

8th April 2026

By email

████████████████████

Dear ██████████

I am writing to you in response to your Freedom of Information request received by the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) on 5th March 2026 in which you requested information relating to recruitment statistics for Core Surgical Training in Northern Ireland:

I am writing to request recruitment statistics for Core Surgical Training in Northern Ireland for the past four application cycles (2022–2025, or the most recent four years available).

Specifically, I would be grateful if you could provide the following information for each year:

- **Total number of applicants**
- **Number of applicants invited to interview**
- **Total number of available Core Surgical Training posts**

If possible, I would also appreciate a breakdown of applicants by the following categories:

- **UK medical graduates**
- **Irish medical graduates**
- **Applicants who have completed the UK Foundation Programme**
- **Applicants who have completed an overseas equivalent foundation/internship programme**

NIMDTA has carefully considered the scope of your request and the information that would be required to locate, retrieve and collate the information sought. Following an initial assessment, we have concluded that responding to your request in full would exceed the appropriate cost limit set by the Act.

To identify applicants who completed an overseas equivalent of a UK Foundation Programme or internship, it would be necessary to manually review each individual application to confirm employment history. This information is not held in a format that allows it to be extracted automatically.

The figures below represent a high-level and indicative dataset based on the number of applicants during the relevant recruitment years who submitted a Certificate of Readiness to Enter Specialty Training (CREST). Submission of a CREST would normally indicate that foundation competences have been obtained outside the UK. However, this is not an accurate measure as applicants who completed a UK Foundation Programme but subsequently spent more than 3.5 years out of training are also required to submit a CREST, meaning these data include individuals who did not complete an overseas foundation or internship programme.

Recruitment Year	CREST Submission Numbers
Aug 22	164
Aug 23	349
Aug 24	593
Aug 25	1215
Aug 26	528

Verifying whether each applicant completed an overseas equivalent programme would require a manual review, estimated at up to 10 minutes per application. In addition, access to application records is retained for 18 months following the completion of a recruitment exercise. As a result, verification would only be possible for the August 2025 and August 2026 recruitment rounds.

We estimate that these activities would exceed the statutory cost limit. Accordingly, NIMDTA is refusing this request under section 12(1) of the Act. As section 12 is an absolute exemption, we are not required to conduct a public interest test.

In accordance with section 13(1) of the Act and the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004, NIMDTA is not required to comply with the request where the estimated cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit unless the requester is willing to pay a fee.

If a public body spends more than £450 on staff time in complying with a request, then charges may be applied; this figure is based on an hourly rate of £25 over 18 hours. Please refer to sections 12 and 13 of FOIA and sections 3 and 4 of The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 ('The Fees Regulations') for further information.

NIMDTA has estimated that it would take a minimum of 38.7 working days (i.e. 290.5 hours) to determine what information is held in relation to your request. Minus the appropriate limit of £450, the minimum cost to comply with your request would therefore equate to £6,812.50.

Under section 16 of the Act, NIMDTA has a duty to provide advice and assistance. You may wish to consider refining or narrowing the scope of your request (for example, by reducing the time period, subject matter, or specific types of records sought). A revised request may fall within the cost limit and could therefore be reconsidered.

NIMDTA have provided the following response to the information you have requested:

Year	Total number of applicants	Number of applicants invited to interview	Total number of available Core Surgical Training posts	Applicants who are UK medical graduates	Applicants who are Irish medical graduates	Applicants who have completed the UK Foundation Programme	Applicants who have completed an overseas equivalent foundation/internship programme
Aug 2026	1013	200	39	278	16	280	Refusal under section 12(1)
Aug 2025	1640	200	39	168	15	360	Refusal under section 12(1)
Aug 2024	787	196	35	No data	No data	No data	Refusal under section 12(1)
Aug 2023	564	142	51	151	14	125	Refusal under section 12(1)
Aug 2022	363	115	38	130	16	173	Refusal under section 12(1)

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter, as NIMDTA, along with all other public authorities are not obliged to accept internal review requests after this period has lapsed.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to The Business Services Organisation (BSO), which provides an Information Governance service on our behalf:

Post: Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ

Email: foi.bso@hscni.net

If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether NIMDTA has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act

The Information Commissioner's Office – Northern Ireland
10th Floor
Causeway Tower
9 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 8DN

Telephone: 0303 123 1114
Email: ni@ico.org.uk

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,



Aaron McClelland
Senior Governance, IT and Facilities Manager, NIMDTA