

QAPC and NQAAPs – temporary pause in activity

High-quality laboratory practice is fundamental to patient safety. While the UK has a strong foundation of quality assurance mechanisms, there remain areas that require greater coordination, authority and resourcing.

For many years, the Royal College of Pathologists has hosted the Quality Assurance in Pathology Committee (QAPC) and 7 National Quality Assurance Advisory Panels (NQAAPs). These panels have played an important role in reviewing referrals from external quality assurance (EQA) schemes and addressing technical concerns about assay and analyser performance. However, several structural challenges remain unresolved.

Governance and mandate

The current framework lacks formal links to national regulatory and oversight bodies, such as the Care Quality Commission, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and the Department of Health and Social Care. Strengthening these connections was a key recommendation of both the 2013 Quality Assurance Review and the Getting It Right First Time national pathology report. This remains essential to achieving consistent standards across the system.

Volunteer capacity

Like many professional activities, the QAPC and NQAAPs rely heavily on the goodwill and expertise of volunteers. Sustaining this commitment at the scale and complexity now



required has become increasingly difficult, particularly where employer support for volunteering is limited.

Funding and sustainability

In recent years, the College has covered operational costs through membership fees. This arrangement is not sustainable or appropriate for a national quality function. Despite repeated approaches to relevant health departments, agencies, EQA providers and service leaders, no alternative source of funding has yet been secured.

Given these constraints, the College has taken the difficult but necessary decision to pause QAPC and NQAAP activities from January 2026. This pause will allow time to agree a sustainable model for governance, data management and funding.

A stakeholder meeting later in 2025 will bring together professional bodies, service providers, regulators and government representatives to identify a collective solution.

This decision does not diminish the profession's commitment to quality and patient safety. The College, together with the Institute of Biomedical Science and the Association for Laboratory Medicine, remains determined to work with partners to secure a robust and enduring structure for national quality assurance in pathology.

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