

The Royal College of Nursing is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.

- I. The UK's relationship with the EU has had, and continues to have, a substantial direct and indirect impact on delivery of health and social care. Nursing staff, and the wider health and care community from all backgrounds, are central to the delivery of high quality patient care. EU nurses make an invaluable contribution to health and care services across the UK.
- II. The current uncertainty of status for EU and EEA nurses is causing them to leave the profession or preventing them from choosing to work in the UK in the first place. By December 2016, the number of EEA nurses joining the NMC register had fallen by 92 percent¹. Calls on the UK Government should be made to commit to granting EU and EEA healthcare workers indefinite leave to remain. Securing the status of health and care workers will enable high quality of care to continue after the UK withdraws from the EU.
- III. As well as granting indefinite leave to remain for current EU and EEA health and care workers, the sector must also be enabled to recruit staff from the EU and EEA countries in order to ensure the delivery of high quality services. It will also be vital to secure arrangements for nurses and other healthcare workers to be easily recruited from outside the UK; not only to fill vacancies, but to enable healthcare settings to draw on a wide pool of candidates who offer a wealth of experience.
- IV. Nurses are presently listed as one professional group on the shortage occupation list and any future immigration system must ensure that health and social care services across the UK have access to the greatest possible pool of qualified candidates. Taking nursing off the shortage occupations list will only exacerbate this challenge.
- V. It is also essential that Brexit does not negatively impact upon the working conditions, health and safety at work and employment rights for those working in the health and social care sectors. Membership of the EU provides all citizens of member states with a number of social and employment rights, including protection afforded to nursing staff from employment legislation such as the Working Time Directive, collective redundancy and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE), as well as health and safety at work legislation.
- VI. Whilst it is recognised that membership of the EU is not necessarily essential for the continuation of these rights, the EU has promoted this agenda over

¹ <http://www.health.org.uk/news/new-data-show-96-drop-nurses-eu-july-last-year>

several decades. The nursing workforce would not countenance any erosion to hard-won terms and conditions of service and health and safety legislation.

- VII. Similarly, a substantial proportion of UK health and safety regulations originate from the EU and provide important protections for nurses and other health and care workers working across health and care settings. The EU's health and safety related directives provide a legal framework for employers to reduce the risks of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), biological hazards, stress and violence to health care staff. MSDs and stress are particularly prevalent in the nursing workforce and the main cause of sickness absence.
- VIII. These protections, policies and health and safety regulations must not be sacrificed, or diluted as the UK withdraws from the EU. Health and safety regulations and the frameworks which secure decent working conditions must be retained following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The UK must remain committed to promoting employment policy and practice which is attractive to skilled healthcare professionals from Europe and around the world.
- IX. Finally, Brexit is also likely to have an impact on access to research funding. Pan European collaboration has contributed significantly to the success of UK science and research, and continued access to sustainable financial support for world-class infrastructure and facilities are essential for UK medical and health research. It is crucial that a future model of engagement with the EU enables the UK to maintain a strong voice in research strategy and policy, which has previously benefitted both the UK and research across Europe.

About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 450,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.