

(Observers) Copy of Social Work England Board Meeting

MEETING
23 January 2026 10:30 GMT

PUBLISHED
19 January 2026

Social Work England Board Meeting
Friday 23 January 2026, 10.30am – 1.00pm
at The Don, Social Work England and by videoconference

AGENDA

Item	Time	Topic	Paper / Ref.	Board Action	Lead						
1.	10.30	Welcome	Verbal		Chair						
2.	10.30	Apologies for absence and declarations of interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members' register of interests link 	Verbal	To note/ declare	Chair						
3.	10.35	Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2025	Paper 01	To approve	Chair						
4.	10.40	Matters arising and action log	Paper 02	To discuss and note	Chair						
5.	10.45	Chair's report	Verbal	To note	Chair						
6.	10.55	Chief executive's report	Paper 03	To discuss and note	Chief Executive						
7.	11.05	Policy committee chair's report	Paper 04*	To note	Policy Committee Chair						
8.	11.15	Break									
9.	11.20	Finance and commercial report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management accounts 31 December 2025 	Paper 05	To discuss and note	Executive Director, People and Business Support; Interim Head of Finance and Commercial						
10.	11.35	Quarter 3 performance report 2025/26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness to Practise performance Q3 2025/26 	Paper 06 Paper 06a	To discuss and note	Executive Directors; Head of Business Planning and Improvement						

Item	Time	Topic	Paper / Ref.	Board Action	Lead	
11.	12.00	Social Work Week 2026 & Change the Script 3	Paper 07*	To discuss and note	Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement	2
12.	12.15	Any other business	Verbal		Chair	3
13.	12.25	Review of meeting	Verbal		Chair	4
	12.35	Meeting ends				5
		Date of next meeting: Friday 13 March 2026 10.30 - 1.00				6
	12.35 – 12.50	Board Information Governance Training			Head of Data Protection and Information Governance	7
	13.00	Lunch will be provided				8
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* Papers marked with an asterisk are 'private' to protect confidentiality according to our guidance for publishing board papers. [LIST OF ATTENDANCE](#)

Board members: Dr Andrew McCulloch Chair, Non-executive Director

Amrat Khorana Non-executive Director

Cheryl Hobson Non-executive Director

Chris Nicholson Non-executive Director

Dr Adi Cooper Non-executive Director

Dr Sue Ros Non-executive Director

Simon Lewis Non-executive Director

Colum Conway Chief Executive

Board Apprentice: Bhavna Chandra Boardroom Apprentice

Staff in attendance: Linda Dale Executive Director, People and Business Support

Phil Hallam Executive Director, Regulation

Sarah Blackmore Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement

Joseph Stockwell Assistant Director, Assurance and Improvement

Natalie Day Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy

Rachel McAssey Assistant Director, Regulation (Registration, Advice and Adjudications)

Stephen Hale Assistant Director – Digital Programme Manager

Stephen Barnett Assistant Director, Regulation (Investigations)

	Grant Evans	Interim Head of Finance
	Neil Smith-McOnie	Head of Business Planning and Improvement
Guests:		
Sponsor team:	Andrew Wise	Department for Education
	Sonia Mosley	Department for Education
	Peter Royal	Department for Education
Public observers:	Richard West	Professional Standards Authority
	Sarah Fox	Professional Standards Authority
	Ben Jones	Unison
	Sarah Ellson	Fieldfisher
Staff observers:	Alex Hayward	Fitness to Practise Performance Manager (Item 10 only)
	Maria Mora	Project Delivery and Improvement Manager
	Lucy Davies	Policy Manager
	Faith Salih	Head of Legal
Minute taker:	Penny Clarke	Corporate Governance Manager
	Elle Langdown	Executive Assistant

Minutes of the Social Work England board meeting
Friday, 31 October 2025, 10.30am – 1.00pm
at The Don, Social Work England and by videoconference

Board members:	Dr Andrew McCulloch Amrat Khorana Cheryl Hobson Chris Nicholson Dr Adi Cooper Dr Sue Ross Simon Lewis Colum Conway	Chair, Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Non-executive Director Chief Executive
Board Apprentice	Bhavna Chandra	Boardroom Apprentice
Staff in attendance:	Linda Dale Sarah Blackmore Phil Hallam Natalie Day Rachel McAssey Stephen Barnett Clare Cocken Stephen Hale Matthew Devlin Neil Smith-McOnie Kevin Stone	Executive Director, People and Business Support Executive Director, Professional Practice and External Engagement Executive Director, Regulation Assistant Director, Policy and Strategy Assistant Director, Regulation (Registration, Advice and Adjudications) Assistant Director, Regulation (Investigations) Assistant Director, Communication, Insight and Engagement Assistant Director - Digital Programme Manager Head of Strategic Engagement Head of Business Planning and Improvement Outgoing ETAF Chair
Guests:		
Sponsor team:	Andrew Wise Kate Phillips Peter Royle	Department for Education Department for Education Department for Education
Public observers:	Richard West	Professional Standards Authority
Staff observers:	Paige Daniels Alexandra Hayward James Tynemouth	Policy Officer Fitness to Practise Performance Manager Business Improvement Officer
Minute taker:	Penny Clarke Dani Shaw	Corporate Governance Manager Executive Assistant
Apologies:	Richard Simpson	Head of Finance and Commercial

1. Welcome

- 1.1 The chair welcomed board members, colleagues and observers to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from the head of finance and commercial.
- 1.3 No new declarations of interest were reported.

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1.4 The chair announced that this would be the board apprentice's final board meeting, expressed gratitude for her contributions, and extended best wishes for her future endeavours.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Paper 01

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 25 July 2025 **were approved as a correct record.**

3. Matters Arising and Action Log

Paper 02

3.1 There were no matters arising.

3.2 The chair reviewed the action log. Actions closed at or since the last meeting were **approved** as follows:

- **Action 120:** Executive director, professional practice and external engagement and head of equality, diversity and inclusion to arrange at least 2 informal meetings between board members and members of the NAF per year. *Informal meetings between the board and the National Advisory Forum have been scheduled for 25 July 2025 and 26 September 2025. This requirement will be incorporated into the board programme for subsequent years. Action closed.*
- **Action 121:** Assistant director, communications, engagement and insight to share links to negative media articles referenced in the performance report with Simon Lewis, non-executive director. *The head of communications provided details and links to both positive and negative media coverage to Simon Lewis on 16 July 2025. Action closed.*

3.3 The progress on the open actions was **noted**:

- **Action 124:** Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide an update to the policy committee and board on the progress of the inspections of BIA and AMHP courses at an appropriate point once the inspection programme begins. *At the September Policy Committee, the Head of Educational Programme provided a detailed overview of our approach to AMHP and BIA inspections, which draws on our learning from our first cycle of inspections in social work education and training, as well as broader stakeholder engagement. The first AMHP and BIA inspection cycle is just getting underway, starting with BIA in October. We will keep the board informed of progress.*

4. Chair's Report

Verbal

4.1 The chair updated the board on progress with annual appraisals. He reported that appraisals with each non-executive director were ongoing, the half-year appraisal with the chief executive had been completed, and the chair's own appraisal with the sponsor department (Department for Education) was scheduled for Tuesday 4 November.

4.2 The chair informed the board about his forthcoming engagement activities scheduled over the coming weeks. These included attending the General Medical Council (GMC) conference, meeting with the director general at the Department for Education (DfE), meeting with the chief social worker for adults. Additionally, the chair would be attending the Social Work England roadshow in London and joining a meeting of the chairs of regulators overseen by the Professional Standards Agency (PSA).

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4.3 The chair encouraged the board to share feedback on his performance and to share any key messages or briefings relevant to the upcoming external meetings.

4.4 The board **noted** the report.

5. Chief Executive's Report

Paper 03

5.1 The chief executive introduced his report and spoke to some of the key points.

5.2 He informed the board that the launch of the education and training standards consultation, and publication of the report on learning from the first cycle of education inspections, had been delayed from the original September target. Work was ongoing, and it was hoped to publish these shortly.

5.3 He noted that there had been a sustained increase in the volume of fitness to practise (FtP) concerns, prompting joint work between the fitness to practise and policy teams to analyse the nature of these. Research would be key to understanding what was driving the increase, how to respond and how best to manage operational caseloads and timescales. The findings would be shared with the board and shape future strategies, with research remaining a priority for ongoing development.

5.4 On 1 November, Social Work England would enter the final month of annual social worker registration renewals. The current renewal rates were consistent with the same point last year. Renewal trends had remained steady each year, and the renewals team continued to respond efficiently and effectively to the process.

5.5 Following the government's announcement to implement Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) and replace Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), the organisation would need to revisit and adapt education and training standards, inspection processes, and prepare for the transition to the new approved mental capacity professional (AMCP) role, while continuing current best interest assessors (BIA) inspections for the time being. Work had been undertaken previously to develop and consult on education and training standards to facilitate the transition; however, the previous government decided to delay LPS, leading the organisation to prioritise inspection of AMHP and BIA courses instead. The chief executive reassured the board that as the timeline for implementing LPS became clear, the organisational approach would adapt. Further updates would be provided in due course.

5.6 The board discussed the professional make-up of AMHPs and BIAs, noting that the vast majority are social workers, and highlighted the importance of liaison with other professions as the AMCP role is introduced.

5.7 The board **noted** the report.

6. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) Chair's Report

Paper 04*

6.1 Audit and risk assurance committee chair introduced the report and appended papers.

6.2 She summarised key discussion and assurance items from the ARAC meeting including the NAO management letter and the business case for procurement of legal services

6.3 Assurance was given to the board that there had been significant scrutiny to the management letter action plan and business case.

6.4 The ARAC chair updated that she would be attending the NAO session on cyber assurance on 5 November 2025 and intended to share learning with the board.

6.5 The board **noted** the report and then discussed the two items.

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National Audit Office (NAO) management letter and action plan Paper 04a*

6.6 The board discussed whether the improvement actions in the management letter were feasible and reasonable. Executive director, people and business support noted that the NAO's feedback was both helpful and valid. While some points had been accepted in principle, they would be reviewed further to determine if they could be successfully implemented and deliver benefits. The board also queried whether the level of scrutiny was proportionate for an organisation of Social Work England's size; however, based on board member's experiences, this was a common discussion amongst arms-length bodies (ALB). The board remained reassured by the positive working relationship with the NAO, who had also conducted research into accountability burdens on smaller government bodies and were mindful of this issue.

6.7 The audit and risk committee chair highlighted that several actions were continuations from previous years, it would be important to fully close these in 2025/26. A process had been agreed to ensure that key accounting notes and judgments would be available to ARAC for scrutiny before the end of the financial year, to provide assurance.

6.8 The board **noted** the action plan and ongoing positive engagement with NAO, noting the importance of proportionality and benchmarking our processes with similar organisations.

Business case – legal services re-procurement

Paper 04b*

6.9 The audit and risk committee chair informed the board that the committee recommended board approval of option four in the business case for re-procuring legal services to support the Fitness to Practise process.

6.10 The board supported the recommended option, emphasising its necessity for achieving core regulatory aims. Concerns were raised about the high proportion of fee uplifts requested under the existing contract. The chair stressed the need for genuine like-for-like price comparisons and careful assessment of the most appropriate pricing structures for the procurement process.

6.11 The executive director, people and business support, confirmed that these matters were under active consideration, with internal and external advice being sought on contract structuring and pricing. Further discussions with board members with commercial experience would be welcomed.

6.12 In response to a query about the balance between in-house and external legal services, executive director, regulation confirmed that the in-house advocacy service would initially handle mandatory work (such as interim order applications and reviews), with the potential to expand to more substantive hearings in the future. He agreed that it would be helpful to benchmark in-house costs against the costs of the previous externally delivered service, and to continue to analyse and review the division of work.

6.13 There was agreement that there should be no automatic assumption that in-house provision is more cost-efficient than external; both cost and quality should be monitored and compared.

6.14 The board unanimously **approved** option four for the procurement of legal services, following committee scrutiny and minor amendments, with discussion on the

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prevalence of fee uplifts and the need for careful contract design to ensure value for money.

7. Policy Committee Chair's Report

Paper 05*

- 7.1 The policy committee chair introduced the paper and reported that the policy committee had a productive discussion on proposed changes to education and training standards and progress with the current BIA inspections.
- 7.2 The committee continued to conduct deep dives with focus on specific areas at each meeting. The committee chair encouraged board members to observe meetings, when possible, for early input and understanding of key issues.
- 7.3 Recently there had been a joint session between the board and the National Advisory Forum (NAF). It was noted that this had been a good opportunity to introduce new board members and new NAF members. Participants had engaged positively, and the opportunity was greatly appreciated.
- 7.4 The next policy committee meeting was scheduled for 5 December 2025.
- 7.5 The board **noted** the report.

8. Remuneration Committee Chair's Report

Verbal

- 8.1 The remuneration committee chair provided a verbal update on the meeting held on 17 October 2025 and noted the following:

- The committee had reviewed the chief executive's objectives and was assured of progress and performance at the mid-year stage.
- The chief executive, along with other members of the leadership team, were currently undergoing 360-degree feedback to support personal reflection and learning in the second part of the year.
- The committee reviewed the two corporate risks relating to people and culture and was satisfied that both remained stable.
- The committee discussed the Shaping Success Together programme, which is supporting the organisation to understand and embed the new behaviours framework, and reflected on the role of the board in supporting this work. A discussion would be scheduled at the next private strategy meeting.
- It was noted that the current people strategy is in its last year. Plans were in place to review and refresh the strategy by March 2026, although the timeline would need to be flexible and respond to recommendations that arose from the independent review.
- The committee agreed that it would review its effectiveness and current terms of reference at the next meeting in May 2026, although it felt that broadening the scope to consider people strategy and culture had been beneficial and should continue.
- The board **noted** the report.

People Engagement Survey results 2025

Paper 06*

- 8.2 The board considered the People Engagement Survey results and agreed these were positive overall, highlighting a 5 percentage point improvement in the overall engagement score and the emphasis on culture and flexible working in the free text comments. The board also acknowledged ongoing challenges in scores for the leadership, tools and customer questions. The board highlighted the importance of

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team-level discussions to interpret the results and agreed that maintaining high staff engagement would be essential for organisational success.

- 8.3 The board queried the reason for the lower leadership score, Executive director, people and business support clarified that internal work showed leadership was visible, engaged, and approachable. Staff feel comfortable approaching leaders, but the score may reflect perceptions of leadership at different levels and the question asked about leaders' 'understanding of day-to-day realities of my work'.
- 8.4 Executive director, people and business support emphasised that team-based discussions were used to unpack what drives the leadership score in each area, and that the Shaping Success Together programme aims to improve communication and leadership messaging. She acknowledged the leadership score had been stable for several years and expressed hope for improvement as these initiatives progressed.
- 8.5 The board sought clarification regarding the definitions of "tools" and "customer", and it was agreed that the survey questions would be shared with the board.
- 8.6 The board **noted** the report.

Agreed action: The executive director of people and business support will distribute the People Engagement Survey questions to the Board to facilitate access, enable thorough review by the board, and assist in interpreting the resulting scores.

9. Finance and commercial report

Paper 07

Management accounts to 30 September 2025

- 9.1 The executive director, people and business support, introduced the report, highlighting initial challenges in scaling up activity at the start of the year. The organisation had responded by making a timely adjustment to grant in aid.
- 9.2 As a result, the organisation expected to finish the year close to budget, with capital spending remaining on track and the financial key performance indicator (KPI) was expected to be met.
- 9.3 The board received assurance that issues had been identified and addressed proactively. Audit and risk assurance committee chair confirmed that there had been detailed scrutiny of budget management via a risk deep dive at the last ARAC meeting.
- 9.4 The board also expressed appreciation for the head of finance and commercial's contribution, noting that this would have been his final board meeting, and requested that their thanks be communicated to him.
- 9.5 The board **noted** the update.

10. Quarter 2 performance report 2025/26

Paper 08

Fitness to Practise performance Q2 2025/26

Paper 08a

- 10.1 Head of business planning and improvement introduced the papers and the chair handed over to the executive directors to update the board on progress and performance during quarter 2.

Prevention and Impact

- 10.2 The executive director, professional practice and external engagement, reported a busy quarter 2, involving significant collaboration with the DfE and DHSC on statutory

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work with children and adults. The appointment of Josh McAllister OBE MP as parliamentary under-secretary was noted.

10.3 There had been strong engagement with the media and stakeholders, including our own roadshows, involvement in Community Care Live, and a speaker role coming up at the National Children and Adult Social Care Conference.

10.4 Planning for phase 3 of the “Change the Script” campaign was advanced, responses to the registration rules consultation had been published and resulting changes implemented. Consultation had begun on draft guidance for social workers’ online communications.

10.5 Research activity was well-advanced, with key reports being finalised, and new investigations to understand the current high referral rates and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) patterns in fitness-to-practise data.

10.6 Communications for annual registration renewal had been launched, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) engagement events continued, and work on the education and training standards is ongoing.

10.7 BIA inspections had started, with four completed successfully.

10.8 Preparations had been ongoing for the expected changes to the Liberty Protection Safeguards, with adaptation of inspection and training approaches as government policy evolved.

10.9 Research into the practice education is nearing publication and will provide a key foundation for future initiatives. To support this work, three new team members are being recruited.

10.10 Work on the third organisational strategy remained paused pending the independent review of Social Work England, but the earlier engagement work would inform future plans.

Delivery and improvement

10.11 Executive director, people and business support reported progress with digital, data, and technology objectives during quarter 2, noting that the programme manager, user researcher, and data governance lead roles had been recruited, and that these roles are key for advancing priority projects.

10.12 She highlighted that resource demands on existing operational teams remained a risk and this would be closely monitored throughout the year.

10.13 The Shaping Success Together programme was on track, with ongoing activities to launch and embed new behaviours across the organisation, and the main challenge was maintaining momentum and measuring early impact.

10.14 The financial position had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Regulation

10.15 The executive director of regulation reported that KPIs for registration and advice were being met. There had been a decrease in time taken to approve restoration applications due to changes in the skills and knowledge form. The renewal period was underway, with targeted communications to registrants who had not yet renewed. About 33% of the register had renewed, and support would be available for last-minute renewals over the weekend of 29/30 November.

10.16 There had been a sustained 29% increase in incoming fitness to practise (FtP) concerns, mainly from the public. Throughput had been remodelled twice to account

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for this trend. Triage staffing had been increased, and the organisation was recruiting further to manage the volume. Triage decision-making had increased by 46%.

10.17 Timeliness KPIs continued to fluctuate, as expected due to volume, but closure rates remained high.

The board inquired about the reasons behind the increase in concerns. Executive director, regulation explained that, as noted earlier in the meeting, research was underway to analyse why people were coming to the regulator, what they were seeking, and whether local complaint resolution might be failing, leading to more regulatory referrals. Additional research was necessary to examine the sources and nature of the of referrals. The board noted that an increase in complaints had been seen across sectors, including employment tribunals, suggesting broader social and sector-specific factors.

10.18 The board confirmed the need to continue to provide detailed FtP reports for continued assurance.

10.19 Executive director, regulation noted that investigations performance was broadly in line with forecast, and KPIs were better than expected with ongoing process reviews aiming to identify further improvements.

10.20 With regards to adjudications, the timeliness of case examiner decisions was nearly on track, though team vacancies had impacted overall performance.

10.21 The hearings backlog was expected to decrease, with a projected 92 cases to be resolved at the hearings stage by the end of the year. By then, it was expected that 425 cases would be waiting for a hearing, down from 470 estimated in quarter one. The reduction in the backlog resulted from faster throughput and higher closure rates earlier in the process. Continued collaboration with the external legal provider was helping to ensure steady progress on case management.

10.22 Executive director, regulation highlighted the need to balance financial risk with operational requirements and suggested a more open risk attitude to address backlogs and increased demand.

10.23 The board **noted** the report.

11. Corporate risk register

Paper 09*

11.1 Head of business planning and improvement introduced the paper and explained that the corporate risk register has been reformatted to move away from the previous spreadsheet approach, aiming for greater clarity.

11.2 Head of business planning and improvement reported that one risk (CRR 20) had been moved to the operational risk register after discussion at ARAC and executive leadership team (ELT) meetings, as it had reached its expected mitigation level. Additionally, the description of CRR 30, a finance-related risk, had been updated to better reflect current circumstances.

11.3 The board welcomed the new reporting format, suggesting the inclusion of a summary dashboard and a simple indicator showing whether each risk had improved, worsened, or remained static since the last review. Head of business planning and improvement agreed to work on incorporating this to enhance board oversight.

11.4 The board discussed the scrutiny process at ARAC. ARAC chair provided assurance that the committee had agreed with management's decision that only one of four

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'stable' risks should be removed from the corporate risk register. It was right to retain oversight of the remaining three due to ongoing potential for volatility.

11.5 The board **noted** the report.

12. Social Work Week 2026

Paper 10

12.1 Assistant director, communication, insight and engagement introduced the paper explaining the importance of Social Work Week in the calendar and the purpose of the paper, which was to provide an overview of plans for the next year and a look back at 2025. The full programme would be brought back to the board in January.

12.2 The head of strategic engagement added that Social Work Week 2025 saw high engagement, with over 6,000 attendees and one session exceeding 1,000 participants. The event embedded co-production throughout planning and delivery, with significant involvement from the National Advisory Forum (NAF) and external stakeholders. The 2026 event would build on previous years. The expressions of interest process would launch soon.

12.3 Board members expressed strong support for Social Work Week and enthusiasm for participating in sessions, emphasising the value of board visibility.

12.4 The board noted the heightened profile of the week and increasing number of alternative offers, with British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and others also running significant programmes. This suggested a need for strategic collaboration. These points were acknowledged, and ongoing efforts to work collaboratively were highlighted.

12.5 The board **noted** the report.

13. Reflections from the outgoing Education and Training Advisory Forum (ETAF) chair

Verbal

13.1 The outgoing Education and Training Advisory Forum (ETAF) chair shared his reflections on the forum's achievements. He highlighted ETAF's role as a critical friend to Social Work England, its broad membership, and successful collaboration with the NAF. The forum had contributed to document reviews and alignment with sector standards. He emphasised the value of two-way communication between Social Work England and the sector, allowing sector views to influence Social Work England's work.

13.2 ETAF chair noted the publication of knowledge, skills and behaviour statements, that are ready for integration into revised education and training standards following consultation. The standards set clear expectations for providers and students in a way that other informal frameworks had not done previously.

13.3 He raised the growing interest in artificial intelligence noting its potential as an ally or threat, and the importance of Social Work England's engagement with ETAF on this topic.

13.4 He emphasised the importance of practice education, calling for a deeper understanding about practice educators, and greater consistency in their quality and status. Social Work England was encouraged to raise its ambitions in this area, including a broader focus on the social work educator ecosystem.

13.5 ETAF chair highlighted his view that there were regulatory risks arising from the absence of student or apprentice registration. He suggested reviewing processes to

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identify and manage risks associated with students moving between courses, where concerns about their suitability for social work practice had been identified.

13.6 The outgoing chair praised Social Work England's balanced and supportive regulatory approach that maintained standards without being overly burdensome to universities.

13.7 Following applications for the new ETAF Chair, an existing member has been appointed to the position. The current Deputy Chair will continue in their role, but the selection process for a new Deputy Chair will commence soon and all were committed to supporting a smooth transition.

13.8 The board welcomed and **noted** the feedback. The outgoing ETAF chair was thanked by the chair for his significant contributions.

14. Corporate Governance: policy update:

Paper 10

Annex 10a

Travel and expenses policy

14.1 The chair introduced the item.

14.2 In discussion, it was clarified that the policy was being shared for information as part of the agreed review cycle. A suggestion was made for a high-level structure for policy management.

14.3 Assurance was given that first class train travel would only be approved in exceptional circumstances. The board suggested removing the reference to newspaper purchases from the expenses policy, as it was outdated.

14.4 The board **noted** the policy.

Action: The executive director of people and business support will provide the Board with the policy review schedule and remove newspapers as an example of allowable expenses from the travel and expenses policy.

15. Board and committee dates for 2026/2027

Paper 11

15.1 The chair invited approval of the board and committee dates for 2026/2027.

15.2 The ARAC chair noted that the committee meeting scheduled for 26 June 2026 would need to be rearranged due to pre-existing commitments.

15.3 The board **agreed** the dates with the exception of the ARAC meeting in June, that would be rescheduled.

16. Sub-committee appointments -verbal

16.1 The chair presented the paper regarding proposed changes to sub-committee appointments.

16.2 The board **approved** the proposed subcommittee appointments.

17. Any other business

17.1 There was no other business, and the chair thanked all those in attendance.

Date and Time of Next Meeting: Friday 23 January 2026, 10.30am - 1.00pm

The meeting ended at 12:42

Summary of Actions

- The executive director of people and business support will distribute the People Engagement Survey questions to the Board to facilitate access, enable thorough review by the board, and assist in interpreting the resulting scores.
- The executive director of people and business support will provide the Board with the policy schedule and remove newspaper expense allowances from the relevant policy.

* Papers marked with an asterisk are 'private' to protect confidentiality according to our guidance for publishing board papers.

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Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
The Chair

Author
Penny Clarke, Corporate Governance Manager

Date
23 January 2026

Reviewed by
Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Governance and compliance – Cautious

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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1. Summary

The actions below provide an audit trail of items closed at or since the last board meeting on 31 October 2025. Actions still in progress or yet to complete since the last meeting are listed on the log that follows.

Actions pending sign off at the 23 January 2026 meeting:

- **Action 125:** The executive director of people and business support will distribute the People Engagement Survey questions to the Board to facilitate access, enable thorough review by the board, and assist in interpreting the resulting scores. *The complete set of questions contained in the People Engagement Survey were uploaded to Board Intelligence and shared with the board on 3 November 2025.*
Action to close.
- **Action 126:** The executive director of people and business support will provide the Board with the policy schedule and remove newspaper expense allowances from the relevant policy. *The travel, subsistence and expenses policy has been updated to remove newspaper expense allowance. A complete list of policies and the corporate documents policy and procedure has been shared with all members of the board and the boardroom apprentice.* **Action to close**

2. Action required

The board is asked to note the progress against the actions.

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Social Work England Board
Action Log

Action no.	Date of Meeting	Action	Owner	Due By	Update	Next review	Status
124	25/07/2025	Assistant director, policy and strategy to provide an update to the policy committee and board on the progress of the inspections of BIA and AMHP courses at an appropriate point once the inspection programme begins.	Assistant director, policy and strategy	31/10/25	<p>Best Interests Assessor (BIA) inspections started in October 2025 as planned and are progressing well. Our approach remains flexible and supportive which has been welcomed by course providers.</p> <p>We have now completed 9 inspections and have a further 8 planned between January and February 2026, which will then conclude our BIA reapproval cycle.</p> <p>We will be starting our reapproval of Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses in March 2026, preparation for this is on track. Meetings with course providers in preparation for inspections have started.</p> <p>The outcome of the inspections can be found in the quarterly performance report section of board papers.</p>	13 March 2026	Open

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Chief executive's report

Agenda Item 06 Paper Ref 03

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
Colum Conway, Chief Executive

Author
Colum Conway

Date
23 January 2026

Reviewed by
Executive Leadership Team

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Strategic approach - Open

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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1. Introduction

Our meeting today will include information and discussion on Change the Script and Social Work Week. The programme for the 6th Social Work Week is now almost complete and planning for phase 3 of Change the Script is now well underway with a view to broadening the campaign to highlight the variety of contexts for social work.

It is positive to note that in recent months we have had several meetings with senior colleagues at BASW. The focus for these meetings is on areas of the social profession where we could be working more closely together going forward.

An update on the DDaT programmes is contained within the Q3 performance update, the board will note that the status on delivery has changed. While it has been complex and challenging to move forward at pace, we now have all the additional fixed term roles in place. We are progressing work on the workstreams covering data governance, user research, team resourcing, technical debt, developing our future strategy. We will be bringing a more detailed report through to ARAC in February for oversight and advice.

The Q3 performance report on fitness to practise (FtP) serves to highlight the ongoing challenge presented at the Triage stage of the process by the sustained increase in the number of concerns raised with us. Throughout the year, we have increased capacity in the team which can be seen in the increased number of decisions. However, we will need to continue to increase capacity in the months ahead and focus on potential process efficiencies to ensure we can respond effectively to the increasing demand led concerns profile. I spent part of last week meeting with senior colleagues from the social work and social care regulators across the UK and Ireland. The social care regulators in the UK are also seeing a significant and sustained increase in the concerns raised with them, and we know this is also the case with the other health and care regulators in the UK with whom we have regular meetings. In the quarter ahead we are planning to bring to completion the highest number of final hearings than we have in any other part of the year.

2. Renewals

We concluded a successful renewals period in Q3, which was supported by a comprehensive communications and engagement plan. We exceptionally ran a weekend enquiries service on the last 2 days of renewals to offer help to any social workers who needed support with navigating renewals.

We have published a report on our web pages [Registration renewal and CPD progress reports - Social Work England](#). Additional data updates will be available on 5 February 2026.

3. Independent review

The Independent Review of Social Work Regulation led by Dame Annie Hudson is now well under way. The review is required under part 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. We have met with Annie and the review team on a number of occasions and shared with them a range of documents and information. The team also spent a day in the office meeting staff

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from across the organisation. The reviewer will assess how effectively Social Work England is discharging its statutory functions and delivering against its overarching objectives. It is anticipated that the review will conclude in spring 2026.

4. Practice education

We are pleased to be moving forward at pace with our work on practice education. We have engaged extensively with practice educators including the National Organisation for Practice Teaching and we have established our Practice Education Group to support our ongoing work in this area. The group consists of key stakeholders, including members of our Education and Training Advisory Forum, in recognition of the links between the two areas. We have now published our commissioned research into the current practice education landscape in England. We have also launched a practice education survey with registrants and work is well under way for our three in-person workshops planned for February and March in Ipswich, Manchester and Plymouth.

5. Social work in adult social care

Following our workforce roundtable, we have established a steering group, co-chaired by the Chief Social Worker for Adults to look in more detail at workforce issues in adult social work. This will draw on the work of the earlier roundtables and on the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy developed by Skills for Care last year. The group will, of course, be alert to developments in the Casey review and in other areas of social work practice to ensure alignment where appropriate. An initial meeting has taken place and was well attended with enthusiasm for taking this forward.

6. Artificial intelligence (AI)

Given the increasing prevalence of AI in social work practice and arising as an issue for the sector, we are planning to hold a national conference to look at AI at all levels of social work – from students to leadership. This will be underpinned by research we have commissioned and will shortly be publishing, and the feedback we have had from social workers and others. Separately, we have met with the Patient Safety Commissioner and Deputy Chair of the National Commission into AI and Healthcare, and her team, and are part of the PSA Regulatory AI Forum.

7. Finance

The board will be aware of the budget and business planning processes for 2026/27; final drafts will be brought to the next board meeting in March. The capital budget for next year is confirmed and we continue to work with DfE on revenue, focused on figures supplied previously as part of the spending review and on anticipated income from fees. We are hoping to confirm the position before start of next financial year.

As noted in the finance report, as we move towards our year-end position for this year, we anticipate challenges to our forecast position based on three key areas – fee income, spend

with our external legal provider and the provision made against the potential costs in relation to the partner worker status project. To note we are now starting to plan the 2026/27 external audit and Annual Report and Accounts with the interim audit scheduled for early March.

Interviews for the two vacant leadership posts in the finance team are scheduled for the last week in January and mid-February. In the meantime, the positions are being well covered by Grant and Laura who will be with us at least until the posts are filled.

8. Conclusion

Looking forward to the final months of this financial year we are anticipating the Professional Standards Authority report on their monitoring review of our performance 2024/25, we will be working with the National Audit Office on our Annual Report and Accounts for 2025/26, we will continue to support the Independent Review Team as appropriate as they prepare their recommendations for spring 2026. We will be having our regular quarterly reporting/planning meeting with our sponsor team at DfE, and we will be completing the internal/external review of our Triage process.

We will continue to focus on our business plan objectives for this year and on finalising drafts of our annual business plan and associated budget for 2026/27. We will also be restarting our process for the development of our Strategic Plan 2026/29.

Quarter 4 is a busy time for planning, review and oversight.

9. Annexes

Annex 1: Chief Executive's meetings

CEO Professional Standards Authority

Lead Reviewer Independent Review Team

Casey Review Team

Interim CEO and Chairperson BASW

International Social Work Professional Regulators Network

Permanent Secretary and CEOs of ALBs at DfE

National Children and Adults Services Conference

President and Vice President Association of Children's Services

National Practice Group

Director General Families at DfE

Chief Social Worker Adults

National Director Regulation and Social Care

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UK and Ireland Alliance Partnership
NHS Social Work Leads
CEOs Health and Care Professional regulators

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Finance and Commercial Update

Agenda Item 09 Paper Ref 05

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

Sponsor
Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

Author
Laura Gregory, Interim Senior Finance Business Partner

Date
23 January 2026

Reviewed by
Linda Dale, Executive Director, People and Business Support

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective
SO10: Continually develop and improve how we work, ensuring we are a well-run organisation that delivers the right outcomes and provides value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Financial governance - Cautious

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
N/A

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1. Summary

This paper provides an update on the following:

- Management accounts for the period ending 31 December 2025
- Recent commercial activity

2. Action required

For discussion and noting.

3. Commentary

Management accounts

A summary set of the management accounts for the year to 31 December 2025 can be found in Annex A.

Key highlights are set out below.

At the end of December, year to date revenue expenditure, net of fee income, was £10.2m compared to the budgeted amount of £11.0m, an underspend of £794k. This relates largely to a positive variance on fee income of £157k, an ongoing underspend on legal services, £317k, as well as the timely recruitment of vacant roles, a £339k underspend.

Year to date capital expenditure is below budget, with an underspend compared to budget of £422k. We expect the rate of activity and spend on capital projects to increase during Q4 and this increased activity will reduce the underspend by the end of the financial year.

The forecast position at the end of the financial year for revenue expenditure, net of fee income, is for an underspend of £516k, a variance of 3.2%. This compares to the previous forecast underspend of £71k. This is a result of updated information relating to fee income, with the full year forecast now £178k ahead of budget and a £234k increase from last month's full year forecast. Renewals, restoration and scrutiny fees were £94k higher than budgeted in December and look to continue at a similar run rate to the end of the year. Our previous forecast anticipated a small reduction in income from annual registration renewals, following implementation of the fees increase in September. This has not materialised; in fact, we have seen continued growth in the register.

External legal fees are now forecast to be £176k behind the original budget, a situation that is being closely monitored. Activity in December was lower than planned, although it was not a typical month. The external legal provider is confident that activity and spend will increase in Q4, when a higher volume of hearings is scheduled. This remains a key area of risk to the end year outturn.

As we enter Q4 there is potential for underspend to grow, as any delay to planned activities at this stage of the year - such as recruitment - would be challenging to mitigate. We will also determine, during Q4, how much of the provision made last year for implementation of

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worker status for our partners we expect to utilise. Reversal of any unused amount would affect the end year outturn.

Commercial update

Plans to procure a second legal advocacy provider are ongoing with support from our DfE sponsor. The tender proposal is currently under review by the Cabinet Office and, subject to approval, will be advertised in February.

Planning is also underway to re-procure translation and transcription services. A business case will be provided to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for scrutiny in February.

4. Conclusions and/or Recommendations

N/A

5. Annexes

Annex A – management accounts

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5. Annexes

Annex A – Management accounts to 31 December 2025

Income and Expenditure Statement

Directorates	Year to date amount	Year to date budget	Year to date £ variance	Year to date % variance	Full year forecast	Full year budget	Full year £ variance	Full year % variance
Fee income	(8,068,006)	(7,911,294)	156,712	2.0%	(11,420,304)	(11,241,726)	178,578	1.6%
Total	(8,068,006)	(7,911,294)	156,712	2.0%	(11,420,304)	(11,241,726)	178,578	1.6%
Executive Leadership Team								
Wages & Salaries	450,511	426,716	(23,796)	(5.6%)	603,467	571,547	(31,920)	(5.6%)
Support	33,888	30,000	(3,887)	(13.0%)	38,450	40,000	1,550	3.9%
Total	484,399	456,716	(27,683)	(6.1%)	641,917	611,547	(30,370)	(5.0%)
People & Business Support								
Wages & Salaries	2,598,089	2,871,985	273,897	9.5%	3,579,969	3,815,417	235,448	6.2%
Support	2,620,409	2,284,234	(336,175)	(14.7%)	3,483,082	3,464,470	(18,612)	(0.5%)
Total	5,218,497	5,156,219	(62,278)	(1.2%)	7,063,051	7,279,887	216,836	3.0%
Regulation								
Wages & Salaries	5,878,555	6,291,845	413,290	6.6%	8,873,857	9,022,586	148,730	1.6%
Support	4,499,633	4,845,718	346,085	7.1%	6,851,754	6,926,296	74,542	1.1%
Total	10,378,188	11,137,563	759,374	6.8%	15,725,610	15,948,882	223,272	1.4%
Professional practice and external engagement								
Wages & Salaries	1,968,266	1,922,047	(46,219)	(2.4%)	2,759,205	2,715,503	(43,702)	(1.6%)
Support	226,540	241,067	14,527	6.0%	598,487	569,891	(28,595)	(5.0%)
Total	2,194,806	2,163,114	(31,692)	(1.5%)	3,357,692	3,285,394	(72,297)	(2.2%)

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Total Expenditure													
	18,275,890	18,913,611	637,721	3.4%									
Net Expenditure		10,207,884	11,002,317	794,433	7.2%								
		26,788,271	27,125,711	337,441	1.2%								
		15,367,967	15,883,985	516,019	3.2%								

Balance Sheet at 31st December 2025

	Cost £	Depreciation £	N.B.V. £
Fixed Assets			
Buildings	1,264,299	(1,046,400)	217,898
Right of Use Asset	1,126,455	(641,620)	484,836
IT Equipment	1,336,982	(1,093,538)	243,444
Fixtures & Fittings	336,397	(321,630)	14,767
Internally generated system	11,389,358	(5,055,353)	6,334,005
Forge System (WIP)	2,585,362	0	2,585,362
	18,038,852	(8,158,540)	9,880,312
Current Assets			
Prepayments			349,211
Bank			6,350,114
Debtors			3,429
			6,702,755
Current Liabilities			
Accruals			(3,016,542)
Deferred Income			(8,175,859)
Payables			(2,660,525)
			(13,852,925)
Working Capital (Current Assets less Current Liabilities)			(7,150,171)
Non-Current Liabilities			
Short Term - PFI Finance Lease Liability Additions			(1,152,302)
Lease liability payments			609,600
Lease interest			(89,123)
Provisions			(899,012)
			(1,530,837)
Total Assets & Liabilities			1,199,304
Taxpayers equity			1,199,304

Social Work England

Quarterly report for October – December 2025



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Executive summary



Executive summary

Business plan progress

We are on track to deliver 8 of our 11 business plan objectives.

BP 3.2 Finalise and start to implement our new digital, data and technology strategy is now Amber, a change from Green last quarter. This is a result of slower than expected progress against the projected roadmap across all workstreams.

We launched the education landscape report – ‘Preparing for practice: social work education in England’.

We published our research on the practice education training landscape.

We recruited into the new role of Head of Triage.

During October and November, we held 5 Roadshow events in Sheffield, Bristol, Birmingham, Newcastle and London. Engagement throughout the series was overwhelmingly positive.

Performance update

We achieved 16 of our 18 KPIs.

We did not achieve *FTP3 Time taken to complete case examination process* due to vacancies, which are now filled. We expect KPI performance will improve and return to target over the course of Q4 and the first quarter of the next FY.

We achieved both *FTP1 Time taken to complete triage* and *FTP4 Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at case examination*, both improvements from Q2.

We did not achieve *FIN 1 Forecast year-end variance to budget*. The forecast position at the end of the financial year for revenue expenditure, net of fee income, is for an underspend of £516k (3.2% variance). This relates to higher than anticipated fee income and a lower level of legal activity and spend in December.

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Business plan progress



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Business plan progress overview

Business plan progress

ID	Business plan objective description	RAG
1.1	Build trust and confidence in social work and in regulation by engaging with the profession, stakeholders, people with lived experience and the public.	Green
1.2	Embed our research function to enhance and inform our understanding of the profession, and to positively impact public policy through evidence-based advice and insight.	Green
1.3	Reflect on the learning from our recent review of continuing professional development (CPD) to advance a more comprehensive and valued approach to our CPD requirements, with staged implementation.	Green
1.4	Refine and develop our approach to social work education and training, working in partnership with providers and the social work sector to improve the consistency and quality of courses, and the readiness of graduates for professional practice.	Amber
1.5	Build a more in-depth knowledge of the practice education landscape to inform and support the critical role of practice educators, including exploring potential regulatory levers.	Green
2.1	Take action to improve timeliness in our triage, investigations and case examiner functions whilst maintaining decision making quality and fairness.	Green
2.2	Use the additional funding to take action to address the hearings backlog.	Green

Business plan progress overview

Business plan progress

ID	Business plan objective description	RAG
2.3	Identify and realise further efficiency and effectiveness opportunities in our hearings and case review functions.	Green
3.1a	Develop and publish a new strategy for 2026 to 2029	On hold
3.1b	Align and strengthen approach to annual business planning and performance management	Green
3.2	Finalise and start to implement our new digital, data and technology strategy.	Amber
3.3	Adopt and embed our new behaviours framework.	Green

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Communications, engagement and insight

Business plan progress

1.1: Build trust and confidence in social work and in regulation by engaging with the profession, stakeholders, people with lived experience and the public.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We completed the Expression of Interest process for contributions to Social Work Week (SWW) 2026.
- We gathered sector views on regulation, CPD, education and fitness to practise via our five regional roadshows. We received positive and meaningful feedback which we are evaluating.
- We worked with Skills for Care on planning the 'AI and the future of social work' one-day summit in April.
- DfE approved the third phase of Change the Script, which we will deliver by March 2026.

Public consultations

- We closed the consultation on our 2 pieces of communicating online guidance.
- We carried out a consultation on new adjudicator panel disposal guidance.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Outcome and impact

- Roadshows deepened our understanding of sector needs and built trust with the profession, ensuring our work remains relevant and responsive.
- The EOI process for SWW 2026 invites the sector to shape the programme, embedding coproduction and strengthens our collaborative relationship with the profession.

Key planned activity next quarter

- We'll launch and run SWW 2026 in collaboration with the sector.
- We'll confirm the programme and open tickets to the sector for the AI conference.
- We'll plan and deliver phase 3 of Change the Script with delivery of outputs and PR activity during SWW 2026.
- We'll publish the outcomes from our communicating online and adjudicator panel disposal consultations.
- We'll publish the outcomes from phase 2 of our FtP/EDI analysis.
- Develop a 2026/2027 engagement programme, structured by quarters and collaboratively designed.

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.2: Embed our research function to enhance and inform our understanding of the profession, and to positively impact public policy through evidence-based advice and insight.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We finalised both pieces of AI research.
- Held a focused deep dive on research at the policy committee.
- Began internal work with leaders to inform the research strategy.
- Approved the creation of a discrete research function.

Outcome and impact

- Internal engagement on the research strategy will ensure it is embedded in our work across the organisation.
- Expanding the research team and moving it out of policy will support our growing ambitions for research.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- We'll publish both pieces of AI related research.
- We'll finalise the seriousness research and consider next steps.
- We'll commission research that focuses on social work student placement sufficiency and quality.
- We'll continue engaging with internal and external stakeholders, and use the feedback to draft our first research strategy.
- We'll progress plans for our research function.

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.3: Reflect on the learning from our recent review of continuing professional development (CPD) to advance a more comprehensive and valued approach to our CPD requirements, with staged implementation.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We completed analysis of feedback from all activities carried out to date.
- We used external engagement opportunities, including the roadshow events, to test our developing options and explore how CPD might better support specialist roles.

Outcome and impact

- Ongoing engagement with the sector ensures that our developing thinking continues to be informed by current sector views and opinions.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- We'll continue to engage with the sector, including a joint workshop with BASW. A next focus of our engagement will be to build our knowledge of what CPD looks like for those in specialist and advanced roles.
- Taking our learning so far, we will test options with senior leaders that help us to achieve our ambitions for CPD (to create a model that provides regulatory assurance, reduces regulatory risk and improves practice).

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.4: Refine and develop our approach to social work education and training, working in partnership with providers and the social work sector to improve the consistency and quality of courses, and the readiness of graduates for professional practice.

Activity and assurance

Education landscape report

- We launched the education landscape report - *Preparing for practice: social work education in England* as part of our session at the NCAS conference. We have received positive feedback on the report, both from internal and external stakeholders.

Education and training standards review

- We discussed our proposed changes to the education and training rules, standards and guidance with the DfE and DHSC.

Children's social care reform

- We fed into the latest iteration of the DfE's Early Career Standards for NQSWs.

Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP) and Best Interest Assessors (BIA)

- 10 BIA inspections have now been completed.

Social care reform

- We participated in the DfE's recently-established working group reviewing social work education and training provision.
- We held initial conversations with colleagues at the DHSC on the implications around the introduction of the LPS.



Outcome and impact

- It's the first time we've published a report like this one, demonstrating our transparency, and providing learning for those involved in initial education and training.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- We have experienced delays in progressing our review of the education and training standards, rules and guidance, but are working on a revised timeframe to publish following conclusion of the independent review.

Key planned activity next quarter

- We will agree a way forward for the review of our education and training standards, rules and guidance, including the readiness for professional practice guidance.
- We will continue to review our approach to BIA and AMHP inspections to inform our future approach to inspecting social work courses
- We'll continue to engage with colleagues in the departments to support work relating to social care reform.

Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

1.5: Build a more in-depth knowledge of the practice education landscape to inform and support the critical role of practice educators, including exploring potential regulatory levers.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We published our research on the practice education training landscape.
- We commissioned two rapid evidence research pieces focusing on student experiences on placements and what assessments look like.
- We launched a practice educator workforce survey and shared it with key stakeholder groups.
- We finalised and implemented our engagement plan.

Outcome and impact

- Publishing the research we commission positively contributes to sector knowledge, particularly in un-researched areas like practice education.
- The survey will help to improve our understanding of the size and shape of the practice educator workforce, to inform proposals for regulation.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- We'll publicise the workforce survey more widely and analyse responses to inform policy decision making.
- We'll continue to engage with the sector, including delivering in person events and presenting at events hosted by others.
- We'll work with the practice education development group to explore guidance for practice educators.
- We'll collate our learning in an outcomes report, including recommended next steps for this work.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.1: Take action to improve timeliness in our triage, investigations and case examiner functions whilst maintaining decision making quality.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We have started re-engineering some processes as part of the triage and investigations process review project.
- Additional triage resource is ensuring increased decision making compared to previous years. But this continues to be impacted by a large increase in referrals received.
- We have recruited into the new role of Head of Triage.
- We have started internal research, and work with other regulators, to understand the reasons for significant increases in referrals during 2025.
- We have recruited a new cohort of case examiners to increase decision-making capacity by Q1 26/27.

Outcome and impact

- Good progress is being made against timeliness targets in investigations.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Monthly triage referrals continue to increase and are now 33% higher than this time last year.

Key planned activity next quarter

- Recommendations from the triage & investigations process review are due in March 26.
- We will induct and train the new case examiner cohort.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.2: Use the additional funding to take action to address the hearings backlog.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- We have agreed the listing schedule for Q4 and continue to develop the 2026-2027 listing schedule.
- Previously ‘paused’ cases continue to be progressed and we are accelerating the number of active cases being investigated by our external legal provider.
- Further review of the post-case examination caseload through our external legal provider has started to help increase case progression over the next 2 years.
- We progressed our project to reprocure our external legal services, as well as moving from a single provider to two.
- More information on this objective, along with a detailed picture of fitness to practice performance is in the accompanying report: FtP Performance Q3 2025-26.

Outcome and impact

- Cases awaiting a hearing are being dealt with at an increased rate, and this will continue into Q4 and beyond.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- Subject to the necessary approvals, we’ll go out to tender for procurement of our FtP legal services.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Fitness to practise

Business plan progress

2.3: Identify and realise further efficiency and effectiveness opportunities in our hearings and case review functions.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
RAG				

Activity and assurance

- The new in-house legal advocacy team has completed internal and external training to support it to deliver the service.
- The adjudicator consensual disposal (ACD) consultation closed in December 2025, and we are now analysing responses.

Outcome and impact

- Nothing to note

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- The in-house advocacy team will start to present cases, supported by robust quality assurance processes.
- Further guidance and handover arrangements are being developed for the transition of work from our external legal supplier to the in-house advocacy team during Q1 of 26/27.
- We will publish finalised ACD guidance, ready for the process to be used from April 2026.

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Policy and strategy

Business plan progress

3.1a: Develop and publish a new strategy for 2026 to 2029

3.1b: Align and strengthen our approach to annual business planning and performance management.

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
3.1a				
3.1b				

Activity and assurance

NB We have separated the two elements of this objective to enable better clarity

3.1a Develop and publish a new strategy for 2026 to 2029

We have RAG-rated this as 'on hold', as this has been paused to ensure the next strategy is aligned with the outcomes of the Independent Review.

3.1b: This work was concluded in September, and a final version of our new approach to business planning was presented at the board's strategy meeting in September 2025.

Outcome and impact

We have agreed a new approach to business planning that considers our organisational context and the needs of diverse stakeholders. This new planning process is more streamlined and efficient.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change to report

Key planned activity next quarter

- **3.1b:** The new approach to business planning is now being utilised to produce our plan for 2026/27. We will share working drafts of the 2026/27 plan with the board in January and February.

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Digital, data and technology

Business plan progress

3.2: Finalise and start to implement our new digital, data and technology strategy



Activity and assurance

We have worked to further develop the draft DDaT strategy and replot our delivery roadmap for 2026-28. Live activity includes:

Design

- An audit of service design artifacts

Data

- Data governance exemplar (qualifications data)
- Data architecture discovery
- Development of a data governance charter

Technology

- User authentication solution

People

- Cost/benefit analysis of internal v external resource allocation and development of proposed future resourcing model
- Immediate training need review (and delivery)

Governance

- Reviewing project methodologies
- Development of an adoption plan for emerging technologies

We are on track to deliver progress on case management security, data governance, workforce planning, and emerging technologies by March 2026.

Outcome and impact

- It is too early to report impact

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- The status of the programme is amber because of slower than expected progress against the projected roadmap across the 5 workstreams
- We have taken steps to review and replot the roadmap, and plan key pieces of work that have been prioritised to begin next
- We are addressing delivery capacity by creating protected time for key individuals to contribute to the programme

Key planned activity next quarter

- A progress update, the draft strategy and revised roadmap will be provided for ARAC in February for scrutiny and approval.
- Initiation of key tasks and projects on service ownership, user research strategy, people and finance reporting, Forge technical debt and feature review, test strategy, digital change process review

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

People

Business plan progress

3.3: Adopt and embed our new behaviours framework



Activity and assurance

- We appointed a provider for the leadership development programme.
- We delivered an ‘Ambitious’-themed leadership development workshop.
- We appointed a provider to help us to develop a governance framework.
- We gathered and analysed feedback on our performance management arrangements.
- We conducted a change-readiness check-in.

Outcome and impact

- Peer groups are starting to yield benefits as colleagues are sharing challenges and successes.
- The change readiness check-in and pulse survey have provided insights and examples of where we are starting to see role modelling of the behaviours, and also where people still feel unsure or there are other barriers to address.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change

Key planned activity next quarter

- We will focus on the ‘Collaborative’ behaviour, including a leadership development session.
- We will share our summary “Shaping Success Together” document with the organisation and continue to deliver our communications plan.
- We will review governance and consider revisions to our internal governance framework.
- We will agree outcomes and success measures for the programme.

Quarterly performance report for October – December 2025



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	...
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KPI performance overview

Performance update

ID	KPI	Target	RAG
EQA1	Time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision	≤ 60 working days (median)	36
REG1	Time taken to approve UK registration applications	≤ 10 working days (median)	3
REG2	Time taken to approve restoration applications	≤ 20 working days (median)	5
REG3	Time taken to answer emails	≤ 5 working days (median)	1
REG4	Time taken to answer phone calls	≤ 8 minutes (median)	4
FTP1	Time taken to complete triage	≤ 26 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q3: ≤ 30 weeks (median)	28
FTP2	Time taken to conclude investigation	≤ 54 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q3: ≤ 58 weeks (median)	53
FTP3	Time taken to complete case examination process	≤ 12 weeks (median)	16
FTP4	Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at case examination	≤ 92 weeks (median) by March 2026 Q3: ≤ 100 weeks (median)	97
FTP5	Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at hearing	No target. Weeks (median)	228

KPI performance overview

Performance update

ID	KPI description	Target	RAG
FTP6	Time taken to approve interim orders	≤ 20 working days (median)	19
IG1	Time taken to complete FOI requests	≥ 90% within statutory deadline	92%
IG2	Time taken to complete subject access requests	≥ 90% within statutory deadline	100%
C1	Corporate complaints response time	≥ 80% within 20 working days	100%
P1	Retention rate	≥ 80%	89%
P2	Sickness absence over last 12 months	≤ 7.8 days per person	7.8
FIN1	Forecast year-end variance to budget	+/- 1.5%	3.2%
IT1	System availability excluding planned outages	≥ 99%	99.9%

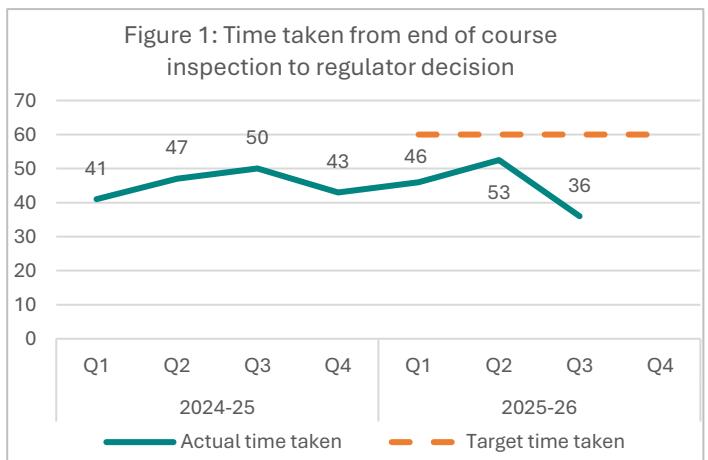
Strategic theme: Prevention and impact

Education

Performance update

EQA1: Time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision

Target: ≤ 60 working days (median)



Commentary

- We remain within KPI for time taken from the end of course inspection to regulator decision.
- The number of decisions made remains low for this quarter but will increase as we conclude BIA inspections.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

No change to note

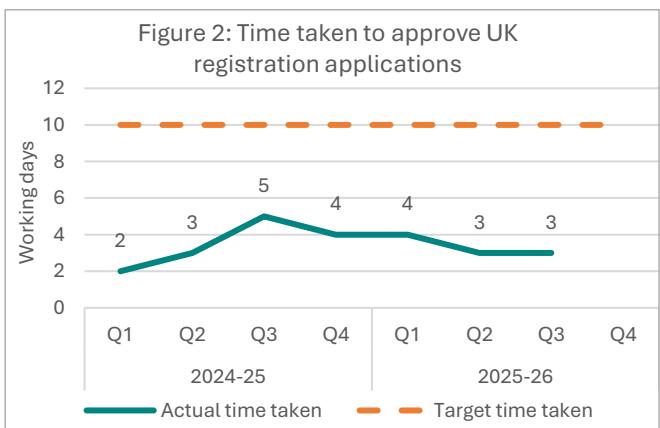
Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Applications to join the register

Performance update

REG1: Time taken to approve UK registration applications

Target: ≤ 10 working days (median)



REG2: Time taken to approve restoration applications

Target: ≤ 20 working days (median)



Commentary

- We met our KPIs, balancing support for renewals during October and November.
- Renewals closed on 30 November. A report is available on our website <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/about/data-and-research/data-and-insight/registration-renewal-and-cpd-progress-reports/>

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Nothing to note

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

Contacts

Performance update

REG3: Time taken to answer emails

Target: ≤ 5 working days (median)



REG4: Time taken to answer phone calls

Target: ≤ 8 minutes (median)



Commentary

- We met our KPIs utilising the temporary support offered by the fixed term renewals officers

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Nothing to note

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

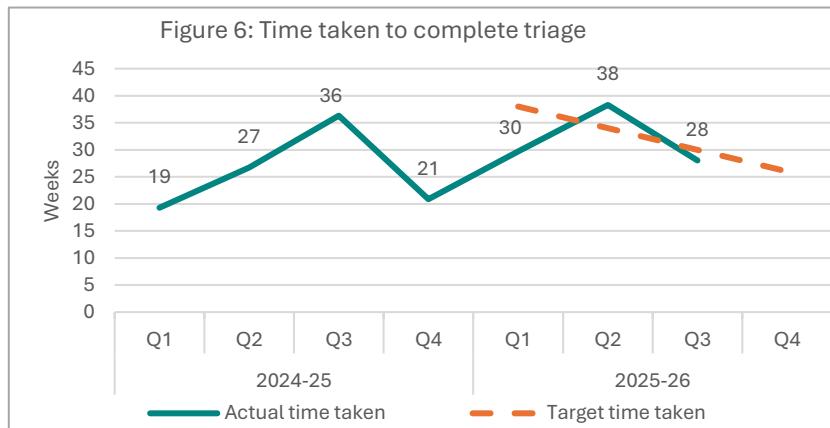
Fitness to practise KPI overview

Performance update

FTP1: Time taken to complete triage

Target: ≤ 26 weeks (median) by March 2026.

Q3 target: ≤ 30 weeks (median)



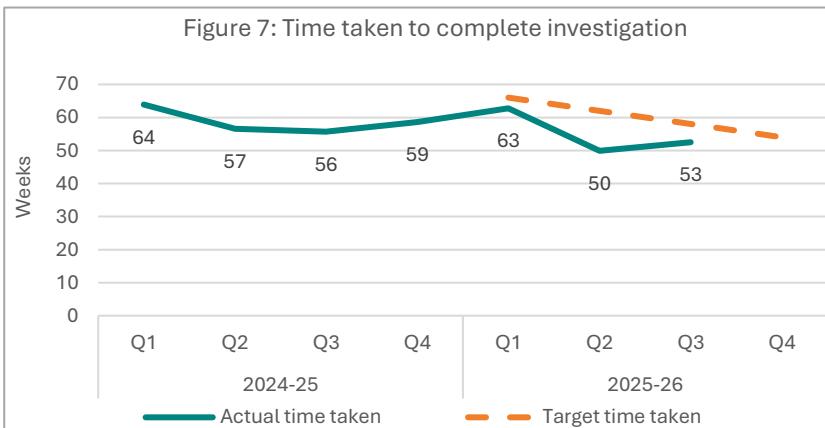
FTP2: Time taken to complete investigation

Target: ≤ 54 weeks (median)

FTP2: Time taken to complete investigation

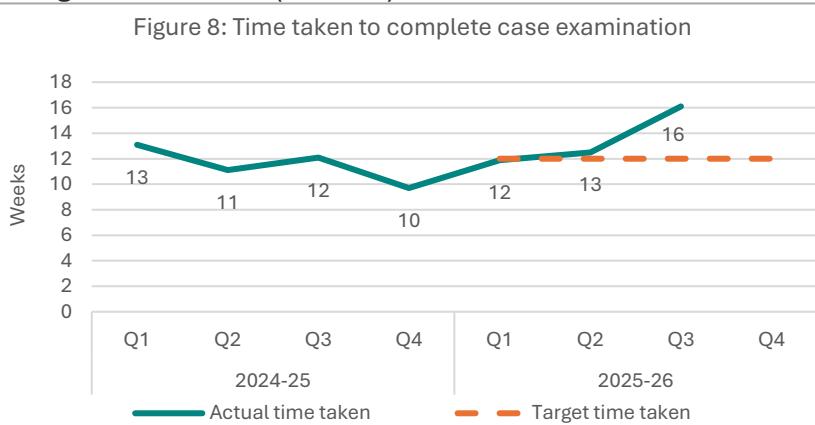
Target: ≤ 54 weeks (median) by March 2026.

Q3 target: ≤ 58 weeks (median)



FTP3: Time taken to complete case examination

Target: ≤ 12 weeks (median)



Commentary

- Triage timeliness is impacted by the high numbers of referrals. Performance will be volatile until the backlog is reduced; but we are consistently concluding higher numbers of triage cases than 24/25.
- Timeliness targets in investigation are being met.
- Timeliness at the CE stage was negatively affected by vacancies. These have now been filled, and we expect that KPI performance will improve and return to target over the course of Q4 and the first quarter of the next FY.

Strategic theme: Regulation and protection

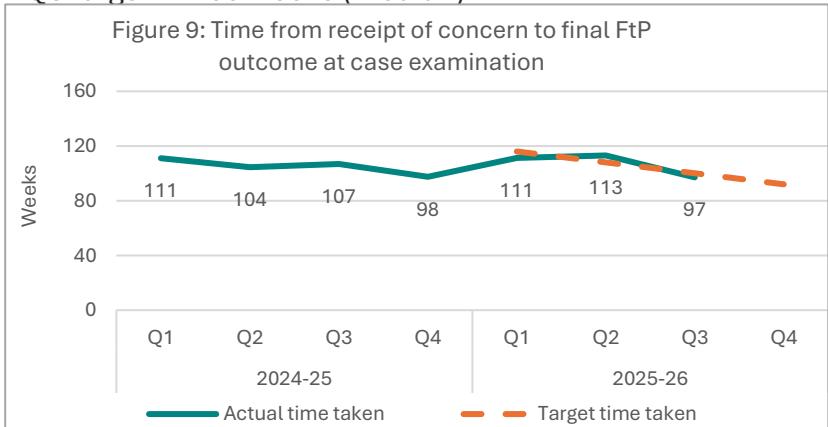
Fitness to practise KPI overview

Performance update

FTP4: Time from receipt of concern to final fitness to practise outcome at case examination

Target: ≤ 92 weeks (median) by March 2026.

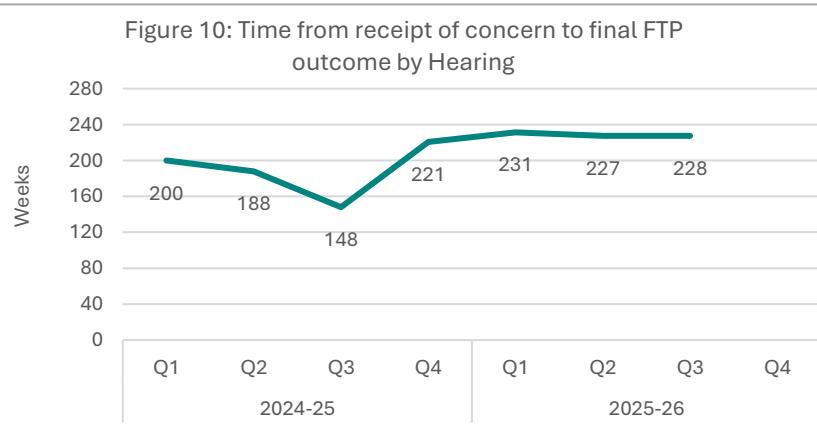
Q3 target: ≤ 100 weeks (median)



FTP6: Time taken to approve interim orders



FTP5: Time from receipt of referral to final fitness to practise outcome at hearing



Commentary

- KPIs are currently on track
- The hearings listing schedule for Q4 continues to prioritise cases by risk and age

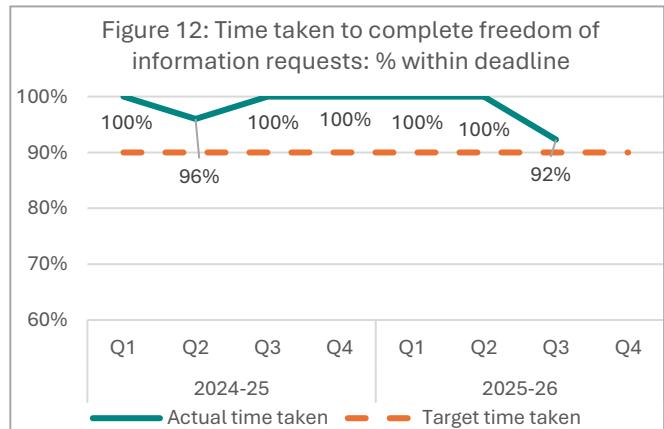
Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Information governance

Performance update

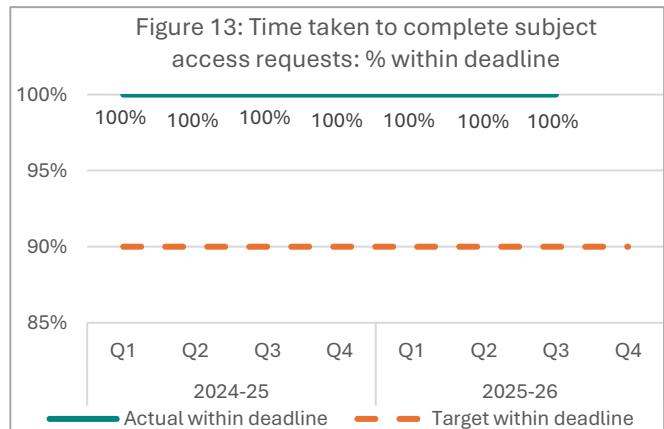
IG1: Time taken to complete FOI requests

Target: $\geq 90\%$ within deadline



IG2: Time taken to complete subject access requests

Target : $\geq 90\%$ within deadline



Commentary

- We missed the deadline for 1 FOI request
- We continued to meet both KPIs

Changes to risk, any further concerns

Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Corporate complaints

Performance update

C1: Corporate complaints response time

Target: $\geq 80\%$ within 20 working days



Commentary

- We continued to meet this KPI.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- No change.

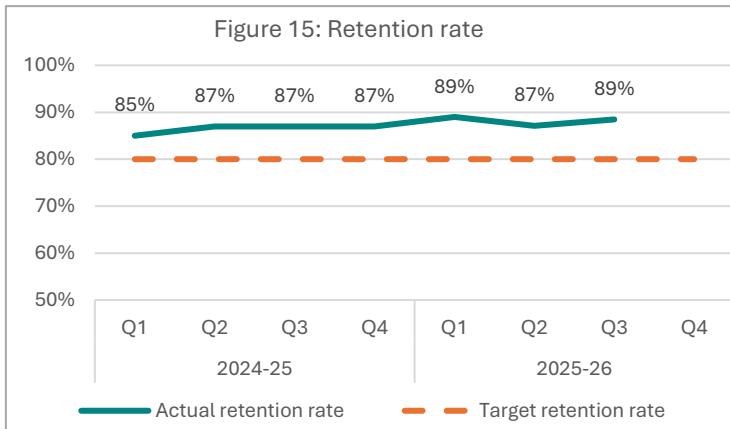
Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

People

Performance update

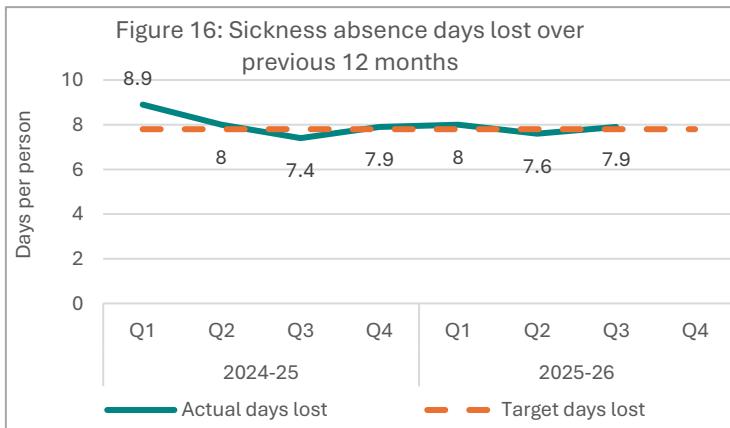
P1: Retention rate

Target: $\geq 80\%$



P2: Sickness absence over last 12 months¹

Target : 7.8 days



Commentary

Some long-term absence can be linked to ongoing performance management.

There has been a focus on reminding line managers and colleagues about the benefits of our support packages, either for in-house wellbeing support, or formal counselling or medical advice. These services provide proactive support to employees to either keep them in work or enable them to return to work with strategies for their wellbeing, stress, and mental health.

There has been an increase in the number of line managers proactively seeking support with arranging, planning, and reviewing suitable phased return to work programmes.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- There has been no significant change to risk.

¹ The quarter 2 figure differs from last quarter's submission. This is due to retrospective changes being captured on the system after the data had been compiled and reported.

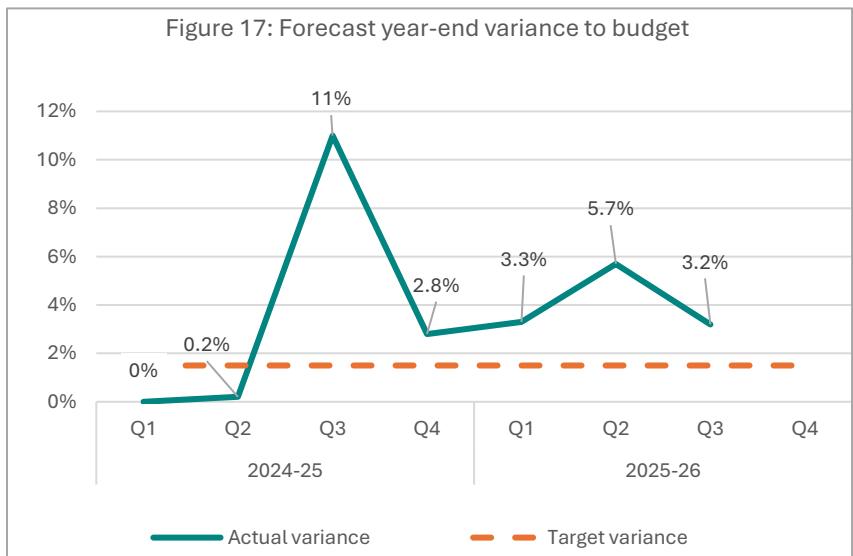
Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Finance

Performance update

FIN1: Forecast year-end variance to budget

Target: +/- 1.5%



Commentary

The year-end forecast now shows an expected underspend of £516k. The largest elements of this are fee income (£178k) and external legal fees (£176k). Registrant numbers, and therefore fee income, have increased above expectations. Legal activity in December was lower than anticipated, although the provider is confident spend will increase during Q4 when a high number of hearings are scheduled.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

- Further underspend is possible as we approach year-end as it will become more challenging to mitigate any areas of slippage. Legal fees is a particular area of risk within the forecast. Some portion of the provision made last year for implementation of worker status for partners may also have to be released, if it is not required.

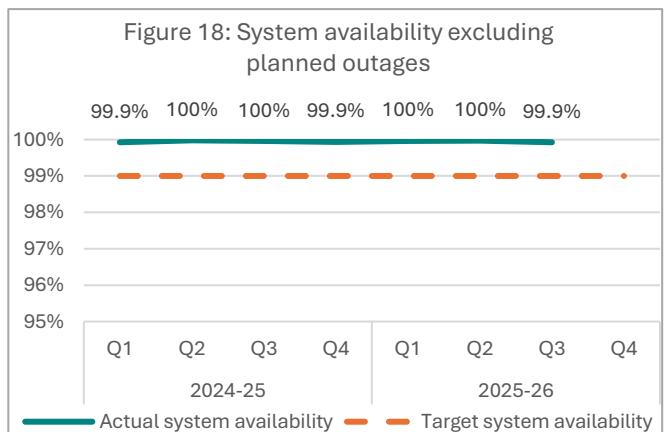
Strategic theme: Delivery and improvement

Technology

Performance update

IT1: System availability excluding planned outages

Target: $\geq 99\%$



Commentary

- Whilst the KPI was met for this period, we did experience approximately 6 hours of service disruption during the renewals period. This issue affected social workers' ability to complete their renewals during that time, but did not affect the website or searchable register.
- The issue was a result of a third-party system outage which provides our CDN (Content Delivery Network) service.

Changes to risk, any further concerns

Annex A

Q3 2025-26 performance data



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	...
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Education and training

Performance data

Education and training		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken from end of course inspection to regulator decision (working days)	2025-26	N/A	38	54	47	47	58	34	36	46			
	2024-25	41	30	42	47	38	47	50	56	61	43	37	42
Time taken for report to be written and agreed after inspection end date	2025-26	N/A	25	30	28	35	26	25	29	29			
	2024-25	27	25	28	28	29	29	36	32	30	30	22	29
Time taken for the regulator decision after final report sent to regulator	2025-26	N/A	3	14	6	7	14	4	4	9			
	2024-25	5	3	5	10	6	8	8	8	5	2	8	4
Number of course inspections decisions made	2025-26	0	7	5	3	1	2	2	2	3			
	2024-25	10	8	9	13	4	12	15	5	9	6	7	3
Number of BIA reapprovals decisions made	2025-26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1			
	2024-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of AMHP reapprovals decisions made	2025-26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
	2024-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of approvals decisions made (including AMHP & BIA approvals)	2025-26	0	7	5	3	1	2	2	2	2			
	2024-25	4	3	3	6	2	3	4	2	4	3	0	1

Registration

Performance data

Registration		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Number of registered social workers	2025-26	105,007	105,337	105,454	106,294	107,070	108,088	108,406	107,741	105,590				
	2024-25	103,000	103,133	103,353	104,270	105,025	105,814	106,395	105,625	103,893	104,351	104,594	104,857	
Number of social workers joining the register	2025-26	275	380	280	888	856	1,188	640	379	621				
	2024-25	245	198	332	966	812	946	843	378	515	479	267	319	
Number of social workers leaving the register	2025-26	123	49	161	42	76	169	320	1,063	2,765				
	2024-25	103	65	109	48	56	157	263	1,186	2,216	16	23	56	
Number of new registration applications received	All applications	2025-26	349	457	521	1,230	1,226	1,351	605	594	219			
		2024-25	298	255	580	1,356	976	1,569	677	542	285	411	283	
	UK graduates	2025-26	235	338	413	1,104	1,125	1,232	507	463	170			
		2024-25	139	122	451	1,221	858	1,442	535	431	190	312	172	
	Overseas graduates	2025-26	114	119	108	126	101	119	98	131	49			
		2024-25	159	133	129	135	118	127	142	111	95	99	111	
Median time taken to approve registration applications (working days)	All applications	2025-26	5	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	8			
		2024-25	8	12	2	3	3	4	7	3	4	5	8	
	UK graduates	2025-26	5	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	6			
		2024-25	2	2	1	2	2	4	6	2	3	5	6	
	Overseas graduates	2025-26	12	20	17	21	19	20	21	22	23			
		2024-25	65	48	35	26	21	23	19	15	21	19	17	
Number of restoration applications received		2025-26	57	42	52	70	71	59	58	77	528			
		2024-25	59	61	72	60	49	71	62	85	526	101	72	
													67	

Registration

Performance data

Registration		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to approve restoration applications (working days)	2025-26	15	18	15	10	14	11	9	4	5			
	2024-25	3	3	2	3	7	5	5	6	4	9	12	17
Number of misuse of title cases opened	2025-26	17	11	7	5	7	5	10	8	20			
	2024-25	9	4	10	4	3	6	11	7	25	18	22	19
Number of misuse of title cases closed	2025-26	24	22	19	20	7	13	3	6	30			
	2024-25	14	7	5	12	8	8	1	9	18	4	5	11
Median time taken to conclude misuse of title cases (working days)	2025-26	22	14	12	24	58	9	22	20	0			
	2024-25	88	32	54	53	62	64	5	24	0	9	0	16
Number of phone calls received	2025-26	1,314	1,309	1,359	1,752	1,571	2,630	2,866	4,760	3,346			
	2024-25	1,455	1,400	1,473	1,782	1,793	2,670	3,381	5,107	4,208	1,912	1,377	1,613
Median time taken to answer phone calls (minutes)	2025-26	4	2	3	3	3	7	8	3	9			
	2024-25	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	2	8	5	4	5
Number of emails received	2025-26	2,438	2,404	2,380	2,611	2,915	4,215	3,966	5,052	4,039			
	2024-25	3,387	2,793	2,473	2,973	3,022	4,074	4,058	4,402	3,462	2,595	2,513	2,759
Median time taken to answer emails (working days)	2025-26	3	2	7	3	2	2	3	1	1			
	2024-25	4	1	5	3	4	2	1	2	2	3	3	3

Continued professional development

Performance data

Continued professional development		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Percentage of social workers that have submitted at least one piece of CPD	2025-26	3%	4%	5%	7%	8%	16%	33%	96%	0.3%			
	2024-25	4%	5%	6%	7%	10%	17%	33%	96%	0.3%	1%	2%	3%
Percentage of social workers meeting all CPD requirements	2025-26	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	11%	26%	95%	0.04%			
	2024-25	1%	2%	2%	3%	5%	11%	26%	96%	0.04%	0.2%	0.4%	1%

Fitness to practise - triage

Performance data

Fitness to practise – triage ²		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of concerns received	2025-26	193	184	210	250	211	194	233	204	237			
	2024-25	128	158	151	158	140	156	155	150	193	180	191	175
Median time taken to complete triage (weeks)	2025-26	25	31	30	36	42	35	33	25	17			
	2024-25	22	21	11	28	26	27	38	33	36	28	18	17
Number of open triage cases	2025-26	1,907	1,926	1,993	2,083	2,128	2,134	2,215	2,254	2,380			
	2024-25	1,298	1,344	1,399	1,436	1,458	1,505	1,527	1,573	1,696	1,769	1,843	1,887
Median time open cases have spent in triage (weeks)	2025-26	25	26	25	24	22	22	22	23	24			
	2024-25	22	23	25	27	28	29	26	27	27	28	27	27
Number of concluded triage cases	2025-26	187	179	149	175	173	206	182	176	129			
	2024-25	157	123	112	128	122	105	136	107	78	126	135	138
Percentage of cases closed at triage	2025-26	87%	80%	79%	87%	82%	86%	82%	86%	78%			
	2024-25	80%	82%	83%	78%	80%	74%	89%	81%	76%	79%	85%	80%
Percentage of cases progressed to investigation	2025-26	13%	20%	21%	13%	18%	14%	18%	14%	22%			
	2024-25	20%	18%	17%	22%	20%	26%	11%	19%	24%	21%	15%	20%

² These figures differ from last year's submissions. We have grouped three stages (concern, pre-triage and triage) into one triage stage, and recalculated these metrics accordingly.

Fitness to practise - investigation

Performance data

Fitness to practise - investigation		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to complete investigation (weeks)	2025-26	64	57	64	50	50	51	68	36	40			
	2024-25	66	73	33	63	65	32	56	45	63	54	56	80
Number of cases into investigation (including adjournments)	2025-26	29	40	34	33	35	37	45	29	33			
	2024-25	42	34	30	44	57	39	25	26	23	37	31	43
Number of open investigation cases	2025-26	464	460	441	434	430	434	438	443	436			
	2024-25	567	555	547	552	535	537	522	506	493	487	465	471
Median time open cases have spent in investigation (weeks)	2025-26	55	53	47	46	45	44	37	38	39			
	2024-25	44	45	49	50	50	44	63	55	55	44	55	28
Number of concluded investigation cases	2025-26	35	42	53	40	38	33	40	24	40			
	2024-25	46	45	38	38	74	37	40	42	37	41	53	37

Fitness to practise – case examiner

Performance data

Fitness to practise – case examiner		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time taken to complete case examination (weeks)	2025-26	12	11	13	7	13	14	16	14	17			
	2024-25	14	12	13	11	11	12	13	12	10	12	12	8
Number of cases into case examination (including adjournments)	2025-26	39	43	53	41	40	32	43	22	37			
	2024-25	54	43	41	40	74	39	42	45	36	44	53	40
Number of open case examination cases	2025-26	80	101	120	119	130	129	139	137	154			
	2024-25	133	142	140	122	123	111	82	89	87	91	101	80
Median time open cases have spent in case examination (weeks)	2025-26	7	7	7	8	9	10	11	13	12			
	2024-25	9	10	11	12	8	8	8	6	7	8	5	7
Number of concluded case examination cases	2025-26	32	18	31	32	23	23	20	19	15			
	2024-25	33	22	30	41	40	39	59	29	34	27	33	45
% of cases closed at case examination	2025-26	47%	67%	61%	81%	74%	57%	65%	68%	73%			
	2024-25	45%	91%	80%	78%	70%	72%	80%	83%	74%	67%	70%	78%

Fitness to practise – case examiner

Performance data

Fitness to practise – case examiner		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
% of cases progressed to hearings	2025-26	53%	33%	39%	19%	26%	43%	35%	32%	27%			
	2024-25	55%	9%	20%	22%	30%	28%	20%	17%	26%	33%	30%	22%
Median time from receipt of concern to final FtP outcome at case examination (weeks)	2025-26	122	144	84	111	104	136	85	120	116			
	2024-25	104	107	133	100	91	109	113	99	98	106	103	85
Number of cases closed with 'No Impairment'	2025-26	6	7	9	15	9	4	9	9	3			
	2024-25	8	11	15	22	14	18	32	17	14	13	17	22
Number of cases closed with 'Impairment'	2025-26	9	5	10	11	8	9	4	4	8			
	2024-25	7	9	9	10	14	10	14	7	11	5	6	13
Number of Accepted Disposals offered	2025-26	4	11	10	17	11	6	9	9	6			
	2024-25	14	7	11	21	20	11	10	14	7	10	15	14

Fitness to practise – hearing

Performance data

Fitness to practise – hearing	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time from receipt of concern to final FtP outcome at Hearing (weeks)	2025-26	231	217	260	337	204	214	230	229	226		
	2024-25	198	229	193	226	166	185	181	230	133	174	221
Number of cases into hearings	2025-26	27	7	13	8	6	14	7	8	7		
	2024-25	19	5	12	14	12	11	13	6	11	12	11
Number of open cases in hearings	2025-26	428	431	440	442	446	449	447	444	441		
	2024-25	392	391	386	386	393	399	410	414	421	426	426
Median time open cases awaiting a hearing (weeks)	2025-26	140	103	106	106	109	112	115	113	115		
	2024-25	79	82	84	108	113	118	114	116	125	129	133
Number of concluded hearings	2025-26	1	3	2	4	2	7	8	9	7		
	2024-25	5	6	2	6	4	3	3	1	1	4	13
Median time concluded cases spent in pre-hearing (weeks)	2025-26	162	132	140	160	114	165	155	167	131		
	2024-25	105	115	172	140	115	100	91	166	86	92	117

Fitness to practise – interim order and quality

Performance data

Fitness to practise – hearing		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Median time take to approve interim orders (working days)	2025-26	14	18	18	N/A	18	19	19	19	17			
	2024-25	17	18	26	N/A	18	18	18	18	21	18	17	17
Number of interim order application hearings	2025-26	2	6	4	0	2	8	2	4	2			
	2024-25	1	3	1	0	3	3	1	2	4	3	2	2
Number of interim orders imposed	2025-26	2	6	4	0	2	8	2	4	2			
	2024-25	1	3	1	0	3	3	1	2	4	3	2	1

Fitness to practise – internal quality		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
FtP internal quality score	2025-26	100%	89%	100%	91%	N/A ³	94%	84%	89%	N/A ³			
	2024-25	97%	88%	94%	87%	90%	88%	97%	97%	97%	100%	87%	94%

³ No meeting held in month.

People

Performance data

People		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
		2025-26	89%	89% ⁴	89%	88%	88%	87%	88%	88%	89%		
Retention rate	2024-25	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	87%	86%	87%	87%	86%	86%
	2025-26	276	271	276	279	288	285	300	309	308			
Headcount of staff	2024-25	233	232	234	237	241	247	250	255	258	263	264	275
	2025-26	8.2	8.2	8	7.9	7.7 ⁴	7.6 ⁴	8	7.9	7.9			
Days lost to sickness per employee over previous 12 months	2024-25	8.9	8.8	8.9	8.9	8.5	8	7.7	7.5	7.4	7.1	7.4	7.9

⁴ This value differs from last quarter's submissions. This is due to retrospective changes being captured on the system after the data had been compiled and reported..

Corporate complaints

Performance data

Corporate complaints		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Corporate complaints responded to within timescales	2025-26	91%	90%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%			
	2024-25	74%	94%	91%	83%	100%	92%	96%	100%	88%	94%	100%	89%
Number of corporate complaints received (stage 1 only)	2025-26	5	7	9	17	6	9	16	13	18			
	2024-25	18	12	6	9	8	16	15	10	12	11	5	11
Number of corporate complaints that missed 20-day timescale	2025-26	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0			
	2024-25	5	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1
Median response time over previous 12 months (working days)	2025-26	16	16	15	16	16	16	16	15	15			
	2024-25	15	15	15	15	16	16	16	15	16	16	16	16

Annex B

Q3 2025-26 course reapproval and approval decisions



Course approval decisions

Provider	Course	Region	Inspection dates		Link to inspection report	Decision
			From	to		
University of Central Lancashire	MA Social Work (part time)	North West	15 July 2025	17 July 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/dc_bnikky/20251017_approval_report_uclcpp499_final.pdf	Approved with conditions
University of Central Lancashire	Pg Dip Social Work (Part time)	North West	15 July 2025	17 July 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/dc_bnikky/20251017_approval_report_uclcpp499_final.pdf	Approved with conditions
TEC Partnership	BA (Hons) Social Work Apprenticeship	Yorkshire and Humberside	5 August 2025	8 August 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/bmpo2zxd/tecp-cpp503-cpp507-inspection-report.pdf	Approved with conditions
TEC Partnership	BA (Hons) Social Work	Yorkshire and Humberside	5 August 2025	8 August 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/bmpo2zxd/tecp-cpp503-cpp507-inspection-report.pdf	Approved with conditions
Leeds Beckett University	Pg Dip Social Work Apprenticeship	Yorkshire and Humberside	30 September 2025	2 October 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/avnj4ewq/12102025_lbu_cpp509_approval_report_final.pdf	Approved
University of West of England Bristol	BSc (Hons) Social Work Apprenticeship	South West	21 October 2025	23 October 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/pk3p2smm/20220808_approval_uweb-2025.pdf	Approved

Course reapproval decisions

Provider	Course	Region	Inspection dates		Link to inspection report	Decision
			From	to		
Kingston University	Best Interest Assessor	London	14 October 2025	15 October 2025	https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/media/vmpfbkhp/20260105_kiur1_bia_final.pdf	Approved



Fitness to practise – performance Q3 2025/26

Agenda Item 10 Paper Ref 06a

**Paper for the
Social Work England Board**

Sponsor

Philip Hallam, Executive Director, Regulation

Author

Philip Hallam, Executive Director, Regulation

Stephen Barnett, Assistant Director, Regulation (Investigations)

Alexandra Hayward, Fitness to Practise Performance Manager

Date

23 January 2026

Reviewed by

Colum Conway, Chief Executive

This paper is for

Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective

SO6: Review our fitness to practise case resolution approach, to improve service quality and fairness, and ensure value for money.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite

Statutory regulatory functions – Open

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

N/A

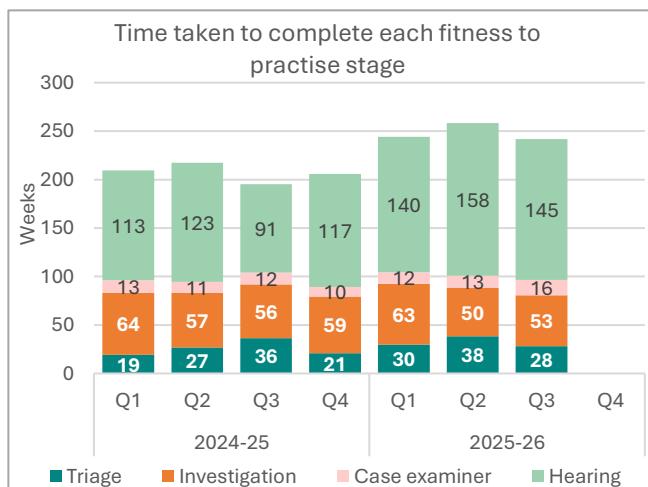
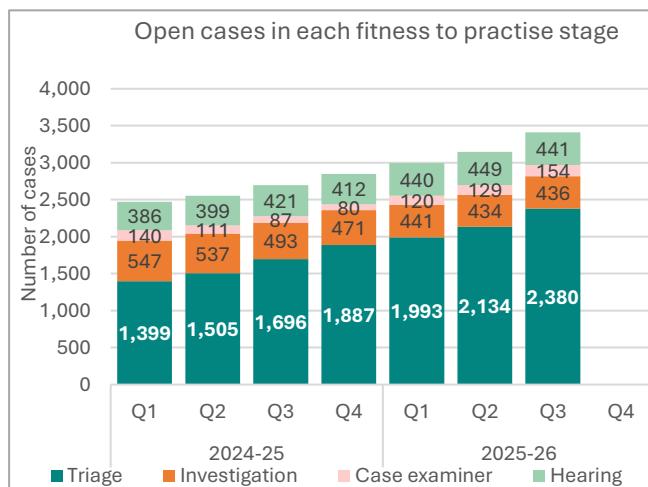
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1. Summary

This report sets out performance across the fitness to practise service for the third quarter of 2025-26. In line with discussions with the Board in March, July and October 2025, and the papers provided at that time, this paper focuses on the throughput of cases at each stage of fitness to practise and sets out our projections for caseloads at the end of the financial year. The paper also considers closure rates and decision-making outcomes, and references performance against timeliness indicators. It sets out activities that have taken place over the quarter and looks ahead to activities planned for the next quarter.

Headline performance for this quarter is as follows:

- We have closed more cases at triage in Q3 than in any quarter in 24/25. However, the number of closures in Q3 was lower than Q1 and Q2, and lower than forecast.
- The number of open triage cases remains higher than forecast earlier in the year. We have now seen a 33% increase in referrals since December 2024, with increases each consecutive quarter. This has increased the overall triage caseload, notwithstanding the higher number of triage decisions made.
- Investigations performance is broadly in line with our forecast expectations.
- Vacancies in the case examiners team have impacted case examinations performance; vacancies have now been filled, and new case examiners are undergoing training.
- Additional resources at the post-case examinations stage have allowed for more cases to be progressed and readied for hearing than originally forecast. Alongside this, our re-forecast of throughput has reduced the expected number of cases we anticipate will be referred for hearings this year. We therefore anticipate fewer cases will be awaiting a hearing at the end of the financial year than modelled.



2. Triage

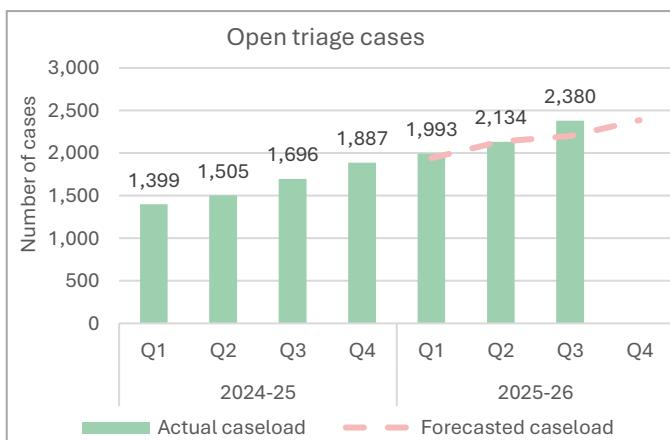
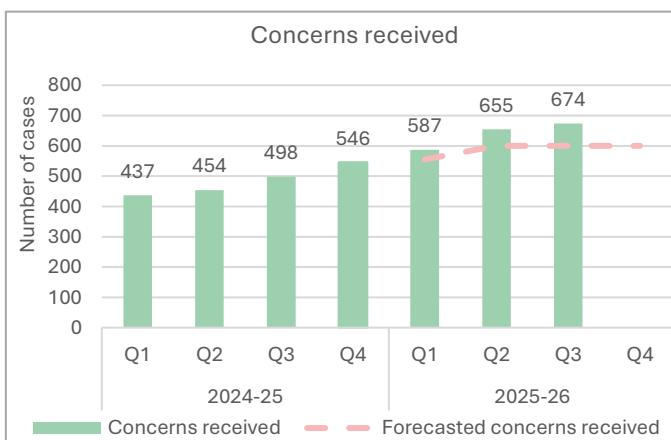
Triage have made a lower number of decisions in Q3 than in Q2, whilst also sustaining higher numbers of decisions than throughout each quarter of 24/25. The triage service continues to be affected by the backlog of cases, and the large and sustained increase in the number of referrals coming in. In each of the last seven quarters the number of concerns received has increased and exceeded the number of decisions being made.

The key performance indicator, time taken to complete triage, has improved in Q3 and is now back on target. However, as previously discussed with the board, there will be continued volatility in this indicator as older backlog cases are closed alongside newer ones.

The last thirteen months have seen a 33% increase in referrals received when compared to numbers of referrals seen in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Q3 has also seen a higher number of new concerns received than both Q1 and Q2. The average number of concerns received during 23/24 and 24/25 was 154 per month, and the average for this financial year is currently 213. We have re-modelled the incoming referral rate again to reflect this further increase.

Gains made through making more decisions than in 24/25 have effectively been cancelled out by the concurrent rise in referrals received. Since our last report in October, we have re-forecast our targets and have sought to bring in further fixed term resources into triage. However, recruitment during this quarter has not been as successful as hoped for. The 33% increase in referrals through 2025 means that assumptions and targets made at the beginning of the year have changed, and that progress to clear the triage backlog will be slower.

Concerns received	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Apr-25 (1st forecast)	May 25	Jun 25	Jul-25 (2nd forecast)	Aug 25	Sept 25	Oct 25	Nov 25	Dec 25	YTD
Actual	193	180	191	175	193	184	210	250	211	194	233	204	237	2655
Forecast	154	154	154	154	185	185	185	200	200	200	200	200	200	2371
Variance	+39	+26	+37	+21	+8	-1	+25	+50	+11	-6	+33	+4	+37	+284



The sustained increase in referrals shown above has had a material impact on our forecast for open triage cases for the remainder of 25/26. We are now planning and re-forecasting on a monthly basis, based on referrals received and available resource. Alongside this, we have commenced work with colleagues in the policy team to undertake research on the reasons for this sustained increase in referrals. We are also liaising with other regulators who have seen similar increases in referrals over the last 18 months.

Decision making in Q3 was below forecast. This is mainly due to a dip in decision making in December against forecast. This was due to annual leave during the month; sickness absence; and a December 'cut off' for communicating decisions. We anticipate that January 2026 will see improved performance, including completing activities started in December.

For Q3, the total number of triage decisions made was 487 against an April forecast of 638. Open caseload at the end of Q3 was 2,380 against an April forecast of 1,507.

Triage throughput 2025/26					
FY	Q	Forecast Jan 25	Forecast April 25	Actual	Variance to April forecast
No. of decisions	Q1	474	501	515	+14
	Q2	637	720	554	-166
	Q3	651	638	487	-151
	Q4	723	702		
Caseload	Q1	1,761	1,941	1,993	+52
	Q2	1,586	1,683	2,134	+451
	Q3	1,397	1,507	2,380	+873
	Q4	1,136	1,267		

In Q3, closure rates at the triage stage were at 83% (see below). Closure rates in 2025/26 continue to be higher than our assumption of 80% of cases closing once the triage test is applied. We will continue to monitor the closure rate over the course of the financial year.

The table below also highlights the higher number of triage decisions made in 2025/26 when compared to 2024/25. The first three quarters of this financial year have seen a 48% increase in the total number of triage decisions made when compared to last year. However, in each of the last seven quarters the number of decisions made was outstripped by the number of new referrals coming in. This has led to the triage backlog increasing, despite additional resources being brought in and more decisions being made.

Triage decisions						Total decisions made
FY	Q	Closed		Progressed		
2025-26	Q3	402	83%	85	17%	487
	Q2	472	85%	82	15%	554
	Q1	423	82%	92	18%	515
2024-25	Q4	326	82%	73	18%	399
	Q3	267	83%	54	17%	321
	Q2	275	77%	80	23%	355
	Q1	319	81%	73	19%	392

The KPI for time taken to complete the triage stage of the fitness to practise process will fluctuate over the course of the financial year as older cases are concluded or progressed. For Q3 the time taken was 28 weeks against the quarterly target of 30 weeks. The end of year KPI target is 26 weeks.

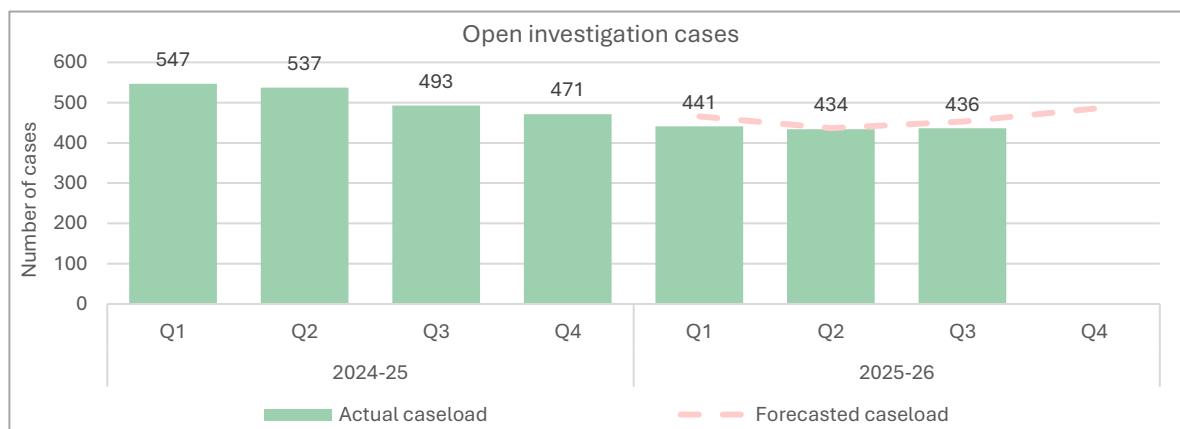
Actions we have taken this quarter to address the high volume of cases in triage, and improve our approach, have included:

- Further induction and onboarding of fixed term additional resources, albeit with some challenges in recruitment this quarter (10 different triage roles brought in this financial year and 4 roles still to recruit into).
- Making good progress on the process review project to streamline processes across triage and investigations. Recommendations are expected in March 2026.
- Ongoing focus on performance through a service delivery plan; balanced scorecard; improved approaches to performance management.
- A continued focus on employee engagement within triage.
- Approval by the Executive Leadership Team to create a new role of Head of Triage. An external candidate has been recruited and is due to start in January 2026.

3. Investigations

Performance in the Investigations service is generally tracking in line with expectations:

- Time taken to conclude investigations is better than the Q3 target at 53 weeks.
- The overall caseload is lower than planned and, as a result, concluded investigations and decisions are correspondingly also lower than planned. Forecasts have been adjusted accordingly.



Our targets, and results, in the investigations service for Q3 are as follows:

Investigation throughput 2025/26					
FY	Q	Forecast Jan 25	Forecast April 25	Actual	Variance to April forecast
No. of decisions	Q1	147	147	130	-17
	Q2	161	161	111	-50
	Q3	176	176	104	-72
	Q4	176	176		
Caseload	Q1	473	466	441	-25
	Q2	512	519	434	-85
	Q3	541	550	436	-114
	Q4	596	605		

The open caseload is affected by a higher percentage of cases being closed at triage than originally planned (and therefore fewer cases progressing into an investigation), as well as the backlog in triage. Consequently, there are fewer cases in the investigations service than originally modelled.

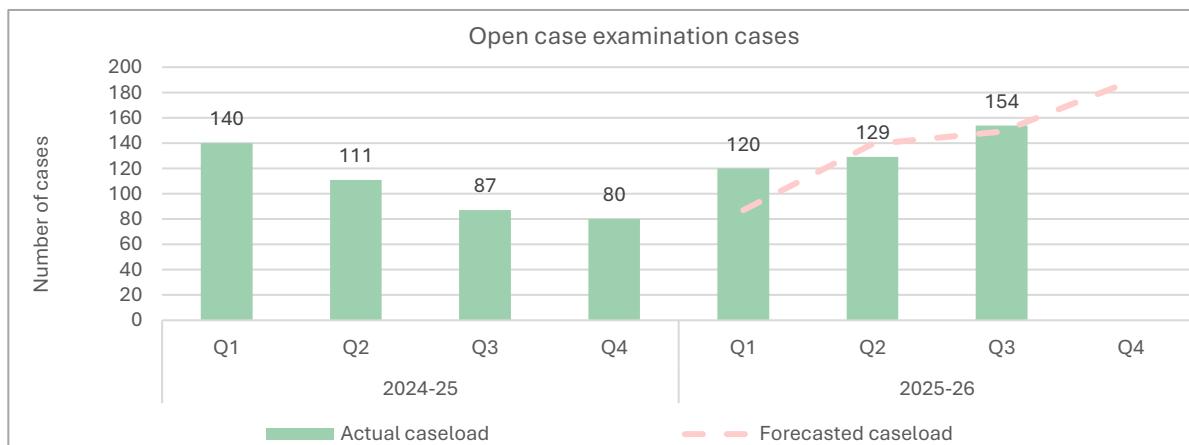
As with the triage KPI, the KPI for time taken to complete the investigation stage of the fitness to practise process will fluctuate over the course of the financial year as older cases are concluded or progressed. However, performance on this indicator is tracking better than originally planned. For Q3 the time taken was 53 weeks against a quarterly target of 58 weeks. The end of year KPI target is 54 weeks.

We continue to improve our approach to the investigation of cases, and activities we have taken in the investigations service this quarter have included:

- Progressing a process review and re-engineering project (alongside the triage process review).

- Establishing new processes for management and monitoring of ‘Post- Case Examiner’ cases that are currently awaiting a hearing.
- Ongoing focus on performance through a service delivery plan; balanced scorecard; improved approaches to performance management.
- A continued focus on employee engagement.

4. Case examination



As previously discussed with the board, performance at the case examination stage this quarter has been impacted by 3 vacancies within the team, following a long period of relative stability. Case examiners make decisions in pairs (one lay and one professional case examiner). As a result, a vacancy directly affects the number of cases we can conclude. We have now recruited into these roles, and the new case examiners have commenced training from December onwards. We anticipate this new group of case examiners will begin processing cases in Q1 2026-27 after completing their training and reach full establishment by Q2. For Q3 the median time taken to complete the case examination stage of the fitness to practise process has risen slightly to 16 weeks against the target of 12 weeks.

Consequently, volumes at the end of the quarter are as follows

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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Case examiner throughput 2025/26					
FY	Q	Forecast Jan 25	Forecast April 25	Actual	Variance to April forecast
No. of decisions	Q1	114	114	81	-33
	Q2	124	124	78	-46
	Q3	132	132	54	-78
	Q4	132	132		
Caseload	Q1	97	87	120	+33
	Q2	106	98	129	+31
	Q3	123	116	154	+38
	Q4	141	134		

Of those cases concluded at the case examination stage, outcomes have been as follows:

Case examiner decisions							Total decisions made	
FY	Q	Closed no further action		Accepted disposal		Referred to hearing		
2025-26	Q3	21	39%	16	30%	17	31%	54
	Q2	28	36%	28	36%	22	28%	78
	Q1	22	27%	24	30%	35	43%	81
2024-25	Q4	52	50%	24	23%	29	28%	105
	Q3	63	52%	32	26%	26	21%	121
	Q2	54	45%	34	28%	32	27%	120
	Q1	34	40%	25	29%	26	31%	85

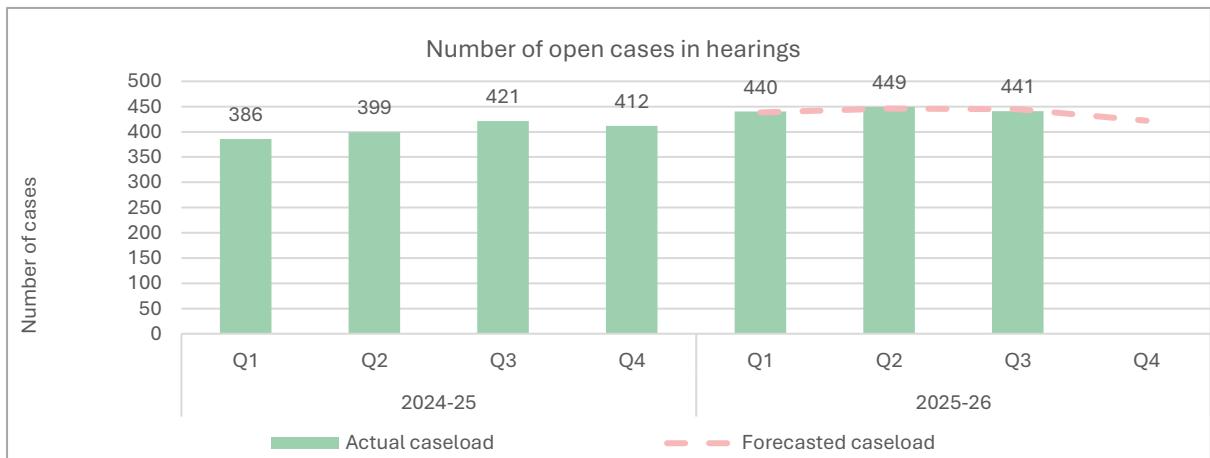
The referral rate to hearing was within the forecast range, with 31% of cases referred this quarter.

For 25/26, we have also set out a target for the median time taken from receipt of a concern to the closure at the case examination stage. By the end of the year, we have set out that this time taken should be 92 weeks. For this quarter, the time taken is 97 weeks. Based on current performance in both triage and case examination, it looks unlikely that the end of year target will be met and will continue to fluctuate.

5. Hearings

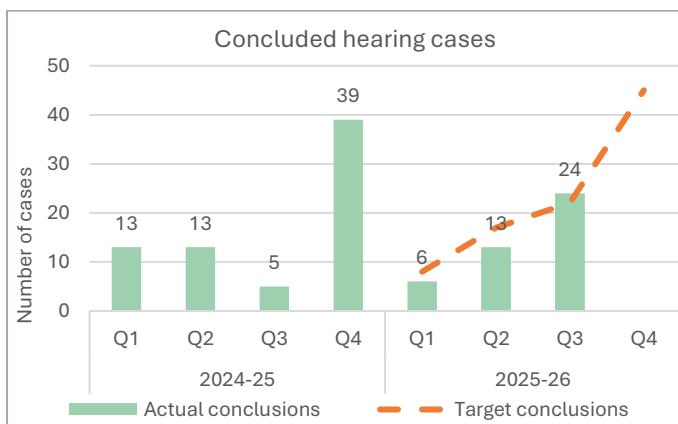
There are currently 441 cases at the hearings stage of the fitness to practise process. Over the course of the quarter, 17 cases have been referred by case examiners, against a forecast of 21.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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We continue to work closely with our external legal provider to use our available financial resources to progress as many cases for hearing as possible. Additional resources available this year are enabling more cases to be progressed than previously anticipated. At the end of Q3 we forecast that 91 cases will be concluded at the hearings stage by the end of the financial year (this number takes into account our modelled 18% adjournment rate). This would mean that the end of year number of cases awaiting conclusion at this stage would be in the region of 417, a reduction from the 538 cases forecast earlier in the year.

We have listed a higher volume of cases in quarter 4, and we anticipate a significant number of conclusions. We will continue to list cases for the rest of the fourth quarter and have already begun listing cases for the first quarter of 26/27.



The process of procurement for a second legal provider to provide extra capacity to address the hearings backlog continues. This process is currently due to conclude in Q1 of 2026/27, and we anticipate that a second provider would be able to add extra capacity from Q2 2026/27.

We continue to monitor the time taken from receipt of concern to the final outcome at the hearings stage. Timeliness here will continue to be affected by the backlog of cases awaiting conclusion at this stage. For Q3, this KPI is 228 weeks.

This quarter, 24 cases were disposed of via a final hearing, with the following outcomes:

Hearing outcomes	2025-26			2024-25			
	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3	Q2	Q1
No impairment, no further action	3	5	2	6	1	1	4
No impairment, advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No impairment, warning	1	0	0	2	0	0	2
Impaired, no further action	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Impaired, advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Impaired, warning order	1	0	0	8	0	0	0
Impaired, conditions of practice order	1	0	0	1	0	1	2
Impaired, suspension order	8	3	3	8	0	3	3
Impaired, removal order	10	5	1	14	4	8	2

In addition to the above, we have also concluded two remittal cases this quarter, taking the total number of concluded final hearings to 45 at the end of Q3.

6. Interim orders and case review

We continue to meet our KPI target for the time taken to approve interim orders.

In Q3, 8 interim order applications were considered by adjudicators, and 8 orders granted (7 suspension orders and 1 conditions of practice orders).

Our case review team continue to support social workers subject to interim or final orders, and in Q3 64 interim order review and 19 final order review hearings events were held.

7. Other fitness to practise activities

In Q3 there was one ongoing County Court claim in relation to a case closed at triage, three ongoing judicial review claims (two in respect of cases closed at triage and one in respect of a referral where a triage decision has not yet been made) and one ongoing High Court appeal by a former registrant relating to a final order review meeting.

Alongside this, we continue to receive learning points from the Professional Standards Authority relating to cases they have considered through their section 29 process. This

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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process allows for the Professional Standards Authority to review final fitness to practise panel decisions and disseminate any learning identified. We review these learning points and share internally and with our partners.

Our Decision Review Group continues to review decisions from across the different stages of the fitness to practise process. Our internal quality score for Q3 is 89%.

In Q3, our legal team received 3 new applications to review a case examiner decision, and we had 1 application ongoing. Of these applications:

- 2 are awaiting an eligibility determination
- 1 was considered at stage 1 of the process, has progressed to stage 2 of the process and is awaiting consideration at stage 2
- 1 is awaiting consideration at stage 1 of the process
- 0 cases were referred back to the case examiners for a fresh decision
- all applications remain ongoing at the end of the quarter.

In Q3 we have received 14 applications for voluntary removal from the register by registrants currently in the fitness to practise process. We made decisions on 6 applications in the quarter, with 1 application granted, and 3 refused. 2 applications were withdrawn.

8. Looking ahead to Q4 and beyond

We will continue to pro-actively monitor and adjust our referral assumptions and our decision-making targets in Q4. On the assumption that referral rates remain high, our progress at reducing the **triage** backlog is forecast to take longer than originally planned, with current modelling showing incremental reductions throughout 2026/27. Our process review will conclude in March 2026 and will include recommendations for introducing new approaches to triage management and revised resource models responding to current referral rates.

In **investigations** we will continue to work closely with our external legal provider to ensure that a pipeline of ongoing work at all stages is maintained. We are currently moving 200 cases awaiting a hearing back into the investigations team, and our external legal provider is undertaking a review of all these cases to help progress them ahead of further pre-hearing work.

Our process review in **triage and investigations** will be currently mapping out new processes and collating broader recommendations on changes to ways of working, roles and structures. This will include recruiting additional roles to increase capacity.

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In **case examinations** we have recruited a new cohort of case examiners who started in December and have a clear induction plan in place. We continue to work towards embedding the revised decision-making framework and further develop the quality assurance framework which is due for roll-out in Q4. There is limited decision-making capacity in Q4, and we will continue to prioritise case allocations to case examiners and ensure their capacity is optimised to prioritise decision making.

In **hearings and case review** we will review the feedback received from the adjudicator consensual disposal guidance consultation, to ensure that this process is in place by end of Q4. In Q4 we will conclude our project on additional support and implement the improvements. We continue to work with all parties where a case is ready for listing to identify appropriate listing dates in the 25/26 and 26/27 hearings schedule.

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