Strengthening our relationship with the public and the profession

From 2018 to 2020, our Patient Liaison Service supported **over 1,200** patients, relatives and members of the public who had raised concerns about a doctor. **Over 90%** of those we surveyed were happy with the service.

Our contact centre advisers answered **178,823** calls and responded to **116,205** emails and letters in 2020.

The number of doctors who are confident in GMC regulation has increased by **around a third** from 2018 to 2020. And in 2020, **85%** of responsible officers felt supported by us.

Around two thirds of doctors (65%) find our guidance, advice and learning sessions helpful and relevant.

Patients have a higher awareness of us now (82%) compared with 2018 (74%)10.

Overall, confidence in GMC regulation remains high for most groups:
- **73%** for medical students
- **70%** for responsible officers
- **77%** for educators
- **92%** for stakeholders10.

10 Figures taken from the GMC perception survey 2020.
Involving patients and the public in our work

Involving patients and the public in developing our guidance and policies can help improve healthcare outcomes and experiences for everyone. It’s something we’ve done increasingly in recent years. Between 2018 and 2020, over 1,100 patients and members of the public have been involved in our consultations, including on Decision making and consent guidance and Patient feedback for revalidation. We’re committed to building on this important development, particularly so we can represent the diverse needs of all patients.

In 2020, we invited representatives from Stonewall and from GLADD (The Association of LGBT Doctors and Dentists) to feed into our new lesbian, gay, bi and trans patient information.

As part of our 2020 conference, Olivia Butterworth, Head of Public Participation for NHSE/I, joined our panel discussion ‘Where do we go from here? The post-pandemic future of healthcare’.

As well as involving patients in our work, we’re keen to learn more from them about their interactions with us and use this information to make improvements to the services we offer. Our new Strategic Relationships Unit regularly consults with patient representative organisations on our policies and initiatives.
Supporting people who raise a concern about a doctor

Raising a concern can be a daunting experience. We always strive to give everyone the help they need and the compassion they deserve during what can be a very difficult time.

Our Patient Liaison Service

Our Patient Liaison Service (PLS) gives dedicated, personal support to patients, their relatives, or members of the public who have raised a concern about a doctor’s fitness to practise. From 2018 to 2020, the PLS team supported over 1,200 patients, relatives, and members of the public who had raised concerns about a doctor. In 2020, this was mostly virtual (see page 15). Each year, over 90% of the people surveyed about their PLS experience found the service helpful.

Using feedback to improve our support

We use feedback to continue to strengthen our processes and improve clarity about what people can expect from us. It’s led to us:

• continuing to provide a telephone service for people who are unable to provide their concerns to us in writing – we took 465 calls through this service in 2020

• publishing Our charter for patients, relatives and carers, which sets out what they can expect when they raise a concern with us.

And, crucially, we’re now reviewing and acting on the feedback we’ve had since publishing the charter, including the length of time an investigation can take, the experience of giving evidence at an MPTS hearing, and how frequently we provide information to patients during an investigation.

Supporting doctors who raise a concern

Our speaking up hub provides advice to doctors who want to raise a concern. It complements the work our liaison advisers do with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians based across England.

I was given time to voice any concerns and questions. I felt listened to and understood. A full, clear explanation was given to me regarding the process to take place.

– Patient who accessed the liaison service
We put in place safeguards for doctors who raise public interest concerns including requiring an organisation to disclose when a referred doctor has raised a concern and if the concern has been investigated. When making a referral, responsible officers must also provide a statement of truth, confirming the information provided is fair and accurate. This is just one of the mechanisms we put in place to safeguard whistleblowers.

In 2020, our report Supporting vulnerable doctors – Changes to better support doctors under investigation showed the important impact of changes we’ve made to our investigation processes and the support we offer. While positive, our focus on supporting vulnerable doctors is a long-term approach and not just connected to a one-off programme of work.

It’s important that everyone who interacts with us – through our processes or our communications – is met with empathy and efficiency. ‘Making every interaction matter’, as we say in our new strategy for 2021−2025, will be of key importance in continuing to strengthen our relationship with the public and the profession.

**Engaging with people in a way that meets their needs**

Our Contact Centre is the first point of contact for many of the people who interact with us. In 2020, they answered 178,823 calls and responded to 116,205 emails and letters.

The team’s commitment to providing excellent customer service has been recognised in their achievement of ServiceMark accreditation from the Institute of Customer Service. In April 2020, despite the impact of the pandemic, 85% of the people surveyed were happy with the quality of the service provided by our advisers in response to customer surveys — against an external industry benchmark of 76.9%.

Since 2019, we’ve also piloted Live Chat, which gives members of the public and doctors more options to contact us via our website, in a way that suits them. It’s particularly beneficial to those people who may find it difficult to contact us using the phone. From March to December 2020, 84% of people who accessed Live Chat were satisfied with the service.

As well, we introduced Facebook Messenger as a channel for doctors and members of the public to speak with the Contact Centre. On this channel alone, we had 6,877 people contact us, sending 107,520 messages. Alongside this, in November 2020, we launched an Instagram account for UK medical students, where we shared posts about wellbeing, ethical guidance and provisional registration.
**Digital transformation**

Our Digital Transformation 2020 programme has been transforming the way we communicate, engage and interact with our customers online – making sure we provide a better experience for the public and for doctors across our digital channels.

As part of this work, we launched a refreshed GMC website in 2018. Since then, monthly views of our ethical guidance pages have increased from 153,953 in May 2018 to 265,578 in January 2020. This is a positive sign that our guidance – designed to help doctors provide high-quality patient care – is reaching more people.

Accessibility is central to our communications. We also offer many of our communication products in a variety of accessible formats, including easy read, large print and other languages.

**Social media**

With the onset of the pandemic, social media has become even more crucial as a communications tool. It helps us to quickly share important information and to connect with people on a more personal level.

![Facebook reach: 2.4m unique users, up 1.2m from 2019](image)

![Twitter impressions: 2.4m, up 564.1k from 2019](image)

![LinkedIn reach: 624k unique users, up 45k from 2019](image)

Some of our key work on social media in 2020 included:

- raising awareness of our updated *Decision making and consent* guidance
- sharing regular updates about PLAB and registration pathways for IMGs, including updates on booking periods, cancelled exams, hosting socially distanced exams, alternative registration pathways, and Q&As
- Professor Colin Melville, Director of Education and Standards, and Greta McLachlan, Clinical Fellow, holding a Twitter chat to share some tips for new doctors in July.

Throughout the pandemic, we also used our e-bulletins to send several supportive messages to doctors, medical students, trainers and trainees. Making sure everyone can easily access information and interact with us, whether that’s digitally, over the phone, or face to face, is at the core of our new strategic aim, ‘Making every interaction matter’.