



Briefing Note: Data (Use and Access Bill) 2nd Reading

Briefing February 2025

The Association of Anaesthetists is the professional membership organisation for over 10,000 anaesthetists in the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally.

Effective IT infrastructure and data systems are essential for the delivery of safe and efficient patient care, however existing digital infrastructure is failing patients and clinicians alike. Issues with connectivity, fragmented IT systems, and accessibility are leading to patient safety issues and inefficient delivery of care – and making our members' work to reduce the backlog even harder.

The Data (Use and Access) Bill presents an opportunity to address these issues and ensure digital transformation improves, rather than hinders, patient care. This briefing outlines some of the key issues we would like the legislation to address.

Key Issues

1. Wi-Fi & Connectivity

- Hospitals rely on effective digital infrastructure including usable Wi-Fi however in many hospitals Wi-Fi is frequently overloaded and slow making clinical work difficult, especially during peak hours.
- Association members have reported having to use their own mobile data instead of Wi-Fi. This is unacceptable and has implications for patient safety with clinicians being at times unreachable.
- Patient experience is further impacted by poor connectivity with patients often unable to communicate with family members or access entertainment during hospital stays.
- Improving the reliability and usability of Wi-Fi must be a priority in any programme of digital upgrade.

2. Fragmented IT Systems

- Clinicians also report having to use multiple fragmented software systems that do not communicate with one another, leading to poorer outcomes and inefficiencies in care.
- Accessing patient notes for example often requires using multiple different, non-communicating software programmes. This can lead to situations where essential patient data such as crucial information about previous anaesthetics are inaccessible across different trusts.
- Different specialties within the same hospital commonly also use separate, non-communicating systems, which contributes to fragmented care and has further implications for patient safety.
- Rotating resident doctors are as a result of these issues routinely required to relearn IT systems when moving hospitals.
- These inefficiencies make tackling growing waiting lists in elective care more difficult and should be addressed as a priority.



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3. Shortages & Workforce Impact

- Along with issues with connectivity, persistent shortages of computers remain an issue across trusts.
- Poor digital infrastructure has significant negative impacts on the ability on the ability of clinicians to deliver effective care.
- Association members have reported poor digital infrastructure as a central issue impacting work satisfaction. With a growing crisis in recruitment and retention government should prioritise improving digital infrastructure to address workforce concerns.

Recommendations for the Data (Access and Usage) Bill

1. **Improve Digital Infrastructure** – Invest in reliable hospital Wi-Fi and IT equipment to support staff and patients.
2. **Mandate usable software packages** – Require NHS Trusts to use systems that integrate and ‘speak to one another’, ensuring clinicians can access full patient records across hospitals.
3. **Ensure Sufficient IT Resources** – Guarantee sufficient computers for frontline staff to work effectively.

Conclusion

The Data (Access and Usage) Bill represents a significant opportunity to address ailing NHS digital infrastructure. Without action, poor connectivity and fragmented IT systems will continue to have negative outcomes for clinicians and patients and hinder the delivery of safe, effective care.

Contact

For any queries or further information, please contact policy@anaesthetists.org