



The
British
Psychological
Society

Government White Paper

Trust, Assurance and Safety: The Regulation of
Health Professionals in the 21st Century

Parliamentary Briefing Paper

This White Paper states that psychologists in the UK will be statutorily regulated by the Health Professions Council (HPC). The British Psychological Society is in favour of regulation and has been attempting to persuade government to introduce the necessary legislation since the 1980s. So, whilst welcoming the government's intention we are hugely disappointed with the proposals.

As a Royal Chartered body we have a responsibility to the nation to 'look after' psychology and to ensure the nation is best served by appropriately trained and qualified professionals who can and will deliver a safe and effective service wherever they work or are employed.

The whole emphasis in the White Paper is on regulating persons employed in or by the National Health Service, who deliver individual 'patient' services. Whereas over half the psychologists who need to be regulated work outwith the NHS – in business, commerce, schools, prisons, education, and with individuals, groups and whole organisations. Our goal is to ensure that the public are fully protected – we have severe doubts whether the government's proposals will deliver that aim.

The Secretary of State for Health, in the White Paper, stated that regulation must be based on **five** key principles:

1. *The overriding interest should be the safety and quality of the care that patients receive from health professionals.*

We say: Many thousands of psychologists do not provide 'care to patients'. They work outside health with businesses, teams, the courts, prisoners, teachers, young children – so, how do they fit in with the principle?

2. *Regulation needs to sustain the confidence of both the public and the professions through demonstrable impartiality. Regulators need to be independent of government, the professionals themselves, employers, educators and all the other interest groups involved in healthcare.*

We say: The White Paper clearly says that employers are to be central to both initial registration and revalidation – hardly independent and impartial.

3. *It should be as much about sustaining, improving and assuring the professional standards of the overwhelming majority of health professionals as it is about identifying and addressing poor practice or bad behaviour.*

We say: How can professional standards be improved if, as stated in principle 2, the professions are to be excluded from regulatory processes? We have Royal Colleges and professional bodies to improve and assure professional standards.

4. *Regulation should not create unnecessary burdens, but be proportionate to the risk it addresses and the benefit it brings.*

We say: Unnecessary burdens on whom? With the central role of employers, will the main criterion be cost? What price do we put on proper public protection?

5. *A system that ensures the strength and integrity of health professionals within the UK, but is sufficiently flexible to work effectively for the different health needs and healthcare approaches within and outwith the NHS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and adapt to future changes.*

We say: As thousands of psychologists work neither within health, nor healthcare, nor the NHS, ensuring the strength and integrity of the profession will be virtually impossible. An arbitrary split of the profession into health and non-health would be divisive, cause confusion, and fail to provide public protection.

In a recent letter, Lord Hunt, Minister of State, said:

‘...The Government has decided that the regulation of new and emerging professions should be managed by the existing statutory regulatory bodies [the HPC]. For the following reasons:

– it will help to foster consistency where appropriate and the application of best regulatory practice across all regulated professions to stop members of some professions being treated more leniently or harshly than others...’

But this will not be the case. The White Paper sets out different systems for medical doctors than for other professions. So, even within the NHS psychologists working alongside doctors and nurses will work to different regulatory systems. Our view is that this is a massive missed opportunity to ensure that all the regulatory bodies work to consistent processes and systems. The single advantage of this would be to remove any confusion from the minds of the public about such matters as disciplinary and revalidation procedures.

The Society’s position

The Society’s Trustees have said:

*‘The Society recognises that the Government, in their White Paper, have set their policy and direction of travel: ie that psychologists are to be regulated and that the regulatory body will be the Health Professions Council (HPC). **However, we remain opposed to regulation by the HPC as it presently operates.**’*

But why?

- HPC's standards and procedures for accrediting training, entry to its register, maintaining competence and handling complaints are less rigorous than under our current voluntary regulation (*The Register of Chartered Psychologists*) – meaning that people we believe to be unfit to practice could be approved to do so.
- HPC does not regulate professionals in training or pre-qualification grades. Many of these individuals provide direct services to clients and therefore the public need protecting.
- HPC regulates 13 health service professions and simply does not have the governance systems to manage psychology as well – meaning that it will not be aware of profession specific issues needed to inform safe and effective practice and regulation.

We have also agreed to continue discussions with the Department of Health on two fronts:

- a) to ensure that any Section 60 Order is acceptable to the discipline/profession;
- b) to attempt to reform the HPC so that its processes provide for an acceptable level of public protection.

Both of these points are offered in the White Paper, although we are concerned that the public statements of the Chief Executive of the Health Professions Council seem to indicate that the HPC has no need to change its systems to accommodate psychologists, despite the fact that over half do not work in health, and the fact that psychology qualifications are postgraduate rather than undergraduate. In our view systems and processes will have to change to ensure that the public are fully protected.

In our discussions with the Department of Health our principles remain:

- the public must be fully protected;
- all those that need to be regulated must be regulated, i.e. all those that offer psychological services to the public;
- there must be no reduction in standards in all areas relating to regulation and professional recognition from those currently enjoyed by Chartered Psychologists, this also relates to standards of and for course accreditation;
- the title to be protected will be 'psychologist';
- a 'psychologist' is defined as a person with Doctoral level qualifications/competences.

The Society will continue to communicate its views to the Government and will attempt to take this issue forward in a constructive manner. We will continue to keep you informed of progress and especially if a Section 60 Order (Statutory Instrument) is tabled that would not deliver the goal of full public protection. We are sure that as elected representatives of the people your aim is the same as ours and hope that you will support us to ensure that whatever finally emerges is fit for purpose.

If you would like to meet with representatives of the Society to discuss the detail of this matter we will be delighted. Please contact us at the Society's office: The British Psychological Society, 48, Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR. Telephone: 0116 254 9568. E-mail: statreg@bps.org.uk; For further information go to www.bps.org.uk/statreg

Proper public protection is the only goal – we fear that the White Paper will not deliver.

The British Psychological Society was founded in 1901 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1965. Our principle object is to promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of Members of the Society by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge.

The Society has more than 44,000 members and:

- has branches in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- accredits around 800 undergraduate degrees;
- accredits nearly 160 postgraduate professional training courses;
- confers Fellowships for distinguished achievements;
- confers Chartered status for professionally qualified psychologists;
- awards grants to support research and scholarship;
- publishes 11 scientific journals and also jointly publishes *Evidence Based Mental Health* with the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Psychiatrists;
- publishes books in partnership with Blackwells;
- publishes *The Psychologist* each month;
- supports the recruitment of psychologists through *Psychologist Appointments* and www.psychapp.co.uk;
- provides a free 'Research Digest' by e-mail and at www.bps-research-digest.blogspot.com, primarily aimed at school and university students;
- publishes newsletters for its constituent groups;
- maintains a website (www.bps.org.uk);
- has international links with psychological societies and associations throughout the world;
- provides a service for the news media and the public;
- has an Ethics Committee and provides service to the Professional Conduct Board;
- maintains a Register of more than 14,000 Chartered Psychologists;
- prepares policy statements and responses to government consultations;
- holds conferences, workshops, continuing professional development and training events;
- recognises distinguished contributions to psychological science and practice through individual awards and honours;
- maintains a Register of Psychologists Specialising in Psychotherapy.

The Society continues to work to enhance:

- recruitment – the target is 50,000;
- services to members –by responding to needs;
- public understanding of psychology – addressed by regular media activity and outreach events;
- influence on public policy – through the work of its Boards and Parliamentary Officer;
- membership activities – to fully utilise the strengths and diversity of the Society membership.

The British Psychological Society

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