

NMC

Corporate Plan

2021–2022

Message from the Chief Executive and Registrar

2021–2022 is the second year of the NMC strategy for 2020–2025. That strategy launched in April 2020 as the first wave of the global pandemic intensified, set out clearly our purpose to regulate well; work in support of the public, the professionals on our register and our partners; and use our regulatory insight to influence health and social care policy. We set out an ambitious programme of work to deliver our purpose and improve our organisation.

The last year has seen us achieve a great deal and we are proud of so many successes including launching and maintaining the temporary register to increase workforce capacity in the crisis; introducing emergency and recovery education standards to support students and educators; working remotely to continue our services including the contact centre and establishing virtual hearings in fitness to practise.

To do all this we've been agile and responsive working collaboratively with our professionals and partners to agree what needed to be done, find solutions and implement them. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has worked with us over this pandemic-affected year, we couldn't have done it without you.

Our greatest thanks are reserved for the nurses, midwives, nursing

associates and nursing and midwifery students. As leaders, newly qualified professionals, experienced practitioners, returners to the temporary register or students, this last year has been challenging personally and professionally. They have given so much and some have lost so much. Their dedication and commitment inspire us all at the NMC to do the best we can to promote and support the high professional standards that protect the public.

Many of our achievements in the last year did not feature in our new strategy. While our purpose to regulate, support and influence and our new values to be fair, kind, ambitious and collaborative guided everything we did, some of the specific initiatives we'd planned for the year could not proceed as we originally envisaged. The pandemic also affected our work,

contributing, for example to a backlog in our fitness to practise cases. These factors will have a significant impact on our priorities for the year ahead.

The future is also uncertain – the vaccine programme is a fantastic success and brings real hope of recovery from Covid-19 but what twists and turns will there be along the way? We can see the pressures on the workforce. The consequences of Brexit are yet to be fully realised. The Government's White Paper 'Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all' brings the promise of long-awaited regulatory reform but the timetable and specific proposals for us are as yet unclear.

We have a good basis to build from but with the delays to our strategic programmes, operational pressures and an uncertain environment, this is not a time for us to be complacent. Our corporate priorities for the year ahead set out in this plan reflect our ambition to continue to develop.

The Fitness to Practise recovery is vitally important, and we have plans to resolve the backlog through investment and improvement. But that won't be our only priority. For example, we will complete our work on post-registration standards so we can move in subsequent years of the strategy to considering advanced nurse practice and the review of the Code. And we will continue to focus on making the NMC a truly great place to work by continuing to transform our support for colleagues; improve IT systems and kit; and reimagine how we work at home and in our offices.

There's a lot for us to do, no doubt. We've just come through the toughest of years when we've also had personal as well as professional trials and tribulations to cope with. There's been a lot of change – including the sad and unexpected departure of our Chair Philip Graf and the welcome arrival of four new Council members.

But despite all this, we've made a difference. Our teams are talented and dedicated and we are continuing to recruit enthusiastic, expert new colleagues. We have embraced new ways of working and we are determined to succeed.

I am extremely grateful to my colleagues across the organisation, the senior team and Council for everything they have done in 2020–2021. I know that working collaboratively together, being fair and kind we will realise the ambitions we have set out in this plan for 2021–2022.

Andrea Sutcliffe
Chief Executive and Registrar



Who we are and what we do

Our vision is safe, effective, and kind nursing and midwifery that improves everyone's health and wellbeing. As the professional regulator of almost 732,000 nursing and midwifery professionals, we have an important role to play in making this a reality.

Our core role is to **regulate**. First, we promote high professional standards for nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England. Second, we maintain the register of professionals eligible to practise. Third, we investigate concerns about nurses, midwives and nursing associates – something that affects less than one percent of professionals each year. We believe in giving professionals the chance to address concerns, but we'll always take action when needed.

To regulate well, we **support** our professions and the public. We create resources and guidance that are useful throughout people's careers,

helping them to deliver our standards in practice and address new challenges. We also support people involved in our investigations, and we're increasing our visibility so people feel engaged and empowered to shape our work.

Regulating and supporting our professions allows us to **influence** health and social care. We share intelligence from our regulatory activities and work with our partners to support workforce planning and sector-wide decision making. We use our voice to speak up for a healthy and inclusive working environment for our professions.

Our values

We're fair

We treat everyone fairly. Fairness is at the heart of our role as a trusted, transparent regulator and employer.

We're kind

We act with kindness and in a way that values people, their insights, situations and experiences.

We're collaborative

We value our relationships (both within and outside of the NMC) and recognise that we're at our best when we work well with others.

We're ambitious

We take pride in our work. We're open to new ways of working and always aim to do our best for the professionals on our register, the public we serve and each other.



Photograph taken pre-pandemic

I Our strategy

2021–2022 marks the second year of our five-year strategy to 2025. You can read our full strategy [on our website](#).

Our role 2020–2025

Regulate

- An accurate and transparent **register**
- Robust professional and educational **standards**
- Assuring education **programmes**
- Responding fairly to **fitness-to-practice (FtP) concerns**

Support

- Promote **understanding** - our professions and our role
- Provide **practical tools** - help embed standards
- **Emotional/practical support** - people involved in our processes

Influence

- Promote positive and inclusive **professional working environments**
- Share **data and insight** to identify risks of harm and address workforce challenges
- Encourage **regulatory innovation**

Themes 2020–2025

Innovation and improvement

Proactive support

Visible and better informed

Engaging and empowering

Insight and influence



Context for the year ahead

Recovering from the coronavirus pandemic

We played a crucial role in supporting the health and social care sector to increase the workforce during the first year of the pandemic.

We established a Covid-19 temporary register, and invited nurses and midwives who had left our permanent register after March 2015 to join. We also invited specific groups of overseas-trained professionals who had not yet joined our permanent register. There were 16,077 nurses and midwives registered on the Covid-19 temporary register on 28 February 2021.

The pandemic meant we had to adapt quickly to home working. We also had to pause our fitness to practise casework except for the highest risk cases, and adapt our onsite working practices. This meant that our fitness to practise caseload rose significantly. And we had to re-plan work that we had intended to deliver in the first year of our five-year strategy.

Now with the success of the vaccination programme and restrictions easing, we'll concentrate our efforts in three areas during 2021–2022:

1. maintaining our Covid-19 temporary register for as long as necessary
2. bringing colleagues back into the office while keeping the advantages of flexible working
3. reducing the fitness to practise caseload.



Photograph taken pre-pandemic

Reducing our fitness to practise caseload

We start 2021–2022 with a very high fitness to practise caseload. This is due to a combination of factors that have affected us over the last year, rather than an increase in referrals.

The caseload was beginning to increase toward the end of 2019–2020. This was partly due to new, person-centred ways of working which were taking longer. It was also partly due to vacancies in key teams, such as screening and investigations.

We'd started to address this increase in cases. But the pandemic meant that we needed to make some decisions about fitness to practise that increased our caseload further.

- Prioritise activity to manage immediate risks to the public. This concentrated on interim orders, interim order reviews and substantive orders, and extending interim orders through the courts where necessary. To do this we created the facility to run virtual hearings.
- Prioritise cases where the outcome of the investigation indicated that it was likely to close at the Case Examiner stage. This enabled nurses and midwives to help with the pandemic response without the concern of an open fitness to practise referral.
- Suspend other fitness to practise casework where there was no immediate risk to the public, so as not to divert frontline health and care professionals from the response to the pandemic.

The impact is that we now have an excessively high caseload. We know that delays in casework have a significant negative impact on everyone involved in our processes, especially members of the public and people on our register who are waiting for their cases to move forward.

Reducing our fitness to practise caseload is the cornerstone of our 2021–2022 corporate plan. We want to make changes that reduce the caseload quickly, building on our existing work in fitness to practise and creating long lasting improvements to the way we regulate.

To reduce the caseload as quickly as possible we're redesigning the processes that support our regulatory work and investing in additional resources.

We want to create long-lasting improvements that will help us make the right decisions, at the right time. So we're also working with employers to resolve cases quickly, locally, wherever that's appropriate.

Making our processes fair to everyone

We're clear about our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) responsibilities as a leading healthcare regulator. We're ambitious about what we can achieve when we promote best practice in equality, and work with others to ensure our processes, and the wider sector, are rooted in fairness.

We have four strands to our EDI approach – clear policy, effective communication, valuing our people and solid evidence. These four strands are underpinned by effective leadership at all levels.

We have a dedicated EDI team providing advice and guidance, building relationships, scrutinising our compliance and driving progress. It will continue to support colleagues to use EDI tools effectively, such as equality impact assessments.

We also have an EDI Leadership Group which is responsible for overseeing improvements in all areas of our organisation. And our internal employee networks bring colleagues together in a supportive and celebratory way, and provide invaluable insight on issues affecting minority groups.

For the first time in 2020 we submitted data to the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES). We also published our disability and ethnicity pay gap reports, alongside our gender pay gap report. We became the first professional health and care regulator to sign up to WRES and one of few organisations nationally to publish information on our ethnicity pay gap.

This year, we want to build on the foundations we laid in 2020 to promote equality within the NMC.

To make our own work fairer, we'll launch the second phase of our **Ambitious for Change** research in 2021. It will look at why different groups of professionals experience different outcomes when they go through our processes, what the impacts are and what we can do, with others, to address the differences.

Externally we'll continue to collaborate with partners at other regulatory bodies, specialists across healthcare and EDI organisations to ensure we hear a wide range of voices on the issues that really matter. We'll work alongside experts to drive forward change across the sector together.

Making progress with our strategic ambitions

Although recovering from the coronavirus pandemic and reducing our fitness to practise caseload are high priorities, our strategic ambitions remain intact.

Making progress with our strategic ambitions by improving the way we regulate, enhancing our support and strengthening our influence will continue to shape our work in the year ahead. Our experience of the pandemic has reinforced our resolve to deliver on the ambitious plans we originally set out.



Our commitments for 2021–2022

Innovation and improvement

1 Reduce the fitness to practise caseload and improve how we handle concerns



2 Update the test that international nurses and midwives take to join our register



Proactive support for professionals

3 Deliver new post-registration standards



4 Decide whether to propose changes to programme standards for pre-registration education



More visible and better informed

We'll develop a more systematic approach to stakeholder engagement across the four nations of the UK. We'll also develop a new approach for our outreach service.



Empowering and engaging

5 Build trust in nursing and midwifery regulation



Greater insight and influence

6 Work with the Government on regulatory reform for better, safer regulation



7 Get smarter at data, insight and influence standards for pre-registration education



Fit for future

8 Improve the way the NMC is structured and develop our people



9 Update digital systems to improve the experience for customers and colleagues



10 Create workspaces that support wellbeing and flexible working



Cross-cutting priorities that underpin our commitments

Deliver our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) commitments



Recruit and on board our new Chair



Return colleagues to our offices and establish hybrid working



Monitored through corporate performance measures



Our corporate commitments for 2021–2022

Our core role is to regulate nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England.

We do this by:

- maintaining an accurate and transparent register of midwives, nurses and nursing associates
- maintaining the Covid-19 temporary register as long as necessary
- setting robust education and professional standards
- quality assuring nursing and midwifery education
- responding fairly to concerns about midwives, nurses and nursing associates.

The following corporate commitments support our core role. We've presented each commitment under our strategic themes for 2020–2025.



Photograph taken pre-pandemic

Innovation and improvement

To improve and innovate across all our regulatory functions, providing better customer service, and maximising the public benefit from what we do.

Commitment 1

Reduce the fitness to practise caseload and improve how we handle people's concerns about nursing and midwifery professionals.

Owner: Executive Director of Professional Regulation

We want to reduce the fitness to practise caseload and make long term improvements to foster a fairer culture in health and social care by:

- delivering sustained improvement by applying the principles of our new approach to fitness to practise, putting ourselves in other people's shoes and fostering a fairer culture which encourages openness and learning
- providing better information for people who raise concerns and supporting local resolution of concerns where it's appropriate
- investing in additional resources to increase our capacity.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- bringing in new colleagues and supporting all of our colleagues to address the caseload
- improving our information about what we can and can't do so that we reduce the number of referrals that we close at the start of our processes
- strengthening our assessment of potential concerns when they're raised
- delivering changes to our fitness to practise processes which improve our overall efficiency and effectiveness.

Commitment 2

Update the test that international nurses and midwives take to join our register.

Owner: Executive Director of Professional Regulation and Assistant Director, Registration and Revalidation

We want to update our test for assessing the skills and knowledge of overseas applicants and those wanting to re-join our register after a period away from practice.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- introducing a new 'test of competence' for these two groups, reflecting our innovative new standards for nursing and midwifery

- engaging extensively with partners to help candidates for the new test to prepare, including promoting a series of supporting material
- tendering for new contracts for test centres, currently in three locations across the UK.



Photograph taken pre-pandemic

Proactive support for professionals

Enabling our professions to uphold our standards today and tomorrow, anticipating and shaping future nursing and midwifery practice.

Commitment 3

Deliver new education standards that build on ambitions for community and public health nursing in the UK.

Owner: Executive Director of Professional Practice

We want to make sure that our professional standards for nurses, midwives and nursing associates continue to meet the needs of the people they serve. Our standards need to be ambitious, so that our professions have the right knowledge and skills now and in the future.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- launching a four-month public consultation on draft post-registration standards, which equip the next generation of community and public health nurses to care for people in a rapidly changing world

- using feedback from the consultation to revise our draft post-registration standards, to make sure they will equip the next generation of community and public health nurses with the right proficiencies to care for people in a rapidly changing world
- preparing to publish the new standards by liaising with partners and engaging with registrants involved in community, public health and other specialist nursing practise.

Commitment 4

Use evidence and research to decide whether to propose changes to our programme standards for pre-registration education.

Owner: Executive Director of Professional Practice

We want to make sure that the next generation of nurses, midwives and nursing associates are prepared for new challenges in the changing world of health and social care.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- deciding whether to ask for Council's approval to change the programme standards for nursing and midwifery education (and amend the programme standards for nursing associates)

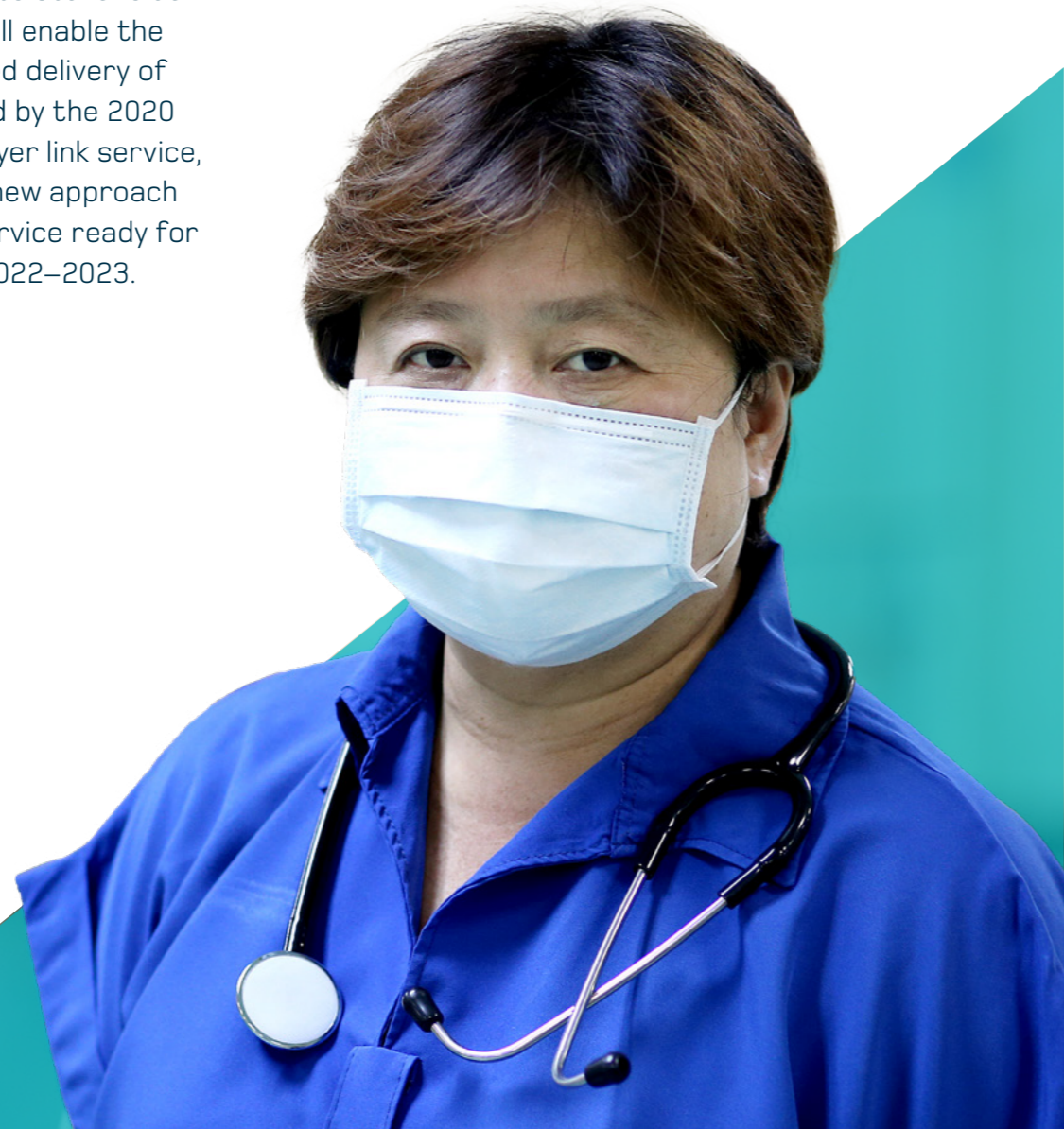
- if we do propose changes, working with stakeholders to co-produce evidence-based programme standards that are focused on outcomes, so that students can demonstrate safe and effective training at the point of registration
- then preparing to consult on any proposed amended standards.



More visible and better informed

We work in close contact with our professions, their employers, and their educators so we can regulate with a deeper understanding of the learning and care environment in each country of the UK.

We'll proactively communicate and engage with the professionals on our register, our partners and the public, using a mix of two-way channels. Importantly, we'll review and develop our presence across the four nations of the UK, with a more systematic and targeted approach to stakeholder engagement. This will enable the regional and devolved delivery of our strategy. Guided by the 2020 review of the employer link service, we'll also develop a new approach for our outreach service ready for implementation in 2022–2023.



Empowering and engaging

Actively engaging with and empowering the public, our professions and partners. An NMC that is trusted and responsive, actively building an understanding of what we and our professionals do for people.

Commitment 5

Build people's trust in nursing and midwifery professional regulation through better understanding.

Owner: Executive Director of Communications and Engagement

We want professionals, students and the public to know what we stand for, what we do and don't do, and where we are heading.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- developing an 'NMC and You' programme of communications and engagement across the four countries of the UK
- carrying out research to provide these groups with the information they need, when they want it and how they like to receive it
- developing a more accessible and inclusive identity that fosters better interaction with us and demonstrates our values
- developing information campaigns for professionals, students and the public to build trust and confidence in what we do.

Insight and influence

Learning from data and research to improve what we do and working collaboratively to share insights responsibly to help improve the wider health and care system.

Commitment 6

Work with the Government to remove legal barriers that limit improvements in the way we regulate, so we can deliver better, safer regulation for the public.

Owner: Executive Director of Strategy and Insight

Our legislation was written in 2001 and our expectations of care, and how care is delivered, have changed hugely. With more modern, flexible legislation we will be better placed to continue to enable professionals to provide excellent care for people across the UK.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- responding to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) consultation on the principles of regulatory reform (Regulating healthcare professionals, protecting the public)

- developing our policy so that we can influence the content of the legislation
- developing draft model rules to inform the consultation on our legislation in 2022
- preparing for the consultation on our new legislation in 2022.

Commitment 7

Get smarter at using our data, insight and influence.

Owner: Executive Director of Strategy and Insight

We want to improve how we gather and understand data, and carry out research to enhance our insight into how we can work more effectively, tackle inequalities, and influence health and social care.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- delivering the next stage of our work looking at disparities in fitness to practise referrals and case outcomes
- playing our part in improving the safety, quality, and culture of maternity services in the UK

- putting foundations in place to improve our data, insights and analytical capability
- working toward publishing our first annual insight report on the context in which our professions learn and work.



Photograph taken pre-pandemic

Fit for future organisation

Our strategic aims have significant implications for how we operate as an organisation. We need to make sure we have the right capabilities, processes, and resources to fulfil our ambitions for the strategic period ahead.

Commitment 8

Continue to improve the way our organisation is structured, and develop our people so that we can deliver our strategy.

Owner: Executive Director of People and Organisational Effectiveness

The way we're structured as an organisation can help us to support safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice. Developing our organisational design helps us to deliver our strategy:

- establish smarter ways of working
- reduce silo working and encourage a 'one NMC' approach to policy, learning, communications and intelligence
- be more effective and efficient in our work, internally and externally.

We'll also make sure our people are at the heart of our work. We'll become a more inclusive employer that develops its people, making sure they're properly rewarded.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- carrying out a review of the way we work in key areas with an action plan to be implemented by the end of the year
- implementing a new people plan that focusses on career progression, delivering a modern pay framework and prioritising EDI.

Commitment 9

Upgrade our digital tools and systems to make it easier for people to connect with us and for NMC colleagues to do their jobs well.

Owner: Executive Director of Resources and Technology Services

We'll keep modernising the systems that support our regulatory work. This will help to improve our customer service. It will also help us use data to improve our work and influence the wider health and social care sector.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- improving the performance of our digital network, upgrading our computer operating system, using new collaborative tools, and upgrading our video conferencing facilities
- delivering the next stage of work to move our register to a more modern system and planning how we'll deliver a new case management system in the future.

Commitment 10

Create workspaces that support wellbeing and collaboration between those working remotely or in the office.

Owner: Executive Director of Resources and Technology Services

We're developing plans for more modern working environments, to support better collaboration and new ways of working. We'll consider everything we've learnt from the success of remote working during the coronavirus pandemic. This will help us serve the professionals on our register, our partners and the public.

Our work in 2021–2022 will include:

- moving our colleagues in Edinburgh to a more modern office
- supporting colleagues to return to our offices safely
- planning for the refurbishment of our office at 23 Portland Place.

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