



The Royal College of **Pathologists**

Pathology: the science behind the cure

**Response from the Royal College of Pathologists to the Health and Sports Committee Consultation on Impact of leaving the European Union on health and social care in Scotland - Call for views**

**The Royal College of Pathologists' written submission**

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## 1 About the Royal College of Pathologists

1.1 The Royal College of Pathologists (RCPATH) is a professional membership organisation with charitable status. It is committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and to promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology. Pathology is the science at the heart of modern medicine and is involved in 70 per cent of all diagnoses made within the National Health Service. The College aims to advance the science and practice of pathology, to provide public education, to promote research in pathology and to disseminate the results. We have over 10,000 members across 20 specialties working in hospital laboratories, universities and industry worldwide to diagnose, treat and prevent illness.

1.2 The Royal College of Pathologists response reflects comments made by Fellows and members of the Scotland Regional Council of the Royal College of Pathologists.

## 2 Response

### 2.1 Overall Impact

On leaving the European Union, the overall impact on Health and Social Care, and specifically the provision of Laboratory Services, is difficult to predict given the high degree of uncertainty that exists. Clearly the effects on recruitment and retention of key staff, the overall economy and trade relationships, could all have a dramatic effect on the sustainability of Laboratory Services in the future.

It is important to emphasise the pivotal role that Laboratory Services have within the Scottish NHS. It is estimated that up to 75% of decisions taken in Medicine are made because of a laboratory test. This is evident across both Primary and Secondary Care where laboratory test results drive decision making around screening, case selecting, diagnosis, hospital referral, hospital admission, treatment options, discharge decisions and follow up choices. It follows that an efficient, quality driven and technically competent laboratory service is pivotal to all these processes and any threat to these services as a consequence of leaving the European Union will be felt across the whole of the Scottish NHS.

#### Specific Concerns:

- 1) **Staffing** – Laboratory Medicine is highly dependent on a wide range of specialist Medical doctors, Clinical Scientists, Biomedical Scientists, Informaticians and other key staff. Recruitment and retention of these staff members is already very challenging, especially in the remote and rural parts of the service. Much dependence on foreign nationals, especially from the European Union, coming to Scotland to work within the NHS is evident, as is the recent fall off in numbers wishing to do so – this only adds to the challenge and looks likely to worsen as Brexit kicks in.
- 2) **Economy** – much uncertainty exists – this alone may impact negatively on the UK economy, which in turn could affect the resource made available to the NHS in the coming years. In addition, as much of the equipment and consumables used in laboratories is sourced and manufactured overseas, the decrease in the value of the pound has made such purchasing more expensive.

- 3) **Research** – Scotland consistently punches above its weight in terms of Healthcare Research output and grant income. Many collaborations and sources of research income are linked with European Union colleagues and funding bodies. Such opportunities will be very limited once the UK leaves the European Union. Researchers from abroad wishing to work in the UK may also diminish.

## 2.3 Response to Questions

### ***1. How could the potential risks of Brexit for health and social care in Scotland be mitigated?***

The concern that staff recruitment and retention will worsen post Brexit is something that can be predicted. It is vital that in order to mitigate against this, efforts should be made to increase training locally within Scotland while at the same time encouraging colleagues from the European Union already working within the Scottish NHS to stay working within Scotland. This is especially important for specialist jobs, such as those found within laboratory services.

The uncertainty over the economy in the future and money available for the NHS is very concerning – especially at a time when healthcare costs are outstripping the existing NHS budget. Difficult to mitigate against this but clearly more investment is needed as well as further attempts to consolidate services and lesson the scope of care available – controversial though it may be.

The government needs to consider ways to plug the potential research funding gap that may emerge and also do more to encourage foreign researchers to come to the UK to work.

### ***2. How could the potential benefits of Brexit for health and social care in Scotland be realised?***

It remains difficult to see much in the way of benefits. Predicted savings by not being a member of the European Union may be diverted to NHS budgets but controversy exists as to how much this will be and the timescale over which it may become available, if at all.

### ***3. In what ways could future trade agreements impact on health and social care in Scotland?***

As mentioned above, much trade and purchasing related to the delivery of Laboratory Services is done within the European Union and beyond. Difficulties around new trade agreements and the potential for further devaluation of the Pound can only add more financial pressure to our budgets.

### ***4. The Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) has agreed a definition and principles to shape discussions within the UK on common frameworks including enabling the functioning of the UK internal market. What implications might this have for health and social care in Scotland and what are your views on how these common frameworks are agreed and governed?***

No response

## **2.4 Overall Summary**

Clearly there are many concerns round staffing, funding and research post Brexit. This applies to all aspects of Laboratory Services and so an attempt needs to be made to mitigate against such eventualities to avoid any negative impact on the overall quality and competency of the NHS in Scotland.