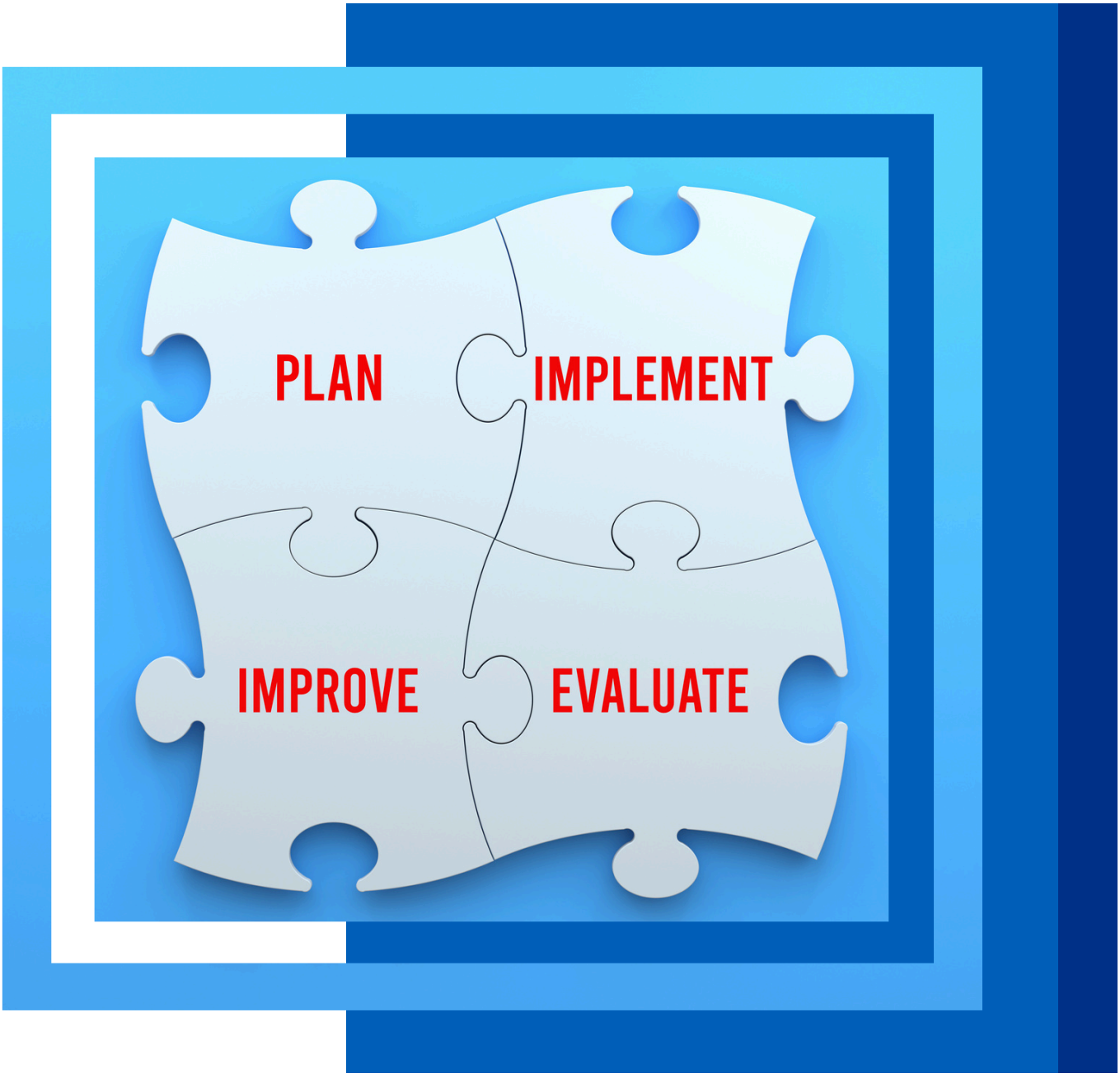
NHS England

GIRFT
GETTING IT RIGHT FIRST TIME

Evaluation & learning framework

June 2026



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The GIRFT evaluation and learning framework: Supporting insight, improvement and implementation

Purpose of this framework

The purpose of this document is to describe the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) evaluation and learning framework and to explain how it can support understanding of delivery, outcomes and improvement across GIRFT initiatives.

The framework is intended for clinicians, programme teams and colleagues involved in GIRFT work who are interested in understanding how quality improvement initiatives are implemented across diverse organisations, what can be learned from their implementation, what their impact has been and how improvements introduced through GIRFT initiatives can be sustained within local systems.

The document provides an overview of concepts and approaches that may help teams think about programme design, reflect on implementation and capture learning as initiatives are delivered. It is intended as a supportive resource rather than a prescriptive guide.

This framework should be read alongside the GIRFT academic, improvement and evaluation plan which provides the operational delivery and annual priorities supporting this framework.

Executive summary

GIRFT quality improvement initiatives (e.g. workstreams, initiatives of work) support improvements in clinical services across the National Health Service (NHS). Understanding how these initiatives are implemented, what outcomes they achieve and how improvements are sustained can help inform future work.

This document describes the GIRFT evaluation and learning framework which brings together several complementary approaches used to understand delivery, impact and learning. These approaches include analysis of national data, monitoring implementation and learning from the experiences of organisations participating in GIRFT initiatives.

By bringing these sources of information together, the framework helps provide a fuller picture of how improvement occurs in practice. Quantitative data can show

what changes are happening across services, while insights from delivery help explain how those changes occur within organisations.

Together, these approaches support GIRFT's ability to understand the impact of its initiatives, learn from implementation across the NHS and gain insight into how improvements introduced through GIRFT initiatives can be embedded and sustained within organisations over time.

1. Introduction

GIRFT initiatives support improvements in patient care and clinical services across the NHS. These initiatives operate across a wide range of clinical specialties and NHS organisations and involve collaboration between national teams, clinical leaders and participating sites.

Delivering improvement initiatives across multiple organisations can involve a range of practical challenges. Organisations often adapt initiatives to local circumstances, develop new approaches to implementation or encounter barriers that influence how improvements are achieved.

Understanding these experiences can provide valuable insight into how improvement occurs in practice and how implementation of quality improvement initiatives operates across different healthcare settings.

Evaluation within GIRFT has historically included strong quantitative analysis of national datasets and clinical metrics. This work provides important insight into service performance and progress against GIRFT benchmarks.

However, quantitative data alone cannot always explain how initiatives are implemented within organisations or why improvements occur in some contexts more easily than others.

The GIRFT evaluation and learning framework therefore complements existing analytical approaches by bringing together different sources of insight. Alongside analysis of national data and monitoring, the framework introduces approaches that help capture learning from implementation.

By considering these sources of information together, the framework supports a broader understanding of both outcomes and the processes through which improvement occurs.

The approaches described in this framework are intended to be applied proportionately, recognising variation in programme scope, capacity and available resource across different contexts.

This framework aligns with the principles set out in the United Kingdom's Department of Health and Social Care's Evaluation Strategy 2026, supporting proportionate, learning-oriented evaluation that is integrated into programme design and continuous improvement.[1]

2. The GIRFT evaluation and learning function

2.1 Overview

The GIRFT evaluation and learning function brings together a range of activities that help us understand quality improvement delivery and outcomes across the NHS.

These activities combine evaluation of impact and performance with learning from implementation. Together they help provide insight into both what changes are occurring within services and how those changes are achieved in practice.

Through this combined approach, the function supports GIRFT's ability to understand outcomes, learn from the experience of organisations participating in GIRFT initiatives and share insights that may inform future improvement work.

These activities can be grouped into four complementary workstreams, each contributing to the overall evaluation and learning function. The first three workstreams relate to internal evaluation and learning activities within GIRFT, while the fourth workstream relates to independent evaluation conducted by external organisations. As this document focuses primarily on the internal evaluation and learning framework, the emphasis in this section is on the first three workstreams.

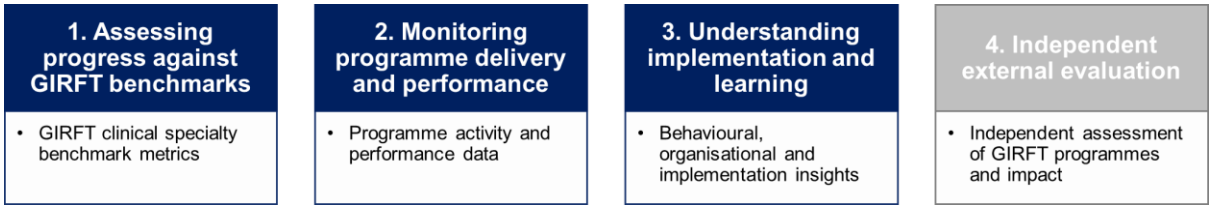

Figure 1. Overview of the GIRFT evaluation and learning function and its four complementary workstreams.

2.2 Assessing progress against GIRFT benchmarks

A core component of the evaluation and learning function involves analysing national datasets to assess progress against GIRFT clinical benchmarks and specialty metrics.

[1] Department of Health and Social Care (2026). DHSC evaluation strategy 2026. Available at: GOV.UK (accessed 29 June 2026)

This work builds on GIRFT's established analytical capability and provides insight into how services evolve over time and how initiatives may influence clinical performance across specialties.

Through benchmarking and trend analysis, this workstream helps assess whether improvements are observed in areas targeted by GIRFT initiatives. These analyses also contribute to organisational learning by highlighting areas of progress, variation and emerging trends across the NHS.

2.3 Monitoring programme delivery and performance

A second strand focuses on monitoring delivery and operational progress across participating organisations and their reasons for engagement. Organisations undertaking improvement initiatives do so for various reasons, for example differences in local performance. Capturing this variation helps ensure that the nuances and challenges associated with implementation are understood.

This strand primarily includes tracking rollout, participation across organisations and the implementation of activities. It also considers how programmes are delivered in practice, including the extent to which delivery aligns with the intended approach, while adapting to local contexts.

Monitoring provides an overview of how initiatives are progressing across the system and helps programme teams understand delivery across participating sites. It also supports learning about how initiatives are adopted across organisations and how implementation evolves over time.

2.4 Understanding implementation and learning

Alongside quantitative analysis and monitoring, GIRFT is developing an additional capability focused specifically on learning from implementation.

This workstream aims to understand how initiatives are experienced across organisations and what factors support or hinder improvement in practice.

Learning from delivery often involves gathering insight from participating sites through surveys, interviews, workshops or structured discussions. These activities help capture the experiences of teams who are implementing GIRFT initiatives within their organisations.

This strand also draws on ideas from behavioural science and implementation science, which help explain how changes in clinical practice and organisational processes occur within complex healthcare systems.

2.5 Independent external evaluation

In addition to internal evaluation and learning activities, GIRFT initiatives may also be subject to independent external evaluation conducted by organisations such as academic institutions, research bodies or policy organisations.

External evaluation provides an independent perspective on GIRFT initiatives and contributes to wider learning across the health system.

While this document focuses primarily on the internal evaluation and learning approaches used within GIRFT initiatives, external evaluation forms an important part of the broader GIRFT evaluation landscape:

- Discrete external evaluation of specific projects/pilots as opposed to programme-wide reviews.
- Focusing on GIRFT's methods, attribution of improvement achieved, and analytic challenge and scrutiny.
- Use of external input to sense-check assumptions, strengthen counterfactual thinking and help GIRFT to be clearer about the contribution made through our programme of work.
- Maintain the GIRFT programme's credibility through a combination of internal and independent analysis.

3. An approach to generating and using insight

The following sections outline a potential approach to generating and using insight, intended to support thinking and adaptation rather than prescribe a single model.

3.1 Understanding programme design

Before initiatives begin, it can be helpful to consider what improvements they are intended to achieve and how those improvements might occur in practice.

One approach that supports this thinking is often referred to as a theory of change. In simple terms, this involves starting with the desired long-term impact and then working backwards to consider what needs to happen to achieve that outcome.

For example, an initiative may aim to improve patient outcomes, reduce unwarranted variation or introduce new models of care. Working backwards from these goals can help teams consider what activities, behaviours or organisational changes may be required to reach those outcomes.

This process encourages programme teams to think about the end goal first and then map the steps that may lead to that outcome.

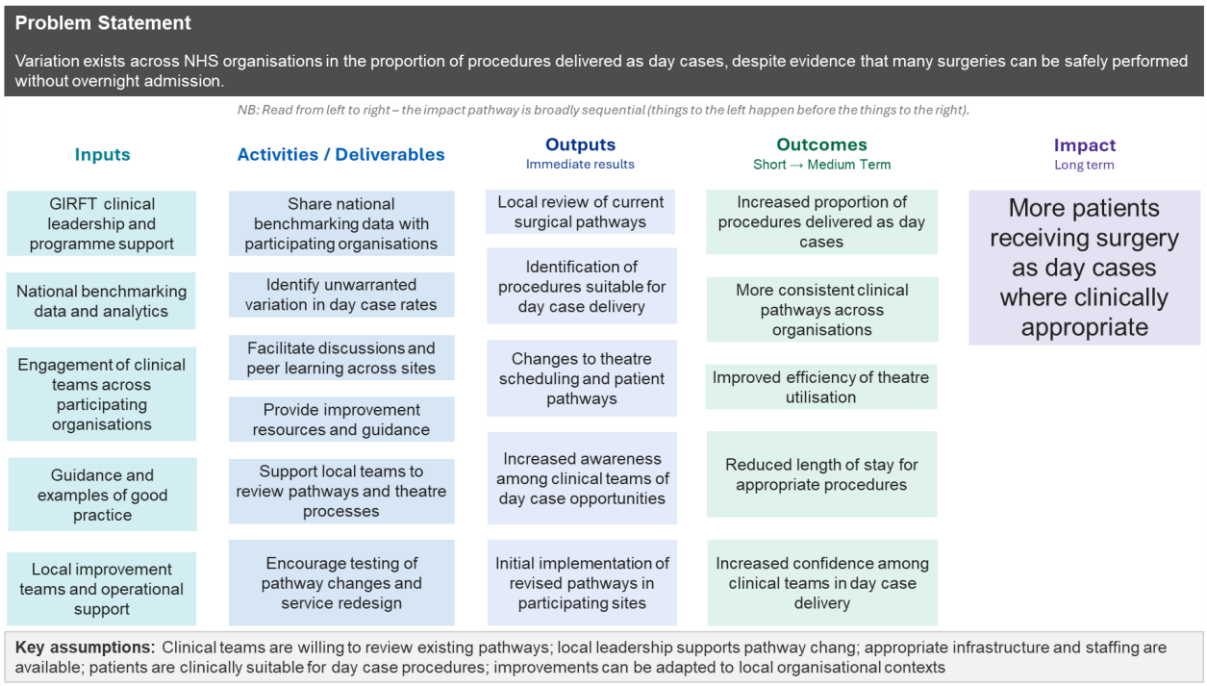

Figure 2. Illustrative example of a theory of change for a GIRFT-supported improvement initiative. A larger version of this figure is provided in Appendix 10.1.

3.2. Identifying themes and areas of focus

Early stages of programme development can also provide opportunities to understand how participants expect initiatives to operate and what challenges they may encounter.

Activities such as surveys, facilitated discussions or workshops can help identify themes related to implementation, including potential barriers, enabling factors and areas of uncertainty.

These insights can help shape the areas that initiatives choose to explore as they progress.

In some initiatives, these themes may also inform the development of implementation roadmaps that provide participating organisations with practical guidance on areas that may require attention during delivery.

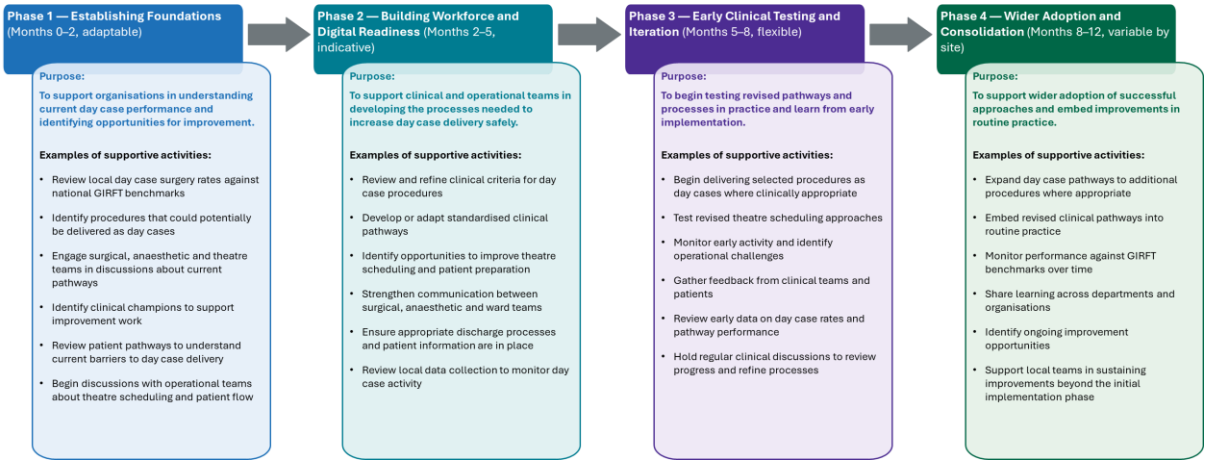

Figure 3. Illustrative example of an implementation roadmap for a GIRFT-supported improvement initiative. A larger version of this figure is provided in the Appendix 10.2. *Note: This simplified example illustrates how implementation phases might be structured in practice. Local initiatives would adapt timing and activities based on their context. This roadmap is based on the illustrative Theory of Change shown in this document (see **Figure 2**).*

3.3 Learning during delivery

As initiatives progress, valuable learning can emerge from the experiences of participating organisations.

Capturing these insights during delivery can help identify emerging challenges, adaptations or successful approaches that organisations develop as they implement changes.

This learning may be gathered through structured discussions, meetings, site engagement, surveys, interviews or analysis of meeting notes and documentation. These activities help capture the experiences of organisations as they implement changes and adapt them to local circumstances.

Tracking these insights over time can help highlight patterns and provide a clearer understanding of how initiatives evolve in practice. In some initiatives, recurring themes or signals may emerge across multiple organisations, providing early insight into common challenges, enabling factors or areas where additional support may be helpful.

3.4 Bringing different sources of insight together

The GIRFT evaluation and learning framework recognises that understanding impact often requires bringing together multiple sources of information.

Quantitative analysis can help identify trends in clinical performance or service delivery. Insights from implementation can help explain why those trends occur and how organisations respond to initiatives.

When considered together, these different sources of insight can help the data ‘speak to each other’: quantitative trends can highlight where change is occurring, while insights from implementation can help explain why those patterns are emerging and how organisations are responding in practice.

When these sources of information are considered together, they can provide a richer understanding of both outcomes and the mechanisms through which improvement occurs.

3.5 Supporting shared learning

One of the broader aims of the evaluation and learning framework is to support shared learning across GIRFT initiatives and participating organisations.

Insights generated through evaluation and learning can help inform future GIRFT initiatives and provide practical examples of how organisations have implemented improvements in different contexts.

By capturing insights from delivery and analysing data across the system, the framework helps identify lessons that may inform future initiatives or support ongoing improvement efforts.

Sharing these insights across initiatives can contribute to a broader understanding of how improvement initiatives operate within complex healthcare environments.

Examples of evaluation outputs and learning from GIRFT initiatives will also be shared through the GIRFT evaluation and learning webpage, where colleagues can explore reports, insights and practical examples emerging from different initiatives.

4. Future development

The GIRFT evaluation and learning framework will continue to evolve as initiatives develop and new insights emerge.

As more GIRFT initiatives apply these approaches, further insights may emerge about how improvement initiatives are implemented across different clinical specialties and organisational contexts.

Future work may include further refinement of methods used to capture implementation learning, continued development of analytical approaches and opportunities to share learning across initiatives and organisations.

Use of external evaluation will be targeted and allow GIRFT to understand evidence of contribution to improvement and build on credibility achieved through the programme.

5. Conclusion

GIRFT initiatives play an important role in supporting improvements in clinical services across the NHS.

The GIRFT evaluation and learning framework brings together complementary approaches that help understand impact, monitor delivery and learn from implementation across participating organisations.

In doing so, it recognises that understanding improvement in complex healthcare systems involves not only measuring outcomes but also learning from how change is implemented in practice.

By combining quantitative analysis with insights from delivery, the framework supports a broader understanding of how improvements occur and how they may be sustained within healthcare systems.

6. Appendix

6.1 Theory of change

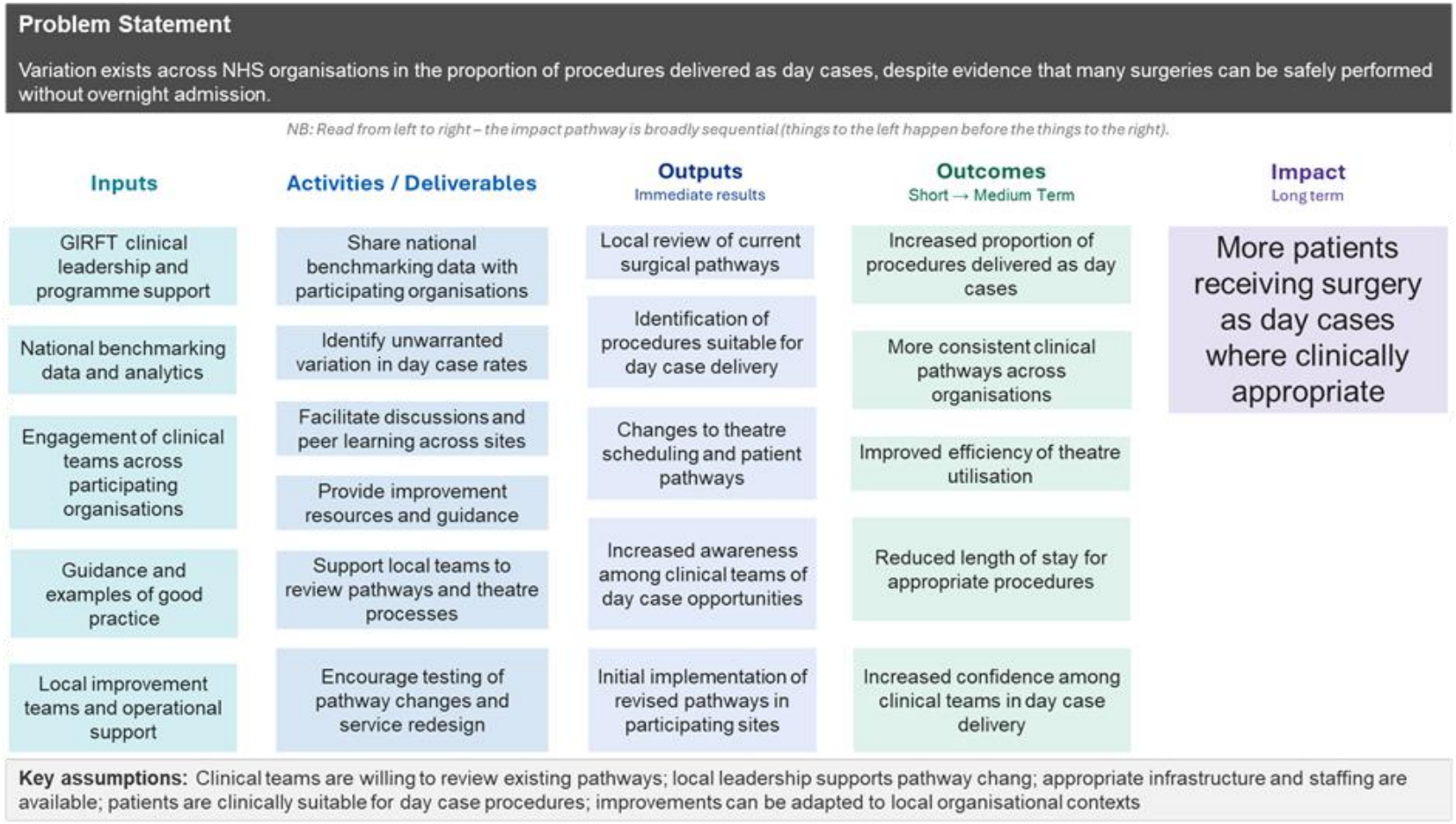

Figure A1. Illustrative Theory of Change.

6.2 Implementation roadmap

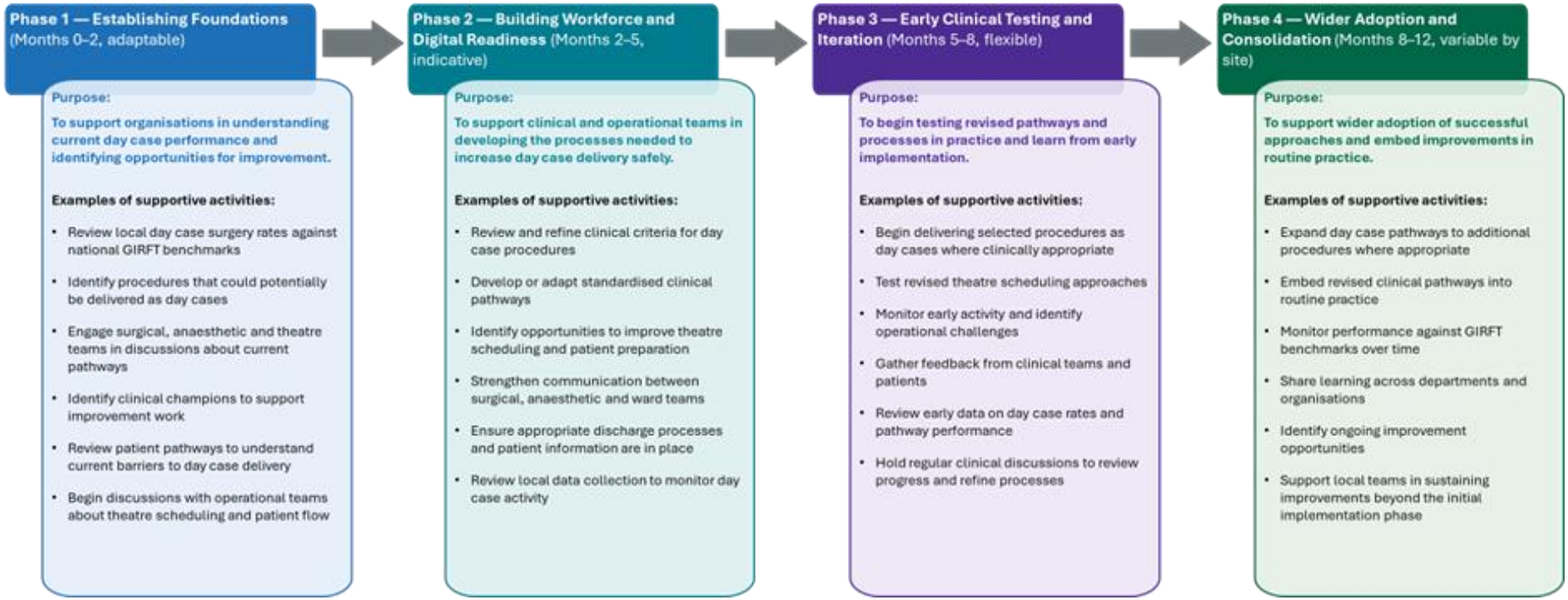

Figure A2. Illustrative implementation roadmap.

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Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT)

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GIRFT is part of an aligned set of programmes within NHS England

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