

Public Voice Forum: 9 December 2025

Summary meeting notes

Public Voice Forum (PVF) members came together for the last meeting of 2025.

Main agenda items were:

1. Corporate updates from Julia Corkey, Executive Director, Communications and Engagement.
2. Presentation and discussion on the proposed changes to the Fitness to Practise (FtP) rules from Darren Shell, Head of Policy and Legislation and Sinead McKenna, Legal Lead, Legislative Change.
3. Practice Learning update following the Council meeting by Suma Das, Standards Development Specialist.
4. Wrap up of 2025 forum engagement by Miles Wallace, Deputy Director, Communications and Engagement.

1. Corporate updates from Julia Corkey, Executive Director, Communications and Engagement.

Introductions

Julia Corkey opened the meeting by paying tribute to Edward Welsh, the NMC's former Executive Director of Communications and Engagement, who sadly passed away recently and acknowledged his instrumental role in establishing the Public Voice Forum. She also thanked Philip Bell for his contributions to the forum as he steps down due to health reasons. She then welcomed Kirralee Glass, a Strategic Engagement Officer from the General Medical Council (GMC), who shadowed the meeting.

Impact of current financial pressures

Julia provided a detailed update on the NMC's financial position, driven by a decade of freezing the registration fee, which has reduced income in real terms by 28%. This financial shortfall has necessitated drawing on the organisation's reserves, a position that is not sustainable in the long term.. Due to the financial situation, the NMC is proposing its first registration fee increase in 10 years, raising the annual fee from £120 to £143 (an equivalent of £1.92 per month).

The NMC is concluding a staff consultation (mid-December) on a restructure proposing the removal of 145 roles (with a third already vacant) to achieve annual savings of £9.1m, through a combination of the workforce reductions and £3.1m of non-staff cost

savings. Julia gave reassurance that core regulatory functions have been protected, and support is being provided to affected colleagues.

Despite some changes internally, Julia confirmed it will retain dedicated public engagement staff and remains committed to incorporating public engagement across the wider organisation.

NMC Register data

Julia shared the latest register data [published](#) on 5 November, the total number of people on the register has reached a record high of 860,801. International recruitment growth has slowed significantly, primarily due to a substantial 49.6% drop in new international professionals joining the register in the last six months compared to the same period the previous year.

Commitment to EDI and Midwifery Action Plan

In relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Julia set out that the NMC's leadership is fully committed to EDI, which is integrated into stretching three year Culture Transformation programme. She mentioned that the EDI team has grown significantly to support the NMC's efforts in implementing our new EDI targets and driving culture transformation.

Julia shared with the forum that in November we [published](#) a detailed midwifery action plan, outlining work to ensure safe, equitable, and person centred maternity care, with a focus on Black maternal health and supporting midwives.

Future campaign on referrals to FtP

Julia outlined a future priority to review the process for employer and public referrals into Fitness to Practice. Given that 90% of public referrals are screened out at the first stage, the NMC will be seeking the forum's input on developing a campaign and intervention strategy to ensure the right referrals go to the right place at the right time.

Q&A

Members were invited to ask questions. The Q&A session primarily focused on the scale and impact of the NMC's proposed staff restructure and financial measures, alongside necessary assurances regarding strategic priorities and staff wellbeing.

Members sought clarity on the financial rationale behind the planned staff reductions, with Julia explaining that the proposal to remove 145 roles (of which some are vacancies) is a necessary step to address the deficit budget incurred over the last two years due to the decade long fee freeze. This move is projected to save the organisation £9.2 million per year, and while the number of staff redundancies will be lower than the number of roles removed, the final figures are pending the closure of the consultation. The NMC reassured the group that certain critical areas, have been protected from these reductions, and that core functions remain safe.

Questions also arose regarding whether remaining staff would be overburdened. Julia confirmed that the goal is not to expect staff to "do more with less," but rather to ensure greater efficiency, prioritisation, and improved workload management.

Furthermore, in response to queries about reducing overheads like office space, Julia explained that the main London office is held on minimal rent, and that current hybrid working patterns mean existing rented offices are already at full capacity.

Finally, members thanked Julia for the NMC's focus on midwives and maternal health, and she confirmed that the Midwifery Action Plan and the review of the Code are taking into account the learnings from national maternity reviews to ensure support is reflective of the modern midwifery workforce.

2. Fitness to Practise Rules consultation (part 1)

On 3 November 2025, we [announced](#) that we are consulting on changes to our rules that govern our Fitness to Practise process. This consultation is open for 12 weeks from 3 November 2025 to 26 January 2026.

The easy read consultation is available [here](#).

At today's meeting, forum members had the opportunity to input into the consultation and help shape what the current proposals could like. Darren Shell, Head of Policy and Legislation and Sinead McKenna, Legal Lead, Legislative Change provided an overview of the proposals and opportunities for members to shape elements of this work.

FtP breakout discussions (part 1)

We asked members to consider and discuss the following questions:

Legally qualified chairs

- a) Would appointing legally qualified chairs make you confident that hearings and meetings are fairer?
- b) If we make changes, what should we consider to make sure hearings are fair and accessible for everyone?

Case management powers

- c) Would giving more directions for the preparation of the case make the process more overwhelming?
- d) If legally qualified chairs give directions without meeting with the registrant or NMC case presenter, would this be fair?

Legally Qualified Chairs

Members considered the proposed requirement for FtP Hearing Chairs to be legally qualified, combining the current roles of the Chair and the Legal Assessor. There was initial confusion about the proposed structure whether it mirrored a magistrate/clerk arrangement and what the difference would be between the two roles. Members emphasised the need for clarity on the required qualifications for the Chair, suggesting a minimum of 10+ years of related legal experience.

A key concern was the potential loss of the "human" knowledge, empathy, and practical, "on the ground" understanding of nursing and midwifery practice. Some members felt a Chair with an HR, patient, or professional background might be better suited, fearing a legally qualified person might have "tunnel vision" or make the process too adversarial and legalistic.

Concern was raised that losing the separate legal assessor meant losing a distinct point of view, forcing one person to see both professional and legal perspectives, which could be challenging. Members acknowledged the potential benefit of the legal perspective for ensuring due process and increasing confidence in fairness as the Chair would be trained in legislation. The legal expertise could be useful for summarising complex cases.

The proposal was generally viewed as a good way to cut costs and achieve greater efficiency and time saving. There was a reminder of the need for diverse representation among Chairs and that EDI training must be mandatory.

Strengthened Case Management Powers

This proposal aimed to empower Chairs to make more pre-hearing decisions, streamline the process, and drive earlier engagement. There was general support for getting more information out earlier in the process, as knowing all the facts from the start, and anything that can speed up the process, would be helpful, even if the situation remains stressful.

Members agreed the measures could definitely streamline the process and save time and money. Making forms simpler would reduce the need for back and forth communication, which could have a huge emotional impact on registrants. Members worried that context and clarification could be lost if decisions are made without meeting the parties, raising the risk of unfairness.

There was concern that giving too many directions could increase complexity and be overwhelming for registrants, particularly those without legal representation. Members stressed the importance of using plain, non jargony language in all communications and when giving directions, potentially alongside a plain English summary of legal guidance.

To mitigate the risk of unfairness, a suggestion was made to require written submissions or short preliminary discussions so parties can present their concerns before formal directions are issued. Confusion remained regarding the extent of the Chair's powers; members emphasised the need for clear criteria defining what the Chair is *not* permitted to do.

3. Fitness to Practise Rules consultation (part 2)

The second part of this presentation was focused on the proposal to modernise its definition of a vulnerable witness to align with current research and best practice, as the existing rules date back to the early 2000s and use outdated, narrow language. It also focused on modernising and streamlining notice requirements, these changes aims to give the NMC more flexibility in how it communicates with registrants, speeds up case closure where appropriate, and moves communication into a more modern approach.

FtP breakout discussions (part 2)

Support for vulnerable witnesses

- a) How do you feel about replacing the current narrow definition of a “vulnerable witness” with a broader, more person-centred approach based on individual circumstances?

Changes to notice requirements and sharing documents

- b) Do you feel that giving the NMC more flexibility with notices and deadlines (such as sharing documents online or reducing repeated 28-day notices) would make the process easier to understand and less overwhelming?
- c) What concerns, if any, do you have about these changes, for example, around fairness, transparency, or parties having enough time to respond?

Supporting vulnerable witnesses

Members broadly agreed with the necessity of moving towards a more human and person centred approach but expressed strong views on the terminology and application of the proposed changes.

There was widespread consensus that the term 'vulnerable' should be avoided or replaced, as it is outdated and can be stigmatising. Suggestions included using terms like 'person who needs support,' 'sensitivity,' or simply asking broadly, "What can we do to help someone?" Members noted that everyone is vulnerable at times, and the entire FtP process itself creates vulnerability. The approach should be positive, friendly, and soft.

Support should not be strictly limited to those deemed "vulnerable" but should be person centred and available to anyone for whom it would be useful, making the process as inclusive as possible.

Concerns were raised about how the threshold for being classified as needing support would be determined, especially as vulnerability can be situational (varying based on time, pressure, or support received). There was apprehension about how panels would maintain consistency in applying a broad, flexible definition and determining who needs support. Members suggested the need for monitoring and auditing processes to measure consistency across panels, potentially drawing inspiration from other regulatory bodies.

While flexible, there is a risk that without explicit guidelines, staff or panels could misapply the definition, leading to delays or misclassification, or making the process less predictable for unrepresented individuals.

Changes to notice requirements and sharing documents

This section covered proposals for using an online portal, making response deadlines more flexible, and allowing early case closure without always inviting a representation.

The proposals were generally supported for efficiency, but with conditions regarding fairness and robustness.

Using a single online portal to share all documents was viewed as a good idea for efficiency, allowing all materials to be kept in one place. However, members stressed that the system must be robust, thoroughly user tested (e.g., by members of the public), and supported by clear education to prevent errors and teething issues that could exacerbate stress.

Members generally agreed with introducing flexibility to deadlines, noting that no two cases are the same and that waiting increases stress. They appreciated that flexibility can prevent cases from dragging on unnecessarily.

A major concern was that increased flexibility might decrease fairness. Introducing shorter deadlines could disadvantage those already under pressure (e.g., due to mental health concerns or lack of representation) compared to those who can afford legal advice or prepare quickly. Fixed deadlines were seen as providing essential structure.

Confusion arose regarding whether the minimum 28 day notice period could now be shortened. Confirmation was sought and received that a shorter notice period is only an exceptional circumstance if the registrant and NMC agree.

Concern was raised about the amount of power shifting to the panel in managing timelines and closing cases. Members asked how the NMC would ensure oversight and consistency to guarantee panels operate in the public interest and that flexibility is not misapplied.

Members stressed the need for clear guidance, clear communication, and a clear timeline to reduce confusion and help all parties prepare efficiently, particularly to mitigate anxiety about the FtP process. The importance of treating each case individually and remembering that those involved are human beings was strongly emphasised.

4. Practice Learning update

Suma Das, Standards Development Specialist provided an update on the [ongoing review of practice learning](#), which focuses on the student experience and the learning environment in clinical settings. Throughout the project, the NMC has prioritised listening to a wide and diverse range of voices, including students, educators, professionals working in the learning environments, and members of the public (via forums such as this one). The engagement approach has been mixed, utilising flexible, innovative events, roundtables, and site visits throughout the summer.

There were a set of recommendations presented to the Council, which have been approved, falling into three main areas:

1. Exploring the need to formally improve the existing education standards specifically relating to practice settings. This area would require future public consultation.

2. Focusing on providing better support and guidance to help implement the existing standards. The NMC has heard that difficulties often lie in the application of the standards, rather than the content itself.
3. Clearly defining what is within the NMC's remit as a regulator and identifying areas where other partners and agencies must play their part, with the NMC working in partnership to support them.

Suma took the forum through the next steps and set out that we are in the planning stage for a public consultation, which is set to launch in February 2026. The aim is to return to the Council in Spring 2026 to confirm the findings and potential changes resulting from the consultation. Suma set out that it is our intention to return to the forum to share and seek assistance with consultation questions, and to offer members the opportunity to participate in planned engagement events.

Q&A

There was a question around the steps being taken to conduct targeted engagement with groups the NMC does not usually reach well, rather than relying on broad engagement efforts.

Suma acknowledged that this is a key priority and confirmed that the team plans to deepen engagement by adopting methods used in previous projects. This includes setting up specific roundtables designed for individuals who might not feel confident participating in larger forums. There will also be engagement with targeted groups including; students with specific protected characteristics; students and educators in remote and rural areas, or those from coastal areas, to ensure the review is not "England centric or London centric" and students in sole placements or settings where access or socio-economic considerations might create barriers.

5. Wrap up of 2025 engagement

The session concluded with a reflection by Miles Wallace, Deputy Director, Communications and Engagement on the significant contributions of the Public Voice Forum over the past year and an outlook on future priorities, emphasising the forum's role in shaping the organisation's strategic direction.

He stated that members committed significant time to serve on interview panels for several senior leadership roles, including the Chief Executive and Executive Directors for Communications & Engagement, Strategy & Insight, and People & Culture, ensuring the right leaders were appointed.

In March, members helped shape the Culture Transformation Plan, providing essential feedback, particularly on the commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation, and advising on the diverse representation needed for the new supporting culture transformation network. The forum provided vital input on the new FtP referral process on the website and helping the NMC ensure the user journeys were correct and provided the best possible experience for people engaging with the process.

Members contributed valuable initial input to the inception stages of the major, multi-year projects reviewing the Code and the Revalidation process, laying the foundations for the future of nursing and midwifery practice. Miles also let the forum know that we are actively recruiting new members to the PVF from Wales to ensure the entire breadth of the UK is fully represented.

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