

**General  
Dental  
Council**

# **Trusted and effective**

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A strategy for dental regulation  
2026-2028



# Foreword

## **Our strategy for 2026 – 2028 is very consciously titled trusted and effective – this is what we are aiming to be seen to be and how your experience working alongside us should feel.**

Our vision is to be a trusted and effective regulator, supporting dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients.

The strategy sets out our vision, values, objectives, the work we will do to achieve them and how we will measure and know that we're making progress. It's a strategy intended to make a difference to dental regulation that will be felt by dental professionals, external partners, patients and the public.

We will champion a model of regulation that supports professionalism, enables learning, and resolves issues quickly and proportionately. Equality, diversity and inclusion will be at the heart of how we work. We want to provide right touch regulation that fits the times we're in and anticipates future changes in the practice environment. We want to be on top of emerging issues and able to play our part in tackling shared challenges.

We are clear that we want to be trusted and, to do this, we have to be effective. We have tested our plans to ensure sufficient funding, people and skills to deliver. We will be transparent about our progress and performance, and report on these, keeping an open dialogue about our accountability to you.

Collaboration with partners is key. We have shared interests in making dentistry work across the UK, and we all have a role to play. The Council is resolved that we will be recognised as a regulator that operates with greater effectiveness across all our functions and works collaboratively as a valued partner across the sector. For my part, I am committed to nurturing relationships built on trust and support and using these to listen and to learn so that we support dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients.

**Dr Helen Phillips**  
**Chair, General Dental Council**



# Our role, purpose and responsibilities

## Our purpose is public protection

We are the professional regulator for dental professionals in the UK.

We exist to protect the public and maintain public confidence in the dental professions.

This is a role given to us by Parliament and set out in the Dentists Act.



### To fulfil that role, we:

- Set requirements for dental education that support people to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for entry onto our register.
- Maintain a register of dental professionals who meet our standards and can practise dentistry in the UK.
- Set, maintain and promote standards and professional guidance that support professional practice, and requirements for lifelong learning through our Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme.
- Investigate serious concerns raised about a dental professional and act to protect the public if needed.

By doing those things, we aim to promote and maintain public confidence in the dental professions.

Our overriding purpose is at the core of everything we do.

Our strategy sets out our vision and objectives and describes the work we intend to do to achieve them. Some of this involves doing what we do now, but better with modernised systems and more user-friendly approaches. Other elements require us to think differently about how to achieve our desired outcomes, and particularly how we respond to developments and pressures in and on the sector and changes in patient needs and behaviours.

# Our vision and values

The ultimate purpose of the dental system is to promote safe and effective oral healthcare across the UK. The purpose of the regulatory system is to enable dental professionals to deliver safe and effective care to meet the oral health needs of the population.

These are not goals any of us can achieve in isolation – each of our partners in the dental system has a unique role to play. We need to work collaboratively towards the delivery of safe and effective care with the UK and devolved governments, the dental professions, and our partners in dentistry, healthcare and regulation.

As the professional regulator of dental professionals, the GDC has a particular role to play in this. Our vision for the GDC sets out our role in creating the environment in which there are more dental professionals equipped to deliver the care that people need.

## Our vision is:

To be a trusted and effective regulator, supporting dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients



A key part of our statutory purpose is to maintain confidence in the dental professions. There are clear connections and inter-dependencies between confidence, trust and effectiveness.

In delivering this strategy, we will focus on building trust with those that we work with, including the dental professions and patients, and improving our effectiveness in how we operate and regulate.

Why? We cannot be effective without being trusted, and we cannot be trusted without being effective.

Our vision emphasises the importance of the supporting and enabling role that regulation can and should play in the delivery of safe and effective care. The objectives that we set for ourselves describe how we will fulfil that vision.

A key aspect of our strategy is to build an organisation which adheres to our values in everything we do. Our values shape how we work and how we interact with our partners, the public and patients, dental professionals and our colleagues.



Our values:

<p><b>Respectful</b></p>  <p>We work and build relationships based on trust, empathy and fairness</p>	<p><b>Transparent</b></p>  <p>We are open, truthful and reliable in all we do, acting and speaking with integrity</p>	<p><b>Inclusive</b></p>  <p>We value all differences, and the perspectives they bring</p>	<p><b>Purposeful</b></p>  <p>We are clear in our public purpose and focused on effective delivery</p>
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We have adopted these values recognising the challenge which they represent. We know many of our partners and wider stakeholders will not recognise them as describing the GDC of today. Our commitment, and a guiding principle running throughout this strategy, is to strive to act in line with our values so that they become recognised over time as characterising the GDC and everyone’s experience of us.

In 2024, we made Equality, Diversity and Inclusion fundamental to our corporate purpose and strategy, and we sought to give effect to that commitment in our vision and objectives. It is central to everything we do as a regulator and a responsible employer, in full harmony with our values.

The priorities and activities set out in this strategy, which showcase how we will achieve our strategic objectives, include activities focused on promoting inclusion and reducing inequality. Making this part of our core strategic activity better demonstrates our commitment to equality and diversity in everything we do.

We will continue to report on the progress towards our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion goals in line with our values.





# Refreshing and refining our focus: building on progress so far

The approach in this strategy is consistent with previous strategic approaches. In particular, we continue to advocate for a model of regulation that focuses on supporting professionalism, enabling learning, and resolving issues quickly and proportionately.

Our delivery over the last three years therefore provides us with a solid foundation on which to build.

## Key successes:

- A modern and improved framework of learning outcomes for education for all dental professionals, establishing dental education requirements and expectations.
- Collection and publication of data on dental professionals' working patterns, contributing information and intelligence to inform strategies on workforce development and deployment.
- Revisions to all the curricula for specialty education, and improvements in the process for assessing applications to the specialist lists.
- A well-established dental leadership network, which supports collaboration, information sharing, and consensus building on priorities for action.
- More effective support for local resolution of complaints, delivering more appropriate outcomes for patients and empowering professionals.
- An efficient and accessible model for operating hearings, with most hearings taking place online.
- Changes to the information we publish following interim orders hearings, to support proportionality and help protect the privacy of those involved when allegations are untested.
- Changes to our fitness to practise process, such as the introduction of a new approach to initial inquiries, aimed at establishing the extent of investigation required and enabling more rapid closure of cases which do not require further investigation.
- New rules to govern our international registration processes, giving us more options for enabling access to the registers, and working with our delivery partners to significantly increase the capacity of the Overseas Registration Exam (ORE).

We have made significant progress over the previous strategy period. However, our core strategic goals are long-term ones, and we are still some way from fully achieving them. Our legislative framework does not support modernisation or change and continues to constrain our progress, meaning we cannot advance as quickly as we would like.

While our strategic direction remains consistent, we understand the environment in which we work has changed significantly. As such, we need to renew our focus and shift emphasis to account for the changing context and environment.

# Understanding the strategic context

Our approach to regulation must adapt to a constantly changing context, considering developments such as changing patient needs and expectations, the wider environment in which dental professionals work, and new models of care such as remote treatment and advancing technology.

We considered available evidence and worked with our Council and partners to identify the key threats and challenges facing the sector that we must respond to.

## There is a serious and continued strain on access to dental services, particularly NHS services

We know the biggest concern for dental patients is access, particularly to NHS dental services. Our research in 2024 indicated that just under a third of respondents did not have a regular dental practice, and one-fifth had been unable to book an appointment. Analysis also shows that this lack of access is not experienced equally across different geographic areas or social groups, which can lead to increased health inequalities. Unmet need for preventative dental care can result in increased need for remedial treatment later, with consequent impacts on patients and professionals.

Our 2024 research also indicated that the shift from NHS to private dentistry has been sustained and will continue to impact equitable access to dental services, due to affordability and availability.



## The Overseas Registration Exam (ORE) is not currently able to meet demand

The number of new dental professionals joining the register each year is slowly increasing. In recent years, while the number of UK-qualified dental professionals has grown slightly, the number of internationally trained dental professionals joining the UK register has grown significantly. In 2024, only 53% of newly registered dentists were UK-trained, continuing a trend that highlights the vital role of international recruitment in sustaining workforce capacity.

When dental professionals with overseas qualifications join our register, we must have processes in place to ensure they meet the high standards we require for registration. However, our processes should not be an unnecessary or disproportionate barrier to entry to the UK workforce. In the past five years, we have seen very significant increases in demand for the ORE. Despite increases in the capacity of the exam, made possible following a recent legislative change, demand has continued to outstrip supply. Coupled with that, policy changes following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) continue to take effect, and we must adapt our assessment frameworks to maintain rigorous and efficient evaluation processes, supporting effective workforce expansion while maintaining patient safety.

## Fitness to practise is adversarial and can impact dental professionals' mental health and wellbeing

We know the fitness to practise process can negatively impact dental professionals' mental health, wellbeing and confidence. Our research clearly demonstrates that the threat of fitness to practise proceedings and prolonged case resolution times are key causes of stress in dental professionals.<sup>1</sup> Not only does this impact the trust that the profession and our partners have in the GDC, but it can have a direct impact on patient care and is likely to affect career choices and retention over the long term.

## A climate of fear exists within dentistry, driven by mistrust of regulation

Over the years, a climate of fear has grown within dentistry. We understand this has been driven in part by mistrust and fear of regulation, and in particular of the fitness to practise process.

Our research suggests this effect starts early in a dental professional's career, as their perceptions of the GDC decline quite sharply post-qualification, with terms such as 'fear' frequently associated with regulation.

This climate of fear can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of regulation. The threat of fitness to practise can impact a dental professional's confidence, reduce the dental procedures that they are willing to undertake and may also result in their leaving the profession, all of which can have a serious impact on patient access and patient care.

<sup>1</sup> [Experiences of GDC fitness to practise participants 2015 – 2021: A realist study November 2022 \(gdc-uk.org\)](https://www.gdc-uk.org/research/experiences-of-gdc-fitness-to-practise-participants-2015-2021-a-realist-study-november-2022)

## Dentistry is changing, and we need to change with it

Dentistry is evolving, requiring us to adapt our regulatory approach. The rise of cosmetic dentistry and aesthetic procedures is blurring the line between essential healthcare and elective treatment, raising questions about patient expectations and professional responsibilities. Technology is also transforming dentistry, with innovations in digital diagnostics, treatment planning, record keeping, and patient communication happening at speed. Delivering effective and proportionate regulation is critical to enabling innovation while maintaining public confidence.

## We need to meet the needs of a diverse public and diverse professions

We serve a diverse public and must ensure that our strategy recognises this. We must understand public and patient needs and address them with a clear and specific focus on improving equality and inclusion. This includes playing our role in reducing health inequalities – in respect of access, experience and outcomes – and ensuring the services we provide and how we communicate are accessible to everyone.

The dental workforce is changing. For example, we are seeing more women become dentists. In 2024, 61% of newly registered dentists were women. We are also seeing increasing numbers of internationally trained professionals joining the registers, which impacts workforce diversity. Our fitness to practise data also shows that certain ethnicities and internationally trained professionals are overrepresented in proceedings compared to white and UK-trained counterparts, particularly at the early stages of the process.

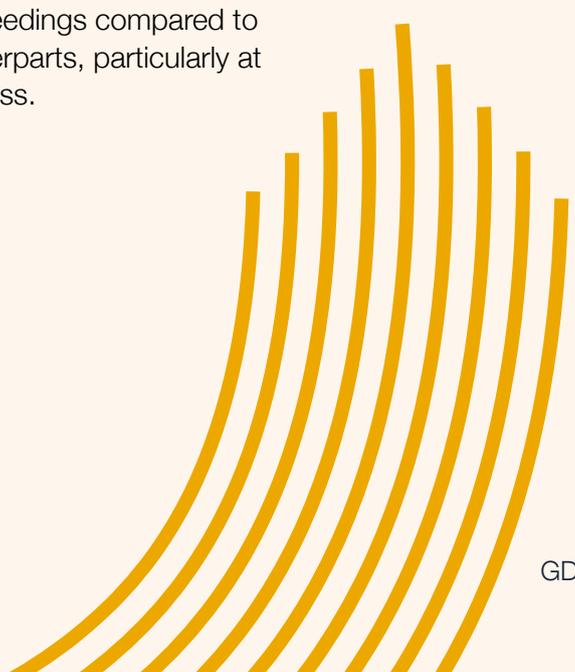
We need to understand why this is happening and whether it indicates bias or a need to strengthen support or guidance.

A clear and effective framework supporting professionalism is a key tool to ensure a safe, inclusive workplace. Sexual misconduct inside and outside the workplace continues to be an issue which predominantly affects women, exacerbated by power imbalances within workplaces. There is a clear role for us, as the professional regulator, in making it clear that sexual misconduct is unacceptable and doing all we can to eliminate it within dentistry.

## What does this mean?

The above challenges require us to respond. Developing this strategy provides an opportunity to refresh and refine our approach to account for the opportunities and threats we face.

While our core regulatory responsibilities are unchanged, we must ensure our processes, policies, and engagement strategies evolve to meet the needs of the professions and the public. By fostering trust, promoting fair and effective regulation, and ensuring our approach remains responsive to dentistry's changing landscape, we can continue to uphold high professional standards while supporting a sustainable and resilient dental workforce.



# Where do we want to be by 2030?



In developing our vision and objectives, we looked beyond the three-year strategy period and articulated what we want to have achieved and how we want to be working by 2030, so that we set ourselves on the right course.

## **Our aim is for the GDC of 2030 to be:**

- Living by our values – and be seen to be doing so.
- Trusted by the public, dental profession, and our partners, to do the right thing with fewer dental professionals fearing us.
- Fully effective in delivering our four key regulatory functions.
- Maintaining the integrity of the dental register by regulating in a timely and proportionate way.
- Setting standards and professional guidance which supports dental professionals to make the right decisions.
- Financially robust and operationally efficient.
- Taking full advantage of modern digital tools and channels.
- A collaborative partner, valued by people and organisations across the sector.
- An employer of choice, attracting and retaining the right staff.
- A fair and inclusive regulator and employer, embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion across all our functions.

We also want to be working within an improved legislative framework which allows us to improve and adapt to regulate effectively now and in the future.

Our legislation is outdated and an impediment to effective regulation in several areas. For years, we have been strongly advocating for regulatory reform, and we will continue to do so.

However, we understand that wholesale legislative change in the next three years is unlikely, so our immediate focus will be on securing incremental change to our legislation where possible and continuing to improve and challenge existing processes and approaches within the constraints of the current legislation. Our priorities will be to reduce the negative impacts of regulation, which can lead to fear and stress for professionals, and to adopt a more empathetic approach. Through this, we hope to become more trusted, effective and efficient and ultimately to achieve better outcomes for patients and the public.



# A summary of our strategy

## Trusted and effective

A strategy for dental regulation  
2026-2028

### Our vision

To be a trusted and effective regulator, supporting dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients

### Our values



Respectful



Transparent



Inclusive



Purposeful

### Our objectives

1

Support dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients

2

Maintain high standards for registration and register those who meet them in a timely and effective way

3

Improve fitness to practise, maximising patient safety and reducing unintended impacts

4

Work collaboratively to speak up on, influence and address issues that affect patients and the public

5

Maximise the effectiveness of our people, our culture, and our systems

### Our aim is for the GDC of 2030 to be:

Setting standards and professional guidance which supports dental professionals to make the right decisions.

Maintaining the integrity of the dental register by regulation in a timely and proportionate way.

Financially robust and operationally efficient.

Trusted by the public, dental profession, and our partners, to do the right thing with fewer dental professionals fearing us.

A collaborative partner, valued by people and organisations across the sector.

Taking full advantage of modern digital tools and channels.

A fair and inclusive regulator and employer, embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion across all our functions.

Fully effective in delivering our four key regulatory functions.

An employer of choice, attracting and retaining the right staff.

Living by our values - and be seen to be doing so.

# What will we do to achieve our goals?



We have identified five strategic objectives that we need to achieve to deliver on our vision.

## Our objectives

<b>1</b> Support dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients.	<b>2</b> Maintain high standards for registration and register those who meet them in a timely and effective way.	<b>3</b> Improve fitness to practise, maximising patient safety and reducing unintended impacts.
<b>4</b> Work collaboratively to speak up on, influence and address issues that affect patients and the public.	<b>5</b> Maximise the effectiveness of our people, our culture, and our systems.	

## Delivery plan

The delivery plan, which is included for each objective, provides a roadmap that outlines how we will deliver the priority areas set out within the strategic objectives. It illustrates how Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is embedded within each priority area of the strategic objectives. For each strategic objective priority area, we are developing our approach to monitoring and evaluating our progress toward achieving the desired outcomes. This will evolve throughout the strategy delivery and will combine internal and external quantitative and qualitative evidence.

The Council will review delivery performance quarterly. Within the scope of our entire business plan, they will evaluate and prioritise recommendations for change resulting from new information (legislative change, over- or under-performance or changing budget and/or resourcing demands). The Council and relevant committees will then make appropriate approval decisions.

# Objective 1: Support dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients

The most effective way we can protect patients is through 'upstream' regulatory levers that focus on preventing harm through equipping and empowering dental professionals.

We do this in several ways, including ensuring the quality of UK dental education and training, promoting professional standards and guidance, and setting requirements to enable professionals to keep their knowledge and skills up to date via CPD.

To do this more effectively, we want to regulate in a way which promotes learning over fear, supporting dental professionals to continuously demonstrate professionalism, rather than driving behaviours through the threat of fitness to practise.

Our role is to provide a clear, accessible and forward-looking guidance framework to support that professionalism and good decision-making, for the benefit of patients and the public.

We aim to develop and deliver that professional guidance that creates an environment in which dental professionals can flourish. Our guidance needs to:

- Be forward-looking, considering new or emerging risks or challenges.
- Encourage positive professionalism by supporting and empowering professional decision-making.
- Promote patient safety by focusing on what makes things go right, and how this can be applied in different contexts.
- Set clear expectations of dental professionals of what is required of them, based on patient needs and public expectations, with useful supporting information demonstrating how to meet those requirements.
- Help to foster a learning culture, promoting and encouraging good practice and continuous improvement to achieve positive patient outcomes.
- Be made available to all dental professionals in a format that they can easily identify, access and understand.

Trust in the GDC and the way we regulate is integral to developing this more supportive approach. If our professional guidance is useful and seen as valuable to the profession, trust in regulation will increase. With greater trust, the more likely it is that dental professionals will engage with the professional guidance that we set.



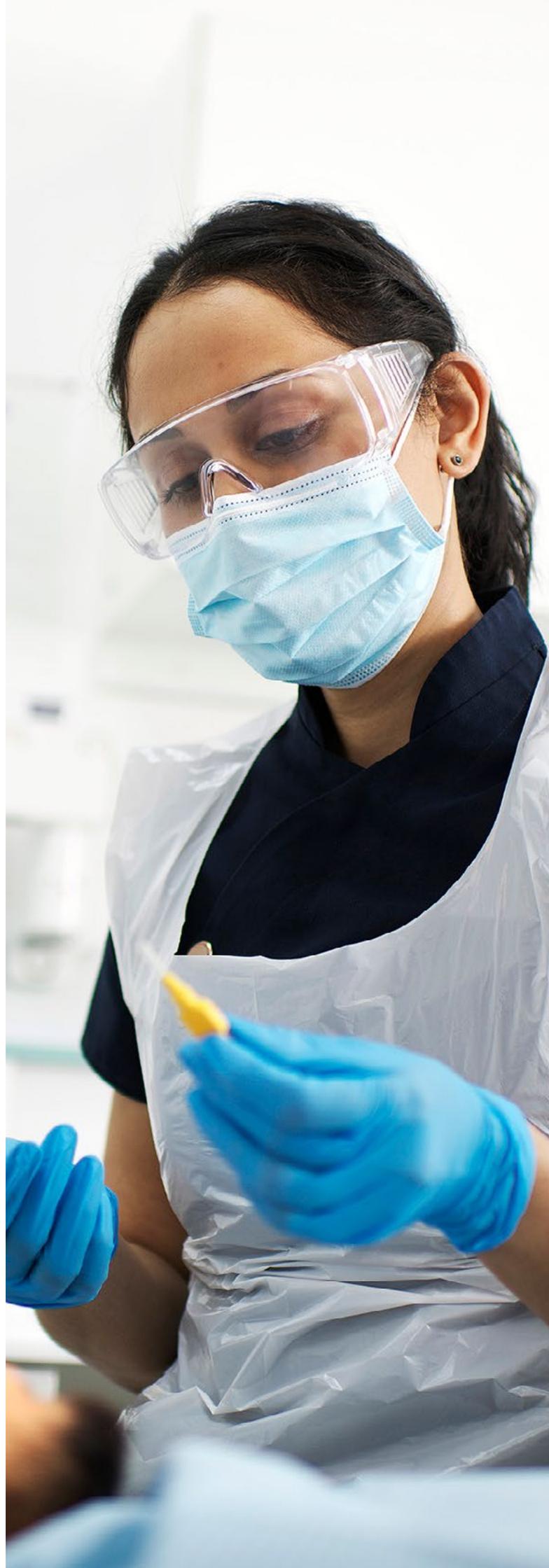
## How will we achieve this?

We will develop and maintain a principles-based standards and guidance framework that recognises and responds to new and emerging threats and concerns, and we will work with the professions to promote and embed it and make it a valuable and accessible tool by:

- Continuing to develop a new professional guidance framework, based on the principles of professionalism.
- Identifying emerging issues, trends and information needs.
- Developing a range of professional guidance and supporting materials to support professionalism, in collaboration with our partners.
- Actively promoting and embedding professional guidance.

We will develop a learning culture in our approach to regulation by:

- Using our own research and insight, and working with partners and the professions, continuously identify sources of learning, including analysing fitness to practise data to provide insight into areas of practice risk.
- Feeding this learning into professional guidance development and maintaining the lifelong learning scheme.



We will address the climate of fear within dentistry and increase trust in regulation through enhanced communications and engagement with the profession and our partners by:

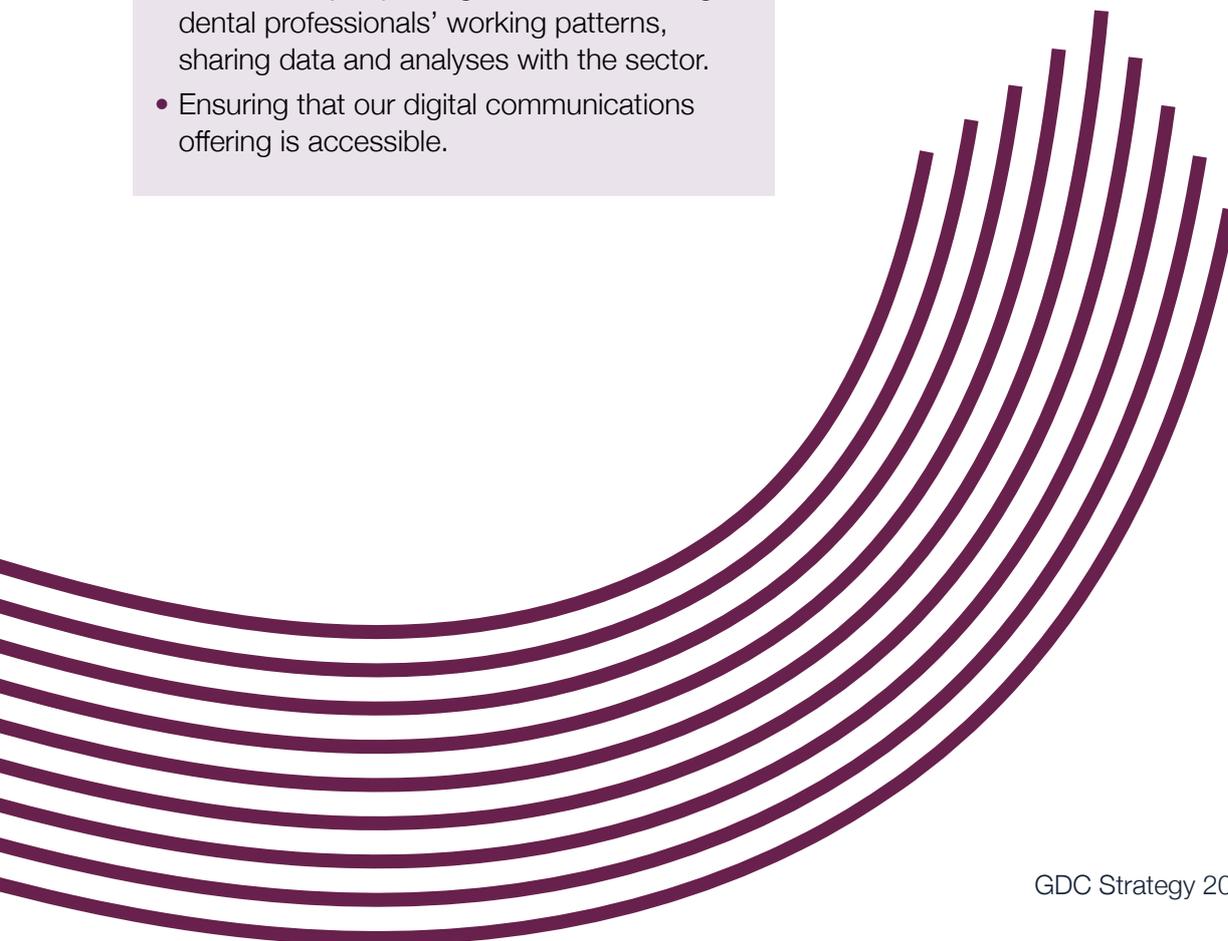
- Strengthening our engagement with, and listening to, student and trainee dental professionals, the professions and our partners.
- Maintaining a transparent and constructive dialogue about what we are doing and why.

We will support dental professionals and account for their diverse needs by:

- Improving our understanding of the diverse needs of dental professionals and students, and of how we can support them.
- Developing information for those joining the registers from overseas to help them understand the expectations for the delivery of good oral healthcare in the UK.
- Better understanding the existence and prevalence of discrimination in dentistry and what we can do to address it.
- Ensuring that we meet the diverse needs of professionals who interact with our services.
- Continuously improving our understanding of dental professionals' working patterns, sharing data and analyses with the sector.
- Ensuring that our digital communications offering is accessible.

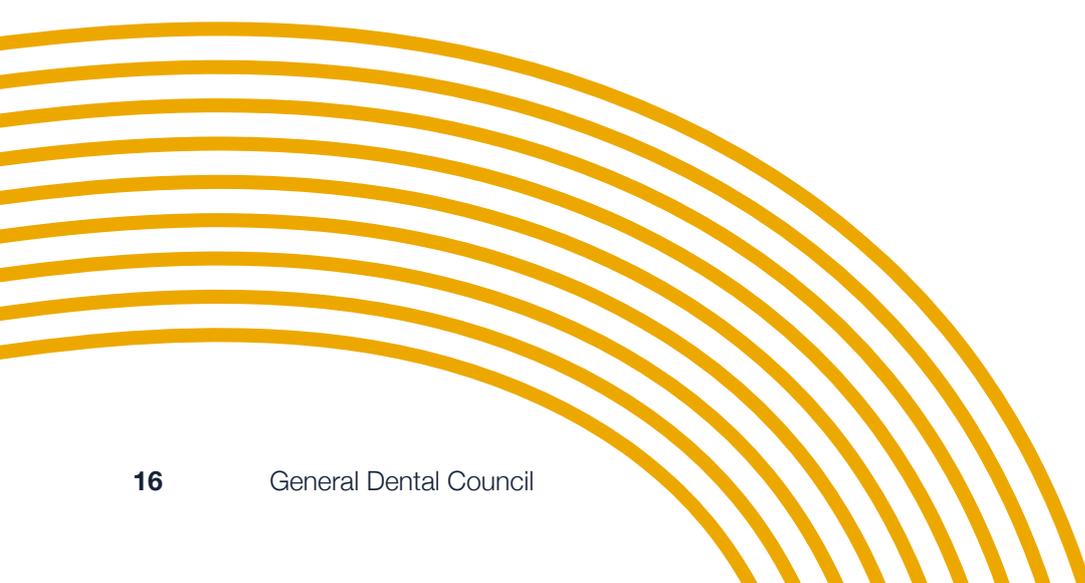
We will support all dental professionals to practise safely in a modern healthcare landscape by:

- Developing a more agile approach to understanding societal changes and advances in digital technology and innovation, and their potential impact on the delivery of safe and effective dental care.
- Supporting the profession to practise in a modern landscape, and safely utilise digital technology and innovation.
- Ensuring that our approach to tackling illegal practice keeps pace with changes and advances in dentistry, society and technology.
- Recognising and enabling the effective use of the range of skills across the dental team to deliver oral healthcare.



# Delivery plan

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will develop and maintain a principles-based standards and guidance framework that recognises and responds to new and emerging threats and concerns, and we will work with the professions to promote and embed it and make it a valuable and accessible tool.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Implement our Principles Based Guidance Framework, with horizon scanning function established.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Publish and promote a new sexual misconduct framework across stakeholders.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Continue development, improvements and engagement across the guidance framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a guidance framework highlighting registrants’ EDI-specific responsibilities when treating patients, and how they can maintain confidence in the professions by following these principles.</li> <li>• Present the framework and supporting materials in an accessible way, to enable registrants to effectively engage with them.</li> <li>• Focus on sexual misconduct as an element of the wider work on professionalism, to support the creation of a more inclusive environment in which sexual misconduct is not tolerated.</li> <li>• Use our monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will develop a learning culture in our approach to regulation.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Work to understand current learning models and learning engagement.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Design the future CPD model.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Develop new CPD scheme following legislative change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate diversity considerations into learning, including access, learning styles and use of evidence, to ensure our approach meets diverse needs.</li> <li>• Develop a learning system focused on meeting the needs of a diverse population.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>



Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will address the climate of fear within dentistry and increase trust in regulation through enhanced communications and engagement with the profession and our partners.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Build trust in regulation and raising student awareness of the GDC through engagement campaigns.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Increase reach and engagement through evaluation of engagement channels.</p> <p><b>2028:</b> Improve annual statistical reporting to the profession.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Understand perception and the impact of ongoing engagement on reducing fear through ongoing evaluation and engagement.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Engage ongoing students with foundation/vocational training engagement.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Instigate ongoing senior level engagement with the sector, including regulators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing this climate of fear will have positive impacts for patients, potentially improving access and health outcomes.</li> <li>• Focus on supporting better mental health for registrants.</li> <li>• Employ a range of engagement methods to reach a diverse registrant base and make communications accessible.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>



Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<b>We will support dental professionals and account for their diverse needs.</b>	
<p><b>2026–2030:</b> Ensure inclusion remains a key and cross cutting theme for research and statistical analyses.</p> <p><b>2026:</b> Develop supporting materials for dental professionals for application in practice.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Improve guidance and ensure accessibility.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Instigate annual activities to improve our understanding, identify gaps and ensure increased value.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach internationally qualified, new to UK practice dental professionals in their first years of registration.</li> <li>• Demonstrate we are a fair and inclusive regulator through the campaign “Trusted regulation through EDI engagement”.</li> <li>• Promote revisions to professional guidance framework, standards for education and learning outcomes.</li> </ul> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Embed EDI into our revised CPD programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce materials to support the professionalism framework with an EDI focus, including working with diverse populations and in a diverse workforce.</li> <li>• Produce materials in a range of formats accessible to a diverse registrant base.</li> <li>• Focus on the needs of internationally qualified registrants, better equipping them to practise safely and effectively in the UK, and to support positive patient interactions.</li> <li>• Improve understanding of the impacts of discrimination in dentistry will help inform responses.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<b>We will support all dental professionals to practise safely in a modern healthcare landscape.</b>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Establish a clear position on regulation of non-surgical cosmetic treatments, working with Westminster and Scottish governments.</p> <p><b>2026:</b> Prioritise a plan to address issues including innovation, professional/consumer relationships and remote treatment.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Implement approaches to regulating modern dentistry and how we address illegal practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and effectively regulate innovation in dentistry and how availability of care options could support improved access for underserved populations. This work is currently in discovery, and its impacts for EDI will become clearer as the scope of the work is developed.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>

## Objective 2: Maintain high standards for registration, and register those who meet them in a timely and effective way

The best way to protect patients and the public is to ensure the integrity of the registers. This means ensuring those on the registers demonstrate the professional knowledge, skills and behaviours to safely and effectively practise dentistry, so the public can have confidence in the dental professions.

However, we must also ensure that our processes do not present an unnecessary or disproportionate barrier to those with the right skills and experience. We recognise that the current capacity of some of our international registration routes is insufficient, and that this impacts workforce capacity and those professionals seeking to register with us. Therefore, we must do more to ensure that all our routes to registration effectively protect the public by better enabling access to dental treatment and preventative care, in particular.

This will become increasingly relevant as current routes, particularly those involving recognition of EU qualifications, change in line with government policy and the UK's relationship with the EU.

### How will we achieve this?

We will ensure education and training continue to produce safe professionals and meet patient needs by:

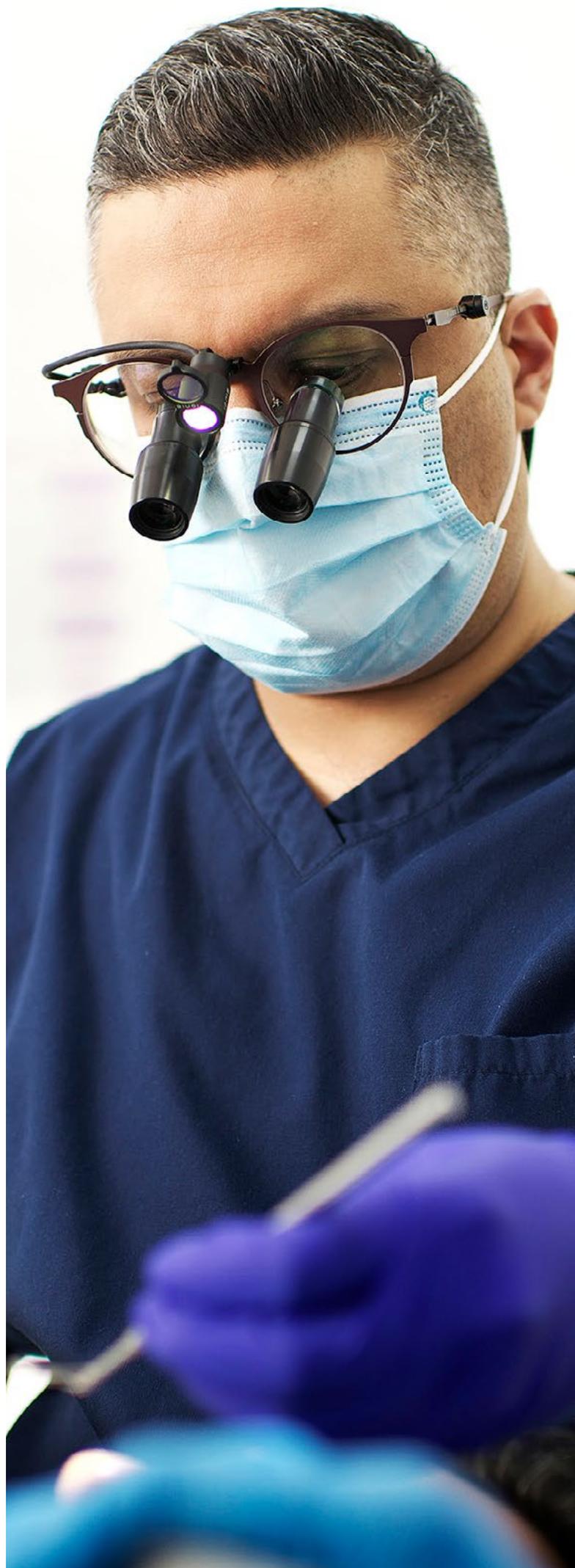
- Evolving and adapting our approach to quality assuring education and training, and responding effectively to new courses and providers.
- Ensuring education and training programmes adopt the Safe Practitioner Framework and have formal approaches to monitoring student behaviours and addressing behavioural issues.
- Using research and engagement to listen to and capture the voice of students and early career registrants to better understand their experiences of education and training.

We will develop a comprehensive and accessible framework to register internationally qualified dental professionals, for all dental professions, by:

- Exploring and evaluating options for assessing internationally qualified applicants, to create an efficient and effective, forward-looking international registration framework to meet future capacity demands.
- Working closely with partners to develop and implement new routes to registration for internationally qualified professionals that keep patients safe and meet the needs of the system and the profession.

We will ensure all our registration processes are efficient and effective by:

- Modernising our registration and renewal processes, enabling digital and online interfaces where possible.
- Identifying and addressing inefficiencies in our current processes.
- Making sure our registration processes are fully accessible, to help ensure a more inclusive dental workforce.



# Delivery plan

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will ensure education and training continue to produce safe professionals and meet patient needs.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Implement revised standards of education across all providers.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Ensure the Safe Practitioner Framework is adopted by all provider programmes.</p> <p><b>2028:</b> Implement revised standards for specialty education.</p> <p><b>2030:</b> Complete implementation of new learning outcomes.</p> <p><b>2030:</b> Implement revised specialty curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure and report EDI against the Safe Practitioner Framework and Standards for Education (of which they are key elements) as part of the EQA inspection programme.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will develop a comprehensive and accessible framework to register internationally qualified dental professionals, for all dental professions.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Bring new ORE contract into operation.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Evaluate options for international registration framework.</p> <p><b>2028:</b> Undertake consultation on new international framework.</p> <p><b>2028:</b> Extend or replace process for registering EU trained dental professionals following the end of EU standstill period.</p> <p><b>2029:</b> Begin operating new international registration routes.</p> <p><b>2030:</b> Undertake gap analysis on future requirements for ORE and international registration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a proportionate and efficient set of registration pathways for internationally qualified professionals, to enable deployment of a skilled workforce and address workforce shortage and access issues, enabling better access to oral care for underserved populations.</li> <li>• Reduce waiting times for overseas qualified candidates, providing a more positive experience of assessment and registration for internationally qualified professionals.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<b>We will ensure all our registration processes are efficient and effective.</b>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Ensure new online registration and renewal process becomes operational and embedded.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Evaluate registrant user experience and identify improvements to ensure ongoing accessibility and efficiency for users.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Commence iterative registration improvements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed accessibility into the design of the system.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>



# Objective 3: Improve fitness to practise, maximising patient safety and reducing unintended impacts

Taking an effective, proportionate approach to determining fitness to practise plays a vital role in ensuring patient safety. We must operate fair and effective processes that:

- Enable people to raise concerns.
- Support learning and remediation where possible.
- Are concluded in a timely way to minimise stress on all parties.
- Deliver proportionate outcomes.

We know our current approach to fitness to practise can feel punitive and disproportionate to those under investigation, and as a result, it can negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of those involved. We also know that fear of fitness to practise is a key factor in levels of stress for dental professionals and a driver of the climate of fear.

While we have made several changes to our fitness to practise process and approach since 2018, we know we must do more to develop a more supportive and empathetic approach.

More specifically, we want to explore less adversarial ways of handling and resolving concerns, to deliver the right outcomes over the right timeframe. Only a small proportion of concerns raised with us are so serious or irremediable that they require a sanction or restriction on a professional's practice. Most cases involve less serious concerns that eventually close with no finding of impairment or any sanction. In many cases, there are opportunities for earlier interventions focused on remediation and learning, through which we could reduce the punitive effect

of the process. Shifting to a more prevention-focused regulatory model that prioritises empathy, support, risk mitigation, and professional development can also help build trust with the profession while maintaining public protection.

## How will we achieve this?

We will explore how we can use fitness to practise to manage risk more effectively, within the current legislative framework. This will include:

- Actively exploring and testing the boundaries of our legal framework and developing options for change by challenging existing positions, and thinking innovatively about how to make further, more impactful change.
- Exploring greater use of less adversarial approaches to closure of cases (such as remediation), to decrease punitive effects and maximise the learning potential of fitness to practise.
- Continually identifying and implementing improvements to the fitness to practise process and decision-making, through robust quality-assurance processes and effective decision-making guidance.



We will work with dental professionals and partners to better understand the elements of the current process that have the most negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of those involved and work collaboratively to address them. This will include:

- Using research, evidence and data, and listening to dental professionals through ongoing engagement to ensure we understand the impact of the various elements of the process on everyone involved in fitness to practise.
- Working with professionals, partners and wider stakeholders to develop, test and evaluate ways of reducing that impact, by seeking to make changes to the process, enhancing the available support, and developing a more compassionate and empathetic approach.

We will gather and use evidence to improve our understanding of the impact of fitness to practise on dental professionals, including looking at factors related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), to ensure our processes are fair and equitable. This will include:

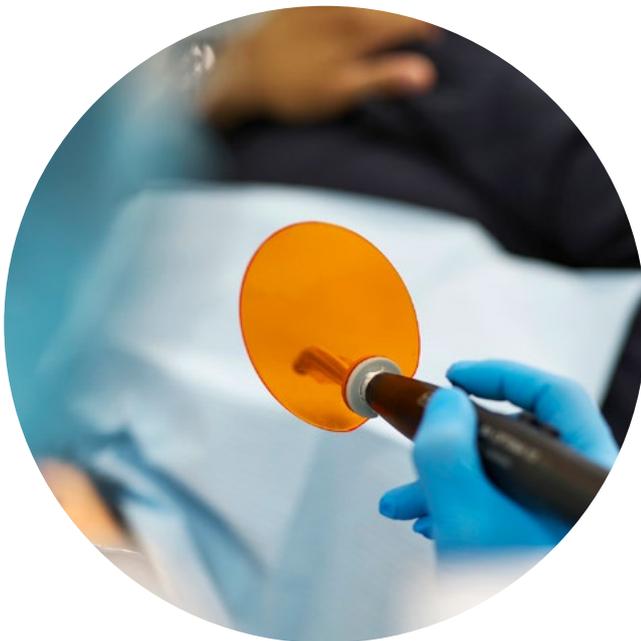
- Continuing to analyse our registration and fitness to practise data, to explore and identify EDI-related correlations and any change over time.
- Listening to user voices via public, registrant and student panels to inform our efforts to mitigate the risk of bias/discrimination, and to test and evaluate our responses.
- Better understanding who is raising concerns with the GDC and the Dental Complaints Service, and identifying any trends which may provide insight into the accessibility of the dental complaints system.



# Delivery plan

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will explore how we can use fitness to practise to manage risk more effectively, within the current legislative framework.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Implement changes to improve effectiveness of remote hearings.</p> <p>Scope and develop options for closing cases earlier through employing less adversarial methods.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Instigate procedural improvements that can be implemented without legislative change.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Continue to review and develop any case management procedural improvements and evaluate those that have already been implemented (TBD).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include handling of cases on discrimination and sexual misconduct in guidance on decision making.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will work with dental professionals and partners to better understand the elements of the current process that have the most negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of those involved and work collaboratively to address them.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Launch enhanced support services for wellbeing support.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Analyse the fitness to practise process to identify areas of negative impact.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Research into impact of process on mental health of participants.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Review and improve support services based on evidence.</p> <p><b>2026–2030:</b> Undertake ongoing programme of research on the fitness to practise experience, communications and operational procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to reduce stress and distress caused by the fitness to practise process and lessen the negative impact on mental health for those involved.</li> <li>• Engage broadly and deeply, with solutions being appropriately developed and targeted according to needs.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will gather and use evidence to improve our understanding of the impact of fitness to practise on dental professionals, including looking at factors related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), to ensure our processes are fair and equitable.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Scope to understand; outcomes of fitness to practise on groups with protected characteristics, representation of groups in fitness to practise process.</p> <p><b>2026:</b> Review of fitness to practise quality assurance processes.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Evaluate options and implement recommendations from the 2026 scoping work on representing groups in fitness to practise process.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Scope changes to data collection to enable future analysis.</p> <p><b>2028–2030:</b> Undertake iterative improvement based on insights from data and research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on identifying and addressing potential bias, discrimination and unfairness in our processes.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>



## Objective 4: Work collaboratively to speak up on, influence, and address issues that affect patients and the public

Given the complex and changing environment in which we work, collaboration and partnership working are key to our success. We have sought to make the most of opportunities to develop relationships, provide platforms for discussion and promote joint working on key issues in dentistry. We want to build on this approach and become a trusted leader within dentistry, utilising new and established partnerships to identify issues that matter to patients and the public and to effectively address them by developing joined-up solutions.

We will continue to gather insights to ensure our work remains evidence led. We will use these insights to inform our conversations with other leaders in dentistry, to improve outcomes for patients and the public.

### How will we achieve this?

We will continue to build robust evidence to inform our work, and where appropriate, sector-wide discussions and initiatives, for the benefit of patients, the professions and public protection by:

- Ensuring we listen to diverse professional, patient and public voices through effective engagement, understanding their concerns and using this understanding to inform our approach.
- Identifying areas in which we can positively contribute to advancing sector-wide insight and undertaking appropriate research and evidence gathering.

We will collaborate with others on issues that benefit patients, the profession and public protection by:

- Developing partnerships to help us identify and address issues.
- Working to build trust in the GDC to strengthen our ability to lead and influence.
- Developing a better understanding of inequalities in access, experience and outcomes in oral health and the GDC's role in addressing them.

We will identify ways to improve the regulatory framework, and use our influence to effect change by:

- Working with professionals, partners and wider stakeholders to identify how we can influence and effect change in the absence of wholesale legislative reform.
- Establishing opportunities and priorities for amendments to legislation and process, and building the evidence base to support them.
- Taking a proportionate approach to ensuring our readiness for reform, so that we maximise our ability to take opportunities should they arise.



# Delivery plan

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will continue to build robust evidence to inform our work, and where appropriate sector-wide discussions and initiatives, for the benefit of patients, the profession and public protection</b></p>	
<p><b>2026–2030:</b> Develop and embed the use of registrant, student and public, and patient panels.</p> <p><b>2026–2028:</b> Continue to frame and structure the Research &amp; Intelligence programme through its four themes – risk, sector, proportionality and inclusion (to review in 2028).</p> <p><b>2026–2030:</b> Continue to apply statistical analyses and forward plan to meet developing business needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed inclusion as a key theme of the research programme.</li> <li>• Recruit diverse and representative panels and facilitate the use of user voice in our work.</li> <li>• Establish an evidence base to support policy development aimed at eliminating bias and discrimination in our regulatory approach.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will collaborate with others on issues that benefit patients, the profession and public protection.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Identify opportunities to increase influence and collaboration to better advocate for patients and the public.</p> <p><b>2026–2030:</b> Increase voice of influence for the dentistry sector.</p> <p><b>2026–2030:</b> Increase influence and identify priorities for the sector by engaging with the dentistry and healthcare sector through the DLN.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a wider range of voices and perspectives in discussions and in policy development by broadening engagement.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will identify ways to improve the regulatory framework and use our influence to effect change.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Complete supporting strategies for delivery and work to deliver in the business plan.</p> <p><b>2027–2028:</b> Undertake ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy delivery.</p> <p><b>2029:</b> Confirm our next corporate strategy.</p> <p><b>2026–2027:</b> Align regulatory reform with government timelines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate EDI considerations in supporting strategies and develop and publish Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) where appropriate.</li> </ul>

# Objective 5: Maximise the effectiveness of our people, our culture and our systems

The GDC can only be an effective regulator if it is an effective organisation. Our new values challenge us to be at our best in how we operate internally as well as in how we relate to dental professionals and our wider stakeholders.

To empower success, we must create the right environment to support delivery through a robust workforce plan and framework, to ensure the recruitment, retention and development of skilled and effective teams, and strong and decisive leadership.

Our services, processes, and the way in which people interact with us must be user-focused, up-to-date, digital where possible, efficient and effective. We must ensure that those who interact with us can do so easily without unnecessary barriers, which is particularly important for improving our regulatory effectiveness.

## How will we achieve this?

**We will focus on recruiting people with the right skills and capabilities who share our values and can deliver our ambitions and develop an organisational structure capable of fulfilling those ambitions. This will include:**

- Designing an evidence-based workforce plan to develop the right organisational structure for the GDC.
- Identifying and implementing improvements in our recruitment processes.
- Providing a competitive and fair employment offer, and an employee experience that matches our promise.

**We will develop a high-performance culture by investing in our people to fulfil our ambitions. This will include:**

- Investing in our people's skills and capabilities to meet current and future requirements.
- Developing outstanding leaders and people managers at all organisational levels.
- Implementing our board effectiveness review recommendations and improving our governance structures and processes, to make decision-making more effective and efficient.

**We will work to ensure that colleagues and teams remain engaged and supported to deliver more effective services and outcomes for dental professionals and the public. This will include:**

- Ensuring our people understand how their role and team contribute to our purpose, role and ambitions.
- Supporting colleagues with their wellbeing, raising awareness of its importance and providing appropriate support.
- Ensuring we have the right working environment to enable colleagues to perform to their best.



We will continue building an inclusive workplace which values diversity, proactively identifying and challenging inequality and discrimination. This will include:

- Understanding and acting on what our employee data is telling us.
- Ensuring that managers and colleagues are equipped to lead and work in diverse teams.
- Developing an inclusive workplace that challenges discrimination and inequality through developing and implementing a clear and appropriate policy framework.

We will ensure our teams have the tools they need to provide effective and efficient service, centred on the needs of the user. This will include:

- Modernising our IT estate, following best practice, ensuring the quality and safety of our data and facilitating more effective working, accounting for the diverse needs of our staff.
- Understanding users' experience of us and re-shaping how we interact with people.

We will adopt modern digital communications channels to ensure we communicate inclusively with dental professionals, patients and the public in the ways which work best for them. This will include:

- Making the best use of different channels for communication.
- Reviewing and improving our websites.
- Ensuring we meet the diverse needs of everyone who interacts with our services, including the digitally excluded.
- Ensuring our digital communications offering is accessible to all.



# Delivery plan

Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will focus on recruiting people with the right skills and capabilities, who share our values and can deliver our ambitions and develop an organisational structure capable of fulfilling those ambitions.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Complete a review of support service function to identify opportunities for improving effectiveness and efficiency. Embed Workforce Planning role in our People Partnering service.</p> <p><b>2027–2030:</b> Implement and embed approved improvement recommendations from the support services function review and perform review of the wider GDC teams for alignment (TBD).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out EIAs to assess impact of workforce planning decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will develop a high-performance culture, by investing in our people to fulfil our ambitions.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Implement revised pay &amp; grading framework. Introduce career pathways. Implement recommendation from the Board Effectiveness review.</p> <p><b>2026–2030:</b> Undertake ongoing continuous improvement to embed values and staff engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor our gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, providing interventions which support attraction, retention and progression of talent.</li> <li>• Include EDI aims and objectives in our workforce development project.</li> <li>• Complete EDIs against all projects and initiatives impacting workforce.</li> </ul>



Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will work to ensure that colleagues and teams remain engaged and supported to deliver more effective services and outcomes for dental professionals and the public.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026–2030:</b> Undertake ongoing continuous improvement workstreams, using continuous staff feedback, to understand and enhance engagement across people and teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor our gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, providing interventions which support attraction, retention and progression of talent.</li> <li>• Include EDI aims and objectives in our workforce development project.</li> <li>• Where appropriate, EIAs will be completed against policies and projects impacting workforce.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will continue building an inclusive workplace which values diversity, proactively identifying and challenging inequality and discrimination.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026–2030:</b> Ensure that considerations for EDI are embedded throughout the employee lifecycle through Our People Strategy, which features three key initiatives.</p> <p><b>Initiatives</b></p> <p>Improve our understanding of the right considerations that apply to team functions, addressing gaps and opportunities.</p> <p>Advance colleague awareness to apply EDI considerations more intuitively, through expanding learning information available and engagement programmes across our Employee Networks.</p> <p>Advance our understanding of stakeholder group diversity needs through expanding our EDI data capture and insights analysis and research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor our gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps, providing interventions which support attraction, retention and progression of talent.</li> <li>• Carry out EIAs on the people strategy to identify positive impacts and mitigate negative ones.</li> </ul>



Roadmap goals	EDI focus
<p><b>We will ensure our teams have the tools they need to provide an effective and efficient service, centred on the needs of the user.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026–2029:</b> Improve security with up-to-date detection tools, automation of updates and anomaly detection, adaptive access controls, threat detection, and external audits.</p> <p>Improve colleague technical capabilities through role based digital skills identification and training programmes.</p> <p>Continue our full migration to cloud by procuring appropriate partners to support business critical systems, with focus on user experience, reviewing analytics to ongoing improve cost effectiveness, performance and usability.</p> <p>Continue to understand opportunities with new technologies through piloting, expanding and optimising AI use cases.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed accessibility as a key component of the IT strategy, with training provided to staff to enable effective use.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We will adopt modern digital communications channels to ensure that we can inclusively communicate with dental professionals, patients and the public in the ways which work best for them.</b></p>	
<p><b>2026:</b> Complete user need analysis for the GDC and DCS websites.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Implement new websites.</p> <p><b>2027:</b> Align website with social media channels.</p> <p><b>2026-2030:</b> Undertake annual review and refresh of social medial channels and content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure accessibility of communications becomes a key element of the work in understanding user needs.</li> <li>• Increase engagement via social media and other channels enables increased inclusion from under-represented groups.</li> <li>• Use the monitoring and evaluation framework to measure EDI impact where possible.</li> </ul>



# Understanding and reporting on our progress and performance

We will monitor and report on our progress in line with the objectives we set out in this strategy, using a range of methods and evidence sources, to both define and track desired appropriate outcomes.

This will include:

## **Objective 1: Support dental professionals to provide the right care for their patients**

- Information, data and outcomes from our education quality assurance processes.
- Research into student, early career registrants and stakeholder experiences, attitudes and perceptions over time.
- Levels of failure demand in relation to our policy framework.
- Feedback from stakeholders.
- Performance against Professional Standards Authority (PSA) standards.
- Using registrant, student and patient and public panels to inform, test and evaluate what we do.

## **Objective 2: Maintain high standards for registration, and register those who meet them in a timely and effective way**

- Delivery of a legal and policy framework for international registration that enables a smooth workforce supply.
- Analysing and sharing working patterns responses.
- Demand and supply in international registration pipelines are well-matched.
- Timeliness in UK and international registration.
- Performance against PSA standards.
- Research and statistical analyses to understand the diversity of outcomes, experiences, and perceptions of those applying to join GDC's register.

### **Objective 3: Improve fitness to practise, maximising patient safety and reducing unintended impacts**

- Research into the experiences of those involved with fitness to practise.
- Research on stakeholder perceptions, focusing on trust and fear, and the impact of regulation on dental care.
- Quality of fitness to practise decision-making at every stage of the process.
- The time we take to conclude the fitness to practise process.
- Performance against PSA standards.
- Research and engagement using registrant, student and patient and public panels to inform, test and evaluate fitness to practise development and improvement.
- Statistical analysis of fitness to practise outcomes to identify disproportionate correlations (for instance, in relation to EDI, registrant role, time on the register).

### **Objective 4: Work collaboratively to speak up on, influence, and address issues that affect patients and the public**

- Research on stakeholder perceptions.
- Research on the public's experiences of accessing and receiving dental care.
- Clear links between our policy frameworks and the available evidence.
- Depth and breadth of our consultation and engagement.
- Research and engagement with registrant, student and patient and public panels.
- Impact of our collaborative work in identifying and addressing health inequalities in oral health outcomes and experiences.



## Objective 5: Maximise the effectiveness of our people, our culture and our systems

- Staff monitoring data and feedback. Examples include:
  - o Recruitment/retention
  - o Sickness absence
  - o Feedback
  - o Engagement
  - o Learning and development
  - o Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
  - o Recruitment and development (KPIs and goals).
- Using statistical and qualitative analyses to interrogate and draw insight and learning from various data and evidence sources.
- Customer feedback and satisfaction levels.



Using a range of outcomes and measures of success will enable us to take a holistic view of our performance and impact as a regulator.

We will publish our three-year rolling Business Plan, which details our activities for strategy delivery. We report quarterly on our progress in delivering the business plan to Council. Our Annual Report and Accounts, which is laid before the UK and Scottish Parliaments, reports on our annual performance and expenditure.

In addition, as we develop detailed plans to deliver this strategy's initiatives, we will develop associated evaluation and success criteria to demonstrate how our actions will deliver on our strategic objectives.

This strategy sets out our ambitions and, at a high level, the activity we plan to undertake to achieve them. It is underpinned by a set of supporting strategies relating to different elements of our business, which contain further detail on how we will approach and deliver our work. These include strategies focusing on:

- People
- Financial
- Communications and engagement
- Digital and IT
- Research
- Data
- Sustainability

These supporting strategies will further detail monitoring arrangements and success criteria.



# The costs associated with delivering our strategy 2026-2028

The table below sets out the costs associated with the delivery of the strategic objectives over the three-years of the corporate strategy.

Objective		Three-year costs £m	Three-year % of total
1	 Support dental professionals to provide safe and effective care for their patients	27.4	17.2%
2	 Maintain high standards for registration, and register those who meet them in a timely and effective way	28.2	17.7%
3	 Improve Fitness to Practise so that it better promotes patient safety	54.1	33.9%
4	 Work collaboratively to influence issues that affect patients and the profession	19.5	12.2%
5	 Maximise the GDC's ability to reach our potential through our people, our culture, and our systems	30.3	19.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>159.5</b>	<b>100%</b>

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