
End of Year Report 2024 - 2025

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A Message from our Chief Executive and Chair

Welcome to our 2024–25 End of Year Report

This year has marked a period of significant evolution and growth for the Advancing Quality Alliance (Aqua). At the heart of this progress is the development of our refreshed strategy, which firmly positions us as the improvement alliance of choice across the health and care system.

Through close collaboration with our customers, we have clearly defined our three core areas of expertise:

- Governance, Regulatory Support and Well-Led
- Leadership and Organisational Development
- Improvement, Productivity, Innovation and Learning

We are proud of our strong track record in delivering measurable impact across these areas. Evaluation and measurement are embedded in all that we do - ensuring that our interventions are not only evidence-based but also continuously assessed for effectiveness and value. This report highlights a selection of the work we’ve undertaken over the past year, showcasing the tangible outcomes and improvements we’ve helped our customers achieve.

Our Story So Far



We continue to strengthen our national presence by deepening collaboration with partners whose expertise enhances our offer. These partnerships — some of which are featured in this report — reinforce our reputation as a credible, collaborative, and professional NHS consultancy.

A key milestone this year has been the transformation of our long-standing membership model into a strategic alliance. This new approach offers members greater access to tailored support aligned with their priorities, while maintaining the benefits of shared learning and cross-organisational collaboration that come from being part of the Aqua community.

Our commitment remains steadfast: to provide value-for-money, evidence-informed, and tailored solutions, grounded in lived experience. Co-production is central to our approach — ensuring that the voices of those who use and deliver services shape the design, delivery, and evaluation of our work. By placing lived experience at the heart of what we do, we ensure that improvement is not only meaningful but sustainable.

As we reflect on 15 years of impact, we are incredibly proud of what we’ve achieved — and even more excited about the difference we will continue to make in the years ahead.



[Signature]

Dr Susy Cook
Chief Executive



[Signature]

Sue Holden
Chair

Our Year in Numbers

3

Festive fundraisers





Trafford South Foodbank

Manchester Christmas Shoebox Appeal

Wood Street Mission



82%

Of staff enjoy working with the colleagues in their team.



8.8

average customer satisfaction score





We worked with over

130

organisations

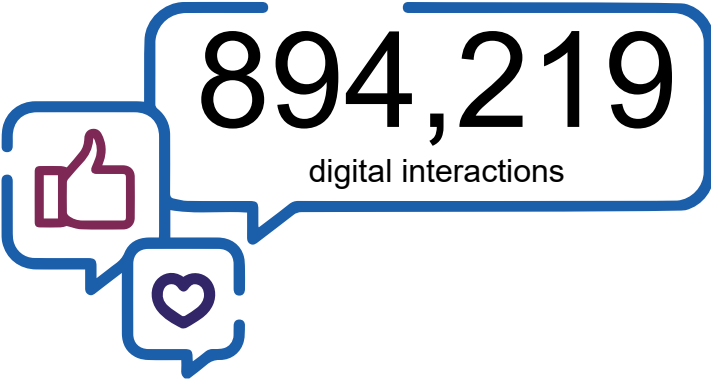
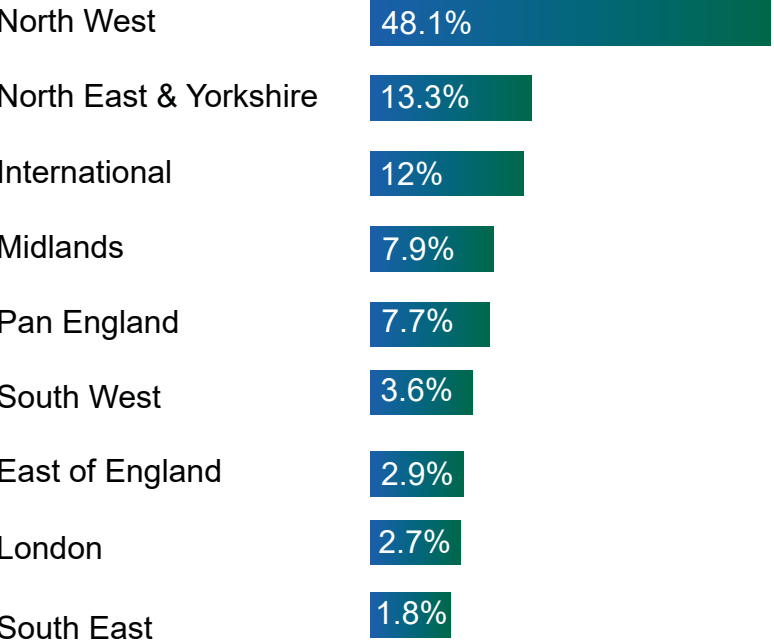


125

bespoke programmes delivered

2024 - 2025

Income by region



LinkedIn follower growth



15

Aqua Star Awards winners

across 5 categories

with 40 nominations



- 4 Wellbeing events
- Mental Health Awareness Week Lunch 'n' Talk
 - Manchester Mind Bake Off
 - Mental Health Awareness Session
 - Time to Talk Day, Cake, Coffee and a Chat

Governance, Regulatory Support and Well-Led

Our excellent reputation for delivering governance and regulatory support has gone global.



Our Expert Team

Our team excels in providing effective leadership and governance support, regulatory preparedness and consulting. Over 50 reviews have been conducted for NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts, community interest companies and the private sector, ensuring their readiness for Care Quality Commission's Well-Led assessments.

Our Services

- Comprehensive Well-Led developmental reviews evaluating leadership and governance.
- Regulatory preparation and mentoring for Boards and senior leadership teams.
- Quality governance reviews.
- Governance deep dives e.g. Board assurance.
- Proving assurance, interpreting your data and measurement for improvement.

Capturing People's Experiences for CQC's State of Care Report

As a leading organisation supporting lived experience and personalised care, we worked in partnership with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to capture people's experiences for the State of Care Report 2023-2024.

We used our diverse skill-set and collaborative approach with our Lived Experience Partners, Evaluation and Mental Health teams to gather people's experiences which explored their care and treatment.



Impact

- 6 Completed **6** comprehensive Well-Led and Lead-Well development reviews.
- Delivered a **cross-organisational** learning review to inform the development of Group Model learning.
- Redeveloped** our offer to align to the changing CQC focus.
- 79 Undertook **79** pre-CQC support and mentoring sessions, plus Board and senior leader development events.

"I believe that you have told my story perfectly. I am really pleased that I am able to share this for research and awareness purposes, and feel this made my experiences worth something. Thank you for your kindness and warmth over the phone that made me feel comfortable enough to fully express everything I went through."

Children and Young Person participant in the CQC State of Patient Care patient experience interviews

Well-Led Development Shared Learning Review

In 2024–2025, we completed developmental reviews for three acute trusts in Bath, Swindon and Wiltshire ICB, as part of the Acute Hospitals Alliance (AHA). The Shared Learning Report, commissioned as part of their joint tender, explored the evolving 'Group Model' and its wider well-led implications. The report highlights the strengths and developments from the three Trust reviews and aligns with new Well-Led guidance, offering additional insights and reflections. Our collaborative approach provided an additional legacy as part of embedding the new requirements and preparing for regulatory assessments.

"The clarity of advice, bringing experience from many other parts of the NHS together with the latest national direction of travel, is what makes it so useful and relevant."

Kevin McNamara, Chief Executive at Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

10+ years of national and international experience in delivering Well-Led developmental, governance and regulatory consultancy.

We assisted Trust Boards in preparing for their well-led assessment, we supported senior leadership teams at Wirral University Teaching Hospital, North East Ambulance Service, South West Yorkshire Partnership and Kettering General Hospital. In the year we conducted 79 one-to-one mentoring sessions and focus groups to assist Board members and senior teams in preparing for the Well-Led assessments. These collaborative sessions helped participants to understand the guidance and respond within a regulatory context and address challenging issues.

"Following on from a challenging CQC report, North East Ambulance Service have worked with the team from Aqua to support our Board development. The team provided a bespoke approach with very clear alignment to our internal work and acted as true critical friends to help us understand our achievements so far and our opportunities for strengthening our approach. The team were knowledgeable, challenging and supportive, and have left us with a set of development opportunities that will further strengthen our work programme."

Helen Ray, Chief Executive at North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

Advancing Healthcare Strategies in Saudi Arabia

As part of our ongoing partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health's healthcare transformation strategy, we embarked upon the next stage of support – completing Gate 2 Lead-Well Graduation Developmental Reviews in the cities of Hail, Makkah and Madinah.

We performed a qualitative assessment to evaluate the cluster's capability in several key areas including Leadership and Governance, Culture, Change Management and Communication, Population Health Management Workforce, Models of Care – Health Care Delivery, plus more.

Leadership and Organisational Development

We support healthcare leaders to create the culture for people to flourish and continuously improve.



Our Expert Team

Our experienced team specialises in coaching, system transformation, organisational and leadership development, whole system flow and managing complex change. They focus on personalised care to help integrate lived experience and co-production into systems and cultures.

Our Services

Individual

- Leadership development at all levels.
- Executive and Non-Executive Director coaching.

Organisation

- Purpose - driven culture change work.
- Developing effective speak up and listen up functions.
- Designing and enabling organisation wellbeing.

System

- Driving system improvement through leadership programmes.
- Convening whole system conversations to drive strategy and implementation.

Using Experience Based Co-Design to Improve the End-of-Life Care Pathway

We collaborated with the Palliative Care team at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust to improve their End-of-Life Care Pathway and empower service users and staff to lead their own improvement projects with confidence and knowledge. The programme utilised an Experience Based Co-Design (EBCD) approach to explore staff and service users experience of delivering and receiving care under the pathway.

In the spirit of co-producing improvements, we supported clinical teams and bereaved relatives to share their experiences, plan ideas using process mapping, and conducted surveys with staff on palliative care confidence. The EB CD approach proved effective in identifying differing perspectives and needs, leading to streamlined services, standardised processes, plus improved education and communication for staff, families, and patients on the pathway.

“Overall, the experience was brilliant and being made to feel you have a voice on change and improvement is perfect.” - Bereaved relative

Igniting Cultural Change by Learning Through Listening

We partnered with North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust (NWAFT) to support their transformation and cultural change programme.



In the first phase, we conducted a Learning through Listening exercise, gathering honest insights from over 340 staff about their experiences at work. This exercise, underpinned by appreciative inquiry, focused on three key questions about sadness and hope at work, and desired changes to build a better future. Five key themes emerged which included: Values and Behaviours, Leadership, Management Capability, Workload and Capacity, and Policy and Process. We produced a report summarising these findings and quoting staff directly which was shared and read verbatim to foster emotional connection and engagement.

In the second phase, 80 staff volunteers participated in a Culture Summit to plan how they will lead and deliver the organisation’s cultural transformation programme, building on the themes from Phase One. The atmosphere was charged with enthusiasm, as staff felt empowered to influence the necessary changes. We continue to support NWAFT with the implementation of the changes.

“My coach was really amazing and she came into my life at the right time. She was really good at making me reflect without me realising I was doing so. She was a good listener and had a knack of summarising our sessions into key take away messages. She was non-judgemental and I felt safe to be vulnerable with her and she allowed me develop at my own pace which was really powerful for me.”

Deputy Director of Nursing

Enhancing Patient Care and Improving Outcomes in Salford



Since 2017, we have been an improvement partner for Salford through our Safer Salford programme.

During 2024-2025 we ran Adult Social Care Provider Excellence events in partnership with the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) and adult social care providers, focusing on safeguarding, falls and frailty, shared decision making, person-centred care and hospital discharge. Notably, 88% of attendees implemented changes post-training, with 90% seeing improvements.

“The Safer Salford programme continues to be an adaptive and integral part of our improvement delivery in the Salford locality.”

Claire Vaughan, Associate Director Clinical Leadership and System Integration, NHS Greater Manchester

International Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare

We attended the International Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare and showcased a poster on building co-production with Wendy Bell, Lived Experience Partner, focusing on the Lived Experience journey.



Improvement, Productivity, Innovation and Learning

We provide trusted advice and support to help you embed a system and culture of continuous improvement.



Our Expert Team

Our team specialises in innovative improvement collaboratives, tailored leadership development and comprehensive training programmes to help you adopt safer, more reliable and productive care.

Our Services

- Improvement capability building at all levels to help embed improvement approaches aligned to NHS IMPACT, including focuses on lean thinking and demand and capacity.
- Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF) education: system-based approaches to investigation, learning and improvement.
- Tackling unwarranted clinical variation through the Advancing Quality (AQ) programme.
- Mental Health collaborative programmes to support process and outcome improvements at scale.

Impact

- 924** cohorts of quality-assured Patient Safety Incident Response Framework implementation programmes delivered across **24** organisations to over **924** attendees.
- 58** Quality Service Improvement Redesign (QSIR) programme is supporting 58 NHS and care organisations develop **sustainable improvement capabilities**.
- £** Delivered a contract of **£1.4 million** as a Systems Improvement Partner to a locality for 8 years.

Utilising Quality, Service Improvement and Redesign (QSIR) Methodologies for Quality Improvement

Through our vast network of Associates, the QSIR team has embedded methodologies to enable impactful quality improvement. The team at One Gloucestershire Integrated Care System (ICS) undertook a project to increase the attendance of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) activities. Their original aim was to increase attendance by 25% by March 2025, but by Summer 2024 they had already seen an increase to 27%, surpassing their original target.

"The depth and quality of the programme radicalised our approach to improvement...It has helped accelerate our transformation agenda at a far greater speed than would otherwise have been possible."

Chief Executive, NHS Foundation Trust

Improving Clinical Pathways with Advancing Quality (AQ)

In partnership with East Cheshire NHS Trust, we developed an improvement plan using data to identify opportunities for improvement, such as timely antibiotic administration, variation in severity scoring and ward admissions. The Trust implemented a robust improvement programme bringing together the multidisciplinary team, resulting in changes to training and education for pneumonia management and a review of clinical bundles.



As a result of this work, pneumonia mortality rates have started to decline, and the incidence of HAP has decreased. A clinical pathways group was established, meeting monthly to review ongoing progress and AQ data, and the Trust has broadened its AQ involvement to include acute kidney injury.

Did you know? Advancing Quality (AQ) is the longest-running QI programme in the NHS since it began over 16 years ago. It has collected data from 604,000 pathways comprising over 3.3 million measures to deliver impact for staff and patients.

Supporting Quality Improvement and Patient-Centred Initiatives with Baby Lifeline



We supported three initiatives for Baby Lifeline's Governance, Assurance and Quality Improvement Programme, designed to enhance delegates understanding of quality improvement methodologies and their application for safer and enhanced maternal and neonatal care. In December 2024, we collaborated with Baby Lifeline on a collaborative session specifically for Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partners and Midwives across the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. The Board session was particularly significant as it emphasised the group's commitment and dedication to integrating lived experiences into their improvement strategies, focusing on real-life stories and feedback.

Transforming Safety Mindsets with our Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF)

We offer approved, credible and quality assured PSIRF implementation programmes by NHS England and The East of England collaborative procurement hub. Together with NHS England's Maternity and Neonatal Safety Transformation team, Patient Safety Learning, NHS Resolution and our Well-Led PSIRF interviews, we are making a national impact in enhancing patient safety.

Our flexible approach has led us to work with organisations and deliver **29 in-person and 31 virtual sessions**, plus **6 bespoke workshops and 4 consultancy programmes** in 2024-2025.

Work With Us

Aqua is a trusted NHS partner, dedicated to improving healthcare services through tailored support, leadership development, and quality improvement initiatives. With over 15 years of experience, we work alongside organisations to drive meaningful change.

Since 2010, we've combined professional expertise with lived experience to support better leadership, stronger governance, and more effective, people-focused services.

Our expertise in leadership and organisational development, governance, Well-Led and regulation, and improvement, productivity, innovation and learning are all delivered through co-designed, tailored approaches that meet the unique needs of each organisation or system.

Our alliances help us achieve greater impact by supporting improvement at individual, organisational, and system levels. We help build skills, strengthen cultures, and drive forward better outcomes for staff, patients, and communities.

Our work leads to real results through improving quality, safety, and efficiency for both staff and the people they care for. We support organisations at every level, from individual leaders to entire health systems, helping to build capability, tackle complex challenges, and drive forward positive change with excellence.

We're known for turning complexity into clarity and for being a supportive, long-term improvement partner. Backed by strong partnerships and solid evidence, we aim to be the improvement alliance of choice; helping health and care services deliver better outcomes for everyone.



Contact us today at enquiries@aqua.nhs.uk or visit www.aqua.nhs.uk

Strategic Alliance

We are proud to introduce our Strategic Alliance, a flexible and impact-driven membership model, designed to help health and care organisations tackle their most pressing challenges. Whether you're looking to enhance patient safety, develop leadership, or improve operational efficiency, we provide bespoke solutions tailored to your needs.

Partnerships

We leverage our alliances to complement our delivery, incubate new ideas and innovations, and collaborate with academic partners to ensure our work is grounded in robust research and evidence, maximizing the impact of our solutions.

Consultancy

Aqua works with organisations including NHS Trusts, systems, local authorities, social care and housing associates, offering project-by-project consultancy and transformation services.

Our expert consultancy team has more than a decade of experience designing and delivering quality improvement and transformation strategies for NHS and other public sector organisations.

From working with an individual to a whole system, and everything in-between, our consultancy services are bespoke and scalable.

Connect with us:



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