

Immigration restrictions for EU citizens could damage UK research and healthcare

October 11 2018

An analysis of senior European scientists and doctors working in the UK underlines the high risk of considerable damage to the UK's science output and international research reputation caused by any post-Brexit immigration restrictions, as well as an associated reduction in healthcare quality. The research, published by the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, was carried out by a team from King's College London and Queen's University Belfast.

The researchers examined how many European individuals had been elected as fellows of the Royal Society and the Academy of Medical Sciences. These independent bodies recognise people who have excelled in their respective fields and have therefore contributed substantially to high-level UK science and research. The researchers also examined the UK Medical Register to identify European doctors working in senior positions as hospital consultants and GPs in the UK.

Their analysis confirmed a significant increase in the numbers of UK-based fellows of the Royal Society and the Academy of Medical Sciences from European countries since the Maastricht treaty was signed in 1992. They also established that since 2004 doctors from European countries are the largest cohort of foreign-qualified practitioners in the UK, with Eastern European doctors predominating during the last decade.

Lead researcher and King's College London academic Mursheda Begum said: "Our results indicate a very positive and statistically significant

contribution of European scientists, academics and medical practitioners to the UK research base and the provision of clinical care. Many immigrants have built strong careers that have been rewarded by prestigious fellowships because they have impacted positively on UK research."

Co-author Professor Richard Sullivan added: "With the UK now officially in the process of leaving the EU, there are concerns about how this will affect NHS services and patient care, health research and international cooperation. It is distinctly possible that uncertainty about the ability of European citizens to work in the NHS may lead to a staffing crisis, as they seek work elsewhere. Medical specialties with a heavy reliance on EU nationals, such as general surgery and ophthalmology, and nursing are likely to be seriously affected."

"Our study clearly demonstrates the positive contribution by scientists and medical [doctors](#) from European countries to high-level research and clinical care in the UK. It is vital that national diversity in high-quality human capital is maintained in a post-Brexit UK research and healthcare environment."

More information: Mursheda Begum et al, The value of European immigration for high-level UK research and clinical care: cross-sectional study, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0141076818803427](#)

Provided by SAGE Publications

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