

# Quality Improvement Strategy

2025–2028



The Royal College of Anaesthetists (the College) is dedicated to upholding the highest standards in anaesthesia, perioperative care and patient care, while actively collaborating with our members to enhance the quality of the service they provide. Improving quality is the cornerstone of the College and is supported through examinations and training, setting evidence-based standards for clinical practice and funding world-class research.

Quality improvement ensures that anaesthetic services remain high-performing, robust, and capable of delivering excellent patient care. To deliver safe and effective care with a decreasing resource, anaesthetists must adopt continuous improvement to maintain the delivery of safe, effective and efficient care.

### Our vision

To ensure continuous improvement is adopted throughout anaesthetic and perioperative care services to improve the way we deliver care to our patients.

### Our mission

It is our goal to enhance services and ensure better patient outcomes through collaborative and sustainable improvement, using data together with improvement science. It is our aim to ensure quality improvement is a core element of every anaesthetist's practice.

### Purpose of the strategy

This strategy sets out the vision for the College's quality improvement programme over the next three years and agreed priorities to enable the College to develop its role as a leader in quality improvement.

The audience for this strategy is those who have an interest in quality improvement, including the Quality Improvement Working Group, the Quality Network, the Quality Audit and Research Coordinators (QuARCs), the Centre for Research & Improvement, the Clinical Quality & Research Board, the Education, Training and Examinations Board, Council and Board of Trustees. It is intended for this strategy to support the College in achieving its overarching goal in the [RCoA Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#) to:

- **pursue excellence** through the delivery of sustainable change and reduce variability in services through our quality improvement programme
- be **innovative and progressive** through the commitment to innovation and development to drive continuous quality improvement.

There is currently variation across the country in quality improvement practices, including disparities in training opportunities, study leave, event attendance, and national engagement. This strategy aims to reduce this variation and promote equity across all regions.

The Quality Improvement strategy spans 2025-2028. It has been reviewed by the Quality Improvement Working Group, approved by the Centre for Research & Improvement Board and updated where necessary.

### Definition of Quality Improvement

Quality Improvement is a formal approach to the analysis of performance and the use of systematic efforts to improve it. Improvement comes from the application of knowledge and a thorough understanding of the system you are trying to improve.

### Our aims

- To strengthen and develop the links between anaesthetists working on quality improvement, embedding formal leadership structures within departments.
- To provide excellent quality improvement training and resources that facilitate the advancement of knowledge and skills by developing a repository of quality improvement activity and resources to facilitate learning and sharing best practice.
- To raise the profile of quality improvement in the specialty and help anaesthetists to gain recognition of their quality improvement work.
- To unite the anaesthetic and wider multidisciplinary teams such as perioperative care teams, around key priorities for quality improvement. To develop networks and links with other Colleges and organisations.

### Current standing

The [Quality Improvement Working Group](#) (QIWG) leads the College's quality improvement programme. The aims of the group are to provide evidence-based guidance to the profession on matters pertaining to quality improvement and quality measurement, to liaise with key stakeholders and to lead on the implementation of quality improvement in anaesthesia and perioperative care.

The [Quality Network](#) aims to share successes and lessons learned from quality improvement work, help members to develop their knowledge and increase their confidence to undertake improvement projects by linking local departments to allow sharing of best practice, and signposting opportunities for anaesthetists in training.

Quality improvement initiatives include an annual Quality Network event, a dedicated study day, as well as publications and podcasts. Furthermore, quality improvement is integrated across the College's educational offerings, including presentations and workshops during the flagship conference. Quality improvement is also dispersed throughout all College workstreams, with the overarching objective to increase the profile of quality improvement within the specialty.

The [Raising the Standards: Quality Improvement Compendium](#) is a manual of quality improvement and audit tools for anaesthetists. Linked to the national quality improvement priorities such as the [anaesthetic training curriculum](#), the National Audit Project ([NAP](#)) recommendations and National Emergency Laparotomy Audit ([NELA](#)). It aligns with the Guidelines for the Provision of Anaesthetic Service ([GPAS](#)) to support the delivery of safe and up-to-date anaesthesia, and facilitates entry into the Anaesthesia Clinical Services Accreditation (ACSA) process.

Quality improvement science and methodology has been formally integrated into the [Anaesthetics CCT Curriculum](#) since 2013. Safety & quality improvement is a key domain of learning within the anaesthetics curriculum for all doctors, and aligns to the GMCs Generic Professional Capabilities [framework](#) as well as the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC) Training for [better outcomes developing quality improvement into practice](#).

## Aims of Strategy

### **To strengthen and develop the links between anaesthetists working on quality improvement, embedding formal leadership structures within departments**

#### **We will:**

- ✓ Strengthen relationships among local quality improvement leaders by offering networking opportunities, and ensuring each department has the opportunity to contribute to quality improvement. Opportunities such as the career development programme, Quality Network and Quality Audit and Research Coordinators (QuARCs)
- ✓ Encourage and support the future quality improvement leads
- ✓ Broaden engagement across the College functions to provide consistent quality improvement support

### **To provide excellent quality improvement training and resources that facilitate the advancement of knowledge and skills by developing a repository of quality improvement activity and resources to facilitate learning and sharing best practice**

#### **We will:**

- ✓ Offer educational resources on quality improvement within the anaesthetic curriculum and other speciality specific topics, including webinars, podcasts, quality improvement study days, and training on assessing quality improvement
- ✓ Equip anaesthetists with the skills and knowledge to undertake quality improvement work, providing clarity on the difference between audit and quality improvement
- ✓ Link the [anaesthetic training curriculum](#) with quality improvement resources such as the Raising the [Standards: Quality Improvement Compendium](#)
- ✓ Link quality improvement to safety and understanding safety culture, in collaboration with the Safe Anaesthesia Liaison Group (SALG)
- ✓ Present at key trainer and national events
- ✓ Support local trainers in formally assessing quality improvement
- ✓ Support local, substantive anaesthetists to undertake quality improvement projects by raising the profile of quality improvement methodology outside of the Quality Network and making quality improvement accessible to everyone

**To raise the profile of quality improvement in the specialty and help anaesthetists to gain recognition for their quality improvement work**

**We will:**

- ✓ Leverage the College's reach and social media platforms to promote the importance of best practice quality improvement
- ✓ Publish quality improvement articles and newsletters
- ✓ Promote the use of validated quality improvement methods as criteria for assessing quality improvement projects
- ✓ Harness local digital innovations and utilise this data

**To unite the anaesthetic and wider multidisciplinary teams such as perioperative care teams, around key priorities for quality improvement. To develop networks and links with other Colleges and organisations**

**We will:**

- ✓ Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify relevant speciality organisations to help us achieve our goals
- ✓ Collaborate with key stakeholders such as the Centre for Perioperative Care and patient co-design via the PatientVoices@RCoA, to advance quality improvement priorities
- ✓ Support the Centre for Research & Improvement in delivering national level quality improvement projects
- ✓ Ensure the College's partner organisations, their members, and the patient voice are central to influencing quality improvement and policy project

## Threats to success of strategic plan

### Capacity versus demand and resources

The workforce is currently stretched and fatigued, with the understanding that NHS clinicians may be unable to engage in national work outside of their clinical responsibilities. Consideration must also be given to ensure sufficient staffing resource is in place not only to maintain current operations but also to support the expansion of new projects. These efforts should align with initiatives such as College projects, including NAP outcomes, GPAS recommendations, or ACSA standards.

Quality improvement activities should be thoughtfully considered and deliver efficiency and time saving. For example, sharing resources from successful projects such as exemplar materials or business cases, reducing duplication of training through collaboration at a regional or national level can all contribute towards producing better value healthcare.

Limited resources, both in terms of specialised expertise and College staff, may lead to longer timelines for achieving our goals. It is important to manage expectations realistically. Additionally, consideration should be given to generating revenue through applications to external funders.

NHS funding restrictions pose challenges for services seeking to develop quality improvement initiatives. Additionally, there are competing demands between research and quality improvement, with research projects often receiving funding while quality improvement efforts do not.

By maintaining regular and senior-level engagement with relevant bodies, we will advocate for the importance of sustainable funding to support the delivery of this strategy.

## Alignment with national quality improvement strategies

Our quality improvement strategy is closely aligned with national QI frameworks across the four nations of the UK. In developing our aims, we have mapped our priorities to ensure consistency with and support for wider strategic ambitions within each healthcare system.

### NHS England – NHS Impact

NHS Impact outlines a system-wide approach to improvement with five core components, all of which are reflected in our strategy:

#### 1 **Building a Shared Purpose and Vision**

Our aim to strengthen and develop the links between anaesthetists working on quality improvement fosters a shared purpose across the specialty and contributes to a unified vision for improvement.

#### 2 **Investing in People and Culture**

We are committed to providing high-quality QI training and resources, ensuring clinicians have the support and learning environment required to champion and embed improvement within their teams.

#### 3 **Developing Leadership Behaviours**

Leadership is integral to sustained improvement. We have embedded the development of leadership capability as a sub-aim within our goal to strengthen inter-anaesthetist collaboration, including the formalisation of departmental quality improvement leadership structures.

### 4 **Building Improvement Capability and Capacity**

Our training and resource strategy also contributes to building system-wide capability by enhancing QI knowledge and practice across all levels of anaesthetic practice.

### 5 **Embedding Improvement into Management Systems and Processes**

Through our overarching strategy, which encourages the integration of quality improvement thinking at departmental and organisational levels, we aim to embed improvement as a routine and strategic element of clinical management.

## NHS Scotland – Healthcare Improvement Scotland Strategic Priorities

NHS Scotland outlines four priorities, all of which are reflected in our strategy:

### 1 **Understanding Safety and Quality**

Our provision of high-quality quality improvement training supports the development of safety and quality understanding among anaesthetists, addressing safety culture in collaboration with the Safe Anaesthesia Liaison Group ([SALG](#)).

### 2 **Using Intelligence and Evidence**

Our leadership development aim aligns with this priority by encouraging the sharing and application of evidence-based practices within and across departments.

### 3 **Involving People and Communities**

We recognise the need to better integrate patient voices in QI. This could be addressed under the aim to unite anaesthetic and multidisciplinary teams, with co-design with patients, and seeking collaboration with wider College initiatives.

### 4 **Accelerating Sustainable Improvements**

By establishing a repository of QI activities and learning resources, we are supporting the spread of proven practices and facilitating scalable, sustainable improvements.

## NHS Wales – Improvement Cymru Strategic Aims

Our strategy supports the following priorities identified by Improvement Cymru:

### ■ **Service Redesign and Continuous Improvement**

All of our strategic aims contribute to building a culture of continuous improvement within anaesthesia and perioperative care.

### ■ **Reduction in Avoidable Harm and Focus on Safety**

As with NHS Scotland, this highlights a potential opportunity to make our commitment to safety culture more explicit within our strategic aims.

### ■ **Building Improvement Capability**

Our focus on QI training and the creation of shared resources directly contributes to the development of improvement capability across the profession in Wales.

### Northern Ireland – Quality 2020 and Subsequent Frameworks

Our strategy reflects the core dimensions of quality as defined by the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland:

- **Safety**

Our provision of high-quality quality improvement training supports the development of safety and quality understanding among anaesthetists, addressing safety culture in collaboration with the Safe Anaesthesia Liaison Group (SALG).

- **Effectiveness**

Our aim to unite anaesthetic and multidisciplinary teams around key QI priorities supports improved effectiveness through collaboration, evidence-based practice, and timely, appropriate care delivery.

- **Patient and Client Focus**

In line with our commitments under NHS Scotland and Wales priorities, we support the inclusion of patient voice as part of our collaborative and inclusive QI efforts.

---

#### Royal College of Anaesthetists

Churchill House, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG

[info@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:info@rcoa.ac.uk)

**rcoa.ac.uk**

