

# The Royal College of Pathologists' election priorities for Wales 2026

The Royal College of Pathologists' (RCPATH) [Wales Regional Council](#) comprises specialty members who provide professional leadership in Wales and contribute to the maintenance and development of pathology services and the quality of care that patients receive at a national and UK level.

Pathologists are doctors and scientists who are essential to diagnosis and treatment to improve patient care. The work of pathologists supports patients throughout their entire life. Without pathologists we cannot understand what is making a patient unwell.

As experts in illness and disease, they use their expertise to support every aspect of healthcare from interpreting laboratory results to making diagnoses, guiding treatment and directing clinical care. They use cutting-edge genetic technologies to treat patients with life-threatening conditions. They play a critical role in education and research, and in devising new treatments to fight infections and diseases like cancer and diabetes.

In this priorities document, we look at the key challenges facing pathologists in Wales and call on the new government to address these areas.

## Investing in workforce for patients

- Safe and effective high-quality patient care relies on the right number of skilled health staff in the right places. Pathology staffing numbers have not risen in line with demand and some pathology services are unable to recruit to vacant posts. The RCPath workforce census<sup>1</sup> reports that 74% of pathology staff in Wales do not think current staffing levels are adequate to ensure long-term sustainability of the service and to meet growing clinical demand.
- The College welcomes the NHS Wales Performance and Productivity Independent Review<sup>2</sup> and its recommendation that pathology be designated a priority fragile service that requires urgent national and regional solutions.
- Increased investment is urgently needed in pathology services, particularly in the recruitment and training of pathologists and scientists. More funded training places are needed across all pathology disciplines to help meet the rising demand for cancer diagnosis.
- There is an urgent need to invest in the recruitment of pathology staff, especially in the more rural parts of Wales, to alleviate delays in diagnosis and to support timely diagnosis in supporting cancer screening initiatives such as lung, breast and colon cancers.
- It can be hard to recruit and retain doctors and nurses who are willing to work in smaller hospitals. This means patients wait longer for a diagnosis and often have to travel long distances. Health boards have to rely more heavily on expensive agency staff to fill gaps in rotas. Financial incentives should be offered to trainees who choose to work in hard to recruit for areas.

## IT for better patient care

- Robust and modern IT systems are vital for pathologists' day-to-day work, including modern, functional Laboratory Information Management systems (LIMS), voice-recognition support, electronic patient records and remote-working software for multidisciplinary teams. The introduction of an All-Wales LIMS is welcomed by the College and will enable data sharing across boards.



- However, for the next LIMS upgrade, procurement teams must ensure that supplying companies have the expertise and experience to deliver LIMS to avoid NHS staff picking up the burden of implementation and delivery. Once LIMS is ready for roll out, there must be staff skilled in IT delivery for its implementation and protected time for clinicians and scientists to carry out testing.
- Digital pathology – the collection, management, sharing and interpretation of pathology information in a digital environment – has been shown to improve patient care and support the pathology workforce by making the diagnosis and monitoring of disease much more efficient. It will bring faster and easier access to expert opinion and advice, with the rapid referral of cases between pathology networks or between organisations.
- The Welsh Government must ensure the implementation of digital pathology so staff can work more efficiently and flexibly and to prepare the ground to benefit from the role artificial intelligence (AI) can play in diagnosis. The workforce, be it clinical or scientific, must be rigorously trained and expert, and that that will include ensuring the next generation is AI literate. The move to digital pathology needs to be completed and followed through with the right infrastructure.
- While the [Welsh Clinical Portal](#), designed to give NHS health professionals in Wales access to patients' digital health records in one place, is produced centrally by Digital Health and Care Wales, the roll out is individual health board based, which can make coordinated use of patient data difficult and means it is not possible to introduce Wales-wide initiatives to optimise patient care.

## NHS estate

- Much of the NHS Estate in Wales, including pathology laboratories, is aging. Many buildings were not originally designed to house modern diagnostic equipment and can present challenges for infection control and data connectivity.
- The Ministerial Advisory Group's NHS Wales review described pathology estates as 'unfit for purpose', with many laboratories lacking sufficient space for modern equipment like digital scanners. This all contributes to low morale, with the RCPATH workforce census<sup>1</sup> reporting that 39% of staff in Wales do not think building facilities enable them to do their job effectively.



- The College welcomes the National Diagnostic Strategy<sup>3</sup> that launched in 2022 and aims to modernise infrastructure.
- The government must urgently invest ring-fenced capital and operational funding for laboratory refurbishment and digital pathology equipment. Minimum environmental and operational standards must be set for pathology spaces, e.g. airflow and space per staff member.

## **Integrate NHS services to ensure equitable care**

- The NHS in Wales is fragmented. Multiple health boards operate pathology laboratories and services, without national coordination, leading to inconsistent practices across regions and variation in test availability and turnaround times. This has been noted by the [Ministerial Advisory Group's NHS Wales review](#),<sup>2</sup> which reported that there is no clear national strategy to develop sustainable diagnostic capacity across Wales, leaving individual health boards to act in isolation, compounding fragmentation in pathology service delivery.
- The government in Wales should support, where appropriate, regionally integrated services like those suggested in Southwest and Southeast England. This will reduce variation and lead to consistent practices, improving diagnostic equity and ensuring better outcomes for patients.

## **References**

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2. Ministerial Advisory Group NHS Performance and Productivity. *NHS Wales performance and productivity: independent review*. Available at: [www.gov.wales/nhs-wales-performance-and-productivity-independent-review](http://www.gov.wales/nhs-wales-performance-and-productivity-independent-review)
3. Welsh Government. *Diagnostics Recovery and Transformation Strategy for Wales 2023–2025*. Available at: [www.gov.wales/diagnostics-recovery-and-transformation-strategy-wales-2023-2025](http://www.gov.wales/diagnostics-recovery-and-transformation-strategy-wales-2023-2025)

