Standards for Clinical Audit, Quality Improvement and Research

Version control		
Document name	Standards for clinical Audit, QI & Research	
Owner	GP Training Academic Council	
Author	Dr Aileen Barrett	
Version	Version 1.0	
Approved	GP Training Academic Council	
Date	17th June 2026	

Contents

1.0 Purpose 3

2.0 Scope 3

3.0 National Standards 3

3.1 National Standards for clinical audit 3

3.2 National standard for quality improvement projects: 4

3.3 National standard for research studies : 4

3.3.1 Quantitative research studies 5

3.3.2 Qualitative research studies 5

3.3.3 Review studies 5

4.0 Related documents 6

5.0 Contact: 6

Appendix 1: Clinical Audit marking scheme 7

Appendix 2: Quality Improvement Project marking scheme 8

Appendix 3: Research Project marking scheme 9

1.0 Purpose

The revised CSCST criterion is now in effect and requires all trainees to demonstrate **'Completion of a clinical audit or quality improvement project to the nationally agreed standard'.**

This document outlines the nationally agreed standards for the completion and assessment of clinical audit and quality improvement (QI) projects. It also includes the marking sheets to be used consistently across all training schemes. These marking sheets will be available on GPEP.

You are also advised to refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, which sets out requirements for upholding academic integrity and provides guidance on the ethical and responsible use of emerging technologies, including generative AI tools, in learning, assessment, and research.

2.0 Scope

The revised CSCST criterion and agreed standards for clinical audit, QI projects and research apply to all trainees enrolled on the national programme of GP training.

3.0 Standards statement

3.1 Standards for clinical audit

Completed clinical audits should provide evidence of:

1. A defined clinical audit topic relevant to general practice
2. A clearly described problem e.g. local (practice-level) or national
3. A recognised reference guideline and agreed standard to be achieved
4. A complete clinical audit cycle i.e. description of baseline data collection, description of the change/ improvement initiative, evaluation of impact i.e. 2nd cycle data collection and outcome
5. Recommendations for change/ongoing improvement at local/national level where appropriate
6. A clearly written clinical audit report

3.2 Standards for quality improvement projects

Completed quality improvement projects should show evidence of:

1. A clearly articulated and defined problem relevant to general practice
2. Background literature review demonstrating literature searching skills and understanding of current evidence relevant to the topic
3. Justification for the QI project e.g. local problem, impact on general practice
4. A clearly articulated aim statement and consideration of drivers for change (driver diagram)
5. A recognised QI framework/methodology e.g. LEAN, IHI Model for Improvement
6. Understanding and awareness of the local barriers to change and plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycles specifically designed to address each barrier
7. A clearly outlined evaluation plan for each PDSA cycle and an overall evaluation of impact
8. Consideration of public and patient interest (PPI) issues and engagement where appropriate
9. Recommendations for change at local and/or national levels where appropriate
10. A clearly written QI report

3.3 Standards for research studies

While completion of a research project is not a mandatory requirement for all trainees, every trainee must demonstrate achievement of the curriculum outcomes relating to evidence-based medicine. For some trainees, this may be achieved through completion of a research study rather than a quality improvement project, provided they have already completed a clinical audit that has been assessed as meeting the required national standard.

Completed research studies should show evidence of:

1. A clearly defined and justified research question
2. Good academic writing, literature searching and critical appraisal skills, and identification of the gap in knowledge in the field
3. Clearly defined aim and SMART objectives
4. A research methodology/approach and defined study design aligned with the research question
5. Quality characteristics/features specific to the methodological approach
6. Transparent recruitment, data collection and analysis methods

7. Consideration of public and patient interest (PPI) issues and engagement where appropriate
8. Analysis and/or interpretation of the study findings, discussion in the context of previous work and implications for practice and/or knowledge in the field
9. A clearly written research report/draft paper with accurate referencing

3.3.1 Quantitative research studies

Quantitative research studies (e.g. observational, cohort, prospective and interventional studies) should also demonstrate:

1. Research Ethics Committee approval prior to commencement of the study
2. Evidence of appropriate statistical methods and inclusion of any statistical guidance or expertise
3. Sample size calculation

3.3.2 Qualitative research studies

Qualitative research studies should also demonstrate:

1. Research Ethics Committee approval prior to commencement of the study
2. Compliance with additional GDPR guidance regarding data collection, storage, retention and disposal, informed consent, and explicit consent for the processing of special category data (e.g. health information). This includes the secure management, handling, and analysis of research data such as video and audio recordings, interview transcripts, and related materials.
3. Reflexivity throughout study design and conduct; recognition of role and positionality of the researcher

3.3.3 Review studies

Review studies should also demonstrate:

1. Evidence of a defined review method (e.g. scoping or narrative review)
2. A clearly outlined search strategy and justified inclusion/exclusion criteria; PRISMA flowchart, appendix containing all included studies
3. An aligned analysis approach

4.0 Related documents

- Academic Integrity Policy

5.0 Contact

Quality assurance and enhancement
qae.training@icgp.ie

Appendix 1: Clinical Audit marking scheme

Audit Title:		
Audit design and conduct	Comments	Mark
Abstract: Did the abstract clearly and concisely summarise the audit? Were the key findings and implications included?		/5
Background: Was the need for the audit clearly established? Are evidence-based criteria and standards clearly described?		/15
Data collection: Are data collection methods clearly described? Inclusion/exclusion criteria?		/10
Findings: Are the audit results clearly described? Have the processes for measuring the data against the criteria and standards been clearly defined and described? Has a change been implemented, and the audit cycle completed?		/5
Discussion: What are the implications of the audit findings for 1: clinical practice 2: research 3: ongoing audit and quality improvement initiatives?		/10
+/- Presentation skills		/5
Total		/50

Appendix 2: Quality Improvement Project marking scheme

Project Title:		
Study design and conduct	Comments	Mark
Abstract: Did the abstract clearly and concisely summarise the project? Were the key findings and implications included?		/5
Background: Originality - did the background and introduction establish the need for the improvement project? Is there a clear overall project aim?		/15
Methods: Is there a defined and transparent process for the improvement project? Are there clearly described planning, implementation and evaluation methods included? Has ethical approval been obtained for the project (where appropriate)?		/10
Outcomes: Are the project outcomes clearly and logically presented? Are tables/boxes/figures used effectively? Are the challenges and barriers identified and described?		/5
Discussion: Did the project meet the intended aim? Were the objectives achieved? What are the implications of the project for 1: general practice 2: future research or improvement projects?		/15
+/- Presentation skills		/5
Total		***/50***

Appendix 3: Research Project marking scheme

Project Title:		
Study design and conduct	Comments	Mark
Abstract: Did the abstract clearly and concisely summarise the study? Were the key findings and implications included?		/5
Background: Originality - did the background and introduction establish the need for the study? Was the gap in the literature clearly identified? Is there a clear research question?		/15
Methodology: Is the study methodology clearly aligned to the research question? Are the aims and objectives of the study defined? Are the data collection and analysis methods (including statistical analysis methods) transparent and appropriate to the study question and methodology? Have all ethical issues been identified and appropriately addressed (including recruitment, participant information, confidentiality, consent and data management)? Has ethical approval been obtained for the study?		/10
Results: Are the results clearly and logically presented? Are tables/boxes/figures used effectively? Do the results clearly present the key findings? Can the statistical analysis findings be verified?		/5
Discussion: Are the findings discussed in the context of previous published work? Is the research question answered? Are the study limitations identified? Is the study trustworthy? What are the implications of the study for 1: general practice 2: future research?		/10
+/- Presentation skills		/5
Total		***/50***