

ICF Advocacy Toolkit

United Kingdom

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Introduction

Since the creation of the International Coaching Federation in 1995, ICF leadership, members and staff have been active proponents of self-regulation of professional coaching. ICF's rigorous standards and credentialing and accreditation programs represent expertise and discipline in an industry that is frequently targeted for piecemeal regulation or wholly misunderstood by legislators and regulators unfamiliar with the profession.

The goals of this handbook are to:

- ▶ Communicate basic, broadly held tenets regarding the regulation and monitoring of coaches, as espoused by ICF and its membership.
- ▶ Look at the regulatory process and how ICF Members can help shape the landscape of industry regulation to promote and maintain industry quality.
- ▶ Look at recent, real-world examples of instances where laws and regulations could have had a significant impact on ICF Members and their clients.
- ▶ Show how you can become a resource to regulatory officials who are unfamiliar with coaching and how you can work with them to create the best regulatory landscape for both members and clients.

Why self-regulation?

There are 650 MPs (and 793 members of the House of Lords) in the United Kingdom. Add to this number more than 300 councils and regulatory staff and the number of stakeholders in the governing and regulatory process grows exponentially. The time pressures and knowledge pressures faced by those elected officials, appointed officials, and their staffs are quite daunting. They are tasked with being subject-matter experts on many topics. Constituents often bring up topics for attention, consideration, and action about which the official (and their staff) have little to no awareness, knowledge, or interest.

That's why associations like ICF can play such a vital role in the policymaking process. ICF, with strict standards and self-regulatory guidelines in place, is a tremendous source of instant expertise and guidance to policymakers that may only be familiar with coaches that wear whistles around their necks. In the *2020 ICF Global Coaching Study*, 75 percent of Latin American and Caribbean coach practitioners said they believed that coaching should be regulated. Among those respondents (including both coaches and managers/leaders using coaching skills) not ruling out the prospect of regulation, 79% of Latin American and Caribbean respondents said that professional coaching associations were best positioned to regulate the industry.

Over the past 25 years, ICF has grown into a global organization, with a membership of more than 41,000 professional, personal, and business coaches in 140-plus countries and territories. Globally, more than 35,000 coaches hold an ICF Credential. ICF also has nearly 140 chapters in 80 countries worldwide. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of accredited coach training programs. States, cities, and other governmental units looking at a successful self-regulatory model should look to ICF rather than creating a hodgepodge of regulatory frameworks that may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



For any questions or concerns you may have about ICF regulatory issues, please contact the ICF Ethics Assist line at ethics@coachingfederation.org or +1.859.226.4245.

Section 1: Why Advocacy is Important to ICF

ICF believes there is a solid, compelling case to be made for self-regulation of ICF Members and ICF-credentialed coaches.

ICF's foundation for self-regulation of coaching are based on:

- ▶ Core Competencies that define a professional coach's required skills and establish the foundation for the professional credentialing examination and accreditation for coach training programs.
- ▶ A strictly enforced Code of Ethics to which coaches pledge commitment and accountability to standards of professional conduct.
- ▶ Professional oversight through an Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process, which allows the public to report concerns and to be confident of objective investigation, follow-up and disciplinary action (including termination of ICF Membership or Credential) by an Independent Review Board (IRB).
- ▶ Professional coach credentialing, entailing a stringent examination and review process in which coaches must demonstrate their skills, proficiency, and documented experience in application of the ICF Core Competencies.
- ▶ Continuing education requirements for periodic renewal of coaching credentials to ensure continued professional growth and development.
- ▶ Professional coach training accreditation, in which coach-training programs submit to review and continuing oversight to demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards for curricula and alignment with defined core competencies, faculty, structure, proficiency and ethics to support excellence in coach training.
- ▶ Ongoing self-regulatory oversight initiatives to track the needs and concerns of individual and organizational clients on an international basis and to demonstrate an active commitment to meaningful, professional self-governance.

In a 2011 article on the professionalization of coaching, David Gray of the United Kingdom's University of Surrey notes that "professional work is defined and redefined through the continuous struggle between different occupational groups. If successful, society (the State) grants professional groups a degree of autonomy in exchange for self-regulation—a promise that the profession will set up and enforce standards of professional development and ethical practice."

Gray adds that groups like ICF can offer a solid alternative to a completely new, state-created regulatory apparatus:

"It appears ... the existence of an association like the ICF, with its code of ethics, has given some surety to state legislators that self-regulation is taking place ... and that state regulation is unnecessary. However, the fact that several US states have considered the regulation of coaching suggests that continuing self-regulation is not guaranteed."

Indeed, several states have introduced legislation to regulate coaching, requiring mobilization of ICF staff and leadership resources.

In all instances, the most important component of ICF's regulatory action is you, the member and practitioner. ICF has staff members who monitor and respond quickly to legislative and regulatory issues. But, as famed U.S. politician Thomas "Tip" O'Neill noted, all politics is local. Your voice, and your action on important issues, is most important and impactful.

Letters from Lexington, Kentucky, to elected officials in Juneau, Montpelier, or Pierre are necessary and important, but they don't carry the impact of a detailed, reasoned letter from a constituent. ICF, as an organization, cannot vote. Staff of ICF don't vote in state and local elections where members are located. ICF speaks authoritatively, but doesn't have the impact of someone, in a local district, who lives, works, pays taxes, and votes in that area. You, as an individual member of ICF, matter to your elected officials... not a big, global organization. To help yourself, your profession, and your colleagues, you need to be an involved, informed advocate for ICF and the coaching profession.

Example of ICF Self-Regulation

In 2020, 32 formal complaints were filed against ICF Members. Of those 32 cases:

- ▶ **7 were moved to ICF Coaching Education's Program Complaint Process**
- ▶ **17 met the requirements for Initial Review**
- ▶ **8 were adjudicated by the Independent Review Board**

Items addressed by the review process included:

- ▶ **Not maintaining appropriate boundaries**
- ▶ **Breach of confidentiality**
- ▶ **Conflict of interest**

In addition, more than 50 trademark and logo issues were addressed.

Section 2: Basic ICF Positions/Talking Points on Important Issues

According to the best estimates available, nearly half of all coaches worldwide are members of ICF. This depth of membership allows ICF to be recognized as the global authority on the profession. As such, it is ICF's responsibility to ensure that professional coach practitioners have the best regulatory atmosphere available in which to practice their craft. There are some basic tenets that have emerged through ICF's advocacy efforts that have become building blocks of current and future advocacy efforts:

- ▶ **Recognition of coaching as a distinct profession—ICF Members have presented testimony on this issue, most notably in the District of Columbia. The main points of the testimony are:**
 - Coaching is not psychology and does not diagnose, treat, or prescribe medication
 - Coaching is not backward-looking, but instead is rooted firmly in the present
 - Coaching is not about pathology, or exploring past issues impacting current behaviors
 - Coaching is about self-discovery and habits that are rooted in the present
 - A psychologist can be a coach, but a coach does not have to be a psychologist

- ▶ **Another fundamental tenet of ICF advocacy is that industry self-regulation is more effective, efficient and stringent than a patchwork of different EU, national, state or local regulations. Points ICF has made on this issue include:**
 - Self-regulation, conducted by an internationally-known organization with significant membership and licensing requirements, is preferred to piecemeal and uninformed regulation by individual states and localities
 - Very few state legislators have experience with coaching, and less than a handful of coaches are legislators or have legislative experience
 - When tasked with discussing coaching and the regulation of coaches, legislators will be reliant on external stakeholders
 - As the saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease ... and those that are persistent in communicating their views set the tone for the regulatory discussion
 - ICF has a stringent, comprehensive system in place that exceeds the capacity and expertise of what states can create on their own
 - A system of individual regulatory systems will be confusing and duplicative and create a dual compliance system for ICF Members

- ▶ **Other important points that ICF makes in communications with lawmakers include:**
 - Coaching supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific, actionable outcomes
 - Coaching is distinct from psychology and requires highly specific education. ICF coaches have completed at least 60 hours of coaching education, with many exceeding 200 hours of education. ICF has created a substantive, comprehensive training and regulatory structure to ensure that the public can rely on professional coaches
 - Coaching is taught separately from psychology at institutions such as Georgetown University, Columbia University, New York University and the University of Wisconsin, among many others. The academic community recognizes the difference in education, scope, and purpose between the two professions

Section 3: Why ICF Members Should Be Involved in the Advocacy Process

In the past decade the United Kingdom seen a tremendous amount of government-sponsored activity to increase the involvement of people in decisions, policies and services in public life. For several reasons, the government of the UK has committed publicly to increase the involvement and empowerment of ordinary citizens. Supporting ICF policy initiatives is in keeping with this spirit of increased civic involvement.

By participating in the advocacy process, you will be viewed as:

- ▶ **A resource.** A travel industry association conducted an annual visit to Congress to educate them on issues important to the industry. Over time, relationships formed with elected officials and, more importantly, their staffs. A legislator's staff is the gatekeeper and relationship manager, and the tracker of meetings and topics. A member, who participated in the annual visits, called the association headquarters saying that staff from their senator's office called them and asked them for their views on legislation pending in Congress. The member was astonished to be contacted, but the staff knew that they were a constituent with knowledge of the industry, and they trusted their viewpoint.
- ▶ **A leader of your profession.** Speaking strongly and authoritatively about your profession positions you as an expert among your peers and potential clients. Advocacy, and the attention it brings, can have tangible benefits that transcend the issue.
- ▶ **A subject-matter expert.** Being known as an authority on coaching and the self-regulation of the profession opens opportunities in industry education, consulting, and thought leadership.
- ▶ **An agent to preserve the integrity of the coaching profession.** ICF's self-regulation system is comprehensive and strictly enforced. Coaches (those with the most expertise about the profession) are actively policing the profession and staying abreast of global trends. Piecemeal state and local regulations may result in the overall decline in industry quality and lead to a loss of public confidence in the coaching profession.

The best advocacy is rooted in fact-based, supportable arguments. With its extensive research capacity, ICF Headquarters can provide statistics and information for use in advocacy efforts. Presenting exaggerated or unsupported arguments will undermine your efforts and severely damage your ability to work effectively with your elected officials moving forward.

ICF's vast network of chapters helps to ensure that the organization is aware of, and can respond to, legislative issues that arise on the local, state, and national levels.

ICF Chapter members are encouraged to take a proactive stance by contacting their local legislators and potential regulators to raise their awareness of coaching as a profession and to explain the actions ICF has taken to ensure that high-quality services are provided. For example, ICF staff were alerted to an important situation in Brazil that demanded immediate attention.

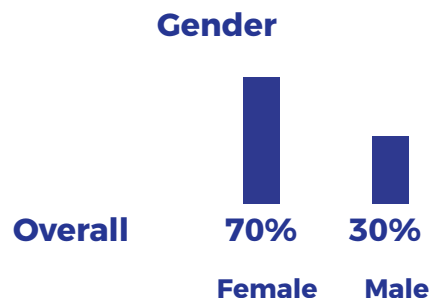
A bill was drafted entitled "Criminalization of Coaching" that would attempt to create a voluntary register of "alternative therapy providers" that would make the practice of coaching a criminal offense.

The chapter believed that this situation created an opportunity to engage more actively with the government, and the public, about coaching. They requested funding that would allow staff to monitor discussion and actions on coaching within the legislature, while also initiating a public relations initiative throughout the country. This effort also allowed ICF to have a prominent voice in any new legislation that would attempt to regulate coaching. ICF's counsel in Brazil suggested language for a new ICF friendly piece of legislation that may be submitted for discussion at the appropriate time.

Should any ICF Member become aware of legislative action or potential action pertaining to the regulation of the profession, they should contact their Chapter Leaders and ICF Headquarters. ICF Headquarters staff and the ICF Chapter will then coordinate their efforts to address the matter quickly and appropriately.

ICF Member Profile Information

Age	ICF Membership Percentage
34 and under	5%
35-44	21%
45-54	35%
55-64	29%
65+	10%



Highest educational level obtained, Western Europe	Percentage
Primary	9%
Secondary	30%
Tertiary	61%

Profile Information, House of Commons

Source: House of Commons Library

- ▶ The average age of all MPs is 51, compared with 40 for the U.K. population. The median age of the average ICF Member is 45–54.
- ▶ Women comprise 34 percent of MPs. ICF's membership is nearly 70 percent female.
- ▶ 85 percent of MPs have advanced degrees. Sixty-three percent of ICF Members have advanced degrees.
- ▶ ICF's overwhelmingly female membership is an important demographic point for legislators. Legislators do not like to create regulatory burdens for small business, particularly women- or minority-owned businesses.

Section 4: How a Bill Becomes an Act

Most new laws passed by Parliament result from proposals made by the government. Proposals aim to or address problems. The process for a bill to become an act is generally as follows:

An issue or problem emerges on the government's agenda.

The government's agenda is generally derived by the general election. Political parties compete for support from British voters by campaigning on their vision for the country and how they would change things. The political party that wins then forms the government and bases its legislative agenda on its election manifesto. However, where no single political party decisively wins the election—as happened in 2010—two or more parties may form a coalition government. They may have to negotiate a joint vision and agree on which new laws to pursue in the upcoming parliament.

Interested people and groups are consulted.

Even a minister's backing isn't enough to guarantee an idea will find its way to Parliament and become a law. Ministers normally - where time allows - shape and inform their proposals by consulting with experts, interest groups and people likely to be affected by the plans. Often, these interested parties are asked to comment on a 'green paper' - an initial outline of an idea. Sometimes a white paper will be produced, which is a firmer statement of the government's intentions.

Cabinet ministers must agree on which proposals to take forward.

Having consulted on a proposal, government ministers then aim to persuade colleagues to support the idea. The merits of various policies are debated in cabinet committees, made up of ministers from across government and chaired by a senior member of the cabinet. Even with approval from a cabinet committee, a proposal must still be selected by the committee responsible for drawing up the government's legislative program. The Legislation Committee makes the final decision as to whether a proposal will be presented to Parliament for scrutiny by MPs and peers.

Proposals are made into bills.

After a proposal is consulted on and approved by the cabinet, the minister responsible draws up instructions for what should go into the bill. Highly specialized lawyers - called parliamentary counsel - work to translate the principles outlined in the government's proposal into detailed legislation. All the bills the government intends to introduce in a parliamentary session are announced in the Queen's (or King's) Speech—the main feature of the near-yearly State Opening that opens each new session of Parliament.

Parliament considers and scrutinizes bills.

The Houses of Parliament consider proposals, called bills, most of which are introduced by the government. To become law, a bill must be approved by both MPs in the House of Commons and peers in the House of Lords. Bills go through a very similar process in both Houses.

Parliamentary Stages

A bill may begin its journey in either the Lords or the Commons chambers. Any bills that relate to taxation begin in the House of Commons.

First reading

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Second reading

MPs or peers discuss the main principles of a bill. MPs may vote at the end of this stage, particularly if a bill is controversial. A bill in the House of Lords passes to the next stage without a vote.

Committee stage

A bill is then considered line by line by committees of MPs or peers. Amendments are proposed and voted on. Commons bill committees normally consist of around 20 MPs. The entire House of Lords often takes part at this stage.

Report stage

The bill, with amendments or changes, is reported to the House. All members can review the amended bill. Those not involved at the previous stage may suggest further changes.

Third reading

MPs debate and vote on the bill in its final form. In the Lords, further amendments may still be introduced.

A bill approved by one chamber is considered by the other

If a bill begins in the House of Commons—and is approved—it is then sent to the House of Lords, where it goes through the same stages. If the Lords were to make changes to the bill, it would return to the Commons for MPs to consider the Lords' amendments. Both the Commons and Lords must agree on the final shape of a bill before it can become law.

The Monarch's assent turns a bill into an act

With approval from the Lords and the Commons, a bill will also receive formal approval by the monarch, called royal assent. The monarch bases their approval on the advice of ministers.

A bill then becomes law and is described as an Act of Parliament.

Section 5: How to Influence your Parliamentarians

You've learned of an issue involving the regulation of coaching and alerted your ICF Chapter Leader, who has, in turn, contacted ICF staff. After quickly researching the issue, you are asked to be one of ICF's advocates on the issue.

The response can be multifaceted, depending on the timeline for the act's consideration. We'll examine some ways to contact your MP and positively influence the legislative process.

Key opportunities for influencing are:

Consultation

- ▶ Government often puts changes in policy or proposals for legislation out for consultation. Where there is a public consultation, the consultation document should explain to whom responses must be sent and by when. Often the consultation document will pose specific questions for consideration. When responding to a consultation it may be sensible to seek to provide responses to the set questions, but if these do not properly allow for a full response it is quite acceptable to go beyond these questions. This is also the stage where ICF involvement can be most effective.

Pre-legislative scrutiny

- ▶ Sometimes the government may invite scrutiny on draft legislation.

Parliamentarians

- ▶ Areas of concern may be raised directly with parliamentarians. Correspondence and/or meeting with constituency MPs in advance of the introduction of a bill provides a valuable means to highlight areas and level of concern to which MPs may need to react when the bill is introduced.

Select Committees

- ▶ Select committees regularly review government policy and administration. Committees have pages on the Congressional website giving information as to their future, current and past work. Providing evidence to a committee in the context of a normal inquiry by that committee will usually be published, and the committee's report may influence current or future lawmaking.

Prior to Second Reading

- ▶ The second reading debate of a bill will not discuss amendments. However, it is the time for parliamentarians to express significant areas of concern in relation to the bill. If a major issue is not raised at this stage, it may appear to be less of a concern if raised later.

Public Bill Committee stage

- ▶ This is the first opportunity for parliamentarians to put forward and debate amendments to a bill. For any amendments to have real momentum behind them, it would be better if the area of concern (not the amendment) had been raised at second reading.

Other stages of a bill's progress

- ▶ Amendments may be raised at later stages. However, after report there are restrictions on what matters may be returned to at third reading. Also, if areas of concern have not been pursued at earlier stages, these may have little or no momentum.

House of Lords

- ▶ The foregoing comments on the stages of a bill's passage broadly apply to both Houses. However, since the government holds a majority in the House of Commons, it is often the House of Lords where the government may come under most pressure. Nevertheless, for reasons of momentum, concerns expressed in the Commons may prove helpful for peers who are interested in pursuing these or similar concerns in the Lords.

Ministerial Statement

- ▶ Even where lobbying does not secure an amendment to the legislation, it may result in a statement by the minister. These statements may act as government commitments. In some instances, they may be used by courts to interpret legislation. In other instances, they may be useful for parliamentarians to return to in the future if the commitment has not been kept and there is a later opportunity to legislate. (Statements by front bench opposition spokespeople may sometimes also be important.)

Other parliamentary procedures

- ▶ Other tools for lobbying government include parliamentary questions (PQs), early day motions (EDMs) and opposition or other debates.

Section 6: ICF Members in Action – Case Studies

Several times in the last decade, ICF Chapter Leaders, Members and staff have responded to inquiries from governmental bodies considering the regulation of coaching.



EU Charter

On June 29, 2011, ICF and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) jointly filed with the EU a Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring as the benchmark standard for the coaching and mentoring professions. The Charter, which is continually reviewed and enhanced, establishes ethical standards and forms the basis for the development of self-regulation. Since then, other coaching bodies have signed on to the initiative.



Portugal

Work is ongoing in Portugal to help the psychological community better understand why coaching is distinct from those professions. ICF Portugal, in partnership with ICF Global, submitted our stance on the matter to the Portuguese Parliament. This should help better educate the parliament and the wider public on the distinction between the two professions and why there is room for both.



Italy

ICF Italy has been working to establish professional norms for coaching. The first step was to establish norms for the profession (i.e., what coaching is); this was completed successfully. The next step is to establish norms for coach practitioners themselves (i.e., who is qualified to be a coach) and this is currently being deliberated. ICF Italy, ICF Global and other coaching organizations are collaborating on this effort.



France

ICF France, working with other coaching colleagues, established a definition of professional coaching within the country. This will assist with correct tax identification for coaches in France. They will no longer need to self-identify as trainers, consultants, etc.



Switzerland

The Swiss government approved a federal diploma for experienced coaching professionals. Depending on the success and the examination process of this diploma, it could become a valuable recruiting instrument for professional coaches in small and mid-size companies as well as government and administrative institutions. ICF Switzerland worked to ensure that the rollout of this diploma takes the ICF Core Competencies and definition of coaching into consideration.

Conclusion

Citizen advocacy is important for you, your practice, your clients and your colleagues. ICF provides you with support and tools necessary to interact with policymakers and ensure that you have the most favorable atmosphere in which to practice your profession.

The ICF Global community takes the ethics of professional coaching very seriously, and our robust system of professional self-governance ensures that ICF Members and Credential-holders meet high standards and that coaching consumers are well-protected.

ICF leaders and staff are ready to assist ICF Chapters and individual members in addressing concerns about potential or actual regulation. We hope that this handbook will be an additional resource for coaches in the UK to leverage in their pursuit of continued professional self-governance.



[coachingfederation.org](https://www.coachingfederation.org)