

NMC Independent Oversight Group

Summary of Meeting held on 3 November 2025

1. Welcome

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.
- 1.2. The Chair recorded his thanks to Derek Barron for his valuable contributions as an expert on the group over the past year. Derek is retiring in January 2026 and will be replaced on the group by Heather Smith, who will bring similar experience and expertise from the social care sector in Scotland.

2. Independent reports into whistleblowing and fitness to practise (NMC)

- 2.1. The NMC noted its thanks to the whistleblower for their courage when raising concerns. The NMC acknowledged that the whistleblower raised important and valid public protection issues. The NMC said that it wants employees to feel able to raise concerns internally.
- 2.2. The NMC recognised that the report into fitness to practise found that there was a flawed process in respect of the NMC's approach to concerns around registrants' private lives. It was noted that the report found some issues in respect of culture, in that decision-makers did not feel empowered to treat guidance as guidance, and instead accepted it as instruction. The NMC said that it has since strengthened its guidance on behaviour in registrants' private lives, and colleagues have received additional training in this area.
- 2.3. The NMC said that the report into whistleblowing amounted to "a clean bill of health" with respect to its management and handling of whistleblowers. The group noted that the report found that the whistleblower did not suffer any detriment as a consequence of blowing the whistle.
- 2.4. Both reports made a range of recommendations, which the NMC is currently working through. The NMC noted that colleagues were critical of the decision to pre-emptively accept all of the findings and recommendations of the Independent Culture Review (ICR), and it is currently in the process of engaging with senior leaders with respect to the recommendations in the further reports. The NMC added that it considers the recommendations to be proportionate, and that it is only considering whether the recommendation for a confidential email route for whistleblowers is the best option. The NMC is also considering its governance around FTP guidance, and reflected that this is subject to fewer reviews than a policy document. It was noted that the report into FTP commented on this but did not make a formal recommendation on this point.

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- 2.5. The NMC emphasised that it is confident that its staff can raise concerns on individual cases at case clinics, but accepted that more is needed to enable staff to raise thematic concerns. The NMC wants a clear route for staff to raise such concerns, and intends to report to its Council on this issue alongside all of the other recommendations. The Chair asked that this is also presented to the group when available, noting that this falls within the group's terms of reference.

ACTION: NMC to present its plan in response to the reports' recommendations to the group at a future meeting.

- 2.6. Group members enquired as to the NMC's definition of a 'serious' concern outside of work, noting the topical issue of social media use. The NMC said that it has specific guidance for registrants on social media use, and emphasised that there is no such thing as private life when expressing discriminatory views. The NMC also acknowledged that it needs to consider how its guidance is presented to registrants as well as decision-makers.

3. Culture Transformation Plan (NMC)

- 3.1. The NMC said it intends to monitor and report on its culture by way of a maturity model. The NMC noted that feedback from stakeholders was that its reporting had been difficult to follow and did not always demonstrate progress.
- 3.2. The maturity model contains four levels of maturity and is aligned to the six pillars of the culture transformation plan, with an additional pillar for the goal to become an anti-racist organisation. The model shows what outcomes should be delivered, and demonstrates how to measure this. The NMC has identified data points as a means of reporting on culture through the maturity model.
- 3.3. The NMC will assess its culture on a quarterly basis and will produce an aggregate report. It will use this to draw together a list of interventions, and will use the model as a mechanism to evidence maturity and progress as an organisation. The NMC will present this to its Council as well as the IOG.
- 3.4. One group member noted that the NMC is aiming to become a learning organisation, and asked how this is captured in the maturity model. It was noted that it could also benefit from insights from the wider healthcare system. The NMC said that the scope of the maturity model covers the issues identified in, and the recommendations from, the ICR. The NMC also noted that it has strengthened its data capture through the adoption of ambitious appraisals, the *Your Voice* staff survey and closer engagement with Unison.
- 3.5. Another group member suggested that the assurance of the IOG should be included as a measure of cultural progress. The NMC said that it will incorporate feedback from the IOG and other stakeholders, and this will form part of the outcome measures when it makes sense to do so. The NMC added that it plans to incorporate multidisciplinary learning into the model.

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- 3.6. The group enquired as to whether the outcome measures for the model are futureproof in the context of legislative reform and a changing regulatory landscape. The NMC expressed its confidence that the model would translate across after legislative reform, and reiterated that it is focused on the outcomes it is aiming to achieve on an annual basis. The NMC also noted that the PSA's draft *Standards of Good Regulation* place more emphasis on collaboration on the part of regulators, and said it welcomes this, particularly from a patient safety perspective. The group agreed that cross-regulator consistency and collaboration is important, and the Chair noted that there are fora to facilitate this, including the Chief Executive's Steering Group and the Health and Social Care Forum.
 - 3.7. The group enquired as to how the model can be used to identify priorities moving forwards. The NMC said that this will become clearer after the first quarterly assessment, and that it will use this to develop a better understanding of how the model informs priorities. The NMC additionally noted that the model has a list of interventions that are designed to benefit its organisational culture, and that it is actively considering if there is anything missing and whether a slightly improved approach is needed.
 - 3.8. The group discussed the findings of the *Your Voice* survey. The NMC noted that this had only recently concluded. The group noted that there has been substantial activity in the EDI space, and that the NMC recently launched its new behaviour framework aligned to its values.

4. NMC staff networks feedback on the Culture Transformation Plan (Unison NMC staff representative)

- 4.1. Niamh Fleming was recently appointed as the new NMC employee forum Co-Chair, and was welcomed to the group in this capacity.
- 4.2. The Unison NMC staff representative provided her perspective on the NMC's cultural progress to date. She said that it is difficult to answer currently because of the ongoing consultation on redundancies.
- 4.3. The Unison NMC staff representative reported that employees lacked trust in the process, whilst recognising that a lot of good work is being done. Staff have reported feeling disconnected from the process changes, and it was reported that there is an underlying lack of trust in the senior leadership team. The Unison NMC staff representative said that she could not be positive about what it is like to work at the NMC currently, but acknowledged that this was not a fair representation with the ongoing threat of redundancies.
- 4.4. The Unison NMC staff representative noted that a lot of thought has gone into the culture transformation plan and that there were definitely some green shoots; however, she commented that staff were doubtful as to whether this would lead to improvement. The Unison NMC staff representative also reported that there is a mismatch between the NMC's external reporting and the internal sentiment of those at the coal face.

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- 4.5. The NMC acknowledged that the ongoing consultation on redundancies will cause distraction and unsettlement amongst colleagues. The NMC noted that an extensive programme of change is underway, including embedding EDI, coaching all managers, psychological safety and enjoying work, and values-based decision-making, which it said is vital given the findings of the ICR. The NMC added that when fixing an organisation with deep-seated challenges, unpopular changes are inevitable, for example hybrid working has been met with mixed reactions amongst NMC staff. The NMC said that it is behind the curve on mandating office attendance – only implementing this in September 2025 - when compared to other organisations, and that this was necessary to ensure greater collaborative working and ultimately better performance.
- 4.6. One group member said that the IOG needs to be careful to avoid scope creep, and noted that redundancies are not unique to the NMC. This group member argued that the IOG needs to agree a clear set of parameters for when the group should stand down, noting the need to arrive at a place where the NMC Council's function is to scrutinise this and other improvement plans. The Chair recognised this, and stated that the group's focus is on the NMC's implementation of the recommendations of the ICR and subsequent reports, as well as seeking assurance that progress is being made at an appropriate pace and that it is sustained. The Chair said that within this context there are other relevant issues. The group agreed that it needs to be consider what levels of assurance are needed in order to reduce the frequency of IOG meetings, before considering when to stand the group down. This is on the agenda for the next meeting in January.

5. The role of the NMC Council (Chair of the NMC)

- 5.1. The Chair of the NMC presented this item. The Chair of the NMC said that governance is ultimately about doing the right thing in the right way, and that this concerns what was, what is and what may be in the future.
- 5.2. The Chair of the NMC said that when he took on this role, it was clear that there were a number of deep-rooted issues at the NMC, and that the Council had taken its eye off the ball and become dissociated from the issues with the organisation. The Chair of the NMC said that it was imperative that Council functions well in holding the organisation to account.
- 5.3. The Chair of the NMC noted the importance of a stable Executive team, which is why the permanent Chief Executive and Registrar post was confirmed as soon as practicable. There are currently three temporary post holders in the Executive team, and the NMC is aiming to hold recruitment for the permanent positions by the first quarter of 2026.

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- 5.4. The Chair of the NMC reiterated his criticism of the Council for its lack of oversight over the past few years, and said that Council colleagues have accepted this. The Chair of the NMC stated that the Council is now more curious in terms of the NMC's progress and what Council needs to do to serve its primary function of protecting the public. For example, the Chair of the NMC noted that the Council held its first direct meeting with the Executive, Chief Nursing Officers and Chief Midwifery Officers, which it intends to repeat in future. The Chair of the NMC said that these meetings will give Council immediate insight into the problems faced on the front line, and will serve an educative function for the Council, half of whom are lay members.
- 5.5. The Chair of the NMC said that he is stabilising the way in which Council holds the Executive to account. It was noted that this is a largely new Executive team, and that Council's role is supportive rather than blameful, which the Chair of the NMC said has led to a more open relationship.
- 5.6. The Chair of the NMC said it seemed that Council had previously floated above the organisation rather than taking an active involvement in holding the organisation to account. To address this, the Chair of the NMC has stabilised the set of committees, for example by expanding the scope of the Audit Committee to include Risk. There is also a People and Culture Committee, and the Chair of the NMC has recently reintroduced the Finance and Resources Committee, which he said had been absent for a number of years, to scrutinise its resource and finances.
- 5.7. The Chair of the NMC told the IOG he is actively considering whether to establish a Strategy and Plans Committee, which would review departmental plans, strategic posture, and long-term aims and gains. This function currently sits under the Finance and Resource Committee. The Chair of the NMC emphasised that concise and effective governance requires committee work to get under the proposals of the Executive, and said he will ensure that this does not go missing again.
- 5.8. The Chair of the NMC said that he is developing a series of projects that will underpin the development and learning of Council. This will include a series of briefings for Council members, covering both NMC and sector issues, as well as legislative reform. The Chair of the NMC also noted that the ongoing consultation on redundancies is a difficult situation, but is necessary to enable more effective management of the organisation.
- 5.9. The Chair thanked the Chair of the NMC for this update, and reiterated that governance fundamentally underpins assurance by having structures in place to do the right thing in the right way.
- 5.10. One group member asked how the Chair of the NMC is balancing transparency with the view that public Council meetings can feel like tick box exercises as it was obvious at the last meeting that the issues had already been discussed by Council in private. The Chair of the NMC said that his test for what should be in the public is if it is in the public interest, then it should not be confidential. He added that the aim is not to withhold information from the public, but rather for information to be properly scrutinised so a clear and proper picture can be presented publicly.

6. Analysis of the group survey results (PSA)

- 6.1. The Chair presented the findings from a recent survey of group members as to their level of assurance in the NMC's progress in three areas: organisational culture; fitness to practise; and safeguarding. Group members were asked to provide their level of assurance from 1-5, with 1 being not at all assured and 5 being very assured. The collective, overall score was 2.5 (mean) 2 (median).
- 6.2. The collective score for FTP was 2.5 (mean) 3 (median). There was a clear recognition that efforts are being made to improve in this area, however feedback was consistent that the process still takes too long and current targets are unlikely to be met. It was also noted that there is not enough improvement for registrants going through the FTP process. Group members also acknowledged that there has been a significant improvement in the quality of FTP data reported to the group.
- 6.3. The collective score for safeguarding was 3.1 (mean) and 3 (median). There was broad recognition that positive steps are being taken in this area, and group members agreed that the safeguarding hub has been a big improvement. Group members noted that safeguarding must remain a high priority, and that this progress needs to be embedded, evidenced and sustained.
- 6.4. The collective score for culture was 2.5 (mean) 2 (median). There were mixed responses from group members, with some continuing to have significant concerns about the organisational culture. Most respondents noted that steps have been taken to improve, but many felt that there had been limited evidence of improvements.
- 6.5. Most respondents also agreed that change takes time and the NMC has a way to go in order to evidence that improvements have been achieved and are translated into measurable impact. The importance of external scrutiny of the NMC's ongoing progress was also noted.
- 6.6. The group will use these findings to inform its discussion at the next meeting in January, where the group will consider what level of assurance is required before deciding to reduce the frequency of meetings and when the IOG can be stood down.
- 6.7. The Chair noted that the group's work should reduce as indicators show evidence of sustained progress. The group agreed that assurance is not currently where it should be, and that a discussion on this is needed in January.

7. AOB

- 7.1. The NMC asked that the FTP dataset be shared with the group, as this was not included in the papers.

ACTION: PSA secretariat to share the latest FTP dataset with the group.

Annex 1: Attendee list

Organisation/Role	Name
Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) England	Duncan Burton
Chief Midwifery Officer (CMidO) Scotland	Justine Craig
CMidO Wales	Karen Jewell
Deputy CNO Wales	Gillian Knight (deputising for Sue Tranka)
CMidO NI	Caroline Keown
Deputy CNO NI	Mary Frances McManus (deputising for Maria McIlgorm)
DHSC	Aisling Fox
Scottish Government	Rebecca Wright
NI Government	Chris Wilkinson
Welsh Government	Ian Owen
NMC Chair	Ron Barclay-Smith
NMC Chief Executive and Registrar	Paul Rees
NMC Chief of Staff	Ben Wesson
NMC Executive Director of People and Culture	Ravi Chand
NMC Executive Director of Professional Regulation	Lesley Maslen
NMC Assistant Director, FTP	Paul Johnson
NMC Executive Director of Strategy and Insight	Emma Westcott
NMC Assistant Director, Culture Change and Transformation	Charlotte Eimer
NMC	Noita Sadler
NMC Co-Chair of the staff network	Niamh Fleming
NMC	Jacqueline Maunder
NMC	Silvia Dominici
PSA Chief Executive	Alan Clamp
PSA Interim Director of Regulation and Accreditation	Amanda Partington-Todd
RCN	Lucy Muchina
RCM Chief Executive	Gill Walton
Unite	Dave Munday
UNISON NMC staff representation	Anne Carvalho
UNISON registrants representation	Gail Adams
Expert – National Guardian’s Office	Beth Carter
Expert – social care	Heather Smith
Expert - NHS England, National Maternity Lead for Equality	Wendy Olayiwola
Expert - Chief Executive, Patient Safety Learning	Helen Hughes

Annex 2: Action Log

On track (including not started) Delayed (or medium risk of delay for projects) Overdue (or high risk of delay for projects) Complete

Mtg. Date	Item No.	Action point	Owner	Date required	Action progress	Status
9 September 2024	2.9	Circulate new version of Terms of Reference to the Group for agreement	PSA Secretariat	13 September 2024	Complete (13 September 2024).	
9 September 2024	3.2	Members to send suggestions for experts to the PSA	All members	16 September 2024	Complete (16 September 2024).	
9 September 2024	3.2	Experts: compile list of suggestions and seek expressions of interest	PSA Secretariat	19 September 2024	Complete (20 September 2024).	
9 September 2024	4.1	NMC to share a version of the action plan with the Group	NMC	As soon as possible (date TBC)	Complete (20 September 2024). The NMC made the action plan materials going to Council available in parallel with the publication of Council papers, making clear that Council would be approving the plan in principle but that the document would be liable to further adjustment and refinement in the light of the Group's comments and wider discussion	

2 October 2024	2.2	NMC to share the detailed version of the fitness to practise improvement plan with the group in advance of the meeting on 18 October 2024	NMC	TBC	Complete (16 October 2024)	
2 October 2024	2.14	PSA secretariat to include an agenda item on the NMC's governance structure and assurance framework at the IOG meeting in November	PSA secretariat	1 week in advance of the IOG meeting in November (date TBC)	Complete (20 November 2024)	
2 October 2024	3.1	PSA secretariat to share a list of experts who have expressed an interest in joining the group	PSA secretariat	3 October 2024	Complete (3 October 2024)	
2 October 2024	3.1	PSA secretariat to review expressions of interest from experts and make a recommendation to the group	PSA secretariat	11 October 2024	Complete (9 October 2024)	
18 October 2024	3.1	PSA secretariat to arrange the next meeting as soon as possible.	PSA secretariat	TBC (November)	Complete (25 October 2024)	
28 November 2024	2.23	PSA secretariat to include an agenda item on the NMC's fitness to practise performance at the next meeting	PSA secretariat	31 January 2025	Complete (31 January 2025)	
28 November 2024	2.23	NMC to provide EDI data on the FTP caseload at the next meeting	NMC	31 January 2025	Complete (31 January 2025)	
28 November 2024	3.1	PSA secretariat to arrange the group's next meeting in the week ending 24 January or 31 January	PSA secretariat	31 January 2025	Complete – meeting scheduled for 31 January 2025	
31 January 2025	3.8	PSA secretariat to include an agenda item for an update on the Ijeoma Omambala KC reports at the next meeting	PSA secretariat	12 March 2025	Complete (12 March 2025)	

31 January 2025	4.10	NMC to provide the group with insights from its data cleansing work at a future meeting	NMC	12 March 2025	Complete (12 March 2025)	
31 January 2025	4.10	NMC to provide the group with FTP scorecard data at future meetings	NMC	12 March 2025	Complete (12 March 2025)	
12 March 2025	2.5	PSA secretariat to include an item on the FTP dashboard data at the next meeting covering FTP as a substantive item	PSA secretariat	6 August 2025	Complete (6 August 2025)	
12 March 2025	3.7	NMC to share its paper on safeguarding with the group	NMC	29 April 2025	Complete (29 April 2025)	
12 March 2025	5.5	NMC to notify the group when it receives the Omambala reports	NMC	TBC	Complete (15 September 2025)	
12 March 2025	8.5	PSA secretariat to include an item on frequency of meetings at the June meeting	PSA secretariat	25 June 2025	Complete (25 June 2025)	
29 April 2025	2.6	NMC to notify the group as soon as possible when it has an indication of Ijeoma Omambala KC's estimated timetable for the reports' publication	NMC	TBC	Complete (6 August 2025)	
29 April 2025	4.1	NMC to present an update, including detailed data, on its oldest FTP cases at a future meeting	NMC	6 August 2025	Complete (6 August 2025)	
29 April 2025	4.6	NMC to present its revised FTP improvement plan to the group when approved by Council	NMC	TBC		
25 June 2025	2.6	NMC to refrain from using acronyms without first explaining their meaning at future meetings	NMC	TBC		
6 August 2025	3.10	NMC to update the group when it has been informed that all information has been shared from Ijeoma Omambala KC to the newly commissioned lawyers	NMC	15 September 2025	Complete (15 September 2025)	

6 August 2025	4.18	PSA Secretariat to include an agenda item to consider the effectiveness of the NMC Council, with the Chair of the NMC in attendance, at a future meeting	PSA Secretariat	TBC	Complete (3 November 2025)	
15 September 2025	1.4	NMC to notify the group when the independent investigations into FTP and whistleblowing will be published	NMC	TBC	Complete	
15 September 2025	3.9	NMC to include graphs showing the age profile of caseload over time and by stage in the dataset for all meetings covering FTP	NMC	TBC		
3 November 2025	2.5	NMC to present its plan in response to the reports' recommendations to the group at a future meeting	NMC	TBC		
3 November 2025	7.1	PSA secretariat to share the latest FTP dataset with the group	PSA secretariat	3 November 2025	Complete (3 November 2025)	