

Paper for the Board

This paper is for Assurance and Noting

Sponsor

Colum Conway, Chief Executive, Executive Officer

Author

Sarah Blackmore, Executive Director, Strategy, Policy and Engagement

Date:

14 February 2021

Reviewed by

Colum Conway, Chief Executive, Executive Officer

1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Social Work England board members on the activity in the Strategy, Policy and Engagement Directorate for Quarter 3. The Board is asked to note the activity presented, impact, and potential associated risks and their mitigations.

2. Regional Engagement Team

To note:

- 2.1 From our engagement we have seen the significant impact of COVID-19; particularly on social worker wellbeing and morale, sickness absence, impact on student placements and capacity within regions.
- 2.2 The move to a more virtual approach to engagement due to COVID-19 has resulted in a significant increase in our activity, reaching over 20% of the register in our first year of regulation.

2.3 Social Work Week has been well received and board members are asked to note the final programme and the way the week has been co-produced, in line with our values and the ambition in our corporate strategy. It is a significant opportunity to share our ambition as a regulator and reflect on the important issues of the last year for the profession.

To be aware:

2.4 A pressing issue is that of vaccinations for social workers; access to vaccinations appears somewhat inconsistent and there are emerging ethical and practice questions around those staff who do not wish to have the vaccination. Social Work England has written to the permanent secretary in the department for education, which she has shared with her colleague in DHSC who responded to our chief executive in supportive terms. Consistencies remain however, and it is an ongoing area of concern for the sector.

3. Communications Team

To note:

3.1 The team successfully launched a marketing push for social work week to drive advocacy and sign up through trade press, stakeholder networks and key influencers.

3.2 Built a bespoke section of the website to ensure people can digitally engage with the social work week programme (over 100+ pages) and conducted user research into the My Account service to inform improvements.

3.3 Submitted and won Government Communication Service '[campaign of the Month](#)' award for our strategic approach to encourage professionals to record CPD in our first year of operation.

To be aware:

3.4 We have a new stakeholder relationship management tool coming on stream that will help us to work much smarter when considering the people and organisations we need to influence and work with to achieve the ambitions set out in our corporate strategy.

4. CPD Team

To note:

4.1 The CPD team managed this element of a successful registration renewal process, with only 256 social workers removed from the register for not complying with our CPD requirement.

- 4.2 We selected approximately 2,200 social workers for our first CPD validation. This activity is due to be completed in March 2021 and will help our understanding of the CPD done by social workers and will inform our future approach to CPD. Ten trained, independent assessors are carrying out this work
- 4.3 Our commissioned research is progressing well and will also inform our future approach and requirements.
- 4.4 We carried out a lessons learned review on the first year's CPD processes and requirements. The outcome of this is informing the development of our system, processes and communications during 2021.

To be aware:

- 4.5 The CPD team is working with the Policy Team on a programme of consultation that will determine our requirements on CPD from December 2021.
- 4.6 Planned in-year changes to our CPD recording system are dependent on resources available to delivery competing IT priorities – there were some system issues this year which resulted in some confusion for the sector. These were quickly rectified
- 4.7 A risk this year will be continuing levels of awareness and engagement, as well as compliance. The last-minute change to allowing non-complying social workers temporary registration at the intervention of the DfE may result in social workers thinking they may have a similar “get out” clause next year.

5. Policy Team

To note:

- 5.1 Pre-consultation work has started to develop professional and education and training standards for Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and Approved Mental Capacity Professionals (AMCPs) specialist roles, in line with the Wessely review and legislative change. We have briefed fellow regulators and held the first meeting of an advisory professional expert group.
- 5.2 We have commissioned three research projects due to deliver in April 2021: a) Education, training and the student experience; b) Social workers and CPD; c) Understanding AMHPs and Best interest Assessors (BIAs) and the people whom they support.
- 5.3 We launched ‘Social Work in England: First Reflections’, a reflection on our first year of activity as the specialist regulator and the beginnings of us sharing data and insight with the sector. The next interim report will follow in January 2022, paving the way to a landmark publication in 2023.

To be aware:

5.4 There is considerable consultation activity planned for 2021. We ask that the Board considers these commitments should further areas of interest for consultation arise. We also ask that the board stands ready to support these consultations, some of which will be accompanied by consultation events. We will brief the board on consultations at the next available opportunity. These are likely to include the following:

- a. AMHP/AMCP
- b. CPD
- c. Education – Definition of statutory placements and professional learning outcomes
- d. Rules amendments

5.5 With the level of consultation required, as well as other communication and engagement activity, there may be a risk of sector overload and subsequent disengagement. We will carefully look across our activity and when and how it is planned to ensure we mitigate this risk as much as possible whilst allowing us to ensure we do consult appropriately on these important developments for the sector.

6. Strategic Development

To note:

6.1 We reached agreement with DfE and DHSC to develop a joint position on a whole social worker workforce whole career approach including the aim in our corporate strategy to “to streamline the post qualification landscape”. The next step is to operationalise this into a project and wider sector engagement.

6.2 We are working on codifying a social work education and training strategy, bringing together all our activity in one place to reach a shared understanding and enhanced integration. This will enable policy on, e.g., regulation of students, to be viewed in a fuller context, better understanding opportunities and risks.

To be aware:

6.3 Work on the post qualifying landscape may generate some adverse reaction from some sector organisations. Conversely, sharing our ambition nationally risks creating appetite we are not able immediately to satisfy as this is a longer-term piece of cultural and systems change not a simple quick win. This is an important element in driving forward the change we were created to help bring about. We will bring further proposals to the board to ensure these are agreed and supported.

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

To note:

7.1 A Professional Associate was appointed to provide expert support and challenge to our work in this area.

7.2 The Steering Group continued to meet, considering the work of the organisation on meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty, learning and development needs, and created 4 subgroups to focus activity and change. These subgroups are workforce, including recruitment, training and development, data and benchmarking, communication and engagement.

7.3 Recruitment commenced for a permanent Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion post

7.4 The Race Equality Network and our LGBTQIA+ network will continue to ensure their voices are represented in the work of the steering group, as well as our other staff groups.

To be aware:

7.5 This is an area of significant scrutiny for us as an organisation, where we have already been subject to considerable challenge. The board is asked to recognise this and support the work of the steering group, adding their insight and suggestions to enable us to achieve our ambitious plans.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The purpose of this report was to update board members on the activity in the strategy, policy and engagement directorate for quarter 3. The board is asked to note the activity presented, impact, and potential associated risks and their mitigations.