

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#)
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**This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care](#)
[Committee](#) consultation on [Health and Social Care Workforce](#)**

HSC 31

**Ymateb gan: | Response from: Cymdeithas yr Anesthetyddion | Association
of Anaesthetists**





Response to the Senedd's Health and Social Care Committee's consultation on the Welsh Government's Health and Social Care workforce strategy

October 2021

The Association of Anaesthetists is made up of over 10,000 anaesthetists in the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally. We seek to promote patient care and safety, and make advances in anaesthesia through education, publications, research and international work. Along with colleagues in intensive care, anaesthesia is the largest specialty in the NHS.

Introduction

The Association welcomes many of the Government's plans and funding announcements contained within the 'A Healthier Wales', NHS Workforce Strategy, and NHS Recovery plans. However, we believe that these plans should, in order to meet the Government's aspirations for recovery and future growth within the next ten years, include specific details on the urgent and longer-term needs in anaesthesia to ensure patient safety. We need specific detail on increased recruitment (both internationally and a sustained increase in training placements) within anaesthesia. We must also see details on how we improve retention through enhanced wellbeing and employment practices and policies for the wider NHS workforce. A regularly updated, detailed workforce plan would bring together both recovery and longer term aspirations and ensure needs are met in good time.

Background

Governments across the UK have announced aspirations to increase pre-pandemic surgical capacity. Importantly to note, surgery and anaesthesia are intimately linked and there can be no sustained increase in surgery without a concomitant increase in anaesthesia.

Across Wales, the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) in 2020 found that there is a shortage of 58 consultant anaesthetists.¹ This increases to 94 if the aspiration or 'real' gap is included. This equates to a 17% gap. The supply of trained anaesthetists has not kept pace with demand.

Couple the pre-pandemic workforce shortages and lack of sufficient wellbeing and employment policies and the need to deal with the surges in COVID-19 cases along with attempting to clear the backlog in care and the prospect of greater winter pressures, the result is that the current anaesthesia workforce can not effectively and sustainably deal with the demand on current numbers.

Furthermore, the impact of this stress on the current workforce will likely mean that some anaesthetists will seek part-time employment, retire early, or simply leave the profession – making this problem even more acute.

Recommendations

Put simply, we need a sustained increase in anaesthetists trained and recruited if any of the ambitions and priorities of the Welsh Government to scale up surgical activity are to be met. In the first instance, this must involve at least plugging the gaps identified by the RCoA's workforce census. In the Health and Care Bill currently going through the UK Parliament, the Association has recommended that a yearly-reviewed and reported workforce plan should be presented to the UK Parliament to ensure needs of all specialties are met and are able to be responsive when issues arise. We believe that a

¹ The Royal College of Anaesthetists, *Medical Workforce Census Report 2020*
(<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2020-11/Medical-Workforce-Census-Report-2020.pdf>)



similar condition could ensure the implementation of the Healthier Wales and the workforce strategy plans are on track.

The Welsh Government's plans must also include specific detail on improving the working environment in the NHS, as this is an extremely important part of efforts to increase retention. The Association firmly believes there are steps that, if taken, would deliver lasting and positive change; steps such as providing flexible working arrangements, creating a healthy work/life balance and ensuring a comprehensive wellbeing and mental health system is in place – potentially styled off the UK military veterans' programme, particularly in light of the experiences seen in the pandemic.² The Association's [Fight Fatigue](#) campaign sets out practical changes which can be made in every hospital. Measures such as access to rest facilities and coffee break rooms would be beneficial and would help retain a happy workforce in high pressured roles.

Without urgent progress and action on these issues, it is difficult to see how the Government will meet two particular aims within the workforce strategy, by 2030. Namely, to (i) have a sustainable workforce in sufficient numbers to meet the health and social care needs of our population, and (ii) that the health and social care workforce will feel valued, fairly rewarded and supported wherever they work.

The Association therefore believes that we need urgent action on progressing funding and implementing actions 1, 7, 21, and 31 from the Government's workforce strategy, with specific commitments around anaesthesia and practical changes to wellbeing and employment practices, such as rest facilities and flexible working.³

Contact

For any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Association by emailing Advocacy and Campaigns Manager [REDACTED]

² The Association of Anaesthetists, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on training: a national survey of UK anaesthetic trainees*. June 2021

(<https://anaesthetists.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Membership/The%20impact%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic%20on%20training%20-%20a%20national%20survey%20of%20UK%20anaesthetic%20trainees.pdf?ver=2021-06-08-124922-263>)

³ Actions referenced:

Action 31: Develop workforce plans for key professional and occupational groups, in the first instance; Nursing, Domiciliary care, Social Work, Medicine; Action 21: Continue to invest in increasing the numbers of health and social care professionals who are trained in Wales, with a focus on value.

Action 7: Review and develop targeted schemes for a) significant shortages in professional and occupational groups and hard to recruit areas...; Action 1: Introduce a Health and Wellbeing Framework across the health and social care workforce setting clear and measurable standards to help drive improvement.

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