

Paper for the

Social Work England Board

Sponsor

Colum Conway, Chief Executive

Author

Colum Conway

Date

25 June 2021

Reviewed by

Executive Leadership Team

This paper is for

Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO9: We will establish robust infrastructure, systems and processes that promote trust and confidence.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite

Strategy - Hungry

1. Introduction

This report will look back at some of the key areas of focus for the organisation since the Board meeting in May. It will also look forward to the months ahead and highlight any areas of challenge and opportunity for Social Work England. In doing so it will touch briefly on agenda items that will be covered in more detail during the Board meeting.

2. Looking back

Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21

The Annual Report and Accounts has been prepared and circulated as draft to ARAC and the Board for final comments. We have received the Audit Completion Report from Mazars and the accounts are now recommended to the National Audit Office for sign off in time for laying before the parliamentary summer recess.

Performance Reporting

In order to provide consistent and comparable data on performance and to align with reporting requirements for the Board, the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA), and the departments, we have agreed to publish performance data on a quarterly basis. The data for Quarter 1 for this year is not available in time for this board meeting and will be published on our website later in the month. A review of the first two months of the year indicates good progress being made on all core services and activities including registration, the enquires service and fitness to practise.

The response to the recent Direct Debit instalment collection for registration fees has been positive with significant reductions in enquires and issues of non-payment in comparison to last year. The registration team are gearing up for an increase in registration application through the summer months as students and trainees graduate from their programmes, and preparations continue across the organisation for the start of the next renewal period.

While it is still early days, the progress on case management in fitness to practise is positive and underpins confidence in the trajectory for the rest of the year. Detailed resource analysis for investigations and adjudication in relation to the legacy cases has been presented to the DfE sponsor team with further analysis and discussion ongoing.

While the number of new concerns received into fitness to practise has been more stable in the last three months and appears closer to the anticipated levels, the incoming rate of fitness to practise referrals overall is higher than expected. Analysis shows that about 50% of the concerns received do not progress beyond the triage stage of fitness to practise, meaning that they do not indicate that a social worker's fitness to practise is impaired. We are seeking to better understand why so many fitness to practise concerns are being made in circumstances where there is no indication of significant concern or where the issues under consideration could be better dealt with at a service level. A programme of work was initiated in April 2021 to explore how we can manage this area of our service more effectively. That work is now well underway and has developed into four separate

workstreams, including additional research, strengthening of external communications, improvements to the management and application of our triage tests and further engagement with service providers.

CPD

The consultation on CPD is ongoing and will end on 11th August. For CPD this year our advice is for social workers to upload their CPD throughout the year. However, at this point the pattern for CPD uploads is similar to last year and is likely to reflect a huge upsurge in CPD admissions at the time of renewal, the last few months of the year. There is a programme of national events planned between July-November to address the requirement to upload CPD and renew registration. These events will be widely advertised and have a large capacity, they were regularly over-subscribed last year. Regional engagement leads will also hold drop-in sessions for social workers to ask questions about uploading CPD. The video demonstrations on utilising your online account and the examples of CPD were well received last year and will be promoted again.

The National Advisory Forum

The National Advisory Forum has been undergoing an extensive internal evaluation to review its first year and plan for the future. Initial findings are positive and show sustained engagement from members who are proud of the approach we have taken to co-production. The feedback also offers several useful challenges and makes suggestions of how we can stretch our approach to co-production in the future. A full version of this report will be shared with the Board in due course for their consideration.

DHSC Consultation on Professional Regulation Reform and Independent Review

The consultation period for the DHSC 'Regulating healthcare professionals, Protecting the Public' has come to an end. [Our response](#) to the consultation has been published on our website. A successful bidder has been secured by the Department of Health and Social Care for the independent review on how the regulatory landscape might be simplified. Social Work England does not come within the scope of the review, it will cover the healthcare professional regulators (excluding the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland) plus the PSA. It will look at options for how the regulatory bodies might be reconfigured with the aim of enhancing public protection and will be informed by efficiency and economic considerations. The timeline for this review is approximately six months.

3. Forward look

Education Quality Assurance

Work on the first re-approval cycle beginning September 2021 is at an advanced stage. All providers have been informed about where their reapproval activity falls within the three-year cycle. For those courses planned within first year of the reapproval cycle, the education quality assurance team have engaged closely with providers to schedule approval activity at the most appropriate times for them. Most providers are still operating with Covid-19 adjustments to their courses or navigating organisational changes, with many

seeking to review the learning from the pandemic and implement longer term changes to courses. The team have sought to schedule the approval activity at a time when these plans are internally validated and provide the inspectors with the most current version of the course to be inspected. This proactive approach to scheduling is expected to reduce the number of cancellations or postponements to inspections. We have had positive feedback about our flexible approach from providers.

People Survey

We conducted our people engagement survey in May with a completion rate of 78%, up 4% from last year. Analysis is underway and will be presented to the board later in the year alongside our action plan.

Assurance Framework

Work has continued on building our assurance framework and identifying first, second, third and fourth lines of assurance. We have developed a regulatory schedule of delegations that clarifies who may make regulatory decisions. Both papers have been reviewed by ARAC and are included on the agenda for this meeting for further discussion and in the case of the regulatory schedule of delegations for approval.

Professional Qualifications Bill

We have been in contact with our fellow healthcare regulators as the Professional Qualifications Bill has been drafted and revised. International applications to the social work register in England are far lower than those received by our health counterparts, and we did not have the same system of automatic recognition of qualifications as some of our colleagues. We are watching the progress of the Bill closely and are keen that it is drafted in recognition of the unique duty of public protection across the health and social work professional regulators, and our ability to make appropriate assessments as part of the process of application.

NMC - Employment Appeal Tribunal decision

We are aware of the recent Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) ruling in the case of Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) v Mr R Somerville which found in favour of a NMC partner's claim to 'worker' status and entitled him to associated benefits. Unless successfully appealed by the NMC, the decision of the EAT could have implications for us as there are similarities in how we engage our partners, and a finding of 'worker' status against us would entitle partners to historical holiday pay and pensions contributions as well as future benefits. In addition to the historical and future financial risks, there may be far reaching policy implications for ourselves and other regulators who use partners in an independent decision-making capacity. We are monitoring the situation and considering mitigating actions.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

We have contacted all registrants and asked them to complete equality and diversity information in a new section on their online registration account. This is a voluntary request for information to help us collect data that will help to continue to provide services lawfully and respectfully. The request for this data will be a permanent feature in social worker's online accounts and enable them to update their equality and diversity data at any time. Over time it will allow us to build a picture of the nature of the profession and its profile.

At the same time we have joined a collaboration of social work organisations which is urging social workers to complete a major [anti-racism survey](#) about their views and experiences.

The Anti-Racist Social Work Steering group is led by representatives from the Principal Social Workers networks for both adults and children and families, What Works for Children's Social Care and Social Work England. The anti-racism survey aims to understand the prevalence, impact and general awareness of racism in social work. Social workers of all ethnicities, working in different positions and sectors, are being encouraged to complete it so that it can inform an action plan on next steps for the profession.

Independent Review of Children's Social Care – The Case for Change

[The Case for Change](#) is the initial publication from the Children's Social Care review on their findings following a 3-month period of investigation. The Review is led by Josh MacAlister. The Case for Change reports on what they highlight as the shortcomings and failures of the current children's social care system. It incorporates views on the workforce, the care system, the child protection system and asserts that not enough is being done to help families. It looks to reinforce support for families within communities and moving away from what it considers to be an interventionist, punitive approach to families in need. The review established an expert by experience panel, a stakeholder panel and sought feedback online and through direct visits which resulted in the findings outlined above. The review will report later in the year on recommendations to address and provide solutions to the issues raised.

Social Work England Framework Document

The Framework document is currently in draft form as it is following a new guidance template - further work on it is planned through the summer months. It is anticipated a final draft will be available to the Board at the meeting in September.

4. Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above in relation to Quarterly reporting there is no update dashboard attached to the report this month. We are working on a new approach to the dashboard in this report and how it aligns with the performance reporting in time for the September meeting.

A good deal of progress is being made on all the key elements of operational delivery and on how we are capturing that progress. We are working closely with the departments and other key stakeholders on the strategic development of policy in the regulation of professions and in issues relevant to social work. It is with great pleasure that we welcome

Lyn Romeo back to her post as Chief Social Worker for Adults and look forward to working with Lyn as one of our key stakeholders.

Chief Executive's meetings with external organisations since the last Board meeting:

Since the last meeting I have met with:

Permanent Secretary, DfE

Josh MacAlister from the Independent Review of Children's Social Services

Skills for Care and Development Alliance

Chief Executives of the social work regulators in all jurisdictions of the UK

Chief Executives of Health and Care professional regulatory bodies

New Chair and Chief Executive of the General Optical Council

Dame Rachel de Souza Children's Commissioner for England

Chief Officer at ADASS

Chief Executive of Skills for Care

Vulnerable Children and Young People National Board