



The Royal College of Radiologists

***From the Office of the President
Dr Katharine Halliday MB ChB FRCS FRCR***

Karin Smyth MP
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

Thursday 9th January 2025

Dear Minister,

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the widespread recruitment freezes in cancer and diagnostic departments across the country. These freezes pose a significant risk to patient outcomes, workforce sustainability, productivity, as well as the achievement of your key healthcare commitments. As an immediate priority, I would urge you to raise this with issue with NHS England leadership to ensure that the cancer and diagnostics workforce are excluded from cost cutting mechanisms.

According to our preliminary 2024 census data, at least one-fifth of NHS trusts are pausing the recruitment of their cancer or diagnostics workforce. Freezes have been reported in every region of England, undermining workforce growth and compounding the strain on services. The causes of these freezes are varied: some trusts are taking these steps to balance local budgets, while others have had recruitment freezes imposed, which prevents the hiring of new trainees, consultants, and specialty and specialist (SAS) doctors.

Recruitment freezes across the NHS mean that, in 2024, there may not be sufficient consultant posts for newly qualified radiologists and oncologists. The number of advertised radiology consultant posts has dropped from 519 in 2023 to just 152 in 2024. Such reductions will lengthen waiting lists amidst rising demand – especially against the context of a shortfall of 1,962 consultant radiologists.

While we acknowledge the financial pressures faced by the Government and NHS, we strongly believe that cancer and diagnostic services should be exempt from such cost-cutting mechanisms. Diagnostic activity underpins over 85% of clinical pathways; reporting delays already hinder timely treatments, worsening outcomes and reducing the value of interventions. These freezes also threaten commitments in your recently published elective reform plan, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan as well as your ambition to improve early cancer diagnosis.

Sustainable investment in consultant posts is not merely desirable; it is essential. We urge you to immediately raise this issue with the NHS England leadership team. We are asking that:

1. Trusts who have been placed under funding freezes should be allowed to continue to invest in their cancer and diagnostics workforce.



2. All hospitals should be required to develop a long-term funding plan for the cancer and diagnostics workforce, which covers both training and consultant posts.
3. The Government should prioritise the radiology and oncology workforce in the Spending Review 2025, by growing the number of specialty training places to meet rising demand.

The NHS's ability to meet patient needs depends on a robust and well-supported workforce. We stand ready to support efforts to achieve this and are keen to discuss these concerns further. A full briefing on this challenge has been shared with you in my original email.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Halliday', written in a cursive style.

Dr Katharine Halliday
President

