



## Original Article

## European Society of Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) strategy 2024–2026: Growth and diversification in a rapidly changing world

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## A B S T R A C T

In 2019, the European Society of Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) published its 2030 Vision “Radiation Oncology, Optimal Health, For All, Together”. However, in 2020, the global pandemic, coinciding with the Society’s 40th anniversary, had long-term consequences on global behaviours and on the financial environment for scientific associations worldwide. In 2022, ESTRO conducted a survey among its members, revealing their strong appreciation for networking opportunities and the creation of high-quality interdisciplinary scientific content. In response to the survey findings and to address the evolving landscape following the COVID pandemic, ESTRO initiated a strategic review process to respond to, and refocus on, the opportunities and challenges ahead.

This paper, marking a turning point in ESTRO’s strategy for achieving its Vision 2030 in a post-pandemic era, describes the 2022–23 strategic review process, discussions, and consequent recommendations. The comprehensive strategic review process involved: (i) pre-meeting preparations with surveys and strategic documents; (ii) a carefully themed three-day retreat in Brussels incorporating a blend of plenary sessions, workshops focusing on ESTRO’s role, value creation and capture, strategic objectives; and (iii) a post-retreat phase including qualitative analysis and development of action plans.

The strategic review emphasized the need for adaptive tactics for scientific associations to remain current and productive in the face of changing global conditions. The development of key strategic goals for the years 2024–2026 focused on improving research impact, strengthening and diversifying ESTRO’s educational offerings and fostering proactive and mutually beneficial partnerships. The Board approved these objectives, alongside prioritising digital innovation, financial sustainability, and community engagement for ESTRO’s continued growth and development.

In essence, ESTRO aims to advocate, empower, expand, and diversify its community, with the overarching goal of enhancing cancer care for patients in Europe, and beyond.

### Introduction

In 2019, the European Society of Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) published its 2030 Vision summarised as “Radiation Oncology, Optimal Health, For All, Together” to be achieved through the four pillars of (i) translating research into practice; (ii) strengthening the profession; (iii) strengthening the Society, and (iv) strengthening partnerships [1]. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, beyond its immediate and devastating human effects, presented profound challenges to

healthcare, and to scientific societies supporting healthcare professionals, their communities and patients. In the context of radiation oncology, immediate challenges included the need to maintain radiotherapy services whilst minimising spread of the COVID-19 virus [2]. In parallel, for scientific societies, the pandemic necessitated significant adaptations to ensure the continued provision of services to their membership, such as delivering large international congresses online [3,4]. As the world emerged from the initial waves of the pandemic however, it became increasingly evident that certain shifts in human

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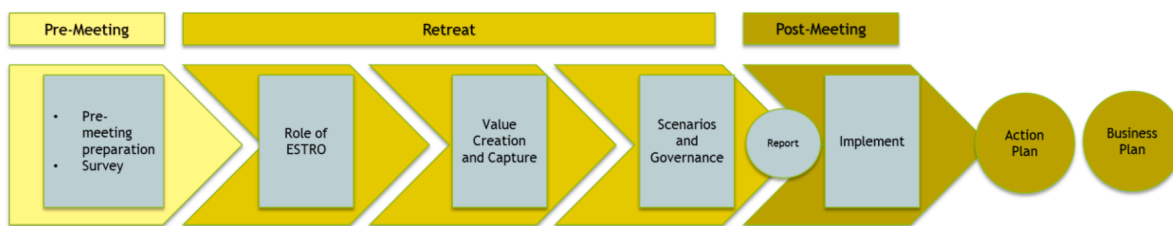


Fig. 1. ESTRO strategy review process outline.

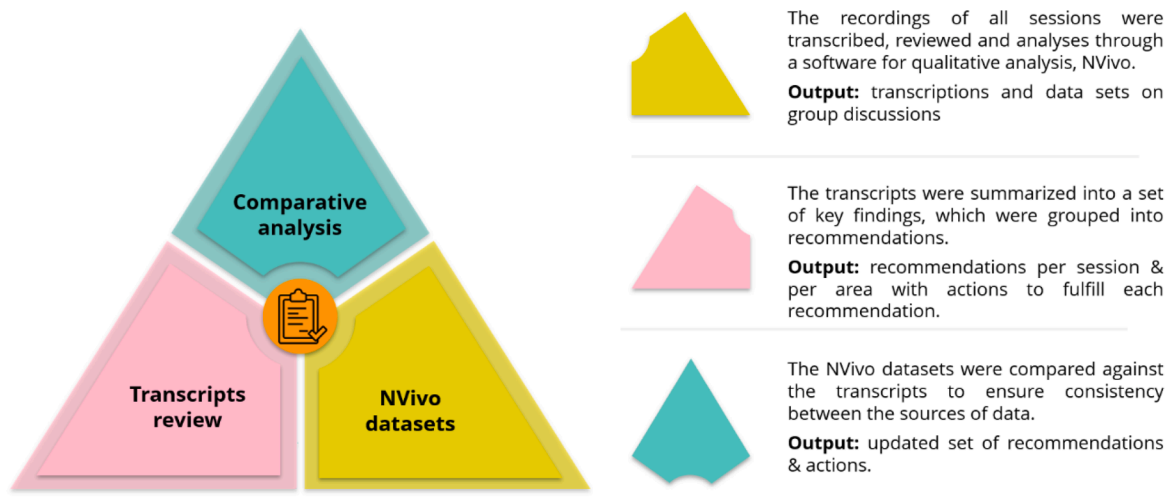


Fig. 2. Summary of methodological approach to analysing transcripts of retreat discussions.

**Table 1**  
Three-phase approach to the ESTRO Strategy Review| Focus areas, key topics, methodology and tools.

| Phase         | Focus Areas                               | Key Topics Discussed   | Methodology  | Tools  | Methodological References |
|---------------|---|--|--|--|---------------------------|
| Pre-Meeting   | Participant alignment                     | Survey feedback  | Pre-meeting surveys, strategic documents                         | Pre-meeting surveys, strategic documents                 | [1]                       |
| Retreat Day 1 | Strategic alignment<br>The Role of ESTRO  | Surveys and preparatory material<br>Role of ESTRO, value propositions, content creation and networking | Comparative Surveys<br>Plenary sessions, breakout groups         | Surveys<br>Discussion guides, strategic question prompts | [1]<br>[12][13]           |
| Retreat Day 2 | Strategies for Value delivery and capture | Membership engagement, Global reach, Congresses, Education   | Collaborative workshops  | Scenario analysis, optimization frameworks               | [12]                      |
| Retreat Day 3 | Value creation, strategy implementation   | Actionable strategies, value capture, implementation plans   | Group consolidation, action planning                             | Governance models, implementation roadmaps               | [13]                      |
| Post-Meeting  | Reporting, action, and business plans     | Finalizing reports, developing action and business plans   | Qualitative Analysis (Nvivo), Synthesis of discussions, planning | Reports, action plan templates, business model canvases  |                           |

behaviour regarding working patterns [5,15] and travel [6] were likely to become permanent. Consequently, the financial implications for the cost of both travel and accommodation were also recognised as long-lasting [7]. To address these challenges from a scientific society perspective, in 2021 the ESTRO Board of Directors recommended reassessing, recalibrating and realigning the Society’s strategy against the priorities defined in the 2030 Vision in order to address the evolving needs of the radiation oncology community in Europe, and beyond.

To gain insights on the needs and expectations of the radiation oncology community with respect to the activities organised by ESTRO, the Board organised a large-scale consultation at the beginning of 2021. Gathering insights from over 700 respondents, including members of the Society as well as non-members, the survey sought to gain an understanding of how the radiation oncology community thought ESTRO should focus in the wake of the global health crisis. Survey respondents continued to prioritise the delivery of high-quality, multidisciplinary

scientific content, together with opportunities for networking, with a strong focus on the Annual Congress as the Society’s flagship event. While the experience of the pandemic increased interest in exploring diverse formats for educational and scientific activities, high-quality science and a connected, collaborative community remain key pillars of ESTRO’s value proposition. Additionally, the survey highlighted a clear interest in increased participation and engagement with the Society, with effective communication around involvement and leadership opportunities within the Society being crucial to meeting these expectations.

Taking stock of these findings and, after organising a hybrid congress in Madrid in 2021 followed by a fully onsite congress in Copenhagen in 2022, the decision was made to convene a strategic retreat, a critical juncture where the ESTRO leadership could collectively reflect on the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic. The primary objective of this retreat was to re-evaluate the priorities established

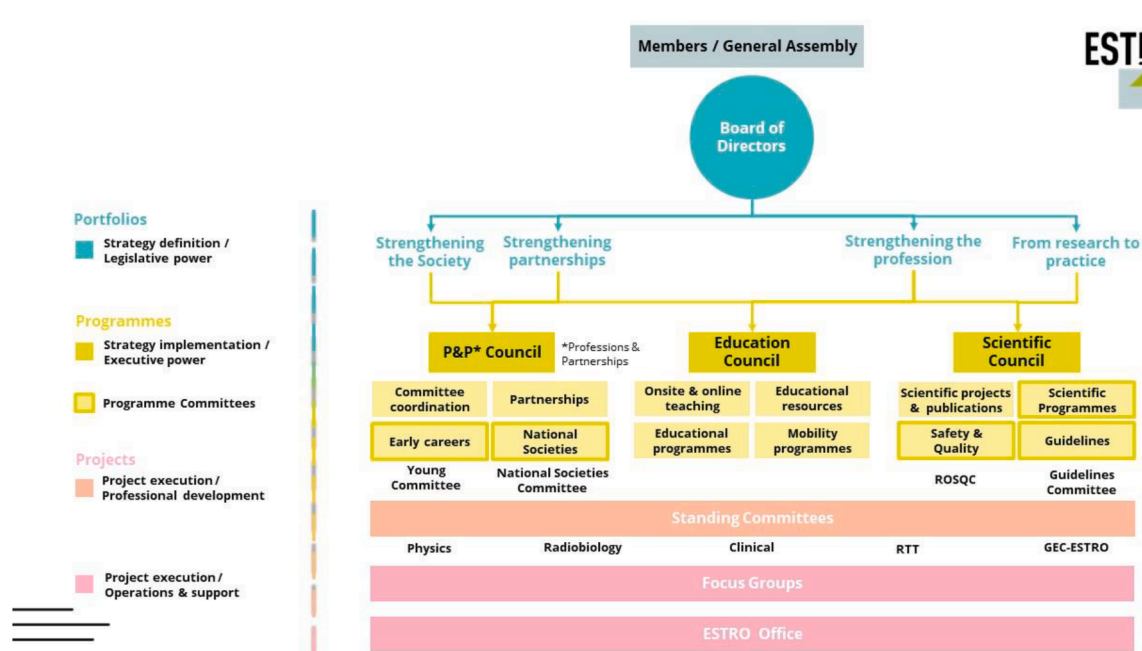


Fig. 3. ESTRO Governance Structure.

during the previous strategy retreats in Estoril in 2012 [8], Turin in 2015 [9], and Mechelen in 2018 [1], in the context of the changes precipitated by the COVID-19 crisis.

The two key questions that underscored the deliberations of the retreat were:

1. How could ESTRO strategically position itself to continue effectively meeting the evolving needs of the radiation oncology community in a post-pandemic world?
2. What key priorities should ESTRO focus on in the next 3–5 years to remain at the forefront of advances in the field?

To answer these questions, ESTRO organised a 3-day retreat in Brussels on 30 January – 1 February 2023, bringing together the Board of Directors and the Chairs of all ESTRO Councils and Committees. A total of 21 individuals in ESTRO leadership positions (see appendix 1) actively participated in this collaborative meeting, providing a wealth of insights and perspectives to shape the future of the Society.

This paper summarises the strategic review, outlining the process, key discussions, and the resultant strategic recommendations that emerged from this critical juncture in ESTRO's ongoing journey.

## Methods

After the Board approved the rationale and concept of a Strategy Retreat, ESTRO's strategic framework was reformulated using a methodical approach divided into three phases (pre-meeting preparations, a 3-day retreat, and a post-meeting analysis and formulation of objectives (see Fig. 1)). The overarching goal was to reaffirm the current vision statement while pinpointing key priority areas in the years ahead for ESTRO.

- **Pre-Meeting:** State-of-play of key priority areas defined by the Board of Directors: Scientific Congresses, Educational Output, Membership and Global Reach; preparatory reports with a survey of strategic questions shared with all retreat participants.
- **Retreat:** 3-day meeting held in Brussels, focusing on networking and community-building, mapping ESTRO value propositions and core values; the meeting was structured around plenary sessions,

breakout groups, and qualitative analysis of discussions and materials.

- **Post-Meeting:** Use of qualitative analysis software to craft a report based on retreat findings; complement findings and recommendations with ideas for implementation.

Board members were involved in the entire strategic review process. Retreat participants included members of the Board of Directors, including the Presidents, Treasurer, and Membership Officer. ESTRO Committee Chairs also participated, representing expertise in Physics, Biology, RTT, Clinical Practice and Research, and Radiation Oncology Safety & Quality. In addition, leaders from the National Societies Committee, Education Council, Young Committee, and the GEC-ESTRO Committee were present. The collective included individuals with diverse perspectives and leadership experiences, promoting an interdisciplinary approach for developing strategic directions and initiatives to advance ESTRO's mission.

In the pre-meeting phase, the results of the community survey were presented to the ESTRO Board with the aim of defining the scope of the subsequent strategic review process. The Board agreed upon four areas of importance to the radiation oncology community as follows: Scientific Congresses, Educational Output, Membership and Global Reach. The ESTRO office then prepared reports on each of these areas including data on state-of-play as well as key strategic questions around how each of these areas should be prioritised and effected going forwards. In parallel the strategy retreat participants received a survey aimed at generating quantitative data on priority areas for ESTRO's leadership.

The retreat itself took place over three consecutive days in January to February 2023 in Brussels. With the aim of agreeing overarching strategic priorities to which a subsequent analysis of retreat discussions could be mapped, the retreat included a combination of plenary sessions and breakout groups. The retreat content addressed different themes for each day. The first day was dedicated to the role of ESTRO in a challenging environment characterized by the increasing demand for Radiation Oncology [10], acknowledging the need for empowering professionals in the field and covering topics such as networking and content, with a focus on the organization's value proposition.

A conceptual framework making a distinction between value creation and value capturing [11] was adopted for days 2 and 3 of the

**Table 2**  
Strategy Retreat | 2024–2025 objectives per ESTRO Council.

| ESTRO Council                      | Strategic Objectives for 2024–2026  |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Professions & Partnerships Council | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Proactively approach partnerships:</b> Focus on creating valuable content through Memoranda of Understanding and strategic collaborations.</li> <li><b>Enhance Collaboration with National Societies:</b> Improve engagement with National Societies, ensuring geographical balance and direct representation.</li> <li><b>Grow ESTRO’s presence in Europe:</b> Assess and grow the ESTRO member base through targeted interactions with European National Societies.</li> <li><b>Signpost content and increase engagement:</b> Highlight the added value of being an ESTRO member; seek collaborations in radiotherapy with specialties that are currently underrepresented; optimise the experience of ESTRO members based on their field of interest and career stage.</li> <li><b>Reignite awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives:</b> Engage a larger pool of members in actively representing the Society; increase ESTRO’s presence at EU and national events. Re-engage experts who have completed their terms in ESTRO for further contribution to external partnerships.</li> </ol> |
| Education Council                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Faculty Empowerment Program:</b> Create a program for faculty development, focusing on digital and hybrid teaching methods.</li> <li><b>Ensuring contemporary high-quality, value-added content:</b> Translating high-quality scientific content from congresses and journals into content of relevance to our community.</li> <li><b>Explore and monitor innovative formats to deliver education and training:</b> Harness the potential of both live and online teaching, catering to multiple audiences, regularly reviewing the performance and relevance of new courses and educational initiatives.</li> <li><b>Sustainable Course Formats:</b> Explore and develop sustainable formats for international courses and events.</li> <li><b>Financial Prudence:</b> Implement new strategies to control financial losses, including reviewing fees and pricing.</li> </ol>  |
| Scientific Council                 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Attract High-Impact Research:</b> Focus on attracting significant research to the Annual Congress and engaging with influential researchers.</li> <li><b>Establish SOPs for Congress Scientific Programme committees to attract and promote high-quality scientific content:</b> Develop Standard Operating Procedures for the Scientific Programme Committee and Scientific Advisory Groups, enhancing inclusivity and visibility.</li> <li><b>Develop “Best of ESTRO” Concept:</b> Curate content to showcase at national meetings and improve the interplay between the Annual Congress and satellite events.</li> <li><b>Enhance Networking:</b> Improve the social and networking aspects of the Annual Congress, catering to specific member interests.</li> <li><b>Increase Impact of Project Outputs:</b> Ensure the relevance of ESTRO’s project outputs, defining roles for engagement in EU projects.</li> </ol>   |

Retreat. This approach ensured that all participants remained aligned, keeping in mind the dual focus on creating value for members and stakeholders and capturing value to ensure the organisation’s sustainability and relevance [11]. This conceptual framework was applied to the four priority areas of the Society mentioned above providing a cohesive approach through which to analyse and prioritise.

The final day of the retreat was dedicated to value creation and implementation, with an emphasis on creating actionable strategic objectives and consolidating the results of the discussions while considering the governance aspects involved in implementing the decisions made during the retreat. All sessions were recorded with a view to undertaking a formal qualitative analysis of the discussions.

In the post-retreat phase, strategy retreat discussions were compiled around four thematic sessions: “Strategic Scenarios”, “The Role of

ESTRO”, “Value Creation” and “Value Capture”. In this data analysis phase of the strategy review process, a similar approach was taken to the previous ESTRO retreat [1] beginning with careful transcription and review of each session recording. This step involved carefully categorizing text from the audio recordings of the retreat into recurring themes to enable a deeper understanding of the underlying narratives. In parallel, NVivo (Lumivivo), qualitative analysis software, was used to process the retreat transcripts, coding the retreat data to identify recurring thematic patterns, and creating statistical data sets that were representative of the group discussions. The consistency of the transcripts was ensured by conducting a comparative analysis with NVivo datasets and cross-referencing them with the qualitative findings to validate our results, as illustrated by Fig. 2. The information was then synthesized into a coherent set of key findings from which specific recommendations were derived for each area and session, as well as concrete actions to put each recommendation into practice.

This methodological assessment assisted in ensuring that the resulting suggestions were representative of the group priorities and insights that emerged during the retreat. It culminated in a consensus set of recommendations and corresponding actions, poised for further review and prioritisation.

The Board, Council Chairs and ESTRO office staff then worked collaboratively to refine the resulting reports and action plans, ensuring they are strategically aligned with insights from the coded data. ESTRO’s commitment to strategic improvement and efficient implementation is demonstrated by this collaborative stepwise approach to reach a consensus, designed to benefit both its members and the larger radiation oncology community. The whole strategic review process is illustrated in Table 1.

## Results

Initial findings of the analysis described in Fig. 2 were presented as a series of potential strategic objectives to the Board in September 2023. To ensure alignment between the potential strategic objectives and ESTRO’s governance structure (Fig. 3), and consequently ESTRO’s capability to achieve these objectives, draft strategic objectives were distributed to the three councils of ESTRO- Science, Education and Professions and Partnerships. Each Council was given the task to validate, prioritise and refine the draft objectives into a set of strategic objectives for 2024–2026. Subsequently, in November 2023, these objectives were discussed and approved by the Board.

The ESTRO Board-approved strategic objectives are summarised in Table 2. The P&P Council emphasises its role in coordinating Standing Committees, managing Focus Groups, and fostering partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). It envisages a proactive approach to collaborations, geographic representation, and deeper engagement with National Societies. Meanwhile, the Education Council, expanding its focus on faculty empowerment, endeavours to explore innovative formats for teaching courses and events with continued focus on financial sustainability. Lastly, the Scientific Council focuses on enhancing the impact of research at the Annual Congress, establishing standard operating procedures, and amplifying the visibility of authors’ work both within and beyond ESTRO.

The ESTRO Vision for 2030 included a comprehensive roadmap to strengthen the role of radiation oncology in achieving optimal health outcomes for all. The ESTRO strategic objectives for 2024–26 support achievement of this vision through three key pillars: members and advocacy, education, and science, representing the scope of action of the three Councils, as illustrated by Fig. 4. The first pillar, implemented by the P&P Council, emphasizes the need to engage, communicate and empower, with a focus on strengthening the ESTRO brand as the leading voice in European radiation oncology. This includes attracting new members, personalizing content, and expanding partnerships with other societies, including those of other disciplines involved in cancer treatment, to strengthen the society’s influence. The second pillar,

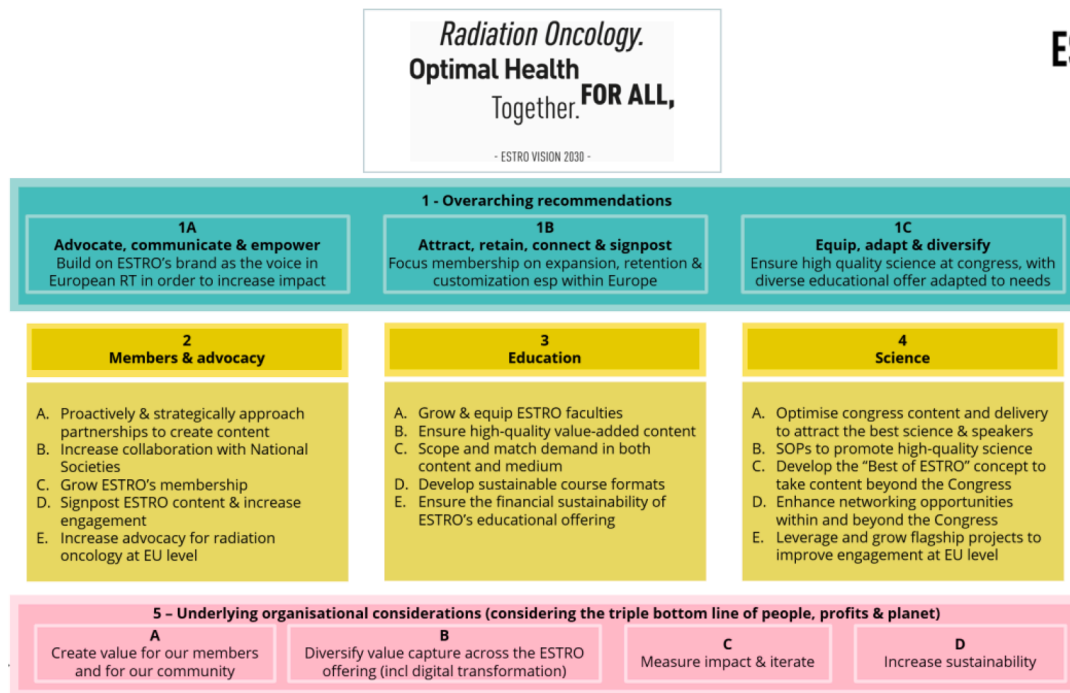


Fig. 4. Key takeaways of the 2022–24 ESTRO Strategic Review Process.

implemented by the Education Council, aims at developing ESTRO faculty and adapting educational provision (both its content and its format) to demand. This includes adapting to the educational and training needs of our members, and diversification of course formats in order to strike a balance between accessibility, fostering networking opportunities and promoting international collaboration. The third pillar, implemented by the Scientific Council, promotes the optimization of the content of congresses, strengthens international cooperation on guidelines and promotes the growth of flagship projects.

Underlying these pillars are the fundamental organizational principles that include the adoption of a triple bottom line approach (People, Profits, Planet) [11], the diversification of value creation [13] across ESTRO's offerings, a progressive approach to digitalisation blending with on-site activities, and a focus on impact measurement and iterative improvement to optimize processes and enhance sustainability. This strategic blueprint provides direction for ESTRO to support evaluation, evidence dissemination and implementation of innovations in radiation therapy and to make a concerted effort to provide comprehensive, high-quality scientific training and advocacy to shape the future of oncology care.

## Discussion

Organisations, including scientific associations, must evolve continuously in order to keep meeting the needs of their members, not least in the face of black swan events [14]. The 2020 global pandemic was one such event precipitating substantial and long-lasting changes to human behaviours and to economic conditions [15] such that scientific societies such as ESTRO have been faced with an urgent need to adapt.

In the context of a rapidly evolving, post-pandemic, radiation oncology landscape, the ESTRO 2022–24 strategy review process offers significant insights into the tactical realignments needed by scientific associations to continue creating and capturing value for their members in this new era. The preceding survey of the radiation oncology community highlighted the dual priorities of being able to network with other radiation oncology professionals as well as being able to access and share the highest-quality scientific content. The ESTRO leadership agreed unanimously that these dual strategic foci are critical to

maintaining the Society's reputation for excellence and fostering a collaborative and progressive community. These priorities underpin ESTRO's 2024–26 strategic objectives of (i) advocating for, communicating with, and empowering our community; (ii) attracting, retaining, connecting, and signposting our members towards relevant content, and (iii) adapting and diversifying our Congress content to maximally equip our community in their roles in radiation oncology care. Both the underlying strategic foci and the ensuing objectives are essential to ESTRO being able to accelerate towards delivering on its 2030 Vision.

As well as the challenges behind, the challenges ahead for the European [16] and global radiation oncology community are also substantial. Early detection of cancer will result in an increase in patients that can be treated primarily with surgery and/or radiation therapy. Radiotherapy, as a minimally invasive and cost-effective treatment modality, is particularly suited to take up this challenge but the increase in demand for local curative therapies will meet an evolving workforce crisis. Therefore, increases in demand will need to be met by programs aimed at strengthening the capacity of the radiation oncology workforce alongside embracing innovations in artificial intelligence, data collection and analysis, that can improve the efficiency of the healthcare systems in which our workforce operates. ESTRO's strategic aims to advocate, empower, expand, and diversify its community will underpin its ability to effectively respond to such challenges [17].

There are few peer-reviewed publications specifically addressing the strategic responses of international medical associations to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic or similar crises. In this context, ESTRO's 2022–24 structured strategic review process provides a detailed case study that may serve as a reference for other medical societies facing similar challenges. This paper reinforces the concept of scientific societies needing to remain flexible and responsive to the needs of their members. The pandemic has changed not only the operating dynamics of these societies, but also caused a shift in member expectations towards more digital-friendly formats and platforms, blending the possibilities offered by the online dissemination of content, alongside the innately human experience of onsite meetings and networking. This shift requires a reassessment of traditional forms of content delivery and professional interaction. The transition to digital and other innovative learning strategies adopted by ESTRO serves as a blueprint for

integrating technological advances into educational and professional development frameworks, ensuring that the radiation oncology community remains connected and informed. In addition, it helps to meet underlying organisational objectives around financial and environmental sustainability. The dual pursuit of innovation and sustainability emerges as a central theme in our analysis and addresses the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit (otherwise expressed as financial sustainability) [11]. This approach underpins the strategic realignment towards more efficient processes, optimized use of resources and the exploration of new economic models. Digital innovations, in particular, offer opportunities to improve access to education, research methods and patient care, ensuring the society's resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

The ESTRO strategic review process offers valuable lessons on the importance of prioritizing high-quality content and networking, pursuing sustainability and innovation and embracing digital transformation. Looking forward, these strategies will be critical to advancing radiation oncology, and to improving global cancer care by promoting excellence in research, education, and professional development, as well as engaging in the advocacy and oncopolicy discussions that will be necessary to optimizing access to radiation oncology in Europe and beyond. Continued stakeholder engagement, leveraging technology and fostering global collaborations will be instrumental in ensuring that the benefits of advances in this field are widely shared, strengthening the role of scientific organisations like ESTRO in the global oncology ecosystem.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**A.M. Kirby:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft. **M. Guckenberger:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **B.J. Slotman:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **C.H. Clark:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **J.G. Eriksen:** Conceptualization,

Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **U. van der Heide:** . **S. De Ioanna:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft. **C. Gasparotto:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Project administration, Writing – original draft. **A.J. Cortese:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – original draft.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Additional members of the 2023 ESTRO Board not present at the retreat: Michael Baumann, Ben Slotman.

Members of the 2024 ESTRO Board not present at the retreat: Marianne Aznar, Icro Meattini, Uulke van der Heide.

Participating ESTRO office collaborators. Alessandro Cortese, Chiara Gasparotto, Simone De Ioanna, Charline Muco.

Participating ESTRO office Senior Management Team: Eralda Azizaj, Tania Bellon, Nathalie Cnops, Laura La Porta, Arnaud Ponsart.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Strategy Retreat | Participants.

| ESTRO Strategy Retreat   Brussels, 30.01—01.02.2023 |   |
|---|---|
| Attendees (in alphabetical order by first name)     |   |
| Anna Kirby  | Chair of Board of Directors – President                   |
| Barbara Jereczek-Fossa                              | National Societies Committee                              |
| Ben Heijmen   | Board of Directors  |
| Catharine Clark                                     | Physics Committee Chair                                   |
| Dirk Verellen                                       | Board of Directors – Treasurer                            |
| Elizabeth Forde                                     | Board of Directors – Membership Officer                   |
| Esther Troost                                       | Board of Directors  |
| Fiona McDonald                                      | Guidelines Committee Chair                                |
| Heidi Lyng  | Biology Committee Chair                                   |
| Jesper Grau Eriksen                                 | Board of Directors / Education Council                    |
| Kari Tanderup                                       | Board of Directors  |
| Karin Haustermans                                   | Clinical Committee Chair                                  |
| Kerstin Borgmann                                    | Board of Directors  |
| Mary Coffey   | Radiation Oncology Safety & Quality Committee Chair       |
| Matthias Guckenberger                               | Board of Directors – President-Elect                      |
| Nuria Jornet  | Board of Directors  |
| Petra Reijnders-Thijssen                            | Radiation Oncology Safety & Quality Committee Chair-Elect |
| Steven Petit  | Young Committee Chair                                     |
| Umberto Ricardi                                     | Board of Directors  |
| Vratislav Strnad                                    | GEC-ESTRO Committee Chair                                 |
| Yat Man Tsang                                       | RTT Committee Chair                                       |

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