



Carl Lummis

LONDON CALLING: QUALITY NEVER DIES

THE 2026 INTERNATIONAL QA VIRTUAL
CONFERENCE, 20TH – 22ND MAY



If you have been to one of our virtual conferences before, you will know we like to have a bit of fun with the strapline. We have riffed on popular culture in previous years, usually a film, and this time felt like the right moment to go with music instead. Our Global face-to-face conference later this year is in London, so *The Clash* felt like an obvious choice. And the second half, *Quality Never Dies*, has a James Bond ring to it, which felt fitting for a British-based organisation with a very international membership.

Beyond the name though, there is a serious programme behind it. The 2026 International QA Virtual Conference runs from 20th to 22nd May, with more than 60 sessions delivered by speakers from 17 countries. It is the largest virtual programme we have put together and, having spent the past few months reading through every abstract that came in, I wanted to share what I think makes this one worth your time.

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WHAT THE ABSTRACTS TOLD ME ABOUT WHERE WE ARE

When you read 60-odd abstracts back-to-back, you start to see patterns. Not because people have coordinated, but because the same questions keep surfacing independently from different countries, different organisations, different disciplines. This tells you something about where the profession is right now.

Three things stood out for me. First, and this will not surprise anyone who spends time on the Community Hub, there is a real preoccupation with AI. Not just at a strategic level, but at a personal one. Members are asking what AI means for their own work, how they should be using it day-to-day and whether their quality systems are keeping up with what is already happening in their organisations. The abstracts reflected that. We received submissions covering AI governance, validation of AI agents, how the EU AI Act will reshape quality roles and how to audit AI use in clinical trials. But we also received submissions from people taking a more grounded view, arguing that AI is a tool we should learn to use well now, rather than something to fear or hype.

Second, the regulatory landscape is moving fast and members know it. ICH E6(R3) is now a legal requirement in major jurisdictions and the shift to principle-based regulation is creating real questions about professional judgement, CAPA processes and what proportionate oversight actually looks like. In pharmacovigilance, EU Regulation 2025/1466 has introduced vendor oversight requirements that are already generating debate. The GVP modules are being updated and CIOMS working groups have published new guidance. These are not distant policy changes, they are the things that members are dealing with in their roles right now.

Third, and this is the one that struck me most, a significant number of abstracts focused on people. Not regulation, not technology, but the human skills that hold quality systems together. Judgement, influence, leadership, the confidence to challenge non-compliance, the ability to exercise independence while still building trust across an organisation. Quality culture came through strongly, not as a buzzword, but as a genuine concern about what happens when leadership does not treat quality as a strategic function. Several submissions looked at inspection data and made the same point: quality failures are rarely caused by missing procedures. They are caused by how people make decisions, escalate concerns and own quality outcomes.

SEVENTEEN COUNTRIES, ONE CONVERSATION

One of the things I love about our virtual conferences is the global flavour. When you remove the barriers of travel and venue capacity, you get submissions from places and perspectives that a face-to-face event simply cannot match. This year we have speakers from the UK, India, USA, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Argentina, China, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, Bulgaria and Russia.

That is not just a number to put on a poster. It means the programme includes a first-hand account of building GLP compliance in the Ivory Coast from no formal quality system to international recognition. It means we have a perspective on clinical trial supply chains in East Africa, on E6(R3) implementation in Argentina and Brazil, and on building a quality function inside a startup biotech in China. These are perspectives that matter because the challenges facing quality professionals are genuinely global and the solutions increasingly come from outside the traditional European and North American centres.

WHAT TO EXPECT ACROSS THE THREE DAYS

The programme has a clear shape to it. Day one, Wednesday 20th May, is built around current QA practice and quality culture. If you are interested in how to make QA observations drive real business decisions, how quality improvement principles work in practice or why the phrase ‘quality culture’ risks becoming wallpaper unless leadership takes it seriously, this is your day.

Day two, Thursday 21st May, is where the regulated disciplines sit. GCP, pharmacovigilance, GLP, IT, veterinary and a dedicated New to QA stream.

Expect practical content on CAPA under E6(R3), clinical laboratory oversight, vendor management under the new EU PV regulation, eTMF auditing, informed consent and a veterinary GCP masterclass working through real-world case studies. There is also a panel asking a question I find genuinely interesting: is the industry moving from a global towards a more sovereign-based PV system?

Day three, Friday 22nd May, is dedicated to AI, technology and the future of the profession. This is where you will find a structured debate on AI in GxP auditing, a discussion on Computer Software Assurance and forward-looking content on digital validation ecosystems and cybersecurity frameworks. Bill Bellows also returns as our keynote speaker. If you have seen Bill present before, you will know he is always fantastic value. If you have not, this is a good place to start.

BELFAST SPEAKERS RETURN, AND EVERYTHING IS RECORDED

We have also invited the speakers who ranked highest in delegate feedback to present again after they appeared live at our face-to-face conference in Belfast in 2025. That means if you missed Belfast, or if you attended but want to revisit specific content, you will find some of that material here in the virtual programme alongside entirely new submissions.

And as with all our virtual conferences, every session is recorded. If you cannot attend live, or if you want to revisit something after the event, the recordings will be available. With 60-plus sessions across three days, nobody can attend everything in real time. The value of the virtual format is that the content is there when you need it.

FINDING YOUR PATH THROUGH THE PROGRAMME

The programme is structured around three learning routes: Learn, Develop and Extend. If you are new to QA or transitioning into a quality role, the Learn route gives you nine sessions focused on the fundamentals, including quality culture, what regulators actually expect of QA and the audit scenarios nobody warns you about. If you are building depth in your discipline, the Develop route has 24 sessions spanning current practice, AI, GCP, pharmacovigilance and more. And if you are looking to broaden into new areas, the Extend route offers 15 sessions that take you beyond your usual scope.

You do not have to follow a single route rigidly. They are there to help you find your way through a large programme and pick the content that matches where you are in your career and where you want to go next.

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WHY I THINK THIS ONE MATTERS

I have put together a few of these programmes now and what makes this year’s conference feel different is the range. Not just in geography, although 17 countries is impressive for a virtual event, but in the kinds of questions people are asking. AI governance sits alongside quality culture. CAPA reform sits alongside environmental sustainability. A GLP facility build in West Africa sits alongside a debate on PV vendor oversight in the EU. ALCOA+ gets challenged. Computer Software Assurance gets questioned. And throughout it all, there is a thread about the people who do this work, the skills they need, the pressures they face and how the profession supports them.

That breadth is not accidental. It reflects what RQA members care about and it reflects the reality that quality assurance does not fit in one box.

Full programme details and registration are available on the RQA website (<https://www.therqa.com/learn-develop-connect/courses-and-events/conferences/2026-international-qa-virtual-conference/>) – members benefit from reduced delegate rates. I hope to see you there, even if ‘there’ is your kitchen table.

PROFILE

Carl is the Marketing and Conferences Manager at RQA, leading conference delivery, member marketing and community management for the association.