

35/43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London
WC2A 3PE
www.asit.org
Telephone: 0207 973 0302
Fax: 0207 430 9235
Email: president@asit.org

Mr John Black
President Royal College of Surgeons
35/43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London
WC2A 3PE

12th February 2011

Dear Mr Black,

The Cost of Surgical Training

The Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT) is a charity working to promote the highest standards in surgical training. With over 2,000 members, the Association is the one of the largest surgical specialty associations in the UK. ASiT's members come from all nine surgical specialties and represent trainees at both Core and Higher Surgical Training levels. ASiT functions through the input of its elected specialty and regional representatives, and serves the needs of trainees beyond its formal membership.

ASiT has recently undertaken a survey of our members investigating the costs of surgical training. The results are troubling and have far-reaching implications for the medical profession, and for the future of the surgical workforce.

Of the 1,085 completed surveys returned, responses were received from all surgical specialties, all grades, and all deaneries. 78% of respondents qualified from medical school in debt, with an average of over £20,000 per trainee since 2004. This figure is in agreement with other contemporary surveys, and will increase further following the Brown report which supports University tuition fees rising to £9,000 per annum from 2012.

Study leave allowances are approximately £400 per 6 months per trainee, but there is significant geographical variation between deaneries. We believe that this budget is often top-sliced to support local curriculum delivery, and is frequently insufficient to support trainees undertaking mandatory courses and exams required for progression.

The overwhelming majority of surgeons in training are not satisfied with the fee to support the JCST and do not feel it represents good value for money. Future rises will be most unwelcome. There is also significant concern over the transparency of many of the compulsory subscriptions for trainees. These fees are however small in comparison to the debt accumulated prior to qualification.

Current surgeons in training who have qualified with significant student debt are finding that they have poor credit ratings, creating difficulties in gaining approval for mortgage or credit card applications. Many are struggling with the expense of mandatory courses and examinations during the early years of training.

These rising costs must be offset against other negative influences on the take-home salaries of surgeons in training. The European Working Time Regulations have restricted the time officially spent at work, subsequently reducing salaries through changes in banding supplements. The loss of free House Officer accommodation is also contributory. Training costs are therefore not only rising in isolation; they are forming an ever increasing proportion of trainee's salaries.

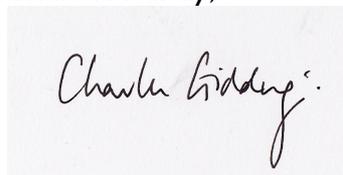
We believe that the beneficiaries of training should shoulder a fair proportion of this cost; this includes not only trainees but also their employers and patients themselves.

We are gravely concerned that the covert and sustained push of educational fees towards the trainee will ultimately reduce the diversity of entrants into surgery, and it may become an unpopular career choice. The current arrangements governing variable study leave budgets are manifestly unfair, and increased transparency is required from all organisations levying training-related fees on increasingly hard-pressed junior doctors.

We are writing to all four Royal College Presidents to raise this issue, as the debate on who pays for training and how much, is one that we are keen to have for the benefit of the future of the profession.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Charlie Giddings
President, ASiT
charliegiddings@doctors.org.uk



Edward Fitzgerald
Past President, ASiT
edwardfitzgerald@doctors.org.uk