



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

The Royal College of Pathologists

Workforce strategy
2025–2028

The Royal College
of Pathologists



The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology.

We work with pathologists and scientists across 17 specialties at every stage of their career – from setting curricula, organising training and running exams, to approving job descriptions, publishing clinical guidelines and providing continuing professional development.

We also engage with a wide range of stakeholders to encourage them to learn more about pathology and the vital role it plays in everybody's healthcare.

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Foreword

The pathology workforce is, first and foremost, people who dedicate their lives to pathology and laboratory services to the benefit of patients and healthcare. The amount and complexity of the work they do are impacted by expectations and the resources available, including the quality of the environment in which they function. The workforce needs to be heard, valued and supported.

This RCPATH Workforce strategy seeks to address the factors that can affect the viability of pathology services across the UK. It looks beyond the task of workforce data collection and sets out the actions we will take to influence the changes required for pathology. These changes are vital in ensuring that high-quality care is provided to patients and high standards are upheld.

Relying on current professional establishment data is not a realistic base from which we can envisage the numbers and skills of the future pathology workforce. We need to be able to develop a workforce where the volume and skill mix is modelled on the increasing volume and complexity of pathology work in the UK, so patients receive efficient, effective and up-to-date information for their diagnosis and ongoing care.

Our strategy is grounded by 6 core pillars: intelligence, engagement, training, retention, reform and contingency planning. That said, we promise to be agile and forward-looking in our efforts to support the workforce, and we will amend our approach if that is what is needed. 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.

Professor Peter Johnston, RCPATH Vice President for Workforce and Corporate Engagement

Our vision

A pathology workforce provided with the right resources and the right support to deliver the highest quality of care for patients.



Our strategy

Over the next 4 years, we will be led by 6 strategic aims. Aims 1 and 2 underpin aims 3–6.

<p>1. Gather and report on intelligence</p> <p>Gather, analyse and report on the data we can in relation to current and future trends for workforce and workload.</p>			
<p>2. Engage and influence stakeholders</p> <p>Ensure our data, interpretation, commentary and conclusions are informed by pathologist expertise and fed into the relevant stakeholder’s workstreams to support the realisation of this strategy.</p>			
<p>3. Enable the next generation of pathologists (train)</p> <p>Listen to pathologists in training and new consultants and use the intelligence we gather to inform guidance and support for stakeholders to attract and retain the current and future pathology workforce.</p>	<p>4. Support our established workforce (retain)</p> <p>Support the wellbeing of pathologists and provide guidance for employers to aid retention of the workforce.</p>	<p>5. Transform ways of working (reform)</p> <p>Explore the breadth and depth of solutions to manage the pathology workload and develop intelligent solutions to support the pathology workforce.</p>	<p>6. Prioritise patient care (contingency)</p> <p>Provide guidance to pathology services in managing barriers to safe and effective pathology practice, supporting them to prioritise and manage workloads in the face of adversity.</p>

Aim 1. Gather and report on data intelligence

We will gather, analyse and act on data in relation to current and future trends for workforce and workload. This is more than numbers. It includes expectations, ambitions, requirements and opportunities.

- Enhance and improve the data held internally by the College in relation to pathologists in training (medically qualified specialist registrars and clinical scientist trainees) and members.



- Run surveys to collect and analyse quantitative data, including headcount, whole-time-equivalents, vacancies, workload, and career and retirement intentions. Enhance this with the collection and analysis of qualitative data, such as morale and wellbeing of the workforce and impacts of workforce pressures on service delivery and patient care.
- Where possible, collate external data sources to supplement our own, for example from the NHS, General Medical Council (GMC), Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS), Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), Association of Anatomical Pathology Technology (AAPT), Statutory Education Bodies (SEBs), Royal College of Physicians (RCP) and Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board (JRCPTB), etc.

- Use the data we gather to help predict training needs for both medically and scientifically qualified pathologists and highlight shortfalls that will impact future service delivery.
- Ensure workforce agenda items and objectives are set for all College Specialty Advisory Committees (SACs) and specialist committees, to ensure they help gather the breadth and depth of workforce and workload data and feedback the appropriate opinion and commentary.
- Develop specialty-specific and region-specific workforce publications highlighting the issues and challenges facing pathology, backed by robust data and insights.
- Forecast future workforce/workload imbalance to help inform contingency arrangements.



Aim 2. Engage and influence stakeholders

We will ensure our data, interpretation, commentary and conclusions are informed by pathologist expertise and fed into the relevant stakeholder's workstreams, to support lobbying efforts.

- Establish a workforce committee to oversee development of the 6 strategic aims of this workforce strategy.
- Work closely with College SACs and intercollegiate committees, so they are able to support the development of College position statements and communications.
- Liaise with Pathology Alliance groups to ensure issues around the wider pathology workforce are collaboratively considered.
- Ensure active engagement with the relevant NHS leaders, senior officials and workforce leads within the 4 NHS systems in the UK is retained and that College workforce outputs are communicated in a timely and relevant manner.
- Work with other stakeholders to enhance support for responsible international recruitment for specialty training, specialty and associate specialist (SAS) doctor and consultant positions.
- Advocate for the necessary expansion of the pathology workforce, with emphasis on consultant and specialist training posts, by engaging with the relevant decision-makers and policymakers.
- Work with other stakeholders on specialty-specific service level crises as and when needed.
- Develop a communications plan to ensure all stakeholders are kept up to date with our work.

Aim 3. Enable the next generation of pathologists (train)

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 established and future pathology workforce.

- Work closely with pathologists in training and new consultants to identify the factors that attract individuals to our training places and understand the potential barriers to taking up a career in pathology.
- Develop our work to attract individuals to a career in pathology.
- Provide guidance and support to training centres and employers on retention of pathologists in training, with a focus on job plans, the estate, infrastructure, culture and wellbeing in the training environment.
- Stress the need to increase the complement of educators in pathology to enable learning, training and supervision of multiple groups in the workplace. This includes advocating for trainers to have adequate, funded supporting professional activities (SPA) time for training the future workforce.
- Encourage the redevelopment of clinical academic pathology to underpin research and development in our disciplines.



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.

Aim 4. Support our established workforce (retain)

We will support the professional and personal wellbeing of pathologists, highlight the reasons pathologists leave the profession and provide guidance for employers to enable improved retention of their workforce.

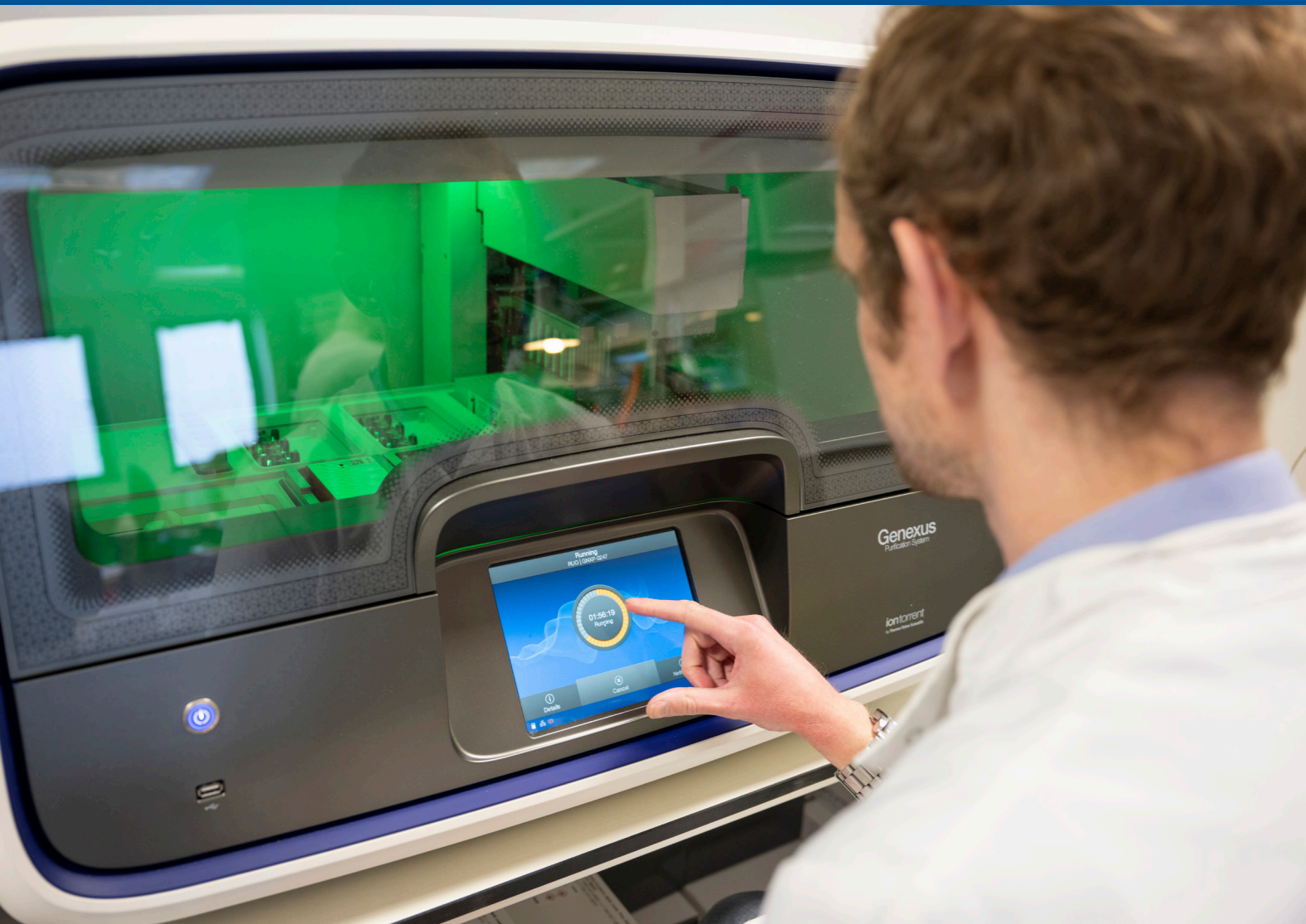
- Work with employers in both the NHS and private/industry sectors to highlight factors affecting retention of pathology staff and ensure retention is optimised, with a focus on senior staff.
- Deliver a suite of resources to support the professional and personal ownership, development and wellbeing of pathologists in the workplace.



Aim 5. Transform ways of working (reform)

We will explore the breadth and depth of options to manage increasing pathology workloads, which are beyond the capacity of the workforce, and develop intelligent solutions to support this workforce/workload imbalance.

- Explore how the design of the pathology workforce and laboratory buildings and equipment can be properly considered to help ensure that future workload can be managed through advances such as automation.
- Work with other stakeholders to further develop options for an expanded pathology workforce, for example extended roles for biomedical and clinical scientists across pathology services.
- Work with consultants, residents, SAS doctors and scientists to support them in their educational, clinical and leadership roles.
- Develop, promote and disseminate best practice recommendations for process improvement within pathology services to improve the efficacy and efficiency of workflows (automation, digital and AI).
- Influence and guide the growth of diagnostic stewardship across healthcare, ensuring the most efficient and effective approach to testing.
- Use intelligence gathered to provide guidance on planning of future models of pathology services, ensuring that key quality and non-service elements, including education, training, research, quality improvement, quality assurance and service development are all retained regardless of the provider of the service (across all sectors).



- Explore new and innovative ways of organising and funding pathology training and pathology services, as a whole or individual services or tests, to safeguard future service delivery.
- Develop 'pathology pathways' as a way of focusing and highlighting the important role that individual or cascade pathology testing can bring to patient care and the efficiency of healthcare services.

Aim 6. Prioritise patient care (contingency)

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

- Monitor emerging supply chain or market withdrawal issues and implement ready to go critical diagnostic stewardship contingency plans to offset any shortages.
- Monitor potential withdrawal of specific tests or services linked to regulatory barriers and implement contingency plans.
- Work with the Pathology Alliance and other groups representing pathology to develop guidance on regulatory changes and the likely impacts for pathology and a regulatory toolkit for services to assess their vulnerability and requirements.
- Facilitate engagement between industry and relevant pathology groups, such as the Pathology Alliance, through our corporate membership work to share intelligence about supply chain or regulatory issues that could impact services and provide support and guidance to our members.
- Create guidance on how services can set up diagnostic stewardship contingency groups to ensure contingency planning is in place.
- Support services in how to prioritise the tests of most value and benefit to patients where workload cannot be met.



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