### Key indicators

Achievement of the objective will be measured using the following key indicators:

- Regional Committees networking, development, and celebration
- Recognition and support of IACP Volunteers through various Volunteer initiatives and development of IACP volunteer strategy
- Develop the IACP Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Review of Member benefits, promote value of membership and grow numbers
- Mentoring support programmes (e.g. CARA)
- Promotion of members' forums (Basecamp, Facebook, LinkedIn, IACP Members Area)
- Promotion of the Irish Journal of Counselling & Psychotherapy as a key mechanism of member connection

### Strategic approach

The purpose of our Regional Committees is to represent the views and assess the needs of regional members (both current and future) to encourage regional member involvement, to support the organisation by delivering regional events and activities and to promote the IACP within the local communities.

The IACP will develop a Volunteer Strategy to support the invaluable work of our more than 150 volunteer members and to recognise and celebrate their work and achievements.

As one of the IACP core values is to encourage and embrace equality, diversity and inclusion, the aim of the IACP is to develop the IACP Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, which will inform the members of the IACP and members of the public on IACP's commitment to underpin our work with these core values.

It is also important to mention that a review of the IACP member categories was carried out by the IACP Member Categories Working Group and a number of proposals were submitted to the Board and for the AGM in relation to member categories. The IACP will also continue to receive member feedback by conducting regular member surveys, which will assist us in the future development and enhancement of member benefits.

### **Mentoring Programme Cara (Gaelic for Friend)**

Mentorship is a proven means to build networks and harness the experience of professionals. It came to our attention that many new, less experienced, and isolated members are missing a sense of connection, community, and engagement to the wider IACP Network. This is also true of retired members, who have invaluable experience and knowledge. To this end, IACP propose to offer new members the opportunity to develop a voluntary mentor/mentee relationship with a more senior member. This will create a capacity to offer support and encouragement while fostering community and belonging.

### **Member Forums:**

The IACP offers three membership forums to IACP Members. These platforms include Facebook, LinkedIn, and BaseCamp. Facebook and LinkedIn are platforms for the national membership, whereas BaseCamp provides support at a regional level. In these forums, IACP Members can offer and request help from their fellow members as well as connect with the IACP staff.

The IACP Journal previously known as the Éisteach, has been a recognised member resource since the mid-90s. The IACP will continue to develop and promote the Irish Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy as a key mechanism of member connection and a way to share member articles and provide the IACP updates.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## Objective 6

*Support IACP Members with the transition to state regulation.*

### Key indicators

Achievement of the objective will be measured using the following key indicators:

- Support Members in smooth transition to State regulation
- Reframing and refocusing IACP
- Engage strongly with the Regulator on regulation development
- Provide regular updates on the progress of the regulatory process to Members

### Strategic approach

Most members of newly regulated professions have not been regulated before. Some of our members may not have an in-depth understanding or be fully aware of professional regulation. One of the objectives of the IACP in supporting the transition to State regulation is to provide clear information and guidance to our members during this period.

The IACP has been preparing for this change for many years and will continue to play a leading role in discussions with the Department of Health and the state regulator, State Regulation, relating to the transition to State regulation.

Our main objectives will be to ensure:

- a. that there is a smooth and seamless transfer of the regulation function to State Regulation; and
- b. that appropriate timeframes and arrangements are put in place to ensure that our members meet State Regulation's registration standards

The change to State regulation will impact on the future direction of the IACP. This change will enable the organisation to devote more time and resources to strengthening its role as the leading voice in promoting the value and benefits of Counselling and Psychotherapy. There will be enhanced opportunities and collaboration within the sector to explore further opportunities for members.

Equally greater scope will become available to concentrate on the role of the IACP in the development and delivery of continuous professional development programmes, which will become a legal requirement post regulation.

The over-riding strategic objective will be to ensure that the IACP remains as a vital player in supporting our members and promoting their interests.

# SUMMARY

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The new Strategic Plan covers the years 2021 to 2025, which will be a time of change and opportunity for IACP members and our growing organisation. As the Irish Government has commenced a process aimed at regulating the profession, the strategy outlines a range of specific key actions that the Board of Directors identified as important in parallel with the ongoing regulatory process that will contribute to making IACP and the profession stronger, highly respected and play an integral role in the Irish healthcare system.

IACP's 6 Strategic Objectives for 2021 – 2025 are:



**Strong representation of IACP Members by effective lobbying strategies and engagement with key IACP stakeholders**



**Ensure Development and Provision of high-quality Training, Education and CPD reflecting members' needs**



**Ensure Development of IACP Research Strategy and Activities**



**Provide Highest Quality Service and Professional Standards**



**Embrace the IACP Community and nurture Member Connection**



**Support IACP Members with the transition to state regulation**





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