

Professional self-regulation: an overview

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (the Council) is the independent professional self-regulatory body for teachers here. The Council's Acting Registrar sets out, in 10 key points, the rationale for and importance of self-regulation.

1. ▶ In the 1980s and 1990s teachers had campaigned to become self-regulating through the creation of a professional body that could raise the status of teaching. Teachers would therefore attain the same formal standing as established professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists.
2. ▶ The ability to self-regulate is a fundamental and a defining characteristic of professionalism. Professionals are trusted to regulate themselves in the public interest.
3. ▶ Teaching became a self-regulating profession when the Council was established by the 1998 Education (NI) Order.
4. ▶ Since its establishment the Council has actively promoted teaching as the most vital and important professional endeavour.

Through their professional work teachers have the opportunity to shape and mould the future of society; building civic responsibility and providing the foundations for positive and productive social activity and economic prosperity.
5. ▶ In times of increasing accountability and public scrutiny, professional activity can either be regulated by the State (Government Departments) or can be self-regulating. The option of not being regulated is unrealistic and incompatible with the current expectations placed on professionals.
6. ▶ It is the Council's view that the most effective model of regulation is self-regulation which confers and confirms professional status, reflects the ethical and value-based nature of teachers work, and enhances and maintains public confidence in the profession.
7. ▶ Self-regulation for teachers means that it is the profession itself, through its professional body, which sets the standards for teaching, determines the entry qualifications required for the profession and, through registration, ensures that only teachers of good character and with appropriate qualifications are able to teach in Northern Ireland's grant-aided schools.
8. ▶ The privilege of being able to self-regulate has not been granted to all teachers. In fact there are only 16 jurisdictions, worldwide, where the teaching profession is self-regulating. Teachers in Scotland became the first to become self-regulating, with the establishment of the General Teaching Council for Scotland in 1965.
9. ▶ It is important for teachers to value and understand the significance of self-regulation. The alternative, regulation by the State, deprofessionalises the work of teachers and diminishes teachers' professional autonomy.
10. ▶ The Council continues to explain and promote the advantages of professional self-regulation. Self-regulation is not about self-interest, rather it is the alignment of professional and public interest, for the benefit of all.