

Mike Nesbitt
Minister of Health, Northern Ireland
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27 May 2026

Dear Minister,

Regulatory performance of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)

We have today published our most recent performance review of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). The review covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2025. The NMC's performance during the review period has caused us considerable concern, and I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) to inform you of the action we are taking, in line with our escalation policy.¹ I attach a copy of our report.

About the Professional Standards Authority

The PSA reports to Parliament and the devolved administrations each year on the performance of the 10 statutory health and social care professional regulators.² We judge a regulators' performance against our 18 Standards of Good Regulation (the Standards), which cover five cross-cutting standards as well as the four key regulatory functions: guidance and standards; education and training; registration; and fitness to practise. Each Standard is assessed as being 'met' or 'not met'.

We conducted a periodic review of the NMC's performance this year. Although usually our periodic reviews are conducted every three years (with shorter monitoring reviews in the two years between them), given the concerns identified in the July 2024 Independent Culture Review by Nazir Afzal OBE and Rise Associates, and the outcome of last year's periodic review, during which we identified that the NMC had not met seven of the 18 Standards, we undertook a further periodic review for 2024/25. This

¹ [Professional Standards Authority process for escalating performance review concerns](#)

² These are the General Chiropractic Council, the General Dental Council, the General Medical Council, the General Optical Council, the General Osteopathic Council, the General Pharmaceutical Council, the Health and Care Professions Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, and Social Work England.

included an audit of cases closed at the screening stage of the NMC's fitness to practise process.

Our 2024/25 performance review

We have identified weaknesses in multiple regulatory functions during this period which have led us to conclude that the NMC has not met nine of our 18 Standards this year – two more than in the last review period.

We understand that 2025 was a challenging year for the NMC as it worked to tackle its well-documented operational challenges. We recognise that significant steps have been taken by the NMC to understand the issues within the organisation and improve its performance including the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Registrar, and a new Chair during the reporting period. While we are encouraged by the new leadership's intentions and commitment to change, in the period under review we have not seen evidence of substantial improvement.

Our report sets out our findings regarding the Standards that the NMC has not met in this reporting period in detail, which are summarised below:

- **Standard 2 (clear about purpose):** While we note that the NMC has put in place a number of plans aimed at improving the way it operates during this review period, we have not yet seen clear evidence of progress in how it ensures that its policies are applied appropriately across all its functions and that relevant learning from one area is applied to others.
- **Standard 3 (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)):** We note that the NMC has made progress in this area. It has established appropriate governance, structures and processes to embed EDI across its regulatory activities and continues to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders to advance EDI issues. However, we have seen limited evidence of the impact of the changes the NMC has made with respect to EDI in this reporting period, and we have seen evidence of disparities in the NMC's fitness to practise outcomes.
- **Standard 4 (reports on itself and addresses concerns):** The NMC has failed to address some of the issues identified in our last performance review, most notably in respect of education quality assurance. We have also identified issues with respect to the NMC's transparency of reporting during this review period, which we consider is lacking when compared to other regulators, and falls short of the standard expected.
- **Standard 9 (quality-assures education providers):** The NMC's education quality assurance function remains an area of high risk. We highlighted this in our performance review for 2023/24, and we are concerned that the NMC has taken very limited action to address this in 2025.

- Standards 10 and 11 (maintains an accurate register, registration process operates fairly and effectively):**
 The NMC notified us that it identified that its registrations team had not been following its process to refer high-risk or borderline decisions involving health and/or criminal conviction declarations to an Assistant Registrar for a decision. This had been ongoing for a number of years and affected a significant number of cases. This failure to follow its own processes serves to undermine the integrity of the NMC’s register and the proportionality of its process for registration.
- Standards 15, 16 and 18 (fitness to practise):** The NMC has made significant improvements to timeliness of decision-making at the screening stage of its fitness to practise processes, however this has not been replicated at the investigations and adjudications stages. Cases are still taking too long to process, and we could only take limited assurance from our audit about the quality of the NMC’s decision-making at the screening stage. We have seen the NMC take steps to better support registrants in the fitness to practise process, most notably by establishing a Public Support and Engagement team and by trialling new approaches to contacting registrants. However, we continued to have significant concerns about how the NMC kept case parties updated. This is of particular concern given the length of time these processes take to conclude.

In our report we have made a number of recommendations for the NMC, to indicate some of the areas where we expect the organisation to urgently focus on improving its performance. The recommendations are not exhaustive but highlight certain areas of importance that we have identified this year, issues that the NMC is aware of but has not yet addressed, or where we think changes could be made reasonably quickly to improve the NMC’s performance.

Next review and next steps

Our oversight does not stop when we publish our report. It is an ongoing, continuous process. Our next review of the NMC is already underway and covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2026. As part of the review, we will consider the further scrutiny we think is necessary as we continue to closely monitor the NMC’s performance. Our report on this period is due to be published in March 2027.

Our legislation does not provide us with any power to require action to be taken by the regulators in response to our reports. We will continue to monitor the NMC’s performance closely and will provide you with annual updates until the issues we have identified are resolved.

I have copied this letter to Ron Barclay-Smith, Chair of the NMC, and I am writing in similar terms to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committees across the four nations. If you or your team would like any further information or would like to discuss the content of our report, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Corby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Corby
Chair