



The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

College Workforce Strategy 2025–2028

The College launches its new Workforce Strategy.

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Author: Amy Johnson

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In the face of ongoing workforce challenges in pathology services, the College has developed a new Workforce Strategy that will be implemented over the next 4 years. The College will continue to listen to the needs of our members and use this data to engage and influence decision-makers.

Persistent challenges across the pathology workforce continue to deepen. Chronic workforce shortages, rising workloads, and widening recruitment and retention gaps are placing increasing strain on services. In some specialties, such as paediatric and perinatal pathology, service collapse has already occurred, while many other specialties are reaching crisis points.

Early findings from our ongoing workforce census highlight growing concerns about workforce sustainability and wellbeing.

- More than 80% of respondents so far believe current staffing levels are insufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of their service in the face of rising clinical demand.
- 40% of respondents have reported a decrease or significant decrease in job satisfaction over the past year.

A new Workforce Strategy

Workforce remains a top priority for the College and we are fully committed to addressing the challenges facing the pathology workforce. Recognising the need for a clear, strategic approach, the College has launched its first dedicated Workforce Strategy.

Our vision is clear: to advocate for a pathology workforce that is provided with the right resources and the right support to deliver the highest quality of care for patients.

The strategy is grounded by 6 core pillars: intelligence, engagement, training, retention, reform and contingency.

The Strategy will be delivered in phases across 4 years. An early focus on data intelligence and engagement will set the foundations we need to inform training, retention, reform and contingency aims in the years ahead.

Aim 1: Gather and report on data intelligence

Relying solely on existing professional establishment data is not sufficient for determining future workforce needs. Segmented data collection across external organisations and the lack of coordinated national reporting on pathology workload data make it difficult to measure rising demand against workforce shortages.

Despite these challenges, we are committed to establishing a clear, evidence-based picture through the collection, analysis and reporting of workforce and workload data to support our advocacy efforts.

Key initiatives under Aim 1 include:

- **enhancing internal data** – strengthening the College’s workforce intelligence through initiatives like our revamped workforce census
- **direct-to-service surveys** – gaining insights into headcounts, whole-time equivalents and vacancies across UK pathology services
- **collating external data sources** – bringing together information from the 4 nations, the GMC and other organisations to build a comprehensive national picture. This includes utilising freedom of information requests where possible to collect pathology workload figures
- **predictive workforce modelling** – anticipating future workforce needs to identify potential shortages before they arise and inform contingency planning
- **targeted reporting** – producing impactful, specialty-specific and regionally focused reports to highlight workforce challenges and nuances within each area of pathology.

Aim 2: Engage and influence stakeholders

While we focus on building a strong evidence base under Aim 1, we will continue to engage with key stakeholders. With government and NHS plans on the horizon – including the NHS 10-Year Plan, the revised Long Term Workforce Plan, the National Cancer Plan and the Specialty Training Review – the College will continue to submit evidence and solutions to ensure the pathology workforce is represented.

Key initiatives under Aim 2 include:

- **specialty and regional committee collaboration** – engaging with specialty and regional committees to address workforce challenges and ensure workforce issues remain a standing priority
- **direct engagement with NHS, HSC and government leaders** – advocating for pathology workforce needs to be embedded in national workforce planning and policy development
- **strengthening the Pathology Alliance** – working collaboratively to amplify the professional voice of pathology
- **crisis response mechanisms** – developing strategies to respond proactively to emerging workforce pressures across pathology services
- **advocating for workforce investment** – pushing for investment in training pathways, consultant posts and long-term workforce sustainability, backed by robust evidence
- **proactive stakeholder communications** – keeping professionals, policymakers and external stakeholders informed and engaged in the College’s workforce planning efforts.

Aims 3–6: Train, retain, reform and contingency

To deliver Aims 3 through 6 in the coming years:

- we will listen to pathologists in training and new consultants and use the intelligence we gather to guide and support stakeholders to attract and retain the future workforce.
- we will support the professional and personal wellbeing of pathologists by addressing the urgent need to improve job satisfaction, wellbeing and career progression opportunities to ensure we retain the current workforce.
- we will explore the breadth of options to manage increasing pathology workloads.

- we will provide guidance to pathology services in managing barriers to safe and effective practice and support them to prioritise and manage workloads in the face of adversity.

Keeping you informed

As we continue to implement the strategy over the next 4 years, we will continue to keep our members and stakeholders updated on the progress of our work.

We will be a louder voice for the profession and we will use the skills and expertise within and beyond the College to understand and lobby for the changes the pathology workforce needs, both now and for the future.

You can read the full Workforce Strategy [here](#).

Meet the author

AMY JOHNSON

WORKFORCE AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

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