

Our strategy

2021-25



General
Medical
Council

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Our strategy 2021–25

This strategy has been developed with and for patients, medical professionals, partners and colleagues. Over the next five years, four themes will shape all our work, helping us to achieve our ten-year vision.



What we'll do to achieve this

Together, we'll use these four themes to shape every aspect of our work, including:

- managing the UK medical register and revalidation
- setting standards for medical practice
- overseeing medical education and training
- investigating and acting on concerns.

How we'll work

Our values help us to make our strategy a reality.

integrity

collaboration

fairness

excellence

transparency

Equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to all our work as a regulator and employer.

Where we want to be by 2030

Our vision is to be an effective, relevant and compassionate multiprofessional regulator for patients, the public and medical professionals, and as an employer.

Foreword from our Chair

COVID-19 has presented healthcare with the imperative to innovate and embrace change. Its impact will continue to be felt for years to come.

The challenge remains of how to deliver care when the system is under strain.

Patients' expectations are growing and demand for healthcare is rising. Meanwhile, the increasing diversity of doctors, and the need to meet their expectations for their working lives, are transforming medical practice. We, at the GMC, must be responsive to this evolving picture.

Our focus is on the safety of patients, and the quality and welfare of our registrants.

Doctors' work environments materially affect the delivery of safe, high-quality patient care. Studies show that well-supported, well-trained doctors working in a collaborative, inclusive and compassionate cultures deliver better care.

To meet patients' needs, health services must have the right clinicians, in the right places. Better recruitment and retention of doctors

is vital, both to patient care and to professionals' wellbeing.

As a patient safety organisation, we have a role to play in influencing all these factors. Most importantly for patients, doctors and our colleagues, addressing inequality and discrimination is vital. We all have our parts to play in this endeavour.

In the next few years, we will become a multiprofessional regulator as physician associates and anaesthesia associates become registrants.

We have designed this strategy to be flexible and relevant and will use it to shape our decisions as we navigate the uncertainties ahead.

We are grateful to those patients, doctors, colleagues and partner organisations all of whom gave generously of their time to help shape this strategy.



Dame Clare Marx
GMC Chair



About this strategy

Thanks to the input of many patients, medical professionals, partners and colleagues, we have a clear picture of where we want to be.

In this strategy, we set out our ten-year vision and outline the steps we'll take towards this goal in the next five years. This strategy sets the direction of travel for both the General Medical Council (GMC) and Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS).¹

Alongside this strategy, our three year business plan will set out the main activities relating to our four strategic themes and we will continually revisit and assess this on a quarterly basis.

Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion

We believe equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) are an integral part of our work as a regulator, and as an employer. This is why we've integrated our ED&I commitments into this strategy.

Our ED&I commitments are driven by our ambition to make progress in tackling persistent issues related to inequality, and to achieve positive changes and outcomes for the diverse groups we work with and for.

Having a diverse and inclusive workforce, both within the GMC and in healthcare systems across the UK, is vital.

We are a reflective and learning organisation and we want to do more to understand and respond to the diverse needs of the medical profession and patients. We'll be open and transparent in our progress to identify and address issues around fairness and inequality, and we'll work with others to drive change. You'll be able to find out about our progress in our annual reports.

Tracking progress

Throughout the lifecycle of this strategy, we will assess progress and publish it in our annual reports. This assessment will largely focus on activity-level information. It will be complemented by available analysis and stakeholder feedback to help us understand progress and context for each strategic theme.

¹ The MPTS is a statutory committee of the GMC, which operates separately from the GMC's role in investigating concerns.

Our role

We are the UK's independent regulator of medical professionals. This includes doctors, and within the course of this strategy, physician associates and anaesthesia associates too.

Our purpose

The work we do is set out by the Medical Act 1983. Our overarching objective is to protect the public. We aim to:

- protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public
- promote and maintain public confidence in medical professionals
- promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for medical professionals.²

How do we do this?

- We manage the UK medical register, checking the identity and qualifications of everyone we regulate before they're able to work in the UK.
- We oversee all stages of medical education and training, to enable fair, safe and effective learning.
- We set the standards – professional values, knowledge, skills and behaviours – medical professionals need to follow throughout their careers.
- We help to make sure licensed medical professionals keep their knowledge and skills up to date through revalidation.
- We investigate and act on concerns that put patients or the public's confidence in medical professionals at risk. In some situations, we refer the case to the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) for a hearing.³



² At the time of writing this strategy, this only relates to doctors. In future, it will include physician associates and anaesthesia associates too.

³ MPTS tribunals make independent decisions based on standards set by the GMC.

Our vision: where we want to be by 2030

Our vision is rooted in the people we work with and for. We will be an effective, relevant and compassionate regulator for patients, the public and professionals, and as an employer.

We will foster a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do as a regulator and employer.

We will work to deliver wider health system goals by working in partnership with others. Evidence will drive our decisions.

We will be a multiprofessional regulator focusing on supporting professionals in the places they work. This requires unified action from us all – regulators, employers and educators.

Our strategy

Working towards our 2030 vision, from 2021 to 2025, four strategic themes will shape everything we do.



Enabling professionals to provide safe care

We'll work with partners across the UK health services to improve working environments and cultures, making them supportive, inclusive and fair for medical professionals. We'll work with patients and medical professionals to make sure our guidance remains relevant and effective, and represents individuals' diverse needs.



Developing a sustainable medical workforce

We'll use our position as a multi-professional regulator and our role in education and training to help develop a diverse medical workforce with the right skills, so patients receive the best quality care.



Making every interaction matter

We'll make sure every person who interacts with us – through our processes or our communications – is met with empathy and efficiency. This will include making sure all our interactions are inclusive and tailored to individual needs.



Investing in our people to deliver our ambitions

We'll make sure that, as an organisation, we're in a good position to deliver our ambitions by continuing to develop our GMC people – staff, associates and Council members. In particular, we'll focus on creating a culture of inclusive leadership, innovation and professionalism. Improving equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation will be fundamental to this.



Enabling professionals to provide safe care

Extensive research shows that healthcare professionals who work in supportive environments, where their wellbeing is a priority, are better able to give patients safe, high-quality care.

Our commitment

We will work with partners across the UK health services to improve working environments and cultures, making them supportive, inclusive and fair for medical professionals. In doing so, patients will benefit from safer and better care, and the workforce will retain and attract more professionals.

We will also continue to work with patients and medical professionals to make sure our guidance remains relevant and effective, and represents individuals' diverse needs.

What can we improve?

- Research shows that factors like positive leadership, support and autonomy all promote clinician wellbeing and, therefore, patient safety. Unfortunately, these are not always managed appropriately in healthcare settings.
- Organisations across the UK health services, including in the independent sector, need to work more closely together to align requirements and guidance for healthcare professionals.
- Research and evidence show that some groups of doctors³ face greater challenges and barriers in their working environment and these can impact on their working lives and career progression. There are longstanding health inequalities across the UK, often linked to economic deprivation and geography, which can significantly affect access to healthcare, patient outcomes, quality of life and life expectancy.
- While the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated some existing problems, it also led to some positive changes. We must build on the improvements in teamwork, flexibility and innovation, as well as the focus on professionals' wellbeing.

What will this look like?

We work with others to improve workplace cultures in healthcare environments across the UK making them safe, inclusive and supportive.

- Our work with education and training providers and employers helps to embed inclusive leadership, good inductions, effective team working and manageable workloads, as well as ongoing support for health professionals, across the UK.
- Healthcare regulators and improvement bodies work collaboratively to reduce duplication, align goals and requirements, and clarify regulators' responsibilities.
- Our Outreach teams work with professionals and organisations at a local level to support quality improvement and patient safety, as well as promoting fair, transparent and representative clinical and staff governance.
- Together with healthcare systems, we tackle the issue of unfair referrals to regulators, as well as bullying and discriminatory behaviours. Everyone can speak up and raise concerns about their workplace without fear of retaliation.

The professionals we regulate can meet the professional standards patients expect and use their judgement to apply our ethical standards and guidance.

- Our ethical standards and guidance better align across professions, reflect diverse people's needs and effectively promote the professional behaviours that patients expect.



- Medical professionals feel supported to apply our guidance, for example, through the work of our Outreach teams, and the skills and behaviours are embedded in all healthcare environments.
- The healthcare system builds a more reflective approach to professional development, including through appraisals and revalidation.
- We fully consider human factors, environment and context in our fitness to practise investigations.

We use and share our data and insights to improve environments and address inequalities.

- The data and intelligence we collect, for example through the national training surveys, continues to be proactively shared among partner organisations, employers, the public and the professions and used to promote good practice and identify and address poor practice.
- Our data and intelligence on the healthcare inequalities patients face leads to reductions in inequalities.
- We support the healthcare systems to reduce inequalities in fitness to practise employer referral rates.

Healthcare professionals who work in supportive environments, where their wellbeing is a priority, are better able to give patients safe, high-quality care.





Developing a sustainable medical workforce

The most valuable asset to healthcare in the UK is the talent, commitment and diversity of its people. The ongoing shortage of healthcare professionals in the UK, particularly in some locations and specialties, poses a threat to patient care and professionals' wellbeing and progression.

Our commitment

We will use our position to help shape medical education and training to better support the development of medical students and professionals.

We will make sure entry to the medical register and progression through training is fair and flexible for the professionals we regulate. And we'll take on regulation of physician associates and anaesthesia associates roles, maximising their contribution to the workforce.

What can we improve?

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic, including on healthcare professionals' wellbeing and on international migration, only serves to exacerbate existing workforce challenges.

- Education, training and practice are not flexible enough to meet medical students' and healthcare professionals' needs throughout their careers. Medical professionals need the skills and experience to care for different types of patients, who are older, with increased multiple morbidities and who have different expectations. They need to adapt to innovations in medical practice, which will change the way they work.
- Some of the workforce has difficulty fully participating or progressing, with certain people with protected characteristics facing workplace discrimination. There is differential attainment in exams for black and minority ethnic (BME) doctors, working patterns are not flexible enough for many professionals, including those with caring responsibilities or disabled doctors, and there is a lack of socioeconomic diversity in medicine. A more diverse and inclusive workforce will not only be better for professionals, but for patient care too.
- New professions, such as physician associates and anaesthesia associates, are not yet regulated, which means they're not able to practise to their full potential.

There are also opportunities, such as new technologies, more ways of delivering and receiving care, and more effective teamworking. Together with our partners, we need to make sure the medical workforce can continue to adapt, with the roles and skills it needs, and innovations are introduced safely and equitably.

What will this look like?

We work with workforce organisations to support more professionals who meet the required standards to join and remain in the UK medical workforce.

- Our registration pathways are more flexible and accessible, supporting more doctors to join the UK workforce, in particular sustaining the skills and workforce following Brexit.
- Physician associates and anaesthesia associates can play an even greater role in the UK workforce, when we regulate them.
- The Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA) makes sure that UK students and international medical graduates take assessments mapped to the same set of core knowledge, skills and behaviours for UK practice. This will reduce unwarranted variation in the standards and introduce comparable experiences for candidates.
- Healthcare bodies across the UK have increased focus on retention of the workforce, partly in response to the greater focus on wellbeing, outlined in our first strategic theme, 'Enabling the profession to provide safe care'.

Education and training are relevant, accessible and supportive, giving all professionals the skills they need to better meet future patient needs.

- Education and training equip the workforce with the relevant skills to meet patients' evolving needs. This includes being able to: effectively care for diverse patients and communities; address healthcare inequalities; and deliver care effectively, safely and innovatively. We'll play our part in this through our role in setting education standards and approving curricula, as well as through the MLA and GMC-regulated credentials.



- Training environments are safer, more supportive and inclusive – allowing all medical professionals to develop and progress. Trainers and educators deliver training innovatively in line with new ways of working and patient need.
- Education and training institutions take effective action to address differential attainment and reflect diversity in medical curricula, teaching and learning.

Training for the medical workforce is more flexible, throughout their careers.

- Education and training are more flexible, with greater cross-specialty learning, and address future patient needs and ways of working.
- There are more flexible routes through training and progression, throughout professionals' careers. And there is greater support at transition points, particularly for certain doctors who face barriers, such as specialty, associate specialist and locally employed doctors, disabled doctors, or those with caring responsibilities.
- The medical workforce has access to and capacity for lifelong learning to ensure they continually develop their skills for better patient care.



Growing a skilled, diversified and well-supported medical workforce is essential for patients and medical professionals alike.





Making every interaction matter

Every person who interacts with us has individual needs. Listening and learning everyday gives us the knowledge and adaptability to interact with people in a way that suits them.

Our commitment

Healthcare professionals and members of the public often come to us at a challenging time. We will make sure that they are met with empathy, fairness and professionalism by all our colleagues. And we'll listen to, learn from and act on their feedback about our services.

We'll also make sure our processes are as efficient and effective as possible, and we expect changes to legislation will allow us to improve how we carry out our role.

We will make sure that everyone can access our services and information in a way that's suited to them. For example, by providing information in another format or language, adapting the way in which we communicate with someone, or providing additional support to enable someone to raise a concern with us.

What can we improve?

- We need to learn more about the experiences of people who interact with us, as well their needs and expectations. This insight will help us to adapt our approach and improve our interactions.
- We know that people sometimes feel their interactions with us are impersonal. There are opportunities to join up within the organisation to better support medical students, professionals, patients, regulatory partners and colleagues.
- We can do more to make our processes and interactions more accessible and tailored to individuals' needs.
- Some of our processes are lengthy and complex and our outdated legislation hampers our ability to streamline them.
- The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our activities, and on the UK health service as a whole, meant we made rapid changes to the way we operate. We should build on those that worked well.

What will this look like?

We have a better understanding of the experiences of people who interact with us, particularly professionals, patients and the public.

- Everyone who interacts with us feels listened to and finds it easy to engage with us. This includes, for example, raising a concern about a medical professional, being investigated or applying for registration.
- We work with diverse groups of patients and members of the public to shape our work, so we can continuously improve our interactions and processes.
- We work with diverse groups of medical professionals and better understand their experiences of practice, so we can regulate and support them effectively. And we share our learnings with others to drive improvements in the wider healthcare system.

We use an improved understanding of people's experiences to make our interactions with all those we work with better.

- All of our interactions are empathetic and everyone feels they are treated fairly, and with dignity and respect. We proactively use the knowledge we build to anticipate and meet peoples' diverse needs in the activities we deliver.
- Information about our role and the other organisations that deal with concerns about medical care is clear and accessible to all.
- New and innovative ways of working and interacting are continually considered and embedded in everything we do to meet the needs of everyone we work with and for.



We regularly review our processes to make sure they are as effective as possible, and that we use our resources appropriately and responsibly.

- Recommendations from public inquiries continue to help us adapt our ways of working for the better. And we see changes to legislation that will allow us to increase the flexibility in how we work. This would make our processes simpler and more supportive, improving things for healthcare professionals and the UK health services.
- We better meet what professionals, patients and partners at national, regional or local level need from us as the regulator of medical professionals.

Listening and learning everyday gives us the knowledge and adaptability to interact with people in a way that suits them.





Investing in our people to deliver our ambitions

Our people – our colleagues, associates, Council members – are our biggest asset and enabling their continuous development will help us deliver our ambitions.

Our commitment

We will continue to place a focus on developing our GMC people's skills, in particular fostering a culture of inclusive leadership, innovation and professionalism among colleagues at all levels.

We renew our commitment to be a responsible organisation, both socially and environmentally. And crucially, we believe that providing an inclusive, supportive and caring working environment in the GMC – as in healthcare settings – is paramount.

We are committed to becoming a more inclusive organisation. With this comes a deeply held commitment to create a culture where everyone feels valued and included. It's important that everyone has a voice and feels they belong and are valued for their unique and authentic individual skills and abilities.

What can we improve?

- The way in which our people have responded to unprecedented global changes – with pace, flexibility and compassion – gives us confidence that we can become a more effective and efficient regulator.
- While many things have changed in both our work and personal lives, the collective dedication and commitment our colleagues have shown to those who interact with us remains the same. We want to learn from the changes we've made that have truly benefited those who work for us and with us, and take them forward.
- Through listening to our colleagues, we know they may not always feel empowered to lead within their role, so we need to take the necessary steps to enable this, including developing their skills.
- Our workforce isn't as diverse as it should be, including at senior level. We also know that some groups of staff face barriers and inequalities in the workplace, for example, BME colleagues, those with caring responsibilities and disabled colleagues.

What will this look like?

We'll deliver our ambitions with flexibility, sensitivity to the external environment and leadership across all roles.

- Colleagues are able to build the skills they need throughout their careers. People have greater autonomy and are empowered to speak up and learn within a reflective culture.
- Compassionate and inclusive leadership is demonstrated across all levels.
- Our priorities are clear, understood and leave room to be flexible where necessary.
- We continue to attract more high-quality staff, by offering dynamic, challenging and rewarding roles.

The GMC is a more diverse and inclusive organisation.

- Our environment is inclusive and caring, with wellbeing at the front and centre of our work – in the same way we expect healthcare settings to be.
- Everyone is able to be themselves, as well as encouraged and supported to shape our work. Our colleagues and internal networks play an important role in this and, along with others, help us better understand any issues and potential solutions.
- Interventions are in place to support the retention and progression of staff who face inequalities, for example, a development programme for BME colleagues.



- We take measures to help improve pay parity – for gender and ethnicity – and BME staff retention, progression and representation at senior levels.
- Our leaders develop the skills and capability to create an inclusive working environment for all staff.

We take a more coordinated approach to our corporate responsibilities,⁵ including social, environmental and economic.

- We are a responsible regulator that supports a sustainable environment and healthy communities, making sure we make socially responsible decisions that have a positive impact on the people and the world around us.
- Our work with other regulators will embed the importance of these responsibilities across the health and social care regulatory system.

We believe that providing an inclusive, supportive and caring working environment in the GMC – as in healthcare settings – is paramount.



⁵ See page 21 for more about our corporate social responsibilities.

The way we work

Our culture – how people think, feel and act at work – translates into how effectively we get things done. The values we expect of others are the same ones we strive for in every decision, every interaction, every day.

- **Integrity** – we are committed to doing the right thing for those we work with and for, including being honest and sharing what we see. A core part of this value is respect for all and understanding of individuals' own experiences.
- **Excellence** – we are dedicated to learning and improving, so we can do the best by the public, profession and our partners. Excellence requires diversity as it brings knowledge, innovation and new understanding and skills.
- **Collaboration** – the cornerstone of all our work, internally and externally. We work with others by default and we proactively engage with a diverse range of people to reflect as many individuals' views as possible.
- **Fairness** – we want everyone who comes into contact with us to be treated fairly and to feel that they have been treated fairly. And we want to be recognised as an organisation that actively promotes, supports and fosters fairness and inclusion.
- **Transparency** – we are honest and strive to be open and transparent, so the people we work with and for can hold us to account.



Working together

Collectively, we and other regulators and healthcare partners across the UK will deliver shared goals and, build on existing initiatives to share our expertise, insight and best practice. Joint understanding and action are vital to address today's challenges and affect real change for patients and medical professionals.

The need for much closer working across regulators has been a consistent theme of public inquiries into serious failures in healthcare, in recent years. We are determined to act on what we've learnt by making collaboration our default way of working.

We're also committed to doing more to embed patients' experiences in everything we do. And over the course of this strategy, we'll increase the opportunities for the public, patients and their representatives to work with us.

And crucially, we'll involve diverse groups of medical professionals in our research and work, so we can best incorporate their needs and concerns.

Making evidence-based decisions

Our surveys, research and intelligence inform what we do and where we focus our efforts. Evidence from these sources can show us emerging trends medical professionals' and patients' lived experiences. This insight is fundamental to us being effective and relevant through our own processes and influence within the wider healthcare system.

An increasingly collaborative approach with partners – where we share more data and insight – will enable us to identify risks early, increase cohesion between regulators, and help us address emerging issues affecting the quality of care.

Acting responsibly

We aim to be a socially responsible organisation that embeds sustainability, social impact and ethics in everything we do. From standalone initiatives, to everyday activities and decisions, we strive to carry out our work in a way that benefits the environment and society as a whole. This includes being environmentally-friendly, supporting our communities through volunteering, ethical procurement practices or training, mentoring and apprenticeships for people from underrepresented groups.

It's also about being inclusive and fair in all aspects of our work and providing long-term value for colleagues, patients and the profession.



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Published November 2020

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The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SC037750)

GMC/CS2021-25/1120