



*21st of November 2024*

Sent by email to:  
**Wes Streeting MP**,  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
**Layla Moran MP**,  
Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee  
**Professor Gillian Leng CBE**,  
Chair of the Independent Review of  
Physician Associates and Anaesthesia Associates

Dear Mr Streeting, Ms Moran and Professor Leng,

### **Physician Associates in Operating Theatres and Surgical Environments**

The Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT) welcomes the independent review of Physician Associates (PAs) and Anaesthetic Associates (AAs) within the National Health Service (NHS). We are hopeful that this review will provide a crucial independent voice that will address concerns regarding scope of practice, patient safety and transparency to patients. We also trust that the recommendations of this review will deliver a solid framework to address concerns and move forward from the often unproductive debate surrounding this topic.

ASiT is a national, independent, pan-specialty, pan-grade organisation representing over 3,000 doctors in surgical training and resident doctors with an interest in pursuing a career in surgery. Our mission statement since our formation in 1976 is promoting the highest standards within surgical training. We do this via advocacy, education and training within surgery. Surgery is a craft speciality requiring a unique subset of skills, which is an important distinction when considering deployment of PAs within surgical specialities, in comparison to other clinical settings.

As an Association, we have conducted [the largest survey](#) on the role of PAs in surgery across the NHS, on request of our members. The survey includes responses from 1,978 doctors spanning all surgical specialties, training grades and regions. Our data provides

clear and strong evidence of serious patient safety concerns regarding the current use of PAs in surgical settings. The majority of surgical doctors reported that PAs are negatively impacting their training opportunities in operating theatres. A loss of training opportunities today results in inadequately trained surgical consultants for the future medical workforce.

Whilst some positive interactions were noted – primarily in settings with defined roles, clear scope of practice and support for surgical trainees – these examples remain the exception rather than the rule. These findings underscore an urgent need for robust safeguards to address these critical issues.

It has been over a decade since Sir Robert Francis KC described trainees as the "eyes and ears" of the NHS and stated we should be "heard and heeded". Most recently, Lord Darzi's Independent Investigation identified staff disengagement as a critical threat to the NHS. We strongly believe that as an Association run by trainees, for trainees, we are uniquely placed to provide expertise and on the ground experience on the role of PAs in surgical environments. We are concerned that if an independent, surgical training organisation such as ASiT is not included in this review, you will not be able to accurately address surgery-specific challenges that have arisen with the PA rollout. We therefore formally request you to invite The Association of Surgeons in Training to actively contribute evidence on behalf of surgical trainees and ensure the NHS remains equipped to meet the challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Roberta Garau**  
*General Surgery Registrar*  
**ASiT President**  
*On behalf of ASiT Council*