

Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the External Affairs & Additional Legislation Committee's Inquiry into the implications of Britain exiting the European Union for Wales

- I. The impact of Brexit on health and social care in Wales is largely dependent upon the settlement that the UK negotiates with the European Union post-Brexit, and so it is difficult to say at this time exactly what the full implications will be. In advance of such a settlement, it would be useful to undertake a scoping exercise of what the potential impact could be to determine the real short falls and consequences of Brexit, and in order to manage the worst case scenarios in future to ensure that the NHS and the independent sector health care workforce are not severely compromised. In addition to this, we would welcome a review of the current number of European and international workers who are currently working in Wales who could potentially be affected if their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom was revoked.
- II. However, it is likely that Brexit will create extra restrictions on recruitment both in the NHS and the independent sector, and it may be that the impact is greater on both recruitment from Europe and internationally. Any recruitment issues must be monitored appropriately, with attention focused on the possible increase in the use of agency nurses to cover any shortfall. At present, we do not know the Working Time Equivalent (WTE) of agency nurses, and in addition to this, how many of those agency nurses are undertaking additional work whilst working for the NHS.
- III. The recruitment and retention of healthcare assistants and healthcare support workers also needs to be closely observed. It is already acknowledged that recruiting and retaining people into these roles can be challenging, and so the profession will need to be mindful of the implications that Brexit might have on this issue. As previously stated, it is vital to undertake a scoping exercise to ascertain what the potential shortfall of healthcare assistants and healthcare support workers from Europe and internationally, to be compared against the current data on recruitment and retention.
- IV. 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.
- 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 several decades. The nursing workforce would not countenance any erosion to hard-won terms and conditions of service and health and safety legislation. We hope these rights which may be compromised by Brexit are closely looked at by the Fifth Assembly in regards to the areas of the Trade Union Act that the Welsh Government are seeking to repeal.
- VII. Until the full implications of Britain leaving the European Union are fully understood, there will be an uncertainty around issues of recruitment, access to research funding, and around the protection of terms and conditions. This uncertainty in itself is unhelpful, and it is vital that nurses and health care workers from the EU who are working across the UK continue to feel valued throughout this period of uncertainty.

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 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.