

Association
of Anaesthetists

Manifesto for the next General Election

Representing
the life-changing,
life-saving
profession of
anaesthesia.



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anaesthetists.org

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In advance of the General Election, the Association of Anaesthetists encourages all current MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates to look at ways to improve the National Health Service to make it work more effectively for the patients that use it and the medical professionals that work within it - including anaesthetists.

The Association has developed 6 policy asks for the next Government.



1

Make the NHS a competitive and attractive place to work



2

Produce regular reports to show progress against latest workforce strategies and plans



3

Look at issues with recruiting clinicians, including anaesthetists, and develop solutions



4

Understand the reasons clinicians are leaving the health service and look at policy solutions to improve retention



5

Ensure AAs are a properly regulated and assessed addition to an expanded medical anaesthetic workforce



6

Include anaesthetists in policy discussions and development from the very start



1

Make the NHS a competitive and attractive place to work



NHS Staff surveys have shown that satisfaction with working in the health service is decreasing at an alarming rate. The 2022 NHS Staff survey stated that only 57% of respondents would recommend their organisation as a place to work compared to 66% in 2020 with many anaesthetists looking to retire earlier or leave the service altogether at a younger and younger age, the NHS needs to be a competitive and attractive place to work to make sure it can attract all the people it needs - and keep them.

To achieve this, the next Government should:

- Put the wellbeing of staff at the core of every NHS organisation
- Make sure workplaces are configured and equipped following proven ergonomic science
- Promote the appointment of wellbeing leads in each anaesthetic department
- Support the fundamental wellbeing of staff by giving them:
 - access to rest facilities that meet the standards set by the Fight Fatigue campaign (www.anaesthetists.org/Home/Wellbeing-support/Fatigue)
 - access to hot food and drink 24/7
 - a locker for their belongings
 - a safe way to get to and from the hospital whatever the time of day



2

Produce regular reports to show progress against latest workforce strategies and plans



The NHS is currently facing a workforce crisis with vacancies in the tens of thousands - currently the anaesthetic workforce is over 1400 clinicians short with over 90% of departments reporting they have at least one consultant vacancy.



To solve this the next Government should:

- Look at ways to address the deficit in the number of consultant and specialist anaesthetists needed
- Commission a full review of the structure and duration of all phases of medical training to optimise the time taken from starting medical school to taking up their ultimate post in the speciality of their choice
- Produce regular - at least 6 monthly - reports on the current state of the NHS workforce and present them to Parliament
- Review training post vacancies on a regular basis to make sure gaps are filled and are not increasing in number

3

Address recruitment difficulties



Despite the gaps in the workforce, each year a significant number of core trainees in anaesthesia are unable to get a place on a specialty training scheme to allow them to continue their training. Many SAS and locally employed doctors are also not offered the opportunity to develop their careers.

To solve this the next Government should:

- Increase the number of places on specialty training schemes
- Understand, recognise and develop the pool of talent available in SAS/locally employed cohort of doctors

4

Address retention difficulties



Retention of anaesthetists is crucial and depends upon attractive employment prospects and a good work/life balance. In its Medical Workforce Census Report 2020, the RCoA found that 333 consultants (4.2% of the consultant workforce) and 45 SAS doctors (2.8%) retired in the year preceding the census, both higher figures than in 2015.

In addition to making the NHS a more attractive place to work - as outlined above - the next Government should also:

- Address the reasons that mean a sizeable proportion of doctors chose to leave training at the end of foundation or core training
- Review and revise examination structures to ensure that knowledgeable and skilled doctors are not lost from specialties simply because they have difficulties with examination structure
- Restore remuneration and annual cost of living increases to a level that is competitive in a world market
- Design, in addition to salary, financial incentives to join and stay with the NHS (for example, staged retention bonuses after specified time periods, perhaps tied to reducing student debt)



5

Ensure AAs are a properly regulated and assessed addition to an expanded medical anaesthetic workforce



Currently there are around 180 anaesthesia associates (AAs) working around the UK with the number predicted to increase in the coming years. The Association of Anaesthetists believes that AAs have a role to play as part of the wider anaesthesia team but it is important to make sure this is a complementary role and does not impact on the capacity to train all other medically-qualified anaesthetists. We do not support the rapid proposed expansion of numbers of AAs until the regulation is in place and tested in practice

To make sure the AA role complements the current anaesthesia workforce, the next Government should:

- Ensure that the Order regulating AAs is robust and is regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, updated
- Develop standardised national curricula and assessments for all AAs
- Ensure that training for AAs does not negatively impact on the availability of opportunities for trainee anaesthetists
- Develop a funding model to make sure that AA regulation and examinations are not subsidised by doctors

6

Include anaesthetists in policy discussions and development from the very start of the process



Anaesthetists are involved in the care of more than two thirds of all hospital patients, they make up the largest group of hospital doctors and account for one in six of all NHS consultants. Yet when new policy is being developed, anaesthetists are rarely consulted.

The next Government should:

- Involve anaesthetists from the beginning in the development of new health policies
- Include case studies involving anaesthetists and their work when talking about new health policies

Who are anaesthetists?

Anaesthetists are specialist doctors who are responsible for providing anaesthesia to patients for operations and procedures. In addition anaesthetists have a range of practice which extends beyond anaesthesia for surgery to include pain management and intensive care.

Anaesthetists form the largest specialty group of doctors in NHS hospitals. They are doctors who have chosen after qualifying to undertake postgraduate specialist training of at least seven years in anaesthesia, intensive care medicine and pain management.

An anaesthetist cares for you during your operation and will:

- Discuss types of anaesthesia with you and help you to make choices
- Discuss the risks of anaesthesia with you
- Agree a plan with you for your anaesthetic and pain control
- Be responsible for giving you your anaesthetic and for your wellbeing and safety throughout your procedure
- Manage any blood transfusions you may need
- Plan your care, if needed, in the Intensive Care Unit or High Dependency Unit
- Make your experience as calm and pain free as possible

As well as providing care during operations, anaesthetists are also involved in managing pain relief during childbirth, pain clinics, intensive care, high dependency, and resuscitation services. They are also involved in hospital administration, teaching and training, research and auditing.

How many anaesthetists are there?

According to the Royal College of Anaesthetists workforce census 2020 in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there were:



7,959

consultant anaesthetists

1,781

SAS and Trust doctors

4,804

anaesthetists in training

The Association of Anaesthetists is made up of over 10,000 anaesthetists in the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally. It works to improve safety and quality in patient care, promote anaesthetists' wellbeing, and produce guidelines for the specialty.

To find out more about any of the issues in this document, or to meet with representatives of the Association, please contact **Jenny Gowen, Advocacy and Campaigns Manager** (jennygowen@anaesthetists.org)

Safer, for everyone

Every anaesthetist aims to keep their patients safe. We aim to safeguard every anaesthetist – by educating, supporting and inspiring them throughout their career.

We represent the life-changing, life-saving profession of anaesthesia – by supporting, informing and inspiring a worldwide community of over 10,000 members.

Our work and members span the globe, yet our voice is local and personal. We stay in close contact with our members, look after their day-to-day wellbeing, and act as their champion.

Our world-class conferences, journals and online resources educate and inform, and our respected guidelines continually improve standards of patient safety.

We preserve and learn from the history of anaesthesia. We use that to inform the present, and facilitate vital research and innovation into its future.

As an independent organisation, we speak up freely and openly for the interests of anaesthetists and their patients. We influence policy, raise public awareness and are at the forefront of safer anaesthesia across the world.

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Association of Anaesthetists is the brand name used to refer to both the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain & Ireland and its related charity, AAGBI Foundation (England & Wales no. 293575 and in Scotland no. SC040697).



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