



Royal College of
Anaesthetists

Tuesday 03 February 2026

Dear Ms Haughey,

Following the introduction of the *Medical Training (Prioritisation) Bill*, I am writing on behalf of the Royal College of Anaesthetists to submit evidence to support your evaluation of the proposed legislation.

Medical training system

To qualify as a consultant doctor in the UK, individuals undertake approximately five years of medical school, followed by two years of general foundation training, during which they become known as resident doctors.

After this, resident doctors start their training in a specialty area of secondary care medicine or general practice. There are 65 different medical specialties in the UK, each with varying lengths of training to gain their CCT (Certificate of Completion of Training). In anaesthesia, for example, doctors usually complete three years whole time equivalent (wte) of core anaesthetic training followed by four years wte of higher anaesthetic training.

Removal of the Resident Labour Market Test

In 2020, the UK Government removed the Resident Labour Market Test for doctors, enabling international medical graduates to apply for postgraduate medical training on equal terms with UK trained doctors. This decision was made in an effort to address workforce shortages in the NHS.

The UK Government has since asserted that this policy change has increased the number of candidates competing for posts, contributing to the growing bottlenecks across foundation and specialty training programmes.

Specialty training numbers

The table below shows the total number of **applications and unique applicants** to UK specialty training programmes. Doctors may submit multiple applications, resulting in the higher number of applications than unique applicants. This data illustrates the significant and growing bottlenecks in the medical training system. In the most recent recruitment cycle, nearly 30,000 doctors were left unable to progress with their careers.

Year	Total applications	Unique applicants				Total posts	Ratio (unique applicants to posts)
		UKMG	IMG	Non-medical graduate	Total		
2025	91,999	12,316	20,807	762	41,727	12,833	3.3:1
2024	59,698	10,635	14,871	606	32,623	12,743	2.6:1
2023	42,794	9,147	10,404	809	26,208	12,680	2.1:1
2022	36,563	9,159	8,404	761	23,715	12,105	2.0:1
2021	31,890	9,710	6,913	610	22,858	11,579	2.0:1

Note: for non-medical graduates, public health specialist training is open to both medical and non-medical graduates.

The rising competition is seen across many specialties, including anaesthesia. In 2025:

- Core anaesthetic training: 6,770 doctors applied for 539 posts - a competition ratio of 12.6:1 (almost double the 6.5:1 ratio in 2024).
- Higher anaesthetic training: 699 doctors applied for 423 posts – a competition ratio of 1.6:1 (consistent since 2024).

We are pleased to see the government taking action towards addressing the bottlenecks in specialty training, which are preventing many doctors from progressing in their careers and negatively impacting their wellbeing.

At the same time, it remains crucial that International Medical Graduates, who bring valuable expertise to the NHS, continue to be supported, respected, and valued. Our full response to the proposed legislation is available here: <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/news/rcoa-response-new-legislation-prioritise-uk-medical-graduates>

While we're pleased that action is being taken, it is also important to note that our 2025 Anaesthetic Workforce Census confirms a national shortage of trained anaesthetists, which is directly impacting patient access to treatment. Resolving this will require an increase in the number of specialty training places and support for all anaesthetists to have the opportunity to progress their careers to independent practice. We hence also urge all UK governments to address this side of the equation too.

If you require any further information or support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,



Dr Claire Shannon
RCoA President