10 January 2017

Dear First Minister,

As the representative organisation of 169,000 doctors and medical students across the UK, with over 7,500 members in Wales, I am writing to ask that BMA Cymru Wales is consulted on and included in Welsh Government work involving negotiations to leave the EU which will affect the medical profession, medical students, the NHS, science and research and the services we provide to our patients.

I am also writing to ask that consideration is given to the following areas as a matter of urgency.

With regards to immigration, doctors from the European Union are essential members of Wales’ medical workforce and the NHS depends on them to provide a high quality, reliable and safe service to patients. Specifically, we believe that EU doctors and medical academic staff currently in Wales should be granted permanent residence, and that the Welsh Government should make urgent representations to the UK Government for this. This is vital not just to support workforce planning in the Welsh NHS, but also to the ability of the health service to maintain safe staffing levels and patient safety at a time of mounting demand and pressures on the NHS.

I would also ask that you work to maintain reciprocal arrangements, involving mutual recognition of professional qualifications, along with measures to ensure patient safety and quality standards, once the UK leaves the EU. This policy has enabled many health and social care professionals from countries within the EEA to work in Wales while also allowing Welsh doctors to work in the EU. It has similarly helped to create an environment which has facilitated data sharing and ideas, as well as ensuring EU nationals are able to fill gaps quickly in specialties in the medical workforce and the wider health service.

We are asking for assurances that the UK government will not seek to repeal or amend the UK Working Time Regulations once the UK has left the EU, a position that I hope you will support and pursue. As the representative of the UK’s doctors, the BMA is satisfied with the European Working Time Directive and the important measures it has transposed into the UK Working Time Regulations, namely the limit of a 48 hour working week, rest breaks and statutory paid leave. These regulations protect doctors from the dangers of overwork, while equally protecting patients from overtired doctors. While there is some division within the medical profession about the regulations, it is perfectly possible to design adequate training without needing to break the 48 hour weekly limit.

We welcome confirmation from the Welsh Government that EU students applying for a place at a Welsh university in the 2017 - 2018 academic year will be eligible for student loans and grants for the duration of their course. We are now calling on the Welsh Government to grant home fees to EU students applying for courses in medicine for the 2018 to 2019 academic year, in the same way as has already been agreed for those starting their studies in 2017 to 2018. This would give some
stability and incentive to EU students thinking of applying to come to Wales between 2017 and 2019.

Finally, we have very serious concerns regarding Wales’ ongoing access to EU research programmes and research funding. We are calling on the Welsh Government to ensure ongoing participation in such programmes for the long-term to limit any potential damage to our country’s medical research base.

I would be happy to discuss any of these issues in further detail, and ask that BMA Cymru Wales is involved in any groups or consultations that will discuss how the negotiations to leave the EU will affect the medical profession, medical students, NHS Wales and public health services. It is critical to ensure that doctors continue to be able to deliver the highest standards of patient care in Wales once the UK leaves the EU. Carla Murphy, Head of Media and Public Affairs (Wales) can be contacted on 02920 474626 or cmurphy@bma.org.uk to arrange a meeting or involvement in any new forums.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Phil Banfield
BMA Welsh council chair