

Reflection, accountability and action

This is a sobering moment for all of us at the NMC. It will also be of real concern to nurses, midwives and nursing associates, and to the public we serve.

As the executive team accountable for leading the organisation, we are sorry for the completely unacceptable experiences of racism, discrimination and bullying described in Nazir Afzal and Rise Associates' report. We are equally sorry that people haven't felt safe to speak up about these issues or able to have confidence that they will be dealt with.

Safeguarding people involved in our processes

Our casework brings us into contact with members of the public, employers and professionals on our register, and we have a responsibility to recognise if anyone has any vulnerabilities that we need to consider.

As highlighted in the report, since April 2023, six people have died by suicide or suspected suicide while under, or having concluded, fitness to practise investigation. We offer our sincere condolences to their relatives.

Since January, as the executive safeguarding lead, Sam has led the expansion of resources for the safeguarding team. She is increasing knowledge and training, alongside strengthening our operating procedures. This builds on work we started several months ago to better understand how we can improve our processes to reduce the impact and risk of harm to people. Sam and colleagues will complete this work by September.

We are also establishing a safeguarding hub, which will provide advice to staff working in fitness to practise.

Culture and regulation are intertwined

The independent report is clear about the link between regulatory performance and our culture. One affects the other and this has created a pressurised environment for our people, which has led to poor behaviours and concerning case outcomes in some areas. It has seriously undermined our collective efforts to reach quick, fair and safe decisions across all our casework.

We offer our sincere apologies to anyone involved in a case who has waited too long for a decision, or who hasn't been treated at all times with fairness and kindness – whether they are professionals on the register, employers or members of the public.

An organisation of multiple cultures

Nazir and Rise's review has held a mirror up to life at the NMC. Two people passing each other in a corridor can have very different experiences of working here – some have had experiences of racism, discrimination and bullying, which come across vividly in this report.

To those colleagues we wish to say, we have heard you and we apologise sincerely for what you have been through. Racism, discrimination and bullying should never have had any place at the NMC – where it has been raised with us in the past, we haven't taken enough action to address it and hold people to account. Nazir's recommendations will take us some of the way to ensuring we achieve racial equity at the NMC.

We asked Nazir and Rise to do this review after a whistleblower raised concerns about racism and colleagues feeling fearful to speak up within the NMC. They were right to do so, and opening ourselves up to this degree of independent scrutiny was the right response. It means that a failure to change going forward is simply not an option. We've never had such a wide-ranging review of the cultural issues within our organisation, and we want to thank everyone who has shared their lived experience.

We're sure that sharing these testimonies will have been immensely difficult for people. We want to take action to stop any repeat. If you see or experience anything that isn't right, please contact Anuska Casas Pinto, our new independent Empowered to Speak Up Guardian, on contact@theguardianservice.co.uk, 0333 733 4483. We promise to help you to find a solution to put an end to any poor or unacceptable behaviour you are experiencing.

Senior leaders commit to doing better

Among the report's findings is a failure of senior leadership to rise to the challenges facing the NMC. Nazir says there is a need for leadership to 'depart from a position where bad behaviours are tolerated, where they consult but fail to collaborate and where confidence is replaced by defensiveness.'

Culture is shaped by what leaders tolerate. It's clear that on our watch some people have behaved in completely unacceptable ways that should have been called out and tackled much sooner. We accept this has contributed to colleagues feeling uncomfortable or even unsafe to speak up, or unconfident that appropriate action will be taken if they do.

We recognise that we must demonstrate much greater cohesion as an executive team and that we must be accountable for role modelling the behaviours we expect of colleagues across the organisation. This starts from today.

Starting with the Executive Board, from September, we will be rolling out 360 feedback to all leaders and managers as part of our ambitious appraisals. We will also increase investment in leadership and management, to ensure we develop better, more consistent approaches across the organisation. We will continue with improvements to our people service to support better recruitment, development and retention of colleagues at all levels.

Accepting the recommendations

Change starts now with our full acceptance of the recommendations that Nazir and his team have identified. This acceptance marks a turning point for the NMC – we must change because our culture is only as good as the poorest individual experience. That means we have a very long way to go.

Some of our colleagues and stakeholders will want to see immediate action, while others will prefer us to take the time to reflect carefully on the right way forward. Work starts now to strike the right balance for everyone.

Importantly, in addition to safeguarding, we've already started to address some of the other regulatory issues identified in Nazir's report, including:

- in March our Council agreed a £30m investment in an 18-month plan to make a step change in fitness to practise, with a clear goal to reach decisions in a more timely and considerate way – we will ensure this takes account of Nazir's recommendations going forwards
- in February we strengthened the guidance we use to make decisions on concerns about sexual misconduct and other forms of abuse outside professional practice – making it absolutely clear that whether they occur within or outside a work setting, we take these concerns extremely seriously.

How we'll enable culture change

Now that we have the report, we will work with our people and seek input from our partners to deliver a meaningful, sustainable programme of change. Over the next few weeks, we will talk to colleagues across the NMC about how we deliver Nazir's recommendations.

Together, we will all progress this culture change programme with speed but not haste, learning from previous occasions when colleagues have shared their experiences with

us, and reports have been delivered, but we have failed to take decisive action and follow through on the promise of change.

Further immediate actions

Culture change takes time but there are immediate steps we are taking in response to Nazir and Rise's report.

- We will appoint an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) advisor to the Executive Board to support decision making.
- We will work to increase the diversity of the Executive Board.
- The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian is now available to colleagues to raise concerns and get independent support from a trained professional.
- Listening circles facilitated by trained professionals are now available for all colleagues to enable them to openly discuss and decompress about issues raised in the report.
- We've invested in a partner to improve psychological safety in teams, starting in our Professional Regulation directorate which includes fitness to practise, and registration and revalidation.
- We are extending the offer of decompression support to any colleagues working on sensitive casework. This involves professional counselling from a trained psychologist.
- We are doubling the amount we spend on learning and development. By October, this investment should enable us to start rolling out improvements in leadership and line management, safeguarding, casework and tackling some of the behaviours in the report such as microaggressions. An external equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) partner is undertaking a review of our EDI learning and making further recommendations to improve our mandatory training.
- We are actively working on a new behavioural framework to support recruitment, development, career progression and performance management, for launch in September.

Our vision

Together with our colleagues, we will strive to become an organisation where any two people passing each other in a corridor are enjoying their roles, and feeling proud to work in a safe and inclusive environment at the NMC.

To enable this, we want to see teams working collaboratively in a culture of openness and learning. We want to foster emotionally intelligent management without exception. We want everyone to feel confident that they can speak up about things that concern them, knowing their voices will be heard and responded to. We want people to feel that they have fair opportunities to progress their careers. Ultimately, we want to create a new NMC with one culture, which makes everyone feel proud.

This is what everyone who works at the NMC deserves, and the benefit won't be theirs alone – it will help us to deliver our regulatory work to the high standards that nursing and midwifery professionals, and the public, rightly expect.




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