



In Support of Statutory Regulation of the Psychotherapy Profession in the UK

Protecting the Public, Elevating Standards, and Ensuring Accountability

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Executive Summary

The UK psychotherapy and counselling sector remains largely unregulated at the statutory level, leaving the public vulnerable to harm from untrained or unethical practitioners. We call for the statutory regulation of the psychotherapy profession to protect the public, ensure professional accountability, and bring coherence to an otherwise fragmented sector. Recent initiatives like SCoPEd and the formation of PCPB provide a foundation for professional alignment and could support the implementation of regulation.

1. The Case for Statutory Regulation

1.1 Public Protection

Currently, anyone can legally call themselves a psychotherapist or counsellor, regardless of training or competence.

There is no statutory oversight to investigate misconduct, safeguard clients, or remove unsafe practitioners from practice across the profession.

Vulnerable individuals, often seeking therapy during crises, deserve assurance of safety and minimum standards.

1.2 Professional Accountability

Unlike doctors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers, psychotherapists are not accountable to a legally empowered regulator.

Statutory regulation would allow for consistent disciplinary processes, fitness-to-practise investigations, and public transparency.

1.3 Coherence and Clarity

With multiple voluntary registers (e.g. UKCP, BACP, NCPS), the landscape is fragmented and confusing to the public.

A single statutory regulator would establish clarity, unity, and trust.

2. Role of SCoPEd in Laying the Groundwork

The SCoPEd (Scope of Practice and Education) framework—developed collaboratively by BACP, UKCP, and others—maps training, competencies, and responsibilities across three professional tiers:



- Practitioner
- Advanced Practitioner
- Senior/Autonomous Practitioner

Contribution to Regulation

SCoPEd offers a transparent, standardised career structure that could underpin statutory registration routes.

Aligns educational and ethical standards across professional bodies.

Provides an evidence-based foundation for entry-level and progression standards, essential for statutory regulation.

3. The Emergence of PCPB: A Unified Professional Voice

The Psychotherapy and Counselling Professional Body (PCPB), launched in 2024, seeks to:

- Represent psychotherapists and counsellors collectively
- Promote a common code of ethics and shared professional standards
- Engage with government and regulatory stakeholders

Role in Statutory Regulation

PCPB could act as a collaborative interface between the sector and a future regulator, facilitating:

- Standardised accreditation
- Transition to statutory registration
- Ongoing professional development frameworks

It may also serve as a centralised professional body, similar to the BMA for doctors or RCPsych for psychiatrists, while regulation is handled independently.

4. Addressing Concerns

Concern: Regulation will restrict diversity of approaches

Response: Statutory regulation need not prescribe therapeutic models—only minimum standards of safety, training, and conduct.



Concern: Risk of medicalisation

Response: Regulation can accommodate pluralism, provided all approaches adhere to ethical and professional benchmarks.

Concern: Increased bureaucracy

Response: A proportionate regulatory model can be designed to minimise burden while maintaining rigour.

5. Recommendations

1. Adopt a statutory regulator model—either via the HCPC or a new bespoke regulator, with powers to protect the title psychotherapist.
2. Use the SCoPEd framework as a foundation for defining training and competence levels.
3. Engage PCPB as a sector-wide voice and consultative partner in shaping regulation.
4. Mandate professional registration as a condition of practice in public services (e.g., NHS, schools, prisons).
5. Include transitional pathways for experienced practitioners from voluntary registers to statutory regulation.

Conclusion

The absence of statutory regulation in the psychotherapy profession in the UK is an anomaly in a healthcare system that otherwise prioritises safety, accountability, and public protection. The foundations for change exist. The SCoPEd framework and the formation of the PCPB offer practical tools for alignment. It is time for government, professional bodies, and regulators to work together to introduce statutory regulation that protects the public and strengthens the profession.