

# Statutory regulation of psychotherapy

May 2026 | Briefing for parliamentarians

The [UK Council for Psychotherapy \(UKCP\)](#) is the leading voluntary regulatory and membership body for psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors in the UK. With over 10,000 practitioners working across a variety of sectors, including the NHS and third sector, UKCP's members represent a crucial part of the mental health workforce.

## Current regulatory landscape

Unlike other mental healthcare professions, such as psychology or art therapy, psychotherapy and counselling are not currently subject to statutory regulation in the UK. Instead, the profession operates under a voluntary regulatory framework, overseen by the [Professional Standards Authority \(PSA\)](#). The PSA is an independent body accountable to Parliament that accredits and scrutinises voluntary registers across health and social care.

Voluntary regulatory bodies, such as UKCP, hold PSA Accredited Registers and are responsible for setting and upholding standards for training, ethics and professional conduct. However, membership of an Accredited Register is not compulsory. Psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors may legally practice without joining one, meaning they may see clients without meeting professional standards or being subject to independent oversight. As there is no legal requirement to join a PSA accredited register, anyone may offer services as a psychotherapist or psychotherapeutic counsellor, leading to confusion for the public over how to choose a credible practitioner who is qualified to the high standards PSA registers require.

Where psychotherapists are members of an Accredited Register, the system provides meaningful protections. However, these safeguards operate within the limits of a voluntary framework. Without statutory powers, it is difficult to prevent unsafe psychotherapists from continuing to practice, particularly when they move between voluntary registers or withdraw from them to avoid scrutiny. This serious risk of harm has been evidenced in [recent cases](#). The lack of statutory regulation also makes it difficult for members of the public to understand who is regulated, what protections apply, and where accountability sits.

## UKCP's position on statutory regulation

UKCP has undertaken a year-long [programme of work on statutory regulation](#), engaging extensively with members, training organisations, sector partners, people with lived experience and policy stakeholders through surveys, webinars, discussion papers and targeted consultations.

On the basis of this evidence, **UKCP has developed a set of principles designed to safeguard the public and strengthen confidence in the psychotherapy profession. We will support statutory regulation where it demonstrably meets these principles.**

UKCP's set of principles for statutory regulation include:

- **Entry standards:** Training, supervision and suitability requirements should be evidence-based, proportionate to risk and EDI-aware, without privileging any single therapeutic framework
- **Title and function protection:** Only practitioners meeting agreed standards should use protected titles (e.g.

psychotherapist, counsellor)

- **Ethical standards:** Clear conduct and professional integrity standards, including a commitment to anti-oppressive practice, with fair and transparent mechanisms for addressing breaches
- **Public transparency and accessibility:** A single public register with sanctions and fitness to practice information following practitioners across registers and sectors
- **Safe and informed client choice:** Regulation should provide balanced, modality-neutral information and avoid creating barriers that restrict the diversity of therapeutic approaches
- **Strong enforcement and governance:** Statutory powers to investigate, sanction and remove unsafe practitioners, alongside independent governance with input from professionals and service users
- **Protection of professional diversity:** The plurality of modalities and training routes should be preserved, with standards co-produced by the profession, regulators and people with lived experience

You can read the full list of principles on [our website](#).

## Strengthening the voluntary system

UKCP recognises that statutory regulation for psychotherapy, if it were to be adopted, is complex. In the meantime, we are taking forward a programme of voluntary enhancements to the existing PSA Accredited Register framework. These are practical improvements to standards, processes and public information that can strengthen public protection now, without waiting for legislation.

Key priorities include greater consistency in training standards and suitability processes across the profession, clearer public information about accreditation, complaints routes and practitioner accountability, and stronger information sharing between registers to prevent unsafe practitioners moving undetected between bodies.

We have published our recommendations for strengthening the voluntary system on [our website](#).

## Next steps

The increasing attention on the risk of harm from the profession, the media and the public shows that it is time to examine the issue more closely. Every person seeking support for their mental health deserves a system that is safe and easy to navigate at every stage, from finding a practitioner through to filing a complaint.

Our extensive, industry-leading research and engagement on the statutory regulation of the profession means that UKCP is well-placed to advise the Government on what effective, proportionate regulation of psychotherapy would need to achieve. UKCP would welcome the support of parliamentarians to facilitate ministerial engagement on:

- the public protection gaps that exist under the current voluntary system
- the principles UKCP has developed for what effective statutory regulation must achieve
- the practical improvements already underway within the voluntary framework
- how any future regulatory model should preserve access to therapy, practitioner diversity and the breadth of therapeutic approaches

If you would like to discuss statutory regulation further or arrange a meeting, please contact Ellen Dunn, UKCP policy and research manager, at [PolicyUKCP@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:PolicyUKCP@ukcp.org.uk).