Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State for Health  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
SW1A 2NS

5 October 2016

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you following your announcement at the Conservative Party conference to increase medical school places.

The BMA has consistently raised concerns about the workforce crisis in the NHS and the pressure under which our healthcare system is currently operating. While the government’s proposal to increase medical school places is welcome, we cannot ignore the fact that it will take a decade to translate into more doctors. We are also seeking reassurances that the expansion in medical school places is reflected by an increase in foundation training posts, which is vital to avoid the risk of medical students facing unemployment post qualification. Investment in the medical academic workforce and ensuring adequate training provision to maintain the quality of medical education will also be crucial.

The NHS needs more doctors today. This announcement will tackle neither the current shortage of doctors nor reduce the NHS’s continued need to recruit highly skilled staff from overseas. Our international doctors bring great skill and expertise to the NHS, and without them our health service would not be able to cope. Medicine thrives on the interchange of experience, knowledge and training and as such we do not support the government’s ambition for an NHS that is 100% self-sufficient: closing our borders would be bad for medicine and bad for patient care.

Finally, we believe that compelling medical graduates to work for the NHS for a minimum period of service, or face penalties, is misguided. Patients deserve a health service in which doctors want to work, not one in which they are forced to work. Rather than proposing policies which will only exacerbate the poor morale within the workforce and add to the apprehension of medical students, we believe the government would do better to reflect on the reasons why doctors consider leaving the NHS. The BMA will of course play a full role in any forthcoming consultation on these issues.
Yours sincerely

Dr Mark Porter
BMA council chair

Harrison Carter
Co-chair, BMA medical students committee

Charlie Bell
Co-chair, BMA medical students committee