



Royal College  
of Surgeons  
of England  
ADVANCING SURGICAL CARE

ASiT

Jo Lenaghan, Interim Director General, People, DHSC

5 March 2026

Dear Jo Lenaghan,

### **Ensuring patient safety through continued support for TIG Fellowships**

We write on behalf of the UK surgical community to raise an urgent patient safety concern regarding 'Training Interface Groups (TIG) Fellowships'.

Across the health service, specialist care including breast conservation or reconstruction following breast cancer, head and neck cancer, major trauma, cleft lip and palate conditions, skin cancer, spinal conditions, and complex hand disorders depends on surgeons who possess expertise that spans multiple disciplines. For decades, this experience has been delivered through Training Interface Group (TIG) Fellowships: structured, quality-assured national programmes undertaken at the end of training.

In August 2025, central funding and national support for TIG Fellowships were withdrawn with no warning or consultation. As a result, from August 2026 no new surgeons in England will enter TIG training programmes, and no alternative national mechanism has been identified to ensure the safe development of cross-disciplinary surgical expertise.

The erosion of national coordinated supra-specialist training poses a direct risk to future patient care. A sustained reduction in these pathways would lead to:

- Reduced workforce capacity in complex and interdisciplinary surgical services
- Increasing difficulty in maintaining safe, specialist services as senior surgeons retire
- Long-term impacts on access to timely, high-quality surgical care

TIG fellowships exist precisely to prevent such vulnerabilities: they ensure that surgeons acquire the cross-disciplinary competence needed to manage complex, high-risk conditions safely.

Without access to these posts, the NHS may be forced to rely on international recruitment and UK trainees may have to seek essential experience abroad. This runs counter to other policy initiatives seeking to improve job opportunities for UK medical school graduates.

There are clear risks to patient safety. We would be grateful if you can clarify:

- National commissioning and funding arrangements for TIG training in the 2026/27 financial year.
- The impact assessment undertaken by DHSC and NHS England – particularly the expected impact on patient safety and training pathways.
- Any alternative plans you have in place to ensure services continue to benefit from surgeons with the right specialist skillsets.

Patients rely on an NHS that can deliver complex surgical care safely and consistently. Without decisive action, there is a real threat to the sustainability of specialist services.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and to work collaboratively to help ensure that patients continue to have access to high-quality, specialist surgical care in the years ahead.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Yours sincerely,

**Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT)**  
**The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS England)**  
**Association of Defence General and Vascular Surgeons**  
**Association of Otolaryngologists in Training (AOT)**  
**British Neurosurgical Trainees Association (BNTA)**  
**British Orthopaedics Trainee Association (BOTA)**  
**BAUS Section of Trainees (BSoT)**

**Duke's Club**  
**The Herrick Society**  
**The Mammary Fold**  
**The Moynihan Academy (MA)**  
**Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Fellows in Training (OMFS FIT)**  
**Plastic Surgery Trainees Association (PLASTA)**  
**Roux Group**  
**Rouleaux Club**  
**National Trainee Committee for Cardiothoracic Surgery (NTCCTS)**  
**Trainees in Paediatric Surgery (TriPS)**

