

Our performance review process

We have a statutory duty to report annually to Parliament on the performance of the 10 regulators we oversee. We do this by reviewing each regulator's performance against our Standards of Good Regulation and reporting what we find. Our performance reviews are carried out on a three-year cycle; every three years, we carry out a more intensive 'periodic review' and in the other two years we monitor performance and produce shorter monitoring reports. Find out more about our review process [here](#).

This report covers the period December 2021-December 2022.

Key findings

- Social Work England met Standard 3 in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) for the first time this year. It requested diversity data from its registrants as part of the renewal process, which led to most registrants sharing their data. It has also made clear progress on its EDI action plan, which was published in December 2021. We are satisfied that Social Work England is committed to EDI and that EDI considerations are embedded in its work.
- Social Work England did not meet Standard 15 about timeliness of fitness to practise cases. It met this Standard last year, but we expected to see improvements, along with the resolution of the legacy cases¹, for the Standard to be met this year. Whilst the legacy cases are close to being concluded, the time taken to conclude fitness to practise cases has increased.
- Social Work England did not meet Standard 17 because it was taking too long to make decisions about interim orders.
- Social Work England made changes to its registration renewal process this year, increasing its CPD requirements for registrants and no longer giving registrants a grace period to provide CPD following the end of the renewal period. More registrants left the register compared to last year, but we did not see any evidence to suggest that the process was flawed or unfair, so Standard 11 was met.

Standards met 2021/22



General Standards	5/5
Guidance and Standards	2/2
Education and Training	2/2
Registration	4/4
Fitness to Practise	3/5
Total	16/18

Social Work England standards met 2019-21

2020/21	16/18
2019/20	15/18



98,236

professionals on the register
(as at 31 December 2022)

General Standards

Social Work England met all five General Standards this year.

These five Standards cover a range of areas including: providing accurate, accessible information; clarity of purpose; equality, diversity and inclusion; reporting on performance and addressing organisational concerns; and consultation and engagement with stakeholders to manage risk to the public.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Social Work England did not meet Standard 3 last year, as we had concerns about the low level of EDI data it held about its registrants, and the limited progress made on its EDI action plan.²

This year, as part of its annual renewal process, Social Work England asked its registrants to provide their EDI data. This led to 96.5% of registrants sharing their data with Social Work England. This is a positive step which will help Social Work England understand the diversity of its registrants and address any disproportionalities in its processes.

Social Work England made progress on its EDI action plan this year, with regular reports in its board papers demonstrating this. This included adding EDI considerations to its Decision Review Group (DRG), developing learning outcomes for newly qualified social workers with a specific focus on EDI and anti-oppressive practice, developing bespoke e-learning training on EDI for staff, and taking steps to increase the diversity of job applicants.

It also undertook stakeholder engagement with external groups on EDI issues, and ran an anti-racism survey to look at the prevalence, impact and awareness of racism in social work. It continued to work closely with its National Advisory Forum, co-producing numerous pieces of work together.

As a result of the significant progress made by Social Work England on gathering registrant data and completing actions from its action plan, along with the range of other work undertaken, Social Work England met Standard 3 this year for the first time.

Stakeholder engagement

Social Work England organised Social Work Week 2022. This included organising 13 events attended by over 3,200 participants. There were also more than 30 events organised independently by the sector.

It also uses its Regional Engagement Leads (RELs) to develop its relationships with regional stakeholders. Some of the work they have done includes hosting local events during Social Work Week and running workshops for employers regarding fitness to practise. We received very positive feedback from an employer about Social Work England's RELs, stating that they join events and present well about the social work profession.

Social Work England has also run multiple consultations this year, including on remote hearings, amendments to its rules and its corporate strategy for the next three years. Its consultations often include engagement events where stakeholders can attend and share their views. Its responses also demonstrate the feedback received and changes made, or not, with an explanation.

Guidance and Standards

Social Work England met both Standards for Guidance and Standards this year.

Social Work England has standards for its registrants and we have not received any information to suggest that its standards are out of date. It also published guidance this year for registrants to support them with its renewal and CPD requirements.

Education and Training

Social Work England met both Standards for Education and Training this year.

New education and training standards

Social Work England developed new standards for education and training providers, which came into force in September 2021. They had been due to come into force in September 2020 but were delayed due to Covid-19. Therefore, this was the first review period which had significant quality assurance activity in relation to the new standards.

Social Work England conducted inspections of education and training providers throughout the review period. It publishes its inspection reports on its website, which go into detail about whether the providers have met Social Work England's standards. A significant portion of Social Work England's inspections result in approval with conditions, meaning that further evidence from the provider is required within a set timescale.

Social Work England is also responsible for approving training courses for Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and the new role of Approved Mental Capacity Professional (AMCP).³ It consulted on the new standards it has developed for these roles during this review period and made various changes as a result of suggestions from stakeholders.

Vision for education and training

Social Work England has a long-term focus on education and training, referred to in its strategy for 2023-26. It published its approach to education and training in June 2022. This outlined that there is currently a "crowded education and training landscape" which Social Work England would be seeking to streamline. We heard from stakeholders that the wide variety of standards for social workers and social work courses has been an issue for a long time.

Its first step was publishing and consulting on its *Readiness for Professional Practice* guidance. This guidance makes explicit the knowledge, skills and behaviours that education and training courses are expected to give their students. Social Work England and other stakeholders have told us that the lack of any such guidance has led to differing interpretations from course providers on how to structure courses.

What we heard from stakeholders



We heard that higher education institutions for social work had positive feedback on Social Work England's approach to inspections. This included that Social Work England is transparent about what it is focusing on during inspections and that it deals well with situations where the evidence it needs is not immediately available.

Other areas which Social Work England will be looking at over the next few years, and which we will monitor its progress against, include:

- developing its relationship with practice educators
- reviewing standards and guidance after completing the approvals and reapprovals of all courses
- considering whether student registration would be proportionate
- looking at how it can provide regulatory assurance to support newly qualified social workers.

Registration

Social Work England met all four Standards for Registration this year.

The Register

Our register check did not identify any inaccuracies in Social Work England's register. Social Work England also closed its temporary register in September this year, having removed 6,000 social workers who had not been registered for two years at the end of the last review period. Most people with temporary registration were not practising and Social Work England communicated with those on the temporary register to ensure they were aware it was being closed.

During this review period, we identified that decisions made by the Health and Care Professions Council⁴ (HCPC) to remove social workers from the register were not published by Social Work England. This did not affect the integrity of the register as Social Work England did hold the information, and would have been able to identify if any social workers who had been removed by the HCPC attempted to restore their registration. Social Work England is working to resolve this so that the public can find information about social workers who were removed from the register by the HCPC, for as long as that information is required to be published.

Overseas applications

Applications from overseas graduates increased significantly in this review period, compared to the previous review period. There were, on average, 424 applications per quarter in this review period, compared to a quarterly average of 256 in the previous review period.

Processing times for applications from overseas graduates increased, coinciding with the increase in applications received. The median processing time was below 10 working days for the first five months of

the review period, then steadily increased to 33 working days by October 2022, where it has appeared to stabilise.

Social Work England has monitored this increase, worked with regulators in the countries where the most overseas applications come from, and will be recruiting additional staff to focus specifically on overseas applications. We are satisfied that Social Work England's approach to this is reasonable.

Date	Number of Social Work England registrants
December 2020	95,251
December 2021	97,458
December 2022	98,236

Annual renewal and CPD

Social Work England's registrants are required to renew their registration on an annual basis. This year, Social Work England had increased its CPD requirements, by asking social workers to submit two pieces of CPD as opposed to one, one of which needed to include a peer reflection. It also removed a 21-day grace period which had been in place last year for social workers who had not submitted CPD.

A total of 3,740 social workers were removed from the register at the end of the renewal period. This was 3.7% of the social workers who were eligible to renew and is within Social Work England's range of expectations. More social workers were removed this year compared to last year, but fewer than in 2020.

Despite having paid the registration fee and met the CPD requirements, 1,017 social workers were removed from the register for not completing the application form. This prompted media coverage, including suggestions there had been a technical issue, but we found no evidence that this was the case. Social Work England is clear that

the application form is an essential part of the renewal process, including declarations from the social worker that they continue to meet the requirements of registration.

We sought further information from Social Work England and were satisfied that its approach to the renewals process was reasonable. It communicated and engaged with social workers extensively, via targeted communications with individual social workers and employers, as well as publications in the trade press. The online system also clearly indicated whether a social worker had renewed their registration or not. However, we still encourage Social Work England to reflect on the renewals process and ensure it functions as effectively as possible for next year.

We were also reassured that, following the end of the renewal period, the median time taken for Social Work England to process applications for restoration to the register was only seven days. The prompt processing time for restoration applications means that the scale of any risk associated with social workers being removed from the register is reduced.

Fitness to Practise

Social Work England met three of five Standards for Fitness to Practise. It met Standards 14, 16 and 18 and did not meet Standards 15 and 17.

When Social Work England met Standard 15 last year, we were clear that it would need to make improvements in two areas: clearing the legacy cases from the HCPC and improving the timeliness of cases received by Social Work England since it began regulating social workers.

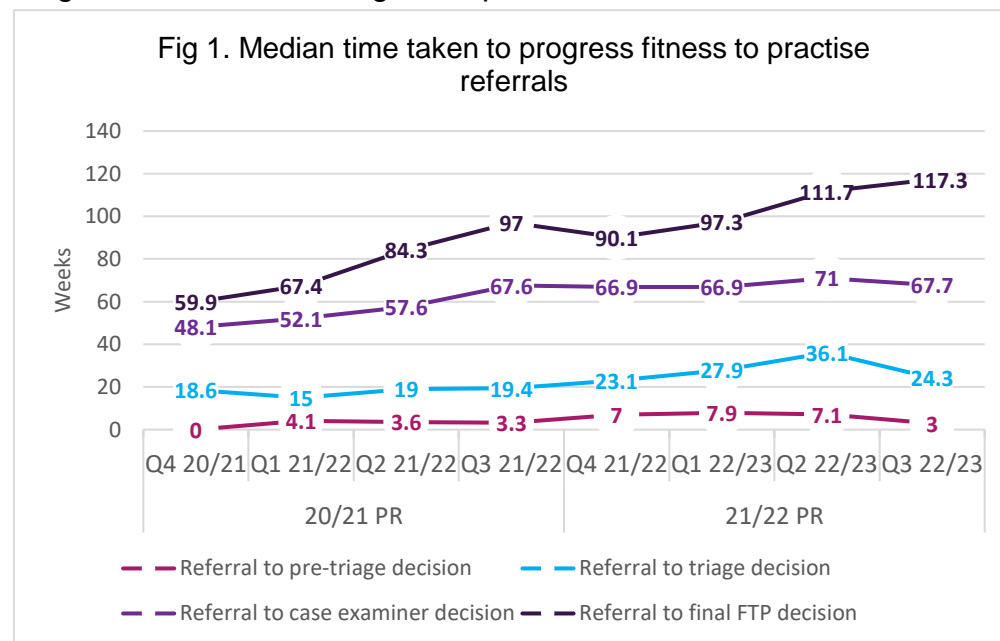
Legacy cases

As of the end of the review period, Social Work England had concluded 87% of the legacy cases received from the HCPC, with the majority of the remaining cases awaiting a hearing.

Social Work England expanded its hearings schedule in July and September, to accelerate the conclusion of the legacy cases. It also sought amendments to its rules and regulations, to further assist with this. We are satisfied that, whilst the legacy cases have not all been concluded, Social Work England has taken reasonable steps to conclude them all as soon as it can.

Time taken to progress cases

We have not seen an improvement in the timeliness of Social Work England's fitness to practise work during this review period. Figure 1 shows the timeliness measures we collect, covering the various stages of Social Work England's process. It shows that the timeliness



measures have mostly worsened in comparison to the previous review period.

Social Work England set itself ambitious KPIs for 2022/23 in relation to the age of its caseloads at the triage and investigations stage. It was aiming to reduce the median age of those caseloads to 12 weeks and 39 weeks respectively, but as of the end of the review period, the median ages were 17 and 64 weeks.

We note that, except for the measure of time taken to the final fitness to practise decision, timeliness did show signs of improvement in the final quarter. We hope to see this continue into the next review period. However, for this performance review, we determined that Standard 15 was not met.

Interim orders

Last year, Standard 17 was not met due to how long it took Social Work England to make interim order decisions, as well as the number of interim orders being applied in legacy cases.

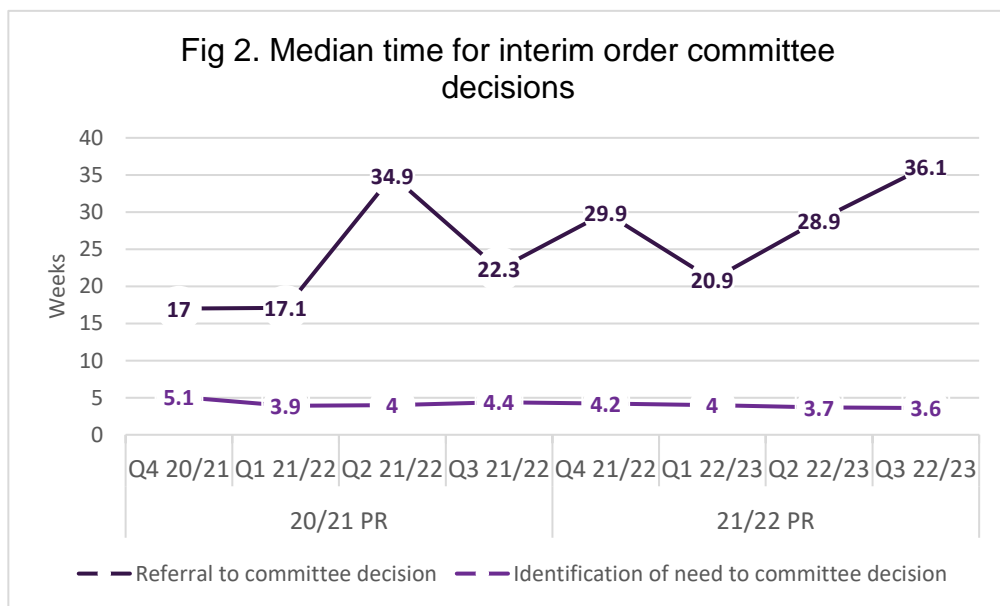
In this review period, as Figure 2 shows, the timeliness for interim orders has not improved.⁵ Whilst the timeliness has fluctuated over the past two years, the time taken has been longer overall during this review period. Timeliness from the point that the need for an interim order is identified, however, decreased over the review period. This is a positive sign.

Social Work England has pursued changes to its rules and regulations, which are in force as of 16 December 2022. This includes increasing the time between reviews of interim orders from three to six months and removing the need for all interim order applications to be initiated by case examiners. These may lead to some improvements in timeliness of interim orders, by reducing pressure on the hearings schedule and reducing the number of steps in the process.

We also saw an increase in the number of interim orders applied for in legacy cases, amounting to 29 in this review period. This was an increase compared to the last review period.⁶ Given that the legacy cases are expected to be concluded in the next review period, and the majority have passed the case examiner stage, this issue is unlikely to be an ongoing concern.

However, given the worsening timeliness compared to the previous review period, we determined that Standard 17 was not met.

This was the third consecutive year that Standard 17 was not met, and therefore, we considered whether it was necessary to escalate our concerns in line with our escalation process.⁷ We decided it was not necessary to escalate our concerns. This is because the issues causing the Standard not to be met have differed across the three performance reviews, and, as noted above, we have reason to believe the scale of the issues will reduce in the next performance review. We will look at this Standard in detail during the next performance review, which will be a periodic review.



Fitness to practise upstreaming

After it began regulating social workers, Social Work England received a disproportionate number of referrals which were not suitable for the fitness to practise process, compared to the number received by the HCPC. It began a project which was intended to address this issue.

Some of the steps it has taken include redesigning its online concerns process, developing a network of contacts with local authorities and conducting workshops with employers to ensure they understood what would amount to a fitness to practise concern.


We have not seen any evidence to suggest that this has led to a significant decrease in the number of cases progressing to investigation, nor have we seen any evidence of any barriers to raising concerns, and therefore Standard 14 has been met. We will continue to monitor Social Work England's work on this over the next review period.

¹ Fitness to practise cases transferred from the Health and Care Professions Council to Social Work England in December 2019 are referred to as legacy cases.

² Social Work England's EDI action plan was published after the end of the last review period and the activity in the action plan was due to take place in the months following the publication of the action plan.

³ AMCPs are replacing Best Interests Assessors (BIAs).

⁴ The HCPC regulated social workers in England prior to December 2019.



Quick links/find out more

- ▶ Find out more about our performance review process
- ▶ [Read Social Work England's 2020/21 performance review](#)
- ▶ [Read our Standards of Good Regulation](#)

⁵ Figure 2 excludes data on legacy cases.

⁶ This review period was 13 months long, a month longer than last year's.

⁷ You can find our escalation process document on our website: www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/publications/performance-reviews/professional-standards-authority-process-for-escalating-performance-review-concerns.pdf?sfvrsn=82c34b20_2