

DRAFT

Quality Improvement Strategy 2025–2028



The Royal College of Anaesthetists (the College) is committed to setting the highest standards for anaesthesia, perioperative care, patient care, and working with our members to improve 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 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 a formal leadership structure within departments.
- To provide high 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 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.

The position of 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 GMC's 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, such as the career development programme, Quality Network and Quality Audit and Research Coordinators (QuARCs) ensuring each department has the opportunity to contribute to quality improvement.
- ✓ Encourage and support the future quality improvement leads.
- ✓ Broaden engagement across the College functions to provide consistent quality improvement support.

To provide high-quality improvement training and resources that enhance knowledge and skills by creating a repository of quality improvement activities and resources for learning and sharing best practices.

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](#)
- ✓ Present at key trainer and national events.
- ✓ Support local-trainers in formally assessing quality improvement.
- ✓ Support local, non-expert individuals to undertake quality improvement projects by raising the profile of quality improvement outside of the Quality Network

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, 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 projects.

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.

Royal College of Anaesthetists

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