

Business plan 2021 to 2022

Last updated: 29 April 2021



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Message from our chief executive and chair of the board

2020 was not only a hugely important year for us, but also an unprecedented one. In addition to establishing ourselves as a specialist regulator that makes a real difference to society, alongside the social work profession and the wider health and social care sector, we responded to the unique challenges of a global pandemic.

Our first year of regulation was always going to be characterised by learning, growth, and development. That it would be undertaken in such unique and unforeseen circumstances has added significant new challenges. Many of our plans and assumptions were upturned and as the year unfolded, we had to test, recalibrate, and renew our plans and expectations.

Now in our second year of regulation, still in the shadow of a pandemic, we continue to learn from the successes and challenges of the past 12 months. These events have shaped our business plan and sharpened our thinking and focus. We know more about what is progressing well across the organisation and where we have areas of concern. We understand the risks we face and have plans in place to mitigate them, while remaining ambitious for what we want to achieve in the second year of our 3-year strategy.

In our regulatory approach, we will continue to support a digital approach to registration, annual renewals and continuing professional development (CPD) processes. We've faced challenges in our fitness to practise function, both in the significant number of complex cases we inherited and the considerable number of new cases. In fitness to practise, our learning is helping us to continually improve, and we are focused on managing both the level of caseloads and the quality of outcomes.

Education and training is another key pillar of our corporate strategy. Later this year we will implement new education and training standards, alongside a programme of reapproval for all social work courses and education programmes over the coming years. This will be supported by a focus on learning outcomes for students and trainees, whilst encouraging new and creative approaches to course development.

Collaboration continues to be key to our work, and we will continue to engage with the profession on areas such as amendments to our rules and standards, policy changes and supporting guidance. This includes consulting on proposals for CPD following our year one outcomes and research into social workers views of CPD. In addition, we will collaborate with

key stakeholders to develop our thinking and consideration of the post-qualifying landscape for social work. We want to make a unique contribution to the evolution of regulation, and will engage with policy developments in regulation and social work, as well as improving our insight through analysis of our own data and research.

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are central to our work, and our equality, diversity and inclusion statement of intent sets out our ambition for ensuring this is fundamental to our core business. We will demonstrate leadership in our approach, learning along the way. We will regularly take time to reflect on our work to make sure we're doing all we can.

As a regulator that prides itself on building and maintaining positive relationships, we strive to ensure that anyone who engages with us finds it easy to do so, and that they feel supported and are treated fairly. We will build on the forums we have to support the development of our policies, communication and engagement, and will continually improve our approach to co-production.

As well as our focus on people, we are committed to developing our systems and services to facilitate effective ways of working, both for ourselves and those we regulate. This year, a new corporate services system for our people, finance and commercial activity, together with developments to our online registration and case management solutions, are just 2 examples of this. Each will contain information and data in single, easily accessible sources, underpinning all our processes with improved governance and quality assurance.

We are incredibly proud of how both the organisation and the profession have responded to the circumstances of the past 12 months. At Social Work England, we have learned a great deal about ourselves as individuals, as teams, and as a young organisation. This year we will consider what we now know about new ways of working, what opportunities have arisen out of greater flexibility, and what we want to maintain for our operations, culture, innovation and collaboration.

We are building on solid foundations, and we know that with the commitment and energy we have evidenced through the past year, we will continue to press forward.

Colum Conway
Chief Executive, Social Work England

Professor The Lord Patel of Bradford OBE
Chair, Social Work England Board

Our regulatory approach

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

In our first year as regulator, 5,001 social workers joined the register for the first time. 94,416 renewed their registration, uploading an average of 2.4 pieces each of CPD. As we learn from the outcomes of our first year, we will identify improvements to be made to our systems. This will ensure that the process for joining and remaining on the register continues to be effective, straightforward, and robust.

Alongside this, we will continue to review our rules and regulations, and where necessary identify improvements to our legal framework. We will also review our resources to ensure a responsive and improving approach to the registration of social workers.

As part of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and using powers provided to us in the Coronavirus Act 2020, we have operated a system for the temporary, emergency registration of social workers to assist during the unprecedented national situation. We continue to monitor closely how this temporary registration is being used, to ensure it remains a valuable tool supporting public protection.

This year, we will use feedback from social workers, our data and research, and the views of our stakeholders and colleagues, to understand how registration processes could be improved, and look to implement these improvements. This will ensure our registration systems and processes are as accessible, effective and intuitive as possible.

We will review how we use the legal framework relating to the registration of social workers. Where necessary, we will begin to identify changes we may wish to make to our rules and regulations, to ensure an efficient and responsive registration process that maintains the integrity of the register.

We will review our policies and processes, including when new challenges emerge. For example, the registration of social workers from outside the United Kingdom following our departure from the European Union.

We will look at potential refinements to the way we regulate, including our requirements for social workers returning to the register after a period away from practice, and our approach to the misuse of the protected title of 'social worker'. We will also look at how the system of annotation for areas of specialist or extended work, undertaken by those on our register, might be broadened into other areas of social work practice.

We will continue to develop our systems to collect important information about the social work profession, including information relating to social workers with protected characteristics. We will then use this data to inform our approach. We will also review how we receive information from education providers about students completing social work courses that lead to registration.

Throughout the year, we will monitor and review our progress towards achieving the objectives set out above. Alongside this, we will measure:

- how long it takes us to approve registration applications where no investigation is required, aiming for a median time of no more than 10 working days.
- how long it takes us to approve restoration applications where no investigation is required, aiming for a median time of no more than 20 working days.
- how long it takes us to respond to email enquiries, aiming for a median time of no more than 5 working days.
- how long it takes us to answer phone calls, aiming for a median time of no more than 8 minutes.

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

While in most cases social work makes a positive impact on people's lives, in a minority of cases things can go wrong and concerns can be raised. We investigate these concerns through our fitness to practise function. In our first year of delivering fitness to practise, we've faced multiple challenges, both in the number of cases we have and in how we investigate during a pandemic.

The caseload we inherited from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) in December 2019 was much greater and more complex than we had anticipated. Additionally, there has been a significantly higher number of concerns raised throughout the year than expected, particularly from members of the public.

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that the most challenging and complex cases that usually require face-to-face hearings were not possible for the majority of our first year. In taking forward cases remotely, our support to those involved in hearings has had to increase. The pandemic has also impacted services across the social work sector, and created a more challenging environment to collaborate with employers and social workers during the investigation stages. These factors meant that we required more resource than we had planned for.

However, we responded to the challenges in a flexible and fast-moving manner, quickly moving most hearings online, restructuring the fitness to practise directorate and increasing capacity through recruitment. We've also taken on a much more flexible approach to the way we list hearings, ensuring that the majority of hearings can take place remotely, where this was not the accepted approach across regulation before the pandemic. We have had to be innovative, which has helped us to better understand how fitness to practise can be delivered and experienced by those involved. This learning will help us make further improvements in the coming year.

As a regulator, we must ensure that appropriate and proportionate assurances and safeguards are wrapped around the fitness to practise process. Equally, we must be transparent and open to challenge from others. In our first year, we established a decision review group to regularly review a sample of decisions across the fitness to practise caseload. Every meeting has people with lived experience embedded fully into the process, as well as an external representative from another professional regulator. This scrutiny enables us to learn, and to identify trends and issues that we need to directly address. Some of these can be managed easily, such as additional training for case examiners. Some are more complex and systemic, such as understanding the factors that may result in disproportional representation from certain sections of the society and how we might work with others to address this.

A key focus for the coming year is to understand why the number of referrals being made is higher than anticipated based on previous data. We will consider a range of information and data, as well as seek feedback from employers through our regional engagement leads. We can then identify and deliver ways to support cases being resolved locally, ensuring they are only referred to us as regulator where, for public protection, local resolution is neither suitable nor appropriate.

This year, we will aim to reduce the time taken to resolve investigations by actively reducing caseloads, realising further efficiencies in the service, and making effective use of the case disposal options given in our legislation.

Building on the experience of undertaking remote hearings, we will explore how we could implement these as part of normal business, rather than solely during a pandemic. We will also extend the measures available to support participants involved in the fitness to practise process.

We will use the intelligence gained from our first year to enhance understanding of risk, severity and public interest when applying our decision-making tests.

We will work directly with employers and use data available to us from our first year to develop a shared understanding of the management of concerns. This will help develop a stronger understanding of when fitness to practise referrals should be made, and what we aim to achieve through our investigations process.

Working with key stakeholders in professional regulation, we will ensure we are sharing innovative practice, advancing our interest in regulatory reform, and optimise the powers available for case resolution.

We will also evolve the focus of the decision review group on identifying thematic issues which emerge from the data and case reviews. This will allow us to identify areas of inequality and disproportionality, which can be addressed through process improvement or further work with the sector.

Throughout the year, we will monitor and review our progress towards achieving the objectives set out above. We will also measure:

- the number of open cases in the triage stage, aiming for fewer than 300 by March 2022.
- the number of open cases under investigation, aiming for fewer than 1,230 by March 2022.
- the number of legacy cases progressed beyond the investigation stage, aiming for 80% or more by March 2022.
- the time it takes us to conclude cases received since our inception following an investigation.

- the time it takes us to approve interim orders once the need for the interim order has been identified, aiming for a median of no more than 20 working days.
- the quality of our decision making, aiming for at least 90% of cases to meet our internal quality standards.

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

We have established vital relationships with social work partners in England and regulators across the UK. We have made early progress in representing the uniqueness of social work and the role of specialist regulation. We have joined with others to make statements on matters of shared concern, including the UK social work regulators, the principal social worker networks, and fellow health regulators.

We have commissioned research to support areas of our growth and development. Over our first year we published research into both social workers' perceptions and attitudes towards the profession, and the public's perceptions of social work. We subsequently commissioned research into social workers and their CPD, approved mental health professionals and best interests assessors, and social work education and training to shape future plans.

Over our first year we have established connections with regulatory partners at strategic, operational and policy levels, and have led early discussions on shifting the balance of regulation 'upstream', intervening early in response to risk. We will pursue this work further in the year ahead.

This year the government is putting forward proposals for ways to develop and reform professional regulation in England in the 'Regulating Healthcare Professionals, Protecting the Public' consultation. Much of the proposed reform is set out in the vision of our own regulatory model and, as such, we will speak from our experience of the newest powers in regulation. Further to this, we will talk with government and others in regulation about adjustments and improvements to our own work, to the benefit of our work on behalf of the public.

Influencing system-wide improvement and contributing to conversations about regulation is a core part of all that we do. Our objectives in this area are reflected throughout our business plan.

The social work profession

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

We are an ambitious regulator, with a firm commitment to driving forward policy, developing new approaches to regulation that enhance public protection, increasing public confidence in social workers, and making a positive difference to the profession. Our twin focus here is to improve the post-qualifying landscape, so that social workers are supported to maintain and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their career. We are also committed to further improving the quality of education and training for new social workers, so they join the profession with the skills, learning and experience they need.

We believe that, by extension, a more supportive professional environment will benefit those who rely on social work services and, crucially, is fundamentally supportive of a wider and more proactive public protection approach. This ambitious agenda, as highlighted in our corporate strategy 2020 to 2023, will take some time to complete, and we will need to prioritise our actions this year.

We have set out our ambitions for improving the education social work students receive, and their transition from study into employment and frontline practice. We will also take our first steps this year to help streamline the post-qualifying landscape, focused around common [professional standards](#) which social workers need to meet to maintain registration, but also the improvement standards and approaches they need to demonstrate in their day-to-day practice. During this year, we will start the engagement process on making the professional landscape simple and effective for all social workers. We do not underestimate this. It is a bold aspiration, and we understand there are a wide range of voices we need to involve in the design and delivery process.

This year, we will continue to establish and sustain a dialogue with social workers on their professional practice. We will learn from our communication and engagement activity, such as

regional outreach and Social Work Week 2021, and will grow our insight on how best to interact with different regulatory audiences.

We will lead and support work on the changes in mental health legislation and policy. We have initiated work during 2020 to 2021 to produce education and training approval standards and explanatory guidance for approved mental health professionals and approved mental capacity professionals. We will continue to develop this in light of the Department of Health and Social Care's open consultation on reforming the Mental Health Act. To support this, we have commissioned external research into the experiences of approved mental health professionals and best interest assessors, and people with experience of their services.

We will learn from the experience of social workers' first year of registration with us and uploading CPD. We will continue to review a sample of the register on the quality of their CPD and gather informal feedback on the process and evidence from externally commissioned research. Our ambition remains to create an intelligent approach to CPD, that responds to the learning needs identified through fitness to practise. We understand this needs to be carefully managed and evidence based. We will use this evidence to revise and improve guidance for this year and consult on the requirements for 2022.

By building on the positive relationships we've established with key stakeholders, we will improve our understanding of the social work profession and help address key issues. Nationally, this includes the chief social workers for children and families and for adults, the principal social worker network, with whom we have been working closely over the past year, and third sector organisations. Locally, our regional engagement leads will continue to engage directly with social workers, employers and providers of services in all settings.

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 are in a unique position to gather intelligence about the profession and use our national voice to share this widely. We do this to help improve practice, to provide support and information to social workers, and to share successes which help increase public confidence in both our regulation and the social work profession. We aim to do this through a joint approach to communication and engagement, having an audience-first approach, and sharing personal reflections from people with lived experience, the profession and stakeholders.

In our first year, we worked with stakeholders and partners to provide rapid response guidance and information on the pandemic for social workers, students, employers, and education and

training providers. We issued regular communications to all social workers, continued face-to-face engagement virtually, developed our digital services, worked alongside the sector press, and partnered with others to encourage honest conversations.

We published 2 research studies: one on the perceptions of social work in England by social workers, and a second on the views of the public and people who have used social work services. These reports offer us a baseline of the perception of social work from both the profession and the public. They will guide our communications and policy, as well as helping contribute to national debate about the value and challenges of social work.

Our [Social Work in England: First Reflections](#) report summarised our first year of regulating, which has highlighted, amongst other things, how social workers feel about their profession and how COVID-19 has impacted the way they interact with individuals. In March 2021, we delivered Social Work Week 2021, the first of its kind in England, convening and hosting a week of co-produced activities to encourage the profession and anyone with an interest in social work to learn, connect and engage. This was, up to this point, our single biggest conversation with the sector with over 6000 people joining us across the week.

This year, we will collect and share data and stories which promote the value of social work to policy makers, the profession and the public. We will do this through communication and engagement activities, engaging a wide, cross-sector audience.

We will gather insights about the sector through our regional engagement leads, feeding this expertise into policy and operational development. We will work collaboratively to improve social work practice through promoting CPD, gathering feedback on the pre- and post-qualifying landscape and championing co-production through all our work.

We will publish new research on approved mental health professionals and best interests assessors, CPD, and education and training. We will also produce our second Social Work in England report.

We will continue to contribute our expertise to wider discussions about how social work supports people in society and continues to change lives positively, such as the independent review into children's social care in England.

Throughout the year, we will monitor and review our progress towards achieving these plans.

The people we work with and for

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

As a regulator with a statutory responsibility of public protection, we will not lose sight of the interests of the people we serve. Our values and behaviours encourage us to be a transparent organisation, listening to the views of others to make lasting positive change.

We're committed to collaboration. We've worked hard to make this commitment a reality, and one of the ways we have done this is to involve people both with expertise in social work and those with lived experience. Our approach is to co-produce our work with those it affects in a meaningful and proportionate way. People with lived and learned experience of social work are involved as critical friends at the earliest point, and throughout any changes we make. This helps us identify improvements and challenges our assumptions. One of the ways we evaluate ourselves in co-production is by asking 'who is missing, and who else should we involve?' One of the ways we demonstrate value is by being able to say how people's views have impacted and changed our work.

We established a National Advisory Forum to bring in the views of those with lived and learned experience. The National Advisory Forum meets on a regular basis and have been involved in over 20 projects in our first year. They've helped our staff deepen their knowledge about social work and the impact on people's lives, from more structured policy discussions to informal involvement in team meetings. We have benefitted from the forum's input in how we operate as an organisation, including being part of recruitment panels and developing Social Work Week. They have also provided a crucial contribution to reviewing our fitness to practise decisions by sitting on our monthly decision review group.

Co-production extends beyond those with lived experience, and the National Advisory Forum provide expert advice and challenge through practising social workers. We also have a vital

relationship with the representatives of universities through the Education and Training Advisory Forum, which is essential given our ambition in this area. Sub-groups have enabled us to look at critical issues in more depth, such as the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and placements, and this specialist input will continue this year. We also have a range of groups providing specialist advice, such as the professional expert group for mental health and mental capacity, and we will draw heavily on them as policy develops in response to the consultation about reforming the Mental Health Act.

We also ensure we are listening to our staff to access their perspectives. We have a range of internal groups and networks, including an equality, diversity and inclusion group, to encourage all to speak up and be confident they will be heard.

In February, we published our statement of intent on equality, diversity and inclusion. This statement, based on a great deal of co-production work, outlines our 3-year ambition for ensuring we operate in a way that reflects our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion as part of our core business. The statement of intent makes clear our plans to drive and oversee the implementation of this work. This includes recruiting a head of equality, diversity and inclusion to work across the organisation, including our professional associate, executive lead, the executive leadership team, and our board. The document also illustrates how the equality, diversity and inclusion steering group is embedded in the governance structure of our organisation.

This year, we will take forward the plans in the equality, diversity and inclusion statement of intent and embed them in our organisation, whilst working to embed positive change in the sector through our policy development and regulation activity.

We will further deepen our co-production approach through operating task and finish groups enabling more detailed work, such as the development of the professional learning outcomes for social work education. We will also develop and formalise the voice of social work students in our co-production approach.

It is vital that we scrutinise our approach to co-production, to ensure we are hearing the full range of voices we need. In the coming year, we will consider this across a range of areas, focusing on equality, diversity and inclusion, but also looking at how we could engage more thoroughly with children and young people, and the public more widely.

Throughout the year, we will monitor and review our progress towards achieving our plans.

Education and training

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

Social workers delivering safe and effective practice, in line with our professional standards, starts with our role in education and training. We want to ensure our regulatory approach helps to drive up the quality of education and training provision, ensuring greater consistency across the training of social workers, while supporting innovation across the range of courses that lead to registration with us.

Delivering these ambitions in the past year has been challenging, as the whole education and training sector, including students, have suffered significant turbulence due to the pandemic. This includes a move to remote teaching, disruption to student placements, and changes to examination and admissions processes. It has also meant our education quality assurance process has gone online, with inspections taking place without visits to campuses or other learning environments. We have responded proactively to the difficult position education and training providers are in, whilst being clear that our responsibility is to ensure those joining our register have the skills and knowledge to practise safely.

This year, we will introduce the 2021 education standards as consulted upon in 2019, following the delay to their implementation due to the pandemic.

We will increase investment in education and training quality assurance activity, to deliver a complete cycle of course inspection and reapproval over a 3-year period from September 2021.

We will conduct the second round of annual monitoring of courses and continue to work with providers to enrich the information and data we gather, enabling a more complete and up-to-date understanding of the social work student population. Through this area of our activity, we will continue to have a particular focus on the protected characteristics of social work students.

Working with education and training providers, employers, student groups and other stakeholders, we will examine the effectiveness of student placements in the light of the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

We have commissioned external research into social work education and training in the context of COVID-19, on provider experiences of regulation, and the student experience of learning during COVID-19, with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. The findings of this research will inform our policy development.

We will also work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and the Office for Students to consider how best to deliver the end point assessment and core external quality assurance element of the social worker degree apprenticeship.

We will continue our work relating to the approval and reapproval of adult mental health professional and best interests assessor courses. We will feed into the development of the new mental health landscape through, for example, the establishment of the professional expert group for approved mental capacity professionals. We will also produce guidance and training on new developments in mental health for the sector and for training providers, providing clarity on our expectations on this crucial and complex area of social work practice.

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

Making the transition from student to registered and employed social worker can be daunting. To ensure newly qualified social workers are capable of high quality and safe practice, we need to do all we can to get qualifying education right. As qualifying routes into social work are increasingly varied, for example undergraduate and postgraduate university programmes, the social work degree apprenticeship, and specialist fast track routes, we will need to ensure our regulation and guidance continue to work for all routes into the profession.

We are concerned the current transition process does not support graduates into social worker practitioner roles as well as it could, which is a core element to keeping them in practice. In part, this is because there is no clear transition from the professional expectations on a social work student into the expectations on a newly qualified social worker.

In the coming year, we will focus on working with others to start to understand the student experience and help address the problems. This work will include consulting on professional learning outcomes for course providers and students, overseen by the education and training advisory forum.

We will continue to develop policy approaches relating to training and education, including considering the risks and benefits of the registration of student social workers. This will involve

discussion with a broad range of stakeholders, as we consider how student registration may improve outcomes for the public.

We will work with the Department for Education, as well as employers and third sector organisations, to help improve the transition from education to employment, including the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programmes run by government.

We will also measure the number of reapproval decisions made, aiming to have completed 36 by March 2022.

Throughout the year, we will monitor and review our progress towards achieving our plans.

Our organisation

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.

Our values are central to how we work, within both our regulatory and corporate functions. We want to be transparent in how we operate and the decisions we make, demonstrating how our systems and processes enable the effective operation of the organisation. We want to ensure our people are supported in how they work, understand those whom we regulate and those we protect, and make real, demonstrable progress to be inclusive and representative.

We have established a range of staff forums to enable voices to be heard, including an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, the Queer Collective, the People Forum, Think Well, the Race Equality Network and the recently formed Women's Network. We intend to create a programme where we can proactively mentor staff from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, as a commitment to help increase the diversity of senior staff over time. Externally, we are members of the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI) and Stonewall's Diversity Champions Group. Last year, we published guidance for social workers wishing to amend their gender identity on the register, and these groups played an important role in leading this work, ensuring it was an unobtrusive process, empathetic in approach, and fully legally compliant.

Our internal communications approach has contributed further to enable our culture to thrive. We have a proactive approach to connecting with our people, with a rich range of content including blogs, weekly chief executive bulletins, fortnightly newsletters, and weekly and monthly all-staff meetings to create valuable touchpoints.

We have made great progress in our first year of operation, but challenges remain in building and reflecting on what we have learnt. The strong emphasis we place on our culture and values has been more important than ever, with our workforce working almost entirely remotely full-time for almost a year due to COVID-19. Our first people survey took place in May 2020, in the

first phase of the pandemic, and showed a high level of engagement, despite the challenges faced. We hope to build on the outputs of that survey this year, as well as increasing the response rate for completion.

Critically, we need to understand how we can develop how we work based on the new realities and new opportunities arising from the pandemic. In line with our values, we have found new ways to be innovative and take on different approaches to co-production, both inside the organisation and beyond, and we need to embed and develop these.

To deliver our objectives, the board has approved the annual budget for the year ending 31 March 2022. Social worker fee income of £9m during the year ending 31 March 2022 will offset a significant proportion of our operating expenditure. The remaining forecasted balance of £9.4m is to be financed by the Department for Education by way of grant in aid; an additional £1m has been agreed by the Department for Education as at risk.

People

The focus of operation up to now has been on recruitment as a new organisation. Now, in our second year, our focus is turning to retention, development of skills and leadership, and improved recruitment.

This year, we will review our recruitment and selection processes in light of the need to make positive steps on equality, diversity and inclusion. We will develop a people strategy that includes specific actions on workforce, learning and development, wellbeing, and talent and leadership.

We will implement a model for workforce and succession planning, and a talent management framework that enables us to develop and retain our people. We have commissioned a management development programme for all our managers, co-designed so that we can deliver and continuously evolve the programme. We will also develop our coaching and mentoring approach and leadership programmes.

Data and insight

During our first year of operation, we collected a wealth of data which wasn't previously available, for example, from fitness to practise casework, CPD and registration data, and university education annual monitoring. Alongside this, we have developed management information reporting systems and tools, to help us track our internal performance against key performance indicators and external benchmarks.

This year, we will develop our management information reporting to drive real and usable insight into how we are operating and what we are learning about the sector. This management information, data and system intelligence will enable us to prioritise key business areas, starting with the fitness to practise caseload, developing insight on what is happening in the system and how we can respond to it.

IT and infrastructure

Our IT systems have successfully enabled a move to home working, and the first round of social worker renewals with nearly 100,000 social workers renewing, uploading CPD, and paying their renewal fee. Our IT systems have also enabled temporary registration, required under the Coronavirus Act 2020.

This year, we will enhance and build on the success of our IT systems in our first year. Our plans will be set out in a fully developed IT roadmap.

We will proactively maintain the security and robustness of our IT systems, infrastructure and data, whilst expanding our internal IT capabilities to drive better value for money and increase the speed at which we can deliver system changes and adaptations, both internally and for those we regulate.

Governance and assurance

In our first year, we began to establish the key components of our governance framework to help us foresee, assess, manage and mitigate risks, with processes for continuous review and improvement designed to ensure accountability is in the right place. Key Performance Indicators are one measure of our performance, but we also use a traffic light system to measure risks, track progress and monitor trends across business functions.

This year, we will take steps to streamline business processes and strengthen our governance and assurance framework. This will create a more integrated oversight process through an executive office function to enable smarter operational, financial, risk management and reporting. This will ensure our board receives the information it requires to effect good governance and management.

We will continue to embed risk management across the organisation, as well as continuing to develop our data protection and information governance framework, policies and processes. This will ensure a robust approach, which encourages learning from others and sharing best practice.

We will expand our internal quality assurance capabilities to support our regulatory functions, using feedback to ensure we can respond to emerging risks, operational and regulatory needs.

We will also continue to deepen our organisational understanding of our legal context to support our people to make the right, risk-based decisions that protect the public. We will do this by continuing to foster a culture which supports continuous improvement and learning, whilst at the same time recognising the standards we need to achieve.

Corporate systems

Reflecting on our first year as the regulator has shown us how we can strengthen our core corporate systems and processes, including finance, procurement and contract management. This is the experience of going live and testing systems in real delivery rather than start up, and where people are working remotely. This year, we will bring together our finance, human resources and commercial operating systems into one corporate system, which will respond to this new environment. This will enable us to increase efficiencies and support our people in their work.

During the year, we will review and monitor progress towards delivering our plans.

We will also measure:

- the average number of days absent due to sickness, aiming to remain well below the public sector average of 5.4 days per person.
- how well we are recruiting against plans, aiming for at least 90% of recruitment activity to be completed as planned.
- the retention rate of our people, aiming for a minimum of 90%.
- variance to budget, aiming to remain within 2%.
- the availability of our front-facing systems aiming for at least 99% availability, excluding planned outages.
- the time it takes us to complete freedom of information requests, aiming to complete 100% within the statutory deadline.

- the time it takes us to complete subject access requests, aiming to complete 100% within the statutory deadline.
- the time it takes us to respond to corporate complaints, aiming to respond to 100% within 20 days.



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