

2026 Manifesto for Scotland



For further information:

Royal College of Podiatry, Quartz House, 207 Providence Square, Mill Street, London SE1 2EW

Email: contact@rcpod.org.uk

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Who are we?

The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) represents qualified, regulated podiatrists across the UK, supporting them to deliver high-quality foot and lower limb care.

As the professional body and trade union representing podiatrists in the UK, we advocate for the integration of foot and lower limb health as a vital component of general health and well-being, recognising its critical role in preventing disease, reducing admissions, and embracing digital innovations.

A focus on prevention

Podiatrists provide ongoing support to patients with long term conditions and complex needs, helping them maintain function and independence. This is particularly relevant for the elderly population, where reduced mobility due to foot pain or dysfunction can lead to social isolation, loss of independence, and increased reliance on care services.

Podiatric interventions address biomechanical issues that contribute to mobility challenges. These services support patients to remain active and independent. Podiatrists also have a critical role in treating foot ulcers, particularly diabetic foot ulcers, preventing deterioration and avoidable lower limb amputations.

By keeping patients mobile and living in their homes for longer, podiatrists in both the NHS and the



independent sector help to alleviate pressure on other parts of the health and social care system. With an emphasis on preventative care and patient education, podiatrists help individuals manage their foot and lower limb health effectively, thereby reducing their risk of hospital admission.

Poor foot health outcomes, such as ulceration, infection, amputation, and sepsis, are closely linked to socioeconomic factors. Inequalities in access to podiatry services can lead to preventable complications and poorer health outcomes. Every citizen in Scotland should have timely access to preventative podiatry services based on need. This requires a concerted investment in both workforce expansion and community-based care models, ensuring that no one, regardless of their location or circumstances, is excluded from the benefits podiatry can provide. By prioritising this, the government can reduce health inequalities, enhance care quality, and improve overall population health.

Recommendation

We call on the next Scottish Government to provide targeted funding for NHS Podiatry services in underserved areas to ensure that the people most at risk of poor foot health outcomes can receive timely and appropriate care.

Workforce

Urgent attention is needed to maximise the benefits podiatry can offer before staffing levels unsafe and avoidable patient harms, such as amputations and deaths relating to lower limb disease, increase.

There are currently under 600 podiatrists delivering NHS services in Scotland; that is 1 podiatrist for every 9,000 residents, and this number is declining over time. Contributing to the decline is an ageing workforce, staff turnover of 7.5% and vacancy numbers also decreasing, suggesting podiatry



posts are being abolished. Simultaneously the need for preventative podiatric interventions is rising. The ageing population is presenting with increasing acuity and living longer with multiple long-term conditions.

A healthy pipeline of new recruits into the profession is needed both to maintain and increase workforce numbers. Currently the only route into the profession is through a full-time degree. While the establishment of the innovative PREPARE project by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow Caledonian University provides an option for a full time salary whilst training, the numbers are low (less than 10 across 3 health boards) and face to face time on campus is still required. There is no option currently to train via the apprenticeship route in Scotland. There must be a concerted effort to understand the drivers for this decline in numbers in the profession and how to efficiently attract people into the profession so that the best outcomes for patients can be promoted.

A comprehensive workforce strategy for podiatry in Scotland, based on projected population need and supported with targeted investment in recruitment, retention and training to build a robust pipeline for the current and future supply of podiatrists, is urgently required. This must include consideration of new routes into the profession, such as apprenticeships.

Recommendation

We call on the next Scottish Government to develop a workforce strategy for podiatry, based on projected population need and supported with targeted investment in recruitment, retention and training, to build a robust pipeline for the current and future supply of podiatrists.

Apprenticeships

We believe that expanding access to the Allied Health Professions (AHP) through degree apprenticeships and earn-as-you-learn routes is essential for addressing workforce shortages and



improving the diversity of the sector. Apprenticeships offer an accessible alternative to traditional university education, allowing individuals to gain hands-on experience whilst earning a wage. This pathway is particularly important for those who may face financial, geographical, and/or logistical barriers to higher education.

The next Scottish Government must take decisive action to introduce degree apprenticeship schemes within podiatry. This will not only create more inclusive routes into health and social care professions but will also support local communities by nurturing a skilled workforce that is attuned to the unique needs of the Scottish population; this is particularly crucial in rural and coastal areas. By increasing training opportunities in this way, the Scottish Government can enhance healthcare provision, reduce inequalities, and provide more individuals with life-changing career opportunities.

Remote and rural

With rural and remote areas experiencing shortages in housing, transport and childcare it is unlikely that attracting new people to these areas will alone, address the staff shortages. Grow your own alternative pathways to training should also be implemented to address staffing in these areas and ensure equity of access, no matter where someone lives in Scotland. Providing access to training for those already living in rural and remote areas will not only provide higher retention rates but will avoid increasing the present pressures on limited public services in these areas.

The PREPARE model of training is already providing a successful alternative route to training for podiatry in 3 health board areas, Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Forth Valley, and Fife, however fully remote access to the education element is required for this model to be successfully utilised in Scotland's most remote areas.



Recommendation

We call on the next Scottish Government to expand access to podiatry through exploring new routes to qualification, including degree apprenticeships, to ensure all areas of Scotland have equity of access to podiatry services.

Leadership and decision making

The RCPod wish to see AHPs within strategic decision making roles within Health Boards. The inclusion of AHP directors on every Health Board must be mandated, alongside AHPs as professional advisors on Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs). The absence of national direction on AHP inclusion in these roles has resulted in a lack of representation of the third largest healthcare profession, professions focused on prevention and early intervention. Without meaningful engagement in these discussions, there is a danger that the invaluable contribution that podiatrists, and other AHPs, can make to the delivery, and importantly the transformation of healthcare, will be overlooked. Mandatory representation of AHPs, such as podiatrists, should be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation

We call on the next Scottish Government to ensure mandatory inclusion of AHP directors with full voting rights on Health Boards and AHPs as Professional Advisors on IJBs, to ensure full and equitable representation.

We call for the next Scottish Government to commit to:

- Commitment to the prioritisation of foot and lower limb health as a cornerstone of healthcare transformation
- A comprehensive workforce strategy for podiatry in Scotland, based on projected population need and supported with targeted investment in recruitment, retention and training to build a robust pipeline for the current and future supply of podiatrists
- Expanding access into podiatry through the introduction of apprenticeships
- Clear career pathways and development opportunities for podiatrists
- Ensure mandatory inclusion of AHP directors with full voting rights on Health Boards and AHPs as Professional Advisors on IJBs.

Further information:

The Royal College of Podiatry
Quartz House
207 Providence Square
Mill Street
London SE1 2EW
Tel: 020 7234 8620
Email: contact@rcpod.org.uk
Web: www.rcpod.org.uk