

NMC Independent Oversight Group

Summary of Meeting held on 15 September 2025

1. Welcome

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies. The Chair invited the NMC to provide an update on the recommissioned independent investigations into FTP and whistleblowing (formerly the Omambala reviews).
- 1.2. The NMC confirmed that it received the reports and undertook a contained exercise to feedback on matters of fact and GDPR issues, as well as the wording of recommendations. The NMC said that compared to the Independent Culture Review (ICR), the feedback was relatively restrained, and it only provided a short list of feedback. The NMC's feedback was sent to the reports' authors on Friday 12 September.
- 1.3. The reports are being finalised by the external lawyers. The NMC confirmed that once it has received the final reports it will publish them as soon as possible.
- 1.4. The NMC was unable to commit to a date for publication, but reaffirmed that the reports will be published in mid-Autumn. The NMC agreed to notify the IOG ahead of publication.

ACTION: NMC to notify the group when the independent investigations into FTP and whistleblowing will be published.

- 1.5. The Chair noted the NMC's commitment to publishing the reports as soon as reasonably possible, and asked that the NMC notify the group if there is to be any delay.
- 1.6. One group member asked the NMC if it intends to engage with trade unions and other stakeholders to discuss the headline findings and recommendations. The NMC confirmed that it will be doing so.

2. Safeguarding update

- 2.1. The Chair thanked the NMC for providing comprehensive papers on this important issue.
- 2.2. The NMC outlined its statutory obligations to safeguard and protect the public from harm. Safeguarding risks are overseen through the governance of the Safeguarding Board, which meets every two months. The Board is comprised of safeguarding experts, staff from professional regulation as well as legal and clinical expertise.

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- 2.3. The NMC has introduced mandatory level 1 safeguarding training for all staff, which is in the process of being rolled out. To date, 50% of NMC staff have completed the training. Levels 2 and 3 training will be rolled out soon. Group members asked how satisfied the NMC is that the training is sufficient for the level of risk. The NMC said that the training is more comprehensive than previously, and covers adult and child protection, legislation and the four nations, with an assessment at the end. Levels 2 and 3 have been tailored to job roles and responsibilities.
 - 2.4. The NMC recognised that although its focus on safeguarding is mostly targeted at FTP, this also extends beyond FTP to all aspects of its work. The NMC's approach to safeguarding in FTP is centred around its assurance of both unallocated and allocated cases. The NMC recently began a safeguarding review of its unallocated cases at Investigations, and has reviewed all 139 red-risk cases. This identified no urgent actions from a safeguarding perspective, although it did identify learning on the safeguarding process and IO applications. Amber and green-risk cases are being reviewed over the course of September and October.
 - 2.5. The NMC launched its updated Safeguarding Handbook in August, to act as a reference guide for all staff when assessing safeguarding concerns. The NMC has also revised its safeguarding SOP, which is due for sign off at the Safeguarding Board later this month. This sets out the approach for staff to take when assessing safeguarding concerns, and provides a clearly defined process to follow. The NMC is also actively reviewing its self-harm and suicide protocol.
 - 2.6. The NMC has carried out an evaluation of its safeguarding hub, which was established in September 2024. The NMC intimated that it intends to conduct regular reviews of this, to provide a mitigation to the safeguarding strategic risk. The group suggested, and the NMC agreed, that this could be reviewed by an external body in future. The NMC aims to develop the safeguarding hub into a safeguarding centre of excellence, supported by the stocktake exercise undertaken by Bates Wells earlier this year.
 - 2.7. Outside of the safeguarding hub process, NMC staff can request support and advice on cases by making a referral to the safeguarding team. The NMC is considering whether to establish a safeguarding hub for cases outside of Screening, in the light of an increase in the number of referrals coming to it from Investigations. Between April 2024 and March 2025, 644 requests for safeguarding advice were made. The NMC said this is evidence that the communications around the hub is resulting in increased awareness in both recognising and escalating safeguarding concerns.
 - 2.8. The group agreed that the NMC's work in this area has been structured and rigorous, and welcomed the handbook and SOP as a means of embedding safeguarding into the NMC's processes. The group asked how the NMC is measuring the impact of these changes, and whether the NMC is satisfied that it is protecting the public through the actions of the safeguarding hub and function. The NMC said it is assured that safeguarding risks are being identified at Screening, however it said that safeguarding is more reactive at the Investigations stage. The NMC said it intends to be proactive in identifying and addressing safeguarding risks at all stages of the FTP process in future.

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- 2.9. The NMC presented its work on the registrant wellbeing service, which is closely linked to its safeguarding function. The professional support and engagement team is acting to support casework teams to improve the experience of people in the process. This team works to build FTP staff's understanding, skills and capabilities to deliver a person-centred process. It also delivers training on issues such as mental health, complex needs, challenging conversations and tailored communications. FTP staff are able to access this through weekly drop-in sessions, where the team is able to provide case-specific advice on engaging and supporting registrants.
 - 2.10. The NMC's Careline service continues to offer 24/7 independent and confidential emotional support to registrants. The NMC acknowledged that the uptake is not as high as it would expect: in 2024/25, the NMC received 1,000 calls, which it considers to be below when compared to the size and the age of the caseload. The NMC noted that representative bodies frequently flag Careline to registrants they represent in the FTP process.
 - 2.11. As part of the FTP improvement plan, the NMC began a health pilot in January 2025. This is a new approach to health investigations with multidisciplinary input to inform the investigative approach, sequencing and engagement strategy with registrants. One group member asked if there is any data on the number of cases involved in the health pilot in the first six months of this year. The NMC confirmed that it has completed a mid-point evaluation of the pilot, and will send this data to the group separately.
 - 2.12. The NMC also launched a first contact pilot in September 2025, which means that registrants are notified of a referral against them by telephone call in the first instance. This involves an initial discussion on communication and support needs, allowing the NMC to identify wellbeing and safeguarding risks from the outset.
 - 2.13. The NMC continues to provide its Public Support Service (PSS) for referrers and witnesses. The PSS carries out a needs assessment and a resulting communication plan, as well as holding virtual support sessions for pre-hearing advice and support.
 - 2.14. For its staff, the NMC provides a decompression service for those involved in continued and consistent exposure to difficult and sensitive content in their work. It also runs debriefing and reflective practice sessions, and provides targeted and trauma-informed training to teams to boost skills and assurance when facing difficult conversations and subject matters.
 - 2.15. The group welcomed the amount of work aimed at supporting registrants and other parties to the FTP process, as well as the support available to NMC staff.
 - 2.16. One group member noted that staff have reported having limited time to engage with the support services available to them, owing to the need to meet KPIs and reduce the case backlog. The Chair emphasised the need to think about offer, uptake and impact, and suggested that some analysis on this would be helpful for the NMC, and the IOG for assurance.

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- 2.17. One group member asked whether the NMC is comparing itself to other regulators, and if there are any opportunities for shared learning. The NMC noted that the contract for Careline is going out for tender soon, and that it has offered to do this alongside other regulators; however no other regulators have accepted this offer.
 - 2.18. One group member noted that Black men are overly represented in the FTP process, and asked that the NMC consider how it can raise awareness of Careline and other services to this group.

3. FTP trajectory and dataset

- 3.1. The NMC presented the headline findings from the dataset up to August 2025. The overall caseload has increased by 53 between July and August 2025, to 6,231 cases. Cases at Screening have fallen to 1,973, which is more than 1,000 fewer when compared to the same time last year. Incoming referrals remain high, with an average of around 573 per month.
- 3.2. The NMC's main concern is around Investigations, which is struggling to keep pace with incoming referrals and the number of cases progressed at Screening. The NMC also acknowledged that Adjudications are not progressing cases as quickly as hoped.
- 3.3. To address these issues, the NMC is actively considering the specifications for procurement of a new delivery partner, following the PwC diagnostic work earlier this year. PwC identified between 20 and 30 percent efficiencies in the FTP process, and the NMC's delivery partner will provide extra capacity and resource to boost efficiency in Investigations. The NMC said that it does not expect to see the benefits until Q4. It also expects the move from its legacy case management system (CMS) to Dynamics in mid-2026 to result in improved efficiency.
- 3.4. The NMC introduced its new Screening guidance in May 2025, and the initial high-level findings show improved efficiency of around 8 percent. The NMC expects Screening to be within the ICR recommendation on timeliness by next year as a result.
- 3.5. The NMC plans to address the increased caseload in Investigations through the work of its incoming delivery partner, and the NMC is also diverting resources from the Case Examiners stage to further increase capacity. The NMC has also increased the budget of Adjudications, and reported that it is seeing improvements through more cases being heard in person. The group asked if this increase in budget is sufficient. The NMC said that it is also reallocating resources from Screening to the Case Examiners stage with a view to improving the timeliness of decision-making.
- 3.6. The Chair noted that improved performance at Screening is pushing work along and consequently stretching, the next stage of the process.
- 3.7. The group considered the sustained increase in the number of incoming referrals, and asked what insights the NMC could share on this. The NMC said it has been working with NHS England in the Midlands on this issue, and agreed to share any insights from this at a future meeting. The NMC also noted that local investigation in social care is a common problem, with there often being lesser HR systems in place.

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- 3.8. One group member noted that graphs showing the age profile of caseload over time and by stage were included in the dataset at the last meeting, and asked that these form part of the dataset moving forwards. The NMC agreed to this.

ACTION: NMC to include graphs showing the age profile of caseload over time and by stage in the dataset for all meetings covering FTP.

- 3.9. One group member asked if there is scope for more guidance for decision-makers to identify and deal with vexatious or malicious referrals from members of the public. The NMC said that its new screening guidance is helping in this area, and that it is actively thinking about its guidance on retaliatory referrals. The NMC acknowledged that this guidance needs to be reviewed, and this is beginning imminently.
- 3.10. One group member asked about the number of cases awaiting allocation at the Investigations stage, and whether this is an accurate reflection of the amount of time between a Screening decision and allocating the case at Investigations. The NMC noted that the largest number of unallocated cases are at Investigations; currently around 800 cases with a median case age of 25 weeks. The NMC said that it is regularly receiving high-risk cases, which leads to lower-risk cases being deprioritised, resulting in blockages.

4. Survey of group members

- 4.1. The Chair reaffirmed that the PSA will be surveying group members for their organisational views on the NMC's progress since the publication of the ICR. The findings from this survey will be analysed by the PSA and presented as an item at the next meeting. The next meeting will also focus on the culture transformation plan and Council effectiveness, with the Chair of the NMC in attendance.
- 4.2. One group member noted that the independent investigations into FTP and whistleblowing may have been published before the next meeting, and asked if that would detract from the other agenda items. The Chair acknowledged this, and said that the PSA will consider this if the reports are published before the next meeting.

5. AOB

- 5.1. One group member asked if the NMC collect data on referrals by ethnicity, age or gender. The Chair said that we would expect the NMC to be looking at this, and for the NMC to report any findings or themes to the group. The NMC confirmed that it is developing a detailed delivery plan to ensure that it meets its ambitious EDI targets, but noted that its legacy CMS has limitations with respect to data collection.
- 5.2. One group member noted that another group member had requested the PwC diagnostic report, and asked whether this report would be made available to the IOG. The group noted that this is relevant to paragraph 1.1 of the terms of reference, and that it would be difficult to scrutinise effectively without this paper. The NMC said that it had agreed to share the high-level findings and outputs from the PwC report with the group member. The NMC added that it is a large report, and it has not been shared with staff yet. The NMC intends to share the findings and outputs from the report with representative bodies in October.

Annex 1: Attendee list

Organisation/Role	Name
Deputy Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) England	Michelle Bateman (deputising for Duncan Burton)
Chief Midwifery Officer (CMidO) Scotland	Justine Craig
CMidO Wales	Karen Jewell (also deputising for CNO Wales, Sue Tranka)
NI Government	Chris Wilkinson
Welsh Government	Ian Owen
NMC Chief of Staff	Ben Wesson
NMC Executive Director of Professional Regulation	Lesley Maslen
NMC Executive Director of Strategy and Insight	Emma Westcott
NMC Executive Director of Professional Practice	Donna O'Boyle
NMC Safeguarding Clinical Advisor	Nicola Burns-Muir
NMC Deputy Director for Professional Regulation	Linda Everet
NMC Co-Chair of the BeMe Network and representative of the staff network	Suma Das
NMC	Caitlin Law
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	Rhea Mills
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	
15 September 2025	1.4	NMC to notify the group when the independent investigations into FTP and whistleblowing will be published	NMC	TBC	
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	