ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

The **Regulation** and **Quality Improvement** Authority

2025
2026

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Foreword

This report sets out the Annual Quality Report 2025-26 of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and reflects the breadth of RQIA's responsibilities, ranging from statutory assurance and oversight through to improvement, learning and collaboration.

This report describes how RQIA fulfilled its statutory responsibilities during the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and highlights the contribution made to improving the quality and safety of health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

The reporting year marks an important milestone for the organisation. It represents the first full year in which the work of regulation, including reviews, investigations and inspections, has operated together following the integration of the Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) functions and the transfer of Project ECHO Northern Ireland into RQIA. Throughout the year we have worked to strengthen the connections between assurance, learning and improvement, creating new opportunities to collaborate in supporting safety and quality improvement across the health and social care system.

The environment in which health and social care services operate remains challenging. Workforce pressures, increasing demand and significant financial constraints continue to impact organisations across the system. Against this backdrop, maintaining high standards of quality and safety, while continuing to improve outcomes and experiences for service users, remains a shared priority.

During 2025-26, RQIA continued to provide independent assurance through regulation, inspection and review activity and reporting, while supporting improvement through enabling collaborations, supporting networks and encouraging quality improvement initiatives. We have listened to the experiences of people who use services and their families, acted on concerns raised by the public and staff, promoted learning and encouraged collaboration across organisational boundaries with a focus on whole system working and a shared patient safety culture.

This report demonstrates the breadth of RQIA's contribution to improving quality and safety across services. It reflects the commitment of our staff, our Authority Members, our partners and the many service users, families, carers and stakeholders who contribute to our work. Most importantly, it demonstrates how regulation, inspection, review and a sustained focus on improvement work together in support of a common purpose:

To secure and improve the safety and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

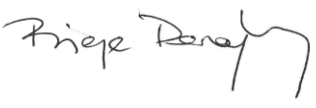
As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening intelligence-led and risk-based regulation, responding to the recommendations of the Muckamore Abbey Public Inquiry, both in our role of Regulator and the Mental Health Commission, and working as part of a collective approach to improve safety, protection and quality standards for all.

Together, these activities will continue to support safer services, better experiences and improved outcomes for the people who rely on health and social care services every day.

Sarah Wakfer
Chair



Briege Donaghy
Chief Executive



Executive Summary

This Annual Quality Report covers the period **1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026** and provides an account of how the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) fulfilled its statutory responsibilities and encouraged improvement in the quality and safety of health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

While the report includes activity delivered through HSCQI and Project ECHO, these examples are presented within the wider context of RQIA's statutory responsibilities for assurance, regulation, review and improvement.

The report reflects the first full year in which regulation, inspection, reviews and reporting work together with quality improvement following the integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) into RQIA, along with the transfer of Project ECHO Northern Ireland into RQIA. This creates opportunities to strengthen support to the statutory HSC system, combined with our registration and regulation roles across the wider health and social care system - whole system working.

Throughout the year, RQIA continued to:

- provide independent assurance regarding the quality and safety of services of registered services;
- register, regulate and inspect a range of health and social care services required to register with RQIA;
- use a risk-based approach and assess intelligence to inform regulation activities
- respond to concerns, safeguarding issues and whistleblowing disclosures;
- support quality improvement through regional programmes and improvement methodologies through HSC QI;
- develop improvement capability and workforce leadership with the support of Project ECHO.

The report is structured around the five Quality 2020 themes:

1.Transforming the Culture
Promoting openness, learning, engagement, safeguarding and public participation while ensuring that service users, families and carers remain at the centre of quality improvement activity.

2.Strengthening the Workforce
Supporting leadership development, quality improvement capability, workforce learning and the spread of improvement knowledge across health and social care.

3.Measuring Improvement
Using intelligence, evidence, evaluation and quality improvement methodologies to understand performance, support learning and improve outcomes.

4.Raising the Standards
Providing independent assurance through regulation, inspection, review and enforcement activity while promoting high standards of quality and safety.

5.Integrating the Care
Supporting partnership working, co-production, collaboration and system-wide improvement across organisational and professional boundaries.

The report also highlights the contribution of Project ECHO, improvement networks, leadership programmes and collaborative learning approaches in supporting workforce capability and service improvement across Northern Ireland.

To secure and improve the safety and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

RQIA 2025-26 At a Glance

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Regulation
- inspections
- registrations
- reviews

Assurance
- safeguarding
- whistleblowing
- concerns

Improvement
- improvement programmes
- QI participants
- Scottish Improvement Leaders (ScIL) Programme
- Scottish Quality and Safety Fellowship (SQSF) Programme

Learning
- ECHO participants
- organisations represented

Impact
- number of improvements implemented
- recommendations made
- examples of change



About RQIA

Who We Are

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is the independent body responsible for monitoring and improving the quality, safety and availability of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. Established under the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, RQIA's duties are to provide independent information on the availability and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland, and to encourage improvements in those services.

Our Purpose

To secure and improve the safety and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

As Northern Ireland's independent regulator, we play a key role in promoting public confidence in health and social care services. Through registration, inspection, review and quality improvement activity, we seek to ensure that people receive safe, compassionate and effective care, and that services continuously learn and improve.

RQIA's responsibilities span the full quality cycle of assurance, learning and improvement.

HSCQI Highlights 2025/26

- Strengthened improvement capability across health and social care
- Delivered regional quality improvement learning events
- Supported medication safety improvement activity
- Advanced improvement through the Delivering Value programme
- Promoted collaboration and shared learning across the system

Regulation

We register, inspect and monitor a wide range of health and social care services, ensuring compliance with legislation, regulations and minimum standards. We highlight good practice, identify areas requiring improvement and, where necessary, take enforcement action to protect service users.

Reviews and Independent Assurance

We undertake reviews of services and systems to provide independent assurance on quality, safety and governance. Through this work we identify opportunities for improvement, sharing learning and contributing to wider system development.

Quality Improvement

Through Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI), RQIA supports organisations and teams across HSC to build improvement capability, apply recognised quality improvement methodologies and deliver measurable improvements in care and outcomes.

Learning and Capability Building

Through initiatives such as quality improvement leadership training, and regional improvement programmes, we support workforce development, and the sharing of learning across organisational boundaries.

Our Responsibilities

RQIA's statutory functions include:

- Keeping the Department of Health informed about the availability and quality of health and social care services.
- Encouraging improvement in the quality of services.
- Protecting the interests of people with mental health conditions and those with learning disabilities.
- Registering, inspecting and enforcing standards across a broad range of regulated services.

RQIA also undertakes additional responsibilities, including monitoring compliance with the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018 and fulfilling a role within the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT, helping to safeguard the rights of people in places of detention.

As a prescribed body for whistleblowing, RQIA is able to receive protected disclosures from staff who raise concerns regarding the quality, safety or availability of services. Information received through whistleblowing forms an important part of our intelligence-led approach to regulation and inspection.

How This Report Aligns to Quality 2020



Improving quality remains a central priority for health and social care services in Northern Ireland. Quality 2020, the Department of Health's ten-year strategy for protecting and improving quality, established a clear vision that all services should be safe, effective, person-centred, timely, efficient and equitable.

In line with Departmental guidance, this Annual Quality Report is structured around the five strategic themes of Quality 2020 and demonstrates how RQIA contributes to improving quality and safety across the health and social care system. This report also reflects the first full operational year in which regulation, review, quality improvement and workforce development have been fully integrated within RQIA. As a result, it not only describes assurance activity, but also highlights how learning, leadership and improvement capability contribute to better outcomes across the system.

Theme 1: Transforming the Culture

This chapter describes how RQIA promotes openness, transparency, learning and continuous improvement. It highlights how we listen to service users, families, carers, staff and stakeholders, and how intelligence gathered through engagement, concerns and whistleblowing informs our work.

Theme 2: Strengthening the Workforce

This chapter demonstrates how RQIA supports workforce development through leadership initiatives, quality improvement programmes, training opportunities and learning networks. It also highlights how HSCQI and Project ECHO contribute to developing capability across the health and social care system.

Theme 3: Measuring the Improvement

This chapter focuses on how data, intelligence, evidence and improvement methodologies are used to understand performance, evaluate impact and support learning. It includes examples from regional quality improvement programmes and demonstrates how improvement is measured across the system.

Theme 4: Raising the Standards

This chapter outlines RQIA's regulatory, inspection and review activity, highlighting how standards are assessed, risks are identified and improvements are encouraged.

Theme 5: Integrating the Care

This chapter illustrates how partnership working, co-production and collaborative approaches support quality improvement across organisational and professional boundaries. It highlights the contribution of shared learning, networks and strategic partnerships to improving care and outcomes.

An Integrated Approach to Quality

Many of the activities described throughout this report contribute to more than one Quality 2020 theme. Regulation, review, quality improvement and workforce development are closely interconnected, with learning generated in one area often informing activity in another.

The integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) has strengthened RQIA's ability to connect improvement and learning in support of a common goal: improving the quality, safety and experience of health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

This report demonstrates how RQIA continues to fulfil its statutory responsibilities while supporting continuous improvement across the health and social care system.

One Year On: Integrating Improvement Within RQIA

Bringing Improvement and Learning Together

The integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) into RQIA on 1 November 2024 marked an important milestone in the organisation's development, bringing together regulation, review, quality improvement and development within a single organisation.

During 2025-26, the first full year of integrated working, the focus has been on strengthening the connections between these functions.

Why Integration Matters

Regulation and quality improvement share a common purpose: improving outcomes and experiences for the people who use health and social care services.

By bringing these functions together, RQIA aims to be better positioned to connect intelligence, evidence and learning from across the health and social care system and to use that knowledge to support meaningful improvement.

What Has Changed?

The integration has strengthened the opportunity to build relationships between:

Regulation: understanding quality through registration, inspection and enforcement activity
Review: providing independent assurance through thematic reviews and investigations
Improvement: supporting services through quality improvement methodologies and collaborative learning
Workforce Development: developing leadership and capability
Project ECHO: supporting workforce learning through shared knowledge and the preparation of peer networks



opportunity to create a more connected approach to quality, safety and improvement.

A More Connected System

The opportunity to consider learning generated through inspections, reviews, safeguarding intelligence, whistleblowing disclosures, stakeholder engagement and quality improvement programmes can now be considered more collectively, helping to identify themes, share learning and inform improvement priorities.

Intelligence → Insight → Improvement

This strengthens RQIA's contribution to developing a learning health and social care system where evidence, experience and improvement methods are used together to support better outcomes. Information gathered through inspections, reviews, safeguarding activity, whistleblowing disclosures, public engagement and quality improvement programmes is, and will be, used to identify risks, share learning and support improvement across the health and social care system.



Figure 1: Developing a Learning System

Chapter 1: Transforming the Culture

Quality 2020 Theme 1

1.1 Putting People at the Centre - Why people matter

The delivery of safe, effective and compassionate health and social care services begins with understanding the experiences, needs and expectations of the people who use them. Putting people at the centre of decision-making is fundamental to achieving high-quality services and remains a core principle of both RQIA's work and the wider ambitions of Quality 2020.

At RQIA, the views and experiences of service users, families, carers and communities help shape how we regulate, review and encourage improvement across the health and social care system. By listening to those who use services and acting on the intelligence they provide, we are better able to identify what is working well, where concerns exist and where improvements are needed.

Listening to People's Experiences

Throughout the year, RQIA engaged with service users, families, carers, providers and partner organisations through a wide range of activities. Information gathered through inspections, reviews, concerns and whistleblowing disclosures provided valuable insight into the quality and safety of services across Northern Ireland.

By placing service-user experiences at the heart of our work, we ensure that regulatory activity is informed by the realities of care and support as experienced by those who rely upon services every day.

A Culture of Openness and Learning

High-quality organisations are characterised by cultures that value openness, transparency and continuous learning. RQIA actively promotes these principles through its regulatory, review and quality improvement functions.

Through inspection findings, review recommendations and improvement support, RQIA promotes cultures that place quality and safety at the centre of service delivery and organisational decision-making.

Working in Partnership

Improving quality is a shared responsibility. RQIA works with providers, professional bodies, service users, carers and partner organisations to encourage improvement and support positive change across the system.

Partnership working enables the organisation to gain a broader understanding of people's experiences, identify common challenges and share learning that can benefit services across Northern Ireland.

The integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) within RQIA will strengthen opportunities for collaboration, enabling quality improvement methodologies, co-production approaches and lived experience perspectives to be more closely connected to the organisation's wider assurance and improvement functions.

Looking Ahead

As the health and social care system continues to evolve, maintaining a strong focus on people and communities will remain central to RQIA's work. Listening to experiences, learning from feedback and involving people in shaping services will continue to be essential in building trust, improving quality and supporting better outcomes for all.

1.2 What We Heard During 2025-26

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA gathered information from a wide range of sources including service users, families, carers, providers, staff, safeguarding activity and stakeholder engagement.

This information provided valuable insight into the experiences of people receiving and delivering care and helped identify both areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement.

1.3 Public Engagement and Participation

How we listened

Public engagement remains central to RQIA's approach to quality improvement and assurance. During 2025-26, we engaged with service users, carers, providers, community and voluntary organisations, and professional stakeholders to inform our work and ensure a broad range of perspectives contributed to our understanding of quality across the system. The views and experiences shared through engagement activity helped inform reviews, inspections, and improvement initiatives, supporting person-centred, evidence-informed decision-making.



Members of the My Home Life Strategic Advisory Group. During the year, RQIA continued to support the My Home Life Leadership Support Programme, an internationally recognised educational programme, delivered by Ulster University for care home managers and staff in leadership roles.

Listening Through Inspection Activity

Engagement with service users and families remains a core component of RQIA's inspection methodology.

Wherever possible, inspection teams speak directly with people using services and with those important to them. These conversations provide valuable information about day-to-day experiences of care and help inspectors understand how services are performing from the perspective of those receiving support.

Information obtained through these conversations contributes to inspection findings and helps ensure that service-user experiences remain central to regulatory assessments.

The Value of Public Participation

Public participation strengthens both assurance and improvement. Feedback and intelligence received from service users, families and communities contribute directly to:

- inspection planning and prioritisation;
- review and assurance activity;
- risk assessment processes;
- quality improvement programmes;
- service improvement recommendations; and
- organisational learning.



By listening to those who experience services first-hand, RQIA is better able to identify opportunities for improvement, support positive change and provide assurance that services remain focused on delivering safe, effective and person-centred care.

At a Glance - How We Listened During 2025-26

engagement during inspections;
discussions with service users and families;
participation in reviews;
and assurance activity;
stakeholder meetings and engagement forums;
partnerships with representative organisations;
co-production and lived experience initiatives;
public contacts, concerns and enquiries.



Why It Matters

informs inspection planning;
supports risk identification;
strengthens assurance;
improves decision-making;
encourages continuous improvement;
keeps people at the centre of quality and safety.





1.4 Learning from Feedback and Concerns

Using Feedback to Improve Quality

RQIA is committed to ensuring that the information received from service users, families, carers, members of the public and professionals is used effectively to support quality improvement across the health and social care system.

Throughout 2025-26, information received through concerns, enquiries and requests for guidance contributed to RQIA's understanding of quality and safety across services. This intelligence complemented information obtained through inspections, reviews, safeguarding notifications, whistleblowing disclosures and wider stakeholder engagement.

The Importance of Listening to Concerns

People often raise concerns because they want to ensure that services improve, risks are addressed and others do not experience similar difficulties in the future. RQIA operates a Guidance Team, who are available to listen, provide advice and ensure concerns are recorded for assessment by the relevant team.

By taking concerns seriously and responding proportionately, RQIA helps strengthen public confidence and supports a culture of openness, learning and continuous improvement.

Guidance and Information

As part of its role, RQIA's Guidance Team provides information and guidance to service users, families, carers, providers, professionals and members of the public.

Many contacts received by RQIA involve individuals seeking advice or clarification about health and social care services, regulatory requirements or concerns about the quality or safety of care.

Providing timely information and guidance helps people to:

- understand RQIA's role and responsibilities;
- access appropriate support and advice;
- raise concerns through the most appropriate channels;
- understand regulatory arrangements;
- make informed decisions regarding care and services.



In many instances, concerns raised through guidance contacts provide valuable intelligence that contributes to RQIA's regulatory and improvement activities.

1.5 Whistleblowing and Speaking Up

Anyone who works within a health and social care service can make a whistleblowing disclosure to RQIA about a concern or wrongdoing within that service under The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which details the protection for those making such disclosures.

During 2025-26, RQIA was contacted on 124 occasions by staff from both statutory and independent health and social care settings, who wished to ‘speak up’ about issues in their workplace.

Encouraging a Culture of Openness

A culture that encourages people to raise concerns is an essential component of safe, effective and high-quality health and social care services. When staff feel confident to speak up about issues affecting quality, safety or service delivery, organisations are better positioned to identify risks, learn from experience and act to protect those who use services.

RQIA recognises the important role that whistleblowing plays in supporting transparency, accountability and continuous improvement across the health and social care system. Staff often have a unique perspective on the services they work within and can provide valuable insight into issues that may not otherwise come to light.

Promoting a culture in which concerns can be raised safely and appropriately contributes to stronger governance, improved quality and better outcomes for service users.

Protecting Those Who Raise Concerns

People who raise concerns in good faith make an important contribution to quality improvement and public protection.

RQIA recognises that speaking up can be difficult and that individuals may have concerns about confidentiality or potential consequences.

RQIA is committed to handling protected disclosures appropriately, sensitively and confidentially. Processes are in place to ensure that concerns are assessed fairly, information is managed securely and individuals are treated with respect throughout the process.



By promoting confidence in whistleblowing arrangements, RQIA seeks to create an environment in which staff feel able to raise concerns when they believe something is wrong.

How We Use Protected Disclosures

- risk assessment;
- inspection planning;
- safeguarding activity;
- review programmes;
- regulatory decision-making;
- service improvement.



Why It Matters

- supports patient and service-user safety;
- identifies risks and emerging concerns;
- strengthens accountability and governance;
- informs inspection and review activity;
- encourages learning and improvement;
- promotes transparency and openness.



1.6 Safeguarding and Protection - Notifications and risk

Promoting Safety and Protecting People

Protecting people from harm is one of the most important responsibilities shared across the health and social care system. Effective safeguarding arrangements help ensure that people who use services are protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and avoidable harm, while promoting their rights, wellbeing and dignity.

RQIA plays an important role in providing independent assurance regarding safeguarding arrangements within regulated services.

Safeguarding as a Source of Quality Intelligence

Safeguarding information provides a source of intelligence for RQIA and offers insight into how services identify, manage and respond to risks.

In line with regional safeguarding guidance (the Adult Safeguarding Prevention and Protection in Partnership (DoH, Department of Justice, 2015)), RQIA is required to be advised by HSC Trusts about safeguarding allegations or incidents in services registered under Part III of the 2003 Order.

In addition, registered providers are also required to advise RQIA of safeguarding matters and/or staff misconduct incidents. When RQIA is advised of a safeguarding incident, it is recorded on the iConnect system against the appropriate service.

Safeguarding intelligence may highlight:

- risks to service users;
- concerns regarding care and support;
- organisational or systemic issues;
- staffing and workforce challenges;
- governance weaknesses;
- environmental or operational risks;
- areas requiring additional assurance or regulatory oversight.



Safeguarding investigations are led by HSC Trusts and/or the Police Service of Northern Ireland depending on the nature of the incident. RQIA participates where required, acting on any regulatory issues identified during an investigation.

By analysing safeguarding information alongside other evidence, RQIA is better able to identify patterns and respond proportionately to emerging concerns.

Responding to Risk

Where safeguarding information identifies potential concerns regarding the safety or wellbeing of people using services, RQIA takes appropriate action in line with its statutory responsibilities. Actions may include:



- seeking additional information from providers;
- reviewing available intelligence;
- undertaking monitoring activity;
- prioritising inspection activity;
- engaging with relevant agencies and stakeholders;
- participating in safeguarding discussions where appropriate; and
- considering regulatory or enforcement action where necessary.

This risk-based approach helps ensure that regulatory activity is targeted where it can have the greatest impact on protecting people and improving quality.

1.7 Lived Experience and Co-production

People who use health and social care services, together with families and carers, provide valuable insight into the quality and experience of care. Throughout 2025/26, RQIA sought to ensure that lived experience informed assurance, improvement and engagement activity across the organisation.

Through HSCQI, co-production approaches continued to be promoted within improvement programmes and learning initiatives, creating opportunities for people with lived experience to contribute to the development, delivery and evaluation of improvement activity.

By listening to and learning from the experiences of service users and carers, RQIA continues to strengthen the connection between people's experiences and improvement across the health and social care system.

1.8 Governance, Leadership and Assurance

How Quality is Governed

Strong governance, effective leadership and robust assurance arrangements are fundamental to delivering safe, high-quality health and social care services. They provide the framework through which organisations monitor performance, manage risk, promote accountability and drive continuous improvement.

As Northern Ireland's independent health and social care regulator, RQIA has a dual responsibility. Internally, the organisation must ensure that its own governance arrangements support the effective delivery of its statutory responsibilities. Externally, RQIA assesses the governance and leadership arrangements of the services it regulates, recognising that strong governance is one of the most significant indicators of quality, safety and organisational effectiveness.

Throughout 2025-26, governance and leadership continued to feature prominently within inspection findings and quality improvement programmes. Consistent evidence across the health and social care system demonstrates that where services are delivering positive outcomes, effective governance and strong leadership are often key contributing factors.

Governance Within RQIA

RQIA operates within a well-established governance framework that supports transparency, accountability and effective decision-making.

The RQIA Governance Framework sets out in an accessible manner the roles, responsibilities and procedures for the effective and efficient conduct of these arrangements by RQIA's Authority, its committees and Executive Management Team. RQIA's Authority, supported by its Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and Business, Appointments and Remuneration Committee (BARC), are responsible for the oversight of corporate performance and governance arrangements within the organisation.

Through regular meetings, arrangements for financial probity, risk management and audit are assessed. The Authority also oversees corporate performance reporting of RQIA's progress against strategic and operational aims and objectives and its commitment to quality improvement.

Governance as a Driver of Quality

Effective governance helps organisations to:

- identify and manage risks;
- respond to concerns and incidents;
- learn from feedback and experience;
- monitor performance;
- support accountability;
- encourage transparency; and
- drive continuous improvement.



Good governance provides the structures, behaviours and culture necessary to support high-quality care and services. Throughout the year, RQIA continued to assess governance arrangements as part of its inspection and review activity.

Leadership and Organisational Culture

Leadership plays a critical role in creating environments where high-quality care can flourish.

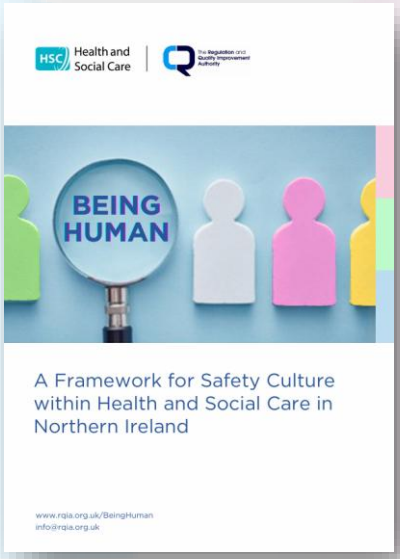
Strong leaders help establish clear expectations, promote positive cultures and support staff to deliver safe, compassionate and effective services. Equally, they create the conditions in which concerns can be raised openly, learning is encouraged and improvement becomes part of everyday practice.

Quality Improvement and Assurance

The integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) will provide opportunities to align regulatory intelligence, review findings and quality improvement methodologies more closely.

1.8.1 Building a Positive Safety Culture – Being Human

During 2025-26, RQIA led the development and launch of Being Human: A Framework for Safety Culture within Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland. The framework promotes a culture that is safe and compassionate, just and open, and continually learning and improving. Formally launched on 17 September 2025, it was endorsed by all six Health and Social Care Trusts.



Developed in partnership with people with lived experience, Health and Social Care organisations, professional bodies, staff representatives, regulators and system partners, the framework draws on learning from reviews, investigations and inquiries and recognises the critical role organisational culture plays in achieving safe, high-quality care.

The framework is structured around three interconnected domains:

- Commitment to Patient Safety and Staff Wellbeing
- Compassion, Civility and Respect
- Curiosity and Constructive Challenge

Together, these domains provide a shared language and vision for safety culture across Northern Ireland's health and social care system, highlighting the importance of leadership, psychological safety, openness, trust and continuous learning in creating environments where both service users and staff can thrive.

A positive safety culture encourages people to speak up, raise concerns and share feedback, recognising these as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than indicators of failure. Services that actively listen, respond and learn are better placed to

improve quality, strengthen public confidence and deliver positive outcomes for those who use their services. Through its regulatory, review and improvement functions, RQIA continues to promote this culture of openness, responsiveness and continuous learning.

Following the launch of the framework, work commenced on Phase 2 implementation support. During 2025-26, RQIA established a regional programme of work, including a Steering Group and three co-production workstreams focused on implementation support, practical resources and assurance. Health and Social Care organisations identified local Ambassadors, Champion Leads and Champions to promote awareness of the framework and support engagement with its principles.

Work also began on developing resources, implementation supports and engagement mechanisms to assist organisations in embedding the framework across the health and social care system. These early activities laid the foundations for the next phase of implementation and demonstrated a collective commitment to strengthening safety culture and supporting safer, more compassionate and continually improving services.

Chapter 2: Strengthening the Workforce
Quality 2020 Theme 2

A skilled, supported and empowered workforce is fundamental to delivering safe, effective and person-centred care. Quality 2020 recognises the importance of strengthening the workforce by developing the knowledge, skills, leadership and improvement capability required to meet current and future challenges across health and social care.

During 2025-26, HSCQI continued to support workforce development across Northern Ireland through a range of leadership, coaching, fellowship, educational and shared learning programmes. These initiatives enabled staff to develop improvement knowledge and skills, learn from colleagues and experts, and apply evidence-based approaches to improving quality, safety and outcomes within their own services.

Working in partnership with regional, national and international organisations, HSCQI provided opportunities for staff at all levels of the system to enhance their improvement capability, strengthen leadership for change and contribute to a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The following sections highlight key programmes and activities delivered during 2025-26 to support the development of a capable, confident and improvement-focused workforce.

2.1 Supporting Our Workforce

RQIA recognises that delivering high-quality regulation, review and improvement activity depends upon a skilled, motivated and supported workforce.

Throughout 2025-26, the organisation remained committed to creating an environment in which staff feel valued, respected and empowered to contribute to organisational success. This includes promoting wellbeing, supporting professional development and ensuring staff have access to the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their roles effectively.

Investing in staff development supports:

- organisational resilience; professional
- innovation and learning;
- workforce sustainability;
- continuous improvement.

RQIA remains committed to fostering a culture in which staff are encouraged to share ideas, contribute to improvement and support one another in delivering high-quality services.

During 2025-26, RQIA continued implementation of its Culture and Investors in People Action Plan.

Work progressed during the year across several themes including leadership, workforce development, staff engagement, communication, equality, diversity and inclusion and staff wellbeing.

Governance arrangements were strengthened through a series of dedicated action groups, supporting the organisation's commitment to creating a positive, inclusive and improvement-focused working environment.



Investors in People Award 2025

We were delighted that during the year RQIA was shortlisted as a finalist for an Investors in People Award 2025 in the 'Excellence in Building Purpose-Driven Impact' category.

This collaborative work aimed to improve culture in RQIA through addressing recommendations from the RQIA's Culture Assessment and IiP Re-accreditation. The judges particularly noted actions supporting change in culture and commitment to evaluate impact.

2.2 Leadership for Improvement

Effective leadership is essential for creating the conditions in which improvement can flourish. Throughout 2025-26, HSCQI continued to support staff and leaders across health and social care to strengthen their ability to lead change, foster collaboration and build cultures that support learning and improvement.

Investment in leadership development helps organisations respond effectively to challenges, sustain improvement efforts and support positive outcomes for the people who use services.

2.3 Building Quality Improvement Capability

Achieving sustainable improvements in quality requires organisations to develop both the capability and capacity to improve.

Quality improvement capability refers to the knowledge, skills, behaviours and confidence required to identify problems, test solutions, measure outcomes and deliver meaningful change.

Through HSCQI, RQIA supports the development of quality improvement capability across Northern Ireland's health and social care system by providing:

- structured improvement programmes;
- leadership development opportunities;
- collaborative learning opportunities
- quality improvement training;
- coaching and mentoring;



A key objective of this work is to create a culture in which improvement becomes part of everyday practice and where individuals and teams are equipped to use recognised methodologies to improve outcomes for service users.

This work supports the ambitions of Quality 2020 by strengthening the system's ability to identify opportunities, implement evidence-based improvements and sustain positive change over time.

Leadership, Coaching and Improvement Capability

During 2025-26, HSCQI continued to build improvement capability across health and social care through leadership development, quality improvement education and coaching.

This work supported staff to develop practical improvement skills, apply quality improvement methodologies and lead change within their services. Participation in quality coaching and all-island quality improvement initiatives strengthened networks, supported shared learning and contributed to the development of improvement capability.

Together, these activities helped grow the capacity and confidence required to support continuous improvement.

Shared Learning and Collaboration

HSCQI continued to create opportunities for shared learning and collaboration through a programme of regional learning events.

Sessions delivered during the year focused on learning from the International Forum, implementation science and practical approaches to collaborative improvement, including Liberating Structures to support improvement. These events enabled participants to share experiences, learn from improvement practice and strengthen their knowledge and skills. The programme supported the spread of learning and promoted a culture of continuous improvement across the health and social care system.

2.4 Scottish Improvement Leaders Programme

The Scottish Improvement Leaders (ScIL) Programme continues to be one of the flagship leadership development programmes supporting quality improvement capability across the health and social care system.

ScIL is a lead-level improvement programme, aligned to a Level 3 Quality Improvement qualification, which aims to develop individuals to design, develop and lead improvement projects, generate support for change and provide expert improvement advice.

The programme supports participants to develop advanced knowledge and practical skills in improvement science, leadership, coaching, measurement and systems thinking. Learning is applied through real-world improvement projects that address organisational and regional priorities.

Graduates of the programme play an important role in developing improvement capability within their own organisations and supporting wider system learning through collaboration, coaching and knowledge sharing.

ScIL Cohort 49

The fourth Northern Ireland Regional ScIL Cohort (Cohort 49) graduated in June 2025 at a ceremony attended by participants, faculty members and invited guests.



RQIA Chair, Christine Collins, speaking at the ScIL Cohort 49 Graduation.

ScIL Cohort 52

The fifth Northern Ireland Regional ScIL Cohort (Cohort 52) commenced in August 2025 with 32 participants drawn from across the health and social care system. This was the first cohort to be fully delivered and administered by local faculty following completion of a three-year phased transition model with NHS Education for Scotland.

Participants completed 19 modules covering topics including improvement science, systems thinking, measurement for improvement, human factors and coaching techniques. Learning was applied through improvement projects linked to regional priorities, enabling participants to translate theory into practice and contribute to service improvement within their organisations. The cohort will graduate in Autumn 2026.

ScIL Improvement Journey

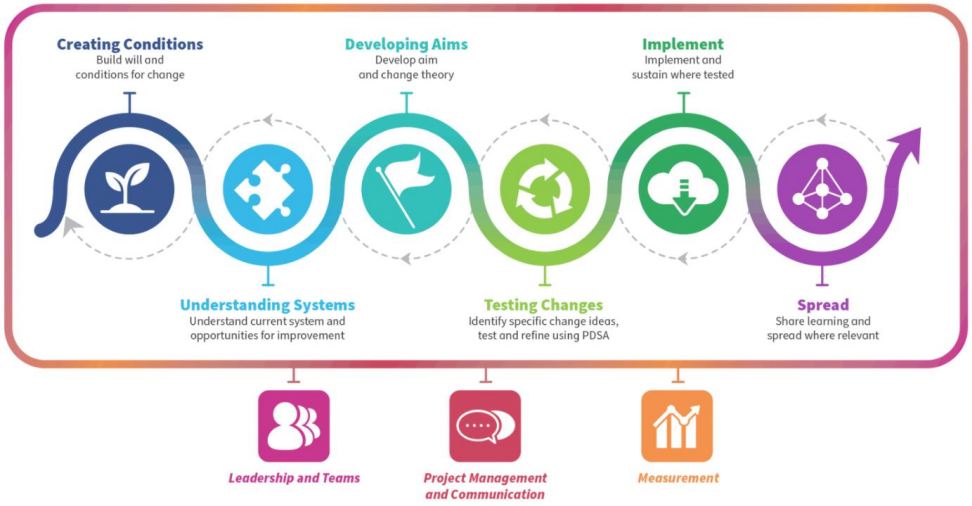


Figure 2: The Scottish Improvement Leaders (ScIL) Improvement Journey.

The ScIL programme provides participants with a structured framework for leading improvement, from understanding systems and developing aims through to implementation, measurement and the scale and spread of successful change.

The model combines improvement science, leadership development and practical application to support sustainable improvement across health and social care services.

The ScIL programme supports participants through a structured improvement methodology encompassing:

- creating conditions for change;
- understanding systems;
- developing aims;
- leadership and teams;
- project management and communication.

This approach equips participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to lead improvement initiatives and support sustainable change across health and social care services.

ScIL Programme 2025-26

- **1 cohort graduated;**
- **32 participants enrolled in Cohort 52;**
- **19 modules completed;**
- **multi-disciplinary participation from across HSC;**
- **first locally delivered cohort following transition from NHS Education for Scotland.**

2.5 Scottish Quality and Safety Fellowship

Scottish Quality & Safety Fellowship Programme

The Scottish Quality and Safety Fellowship (SQSF) is an internationally recognised programme that combines leadership development, quality improvement and patient safety. It is designed for healthcare professionals who have influence over the delivery of services and are committed to improving quality and safety within their areas of practice.

Managed by a partnership of Scottish public service improvement organisations and aligned to a Level 3 Quality Improvement qualification, the programme supports participants to:

- develop leadership skills;
- deepen their understanding of improvement science;
- learn from national and international best practice;
- lead and support quality improvement projects; and
- build professional networks across organisations and healthcare systems.



The Fellowship plays an important role in strengthening improvement capability across Northern Ireland by developing leaders who can influence change, support innovation and contribute to the delivery of safer, higher-quality care.

SQSF Cohort 16

In September 2025, five participants from Northern Ireland graduated from Cohort 16 of the Fellowship Programme alongside colleagues from Scotland, Denmark and Norway. Participants presented improvement projects developed during the programme, demonstrating the application of quality improvement methodologies to real-world healthcare challenges. Cohort 16 Fellowship Programme posters are available at https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/85134

SQSF Cohort 17

In October 2025, seven participants from across the Health and Social Care system commenced Cohort 17 of the programme. The cohort will continue until September 2026 and will provide participants with opportunities to further develop their leadership, improvement and patient safety expertise.

Graduates of the Fellowship contribute to improvement activity at both local and regional levels, sharing learning across organisations and supporting the continued development of improvement capability throughout the health and social care system.

Scottish Quality and Safety Fellowship 2025-26

- 5 participants graduated from Cohort 16;
- 7 participants commenced Cohort 17;
- international programme involving participants from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Denmark and Norway;
- focus on leadership, quality improvement and patient safety;
- fellows contribute to regional and local improvement activity across Health and Social Care.

THE MULTI DISCIPLINARY GROUP GAVE ME NEW PERSEPTIVES ON MY WORK PLACE CHALLENGES

2.6 All-Ireland Quality Improvement Coaching programme

Developing Quality Improvement Coaching Capability



HSCQI also continued to support the development of coaching capability through the **Quality Coach Development Programme**, which aims to build improvement capacity by equipping staff with the skills and knowledge required to coach individuals and teams undertaking quality improvement work.

The programme was developed in partnership with quality improvement experts from across the United Kingdom and adapted for the local context through collaboration between HSCQI and the Health Service Executive (HSE). The inaugural All-Ireland Quality Coach Programme commenced in September 2025 and was delivered jointly by HSE and HSCQI faculty.

A total of 12 participants from across Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care system enrolled in the programme, including representatives from all five

Health and Social Care Trusts and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. Participants developed practical coaching skills designed to support improvement teams, enhance leadership for improvement and strengthen the implementation of quality improvement methodologies within their organisations.

Building on the success of the programme, plans were progressed during 2025-26 to establish a quarterly All-Ireland Quality Coach Network to support programme alumni and provide an ongoing forum for shared learning, peer support and professional development. An All-Ireland graduation event is scheduled for December 2026.

Quality Coach Development Programme 2025-26

- 12 participants enrolled;
- representation from all five HSC Trusts and NIAS;
- joint HSCQI / HSE programme delivery;
- first All-Ireland Quality Coach Programme;
- All-Ireland Quality Coach Network planned for 2026.



2.7 Workforce Learning and Development

Through leadership development, coaching, collaborative learning and quality improvement support, HSCQI continues to invest in the people who drive improvement, helping to build a workforce that is adaptable, skilled and equipped to meet the challenges of a changing health and social care system.

Continuous learning is essential to maintaining and improving the quality, safety and effectiveness of health and social care services. HSCQI supports workforce development through a range of formal and informal learning opportunities designed to enhance knowledge, skills, confidence and leadership capability across the system.

During 2025-26, HSCQI continued to support workforce development through a broad programme of leadership, coaching and improvement initiatives.

These included quality improvement training, workshops, seminars, coaching and mentoring opportunities, improvement collaboratives, leadership development programmes and tailored support for organisations and teams. Together, these activities supported staff at all stages of their professional development and encouraged the application of improvement knowledge within everyday practice.

The year also saw continued delivery of the Regional Scottish Improvement Leaders (ScIL) Programme, the HSCQI/HSE Quality Coach Development Programme and a range of collaborative learning opportunities that brought together staff from across health and to apply learning directly within their own services and organisations.

to test ideas, evaluate outcomes and share learning, these initiatives helped strengthen the health and social care system's capacity to deliver sustainable improvement and better outcomes for service users.

Alongside formal development programmes, HSCQI delivered a range of learning events and shared learning opportunities that enabled staff to access new knowledge, explore emerging evidence and learn from improvement initiatives taking place across Northern Ireland and beyond. These activities supported professional development, promoted innovation and reinforced a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

2.8 HSCQI Community Learning Events 2025-26

HSCQI continued to provide a range of learning and development opportunities for staff across health and social care.

Through partnerships with local, national and international experts, these events supported knowledge exchange, capability building and the spread of improvement/ implementation science across the region.

Key learning events during the year included:

QPS TalkTime: How to Design a Survey for Quality and Patient Safety Work (May 2025)

In partnership with the National Quality and Patient Safety Directorate, HSCQI contributed to the QPS TalkTime webinar series through a session led by Dr Anita Rowe.

The webinar focused on the effective use of surveys within quality improvement programmes, including common survey design pitfalls, writing effective questions, and considerations for collecting high-quality data.

The event helped participants strengthen their evaluation and measurement capability, supporting evidence-based improvement work.



QPS TalkTime 2025

- 13 May 2025
- 40+ participants
- 90% rated the session very good or excellent

Focus areas:

- survey design;
- evaluation;
- data quality;
- measurement for improvement;
- evidence-based improvement.

Learning from the IHI International Forum 2025 – From Inspiration to Impact: Shaping the Future of Health and Care (23 October 2025)



Following attendance at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) International Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare 2025, Utrecht, HSCQI hosted a virtual learning event to share key insights and learning with colleagues across Northern Ireland. The session explored international examples of innovation, emerging improvement approaches and opportunities to apply learning within local health and social care services.

Through presentations, discussion and reflection, participants gained insights into international best practice, quality improvement methodologies and innovative approaches being used to strengthen health and care systems worldwide. The event also provided an opportunity to consider how these approaches could support future improvement activity across Northern Ireland.

More than 40 participants attended from across the health and social care system. Feedback was highly positive, with 90% of respondents rating the event as very good or excellent.

The event demonstrated the commitment of HSC staff to learning from global expertise and applying that learning locally. By creating opportunities to exchange ideas, share experiences and discuss practical applications, the session helped extend valuable learning beyond those who attended the Forum and reinforced the importance of collaboration, shared learning and continuous improvement in driving better outcomes across health and social care services.

EQUIP – Developing Future Improvement Leaders (August 2025)

In August 2025, HSCQI participated in the **EQUIP Celebrate and Launch Event**, led by Nigel Harte and the NIMDTA GP Quality Improvement Programme.
The programme supports GP trainees to develop the language, skills and practical experience required to lead improvement within healthcare and encourages an ethos of **“All Teach, All Learn, All Improve”**.

HSCQI contributed as both a keynote presenter and panelist, supporting the assessment of trainee quality improvement projects and sharing how the HSCQI Hub, HSCQI Network and Leadership Alliance contribute to the delivery of improvement priorities across Northern Ireland.

The event provided an opportunity to demonstrate how quality improvement capability is developed through leadership, partnership working, co-production and learning systems approaches. It also enabled GP trainees to gain a broader understanding of the improvement ecosystem across Health and Social Care, including how local improvement work connects with regional, national and international networks.

By supporting early-career clinicians to develop improvement skills and leadership behaviours, the programme contributes to building a workforce that is equipped to lead and sustain improvement throughout their professional careers.



The EQUIP programme supports GP trainees to develop practical quality improvement skills and leadership capability, helping to strengthen the next generation of improvement leaders across Health and Social Care.

How Can Implementation Science Support Transformation in Healthcare?

(December 2025)



HSCQI in partnership with Queen's University hosted an international virtual session with Professor Geoff Curran, Director of the Centre for Implementation Research at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

The event explored the growing field of implementation science and its role in supporting the uptake, scale and spread of effective practice.

Participants gained insights into how implementation approaches can support sustainable transformation across health and social care services.

Liberating Structures in Action (3 March 2026)



Delivered as an All-Ireland collaboration between the Health Service Executive (HSE) National Quality and Patient Safety Directorate and HSCQI, this interactive session introduced participants to Liberating Structures, a set of facilitation techniques designed to stimulate creativity, innovation and staff engagement.

The webinar focused on practical application in quality improvement, conditions for success, and access to wider resources and communities of practice. The session was particularly relevant for those interested in quality improvement, collaboration, behaviour change and innovation.

Community Learning Events 2025-26

- three major regional learning events highlighted;
- international contributors engaged;
- learning shared across organisational and professional boundaries;
- focus on implementation science, quality improvement and innovation;
- collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and the Health Service Executive.

Overall Impact

These events demonstrate HSCQI's commitment to developing improvement capability by connecting practitioners with contemporary improvement methods, implementation science expertise and practical tools to support quality and patient safety. Through collaboration with regional, national and international partners, the HSCQI Community continues to strengthen networks, promote shared learning and build improvement capacity across health and social care.

2.9 Building Sustainable Improvement Capacity

The development of sustainable improvement capacity requires ongoing investment in people, relationships and learning. Through the programmes and activities described in this chapter, HSCQI continued to support the development of a workforce equipped to lead and sustain improvement.

The combination of formal development programmes, coaching initiatives, fellowships and shared learning activities helped create opportunities for individuals and organisations to strengthen their improvement capability and contribute to system-wide learning. Together, these initiatives support the development of a skilled, confident and improvement-focused workforce capable of delivering sustainable change and better outcomes for service users.

Chapter 3: Measuring Improvement

Quality 2020 Theme 3

Introduction

High-quality health and social care systems learn continuously from evidence, experience and outcomes. Measuring improvement is not simply about collecting data; it is about understanding what information tells us, using that information to support better decision-making and applying learning to improve services and outcomes.

3.1 How We Use Intelligence and Evidence

Reliable intelligence and evidence are essential to understanding the quality and safety of services. Within RQIA, intelligence refers to the systematic collection, analysis and use of information from multiple sources to support decision-making, identify risks, recognise emerging trends and target improvement activity.

This includes regulatory information, review findings, service-user feedback, complaints, safeguarding concerns, stakeholder engagement, workforce information and data supplied by providers and partner organisations.

In practice, intelligence provides the knowledge base that enables RQIA to make informed decisions and direct resources where they can have the greatest impact. RQIA collects and analyses information from a wide range of sources to inform its regulatory, review and improvement activities.

Sources of intelligence include:

- inspections and regulatory activity;
- service-user & carer feedback;
- whistleblowing disclosures;
- review findings;
- concerns;
- provider notifications;
- safeguarding notifications;
- stakeholder engagement;
- service-user & carer feedback;
- quality improvement activity.





Bringing together multiple sources of intelligence enables the organisation to develop a more complete picture of service performance and identify priorities for action. No single source of information provides a complete picture. By triangulating intelligence and evidence from different sources, RQIA is able to identify trends, detect emerging risks and support informed decision-making. This approach ensures that regulatory and improvement activities are proportionate, evidence-based and focused on areas where they can have the greatest impact.

3.2 Intelligence-Led Regulation

RQIA's regulatory activity is increasingly informed by intelligence and risk. An intelligence-led approach enables the organisation to target activity more effectively, ensuring that attention is focused on areas where concerns have been identified or where additional assurance is required. Rather than relying solely on routine inspection activity, intelligence-led regulation considers:

- risk indicators;
- inspection findings;
- notifications and concerns;
- whistleblowing information;
- safeguarding intelligence;
- service-user experiences; and
- wider system developments.



This enables earlier intervention where concerns arise and supports a more responsive and proportionate approach to regulation.

Intelligence-led regulation also strengthens the connection between assurance and improvement by helping identify not only risks and concerns but also opportunities for learning and the spread of good practice.

3.3 Shared Intelligence Framework

Effective improvement depends on the ability to bring together information from multiple sources and use it to support informed action.

The framework promotes:

- better sharing of information;
- improved identification of risks and opportunities;
- stronger collaboration between organisations;
- more informed decision-making; and
- greater alignment between assurance and improvement activity.

The Shared Intelligence Framework provides a structured approach to gathering, analysing and sharing information from across the health and social care system to support regulatory oversight, improvement planning and organisational learning.

The development of shared intelligence approaches reflects a recognition that quality and safety issues rarely exist in isolation, and that a comprehensive understanding of service performance requires collaboration across organisational and professional boundaries.

By bringing together diverse sources of intelligence, RQIA is better positioned to identify emerging themes, develop meaningful insights and support improvement at both organisational and system levels.

By improving how information is shared and interpreted across the organisation, the framework helps ensure that actions are informed by evidence and that resources can be targeted where they are likely to have the greatest benefit for service users.

3.4 Building a Learning Health and Social Care System

A learning health and social care system uses evidence, experience, data and evaluation to inform decision-making and improve outcomes. Through regulation, review, quality improvement and workforce development activity, RQIA contributes to system learning by identifying opportunities for improvement, sharing learning and promoting evidence-informed practice.

The integration of HSCQI within RQIA will help strengthen opportunities to connect assurance, improvement and workforce development, supporting a more learning-oriented approach across health and social care.

3.5 Measuring Quality and Improvement

Quality improvement requires measurement. Measurement enables organisations to understand current performance, determine whether changes are resulting in improvement and identify areas requiring further attention.

RQIA promotes approaches to measurement that focus on:

- outcomes;
- experience;
- safety;
- effectiveness;
- access;
- efficiency; and
- sustainability.



Quality improvement programmes supported by HSCQI use recognised approaches such as:

- collaborative learning methodologies;
- the Model for Improvement;
- Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles;
- measurement for improvement;
- driver diagrams.



These approaches support teams to test changes, evaluate impact and adapt interventions based on evidence and learning.

Measurement is most effective when it is used not simply for assurance but as a tool for learning, improvement and decision-making.

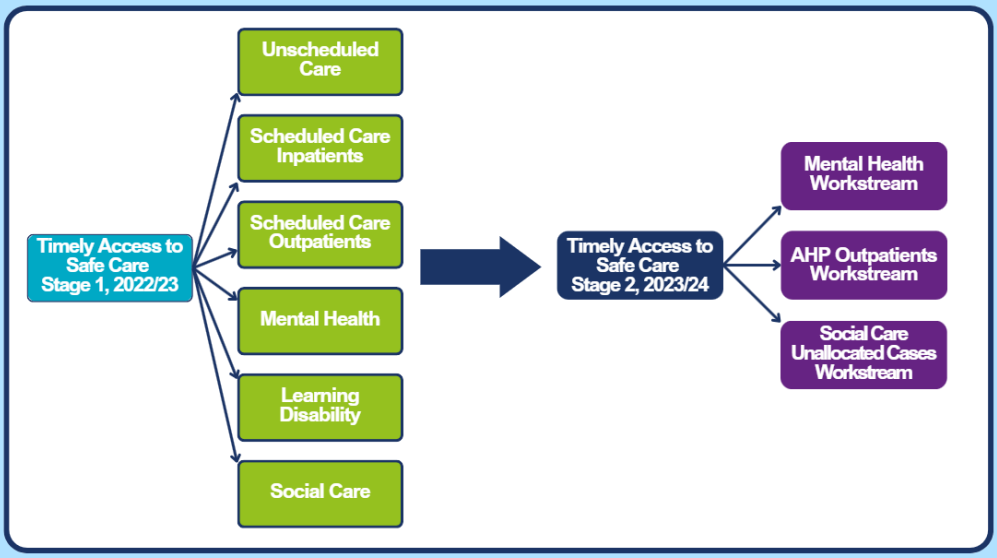
3.6 Quality Improvement in Action

3.6.1 Timely Access to Safe Care (TASC)

TASC Programme Evaluation – Background

In November 2021, the HSCQI Leadership Alliance directed the HSCQI Network to align regional Quality Improvement (QI) resource and effort to identifying local improvement projects focused on improving access to safe care, with a view to scaling and spreading a number of these projects system-wide.

Programme Design and Model



The TASC programme was structured in two stages: **Stage 1: Innovation (November 2022–May 2023)** was focused on identifying and assessing the potential within six workstreams for system-wide scale and spread.

Figure 3: The two stages of the TASC Programme

Following a shortlisting process, three project areas were selected as being in the optimal state of readiness for system-wide scale and spread and progressed to TASC Stage 2.

Stage 2: Co-innovation (September 2023–May 2024) was focused on system-wide co-innovation and adoption of projects selected during TASC Stage 1. There were 21 project teams in TASC Stage 2 (three TASC 1 innovator teams and 18 co-innovator teams) within three workstreams.

Evaluation Scope and Methodology

As the TASC programme was the first scale and spread programme designed and delivered by the HSCQI Network, the evaluation sought to address questions about both programme design and delivery and about its effectiveness. Therefore, the programme evaluation included elements of both process and impact evaluation. Process evaluation examined programme design, participant experience and fidelity of implementation; impact evaluation assessed outcomes such as project aim achievement, replication of innovations, knowledge sharing and application of demand and capacity methodologies. Data were collected via surveys, interviews, SharePoint usage analytics and codification of TASC project team documentation.

Key Findings – Value Added

The region-wide structure of TASC enabled the sharing of best practices and innovations, creating a collaborative learning culture across Trust boundaries. TASC teams reported that the programme helped prioritise QI internally and strengthened organisational commitment to improvement work. Seventy-two per cent of co-innovator teams (n=13) achieved their project outcome aims.

Whilst 28% of co-innovator teams (n=5) did not achieve their main outcome aim, they did make improvements to process measures within internal pathways; for example, through waiting list validation alone, one team reduced their waiting list by 29%. Participation supported organisational learning and created momentum for improvement at a local level. The programme enhanced individual team members' confidence and skills in QI methodology, while regional collaboration enhanced visibility, legitimacy and accountability of local QI projects.

Collaboration was supported through in-person and online learning sets, QI mentorship and facilitation, standardised improvement documentation (including the TIDieR and SQUIRE-based reports), and a shared digital platform (SharePoint) for knowledge exchange. Shared learning environments and cross-disciplinary engagement promoted creativity, accountability and a sense of common purpose.

Every participating team, whether they advanced to Stage 2 or not, made a valuable contribution to the programme's development and findings. These contributions informed refinements to the TASC model and added to the evidence base on scaling improvement in complex systems. Projects that did not progress to wider adoption often achieved meaningful local process improvements and enriched learning across the network.

Evaluation Recommendations

1. **Strategic Alignment**: Define and agree on strategic regional priorities and allow adequate planning time before programme initiation.
2. **Regional Priorities**: Allow for an adequate exploration of the priority in order that the appropriate improvement methodology is decided in advance of the identification of local project teams.
3. **Programme Design**: Strengthen engagement with executive leadership and establish readiness criteria for project inclusion.
4. **QI Capability**: Expand training in improvement methods, data analysis and implementation science; enhance documentation training, support and feedback.
5. **Documentation and Evaluation**: Improve guidance and tools for capturing both explicit and tacit knowledge to facilitate adoption and adaptation across contexts.

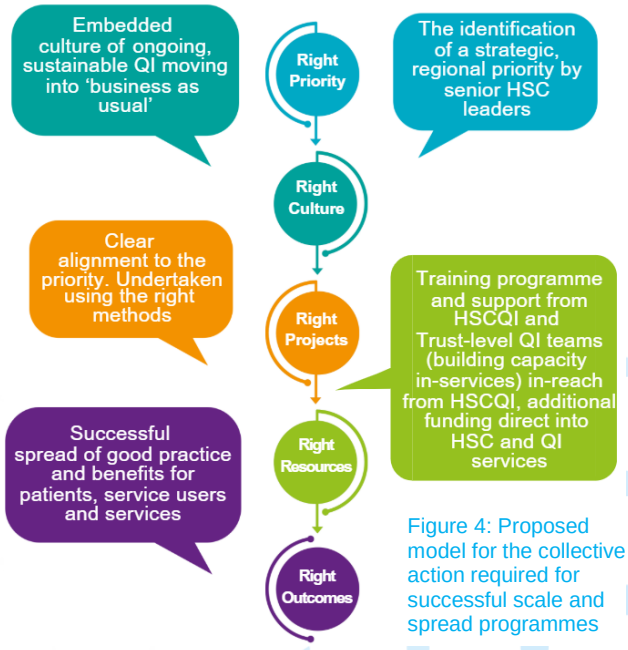
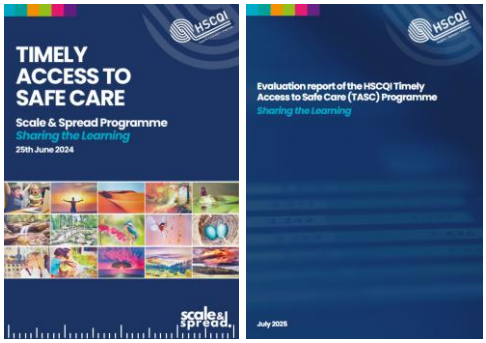


Figure 4: Proposed model for the collective action required for successful scale and spread programmes

Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that regional collaboration can act as a powerful enabler of service improvement through shared accountability, mutual learning and peer support, while providing a strong foundation for future regional quality improvement initiatives.



The TASC Scale & Spread Programme 'Sharing the Learning' document can be viewed at: https://hscqi.hscni.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/TASC-Event-Booklet-PDF-FINAL-Compressed.pdf

The TASC Evaluation can be viewed at: https://canva.link/xn2ikyynjllsru6

3.6.2 Medication Safety

Medication safety remained a significant strategic improvement priority during 2025-26. In partnership with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) HSCQI supported the delivery of the Transforming Medication Safety for Northern Ireland (TMSNI) programmes advancing initiatives to reduce avoidable medication-related harm and improving outcomes for service users.

A key focus during the year was the development and launch of the HSC 5 Moments for Medication Safety tool. HSCQI and TMSNI led a whole-system engagement process to develop and launch a Northern Ireland HSC adaptation of the World Health Organization (WHO) *5 Moments for Medication Safety* tool in November 2025.

The initiative supported the objectives of both the *Medication Without Harm* challenge and the Northern Ireland Transforming Medication Safety Strategy, with a particular focus on improving medication safety, supporting shared decision-making and addressing health inequalities through a health literacy approach.

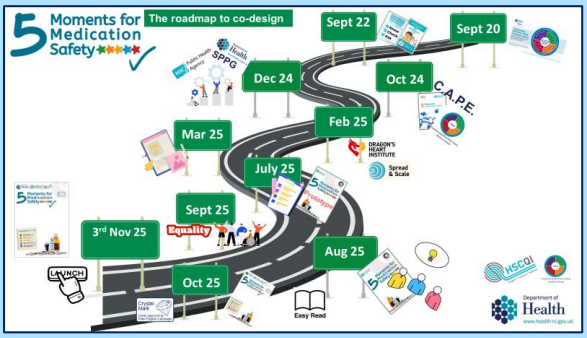
Working alongside lived experience representatives, healthcare professionals and system partners, HSCQI supported a comprehensive co-design process to adapt the WHO resource for the Northern Ireland context. The resulting tool was designed around the principles of health literacy, accessibility and person-centred care, achieving Plain English Crystal Mark standards and including the development of an Easy Read version.

A suite of supporting resources was produced to support implementation and uptake across Health and Social Care settings, including:

- a medication safety booklet;
- *My Medicines List*;
- posters;
- stickers; and
- digital resources.



To support implementation, HSCQI and TMSNI co-delivered a programme of engagement and learning sessions across Health and Social Care Trusts and with lived experience groups. These sessions promoted medication safety, health literacy and shared decision-making and helped raise awareness of the role that patients, service users, families and carers can play in the safe use of medicines.



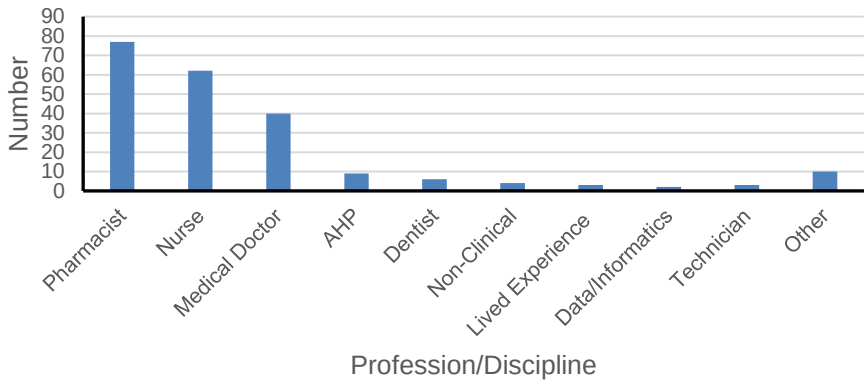
The initiative demonstrates the value of co-production and partnership working in developing practical, accessible resources that empower people to become active partners in the safe and effective use of medicines. By supporting better conversations about medicines and encouraging shared decision-making, the programme contributes to safer care, improved health literacy and better experiences for patients, families and carers across Health and Social Care services.

For more information go to: https://online.hscni.net/our-work/pharmacy-and-medicines-management/medicines-management-programmes/medication-safety/5-moments-for-medication-safety-coming-soon/

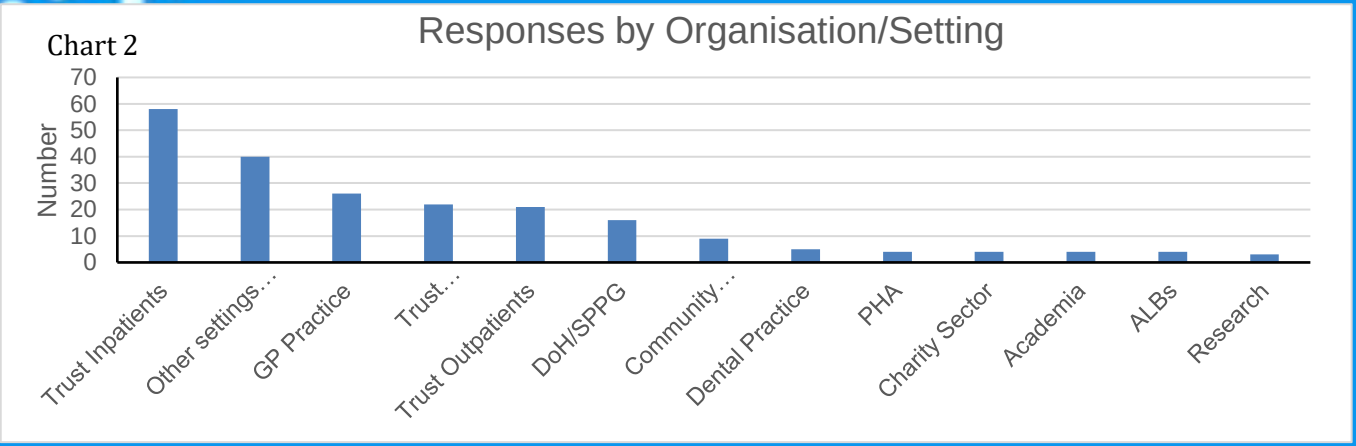
3.6.3 Transforming Medication Safety for Northern Ireland: Identifying the next whole system improvement priority

Building on the success of the Regional Opioid Improvement Collaborative, HSCQI partnered with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group's Transforming Medication Safety Northern Ireland (TMSNI) programme to identify the next regional medication safety improvement priority for Northern Ireland.

Chart 1 Respondents: Breakdown by Profession / Discipline



Between April and May 2025, a system-wide scoping exercise was undertaken involving 216 respondents from across Health and Social Care. Pharmacists, nurses and medical staff accounted for more than 80% of responses, with participants representing a broad range of settings including acute care, community services and primary care.



Respondents were asked to prioritise six potential programme topics:

- hypoglycaemic medicines;
- polypharmacy;
- time-critical medicines (TCMs);
- transitions of care;
- adherence; and
- anticoagulants.

Using weighted scoring, Polypharmacy and TCMs emerged as the highest-ranked priorities. While Transitions of care attracted more first-choice votes than TCM, TCM received stronger support across all rankings, resulting in a higher overall weighted score.

Priority	# Ranked 1	Ranked 1 weighted score	# Ranked 2	Ranked 2 weighted score	# Ranked 3	Ranked 3 weighted score	# Ranked 4	Ranked 4 weighted score	# Ranked 5	Ranked 5 weighted score	# Ranked 6	Ranked 6 weighted score	**Combined weighted score**
Polypharmacy	65	390	44	220	35	140	30	90	30	60	12	12	**912**
Time-Critical Medicines	47	282	48	240	39	156	37	111	27	54	18	18	**861**
Transitions of Care	53	318	35	175	30	120	30	90	38	76	30	30	**809**
Hypoglycaemic Medicines	26	156	45	225	43	172	41	123	37	74	24	24	**774**
Anticoagulants	13	78	23	115	46	184	40	120	36	72	58	58	**627**
Adherence	12	72	21	105	23	92	38	114	48	96	74	74	**553**

Figure 5: Prioritisation of potential programme topics

To further explore the findings, HSCQI and TMSNI co-hosted a regional stakeholder workshop in June 2025 involving more than **90 representatives** from Health and Social Care Trusts, primary care, academia, arm's-length bodies, the independent sector and people with lived experience.

Participants used structured improvement approaches, including Liberating Structures, COM-B and Force Field Analysis, to identify barriers, enablers and opportunities associated with each priority area. Following discussion and deliberation, participants selected TCMs as the focus of the next regional medication safety improvement programme.

Programme development

The outputs from the scoping exercise and stakeholder workshop informed stakeholder mapping, expert engagement and programme design activity.

In March 2026, HSCQI co-led the establishment of a regional TCMs Expert Advisory Group (EAG), with representation from all HSC Trusts, people with lived experience, Parkinson's UK Northern Ireland and Diabetes NI. Engagement has been extended to independent care homes, to support a whole-system approach.

The programme will support future improvement activity focused on reducing harm associated with delayed or omitted administration of Parkinson's and insulin medicines, helping to improve medication safety and reduce avoidable harm.

Transforming Medication Safety 2025-26

- 216 respondents to regional scoping exercise;
- representation from acute, community and primary care settings;
- 90+ stakeholders participated in regional workshop;
- TCMs selected as next improvement priority;
- regional EAG established in March 2026.



3.6.4 Delivering Value

Following further direction from the HSCQI Leadership Alliance, HSCQI launched the second regional scale and spread programme, Delivering Value (DV), in August 2023.

The programme was designed to:

- test local improvement projects using recognised quality improvement methodologies, evidence and measurement;
- support the spread and adoption of effective improvement initiatives across Health and Social Care organisations; and
- strengthen quality improvement capability among participating staff and teams.

As with the earlier Timely Access to Safe Care (TASC) programme, Delivering Value adopted a collaborative approach to improvement and included a structured assessment process to identify projects with the potential for wider implementation.

Regional Scale and Spread of EPCO

Through this process, the Enhanced Patient Care and Observation (EPCO) model, originally developed and tested within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, was selected for regional scale and spread.

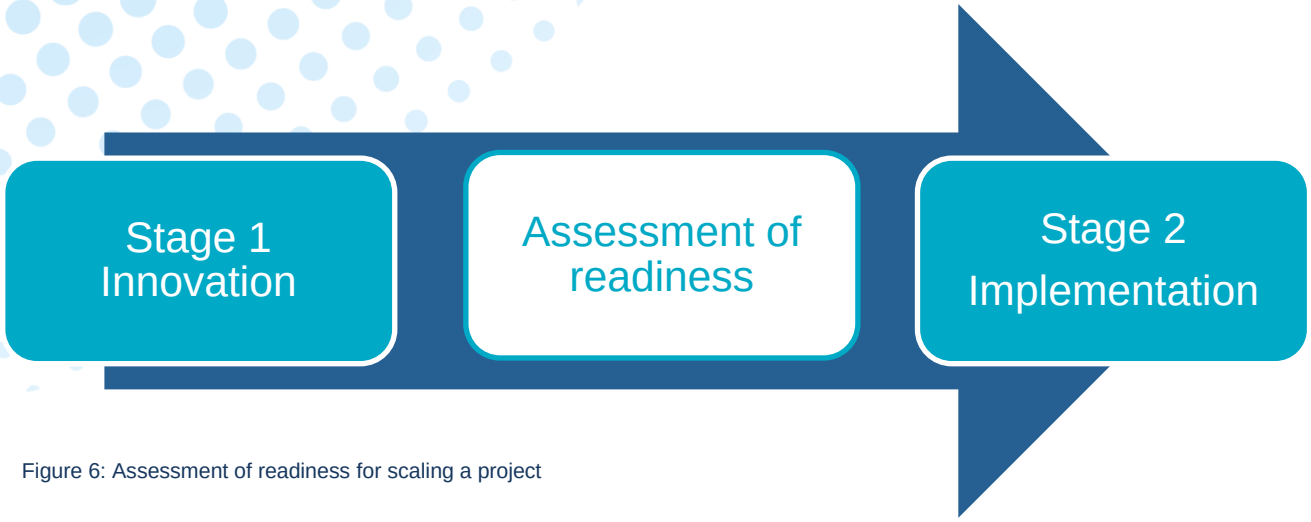


Figure 6: Assessment of readiness for scaling a project

During 2025-26, HSCQI worked alongside Health and Social Care Trusts and partner organisations to support implementation of EPCO across Northern Ireland.

On 18 September 2025, HSCQI hosted a regional implementation workshop that brought together Trust teams involved in the delivery of EPCO. The event focused on implementation planning and shared learning and included contributions from:

- Professor Laurence Taggart, Queen's University Belfast; and
- Rebecca Maud**,** Deputy Director of Nursing, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Participating organisations shared progress updates, implementation experiences and learning from their local EPCO programmes.

On 29 September 2025, Executive Directors of Nursing supported the establishment of two regional task-and-finish groups to address key issues associated with implementation:

- definitions, data and outcomes; and
- training, resources and communications.

These groups brought together representatives from all Health and Social Care Trusts together with the Public Health Agency, Dementia Health Care Northern Ireland, Age NI and the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery.

A further collaborative workshop, Building on Success: A Collaborative Workshop on the Future of EPCO, took place on 9 December 2025**.** The workshop focused on developing consensus around outcome measurement, implementation approaches, training requirements and supporting resources.

Supporting Sustainable Improvement

The Delivering Value programme demonstrated how evidence-based approaches can support successful implementation and wider adoption of improvement initiatives. By providing structured support for scale and spread, organisations are better able to understand implementation challenges, reduce unwarranted variation and accelerate improvements that have already demonstrated value in practice.

The regional adoption of EPCO provides a positive example of this approach in action. Building on the success of local testing within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, the programme was adopted as a regional improvement priority and supported through collaborative learning, implementation support and partnership working.

This work demonstrates the growing maturity of the regional improvement system and highlights the potential for coordinated, evidence-informed approaches to deliver sustainable improvements in care across Northern Ireland.

Delivering Value 2025-26

- EPCO selected for regional scale and spread;
- regional implementation workshop held – 18 September 2025;
- Executive Director of Nursing support secured – 29 September 2025;
- two regional task-and-finish groups established;
- collaborative EPCO workshop held – 9 December 2025;
- representation from all Health and Social Care Trusts and regional partners.

3.7 Impact and Outcomes

The success of quality improvement programmes is ultimately measured by the difference they make to people's experiences and outcomes.

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA continued to evaluate improvement initiatives and assess their impact on:

- access to services;
- patient and service-user experience;
- workforce capability;
- quality and safety;
- operational efficiency; and
- system learning.

The examples outlined throughout this chapter demonstrate how improvement methodologies, partnership working and the effective use of intelligence can support meaningful and sustainable change.

3.7.1 Responsive Quality Improvement Support Across the System

Throughout 2025-26, HSCQI continued to act as a regional improvement resource, responding proactively to requests from Health and Social Care organisations and partners across Northern Ireland.

Through a combination of bespoke workshops, tailored improvement advice, coaching, facilitation and critical friend support, HSCQI helped organisations address local challenges, strengthen improvement capability and apply quality improvement methodologies within their own settings.

This responsive advisory function enables organisations to access specialist improvement expertise when required, supporting the design, delivery and evaluation of improvement initiatives at local, regional and system levels. Demand for support during the year reflected growing recognition of quality improvement methodologies, measurement approaches and co-design techniques as important enablers of service transformation, workforce development and person-centred care.

During the year, HSCQI supported a range of organisations through tailored improvement sessions, including:

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

A bespoke session delivered as part of the NIAS SQ2 Level 2 Quality Improvement Programme focused on “Telling Your Story with Data”. Participants explored how data, narrative and visual presentation can be combined to communicate improvement effectively and support decision-making.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

A workshop focusing on Mental Health Demand and Capacity Management introduced participants to concepts such as demand, capacity, activity, queues and systems thinking. Practical improvement tools were explored to support service redesign, patient flow and workforce planning.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

HSCQI contributed to the Occupational Therapy Conference through a session entitled “Quality Counts: Keeping Data at the Heart of Improvement”, highlighting the importance of measurement, understanding variation and using data to drive sustainable improvement and improve access to services.

Collectively, these bespoke sessions strengthened improvement capability across acute, community and ambulance services by promoting the effective use of data, evidence-based improvement methodologies and systems thinking. Through tailored support, HSCQI enabled participants to develop practical skills that support better decision-making, improved service delivery and enhanced outcomes for service users across Northern Ireland.

Improvement Support in Action 2025-26

✔ Support provided across Health and Social Care Trusts, NIAS, Primary Care, the Public Health Agency, Strategic Planning and Performance Group, academia and the voluntary sector.
✔ Tailored workshops, coaching, facilitation and advisory support delivered.
✔ Focus areas included:

- quality improvement;
- measurement and evaluation;
- demand and capacity management;
- systems thinking;
- service redesign;
- data-informed decision making.



Requests for support were received from a wide range of organisations and sectors including Health and Social Care Trusts, the Strategic Planning and Performance Group, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, RQIA, academia, primary care, the voluntary sector and independent organisations.

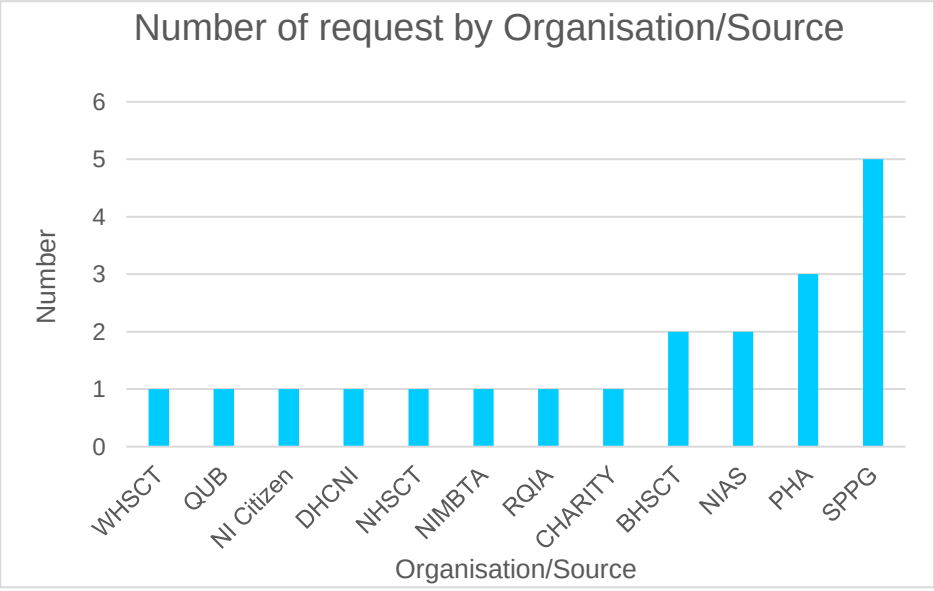
Organisations Requesting Support - Requests received from:

- Strategic Planning and Performance Group (5)
- Public Health Agency (3)
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (2)
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (2)
- Western Health and Social Care Trust (1)
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust (1)
- Queen's University Belfast (1)
- Dementia Health Care Northern Ireland (1)
- RQIA (1)
- Northern Ireland citizen organisations (1)
- Charitable organisations (1)

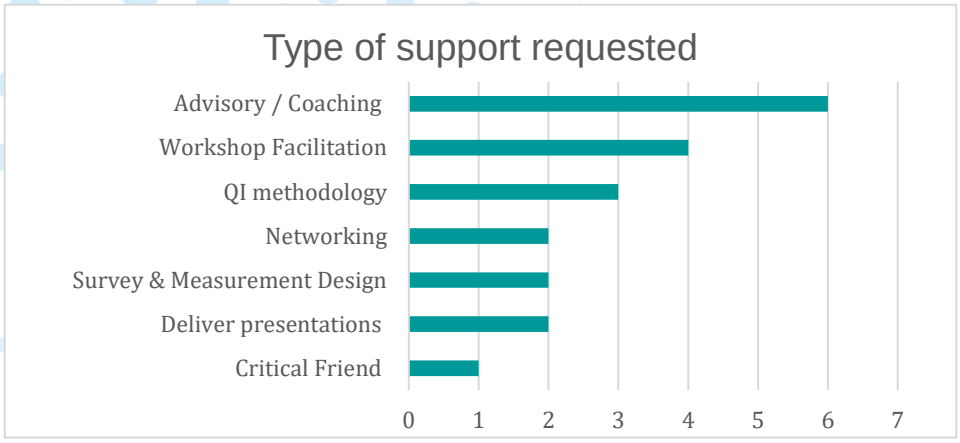
The majority of requests related to advisory and coaching support, demonstrating demand for practical improvement expertise that could be applied rapidly within local services and programmes.

HSCQI also provided workshop facilitation, quality improvement methodology advice, survey and measurement design support, conference contributions and critical friend input to support learning and improvement.

Type of Support Requested



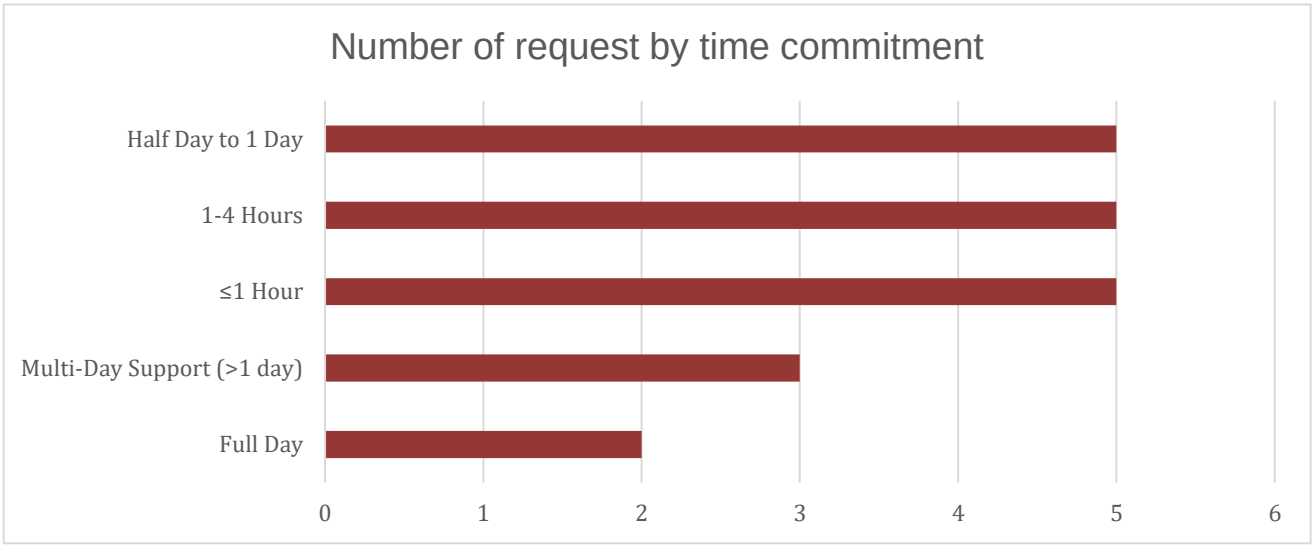
- Advisory and Coaching: **6**
- Workshop Facilitation: **4**
- Quality Improvement Methodology: **3**
- Networking: **2**
- Survey & Measurement Design: **2**
- Presentations: **2**
- Critical Friend Support: **1**



While many enquiries required short-term support, a number developed into more substantial pieces of work involving workshop design, improvement planning, facilitation and ongoing engagement.

This demonstrates HSCQI's ability to provide both responsive consultation and deeper partnership working where organisations require sustained support.

Quality Improvement Support Requests 2025-26



Chapter 4: Raising the Standards
Quality 2020 Theme 4

Introduction

High-quality health and social care services depend upon clear standards, effective governance, robust assurance arrangements and a commitment to continuous improvement. Standards provide a framework for safe, effective and person-centred care, while regulation and review help ensure that services remain accountable for the quality and safety of the care they provide.

As Northern Ireland's independent regulator, RQIA plays a central role in providing assurance to the Department of Health. Through registration, inspection, review and enforcement activities, the organisation assesses compliance with regulations and standards, identifies risks, highlights areas of good practice and encourages improvement where required.

4.1 Regulation and Inspection

Regulation and inspection remain at the core of RQIA's statutory responsibilities.

These functions provide independent assurance regarding the quality, safety and effectiveness of services and help protect the interests of people who use health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

Through inspection activity, RQIA assesses whether services are operating in accordance with legislation, regulations and applicable standards. Inspections also provide opportunities to engage with service users, families, carers, staff and providers, helping to build a comprehensive picture of service quality and performance.

Findings from inspection activity help inform regulatory decisions, provide assurance to the public and contribute to wider organisational learning.

4.2 Assurance Through Review Activity

In addition to regulatory inspections, RQIA undertakes reviews that examine services, systems and issues affecting quality and safety across health and social care.

Reviews provide independent assessment and often focus on areas of strategic importance, public concern or departmental priority. They enable RQIA to examine issues in greater depth, identify opportunities for improvement and contribute to wider system learning.

Review activity supports:

- independent assurance;
- service improvement;
- policy development;
- organisational learning; and
- public accountability.



Through engagement with service users, families, staff, experts and stakeholders, reviews help identify both strengths and areas where action is required to improve outcomes and experiences.

During 2025-26, RQIA conducted and published several important reviews, while also initiating new ones for the coming year.

- *A Whole System Approach - A Collaborative Evaluation and Learning;*
- *Patient Safety Culture Assessment Framework (Being Human);*
- *Neurology: Review of Records of Deceased Patients.*

4.3 National Preventive Mechanism

RQIA contributes to the work of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), the UK-wide network of organisations designated to monitor places of detention and help prevent ill-treatment of people who are deprived of their liberty.

Established under the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture (OPCAT), the National Preventive Mechanism brings together independent bodies from across the United Kingdom to provide oversight of detention settings and promote the protection of human rights. Through its Mental Health Commissioner role, RQIA contributes to this work by undertaking monitoring activity in mental health settings and providing independent scrutiny of the care, treatment and welfare of individuals detained under mental health legislation.

Participation in the National Preventive Mechanism enables RQIA to contribute to wider learning, share good practice and support continuous improvement in the protection of the rights of vulnerable individuals. It also helps ensure that Northern Ireland's mental health services benefit from national and international learning relating to human rights, safeguards and the prevention of ill-treatment.

4.4 Mental Health and Mental Capacity Oversight

Protecting the rights, dignity and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable individuals in society remains an important part of RQIA's statutory role.

Since 2009, RQIA has exercised the functions of Mental Health Commissioner for Northern Ireland and provides independent oversight of the operation of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. This role helps ensure that individuals who are subject to mental health legislation receive care and treatment that respects their rights, safeguards their welfare and complies with statutory requirements.

RQIA also has responsibilities associated with the implementation and operation of the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, supporting assurance regarding the application of legal safeguards and protections for individuals who may lack capacity to make specific decisions.

Through its oversight activities, RQIA seeks to promote and protect human rights, dignity, autonomy and person-centred care for individuals receiving assessment, treatment and support under mental health and mental capacity legislation.

Mental Health Commissioner Responsibilities

As Mental Health Commissioner, RQIA provides independent oversight of the operation of Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, including the care and treatment of people with a mental disorder under Article 86, and the statutory safeguards intended to protect their rights, welfare and interests. This includes:

- scrutiny and review of prescribed forms submitted under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to monitor compliance with legislative requirements and safeguard patients' rights;
- undertaking independent reviews of the care and treatment of people with a mental disorder in accordance with Article 86 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;

- appointment and oversight of Part II and Part IV Medical Practitioners, who undertake statutory functions under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;
- bringing to the attention of Health and Social Care organisations, the Department of Health and other relevant authorities any concerns identified relating to the operation of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order safeguards, rights, care and treatment and welfare of patients.

Through these activities, RQIA helps provide assurance that statutory safeguards are being applied appropriately and that the rights of patients remain central to decision-making.

Mental Capacity and Safeguards

The Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 represents a significant development in safeguarding the rights of individuals who may lack capacity to make decisions regarding their care, treatment or welfare.

During 2025-26, RQIA continued to engage with partners across the health and social care system regarding the operation of the legislation and the safeguards designed to protect vulnerable individuals.

RQIA's oversight responsibilities also extend beyond hospital settings and include consideration of the experiences, rights and safeguards of individuals with mental ill-health, learning disabilities and impaired decision-making capacity who are receiving care and support in community settings, including supported living services. This helps ensure that legal safeguards and person-centred approaches are promoted consistently across a range of care environments.

This work contributes to RQIA's wider commitment to promoting safe, effective and person-centred care, while supporting organisations to meet their legal obligations and uphold the rights of those receiving services.

Monitoring and Assurance Activity

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA continued to undertake monitoring and assurance activities associated with mental health and mental capacity legislation. This included the review and scrutiny of statutory forms, processes and safeguards designed to protect individuals receiving care and treatment under relevant legislation.

In addition, RQIA continued to undertake monitoring activity under Article 86 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 through visits to hospitals and facilities where patients are detained under mental health legislation. These visits provide independent assurance regarding patients' care, treatment and welfare, while supporting the protection of individual rights and safeguards.

Monitoring and assurance activity encompasses a range of settings in which individuals may be subject to mental health and mental capacity legislation, including hospitals, inpatient facilities and supported living environments. Through this work, RQIA seeks to

ensure that rights, safeguards and appropriate standards of care are maintained regardless of where a person receives support.

The volume and complexity of this activity reflect the importance of maintaining robust oversight arrangements and ensuring that legal protections are applied consistently across Health and Social Care services.

Where opportunities for improvement were identified, RQIA worked with organisations to promote learning, strengthen compliance and support continuous improvement.

Impact

RQIA's Mental Health Commissioner role provides an important safeguard for patients, families and carers by supporting transparency, accountability and independent scrutiny of mental health and mental capacity arrangements across Northern Ireland.

This work helps ensure that:

- patient rights are protected;
- statutory safeguards are applied appropriately;
- learning is identified and shared;
- organisations remain accountable for compliance with legislation;
- opportunities to improve the quality and safety of care are recognised and acted upon.



By providing independent oversight of mental health and mental capacity arrangements, RQIA contributes to safer, more person-centred and rights-based care across the health and social care system.

National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide, Homicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH)



RQIA continues to contribute to the work of the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide, Homicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH), a UK-wide programme that collects, analyses and reports on information relating to suicide and homicide involving people who have been in contact with mental health services.

RQIA acts as a conduit for the flow of information between Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland and NCISH, supporting the collection and submission of data to inform national research and learning. NCISH publishes an annual report identifying key findings, trends and recommendations to improve patient safety, and provides individual Trust scorecards which enable Health and Social Care Trusts to benchmark their performance against regional and national indicators.

This collaboration contributes to a better understanding of the factors associated with suicide and patient safety, supports organisational learning, and helps inform service improvements aiming to reduce avoidable harm across the health and social care system.

Mental Health and Mental Capacity Oversight 2025-26

- Mental Health Commissioner role exercised;
- Article 86 oversight activity undertaken;
- mental capacity safeguards monitored;
- NCISH reporting and benchmarking supported;
- Part II and Part IV Medical Practitioners appointed and overseen.

4.5 Registration and Compliance

Registration provides assurance that regulated services meet the requirements necessary to operate safely and effectively.



Providers are required to demonstrate compliance with relevant regulations and standards before services can be registered and throughout the duration of their registration.

RQIA's registration processes help ensure that:

- services are appropriately governed;
- leadership arrangements are effective;
- staffing requirements can be met;
- facilities are suitable and safe; and
- people using services are protected.

4.6 Enforcement and Improvement

Enforcement activity is an important mechanism through which RQIA protects service users and promotes compliance with regulations and standards.

The organisation adopts a proportionate approach to enforcement, seeking wherever possible to support providers in achieving and sustaining improvements. However, where significant concerns are identified or risks to service users exist, RQIA will take appropriate regulatory action.



4.7 Learning from Regulation

Effective regulation generates valuable learning. Every inspection, review, concern and regulatory interaction provides opportunities to understand what contributes to good quality care and where risks may exist.

RQIA actively seeks to use learning from regulation to:

- identify recurring themes;
- recognise emerging risks;
- highlight examples of good practice;
- inform quality improvement activity;
- influence future inspections; and
- support provider learning.



This approach reflects a key principle of Quality 2020: learning should be actively used to improve services and outcomes.

By sharing learning across sectors and organisations, RQIA contributes to wider improvements in quality and safety throughout the health and social care system.

4.8 Promoting Good Practice

Promoting good practice helps organisations to:

- learn from one another;
- adapt successful approaches;
- reduce unnecessary variation;
- strengthen service quality; and
- improve outcomes for service users.



While it is important to identify areas requiring improvement, it is equally important to recognise and share examples of good practice.

Throughout the year, RQIA observed many examples of innovation, professionalism and high-quality care across a wide range of service settings.

Chapter 5: Integrating the Care
Quality 2020 Theme 5

Introduction

Delivering high-quality health and social care requires effective collaboration across organisational, professional and sectoral boundaries. The increasingly complex needs of individuals and communities mean that no single organisation can achieve better outcomes in isolation. Instead, quality improvement depends upon strong partnerships, shared learning and collective action.

The Quality 2020 strategy recognises the importance of integrated approaches to care and highlights the need for organisations to work together to improve quality, safety and the overall experience of service users. By fostering collaboration and encouraging the sharing of knowledge, expertise and learning, organisations can reduce duplication, improve consistency and deliver more effective care.

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA continued to strengthen partnerships across the health and social care system through its regulatory, review and improvement functions. Through the work of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) and a range of regional and international collaborations, RQIA has supported organisations and professionals to learn together, improve together and help deliver better outcomes for the people who use services.

5.1 Partnership Working Across the System

Improving quality and safety across health and social care requires collaboration between organisations, sectors and professions. During 2025-26, RQIA worked with providers, commissioners, professional bodies, service users, carers and regional partners to support improvement, share learning and promote good practice.

Through its regulatory, review and improvement functions, RQIA continued to create opportunities for organisations to learn from one another and address shared challenges.

5.2 The HSCQI Network

The HSCQI Network remains a key mechanism for supporting quality improvement across Northern Ireland's health and social care system. It brings together quality improvement leaders, practitioners and partner organisations to share learning, build improvement capability and support collaboration on common priorities.

The Network provides a forum for:

- developing quality improvement capability;
- supporting regional improvement programmes;
- sharing learning and good practice;
- peer support and professional networking;
- collaborative problem-solving; and
- supporting the scale and spread of successful improvement initiatives.

Throughout 2025-26, the Network brought together representatives from all five Health and Social Care Trusts, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, Primary Care, Social Care and the HSCQI Hub. Through regular engagement, shared learning and collaborative discussion, members exchanged knowledge and experience across organisational boundaries, helping to strengthen improvement capability and promote a more connected approach to quality improvement.

The HSCQI Network also plays a pivotal role in the co-design and delivery of HSCQI programmes and in supporting implementation of the HSCQI Strategy. Through this work, it supports the health and social care system to identify and share best practice, accelerate the scale and spread of successful improvement initiatives and strengthen workforce capability across the system.

Alongside its regular virtual meetings, the Network convened three in-person events during 2025-26, bringing together improvement leaders and practitioners from across the health and social care system.

These events provided opportunities to share learning, review regional improvement priorities, consider opportunities for collaboration and discuss the development of quality improvement capability across organisations.

Discussions included regional improvement programmes, workforce development, scale and spread activity and opportunities to strengthen partnership working across the system.

Following review and agreement by members, Network meetings moved to a bi-monthly schedule from January 2026, with additional meetings convened as required to support emerging priorities and improvement activity.

By creating opportunities for organisations to learn from one another and work collectively on shared challenges, the HSCQI Network continues to play an important role in supporting a learning health and social care system and contributing to sustainable improvement across Northern Ireland.

HSCQI Network 2025-26

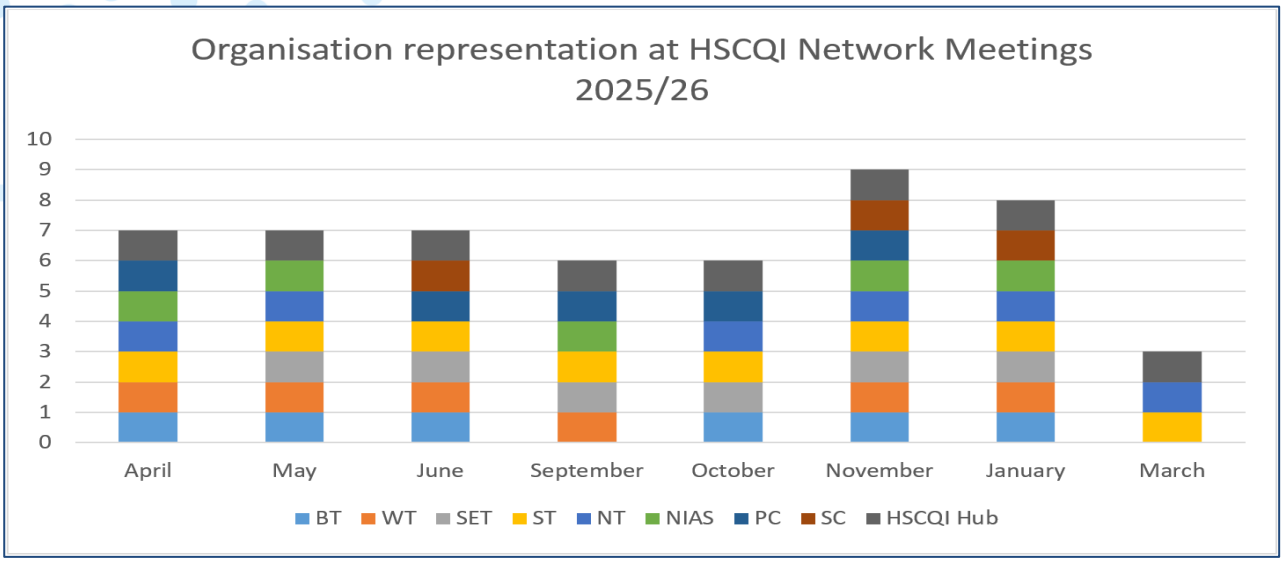
- **8 network meetings** held during 2025-26;
- **9 organisations represented** across the Network;
- representation from:
  - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
  - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
  - Southern Health and Social Care Trust
  - Northern Health and Social Care Trust
  - Western Health and Social Care Trust
  - Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
  - Primary Care
  - Social Care
  - HSCQI Hub
- **3 in-person events** delivered;
- broad representation maintained throughout the year across Health and Social Care Trusts and wider system partners.

HSC Health and Social Care



Figure: Organisational Representation at HSCQI Network Meetings, 2025-26

Representation from Health and Social Care Trusts and system partners was maintained throughout the year, supporting collaboration, shared learning and the coordination of quality improvement activity across Northern Ireland.



5.3 Leadership Alliance and Strategic Oversight

Strong strategic leadership is essential to sustaining improvement and supporting collaboration across the health and social care system.

The HSCQI Leadership Alliance provides strategic oversight and supports the development of quality improvement priorities, helping to ensure that improvement activity remains aligned with wider system needs and priorities. The Alliance is made up of senior leaders from across the health and social care system and is responsible for endorsing and overseeing the annual HSCQI work plan. During 2025-26, the Alliance was chaired by Aidan Dawson, Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency**.**

Through collaboration with senior leaders from across health and social care, the Alliance contributes to:



Figure 7: HSCQI Leadership Alliance

- setting strategic direction;
- identifying improvement priorities;
- supporting regional improvement programmes;
- strengthening collaboration;
- championing quality improvement; and
- promoting shared accountability for improvement.

The continued engagement of senior leaders helps ensure that improvement remains a strategic priority and is embedded within organisational and system-wide decision-making.

During 2025-26, the HSCQI Leadership Alliance met on two occasions and identified three key priorities for the improvement community:

- creating space to reflect on the collective approach to quality improvement;
- undertaking a review to learn from experience and strengthen improvement efforts; and
- contributing to a system-wide reset that renews focus on delivering meaningful and sustainable improvement.

These priorities informed discussions across the wider improvement community and reinforced the importance of collaboration, learning and system leadership in addressing shared challenges and improving outcomes across health and social care services.

5.4 Co-production and Lived Experience

Improving Services with People, Not for People

Quality improvement is most effective when the people who use services are actively involved in shaping how those services are designed, delivered and improved.

RQIA's approach to quality improvement is grounded in the principle that people with lived experience bring knowledge, insight and expertise that are equally important as professional, clinical or organisational perspectives. Their experiences help us understand not only how services perform, but how they feel to those who rely upon them and what difference they make to people's lives.

Co-production is therefore a core element of RQIA's approach to improvement. It supports the development of services that are more responsive, person-centred and aligned to the needs and expectations of individuals, families and communities.

Rather than viewing people as recipients of care or as consultees on decisions that have already been made, co-production recognises service users, carers and communities as partners in improvement.

Embedding Lived Experience Within Quality Improvement

The integration of HSCQI within RQIA will provide opportunities to embed lived experience throughout improvement activity. People with lived experience have contributed to improvement programmes, assessment processes and regional initiatives, helping to ensure that improvement priorities reflect what matters most to those who use services.

Their involvement strengthens decision-making, challenges assumptions and helps keep improvement efforts focused on outcomes and experiences rather than processes alone.

Influencing Improvement Decisions

A particularly important aspect of co-production is ensuring that lived experience influences decisions rather than simply informing them.

For example, lived experience representatives have contributed to discussions regarding the assessment and selection of improvement initiatives for wider implementation and scale. By bringing the perspectives of service users, families and carers into these processes, decisions can be informed by a broader understanding of value, impact and quality.

What We Learned

The most sustainable improvements occur when people with lived experience are involved from the outset and are treated as equal partners in designing solutions, not simply as participants in consultation exercises.

5.5 Shared Learning Across Organisations

One of the greatest benefits of collaborative working is the opportunity to share learning widely and reduce duplication of effort.

Throughout the year, organisations participating in quality improvement programmes, networks and shared learning activities, shared experiences, lessons learned and examples of successful change.

Shared learning supports:

- faster implementation of improvements;
- reduced variation in practice;
- greater consistency in service quality;
- stronger professional networks;
- increased confidence in testing innovation;
- better use of available resources.



A culture of shared learning enables organisations to learn from the successes and challenges of others and strengthens improvement capability across the entire system.

5.6 Regional, National and International Collaboration

Improving quality increasingly requires organisations to learn beyond their own boundaries.

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA and HSCQI continued to engage with regional, national and international partners to share knowledge, access expertise and contribute to wider learning communities.

These partnerships provide opportunities to:

- learn from innovation and best practice;
- exchange ideas and experiences;
- benchmark approaches;
- develop professional networks;
- strengthen quality improvement
- capability.



Engagement with wider improvement communities helps ensure that Northern Ireland continues to benefit from emerging thinking, evidence and experience from across health and social care systems.

Examples of Collaboration

Regional Collaboration

- Health and Social Care Trusts;
- Arm's Length Bodies;
- Independent sector partners;
- Community and Voluntary organisations.

National Collaboration

- NHS Education programmes;
- Quality Improvement networks;
- research and practice communities.

International Collaboration

During 2025-26, HSCQI continued to share learning and collaborate with improvement organisations and networks beyond Northern Ireland.



In 2026, HSCQI presented at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) / BMJ International Forum in Oslo within the Science category, which showcases learning, innovation and evaluation in the science of improvement.

The presentation, *How to Weigh an Elephant: The Art and Science of Evaluating Large-Scale Improvement Through a Realist Lens*, shared learning from the HSCQI Timely Access to Safe Care (TASC) and Delivering Value programmes.

The session explored

- the use of logic modelling in the design of large-scale improvement programmes;
- the application of context–component–mechanism–outcomes frameworks in programme evaluation; and
- the benefits of theoretically informed approaches to improvement and evaluation.



International Forum on QUALITY & SAFETY in HEALTHCARE OSLO

Participation in international forums provides an opportunity to showcase improvement work from Northern Ireland, contribute to the wider improvement community and exchange learning with leading healthcare improvement organisations from around the world.

Equally important, these forums facilitate the sharing of ideas, experiences and evidence with international experts, enabling HSCQI to bring back new knowledge, practical approaches and emerging thinking that can strengthen local improvement efforts.



By sharing its experiences and learning from others, HSCQI helps to build credibility, foster partnerships and ensure that improvement practice in Northern Ireland remains informed by, and contributes to, international best practice.

Participation also supports the ongoing development of quality improvement capability across the health and social care system and helps strengthen the adoption, spread and sustainability of evidence-based improvement approaches.

Q Community – National Improvement Leaders Programme

During 2025-26, HSCQI participated in the **Q** Community National Improvement Leaders Programme, a UK and Ireland-wide initiative that supports collaborative learning and improvement across health and social care systems.

The programme focused on the development and implementation of Quality Management Systems (QMS) and brought together improvement leaders from across the five nations to share learning, challenges and emerging practice. Discussions explored how Quality Management Systems can be integrated with existing governance, quality, safety and strategic frameworks while supporting service transformation and integrated models of care.

The programme highlighted the importance of leadership, organisational readiness, implementation science and a shared understanding of quality management principles in achieving sustainable improvement. Learning from across the UK/Ireland demonstrated the potential for Quality Management Systems to strengthen assurance, improve measurement, reduce duplication and support better outcomes for patients/service users.

Participation in the programme provided access to emerging practice, shared learning and evidence from across the UK and Ireland, helping to inform local thinking on the role of Quality Management Systems in supporting quality, safety, improvement and system-wide transformation across Northern Ireland.

Q Community National Improvement Leaders Programme

- UK and Ireland-wide learning network;
- improvement leaders from five nations;
- focus on Quality Management Systems (QMS);
- key themes: Leadership for improvement, Implementation science, Quality management, System transformation, Shared learning and collaboration.

NICON 2025

In 2025, HSCQI co-presented a session at **NICON 2025** entitled *Improvement Approaches – Accelerating System Change*. The session explored how improvement methodologies, data insights and implementation science can support large-scale and sustainable change across health and social care services.

The presentation highlighted HSCQI's approach to adopting a learning health and social care system model within RQIA, drawing on learning from the Timely Access to Safe Care (TASC) Scale and Spread Programme and wider regional improvement activity. It also included discussion of work led by the NHS Confederation to harness data insights and examples of improvement approaches supporting patient flow within unscheduled care pathways.

The session concluded with a panel discussion examining how organisations can work together to accelerate improvement by combining real-time operational intelligence, implementation science and quality improvement methodologies. It provided an opportunity to share learning from Northern Ireland while engaging with wider professional networks committed to system-wide improvement.

5.7 Improving Through Partnership

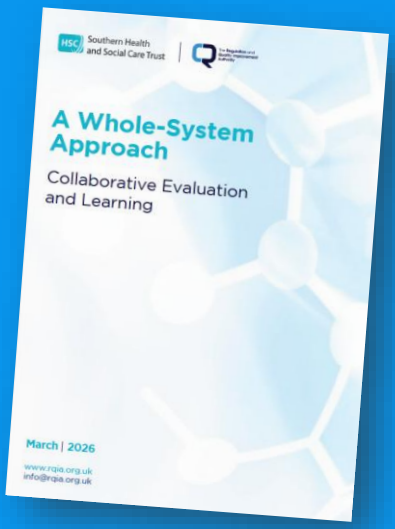
5.7.1 A Whole-System Approach to Improvement

In March 2026, RQIA published **A Whole-System Approach: Collaborative Evaluation and Learning**, a follow-up evaluation to its 2024 review, *Working Collaboratively to Reduce Harm*.

The evaluation revisited the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area to examine progress in how organisations work together as part of a wider health and social care system, including the Health and Social Care Trust, General Practice, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, nursing and residential care homes and domiciliary care providers.

Participants demonstrated a clear commitment to working collaboratively and recognised the benefits that whole-system working can bring. However, the evaluation also identified a number of barriers that continue to inhibit effective collaboration, including governance complexity, differing organisational structures, competing priorities and limited opportunities for shared problem-solving and learning.

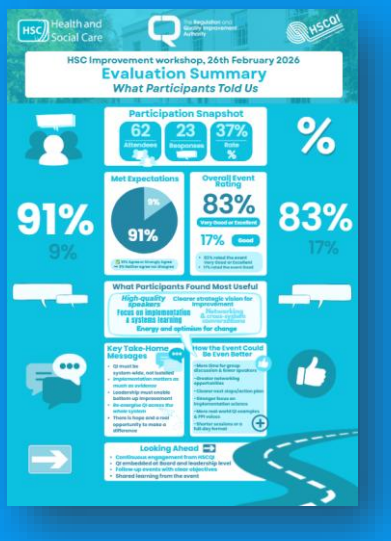
The evaluation concluded that improving outcomes for people increasingly depends on organisations working together across traditional boundaries. It highlighted the important role RQIA can play in bringing organisations together, facilitating discussion and encouraging collective approaches to improvement and learning.



The findings reinforce growing evidence that stronger whole-system working can contribute to improved outcomes and experiences for service users, more effective use of resources, greater opportunities for innovation and continuous improvement, improved workforce wellbeing and stronger community engagement.

5.7.2 Building a Shared Approach to Improvement

To support wider discussion about improvement across the health and social care system, RQIA hosted an **HSC Improvement Workshop** on 26 February 2026, bringing together leaders, improvement practitioners and partners from across the system to explore how quality improvement can be strengthened and coordinated at a whole-system level.



The workshop built on more than two decades of investment in quality improvement and patient safety across Health and Social Care and reflected on the contribution that HSCQI has made in developing regional improvement capability, collaborative networks and improvement programmes. The event provided an opportunity to consider how quality improvement, implementation science, leadership and partnership working can support sustainable change across the health and social care system.

The workshop was attended by **62 participants**, with **23 evaluation responses** received. Feedback was highly positive, with **91% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the workshop met their expectations**, while **83% rated the event as very good or excellent**, with the remaining respondents rating it as good.

Participants highlighted several aspects of the event as particularly valuable, including:

- high-quality speakers and presentations;
- greater clarity regarding the future strategic direction for improvement;
- a focus on implementation and practical application;
- opportunities for networking and cross-system collaboration; and
- renewed optimism regarding improvement across the health and social care system.

Key themes emerging from the workshop included:

The workshop also provided an opportunity to reflect on learning from programmes such as ScIL, EPCO and wider quality improvement initiatives, and to consider how the HSCQI Network and Leadership Alliance could continue to support a more coordinated approach to improvement across Northern Ireland.

Key themes emerging from the workshop included:

- quality improvement should be approached as a whole-system endeavour rather than a series of isolated initiatives;
- implementation is as important as evidence in achieving sustainable change;
- leadership, collaboration and learning cultures are critical enablers of improvement;



Recommendations and next steps

Participants identified a number of priorities for future action, including sustaining shared learning, increasing opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, strengthening the visibility of quality improvement and implementation science within senior leadership structures, and developing clearer implementation plans to support the spread and sustainability of improvement initiatives.

The workshop reinforced the importance of partnership, shared accountability and learning in supporting sustainable improvement and improving outcomes for people who use health and social care services.

HSC Improvement Workshop 2025-26

- **26 February 2026;**
- **62 attendees;**
- **23 evaluation responses;**
- **91%** agreed or strongly agreed the workshop met expectations;
- **83%** rated the workshop very good or excellent.



Key Themes

- whole-system improvement;
- collaboration and partnership;
- system leadership;
- implementation science;
- shared learning;
- continuous improvement.



Chapter 6: Project ECHO

Introduction

Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a collaborative learning and workforce development model that uses virtual communities of practice to support knowledge sharing, learning and collaboration across health and social care systems.

Using a hub-and-spoke approach, Project ECHO brings together multidisciplinary experts and participants to share knowledge, discuss real-world challenges and learn from one another. Through this approach, ECHO supports workforce development, quality improvement and the spread of good practice across health and social care services.

The model complements RQIA's wider commitment to quality improvement by creating opportunities for collaborative learning that are accessible, practical and directly relevant to improving care and outcomes.

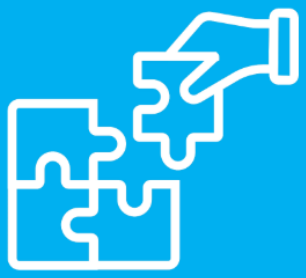
6.1 The ECHO Model

Project ECHO is based on the principle of **"all teach, all learn"**, recognising that valuable knowledge exists throughout the health and social care system.

Unlike traditional educational approaches, ECHO combines specialist expertise with peer-to-peer learning. Participants are encouraged to share experiences, discuss practice challenges and learn from one another within a supportive learning environment.

Each ECHO session typically

- short evidence-based presentations;
- discussion of real-world practice issues;
- facilitated peer learning;
- sharing of experience and best practice; and
- collaborative problem solving.



This approach helps participants build confidence, strengthen professional networks and apply learning directly within their own services.

6.2 Project ECHO Within RQIA

On 1 October 2025, Project ECHO Northern Ireland transferred from Hospice NI to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), becoming part of the Health and Social Care Quality Improvement and Regulation Directorate.

The transition created opportunities to strengthen connections between workforce development, quality improvement, organisational learning and system-wide collaboration.

During the reporting period, work focused on maintaining engagement with existing stakeholders and delivery partners, supporting continuity and preparing for future programme delivery within RQIA.

A notable achievement during the year was the continued commitment of health and social care professionals to the ECHO model. Engagement with stakeholders demonstrated the ongoing value placed on the ECHO principle of “all teach, all learn” and its potential contribution to collaborative learning, professional development and service improvement.

This created stronger links between workforce development, quality improvement, implementation support and system-wide learning, helping to position Project ECHO within RQIA's wider improvement agenda.

Maintaining the Project ECHO infrastructure during the transition period ensured that expertise, relationships and learning developed over a number of years were retained and could be built upon within RQIA.

During 2025-26, the emphasis was on continuity, stakeholder engagement and preparation for future programme delivery, ensuring that the expertise, partnerships and learning associated with Project ECHO could be retained and developed within its new organisational home.

6.3 Supporting Future Development

Project ECHO's transfer into RQIA provided an opportunity to review priorities and establish arrangements for future programme development.

Throughout 2025-26, engagement took place with existing stakeholders, delivery partners and previous network participants to understand future demand and identify priority areas for development. Significant work was undertaken to maintain relationships, sustain connections with established programme areas and plan for future delivery within RQIA.

This work helped preserve the strong foundations developed through Project ECHO and ensured that expertise, partnerships and learning could be retained and built upon within its new organisational home.

Planning also commenced for a range of future networks aligned to emerging priorities across health and social care, laying the groundwork for renewed programme delivery from 2026-27 onwards.

6.4 Looking Ahead to 2026-2027

Building on a successful transition year, Project ECHO Northern Ireland enters 2026-27 with a substantial programme of activity planned across established and emerging priority areas.



The planned programme reflects priorities identified through stakeholder engagement and discussions undertaken during the transition period.

A total of 17 ECHO Networks are scheduled to launch during 2026-27, covering areas including:

- mental capacity;
- public mental health;
- community pharmacy;
- optometry;
- care homes;
- trauma-informed practice;
- clinical practice;
- eating, drinking and swallowing;
- the Being Human Safety Culture Framework.



Through the planned development of new communities of practice, Project ECHO will support knowledge sharing, improvement capability and cross-sector collaboration, contributing to RQIA's wider ambition to encourage quality improvement and facilitate learning across Northern Ireland's health and social care system.

The successful transition of Project ECHO into RQIA during 2025-26 created strong foundations for future delivery and strengthened opportunities to align workforce development, quality improvement and collaborative learning across the health and social care system.

While the reporting period focused primarily on transition and future planning, the work undertaken during 2025-26 established strong foundations for the next phase of Project ECHO's development within RQIA.

6.5 Key Achievements

- **Successful Transition** - Project ECHO Northern Ireland successfully transferred to RQIA on 1 October 2025;
- **Engagement and Continuity** - Relationships with stakeholders and delivery partners were maintained throughout the transition period;
- **Future Programme Development** - Planning completed for the launch of 17 ECHO Networks during 2026-27;
- **Supporting System Improvement** - Stronger links established between Project ECHO, quality improvement, workforce development and organisational learning.

Chapter 7: Impact in Action – What Difference Did We Make?

Throughout 2025-26, RQIA continued to fulfil its statutory responsibilities while supporting improvement across the health and social care system. Through regulation, review, quality improvement and workforce development, the organisation worked collaboratively with providers, professionals, service users and partners to improve the quality and safety of care across Northern Ireland.

While inspections, reviews, improvement programmes and learning initiatives are important activities in their own right, their real value lies in the difference they make to people's experiences, outcomes and confidence in services.

This chapter highlights examples of how RQIA's work contributed to protecting people, improving services, strengthening workforce capability and supporting sustainable change across the health and social care system.

7.1 Protecting People

Protecting people from harm remains at the heart of RQIA's work. Throughout 2025-26, intelligence received through inspections, concerns, safeguarding notifications, whistleblowing disclosures and review activity enabled the organisation to identify risks, provide assurance and act where necessary.

RQIA's regulatory role helps ensure that services remain focused on delivering safe care while maintaining effective governance, leadership and safeguarding arrangements. By acting on concerns, monitoring risk and engaging with providers, RQIA supports a culture where service-user safety remains the highest priority. The organisation's intelligence-led approach also supports earlier identification of issues, enabling action to be taken before concerns become more significant and helping to prevent avoidable harm.

7.2 Driving Improvement

Through Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI), RQIA continued to support organisations and teams to apply evidence-based methodologies, test innovative approaches and work collaboratively to improve outcomes. Regional programmes focused on achieving measurable improvements in quality, safety, access and value while strengthening workforce capability and supporting sustainable change. Together, these initiatives demonstrated how quality improvement can deliver practical benefits for service users, staff and organisations.

7.3 Examples from Regulation, Review, Improvement

Many of the most significant improvements achieved during the year resulted from the combined impact of regulation, review and improvement activity. Examples included: Together these activities illustrate how assurance and improvement can work together to create meaningful and lasting change.

- **learning from inspection** - findings from inspections informed organisational improvement plans and supported provider learning.
- **learning from reviews** - review recommendations helped organisations strengthen governance arrangements and improve service delivery.
- **improvement through collaboration** - regional programmes supported organisations to work together, test changes and share successful approaches.
- **building improvement capability** - learning programmes, communities of practice and Project ECHO networks strengthened workforce confidence and capability.



7.4 Quality Improvement Case Study

Improving care through Enhanced Patient Care and Observation (EPCO) Supporting safe person-centred care

EPCO is a quality improvement initiative designed to support safe effective person-centred care for patients who require additional observation and support.

The programme was developed in response to concerns regarding variation in observation practices and the need for a more consistent approach to supporting patients whose safety, wellbeing or clinical condition required enhanced levels of monitoring.

Working collaboratively with clinical teams, service leaders and quality improvement specialists, the programme focused on strengthening the quality of patient observation while ensuring that care remained personalised, respectful and centred on individual needs.

Improvement activity included:

- standardising approaches to enhanced observation;
- improving staff understanding of observation requirements;
- strengthening documentation and communication;
- supporting multidisciplinary decision-making;
- improving escalation processes; and
- ensuring that observation was linked to patient-centred care planning.



Using recognised quality improvement methodologies, participating teams tested changes, evaluated outcomes and shared learning across services.

Impact

The programme demonstrated how quality improvement approaches can support both quality and safety.

Improvements included:

- greater consistency in observation practices;
- improved communication between clinical teams;
- enhanced documentation and oversight;
- improved understanding of patient needs;
- stronger focus on person-centred approaches to care.
- increased staff confidence regarding observation requirements;



The initiative also provided opportunities for teams to learn from one another, share practical solutions and build improvement capability across participating services.

Why It Matters

Enhanced observation is about more than monitoring patients. It is about ensuring that vulnerable individuals receive the right level of support, at the right time, in a way that promotes dignity, safety and wellbeing.

By combining evidence, professional expertise and quality improvement methodologies, the EPCO programme demonstrated how small changes in practice can support safer care and better experiences for patients.

What We Learned

"Quality improvement is most effective when those delivering care are supported to test changes, learn from data and work collaboratively to improve outcomes. The EPCO programme demonstrated the value of bringing teams together around a shared aim of safer, more person-centred care."

7.5 Service User Perspectives

At the centre of every inspection, review and improvement initiative are the people who use health and social care services.

Throughout the year, service users, families and carers continued to provide valuable insight that informed RQIA's work and helped shape improvement activity.

The experiences shared by individuals highlighted the importance of:

- being listened to;
- feeling safe and respected;
- receiving timely and effective care;
- clear communication;
- involvement in decisions; and
- services that recognise individual needs and preferences.

By listening to these experiences and ensuring that they directly inform regulation, review and quality improvement activity, RQIA continues to support a more person-centred approach to quality.

Chapter 8: Looking Ahead

Introduction

The challenges facing health and social care services continue to evolve. Increasing demand, workforce pressures, financial constraints, rising public expectations and growing complexity across services require organisations to remain responsive, innovative and focused on continuous improvement.

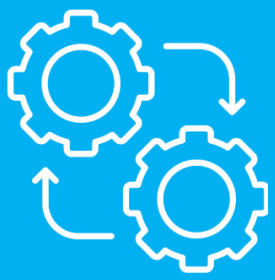
The integration of regulation, review, quality improvement and workforce development within RQIA provides a strong platform from which to support quality, safety and improvement across the health and social care system. As the organisation looks ahead to 2026-27 and beyond, our focus will remain on protecting people, improving outcomes and ensuring that learning and improvement are embedded across all aspects of care and support.

This chapter outlines the key priorities that will guide RQIA's work during the coming year and highlights the areas where we believe the organisation can make the greatest contribution to improving quality and safety across Northern Ireland.

8.1 Embedding Quality Improvement

Key areas of focus will include:

- supporting improvement capability across health and social care;
- strengthening regional improvement programmes;
- increasing opportunities for collaborative learning;
- promoting the use of evidence-based improvement methodologies;
- supporting scale and spread of successful initiatives; and
- encouraging greater use of data and measurement to support improvement.



The integration of HSCQI within RQIA will strengthen the connections between assurance, learning and improvement, creating new opportunities to collaborate in supporting safety and quality improvement across the health and social care system.

Through this work, RQIA will continue to support organisations in developing sustainable approaches to improving quality, safety and outcomes.

8.2 Expanding Project ECHO

Project ECHO continues to provide a model for connecting professional expertise and lived experience across HSC, supporting shared learning around regional priorities.

During 2026-27, RQIA will focus on strengthening established and emerging ECHO Networks and increasing alignment with HSCQI's commitment to building capability for whole-system improvement and implementation.

Priorities for 2026-27 include:

- supporting participation in ECHO networks aligned to HSC priorities;
- strengthening links between ECHO and HSCQI improvement programmes;
- continued growth of cross-sector collaboration for shared learning;
- enhancing evaluation and impact measurement.

Through this approach, Project ECHO will continue to support peer to peer learning, collaboration aligned to whole system priorities, including DoH's Reset agenda.

8.3 Workforce Capability

Developing and supporting the RQIA workforce remains central to delivering high-quality services.

RQIA will continue to invest in leadership development, improvement capability and workforce learning through programmes that equip staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to lead and sustain change.

Priorities include:

- strengthening leadership capability;
- fostering communities of learning and practice;
- promoting workforce wellbeing and resilience; and
- supporting professional and organisational development.

8.4 Innovation and Digital Development

Innovation and digital technology have an increasingly important role to play in supporting quality, safety and improvement.

RQIA will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen how data, digital systems and innovation support regulatory oversight, quality improvement and organisational learning.

Areas of future focus may include:

- enhanced use of data and analytics;
- digital approaches to intelligence gathering;
- improved information sharing;
- innovative workforce learning approaches;
- technology-enabled quality improvement;
- use of artificial intelligence, and
- exploration of other emerging technologies that may support the oversight of health and social care services.

Innovation will continue to be guided by principles of safety, evidence and effectiveness.

8.5 Public Involvement and Co-production

People who use services must remain at the centre of improvement.

During 2026-27, RQIA will continue to strengthen opportunities for public involvement, participation and co-production across its regulatory, review and improvement activities.

By continuing to listen to and learn from the experiences of people who use services, RQIA can ensure that improvement efforts remain focused on outcomes that matter most.

8.6 Conclusion

This report has demonstrated how RQIA continues to fulfil its statutory responsibilities while encouraging improvement across Northern Ireland's health and social care system.

Throughout 2025-26, the organisation has worked to provide assurance, identify risks, support learning and promote improvement through its regulatory, review and quality improvement functions. The first full year following the integration of Health and Social Care Quality Improvement has also demonstrated the benefits of bringing assurance, improvement and workforce development together within a single organisation.

While significant challenges remain across the health and social care landscape, there are also considerable opportunities. By strengthening partnerships, building workforce capability, embracing innovation and placing people at the centre of decision-making, RQIA can continue to contribute meaningfully to the improvement of health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains unchanged:

To secure and improve the safety and quality of health and social care services.

Through independent assurance, collaborative improvement and a continued focus on learning, RQIA will work with service users, staff, providers and partners to support better experiences, safer services and improved outcomes for everyone who relies on health and social care.

Final Reflection

Quality is not a destination but a continuous journey of learning, improvement and partnership. By listening to people, using evidence wisely and working together across the system, we can build services that are safer, more effective and more responsive to the needs of the communities we serve.



Appendix

HSCQI Learning, Improvement and Engagement Activity 2025-26

Key Milestones

June 2025

- HSCQI ScIL Graduation and Delivering Value Workshop

August 2025

- HSCQI Leadership Alliance Meeting
- ScIL Programme Module 1

September 2025

- HSCQI/HSE Quality Coach Development Programme
- EPCO Regional Implementation Workshop 1

October 2025

- Whole System Approach Q Network Event
- Launch of 5 Moments for Medication Safety

November 2025

- Big Discussion Community Projects Workshop
- EPCO Regional Implementation Workshop 2

December 2025

- Implementation Science Event (HSCQI, QUB and University of Limerick)
- Mental Health Service User Workshop
- EPCO Regional Implementation Workshop 3
- HSCQI Community Event

February 2026

- HSC Improvement Workshop: Collaboration in Driving Sustained Improvement Across the Whole System

March 2026

- HSCQI Community Event: Liberating Structures

The **Regulation** and **Quality Improvement** Authority

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
James House
2-4 Cromac Avenue
Gasworks
Belfast
BT7 2JA

Tel: 028 9536 1111
Email: info@rqia.org.uk

RQIA Web: https://www.rqia.org.uk
RQIA-X: @RQIANews

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