

OpenLearn animation

Witness to harm - What is Fitness to Practise for social care and social work service users?

Speaker 1, Speaker 2, Speaker 3:

SPEAKER 1: As a service user, I want to know how to raise a concern about a social work and care professional. How do I start? How difficult will it be? And who will investigate my concern?

SPEAKER 2: The process is called fitness to practise. Your concern will be investigated by a social work and social care regulator. Professionals have to register with regulators to practise their profession. It is a legal requirement.

SPEAKER 1: How many regulators are there?

SPEAKER 3: There are four social work and social care regulators in the UK. They are Scottish Social Services Council, Social Work England, Social Care Wales, and Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

SPEAKER 2: There are also nine health care regulators. You can find out who regulates the health care professionals on the Professional Standards Authority website.

SPEAKER 1: What can regulators investigate?

SPEAKER 3: There are many reasons regulators will investigate professionals, including misconduct, lack of competence, criminal convictions, and health conditions that affect service user safety.

SPEAKER 2: Also dishonesty, fraud, abuse of trust, violence, and sexual misconduct.

SPEAKER 3: There are many more examples.

SPEAKER 1: And what can't regulators investigate?

SPEAKER 3: Regulators can't deal with complaints about the level of service an organisation provides.

SPEAKER 2: They can't get involved in matters which should be decided by a court, and they can't provide legal advice.

SPEAKER 3: Again, there are many more examples. You can find out more on their websites.

SPEAKER 1: OK. So if I want to raise a concern about a professional, where do I start?

SPEAKER 2: You can go through their employer's complaints process. This might be through their website or phone line.

SPEAKER 1: What if I want to raise a concern with a regulator?

SPEAKER 3: You can raise concerns using the regulator's website or telephone support line.

SPEAKER 2: You can get help raising a concern from a social care worker, advocacy service, or citizens advice.

SPEAKER 1: And what happens once I raise a concern?

SPEAKER 3: They will confirm if they are legally able to take up the concern.

SPEAKER 2: Then the investigation can take some time, even years.

SPEAKER 3: The investigation is to decide if there is sufficient evidence to proceed. If there isn't, the process stops there.

SPEAKER 2: If there is, the next stage would be the fitness to practise hearing to investigate if the professional in question is fit to practise in the future.

SPEAKER 3: You may need to provide a witness statement in writing or in person.

SPEAKER 2: In person, the professional's lawyer will ask you about your witness statement, challenging your views on what happened.

SPEAKER 3: It can be hard work and upsetting, but it's vital people raise concerns to ensure safety and quality of care.

SPEAKER 2: If the case is proven, the professional may have limits put on their practice or be taken off the register altogether, struck off, preventing them from practising again.

SPEAKER 3: Raising concerns like this and giving evidence in fitness to practise hearings is an important way to stop the same thing happening again to ensure all care users can trust their care providers.