The Royal College of Radiologists

The Royal College of Radiologists
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11 November 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,

Thank you for your 9 October letter in response to our open letter about consultant recruitment freezes.

Your letter refers to new training places the government has recently committed to creating, which are extremely welcome. So too are your plans for more oncology training places in the areas that need them most. We look forward to learning more about how this work is progressing.

However, our letter raised specific concerns about SAS and consultant recruitment freezes in radiology departments and cancer centres. These recruitment freezes risk undermining the positive impact of new training places. Most importantly, they are also having a real, direct impact on cancer care, radiology provision and patient outcomes. This includes:

- Cancer services being unable to provide treatment for some cancers because they are not allowed to recruit.
- Patients facing longer waits for scan reports which is known to contribute to their condition deteriorating and delays to treatment.
- Soaring outsourcing spend, with emergency, inpatient and outpatient departments having reduced access to the wider clinical advice, continuity of care and support that SAS and consultant radiologists provide.
- Capacity for the supervision of trainees being severely limited, meaning that despite the welcome expansion of training posts, cancer centres and radiology departments cannot take these up.

From April to June, the Faster Diagnosis Standard for people diagnosed with cancer was 54.8%, against a target of 80%. Too many patients continue to wait longer than 6 weeks for a CT or MRI, and the 31-day decision to treat standard has not been met since 2020. While your letter suggests that individual NHS employers are making recruitment decisions which will ensure they can 'deliver safe and effective care', this data suggests that they are not managing to do so.

As the Minister responsible for the NHS workforce, you have the authority to intervene by sending a letter to all NHS providers asking them to end recruitment freezes in clinical radiology and clinical oncology. Doing this would send a clear message to cancer patients, those waiting for a diagnosis, and the NHS doctors working tirelessly to support them that you view addressing these issues as a priority.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope you will consider meeting with us so we can work together to reverse the patient impact of these recruitment freezes.

Yours sincerely,

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