

Our new College strategy 2021-24: what to expect

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Full transcript

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Jo Revill, RCPCH CEO: Welcome to this Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health podcast on the College's new three-year strategy. I'm Jo Revill, Chief Executive of the College, and I'm very pleased to say that today I'm going to be joined to discuss the strategy and what it means by Camilla Kingdon, the College President.

So, Camilla, could we start with why the College needs a strategy? And, who's it going to be for?

Dr Camilla Kingdon, RCPCH President: Hi, Jo. Yes, I think that is a really good place to start. I think people often think of strategy as rather dry dull documents that sit on a shelf somewhere and maybe we occasionally have a look at it. But I think the value of a strategy is that it is a fairly high level document that helps us understand what our priorities are as a College and essentially sort of sets out a track for, in this case, three years.

And the reason why it's so useful is that it is helpful for those of us that work within the College because it reminds of what our priorities are, but even more importantly it is really useful for those that belong to the College or want to understand what the College's roles and responsibilities are and indeed for our members what they can expect from the College. And I think that sometimes people are a bit confused about what the Royal Colleges do and what they don't do. So I really think this as a great opportunity for us to spend a little bit of time really refining what we think we actually do do, and what our priorities are for the next few years - and then to lay it out so people can engage with it and understand what our work is all about, and in fact how they can join us and get involved.

So I think the strategy is a really important for us to lay out our road map for the next three years. I think that is probably how I would summarise it. Is that how you would see it do you think the level of detail within a strategy, might tie us down too tightly, do you think?

Jo: I don't think so, no. We've talked a lot about that, haven't we? Having something that really sets out the ambitions of the organisation over the next three years. Having a document that is going to help us I think with what might be great areas of uncertainty for children and young people in this period and for our members as well. And I think many people listening today will, you know, some people will be tired of organisations talk about strategies as high level documents that are full of jargon, and we've made huge efforts to make sure that's not the case and it's really meaningful. I think the detail really lives with the operational plans that we have for the College each year, which sets out what we are going to do and how we spend our money and what business as usual is and what the new areas are.

But I think this strategic document is really setting, if you like, guiderails for where we see the College going over this next period.

Camilla: Yes, I think that is right and I think the process that we went through to develop the strategy for me has given me a lot of confidence that we've got the guiderails right. But they are only guiderails, and so it might be that over time we want to tweak some of

the detail of what we are planning to do but that the broad priorities and kind of exoskeleton of the strategy will stay in place. And, I quite like that idea as it feels to me like it has been a really great process of engagement with everyone from our Board of Trustees to our sub-specialty groups to Council and so on

It has been a really rich opportunity to actually go out and say, what do you think the priorities should be for the next three years, what do we carry on doing, what should we stop doing. Do we need to get the kind of level of priority right, or change. You know, for me, I endlessly worry about our workforce, for instance, but actually does that chime with everybody's priority, or not?

So I think it has been a really useful - it's been more than six months hasn't it? - that we've gone out and purposefully sought feedback about this.

Jo: I think that's right. It feels to me like we've had a huge number of conversations already to get to this point and I think we looked at the principles which should guide it and how we made sure that we listened to so many people that were involved in the production of the strategy, including, of course, children and young people through our &Us group. And I think that was a really important point for us that we got their views as well and when the strategy is published people will see that reflected.

We tried to meet a set of principles, didn't we, when we started off on this process, that we wanted to make sure that it was a compelling document, that it was something that would be memorable, but also had quite a clear evidence base to it as well. That it wasn't just putting your finger up in the air and checking where trends lay but it was something that we could keep referring back to I think. Did you see it in that way?

Camilla: Yes I did, and I think for many people, when we launch our strategy and people have an opportunity to really go through it and interrogate it, I don't think there will be a huge number of surprises because the broad headlines are, I think, what we believe we are here to do firstly as a charity and secondly obviously as a medical Royal College, which is our dual role around our workforce and our equally important role which is around child health and child health advocacy. I think people will recognise those themes because they are very much the main structure of the future strategy.

But I think what's been really nice is that within those broad headlines we've been able to think really hard about, for instance, the fact that digital transformation now is such a key part of both the present but also our future, not just for the clinicians working in child health but also for our children and young people and the advocacy we have to do on their behalf. And so we were able to bring that theme out in a kind of much more specific kind of way than has perhaps previously been there because of times changing and our role and nature of our work is evolving. I think that is where it encourages me that this is a living, evolving document that reflects the changes in the ways in which we are working both as clinicians but also in terms of the advocacy work we are doing on behalf of children and young people.

Jo: So, perhaps I should mention what these themes are actually, Camilla, so that people have an idea. So all of our activity really fitted under these four themes, I think.

The first is around the improvement of quality and care that's given to children and young people.

The second is around building skills and knowledge within paediatrics and child health.

There was then a major theme about advocacy and influencing others - all the people who shape our world - and we've done so much work on this advocacy piece, haven't we, this year. With everything from free school meals to support for Marcus Rashford

and what he did, to the work that you do as President with others influencing governments and other key bodies in making the case for children.

And then fourthly around developing our community. And, I wondered if you wanted to say anything about what that community piece means for you, because I think that's very much your stamp that you've put on this strategy.

Camilla: Yes, thank you, yes absolutely, this is a bit of the strategy that's really close to my heart because so many members have talked about the importance of communities and we hear this when we talk to our Regional Leads and Area Officers. There's a real desire amongst the paediatric workforce to engage with each other, both within their regions or within their sub-specialty areas or within different communities of practice essentially, and the great advantage of that is about sharing solutions to problems, putting heads together to try and devise some creative ways of navigating through difficult areas, and it certainly comes out during our lifelong careers work as well.

So I am absolutely confident we are going to be achieving a huge amount in this particular domain in the next few years. That really makes me very excited.

Jo: I think the advocacy work came through for me as a really, really strong theme of the strategy and we had a lot of discussions, didn't we, about the challenges we face as we come through and then out of the pandemic. But, also a lot of the opportunities we've got, looking ahead. We do strategies in three-year chunks, so the last strategy is just coming to an end and then this is the next three year chunk beginning in this autumn and going forward for three years and tying in with your presidency.

But I think it was clear at the beginning, wasn't it, that Council were thinking really hard, did we need major changes for the direction of College activity? Because that was obviously one of the questions when you write a new strategy - are you going to radically shift direction and are you going to do something entirely different? But there was that agreement, wasn't there, that a lot of this was about improvement in many areas.

Camilla: Yes, I think that is absolutely right, so actually an awful lot of the strategy is kind of business as usual, isn't it, so it is around delivering our exams and assessments and supporting the professional development of our paediatric and broader child health workforce. But then also accepting that there is a lot of stuff that is changing around us, and our new and emerging priorities for our paediatric workforce and young people - and the obvious example there I would say is around sustainability and around the environment and climate change, and, you know, with the best will in the world that probably wasn't an obvious strategic imperative three or four years ago when we set up the last strategy in the way that it is now. We've got COP26 happening very soon this year, and this is an issue that we know is really front of mind across the child health workforce and of course children and young people. And, so what was really lovely is that this strategy gives us the opportunity to just bring that out as a bit more of an imperative within the strategy. And, that's the bit that I really like about this, and I hope our members will recognise as they read it that we've been able to reflect some of the really important new and emerging trends within child health.

Jo: You know, I think it was Liz Marder, our Treasurer, who said well, maybe this is our moment, you know, in paediatrics, maybe this is the point at which we can really develop across the four nations of the UK and abroad the plans that we need for children and young people. And I do hope that the strategy becomes a way of doing that, with all the operational plans and the business plans that sit below it, of course.

Because I think that is so important. I'm very pleased that the role of digital innovation is threaded through the strategy because I think that is just so so important. And, goodness knows in this period over the last year, we've had to go digital across so many areas of healthcare and within the College itself and 170 staff. We've switched - almost overnight in some cases - to running our activities remotely. And it is about holding on, isn't it, to some of those areas of innovation and holding on to some of the best. And, I think being aware that many of our members are doing innovative work every day and thinking about what the role of the College is in supporting that as well. I think that came through quite strongly, didn't it, as a theme.

Camilla: Yes it did, didn't it. I suppose the question that I have in the back of my mind is when the strategy was written three or four years ago, none of the people and in fact I remember being there on the day and we had a brainstorming, none of us anticipated the pandemic. So let's hope we don't have another massive national crisis like COVID's been in the next three years. But let's say there was some massive change in direction: are you confident with using the strategy that we'd be able to respond to that, do you think?

Jo: I think we can. I'm confident that we can. Because I think the way that it has been written enables us to have the ability and the agility to all the unknown things that might come our way, but also to be able to run the business as usual because behind it all - I would say this as Chief Exec, wouldn't I - but it has to be financially stable, and it has to be work that the staff at the College can undertake and perform. But more than that, we're a College with over 20,000 members now and over 2,500 really active volunteer members who perform a huge host of activities. So I think the strategy is written in such a way that we can continue business, that we can restore the areas of work that we need to, and that we can adapt. It's high level enough that we can do that, with the right plans written underneath about it.

And partly it is a question of our growth, I think, as an organisation. I don't just mean growth in members or growth in money, but I mean our growth in advocacy work and our growth in influence actually, which is something that we've always talked about so much in the College over, I know, decades.

Camilla: Yes, that's right, and I think that something that I noticed while we were doing the strategy and we moved around the different groups sharing the strategy and developing it, was that when we posed the question to the various groups that we were engaging with about what we as the College should stop doing or do less of, that's when we struggled the most, didn't we? I think we as a College are incredibly good at embracing new ideas, getting involved in important new areas of engagement and advocacy. But the risk with that, of course, is that we end up doing a lot of things perhaps not as well as we might be able to.

So I think also the importance of this strategy also is that it just hopefully allow us to keep in check so that instead of, I mean I'm guilty of this myself all the time, is that someone comes up with an idea and you say, yes brilliant, let's get the College involved in that. And, of course we want to be responsive and we want to encourage new ideas and developments, but we've got to be really careful that we continue to deliver really high quality work. And I think that's where hopefully this strategy is going to help us to stay within, as you rightly call it, the guiderails. So that we aren't overstretching ourselves and ending up doing some less brilliant work than perhaps that we would ideally want to do.

Jo: And that's the risk isn't it, that you can end up with a body where activities are diluted because you are trying to do too much and you're overstretched. But I think the strategy

can become a really good way of prioritising and deprioritising as you need to over the next three years. I also think that demonstrating the impact of what we achieve is really important and making sure that this document can be understandable by anyone, actually. That members and young people and children could read it and they could really understand what it is that the College does across so many areas. And, I think that we've committed to reviewing the strategy every year and making sure that we can demonstrate impact. And if necessary adding or subtracting if there are areas that need to change within that period.

Because I think it does represent a lot of investment in both new activities of work as you said around equality, diversity and inclusion - and I can only see the work on climate change growing and growing, and I think you see it the same way, don't you?

Camilla: Absolutely, but I think that sometimes College members will say to me, particularly College members who are beyond CCT and working as either SAS doctors or consultants, I'm not clear what the College does for me. And I understand where that question comes from because I think when you are a trainee it is very, very clear what the role of the College is, but I think historically perhaps people have been less clear as they have got later on into their careers. What I'm really hoping for this strategy is that with the rollout of this strategy and the work that we're planning around engaging with members around the strategy people will become much clearer in their minds about the roles we undertake.

And I love your idea that we'll then be able to measure impact, because it would be so nice, wouldn't it, to be able to go back to members and say you asked us to, for example, engage on the climate change and sustainability agenda, here's what we've done last year in terms of activity and impact. And, I think that would just be the most brilliant, strong message that would really reinforce in people's minds what the College actually does. So I see that as a real strength.

Jo: I think it is going to be really important as well that we make sure that the strategy is a document that comes to life for members and what Council always said at the beginning is that you don't want a document that sits on a shelf for three years and people get it off at the end and say well what have you done? It's got to be a lot more than that.

So I hope that when we publish this strategy [later] in September, that we get a constant dialogue with members and others about the strategy and what's in there and what it might mean to them and what they take away from it as well. And so it is quite important, I think, that we are working on lots of different formats for the document - so, a kind of animated video and then a shorter at a glance version, which I think will be good for people. And that we make sure that our &Us group are constantly plugged into it and manage to give their feedback all the way through as well. Bringing it to life matters, doesn't it?

Camilla: Yes, it absolutely does. And I know that the College team have got some great plans around some webinars and of course the *Milestones* team are really excited about doing some work there as well, so I feel very optimistic that we'll be able to reach as many of our members as possible so that actually so they are aware of this and can hopefully engage with it, also remind us of what we've set out to do and challenge us if they feel that perhaps we're not delivering it as robustly as we promised to.

Because for me, as President, what I want this to be is around getting members far more engaged with the College. And I see this strategy as a real opportunity to help members understand (a) what we do, but (b) how they can get stuck in and contribute because

we've got this hugely talented membership of, as you said, over 20,000 members and I'd just love to see more people getting involved and lending their strengths and talents to our work.

Jo: I think that is when it really comes alive and is really going to start to live, and I'm really excited that we are going to have webinars specifically looking at the four themes that you are going to see coming out in the strategy.

Well, I hope we can enthuse everyone that has listened to this today to pick up the strategy when it comes out and listen to the webinars and find out more detail. But thank you so much for your time Camilla on this.

Camilla: It's a great pleasure.

Jo: So, thank you everyone for listening to this RCPCH podcast and a reminder to please check our web pages at www.rcpch.ac.uk to keep up to date with the latest information about the strategy and other College work.

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