General Medical Council

Sustainability and social responsibility (SSR) policy

Purpose

1 As a socially responsible organisation, we are committed to operating in a way that is ethical, sustainable, and beneficial to society.

2 Sustainability and social responsibility (SSR) are embedded across our organisation — from strategic initiatives to everyday activities. We recognise our responsibility to minimise environmental harm, support social wellbeing, and act with integrity in all that we do.

3 This policy sets out the principles and commitments that guide how we incorporate SSR considerations into our decision-making, operations, and organisational culture.

Strategic context

4 This policy supports and aligns with our 2026-2030 corporate strategy, which states:

"We want to be confident that our environmental sustainability work is relevant and has tangible impact. We also want to consider the social impact of our work."

5 To achieve this, we will:

- actively push forward our environmental sustainability work, setting clear goals and using data to track progress, with the ambition of becoming a fully net zero organisation by 2040.
- carry out our work in a way that is ethical and responsible, and benefits society.

Our commitments

6 As an employer and organisation, we must work to reduce our environmental impact by reviewing how we work and how we use resources. As a regulator, we can influence others by setting expectations, sharing insight, and promoting good practice.

The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SC037750).
You are welcome to contact us in Welsh. We will respond in Welsh, without this causing additional delay.

7 We're also committed to making sure our work has societal benefits more generally, and that the way in which we do it isn't detrimental to fairness, equality, diversity and human wellbeing.

8 Through our SSR work we will:

- integrate SSR considerations into organisational governance and operational practices where possible.
- make progress with our net zero plan to reduce our impact on the environment.
- align regulatory activity with broader public expectations of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

9 These commitments will help make sure ensure that we regulate doctors, physician associates (PAs) and anaesthesia associates (AAs) in a way that reflects societal values, long-term wellbeing, and the responsible stewardship of resources.

10 More generally, our SSR commitments reflect our wider responsibility to act ethically, support our people, manage risks effectively, and contribute positively to society.

11 Our SSR commitments therefore extend beyond organisational benefits; they reflect our wider responsibility to act ethically, support our people, manage risks effectively, and contribute positively to society.

Environmental sustainability

12 The global climate and ecological crisis represent one of the greatest threats to health and wellbeing. Their impacts, including increasing extreme weather events, rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, pressures on natural resources, and growing risks to physical and mental health, are already being felt in the UK and globally. These challenges reinforce the importance of our role as a regulator, employer, and public body in contributing to a more sustainable and equitable future.

Reaching net zero

13 Our Net Zero Plan sets out our ambition to:

- achieve net zero emissions for those we directly control by 2030.
- achieve net zero emissions for those we influence by 2040.

14 To support this, we will:

- calculate and report our carbon footprint annually.
- improve energy efficiency across our estate.

- minimise waste and apply sustainable waste management practices.
- work with suppliers to understand and improve their sustainability credentials.
- empower colleagues and contractors to champion environmental responsibility.

Education and standards

15 Through our work in education and standards, we will:

- set clear expectations for students and newly qualified doctors, PAs and AAs on sustainability and on considering the health impacts of climate change
- ensure these topics are taught, assessed, and reinforced throughout education and training
- consider the environmental impact of healthcare as we review our guidance on the professional standards expected of doctors, PAs and AAs and our learning resources where appropriate
- use our education quality assurance activity and engagement with medical schools, education providers, and employers to support learning environments where sustainable and safe care is modelled in practice.

Fitness to practise

16 We recognise that some doctors, PAs and AAs may feel strongly about social or ethical issues such as climate change, and that several recent cases have prompted questions around how our guidance applies to doctors taking part in protests or other forms of activism.

17 The organisation has put together some key points and case studies to explain our role and how we deal with concerns about the actions of doctors, PAs and AAs during protests, including when they have been found to have broken the law.

Social responsibility

18 Organisations have a responsibility to operate in a way that creates positive social value and supports the wellbeing of their employees, communities, customers, and wider society. Social responsibility recognises that organisational decisions can have significant impacts on people, including equality, inclusion, health, safety, human rights, and access to opportunities. By embedding responsible practices into our operations, we aim to contribute to a fairer and more inclusive society, strengthen trust with stakeholders, and ensure that our organisation plays an active role in addressing social challenges while delivering sustainable long-term outcomes.

19 We are committed to making a positive contribution to society by supporting our colleagues, protecting the public, and strengthening communities.

Social initiatives and community engagement

20 We support social mobility and widening participation by:

- working with medical schools and charities to encourage underrepresented groups into medical education
- partnering with a local high school from 2026 to raise awareness of our role and career opportunities
- supporting volunteering and community engagement initiatives
- encouraging colleague involvement in education, health, and sustainability-focused activities

Safeguarding

21 Safeguarding is a core responsibility of our role as a charity and regulator. We have clear procedures in place to help colleagues recognise, record, and report safeguarding concerns. Our corporate safeguarding team works with statutory organisations to protect those at risk, particularly vulnerable individuals.

22 Effective safeguarding supports long-term societal wellbeing, reduces inequalities, and strengthens public trust, aligning closely with our sustainability and social responsibility commitments.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

23 We are committed to fostering equality, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do. As a regulator and employer, we:

- work with partners to improve workplace cultures and address inequalities
- ensure education and training reflect the UK's diverse and changing health needs
- seek to understand the characteristics and experiences of those who interact with us
- design policies, services, and processes that are fair, effective, and accessible
- involve diverse groups of patients, carers, professionals, and the public meaningfully in our work.

24 We recognise that being a responsible employer also involves creating an environment where colleagues feel valued, supported, and able to thrive. Our commitment to workforce wellbeing is demonstrated through our approach to employee support, our workplace policies, and external recognition through accreditations including "Investors in People" and

"We invest in Wellbeing Silver" accreditation. These frameworks help us benchmark and continually improve our approach to supporting colleagues and building a positive workplace culture.

25 We aim to ensure fairness in decision making and for our workforce and leadership to reflect the communities we serve.

Ethical supply chains

26 We manage our supply chain ethically by requiring suppliers to follow strict standards on fairness, transparency, anti-bribery, modern slavery prevention, equality, and environmental responsibility. We also mandate strong data protection and integrity practices to ensure suppliers operate responsibly. We have a Procurement policy which specifically looks at social value.

27 We manage our supply chain in line with The Procurement Act 2023. This includes requiring suppliers to follow strict standards on fairness, transparency, anti-bribery, modern slavery prevention, equality, and environmental responsibility. We also mandate strong data protection and integrity practices to ensure suppliers operate responsibly. A minimum weighting of 10% will be applied to social value criteria for all tenders above the financial thresholds for which the full regime of the Procurement Act 2023 applies.

28 Responsible procurement prioritises suppliers and products that minimise environmental harm. This can include selecting goods and services that:

- reduce carbon emissions and energy use
- use sustainable materials
- minimise waste and packaging
- support circular economy practices such as reuse and recycling.

29 We can also influence suppliers to operate according to ethical labour and human rights standards. This may involve requiring suppliers to demonstrate:

- fair wages and safe working conditions
- no forced or child labour
- respect for workers' rights and equality.

30 Procurement can be used to support wider societal outcomes by prioritising suppliers that contribute positively to communities. For example, organisations may:

- work with small or local businesses

- support social enterprises or diverse suppliers
- encourage suppliers to demonstrate community benefit.

31 This approach helps ensure organisational spending contributes to positive economic and social outcomes.

Health and safety

32 We protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of colleagues and visitors by operating a robust health and safety management system. We identify, manage, and review workplace risks, meet our legal obligations, and promote a positive safety culture that goes beyond compliance.

Protecting data

33 We are committed to safeguarding personal and sensitive data in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act. We maintain high standards of security and integrity through:

- ISO 27001 and BS 10008 certification
- PCI DSS compliance
- NHS DSP Toolkit compliance.

Scope and exclusions

34 The purpose of this policy is to support the organisation's sustainability and social responsibility ambitions and to contribute to the delivery of the commitments set out in the Corporate Strategy. This policy establishes the principles, scope and approach for sustainability and social responsibility activity across the organisation.

35 **Ethical and sustainable investment decisions and policies lie outside the remit of this policy**: responsibility for investment strategy, investment policy, and related decision-making remains with the Investment Committee, and this policy does not seek to duplicate or influence the work of the Investment Committee.

Governance

36 We recognise that strong governance is essential to embedding SSR principles into our decision-making, managing risks and opportunities, and ensuring accountability across the organisation. Our governance arrangements ensure that our social responsibility and sustainability commitments are managed effectively, transparently, and ethically.

37 The Sustainability and social responsibility working group (SSRWG) is responsible for coordinating and supporting our sustainability and social responsibility workstreams. The group provides oversight of progress in this area, ensuring that activity is aligned with our Corporate Strategy and that there is a coordinated view of related work across the organisation. This group meets quarterly throughout the year.

38 The SSRWG is accountable to the Executive Board with an annual report submitted on SSR progress. Matters may be escalated (where appropriate) by Paul Reynolds, Director of Strategic Communications and Engagement.

39 We recognise the need to remain flexible and responsive to changes in legislation, policy, and best practice, and will review the scope and Terms of Reference of the SSRWG as required.

Communication

40 We will communicate this policy clearly to colleagues and make it publicly available. We will promote awareness of our SSR commitments, report on progress, and encourage feedback to support continuous improvement.