Health and Sport Committee call for evidence:

Impact of leaving the EU on health and social care in Scotland

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Committee. We have chosen to focus our response on the potential implications of Brexit for Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). Despite the lack of clarity surrounding what will happen when the UK leaves the EU, there are some areas of HIS’ work which we have estimated to be at risk from the decision. These are highlighted below.

International collaboration

The Evidence Directorate within HIS has a track record of involvement with European projects. We have led work packages in three EU funded projects and participated in Joint Actions surrounding the sharing of expertise, experience and workload for health technology assessment across Europe (EUnetHTA). Although our current participation in EUnetHTA has been confirmed as unaffected by the decision, there is a real doubt that we will be able to apply for, or be collaborators in, EU funded projects in future. This could potentially result in additional work to ensure that Scottish HTA processes remain fit for purpose and the volume of our work maintained.

We also collaborate with comparator organisations across the EU on a more informal basis. While we are hopeful that the relationships we have already forged can be maintained, there may be less incentive for these organisations to work with us.

Recruitment of specialist staff

Recruitment to specialist posts, such as health economists and statisticians, is a perennial problem, given the attractive packages offered by healthcare companies that NHSScotland cannot possibly match. Access to potential staff from across the EU widens the pool from which we can draw and we have employed a number of staff with specialist technical expertise from the EU in the past. There is a risk that leaving the EU will accentuate the problems of recruitment.

Availability of NHSScotland staff to support our activities

Through formal clinical engagement and via less formal participation in groups and committees, HIS relies very heavily on NHSScotland to undertake its core business. There is a risk that any increased pressure on NHS staffing as a result of leaving the EU and a reduction in EU nationals employed in NHSScotland may impact materially on the availability and willingness of staff to undertake these activities, which in turn could affect our ability to undertake our core business.
Impact on medicines and devices regulation

HIS is likely to be directly affected by wider issues that are out with the scope of HIS, in particular the impact on medicines and devices regulation, which is a reserved issue. Some medicines (e.g. Biologicals) are regulated at European level. There is therefore a risk that leaving the EU will impact on access to data such as comparative uptake data which has been important to informing improvement in Scotland and access to medicines safety frameworks and their ongoing application.

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