

From the President
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The Rt Honourable Jeremy Hunt
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Via email: huntj@parliament.uk

17 February 2023

Dear Mr Hunt,

Spring Budget 2023

I am writing to you on behalf of the Royal College of Anaesthetists ahead of the forthcoming budget.

Last year we were heartened by the Government's announcement of a long-term workforce plan for the NHS, and we very much hope to see a plan that is robust, fully funded, and addresses the UK's chronic shortage of anaesthetists.

As I'm sure you are aware, most operations cannot take place without an anaesthetist. Unfortunately, our [State of the Nation](#) report shows the NHS is approximately 1,400 senior anaesthetists short. Given the case load of the average anaesthetist, we estimate this is preventing 1 million operations and procedures from taking place per year, which is a huge barrier to addressing the NHS's large and growing elective backlog.

One reason for this shortage is a lack of higher training places in anaesthesia. Many medical students and doctors in training wish to become anaesthetists but, due to a shortage of funded higher specialist training places, fewer than half of those who finish core anaesthetic training have a higher training post to go on to. This needs to be addressed urgently. Not only is it wasting resources and potential, but also denying the NHS new members of a shortage profession that it so desperately needs. Furthermore, with 25% of anaesthetists set to retire in the next 5 years, and the number of operations set to grow due to both an aging population and advances in technology, the case for investment in higher anaesthetic training places grows stronger by the year.

Last year it was announced that 70 additional higher anaesthetic places per year for 3 years would be funded starting 2022/23. This was a welcome first step towards filling the anaesthetic training gap, however, we need to go further. On top of that we believe an additional 70 should be funded starting 2023/24 (meaning that 140 extra applicants will be able to start higher anaesthetic training each year, compared to 2021/2022 levels). While many more anaesthetists than this are needed, we believe this is the amount the training system can currently cope with.

We would welcome such announcements either alone, or as part of a wider commitment to fund the long-term plan.

Additionally, we urge you to reform pension taxation. Based on our most recent survey work, 1,133 consultant anaesthetists (14.4%) were reducing their working hours as a result of the pension taxation. If pension taxation were sufficiently reformed, those impacted may be able to rapidly increase their hours. There is likely no faster way that anaesthetic workforce capacity could be increased. These

reforms must go beyond those recently consulted upon, and tackle the core aspects of the issue including the annual and lifetime allowances.

If you think it would be helpful, my team and I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this in more detail, either virtually, at the college, or in your department. Please let me know if and when you, or one of your Ministers, would be able to do this. The best way to contact me is at president@rcoa.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Donald', with a small horizontal line at the end.

Dr Fiona Donald

PRESIDENT