



Summary of Implementation Steering group for Organ Utilisation (ISOU) Meeting, *November 2025*

1. Welcome and introductions – John Forsythe

The Chair welcomed members to the 14th and final meeting of ISOU and introduced Douglas Thorburn, interim National Clinical Director for Transplantation for NHS England (NHSE).

The aim of the meeting was noted – to bring ISOU to a closure with the final meeting, provide an overview of the progress and address ongoing responsibilities. There were no actions outstanding that were not to be covered separately on the agenda.

Conflicts of Interest – All

No conflicts of interest were declared and the Chair reminded attendees to keep the conflict of interest register up to date.

2. Opening remarks from Minister Ahmed

Minister Ahmed, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care, was thanked for his ongoing support. The Minister praised the group's achievements, emphasising the importance of equity and stressing the time invested must continue to result in action. ISOU members provided questions and comments on patient engagement practices going forward, transparent reporting and ensuring organ utilisation work continues after ISOU ends.

3. NHSBT Updates

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) updated that they remain committed to implementing the recommendations of the Organ Utilisation Group (OUG) and Organ Donation Joint Working Group (ODJWG), and acknowledged the significant progress made so far.

Patient Engagement

NHSBT noted they had strengthened patient engagement and are recognising patients as partners in ongoing and future work, this included ensuring patients were part of all advisory groups. Lay summary writing training and 1 on 1 patient partner onboarding were also being provided to patient representatives to support engagement further.

Transplant Collaboratives

Regional teams were working together to standardise care, improve access, and share best practices. Collaboratives had enabled more transplants, for example during crises such as the 2024 cyber-attack. The next focus was to develop cardiothoracic and pancreas transplant collaboratives.

Assessment & Recovery Centres (ARCs)

ARCs aim to boost transplant numbers, especially for marginal organs. Initial pilots to start in

early 2026, aiming for 36 extra transplants by 2027 and up to 750 per year long-term.

Histocompatibility & Immunogenetics

NHSBT were to undertake a discovery to identify the costs and resource required for implementation of high resolution typing in organ offering and improved IT infrastructure to capture this.

National Outcome Measures

NHSBT was developing national Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) and Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) for organ transplantation via an inter-organisational working group. A Delphi study to define the term 'optimal organ utilisation' was initiated, in partnership with the Council of Europe.

Other Initiatives

Other areas of focus for NHSBT included enhanced recovery after surgery, environmental sustainability in transplantation, and working with Clinical Leads for Utilisation (CLUs) on schemes such as the Offer Review Scheme.

Attendee comments:

- NHSBT had made changes in how patient engagement was conducted. These were positively received by the patient representatives.
- The publication of the ODJWG report was upcoming, following receipt of UK Health Department Ministerial approval. A soft launch was proposed, including a series of webinars for both internal and external stakeholders. These sessions would aim to ensure all parties are informed about what to expect prior to the official launch.

4. NHSE Updates

NHSE updated on the progress and next steps for ISOU, focusing on governance, patient engagement, delivery frameworks, and future priorities.

Patient Engagement

NHSE was focusing on taking steps to widen patient engagement even further. For example, increasing the number of patient representatives in the Cardiothoracic (CT) programme, and recruiting a third PPV member to the National Transplant Clinical Panel and Transplant Oversight Group (TOG). For 2026, ongoing work was to build on this to further embed PPV in programme work. Across all programmes, commissioners continued to have a focus on enabling coordinated care, integrated patient pathways.

Governance & Delivery Framework

Over the past year, oversight structures had been established including the TOG, and more recently a National Transplant Clinical Panel, with joint responsibilities between NHSE and NHSBT. A joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NHSE and NHSBT was to be finalised shortly with a webinar planned for early 2026 to share priorities and gather feedback.

Trust Engagement

Trusts had been surveyed on their organ utilisation strategy development. Findings were to be used to inform implementation plans, including guidance to trusts, a review of plans and feedback mechanisms.

Standardised Patient Pathways

The standardisation of patient pathways was underway, focusing on implementing holistic and long-term care approaches, revising service specifications, and ensuring consistent, high-quality care across renal and cardiothoracic transformation programmes.

Cardiothoracic Transformation Programme

The Cardiothoracic review was progressing with dedicated workstreams established including for access, holistic care, utilisation, and long-term care, with deliverables for data, workforce, and finance to be agreed at the November Board.

Future Considerations

The next phase was to focus on integrated delivery between DHSC, NHSE, and NHSBT, developing governance arrangements (if changes require), strengthening patient engagement, and maintaining proactive communications with stakeholders, including plans for an event to bring together PPVs and other stakeholders to support ongoing work.

Attendee comments:

- A summary of recent actions regarding patient engagement was requested to be shared with members and at the upcoming Stakeholder forum. Colleagues were commended for highlighting patient community issues and the ongoing importance of clear communication was stressed. It was emphasised that patient representatives speak for those unable to attend and that engagement is about attitudes and willingness.
- It was noted that Wales has its own Joint Commissioner responsible for commissioning transplant services on behalf of Wales. The group requested clarification on the Memorandum of Understanding and Wales' observer status at TOG meetings.
Action: TOG to provide clarification on whether the Memorandum of Understanding accurately reflects the commissioning arrangement for Wales and confirm Wales' status in TOG meetings.
- NHSE provided updates on the CT transformation programme and clarity was requested on timelines for the established workstreams and a Gantt chart was agreed to be shared. ISOU emphasised the importance of translating the programme deliverables into patient outcomes at pace as we approach the 2-year anniversary of the ICE report.
Action: NHSE to share a Gantt chart and provide timelines for future milestones for the CT transformation programme alongside monitoring and reporting on outcomes impact.
- There was a call for a draft of new service specifications, highlighting the importance of accountability and public dashboards to provide real-time transparency on service performance. It was requested that this be revisited at future relevant stakeholder engagement forums.
- It was questioned which service quality metrics best reflect improvements, noting that using patient outcomes alone is insufficient. It was confirmed that quality standards are being reviewed alongside service specifications. It was requested that these metrics were shared.

5. DHSC Updates

Update from William Vineall

The importance of maintaining coherence and enthusiasm was emphasised as NHSE and DHSC merge into a single organisation. It was noted that the integration will facilitate collaboration and make it easier to share work and align objectives. Additionally, the forthcoming final report was to serve as a reference point for ongoing progress, which must continue beyond the report's publication. Furthermore, it was highlighted that patient engagement remains central, with the new patient experience directorate ensuring patients are more involved in day-to-day activities. The work undertaken so far was described as an ideal template for future initiatives.

NICE

Donor-derived cell-free DNA (dd-cfDNA) was being considered by the NICE prioritisation

board this week.

Xenotransplantation

The xenotransplantation report was to be published shortly on the ISOU website. An article was soon to be published in the Royal College of Surgeons England Bulletin magazine showing some highlights of ISOU's work, including xenotransplantation. Other surgical colleges had been contacted to ensure they are informed and aware of recommendations such as the asks relevant to them in the Workforce report and to be provided with an additional update to disseminate when the reports were published.

Workforce

The workforce symposium report had been cleared by Ministers and officials are working to publish imminently.

Digital

The ISOU Digital workshop took place on 18 November 2025 and was opened by a representative from the London Stock Exchange Group who addressed the similarities in digital challenges across the sectors. The report was to be drafted before Christmas and sent to attendees for comment, before clearance from ISOU members along with the ISOU Closure Report.

Attendee comments:

- There was high interest in the xenotransplantation report and therefore a potential 'wash-up' newsletter to promote the publication was proposed.
- It was noted that high-profile speakers in Sweden and France have been effective in raising the profile of xenotransplantation and disseminating research.
- NHSE offered a slot in their upcoming webinars to promote the new publications.

6. Patient and lay representative comments

- The importance of considering who should attend forums was reflected upon, noting that participation of the stakeholder forum had decreased over time. It was suggested that where topics were highly technical, some stakeholders may be deterred from attending. It was recommended that updates continue to be sent after meetings, with ongoing invitations for interested parties to remain involved. It was also emphasised that stakeholders include not only patients, but a broader group of individuals.
- The two recent meetings with NHSBT and NHSE seniors that focused on patient engagement were considered constructive, with feedback indicating that communication could continue to be strengthened. This was to be reported back at the stakeholder forum.
- There was optimism regarding recent cultural changes and improvements, including a clearer website design that made information easier to find.

7. Additional comments

The involvement of The British Transplantation Society's (BTS) in future work was discussed. It was suggested that BTS could act as an independent "critical friend" and focus on areas where it could add the most value.

8. AOB

It was noted that the ISOU Closure Report is forthcoming and that continued progress was needed, particularly regarding patient engagement and workforce challenges. Attendees expressed their appreciation for the collaboration and leadership displayed throughout the programme.