

LONDON ASSEMBLY BREXIT DIRECTIVE IV - HEALTHCARE

Chair of the Health Committee



Dr Onkar Sahota AM
Member for Ealing & Hillingdon

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Date: 20 February 2018

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

(Via email)

Dear Sadiq,

These are complex and challenging times for our country's most trusted social institution, the NHS. NHS England says that "pressures on the NHS are greater than they have ever been."¹ Our pending exit from the EU presents further challenges. There are thousands of EU nationals who work to keep our NHS running and this letter urges you to ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union for greater certainty about their future, and, in anticipation of attracting more UK nationals into the occupation, to lobby for a review of the decision to remove nursing bursaries.

There are over 5,000 nurses from the European Economic Area (EEA) working in London's hospitals.² Many of our hospitals and clinics could not function without EU citizens. There are consultants, GPs, surgeons and clerical staff from the EU, all working to keep Londoners healthy. In London, our health service is twice as reliant on EU staff as the rest of the country.³

Reports that the number of EU nurses registering to work in Britain have fallen by 90 per cent compared to the year before are alarming, particularly at a time when nursing vacancies have hit an all-time high.⁴ EU nurses and doctors are skilled professionals and if uncertain about their status in the UK, they will leave the NHS.

The social care sector is even more reliant on EU workers, with 13 per cent of its workforce coming from the EEA.⁵ The sector is characterised by small and medium sized enterprises (for

¹ NHS England, [Next Steps on the Five Year Forward View](#)

² Actual figure was 5,355 as at May 2017, according to [NHS Workforce Statistics](#), released Nov 21 2017

³ In London 10 per cent (5,355 of 52,209 total) of nurses are EU nationals, compared to 5 per cent (17,286 of 317,737 total) nationally, according to [NHS Workforce Statistics](#), released Nov 21 2017.

⁴ Nursing Times, [Extent of nurse shortages revealed in new recruitment figures](#), 23 January 2018

⁵ National Minimum Data Set for Social Care, [Adult Social Care Workforce Estimates](#)

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example, nursing homes) and they will be even more vulnerable than hospitals to workforce shortages. The Government has said that it will encourage SMEs to get involved in social care and has introduced a new marketplace for health and social care providers to facilitate this.⁶ The sector needs more certainty about its workforce for this to be a success.

We welcome the Phase 1 Brexit agreement in principle but it does not provide enough reassurance for EU citizens. The agreement commits to protecting the rights of EU citizens already in the UK and those who arrive before 29 March 2019.⁷ But an agreement in principle is not the same as a guarantee. Our EU Exit Working Group heard about the impact that continued uncertainty is having on EU nationals' quality of life and their decisions about their future. Equally, an agreement about EU citizens who arrive before the UK's withdrawal date does not help to attract EU medical professionals in the long term.

The idea of a specific guarantee for healthcare workers is not a new one. Many MPs and peers have already raised this issue.⁸ The UK already gives nurses and doctors from countries outside of the EU preferred immigration status – because nurses and doctors are in shortage.⁹ **We recommend that you discuss whether the Government could provide a sector-specific guarantee for the rights of EU healthcare workers.**

In the long term, we support the Government's aim to train more British citizens to fill these vacancies. A self-sufficient NHS is a goal we can all share.

But the London Assembly Health Committee is concerned about the Government's decision to remove nursing bursaries. Two years ago, the Government removed all nursing bursaries and moved nursing students onto the standard system of £9,000-a-year tuition fees. According to the University and Colleges Admissions Service, applications to study nursing reduced by 23 per cent in the first year after nursing bursaries were removed.¹⁰ At the time, the Department of Health said that the change would create 10,000 new nursing places and that there was likely to be a "bounceback" in applications the year after once the change had been accepted.¹¹ Unfortunately matters have now gotten worse, and nursing applications fell by a further 13 per cent this year.¹²

We think that in light of this new evidence the time has come to ask if the removal of nursing bursaries was the right decision for our NHS. **We recommend that you ask the Government to review the impact of this switch on nursing applications at this crucial time for our health service.**

⁶ NHS Digital and Crown Commercial Service, [SMEs encouraged to form new health and social care marketplace](#), 6 December 2017

⁷ Home Office, [Status of EU citizens in the UK: what you need to know](#)

⁸ House of Commons debate, NHS Staff, 30 November 2017, House of Lords debate, EEA Doctors

⁹ Home Office, [Immigration Rules appendix K: Shortage Occupation List](#)

¹⁰ UCAS, [Applicants for UK higher education down: 5% for UK students and 7% for EU students](#), 1 February 2017

¹¹ DoH spokeswoman, as quoted by the [Guardian on 27 June 2017](#)

¹² UCAS, [Nursing applicants at the 15 January Deadline](#), 5 February 2018

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We have previously called on you to develop a Brexit plan for London. Healthcare needs to be at the heart of that plan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Onkar', with a horizontal line underneath.

Onkar Sahota AM

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee