

Our Corporate Strategy 2020 to 2023

5 May 2020





Introduction

Social Work England is the new, specialist regulator for social workers in England.

Our purpose is to protect the public and raise standards across social work in England, so that people receive the best possible support whenever they might need it in life. We're committed to achieving this through collaboration with everyone involved in social work.

We've been established by the Children and Social Work Act (2017) and The Social Workers Regulations (2018). The Act sets out our overarching objective to protect the public (section 37(1)). The Act also describes how we will pursue this through the following objectives:

- To protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public
- To promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England
- To promote and maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England (section 37 (2)).

This corporate strategy sets out our three year plan which has been developed from a range of discussions with people with an interest in social work. This includes talking to and listening to the views of professionals, key stakeholders and people with lived experience of social work. It will allow us to become an organisation that's rooted in the principles of engagement and co-production.

The steps we'll take to implement and achieve this strategy and objectives will be detailed in our annual business plans.



Our journey so far

Our work so far has focused on building a new organisation and making sure we have the infrastructure needed to take over the regulation of social workers in England from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Working towards a safe and effective transfer of regulation, we placed emphasis on:

- Building and supporting an experienced and talented workforce based in Sheffield
- Creating robust IT, governance and management systems
- Developing our regulatory approach
- Establishing and developing ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the social work sector.

This strategy sets out our commitment to continuing to develop, beginning with our establishing year. It will outline how we'll continue our engagement with those involved in social work and how we'll know that we've been successful.

Development of our plan

The development of this corporate strategy has been carried out in a way that reflects our values, the values of the social work profession and our regulatory approach. We carefully considered the right way to ensure it's meaningful and relevant to anyone who reads it. As part of our preparation, we've reviewed our legislative and policy context, and talked to people who have an interest in social work regulation.

From this work, we've focused on five key areas for activity and impact:

1. Our regulatory approach
2. Social workers
3. People
4. Education and training
5. Our organisation

With these areas in mind, we believe we're presenting a strategy that's in keeping with our culture and values, and which is relevant to the sector.



Policy context

We're a non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care. We've been established in a way that allows us to deliver radically different regulation.

Our focus is on engagement, dialogue and collaboration, and becoming a meaningful, relevant regulator for the profession.

Through this approach, our focus will be on:

- ensuring public protection;
- facilitating positive change; and
- raising standards of practice across the social work profession.

This means that through our legislative powers, we can:

- resolve fitness to practise cases at the earliest appropriate stage;
- include professional advisors from the social work sector at all stages of fitness to practise; and
- develop an effective approach to communication throughout the fitness to practise process.



Our values

Fearless

We'll be fearless in our determination to deliver radically different regulation. In doing so, we'll improve the value placed on social work as a profession and the positive impact social work has on people's lives. Through our leadership, we'll influence and drive change wherever needed and use our intelligence and engagement to shine a light on current social work practice.

Independent

A regulator must always be independent and carry out its work without undue influence from anyone. As the new specialist social work regulator, we hold true to this value and will demonstrate this through all aspects of our work.

Transparent

Throughout our work, we'll be open and honest about what we're doing and how we're doing it. We'll seek feedback and continue to talk to and collaborate with everyone who has an interest in social work. We know we'll make mistakes as we develop, but we'll be honest about these and learn from them.

Ambitious

We have high aspirations for the social work profession, for regulation, and for ourselves. Through our engagement, collaboration and our planning, we'll deliver on our ambition.

Collaborative

Since the beginning of our journey, we've spoken to those with an interest in social work about who we are, what we plan to do and how we plan to do it. Wherever possible, we've done this together with our experts in the social work profession, social work education and training providers and other partners. We'll continue to work in this way.

Integrity

We will hold true to our values and our overarching objectives, and work with integrity in every aspect of our business.



Radically different regulation

We want social workers to feel proud of their profession and we hope that our approach to regulation will help make that happen. This includes how we develop and embed our standards, the way we deal with situations when things go wrong, our use of technology and data, and our engagement and dialogue with people.

We'll make sure our standards continue to be relevant, promoting and encouraging best practice for the social work profession. When things go wrong, our approach to fitness to practise issues will mean we can deal with matters robustly. We'll do so in a way that ensures ongoing communication throughout the process, support for all those involved, and resolution at the earliest appropriate stage.

Additionally, through our approach to continuing professional development (CPD) and our ability to annotate the register with postgraduate qualifications, for example approved mental health professionals and approved mental capacity professionals, we will work to ensure that people remain informed and held close to the sector and in turn, the social work profession is the best it can be.

We'll engage with the profession as a whole, including people with lived experience of social work, and use technology and data to build up and present an accurate and rich picture of social work in England today.

What we'll achieve

We're ambitious in our intent to raise the standards of social work and education and training, to deliver radically different regulation and to build confidence in the profession. However, in line with our ambition in these areas, we know we must be realistic about what can be achieved by 2023.

We've broken down our ambition and set out what this means in relation to our five themes on the following pages.



Our regulatory approach

We'll be delivering our new regulatory approach and learning, reflecting, and testing boundaries. We'll have established an easy-to-use and streamlined registration process, and introduced annotation for areas of extended practice.

We'll have used our annual renewal process and the requirement for CPD to improve engagement with the profession and demonstrate to the public how social workers maintain and develop their skills.

We'll have started to reapprove all education and training courses, including courses relating to extended practice.

Our fitness to practise process will be responsive, collaborative and proportionate. As a result of this approach, we'll begin to see fewer concerns raised with us and more cases being disposed of at an early stage.

Additionally, we'll be continuing our collaboration and engagement in a way that develops understanding and leadership in regulation.

We'll gather evidence and analyse what we're learning about our own unique contribution. We'll begin to publish our research findings and key reviews of social work and professional regulation.



The social work profession

We'll continue to develop clear guidelines, tools and messages to support professionals to understand the relationship between standards and practice. We'll review the standards to make sure they continue to be relevant, specialist and encourage aspiration in social work.

We'll review our published guidance on our approach to continued learning and its impact on practice.

We'll begin to learn from the first uploads of CPD activity, publishing our ambition for CPD for the profession as a result.

We'll gather intelligence, stories and data about social work and the profession through quality conversations and sound research, sharing what we're learning with the sector.

We'll be establishing strong relationships with social workers based on quality conversations and supportive materials to ensure they value and embed their professional standards.

We'll have a comprehensive understanding of social work education and training provision in England and have a robust approach to the quality assurance of those courses against our standards.

We'll have mapped our standards against the knowledge and skills statements (KSS) and professional capabilities framework (PCFs) and started our work to streamline the post qualification landscape.



People

We'll create forums where people can work with us to support the development of our policies, communication, engagement, and other aspects of our work. To facilitate this, we're establishing a national advisory forum made up of people with lived and learned experience of social work to provide guidance, support and constructive challenge to our strategic development and approach. As a result, we'll start to identify and work with ambassadors to champion our work and deepen understanding and value of the social work profession.

We'll co-produce our engagement strategy with those with an interest in social work. We intend to carry on in this way to make changes informed by the sector to deliver regulation that is fit for purpose and which develops trust and confidence in the profession.

We're doing all of the above to protect the public, maintain confidence in the social work profession, uphold standards, and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public.

Education and training

We'll work with course providers to make sure our standards are embedded in practice whilst encouraging innovative and creative approaches to course development. We will ensure the quality and consistency in education and training is improved with the introduction of our education and training standards.

We'll have been clear about our expectation of the provision of high quality practice placements as a core part of all social work education and training, and the responsibility on all parts of the system to work collaboratively to make sure this happens. As part of this, we'll have established a robust approval and re-approval model for social work education and training courses.

We'll work with our established education and training advisory forum to provide advice, support and challenge on enabling high quality provision. This will sit within our national advisory forum. Through our collaboration and intelligence gathering, we'll review and build on an evidence based position on models of provision in relation to the competence of newly qualified social workers.



Our organisation

It's our intention to be respected and valued for how we do things, as well as what we do. In our establishing year, we're placing a strong emphasis on the culture and values that underpin the development of our organisation.

It's crucial that our work reflects a realistic and supportive culture with values that promote the right attitudes and behaviours for our regulatory approach and the impact we'll have on social workers and the social work profession.

We'll have recruited, trained and be retaining talented and motivated staff who thrive at work. We'll do this by providing a positive and inspiring environment with effective support in which to learn, reflect and test boundaries.

We'll be demonstrating good governance and value for money, and be moving towards a self-financing position. We'll establish robust infrastructure, systems and processes that promote trust and confidence, and will continue to improve how we use data and analysis to inform decision making. We'll share our knowledge to contribute to a greater understanding of social work and professional regulation. As part of this, we'll have established sound internal IT systems, implemented advanced verification, and started to explore digital tools to support our work with social workers and to protect the public.

Our culture of innovation, improvement and co-production will be embedded across the organisation. As a result, we'll have a reflective and accessible working environment where people are encouraged to share knowledge and test new ideas.

We'll establish a shadowing programme to enable our organisation to understand the social work profession in more detail, which will inform our day to day working.

We'll lead with authenticity, energy and openness at all levels across the organisation. We're a learning organisation that strives for continual improvement. We're open to new ideas and ways of working.



Engagement and working together

We've placed considerable emphasis on our commitment to ongoing communication and collaboration. As such, we've invested time and effort into our engagement, which has been positive and well received, but which must be part of a continuous and evolving process.

As part of our co-produced engagement strategy, our team of regional engagement leads will continue to be instrumental in building relationships at a local level and gathering data and intelligence.

Through all aspects of our engagement, we want to embed work on the ground, establish long lasting relationships, and gather intelligence to make sure we deliver with impact over the next three years.

Engagement and co-production are at the heart of everything we do. We'll respond efficiently and effectively to what people tell us and use our information to make real and lasting positive change in regulation and social work.

Our resources

Through our set up phase, we've been fully funded by government. In the first years of regulation, our funding will come from a combination of fee income and funding from government.

We have developed a detailed budget plan for 2020/21 and financial forecasts for 2021/22 and 2022/23.



Our governance

We've been established with a governance model that is unique in professional regulation.

Our chair and six non-executive members of the board have been confirmed in post following a public appointments process. Our chief executive also sits on the board.

Our board are essential to ensuring that we're held to account and operating in the way that we should be. They've worked with operational staff on three key areas of our work through a series of innovation groups:

- Standards
- IT and data
- Engagement

In addition to meeting as a governing body, there are two subcommittees:

- Audit and risk
- Remuneration

Members of our executive leadership team regularly attend board meetings to update on progress in key business areas.

Our environment

Our offices in Sheffield are in an area that is being regenerated. We're working closely with Sheffield City Council and other organisations to make sure we support, promote and encourage local business, the city's 'grey to green' initiative, and local charities.

We promote travel by train wherever possible and are establishing a team of 'green champions' internally alongside the development of our sustainability strategy.



Inclusion and diversity

We're committed to the principles of inclusion and diversity and making sure these underpin all aspects of our work. We'll regularly assess our approaches to make sure we're doing all we can in this important area and that we demonstrate leadership in our approach and actions.

Our people are our most important asset and it's through a committed, diverse, vibrant group of people, focused on innovation, improvement and co-production, that we'll deliver our ambition.

It's important that our work remains accessible, inclusive and diverse. To do so we're working to develop and deliver an inclusion and diversity strategy, informed by conversations with our advisory groups and forums both internally and externally. This will reflect our ambition to put people at the heart of everything we do.

Evaluation

We've already set out several ways that will indicate whether our work has been successful. However, there are important steps on our journey that will allow us to reflect on our progress. An important part of this is listening to what people are telling us. This includes through our board, our staff, our key partners, and crucially, social workers and people with experience of using social work services.

We'll test our activity against the early benchmarks we set. We'll evaluate through our commissioned research, our review of our fitness to practise processes, and the themes emerging from this.

We'll review our internal systems, their effectiveness and the feedback from our teams, alongside our annual business plans and how we meet our key performance indicators linked to this strategy. This will make sure we're on track to become the responsive, radically different regulator we are focused on becoming.

Appendix 1 - Strategic objectives until March 2023

These ten objectives will also be the focus of our business plan for 2020 to 2021.

We will continue to develop and refine our registration, systems and processes.

Our fitness to practise process will be responsive, collaborative and proportionate.

We will seek to influence system-wide improvement by continuing our work with others and contributing to conversations about regulation.

We will continue to develop clear guidelines, tools and messages to support professionals to understand the relationship between standards and practice.

We will gather intelligence, stories and data about social work and the profession through quality conversations and sound research, sharing what we're learning with the sector.

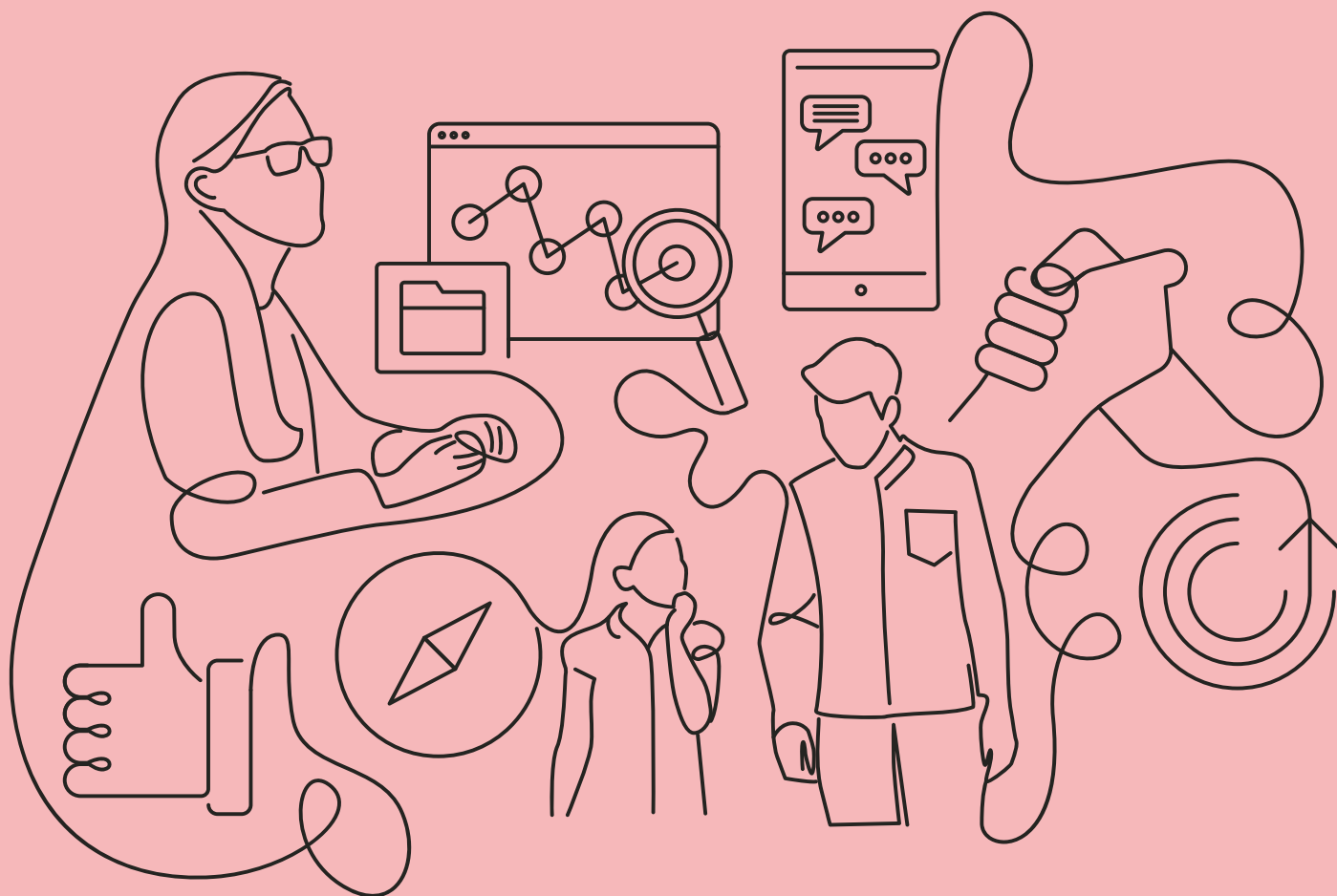
We will create spaces for people to support the development of our organisation, including policies, communications and engagement.

We will work with course providers to make sure our standards are embedded in practice, whilst encouraging innovative and creative approaches to course development.

We will explore and begin to understand the competence of newly qualified social workers.

We will establish robust infrastructure, systems and processes that promote trust and confidence.

Our culture of innovation, improvement and co-production will be embedded across the organisation.



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