Introduction
Recent reports, and announcements such as the speech made by the Home Secretary at the Conservative Party conference in October 2016¹, suggest that the government plans to impose further restrictions on the number of international students who can come to the UK in an attempt to reduce ‘net migration’ to below 100,000. This follows the introduction of earlier policies by the government (such as the abolition of the post study work visa) to make it more difficult for international students to remain in the UK following completion of their studies, thereby seeking to ‘break the link’ between studying and settling to work in the UK².

The BMA opposes further restrictions on international students coming to the UK and we oppose the inclusion of international students in the net migration figures. International students make a significant economic and cultural contribution to the UK bringing income, influence and generating employment in the UK. They contribute £7 billion to the UK economy and to public services through tax receipts³ alone. There is a danger that the imposition of ever tougher immigration restrictions will deter students from wanting to study in the UK at all- this would be to the financial, economic and cultural detriment of UK medical schools, UK universities, research institutes and wider society.

Financial contribution made by international students to the UK economy
The higher education sector is a major UK success story, contributing £73 billion in output to the UK economy, £39.9 billion to UK GDP in 2011/12,⁴ and spreading UK influence and services across the globe.

In 2014/15, almost half of all university income in the UK was derived from tuition fees and education contracts (£15.6 billion). Non-EU students contributed over a quarter of tuition fee income paying fees of £4.226 billion⁵ while home and EU domiciled student course fees

¹ Amber Rudd MP, Home Secretary, Speech to Conservative Party Conference October 2016
² The Guardian (July 2015) A guide to the government’s new rules for international students
³ The Telegraph (October 2016) Ben Howlett MP Theresa May should be smart over immigration and take students out of the official figures
⁴ Universities UK: Higher education in numbers
⁵ House of Lords library note (October 2016) Leaving the European Union: funding for universities and scientific research
accounted for £10.481 billion of the overall income of UK HE providers. The presence of students from across the world and from the rest of the EU helps financially underpin universities and UK medical schools.

**International medical students**

Medicine thrives on the interchange of experience, knowledge and training across countries and backgrounds. We believe that further restrictions on international medical students coming to the UK through changes in immigration policy will inevitably lead to a consequent decrease in opportunities for UK medical students to study overseas and so limiting opportunities to collaborate and share experience, knowledge and training. We believe this will be detrimental for medicine, patient care and medical research.

Furthermore, international students who choose to study at a UK medical school are committed to training and working in the NHS and are considered as part of the future NHS workforce by NHS employers. These individuals have been factored into long-term NHS workforce planning and the opportunity to continue postgraduate training in the NHS helps make UK medical schools an attractive option for prospective students. There is a danger therefore that imposing additional restrictions on the rights of students to live and work in the UK will have the unintended consequence of undermining workforce planning in the NHS and the ability of the health service to maintain safe staffing levels and patient safety in the longer term.

**Fall in application numbers to UK medical schools from EU and international students**

We are concerned that following recent developments in the UK, international students will choose to study in countries which are more conducive and supportive of international students and an international workforce, rather than in the UK. This is a particular concern following the rise in xenophobic attacks and sentiment following the UK’s vote to leave the EU, and policies which appear to devalue or undermine the contribution made by medical students and doctors from overseas.

The Secretary of State for Health recently announced medical workforce reforms to fund the training of up to an additional 1,500 students through UK medical schools in 2018. This announcement forms part of its ambition to create an NHS that is 100% self-sufficient by expanding the supply of UK trained doctors whilst reducing the NHS’s reliance on doctors from overseas.

Already the message is being sent out to potential students from the rest of the world that the UK no longer welcomes them and the threat of ever more stringent immigration policies risks deterring international students from seeking to study in the UK at all. This is deeply worrying, with potentially disastrous consequences for the UK’s ability to attract talented medical students and to build potentially fruitful relationships with future leaders in healthcare from across the world.

Figures from UCAS for 2017 undergraduate entry already show that applicants from non-EU students for places at UK medical schools has fallen from 3,240 in 2016 to 3,040 in 2017, a decrease of 6%. This ends a general trend of annual increases. While there may be a number of reasons for this drop in applications, anecdotal evidence from our members suggests those who are not UK nationals feel unwelcome in the UK since the UK’s vote to leave the EU. Any fall in the

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6Hindustan Times  The message from Britain is clear: Indians are not welcome anymore
number of non-EU students to UK medical schools has serious consequences for medical school funding, as non-EU students pay, in England, fees of between £25,000 and £35,000 per year. If they were replaced by UK medical students, this would create an increased burden on both the UK tax payer and individual universities.

The lack of certainty and clarity following the UK’s vote to leave the EU is also demonstrated by the sharp fall in the number of EU students applying to study medicine in the UK for the coming year. Figures from UCAS for 2017 undergraduate entry show that applicants from the EU to the October deadline for medicine degrees have similarly fallen by 9% (-620) to 6,240 ending a trend of annual increases over recent years.

**Future immigration system**

It is vital that the UK remains culturally attractive to students from overseas. This will require a flexible and efficient immigration system which is able to meet the changing needs of the NHS, a culture that values diversity and tackles discrimination. As mentioned earlier, international medical students who study at a UK medical school have been factored into long-term NHS workforce planning. Any changes to immigration policy must ensure there is no danger to undermining workforce planning in the NHS and must maintain the ability of the health service to retain safe staffing levels and patient safety in the longer term.

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November, 2016

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7 Applicant numbers to ‘early deadline’ university courses increase by one per cent, UCAS figures reveal today