

Paper for the
Social Work England Board

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Date
14 July 2022

Reviewed by
Executive Leadership Team

This paper is for
Assurance and Noting

Associated Strategic Objective
SO9: We will establish robust infrastructure, systems and processes that promote trust and confidence.

Impact: Risk Type and Appetite
Operational delivery - Open

1. Introduction

It is pleasing to bring the Annual Report and Accounts to the Board meeting today. It presents the achievements of Social Work England to the year end March 2022; it also represents a good deal of consistent hard work over the past few months to ensure it is prepared in time for this Board meeting and to be laid before Parliament before the summer recess. This year we have had new external auditors, EY, as appointed by the National Audit Office. This presented an additional challenge to the timeframe and completion dates however these have been overcome and we are pleased to have met our target for the Annual Report and Accounts. Each year a small part of the story of Social Work England is told in the annual report which together over time present the narrative that underpins the overall contribution of Social Work England to public protection and development of the social work profession.

The Quarter 1 performance report is on the agenda for this meeting. It presents a positive picture of delivery against the business plan objectives and our Key Performance Indicators and confirms at this early part of the year that we are on target with our projections for delivery into quarter 2 and beyond. It should be noted however that we are monitoring higher than usual levels of sick leave as a result of this new wave of Covid infections which has stretched capacity and may impact on business delivery.

It is important that the timetable for the amendments to our rules and regulations as consulted upon earlier in the year is maintained as a number of our year end projections, in fitness to practise in particular, are based on the process improvements that can be achieved in case management by implementation of the amendments as planned in the second part of this year.

2. Restructure update

At the last meeting I reported on developments in the restructure at senior leadership level in the organisation. I am pleased to say we have now moved to a three directorate structure as of the 4 July – **Regulation** which includes Registration and Advice and Adjudications, Investigations, Information Governance and Legal; **Professional Practice and External Engagement** which includes Policy, Communications, Engagement, Equality Diversity and Inclusion and Education Quality Assurance; and **People and Business Support** which includes Business and Planning Improvement, People and Development, Finance and Commercial, Information Technology, Internal Quality Assurance and Customer Complaints and the Executive Office. We have also appointed three new Assistant Directors, Berry Rose and Rachel McAssey in the Regulations directorate and Jonathan Monk in the Professional Practice and External Engagement directorate. Berry and Rachel are internal appointments, and we welcome them to their new roles, we have initiated a recruitment exercise to back

fill the posts they are moving from. Jonathan will be joining us in September from his current role with the charity Sense where he is Director of Operations.

As part of the new structure, we have established new lines of management, reporting, responsibility and accountability working through the directorates as the primary organisational structure.

3. Upstreaming project

This project was launched as a response to the higher than anticipated number of FtP referrals we received in our first year. The Executive Leadership Team received an update on phase three of the project which provided a useful overview. The project has worked on a number of key areas – amendments to our online concerns journey; research and evidence on our FtP process and on the experience of people who raised concerns; and early intervention and engagement which involved regional workshop with employers, establishing a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) network, and targeted approaches to local resolution.

By May 2022 we have received 4802 referrals since go live on the 2 December 2019. The monthly referral rate was 215 prior to the beginning of the upstreaming project, over the last six months the monthly referral rate has been 139. No single month since April 2021 has surpassed the highest referral months of October 2020 and February and March 2021. Although the exact reasons why the average rates of referral have decreased over time cannot be determined absolutely and is likely to have many contributing factors, it is fair to say the upstreaming project has had an impact and we are now working on bringing this activity into business-as-usual plans and into our Data and Insight strategy which will work across all aspects of the organisation.

4. EDI data and renewals

We have continued to review the ways in which we seek diversity data from social workers on the register to improve our response rate. Following discussion with other regulators and key stakeholders to explore potential tactics we plan to include the diversity questions in our renewal journey. This will make engagement with the diversity questions effectively mandatory, but the journey has been built to allow people to prefer not to say or skip a question. This means that people can still opt out of answering all the questions if they choose to, but we may get data for some questions. We are aware that this approach could lead to a potential increase in complaints, enquiries, however we can reduce the likelihood of this through messaging on the phone line, in renewals guidance, and through developing clear standard responses. We are also developing a dedicated communications plan to reassure social workers about why we want to collect this data and its value to the sector.

As part of this we are actively looking to produce a piece of joint communication between key stakeholders e.g., BASW, ADASS, ADCS and the unions. By promoting one voice on the issue, we hope to create a unified message to the sector, increase support and response rates.

5. Independent review of Children's Social Care

Following the publication of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care I published a blog on our website (link to [Reflections on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#)) which highlighted some of the key areas for Social Work England to consider arising from the review. This will be considered further and alongside other key policy developments in mental health and adult social care as part of the current ongoing development of our strategic plan.

6. Vision for education and training in social work

In June we published '[Our approach to education and training](#)', which sets out the areas which we believe will make the most impact on preparing new social workers. The focus for the vision is on ensuring that all social workers to qualify equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviors to meet the professional standards, demonstrate the values of the profession, register to use the protected title of social worker and practise safely and effectively. It's a long-term plan, which will be developed in full consultation with the public, profession, educators, students and people with lived experience of social work. The first public consultation as part of this vision is on 'readiness for professional practice' which will run for 12 weeks and include engagement events, the first of which are being held this week.

7. Professional Standards Authority Performance Review 2020 to 2021

The Professional Standards Authority published their second annual performance review on Social Work England on the 27 May. We met 16 of the 18 standards. The review reflects the good work our teams have done in further establishing our role and implementing change in what remains a challenging environment. We are pleased that the review highlights how we have engaged with feedback from the Professional Standards Authority and demonstrated a commitment to improvement.

The review emphasises our commitment to engagement with stakeholders and co-production. It highlights how we provide up to date and accurate guidance to social workers, that we use research to inform policy, and how we have consulted effectively including on changes to continuing professional development requirements. It should also be noted that the Professional Standards Authority had received positive feedback from another UK regulator of social care about our responsiveness and proactivity.

The two standards which the Professional Standards Authority concluded that we did not meet are:

- Standard 3: The regulator understands the diversity of its registrants and their patients and service users and of others who interact with the regulator and ensures that its processes do not impose inappropriate barriers or otherwise disadvantage people with protected characteristics.
- Standard 17: The regulator identifies and prioritises all cases which suggest a serious risk to the safety of patients or service users and seeks interim orders where appropriate.

Both standards cover multiple aspects of our work, and while not meeting the standards the review does highlight progress made against both over the year. In relation to standard 3, the review noted the publication of our equality, diversity and inclusion statement of intent in February 2021. This was followed by the development of our equality, diversity and inclusion action plan as a further positive step, but that the plan was published shortly after the end of the 2020 to 2021 review period.

The review points to our commitment to gather data and intelligence on equality, diversity and inclusion, including through voluntary diversity data collection, research activity and engagement. We acknowledge our data remains limited, and as mentioned in this report we are taking active steps to address this matter.

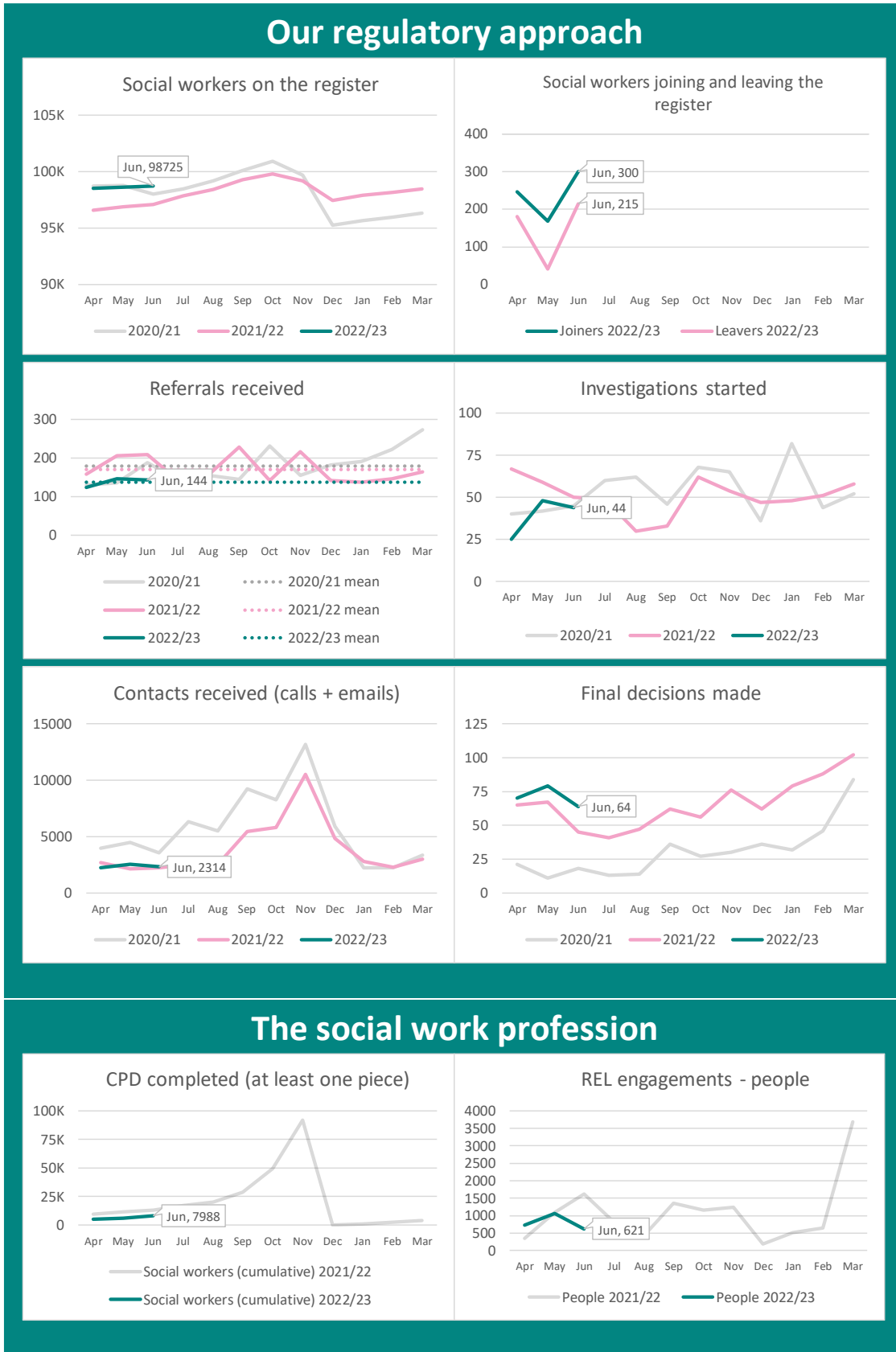
For standard 17, which looks at the need to risk assess and prioritise fitness to practise cases, the review acknowledged that we had made some progress, despite facing challenges. In not meeting the standard, the review raised that we had taken longer to make interim order decisions, particularly on new cases, and longer than other regulators. In making an interim order decision, our process includes additional steps which other regulators do not have to undertake which adds to the length of time to make a final decision. We are actively seeking changes to our Rules and Regulations which would remove the additional steps in our interim order process and improve our performance in this area.

8. Conclusion

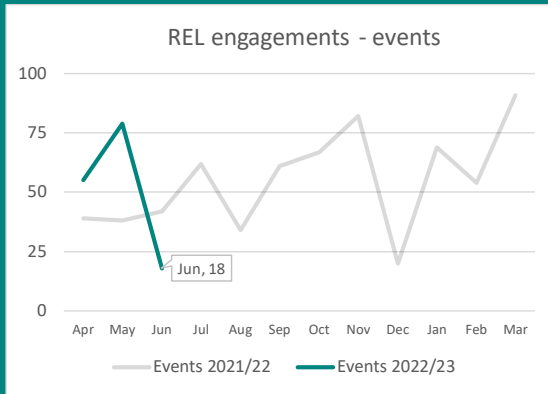
It is an important part of the annual cycle for any organisation to complete the Annual Report and Accounts and always good to have it completed on time and reported to this Board meeting. Of course, we are currently delivering what will become our annual report and accounts for next year. Our 1st Quarter report shows the organisation is on target against objectives and projections for the year. However, our plans for this year are ambitious and will require full capacity for momentum to be maintained.

9. Annexes

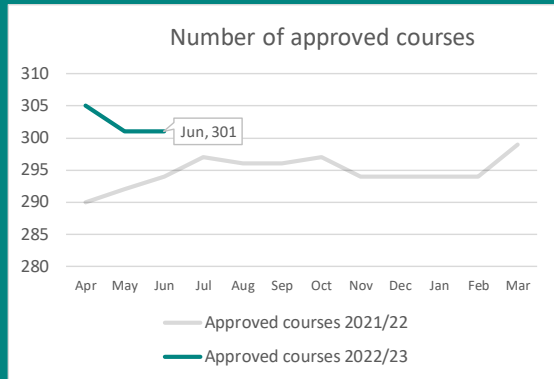
Annex 1: Dashboard Overview



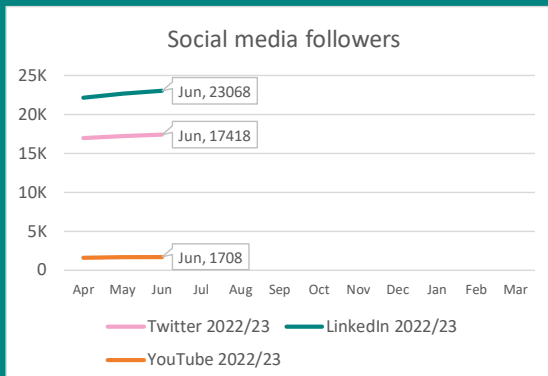
The social work profession



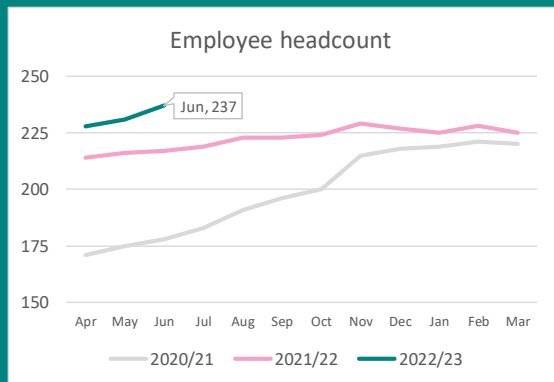
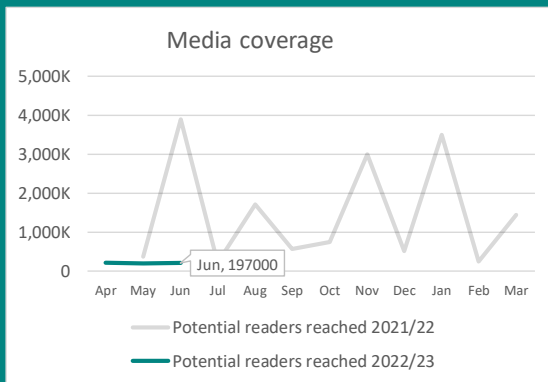
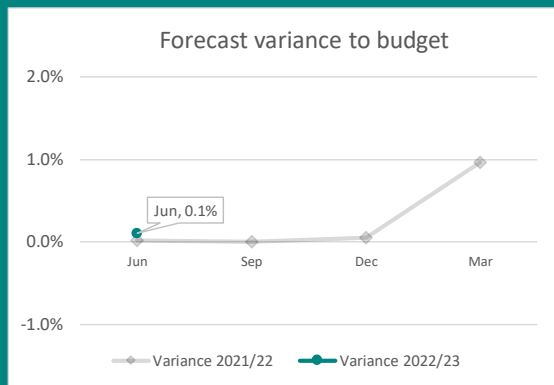
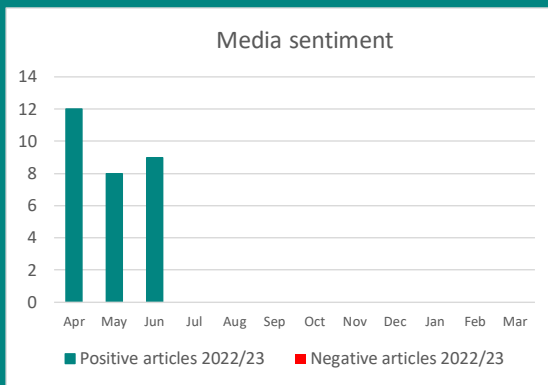
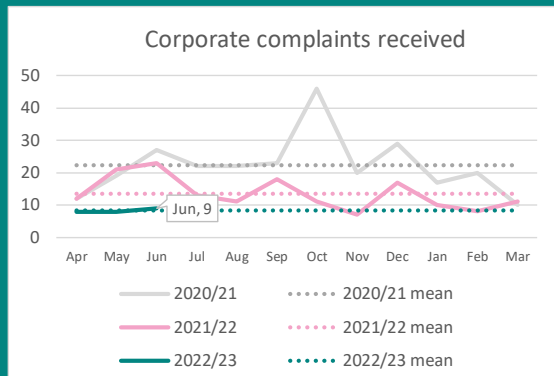
Education and training



The people we work with and for



Our organisation



Annex 2: Chief Executive's meetings with external organisations since the last meeting

Chair and Chief Executive of the Professional Standards Authority

Chief Executive and National Director of BASW

Ofsted National Director, Social Care

Chief Executive NMC

Think Ahead Summer Institute

Regular meeting with ALB CEOs and Permanent Secretary at DfE

Vice Chancellor, staff and students University of Bradford