

Social Work England

Monitoring report

2024/25

Social Work England regulates social workers.
There are:

105,590

social workers on the register as at
31 December 2025

This report covers the
period 1 January 2025
to 31 December 2025

Key findings and areas for improvement

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Social Work England has continued to meet Standard 3 this year. In particular, we noted that its engagement with the Witness to Harm project, including updating its guidance for witnesses and potential witnesses, amounted to good practice. However, we also note that Social Work England still does not collect diversity data for its Board members or for complainants. We will continue to monitor these areas in our next review period.

Continuing Professional Development

Social Work England has maintained its approach not to review any continuing professional development (CPD) records submitted by registrants following the renewal period, whilst it redesigns its approach to CPD. We acknowledge that there could be other ways for regulators to assure themselves that their registrants are fit to practise, but Social Work England had previously gained assurance through its CPD review. Having removed that review and not replaced it with any other system – but for some very basic checks – we do not think the processes in place are sufficient for Social Work England to satisfy itself that social workers continue to be fit to practise. Therefore, we decided that Standard 13 is not met.

Fitness to Practise

Social Work England has not met Standard 15 for the fourth consecutive year. This was due to our ongoing concerns about the time it is taking Social Work England to progress fitness to practise (FTP) cases at each stage of the process, and the large backlog of cases at the hearings stage. However, we note that it is clear Social Work England recognises the problem with its performance with respect to FTP timeliness, and it is taking a range of steps to try to improve its performance. In line with our Escalation Policy, we have written to the relevant Secretaries of State to provide an update on Social Work England's performance.

Standards met: 16 out of 18



General Standards

5 out of 5



Guidance and Standards

2 out of 2



Education and Training

2 out of 2



Registration

3 out of 4



Fitness to Practise

4 out of 5

Previous years

2023/24

17 out of 18

2022/23

17 out of 18

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. The judgements we make against each Standard incorporate a range of evidence to form an overall picture of performance. Meeting a Standard means that we are satisfied, from the evidence we have seen, that a regulator is performing well in that area. It does not mean there is no room for improvement. Where we identify areas for improvement, we pay particular attention to them as we continue to monitor the performance of the regulator. Similarly, finding that a regulator has met all of the Standards does not mean perfection. Rather, it signifies good performance in the 18 areas we assess.

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](#). We welcome hearing from people and organisations who have experience of the regulators' work. We take this information into account alongside other evidence as we review the performance of each regulator.



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.

This section of our report focuses on Standard 3 because this is our second year of using our new approach to assessing the regulators against this Standard. More information is available [on our website](#), including our guidance document and evidence framework.

Our assessment of Social Work England's performance against Standard 3

In 2024, we introduced a new approach to assessing regulators against Standard 3, which focuses on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). As part of that approach, we have broken down the Standard into four separate outcomes. For a regulator to meet the Standard, we would need to be assured that the regulator has met all four outcomes. Our assessment of Social Work England's performance against the four outcomes is set out below.

Outcome 1: The regulator has appropriate governance, structures and processes in place to embed EDI across its regulatory activities

This outcome was met last year, with no major concerns identified. We did identify that, whilst the Department for Education (DfE) collects diversity data for Social Work England's Board members when recruiting them, Social Work England does not have access to this data. We felt that there may be value in Social Work England collecting this data itself. This year Social Work England told us it was considering doing so, but informed us following the end of the review period that it has decided not to collect this data. We will consider its rationale for this as part of our next performance review. It has also told us that it actively considers where additional support or expertise would be beneficial as part of Board-level discussions, and makes use of forums such as the National Advisory Forum (NAF) where appropriate.

We reported last year that Social Work England could report more clearly on the outcome of work done on its EDI action plan, and felt there was limited discussion of EDI actions at Social Work England's Board meetings. This year, its reporting on the outcomes of its EDI action plan has not changed, but we understand it is considering changes which could provide clearer reporting on this. We also noted more evidence of EDI oversight by the Board this year, reviewing a co-production paper and encouraging a clearer focus on EDI within Social Work England's business plan.

Overall, we are satisfied that Social Work England continues to collect diversity data, it has a governance structure for EDI and an EDI action plan, and it completes Equality Impact Assessments where relevant. This outcome is therefore met.

Outcome 2: In terms of EDI, the regulator ensures that registrants and students are equipped to provide appropriate care to all patients and service users, and have appropriate EDI knowledge and skills

This outcome was met last year. Social Work England has not changed its standards and guidance for registrants or education and training providers in this review period, so we can continue to be confident in the way that they ensure students and registrants are equipped to provide appropriate care and have appropriate EDI knowledge and skills. It also continues to encourage registrants to improve their EDI knowledge, with Social Work Week being an example of this. We do not have any concerns about this outcome, which is met.

Outcome 3: In terms of EDI, the regulator makes fair decisions across all regulatory functions

Last year, Social Work England told us about two pieces of work it was planning that were aimed at analysing potential disproportionality in FTP. It has completed a scoping exercise, examining a sample of FTP cases involving social workers with characteristics that appeared overrepresented at each stage of its FTP process, alongside a comparator group. It has also completed a multivariate data analysis to consider which factors affect case progression and the relative impact of those factors. It is due to publish information about this work in the first quarter of 2026/27. We have received some concerns from stakeholders about the time it has taken for Social Work England to complete this piece of work, with the initial data analysis on the FTP process published in September 2023. Stakeholders also noted a lack of information about ongoing work Social Work England is doing to address the overrepresentation of certain groups.

Good Practice

Social Work England has updated its guidance for witnesses and vulnerable witnesses, in response to the Witness for Harm, Holding to Account project, and this forms part of its EDI action plan. We consider Social Work England's engagement with this project to amount to good practice.

Some of the work Social Work England has been doing includes producing "fair referral principles", delivering FTP workshops for employers, encouraging them to think about the diversity data and proportionality in FTP, working with some Principal Social Workers to understand the experience of Black men in social work, and continuing to provide training to staff in FTP. We note Social Work England has published limited information in this area but based on the information we have seen we are satisfied that Social Work England is taking steps to investigate and mitigate possible disproportionality in FTP.

Social Work England does not currently collect diversity data on complainants in FTP, but it is progressing some work to consider how it could do this. It has previously noted concerns to us about potentially creating barriers to complaints by collecting this data. We

do not think this concern prevents Social Work England from having a process in place to collect this data, and expect to see significant progress in the next review period.

Social Work England continues to hold diversity data on almost all registrants. Its guidance addresses discrimination, and this year it consulted on guidance for communicating online which emphasised the seriousness of discrimination and racial abuse. It continues to provide EDI training for staff, and provided bespoke EDI training for its Board this year.

Overall, we are satisfied that Social Work England is analysing disproportionality in FTP, and taking steps to address it. Most other areas for this outcome show good performance. We would like to have seen more progress with Social Work England collecting diversity data for complainants in FTP, but we acknowledge that Social Work England is currently considering this point. Therefore, we do not have significant concerns in this area, and the outcome is met.

Outcome 4: The regulator engages with and influences others to advance EDI issues and reduce unfair differential outcomes

This outcome was met last year. We continue to see evidence of Social Work England engaging with a range of diverse stakeholders, including other regulators and organisations in the sector. We have seen further evidence of it using research and evidence to inform its work, and it continues to offer routes for people to speak out against discrimination. It publishes its own EDI data, and it was awarded a gold talent inclusion and diversity evaluation (TIDE) award by Onvero this year, having been given a silver award last year. We have no concerns in relation to this outcome, and it is met.

Overall, as all four outcomes have been met, Social Work England has met Standard Three.

Social Work England's fees consultation

This year, Social Work England consulted on changes to its fees, proposing to increase the registration and renewal fee from £90 to £120 in 2025 and then increase it again in line with inflation each year after that. It also proposed to increase its other fees to a similar degree. It promoted this consultation via email, on its website, via social media, in its newsletter, with its forums, and in the media.

Social Work England received thousands of responses to its consultation, which largely opposed the fee increase. Over 80% of respondents disagreed with all proposed fee increases, and 96% of respondents disagreed with the increase in the registration and renewal fee. Social Work England acknowledged the feedback received and sought to address some of the key themes in its consultation response. Social Work England decided to go ahead with the proposed fee increases on the basis that the proposed fee increases would ensure a more stable and balanced funding base.

Many of the stakeholders who provided feedback as part of our review this year commented on the fees consultation. Stakeholders who engaged with us on this point (including 17 members of the public) largely disagreed with the decision to increase fees. Some stakeholders told us the consultation felt pointless because Social Work England would have increased its fees regardless of the feedback.

We note the opposition from stakeholders to the proposal by Social Work England to increase its fees, heard both in the consultation process and by ourselves when engaging with stakeholders. However, we do not consider that Social Work England's decision to increase fees is likely to have a negative impact on public protection.

We also note that Social Work England undertakes a range of other work with stakeholders with a clear link to identifying and managing risks to the public, such as research on seriousness in FTP, roadshows held in five English cities inviting views on its regulatory work, and consulting on online communication guidance and adjudicator consensual disposal guidance. On that basis we consider that Standard Five is met this year.

Guidance and Standards

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

Social Work England's standards and guidance for registrants have not changed this year. It consulted on guidance for social workers on communicating online, which, when published, is likely to be a helpful addition to the guidance that Social Work England provides to social workers in understanding how to apply the standards in the complex area of online communication. We have no concerns in this area and both Standards Six and Seven are met.

Education and Training

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

Review of education and training standards

Having completed its first round of reapproval activity of social work course providers and identified potential opportunities for improvement in that process, Social Work England is now reviewing its education and training standards. The consultation has not yet launched, but Social Work England has been undertaking pre-consultation engagement with key external stakeholders. Some of the anticipated changes include a reduction in the number of standards, merging some guidance documents, acknowledging the different routes into social work, and implementing minimum expectations for how placements should be managed, including the support available for students.

Social Work England has previously published its knowledge, skills and behaviour statements, which will form the core part of its Readiness for Professional Practice guidance. These statements provide further information on what it expects to be included in social work courses. It will be bringing these statements into its regulatory framework.

We have received some stakeholder feedback noting concerns about how the Readiness for Professional Practice guidance will relate to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which most social work courses are currently based on. We have also received feedback that, despite the popularity of the PCF, it is right for Social Work England to determine the knowledge, skills and behaviours social workers have to demonstrate.

We do not have any concerns about Social Work England’s work on its education and training standards, and it is positive that it is seeking to implement learning from the first round of reapproval activity. Standard Eight is met.

Inspections of course providers

In this review period, Social Work England published a report collating all the information it identified from its inspections, and describing the overall education landscape for social work. This report highlighted that Social Work England has applied 664 conditions to 80.5% of courses, with common areas for conditions including process development and implementation, administrative matters and effective strategic engagement of partners.

Social Work England has also been preparing for its inspections of courses for Approved Mental Health Professionals and Best Interests Assessors, with the first inspections taking place in late 2025. As part of its preparation for these inspections, it undertook a range of activities including holding drop-in sessions with course providers and producing a Frequently Asked Questions document, holding individual meetings with course providers to prepare for inspections, and working with people with lived experience of social work to consider how best to engage with them. We received some negative feedback suggesting that Social Work England seemed to prefer taking a “hands-off” role with respect to training and trainees’ experiences, and that it could have done more to standardise training to potentially achieve a more consistent approach across England.

We have also received positive feedback that inspections continue to work well, and Social Work England now has a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the time from the end of a course inspection to its decision. The target is 60 days, and Social Work England is consistently meeting this target. We do not have any significant concerns about Social Work England’s work with respect to inspecting course providers and Standard Nine is met.

Registration

Social Work England met three of four Standards for Registration this year.

Continuing fitness to practise

Social Work England has maintained its approach not to review any of the CPD submitted by registrants this year. Social Work England changed its position on reviewing CPD records during the 2024 renewal period. It previously reviewed a sample of 2.5% of CPD records submitted by registrants.

It had inherited the figure of 2.5% from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) but Social Work England told us that the review did not provide meaningful assurance, or have a substantial impact on its confidence in social workers’ fitness to practise. It concluded it was not proportionate to continue reviewing the sample given the resource required and stated last year that it would redirect resources into a substantial redesign of its CPD model but that it would continue to monitor that social workers were meeting the requirements.

We have reviewed the checks Social Work England currently has in place. The system social workers use to upload their CPD requires a minimum number of words in each section of the form and social workers are required to declare that they continue to meet the professional standards, as part of the renewal process. The system also checks that the two CPD records are not the same. We consider these checks to be very limited.

We acknowledge that Social Work England has been undertaking work throughout the year as part of its redesign of CPD. It has analysed data and evidence it has collected in respect of CPD, improved its messaging with the sector and worked on a longer-term communications plan. It has also been exploring technological options to support recording of CPD and assist it with reviewing CPD for themes and has engaged with social workers, via its national roadshows, as well as other regulators.

We have received negative feedback from most of the stakeholders we have had contact with regarding this approach to CPD. They variously described the approach to CPD as feeling tokenistic, poor, devalued and dismissive.

“CPD has been devalued with it no longer being monitored each year.”

Stakeholder feedback

We are concerned about Social Work England’s decision not to review any of the CPD submitted to it in the absence of other effective measures that would see it meeting this Standard this year. We acknowledge that Social Work England has reviewed 600 CPD records this year as part of its project to redesign CPD, but the purpose of its review was as part of its development in this area, not to review the quality of the CPD or to provide feedback to social workers. The review of 2.5% of records would also have amounted to a review of around 5,000 CPD items, as opposed to 600. As such, we consider this review of a small number of records unlikely to provide any further assurance.

This Standard was met last year largely on the basis of Social Work England’s assertion that, despite having paused its CPD checks, there were still some checks in place and the fact that it was actively reviewing its approach to CPD.

As noted above, the checks in place are very basic, and they do not include any kind of quality check. We are concerned that by not reviewing any CPD records, rather than a 2.5% sample, Social Work England has removed a deterrent effect. In previous years, social workers had to ensure their CPD would stand up to scrutiny by the independent assessors. We also note that the most recent information published about the findings of a CPD review undertaken by Social Work England identified feedback for 2% of social workers suggesting that the process identified a number of social workers whose CPD could be improved.

We also consider there to be a potential disconnect, between the decision not to review any CPD records, and the public emphasis Social Work England seeks to put on the importance of CPD.

We understand Social Work England intends to develop a model that meets its ambitions for CPD, in that CPD should be recorded regularly, it should be a shared activity embedded in the workplace, and it should be a tool to drive quality in the profession. We note that it is expecting to consult on its new proposals during 2026. However, we also note that Social Work England has chosen to pause work on this project, amongst other projects, pending the outcome of the independent review of social work regulation.

We note that all of the other regulators we oversee either review a random sample of CPD, or have a third-party that is involved in the process, such as a line manager. While we acknowledge that there could be other ways for regulators to assure themselves that their registrants are fit to practise, Social Work England had previously gained assurance through its CPD review. Having removed that review and not replaced it with any other system – but for some very basic checks – we do not think the processes in place are sufficient for Social Work England to satisfy itself that social workers continue to be fit to practise.

Overall, considering Social Work England’s performance against this Standard during this review period, Standard 13 is not met.

Time taken to process applications for registration

We reported last year on a reduction in the time taken by Social Work England to process applications to the register from people who had qualified overseas, and this has been maintained in this review period. We noted last year that this coincided with a decrease in the volume of applications, and the lower volume of applications has also been maintained this year.

In terms of other applications to the register, Social Work England reports quarterly to its Board meetings on the time to process UK applications and to process applications to restore to the register from people who have previously been registered. Whilst the time taken to process UK applications is consistently low, we have seen an increase in the time taken to process applications for restoration, and will continue to monitor this.

Fitness to Practise

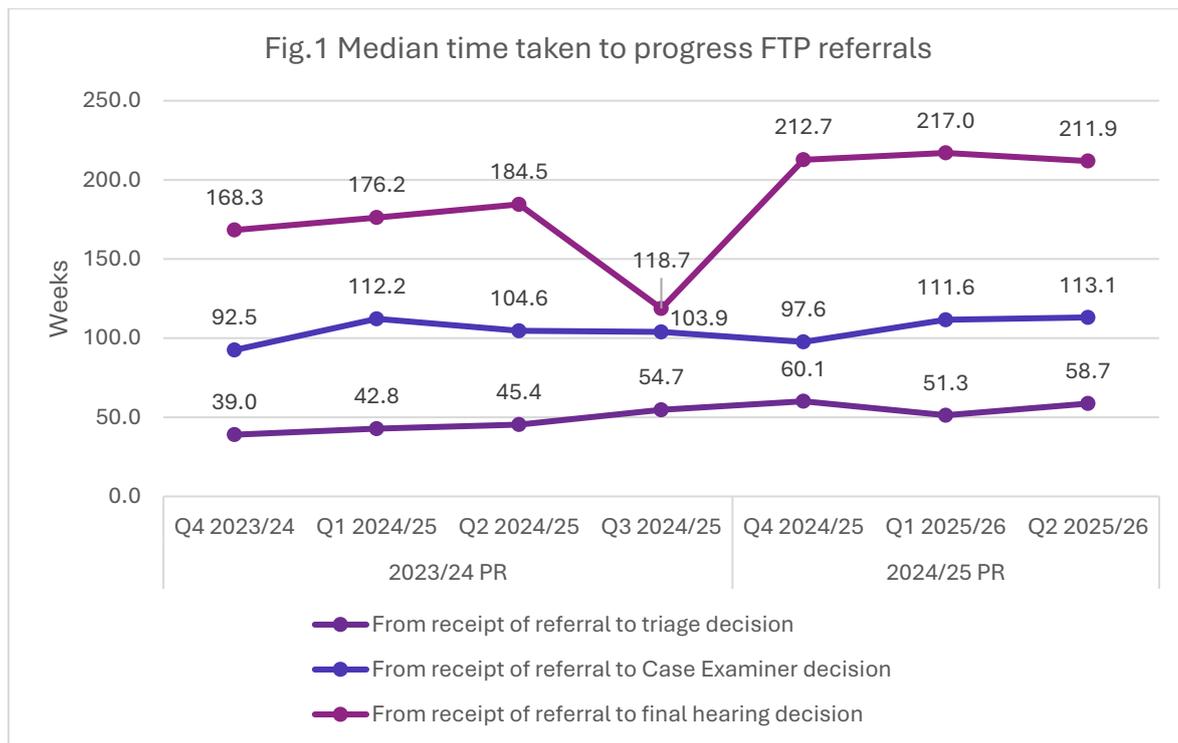
Social Work England met four of five Standards for Fitness to Practise. Social Work England met Standards 14, 16, 17 and 18 and did not meet Standard 15.

FTP timeliness

Last year, Social Work England did not meet Standard 15, for the third year in a row. This was due to our concerns about the time Social Work England was taking to process FTP cases overall, and in particular the growing backlog at the hearings stage of the process. As a result of our concerns, we wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, in line with our escalation policy.

The below graph measures the time taken for Social Work England to progress FTP cases through its process and we can see no sign of any consistent improvement in the time

taken, for any stage of the process. While it is positive to see that these data points no longer appear to be on a consistent upward trajectory, we do consider all stages to be taking too long.



Despite the above concerns, at the end of the review period, Social Work England was on track to meet three of its four KPIs within FTP.¹ This may be a positive indication of Social Work England’s performance, but we note that performance against these KPIs fluctuates. The only FTP KPI Social Work England has been consistently meeting is the time taken to complete investigations, and this is partly due to a higher closure rate at triage than expected, so fewer cases are in the investigations caseload than forecast.

One of the key challenges Social Work England faces is an increased rate of referrals, a challenge faced by all of the regulators we oversee to varying degrees. For the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25, Social Work England received an average of 154 referrals a month. For this financial year, it has been receiving an average of 213 a month. This means that, despite Social Work England making more decisions this year than in previous years, the caseload at triage is continuing to grow. Social Work England also faces challenges with respect to restricted court information, which it finds in close to half of the referrals it receives. It needs to treat this information sensitively, and in some cases apply to the courts to be able to make use of it, which can take up significant time and resource.

Social Work England continues to experience challenges at the hearings stage. It started this review period with 421 cases in the hearings stage, and as of the end, it has 441 cases at that stage. It has concluded 82 final hearings, with 136 cases entering the hearings stage.

¹ Social Work England has a fifth KPI in FTP, for the time from receipt of concern to final FTP outcome at hearing, but this does not have a target.

We are aware that Social Work England has been taking action across all areas of its process, with a view to increasing the rate at which it can progress cases. It has increased resources in triage and is undertaking a process review project in triage and investigations. It has improved guidance for requesting information, and escalating requests for information, and continues to develop its relationships with local authorities. Within hearings, it has been using two-person panels where appropriate, reviewing the post-case examination caseload, and procuring a second legal provider to increase capacity from April 2026.

We acknowledge the challenges that Social Work England faces across the FTP process. It is clear that Social Work England recognises the problem with performance with respect to FTP timeliness, and it is positive that it is taking a range of steps to try to improve its performance. However, we have not seen an improvement in the time taken for Social Work England to process its FTP cases, and therefore, Standard 15 is not met.

Quick links/find out more

- Read [Social Work England's 2023/24 review](#)
- Find out more about [our performance review process](#)
- Read our [Standards of Good Regulation](#)
- Read our [evidence framework for Standard 3](#)

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