

Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery Committee Report

Ralitsa Baranowski
Co-Chair



Committee Members

Member	Office	Term of Office
Miss Ralitsa Baranowski	Co-Chair	2023-2026
Mr Aman Coonar	Executive Co-Chair	2025-2027
Ms Rashmi Birla	Cardiac Surgery Representative (Scotland)	2024-2027
Miss Rhian Allen	Trainee Cardiothoracic Surgery Representative (Wales)	2024-2027
Ms Georgia Layton	Trainee Cardiothoracic Surgery Representative (England)	2024-2027
Dr Nicole Asemota	Trainee Academic Cardiothoracic Surgery Representative	2024-2027
Dr Leanne Ashrafian	Thoracic Surgery Representative	2024-2027
Miss Laura Clark	Research Cardiothoracic Surgery Representative	2024-2027
Dr Alice Copperwheat	Core Surgical Trainee Representative	2024-2027
Miss Augusta Paulikaite	Medical Student Representative	2024-2027
Miss Heen Shamaz	Medical Student Representative	2024-2027

Introduction

The 2025–2026 year has been one of growth, collaboration, advocacy, and visibility for Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery (WiCTS). The committee has continued its mission to support, mentor, and promote women across all stages of cardiothoracic surgery while also addressing wider workforce culture and inclusion challenges within the specialty.

This period saw increased engagement across the SCTS membership, successful networking and educational events, development of collaborative relationships with allied professional organisations, and meaningful work focused on workplace culture, wellbeing, and professional representation.

Annual Meeting and Educational Activities

WiCTS held a successful annual meeting during the SCTS Annual Meeting 2025 in Edinburgh and Belfast 2026. The meetings were well attended and generated enthusiastic discussion regarding mentorship, workforce challenges, career progression, leadership opportunities, and improving representation within cardiothoracic surgery.

The SCTS Annual meeting Edinburgh 2025 was a great success with a plenary session on Leadership with prominent female cardiothoracic leaders. A WiCTS Networking event has been scheduled after the Plenary to foster mentorship, advocacy, community-building while addressing challenges unique to female surgeons. High attendance by female SCTS members with the participation of prominent female leaders Prof Novoa (ESTS President), Prof Yolonda Colson, Prof Opitz. ESTS would like to collaborate with SCTS in the future.

The events provided an important networking platform for trainees and consultants and reinforced the importance of visible female leadership within the specialty. Feedback from attendees was extremely positive, with many highlighting the supportive atmosphere and value of open discussion regarding career experiences and challenges.

Collaboration with Allied Organisations

MWF (Medical Women's Federation) national Conference May 2025

WiCTS Co-Chair Ralitsa Baranowski represented SCTS Women in Cardiothoracic Surgery as part of a panel on "Women doctors's careers – What are we doing? What needs to be done?"

A significant development this year was the strengthening of collaboration between WiCTS and the Women in Cardiothoracic Anaesthesia group within ACTACC.

Joint discussions focused on shared experiences within the cardiothoracic multidisciplinary workforce, opportunities for future educational events, and strategies to improve culture, inclusion, and wellbeing across the specialty. Plans for a future joint meeting and collaborative initiatives are underway.

WiCTS also continued to engage with wider national surgical organisations and leadership groups to ensure that issues relating to representation, mentorship, and workplace culture remain visible at a national level.

Workforce Culture, Survey Work, and Advocacy

One of the major areas of work during 2025–2026 was the development and dissemination of a workforce culture survey exploring experiences within cardiothoracic surgery and the wider multidisciplinary team.

The survey **Levelling the Playing Field in Cardiothoracic Surgery- Perceptions of Women and Workplace Culture** included contributions from surgeons, trainees, anaesthetists, nurses, perfusionists, and allied healthcare professionals.

Themes explored included:

Workplace culture

Inclusion and belonging

Mentorship

Professional barriers

Bullying and harassment

Microaggressions

Leadership visibility

Psychological safety within teams

Preliminary survey findings were presented during the BORS Meeting and generated significant discussion and engagement.

The committee also began work on a broader report examining workplace culture and professional conduct within cardiothoracic surgery. This work aims to contribute constructively to ongoing national conversations regarding workforce wellbeing, professional standards, and the future sustainability of the specialty.

Mentorship and Representation

Mentorship remained a central focus throughout the year. WiCTS continued to advocate for:

- Increased visibility of female role models
- Improved mentorship opportunities
- Support for trainees and early-career surgeons
- Leadership development pathways

The committee recognises the importance of allyship and multidisciplinary collaboration in creating lasting cultural change and remains committed to building an inclusive and supportive professional environment for all members of the cardiothoracic community.

Communications and Visibility

Throughout the year, WiCTS maintained an active presence through:

Educational and networking activities

Contributions to SCTS communications and e-bulletins

Conference participation

Promotion of mentorship and wellbeing initiatives

Advocacy for diversity and inclusion within surgery

The committee also highlighted achievements of women within cardiothoracic surgery and promoted conversations around leadership, resilience, innovation, and career progression.

Looking Ahead: 2026–2027

Priorities for the coming year include:

- Expanding mentorship initiatives
- Strengthening multidisciplinary collaborations
- Developing educational and networking opportunities at the SCTS Annual Meeting 2027
- Continuing workforce culture and inclusion work
- Supporting trainee engagement and leadership development
- Enhancing visibility of women within cardiothoracic surgery nationally and internationally
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WiCTS remains committed to fostering a collaborative, inclusive, and forward-looking cardiothoracic community that supports excellence, innovation, and professional wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

The committee would like to thank the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain & Ireland Executive, committee members, trainees, allied healthcare colleagues, and all members who have contributed to WiCTS activities throughout the year. Their support, enthusiasm, and engagement continue to drive positive change across the specialty.

Committee Transition

Following completion of the current term, Ralitsa Baranowski will be stepping down as Co-Chair of WiCTS. The position of WiCTS Chair will be advertised through the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain & Ireland, and the committee looks forward to supporting the next phase of growth and development under new leadership.