



FAO: Migration Advisory Committee
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Dear Professor Manning,

Response to the call for evidence from the Royal College of Physicians (RCP)

In this response the Royal College of Physicians highlights the existing workforce challenges faced by the National Health Service, its reliance on recruitment from overseas and our concerns for the UK to attract physicians to the NHS in the future.

EU doctors in the UK

Around one in ten doctors working in the NHS is from an EU member state.ⁱ A significant proportion of them are generalists who contribute to emergency care. These posts can be difficult to fill and are not on the Tier 2 shortage occupation list.

Certain specialties are more reliant on doctors from EU member states than others. For example, 11% of cardiology specialists, 11.6% of infectious disease specialists and 13.2% of neurology specialists are from EU Member States.ⁱⁱ

There are also variations across the country, with greater numbers of EU nationals working in London than other regions. For example, 1.7% of EU nationals work in the North East compared to 10.1% in south London alone.ⁱⁱⁱ

The UK workforce

The 2015/16 Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK census^{iv} shows that prior to the vote to leave the European Union, 44% of UK consultant posts were vacant. This was due to either a lack of applications or lack of suitable applicants for the post. By the 2016/17 census this has risen to 45%, which equates to around 691 consultant posts that could not be filled^v.

Over the past 5 years, acute internal medicine, geriatric medicine and gastroenterology/hepatology have advertised the largest number of consultant posts, but have also had the largest numbers of failed appointments due to a lack of applicants.^{vi} There are also significant shortages of 'generalist' posts that for people with urgent healthcare needs in hospitals.^{vii}

Gaps exist at all grades. For example, trainee rota gaps were reported frequently or often by 24% of doctors. Of these, 22% said it had a significant impact on patient safety^{viii}.

Part of the issue is the gap between the number of doctors completing training and vacancies available. The 2016/17 census found that 1,542 consultant jobs were advertised but only 853 certificates of completion training were awarded^{ix}. Since 2010 the number of students entering medicine as an undergraduate has fallen by 3.6%. The number of trainees who go on to specialist training fell by 2.3% in 2015.^{x,xi}



Only 52% of higher specialty training posts in the medical specialties were filled in 2016 and it seems set to continue^{xii}. The rota gaps this creates leads to a circle of increased workload and impacts on team working and recruitment. Supplementation of the UK workforce at this level is vital for patient safety and the long-term sustainability of the acute NHS sector. These shortages have already contributed to 74% of doctors worrying about the ability of their service to deliver safe patient care in the next 12 months^{xiii}. This could be exacerbated if the UK does not continue to attract doctors from overseas.

The workforce shortages facing the NHS predate the referendum. However the UK's departure from the EU and possible restrictions on the movement of doctors to the UK from the 27 EU states would have significant implications for the delivery of patient care and the sustainability of the NHS. Already, 21% of doctors who qualified overseas recently told the RCP that they plan to leave the UK in the next five years or are unsure of their plans.^{xiv}

Aligning the UK's immigration system with a modern industrial strategy

While the long term focus needs to be developing the home-grown healthcare workforce, the RCP wants to see a positive and welcoming migratory system for doctors to ensure a sustainable and safe NHS.

The recent increase in medical school places is welcome^{xv}, but will have a delayed affect as it takes around 13 years to train a doctor. Recruiting skills and expertise from overseas is crucial to the sustainability of the NHS in the interim.

The UK should therefore

- guarantee that EU nationals will be able to remain in the UK following our exit from the EU, so that they can continue to provide patients with support and care
- increase the number of visas available to the Medical Training Initiative that provides trainee doctors from all over the world with the opportunity to work and train in the UK for 2 years before returning to their country of origin
- establish an MTI-like Tier Five visa programme for doctors from DfID or LI&LMI non-priority countries, particularly those – like Australia – that have similar training programmes to the UK more doctors than training places
- establish a scheme to attract students from particular countries to come to the UK on a Tier 4 visa
- include more specialties on the shortage occupation list, especially those with large shortages, such as geriatrics and respiratory medicine.

We thank the Migration Advisory Committee for taking evidence on this important issue. References and further evidence are available in the attached census documents from 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Andrew Goddard
Registrar, Royal College of Physicians



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- ⁱ General Medical Council, List of Registered Medical Practitioners – statistics, 2017. Available online via: http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/search_stats.asp
- ⁱⁱ NHS Digital 2016 Available at: http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&ved=0ahUKewib4OvakY7XAhUMPRoKHaMGDksQFghCMAU&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcontent.digital.nhs.uk%2Fmedia%2F23213%2FEU-nationals-by-staff-group-specialtyand-region-August-2016%2Fxls%2FEU_nationals_by_staff_group_specialty_and_region_August_2016.xlsx&usg=AOvVaw2Vqg-wwaQQMcQZgli-ngsA
- ⁱⁱⁱ NHS Digital 2016 Available at: http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&ved=0ahUKewib4OvakY7XAhUMPRoKHaMGDksQFghCMAU&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcontent.digital.nhs.uk%2Fmedia%2F23213%2FEU-nationals-by-staff-group-specialtyand-region-August-2016%2Fxls%2FEU_nationals_by_staff_group_specialty_and_region_August_2016.xlsx&usg=AOvVaw2Vqg-wwaQQMcQZgli-ngsA
- ^{iv} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK. *Census of consultant physicians and higher specialty trainees in the UK, 2015–16: data and commentary*. 2016. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2015-16-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^v Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK, *2016–17 census (UK consultants and higher specialty trainees)*, 2017. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2016-17-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^{vi} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK, *2016–17 census (UK consultants and higher specialty trainees)*, 2017. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2016-17-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^{vii} NHS Improvement, Evidence from NHS Improvement on clinical staff shortages: A workforce analysis, 2016. Available online via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500288/Clinical_workforce_report.pdf
- ^{viii} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK, *2016–17 census (UK consultants and higher specialty trainees)*, 2017. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2016-17-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^{ix} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK, *2016–17 census (UK consultants and higher specialty trainees)*, 2017. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2016-17-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^x UCAS. *End of cycle 2015 data resources: DR3_015_01 acceptances by detailed subject group*. 2016 Available online via: www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/eoc_data_resource_2015-dr3_015_01.pdf
- ^{xi} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK. *Census of consultant physicians and higher specialty trainees in the UK, 2014–15: data and commentary*. 2016. Available online via: www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2014-15-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees
- ^{xii} Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK. *Census of consultant physicians and higher specialty trainees in the UK, 2015–16: data and commentary*. 2016. Available online via: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/2015-16-census-uk-consultants-and-higher-specialty-trainees>
- ^{xiii} NHS Reality Check: Delivering care under pressure, 2017 Available online at: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/nhs-reality-check-delivering-care-under-pressure>
- ^{xiv} Brexit: What does it mean for patients and doctors? Available at: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/brexit-what-does-it-mean-patients-and-doctors>
- ^{xv} Department of Health, *Up to 1,500 extra medical training places announced*, 2016. Available online via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/up-to-1500-extra-medical-training-places-announced>