



The Royal College of Radiologists

The Royal College of Radiologists  
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15 September 2026

Karin Smyth MP  
Minister of State for Health  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU  
(Sent via email)

Dear Minister Smyth,

**Re: Urgent intervention in clinical oncology and clinical radiology consultant recruitment freezes**

We are writing to urge you to intervene in the growing issue of consultant recruitment freezes in cancer centres and radiology departments. These recruitment freezes are jeopardising timely diagnosis and cancer treatment, with [90% of cancer centre leaders reporting delays to treatment](#) and [80% of radiology department heads reporting seeing patients' conditions worsening](#) because of staff shortages in 2025.

Last year recruitment freezes were imposed on 57% of England's specialist cancer treatment centres, more than double the 24% of the previous year. In the same period, 39% of radiology departments in England also had a recruitment freeze imposed on them. Again, this is more than double the figure in the previous year.

The NHS is consistently failing to meet both diagnostic waiting time and cancer treatment targets. But trusts are imposing recruitment freezes on these vital services in an effort to meet government demands for them to 'balance their books'. These recruitment freezes only reduce the likelihood of diagnostic and cancer targets being met. It is ultimately patients who suffer, with many facing worrying waits for a diagnosis and, in some cases, seeing their cancer outcomes worsen.

Recruitment freezes are creating immediate and long-term risks for patient care by limiting the consultant workforce needed to deliver timely diagnosis and cancer



treatment. For resident doctors, there are real concerns that there may be no substantive consultant posts available for them when they qualify. At the same time, cancer centre and radiology department heads report being unable to take up new training posts because recruitment freezes have reduced training capacity. With 257 clinical radiology and 46 clinical oncology residents forecast to finish training this year and a further 408 and 104 respectively expected to complete training next year, recruitment freezes must end so these doctors can provide the patient care they have trained for. Unless addressed, services will be left without the senior doctors needed to make sure patients get timely diagnoses and the best possible cancer care.

The government must intervene to prevent trusts from imposing recruitment freezes on cancer centres and radiology departments. To do so would send a clear message to the public that the government is serious about tackling waiting lists and delivering on commitments made in the 10-Year Health Plan and National Cancer Plan.

We look forward to your response setting out how the government will tackle the doubling of recruitment freezes in our services over the last year. We would also welcome a meeting to discuss how we can work together to make sure the negative impact of recruitment freezes on patient care is addressed.

We can of course share more data on this issue if helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact [policy@rcr.ac.uk](mailto:policy@rcr.ac.uk) should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

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