

Fitness to Practise



2026

Fitness to Practise & Social Work England

Social Work England's overarching objective is to protect the public.

We do this by:

- protecting, promoting and maintaining the health, safety and wellbeing of the public
- promoting and maintaining public confidence in social workers in England
- promoting and maintaining proper professional standards for social workers in England



What is Fitness to Practise?

The current suitability of the social worker to hold registration and practise without restriction.

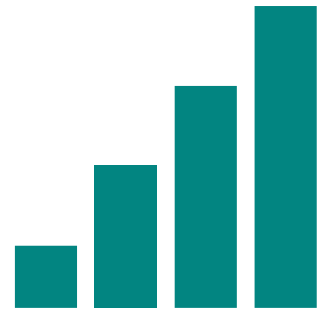
Protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public

Promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England

Promote and maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England

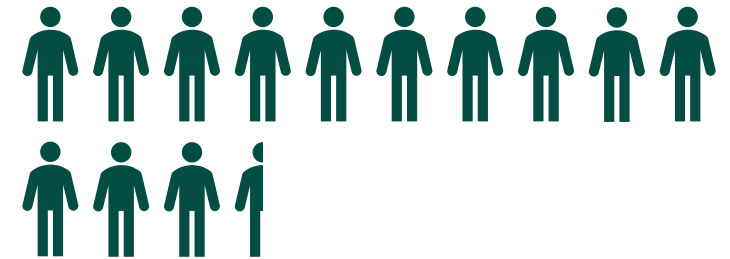
Fitness to practise data: 2024 to 2025

Total number of registered social workers: **104,857**



The number of concerns received

1,935
(1.8% of the register)



The number of cases that progressed to investigation (including adjournments)

431
(0.4% of the register)



The number of cases that progressed to a hearing

142
(0.1% of the register)



Key:

 = 142 people



What do we mean by serious?

Rule 3 of our fitness to practice rules (2019) states (amongst other considerations):

“...the regulator must determine whether there are reasonable grounds for investigating whether the registered social worker’s fitness to practise is impaired by applying the following criteria:

- (i) the **seriousness** of the concern by reference to the pursuit of the regulator’s over-arching objective;”

We must determine for each concern whether it is serious, at further consider this at each stage of the process. What we mean by ‘serious’ in terms of fitness to practise is a constant focus of our work, and we recently commissioned a piece of research exploring this

Professional standards

1

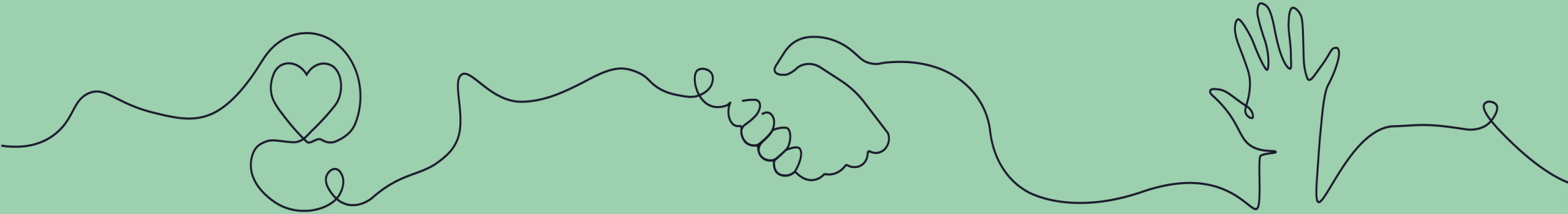
Promote the rights, strengths and wellbeing of people, families and communities.

2

Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of people.

3

Be accountable for the quality of my practice and the decisions I make.



4

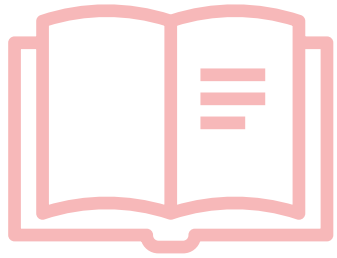
Maintain my continuing professional development.

5

Act safely, respectfully and with professional integrity.

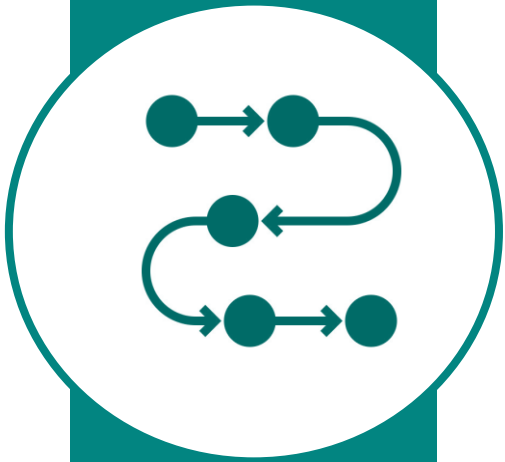
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Promote ethical practice and report concerns.

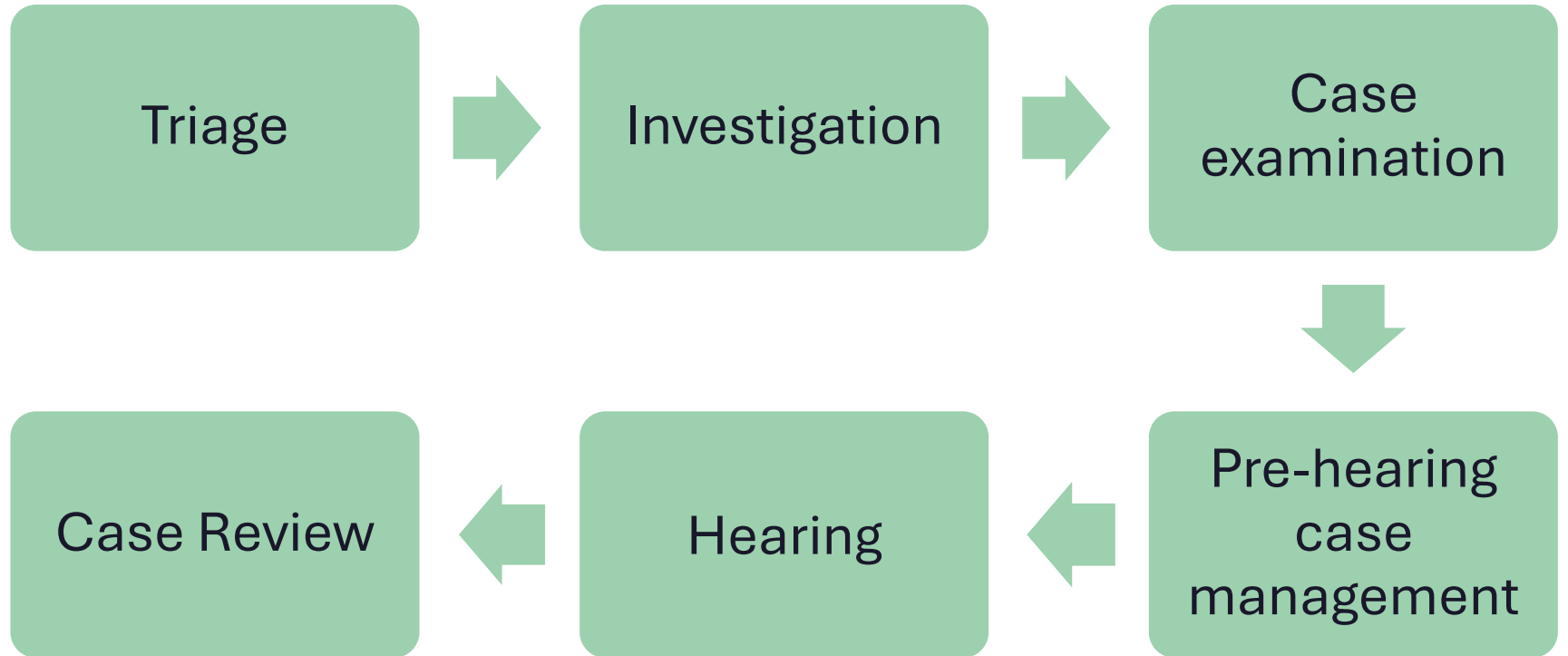


Grounds of impairment

- ✓ misconduct
- ✓ lack of competence or capability
- ✓ a conviction or caution in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence
- ✓ a criminal conviction elsewhere that would be a criminal offence if committed in England or Wales
- ✓ adverse physical or mental health
- ✓ a determination by another regulatory body that the social worker's fitness to practise is impaired
- ✓ being included in the Disclosure and Barring Service barred list or the Scottish Ministers' children's or adults' lists
- ✓ not having the necessary knowledge of English



Our fitness to practise process



What are the most common themes?

Members of the public



1. Dishonesty
2. Professional practice
3. Poor communication
4. Safeguarding
5. Bias and/or prejudicial treatment

Employers



1. Professional practice
2. Dishonesty
3. Safeguarding
4. Breaching professional boundaries
5. Involved/convicted – criminal proceedings



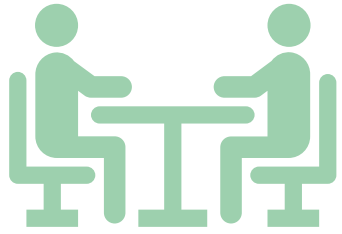
Triage criteria

- ✓ the seriousness of the concern by reference to the pursuit of the regulator's overarching objective
- ✓ the likely availability of sufficient evidence to support an allegation of impaired fitness to practise
- ✓ the concern suggests the registered social worker may have breached any relevant published professional or ethical guidance, rules, regulations, procedures or laws in place at the time of the events giving rise to the concern
- ✓ the outcome of, and subsequent actions arising from, an investigation carried out by a body
- ✓ whether the registered social worker is taking, or has successfully completed, remedial actions in respect of the concern
- ✓ whether the registered social worker has been subject to an adverse finding in any previous investigations by the regulator, its predecessors, or a body referred to in regulation 7, in matters relevant to the registered social worker's fitness to practise



What to expect during an investigation?

- ✓ Investigator and Lead investigator
- ✓ Notification of investigation within 14 days
- ✓ Evidence gathered from a wide range of sources
- ✓ Updates every 8 weeks or more
- ✓ Ongoing risk assessment throughout the process
- ✓ Reasonable adjustments and additional support
- ✓ Case report and bundle



Guiding principles and values

Fair

Impartial

Proportionate

Transparent



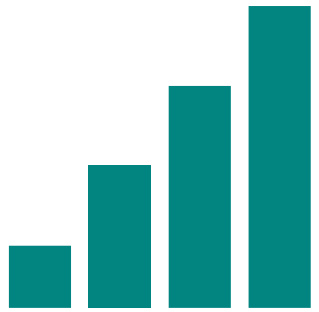
Single Point of Contact network (SPOC)

- ✓ Established in 2021
- ✓ National network
- ✓ 98% of local authorities
- ✓ Principal social workers and senior leaders
- ✓ Prevention and early engagement
- ✓ Relationship based approach
- ✓ Developing insights and data informed approaches
- ✓ Risk management and public protection



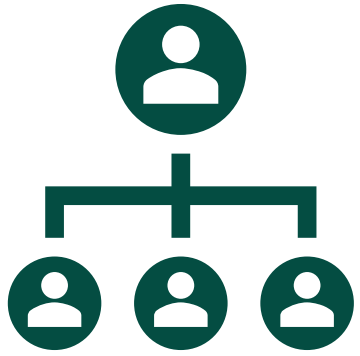
Professional Advisors

- ✓ Registered social workers
- ✓ Practice specific knowledge, advice and guidance
- ✓ Risk management and proportionality
- ✓ Part of the decision-making process at triage
- ✓ Develop lines of enquiry at investigations
- ✓ In-house training and team development
- ✓ Case specific



Case Examiners

- ✓ One lay and one professional
- ✓ Case examiners are independent decision makers
- ✓ Case examiners can offer an accepted disposal to the social worker
- ✓ Realistic prospect
- ✓ Case examiners can also refer a case to a hearing
- ✓ Case examiners will seek the minimum outcome necessary in the circumstances to protect the public



Hearings

- ✓ In nearly all cases hearing are held in public
- ✓ Hearing are made up of a chair, lay member, social worker, legal advisor
- ✓ In almost all cases hearings are held online
- ✓ Support and reasonable adjustments can be made to social workers and witnesses
- ✓ Statement of case and bundle will be provided to the social worker prior to the hearing taking place
- ✓ Notification of hearing

Thank you

