



Review of Social Work Regulation: Terms of Reference

Background

Social workers are at the heart of our care and health system, working with a range of different agencies, to ensure individuals get the support they need. As part of this, they play a range of essential roles – helping and supporting individuals and families, protecting vulnerable children and adults from harm and abuse, and enabling and supporting people to lead independent, fulfilling lives.

Part 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out how social workers are regulated, including establishing the framework to create Social Work England (SWE), the independent body which maintains standards for the profession which ultimately supports some of the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society. It also creates powers for the Secretary of State for Education and for Health and Social Care, including setting improvement standards and ensuring adequate provision of social work training.

Under section 64 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Secretary of State is required to commission an independent person to undertake a review of the operation of Part 2 of the 2017 Act.

Dame Annie Hudson has been appointed to conduct a review in accordance with these requirements and to ensure that the regulation of social work is fit for purpose, and benefits both the professionals it oversees and the individuals it aims to protect.

Scope

The primary purpose of this independent review is assessing the effectiveness and impact of Social Work England. The Reviewer will assess how effectively Social Work England is discharging its statutory functions and delivering against the overarching objectives set out in the Act, which are to:

- protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and well-being of the public;
- promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England; and
- promote and maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England.

In carrying out the review, the Reviewer will:

- Assess the establishment of SWE and the transfer of powers from the Health and Care Professions Council to SWE.
- Assess the regulatory mandate of SWE as set out by the 2017 Act, and review the Social Workers Regulations 2018, to understand how SWE are delivering against the legislation in co-ordination with other bodies concerned with the delivery of social care functions in England and the Devolved Administrations.
- Evaluate SWE's governance and accountability mechanisms, including reporting on activities and providing information and advice.
- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of SWE's core regulatory functions: registration, professional standards, education and training standards and approval including for Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMPHs) and Best Interests Assessors (BIAs), and fitness to practise.
- Assess the delivery of the Secretary of State's powers as set out in the 2017 Act in relation to SWE's fees income; grants; oversight of SWE's transparency and performance; the use of improvement standards as set out in the 2017 Act for social workers; and to ensure adequate provision of social work training.
- Assess how SWE's functions relate to the wider social work landscape, with particular reference to how initial education and training standards and professional standards align with others, including those from government.

In addition, the Reviewer will consider the current model of professional regulation for social workers and make recommendations on whether any changes to SWE's delivery of its functions are needed to enable more efficient and effective regulation and / or to improve the standards of social work practice.

Review lead and structure

The Secretary of State has appointed Dame Annie Hudson to undertake this Review.

As set out in the 2017 Act, the Reviewer will consult representatives of the social work profession and anyone else that the Reviewer considers appropriate. The review will be undertaking a programme of engagement in Autumn 2025 to hear from social workers across adults and children's social work as well as others with experience and expertise in social work practice and regulation.

In addition, a reference group will be established to act as a critical friend to the lead Reviewer as they conduct the independent review into the operation of Part 2 of the 2017 Act.

Timeline

The Review will commence in November 2025 and is expected to conclude by Spring 2026. The Secretary of State will lay both the report and a formal response to the report before Parliament.

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