Executive summary
The Audit and Risk Committee has asked for assurance progress on Horizon Scanning following the report two years ago. We have had an initial discussion with our auditors and are planning to report the considerable progress to date and the fact that we have now agreed to embed as business as usual the key processes. We will be proposing a review of the impact on the organisation towards the end of the year once these processes have matured a little further.

Governance of the horizon scanning work lies with the Data Strategy Board, which in its January meeting noted the progress and approved next steps. Key points to note on progress are:

- Good progress has been made following the re-design of the horizon scanning process at the start of 2019. Outputs have led to some concrete actions and helped to generate reflection and debate about some of the key drivers that are likely to shape the future of medicine and medical regulation

- The new process is helping to foster a collaborative and agile approach to work between teams

- Engagement with external bodies that have expertise in futures work is providing new insights and helping to improve the GMC’s capability and effectiveness in this area.

Recommendation
Executive Board is asked to note the progress to date of the Horizon Scanning programme over the course of the last twelve months.
Horizon scanning process and ways of working

1 Following the outcome of an independent audit report, the horizon scanning process was redesigned at the start of last year and, broadly speaking, now consists of two interdependent components. The first of these (referred to as ‘The Scrum’) is concerned with the detection of near-term and emerging issues, whilst the second is focussed on exploring key strategic issues in more depth and encouraging reflection on what they could mean for the GMC’s operating environment over the longer-term.

The Horizon scanning scrum

2 The Scrum is a bi-weekly triage process involving representatives from different teams who meet to exchange intelligence from a range of internal and external sources – including news stories, social media, think-tank outputs, the devolved offices, and outreach teams (via The Intelligence Module). Once this information has been pooled, participants seek to triangulate insights, before analysts conduct a rapid review to consider it through the lens of GMC data. Issues that require escalation are referred to the Corporate Co-ordination Group.

3 Several themes have recurred on a regular basis since the process began last April, including pensions, technology in healthcare, treatment of transgender issues and workforce. Some updates have led to specific action. For instance, a scan of the Intelligence Module found that trainees in Northern Ireland had difficulties in raising concerns. This led to a targeted analysis of the National Training Survey, before the issue was escalated to the Patient Safety Intelligence Forum who tasked the devolved office to speak to the post-graduate dean for Northern Ireland. The item became a standing agenda item at the NI Joint Working Intelligence Group and fed into a series of local programmes which monitor organisational culture.

4 Further details about key outcomes, findings and actions from the Scrum process during 2019 can be found at Annex A.

5 The fortnightly cycle of intelligence gathering, and data exploration means that we can respond quickly to issues that have been identified. The outputs from the process are provided to individuals and groups throughout the organisation who can use the information to shape the work they are involved with and all outputs are stored on The Knowledge. A cultural impact of this process is that data teams are being encouraged to think more about insight and narrative. It is also contributing to a ‘one GMC’ approach as the scrum brings together every week people from the data, research and insight unit, OCCE, Communications, Education and outreach teams.
The Future Environment

6 The second component of the horizon process is focussed on exploring the ways the environment in which the GMC operates may change and evolve over time, and by encouraging reflection on the implications of such changes. It does so via consideration of key strategic issues, such as the workplace, workforce, education and training, and social attitudes. As well as drawing on information from the Scrum process and desk research, this takes into account external engagement and different ‘futures’ methodologies.

7 Last year’s outputs included a presentation about the ‘world in 2050’ that was produced for the Council Awayday and a scenario building exercise that was run at September’s Policy Summit event. This work is now being used by the Strategy Team to inform the future landscape that is described in the new corporate strategy.

8 Another output was a deep dive paper about the future of patient and public expectations. This formed the basis of a discussion at the Policy Leadership Group quarterly workshop last November and is helping to inform the development of the new patient and public engagement strategy that is being led by the Strategic Relationships Team.

9 The next topic of focus is under consideration at present and options include the medical working environment in 2030, trust in the medical establishment, and the future of regulation.

External Engagement

10 External engagement is an important aspect of the horizon scanning programme. Among the ways in which we have done this over the last year are by participating as members of the Government Office for Science run Heads of Horizon Scanning Network and by running joint horizon scanning workshops that involve the other regulators for healthcare professionals and feature guest speakers. We have also attended scenario building sessions for Health Education England’s Future Doctor project and held bilateral discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority. We are also engaging with the PSA’s futurology work.

11 The benefits of such engagement is that it helps us stay connected not only to relevant new information (such as reports and other resources that we would otherwise be unlikely to have access to), but to what other organisations are doing in this area and the different types of methodological approaches that we can bring to bear on our own work. For example, our involvement in the Heads of Horizon Scanning Network has provided us with access to training opportunities, including a workshop led by the Behavioural Insights Unit about the application of forecasting to
policy making. In turn, we were able to employ this technique during a joint horizon scanning workshop with fellow regulators.

Next Steps

12 Having begun as a pilot, we have agreed that the Scrum should become a business as usual function, and we are looking at ways of tailoring outputs more for different purposes. We will continue to develop and refine the model over the coming year, evaluating benefits and applying a continuous improvement approach to the mechanisms we use for collecting, storing, retrieving and employing information.

13 In respect of the work looking at the future environment, we are considering how best to prioritise the issues that we focus on in-depth and we are engaging with others as we do this, in particular the Research and Strategy teams and the Policy Leadership Group. We will also explore how we can most effectively and efficiently secure internal engagement with horizon scanning outputs and give thought as to how we can ensure that we capture a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints when reflecting on the future challenges and opportunities for the healthcare sector.