

HEIW Response to the Senedd Inquiry into Ophthalmology Services in Wales December 2025

Specific recommendations with actions for HEIW (1, 13,14,15,16, 17).

Recommendation 1: HEIW to be represented on an oversight board to monitor the National Clinical Strategy.

HEIW Response:

HEIW acknowledges the importance of being actively involved in the oversight of the National Clinical Strategy to ensure alignment with national priorities and to contribute expertise in workforce planning and education. At present, HEIW is awaiting formal instruction regarding its representation on the oversight board.

Recommendation 13: HEIW should provide us with an update on the work of its specialty school for ophthalmology and the head of school. This update should include:

- Progress with initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of ophthalmology trainees and consultants.
- Actions taken to promote ophthalmology as a career.
- steps to expand ophthalmology training programme, including any curriculum developments or new training pathways.
- Details of progress with developing a specific trainee recruitment programme for Wales, including timelines and expected outcomes.
- Key performance indicators to track progress, such as number of new training posts created, percentage of trainees retained in Wales post CCT, uptake of enhanced training opportunities and regional distribution of trainees and posts.

HEIW Response:

Ophthalmology training in Wales is delivered across all Health Boards, supported by advanced simulation facilities at Cardiff University. The programme meets all GMC standards and follows the Royal College of Ophthalmologists' curriculum.

Recruitment remains strong, with a 100% fill rate for the August 2025 cohort. National competition is high (21:1). HEIW and Welsh Government continue to monitor the UK recruitment landscape and adapt processes in response to policy changes.

Health Boards hold responsibility for consultant appointments. HEIW provides workforce pipeline data to support local planning. While initial post-training retention into consultant posts is low, this is in part due to many doctors choosing to undertake further Fellowships- retention improves after 1-2 years.

To strengthen earlier engagement, HEIW has expanded taster opportunities for Foundation doctors, with pan Wales availability expected by August 2026. Work is also underway to introduce Longitudinal Integrated Foundation placements, subject to expansion of Foundation

training numbers and supervisor capacity. These opportunities improve visibility and attractiveness of ophthalmology as a career.

HEIW monitors recruitment, retention and training progression KPIs, reporting regularly to the Executive Team, Board and committees. Current metrics show strong recruitment and good trainee progression. A recent increase in requests to transfer out of Wales—mostly for personal reasons—is being monitored to identify any potential systemic issues.

Recommendation 14: HEIW should provide us with an update on the specific actions being undertaken to address training capacity limitations in ophthalmology, including:

- milestones for expanding training infrastructure and supervision capacity
- plans for a phased increase in specialty training places, aligned with projected demand and workforce modelling;
- any barriers to expansion and proposed solutions.

HEIW Response:

A review of current training capacity has been completed by the Head of School across all Health Boards. Within the 2026/27 Education and Training Plan, HEIW has recommended an expansion of two training posts, which is subject to funding decisions. Based on the capacity review, a further increase of three posts is expected to be proposed for 2027/28.

The current ophthalmic training infrastructure requires revision to effectively support future trainee numbers. HEIW is supportive of the review's recommendations, which outline a regional model and the development of centres of excellence to improve patient outcomes and enhance the training environment and capacity. Once implemented, HEIW will undertake additional assessments to identify further expansion opportunities, ensuring alignment with service needs and workforce planning.

Recommendation 15: The Cabinet Secretary should commit to providing funding for additional ophthalmology specialty training places identified by HEIW in its annual education and training plan, ensuring sustainability and alignment with the scale of investment already made in primary care optometry.

HEIW Response:

HEIW's recommendations for expanding ophthalmology training places, as outlined in the 2026 Education and Training Plan, are currently under consideration by Welsh Government.

Recommendation 16: HEIW should provide us with an update on its ophthalmology workforce review, including timelines for completion and early findings.

HEIW Response:

HEIW has not received a formal request from Welsh Government to undertake an ophthalmology workforce review. In light of current financial challenges facing all NHS organisations HEIW will work collaboratively with NHS Performance & Improvement to identify how to further progress the development of the ophthalmology workforce without significant additional investment

Within secondary-care ophthalmology, the clinical workforce comprises ophthalmologists, ophthalmic nurses, orthoptists, and a small number of optometrists. Training needs for each profession are routinely assessed, and the workforce is kept under ongoing review to ensure alignment with service requirements.

HEIW has published profession-specific workforce plans that provide detailed analysis and recommendations. While each profession is considered individually, workforce planning is aligned regionally where appropriate to address demand and capacity across the ophthalmology workforce as a whole. HEIW's remit covers clinical staff only; non-clinical roles fall outside its scope.

Recommendation 17: HEIW should commit to producing a strategic, cross-professional workforce plan for ophthalmology, covering medical, nursing, optometry and allied health professionals. This plan should:

- be informed by regional demand modelling and workforce data;
- include actions to improve retention post-CCT;
- identify future workforce needs across subspecialties;
- be published before the end of February 2026

HEIW Response:

HEIW's 2025/26 remit letter did not include development of a cross-professional ophthalmology workforce plan. However, HEIW continues to publish and maintain workforce plans for Allied Health Professionals (including orthoptists), Nursing, and Optometry (via the Strategic Programme for Primary Care).

While new cross-professional plans are not currently funded, HEIW continues to analyse and share workforce intelligence across medical ophthalmology, nursing, optometry, and orthoptics. This supports evidence-based trainee pipeline planning and informs discussions with health boards, including through tools such as the CCT dashboard.

HEIW is also supporting improvements in eye care services through collaboration with Welsh Government, including:

- expanding training and development opportunities for ophthalmic nurses, including skills such as intravitreal injections

- increasing enhanced training and placements for optometrists in glaucoma and medical retina
- providing administrative and finance support for secondary-care clinics hosting optometrist placements
- scoping opportunities for wider health-care professional placements in optometry settings

HEIW will produce an options appraisal for Welsh Government outlining the requirements to develop a robust, sustainable, and agile Optometry workforce over 5-, 10-, and 15-year horizons, aligned to *A Healthier Wales* and *The Future Approach for Optometry Services*.

Key components include:

- workforce modelling to assess current and future service needs and opportunities for community-delivered care
- scenario planning and risk analysis to inform recruitment, training, and retention options
- integration of Eye Health Needs Assessments to identify gaps and support evidence-based decision-making
- continued collaboration with ophthalmology to strengthen understanding of safe patient stratification into community pathways

This approach ensures HEIW's workforce planning for eye care remains robust, evidence-based, and responsive to evolving population needs.