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Midwives' numbers

WE FREQUENTLY HIGHLIGHT THE

situation of midwives from elsewhere in the EU who live and work here in the UK, and we did so again at the end of March ahead of a Commons debate on the impact of Brexit on the NHS.

We informed MPs that there are enough EU midwives in the NHS in England to staff around 12 maternity units just with EU midwives, and that collectively they care for around 40,000 mothers in England each year. If we include the figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, those numbers are even higher.

We also revealed to MPs that across the UK as a whole, fewer EU midwives have been arriving and more have been leaving since the referendum. Indeed, at the current rate of loss, we would have no EU midwives left in the country in under a decade. That means fewer midwives to care for women in a service already overstretched and understaffed.

The RCM values EU midwives and the fantastic contribution they make to delivering care to women across the UK. We want those here to have their rights to remain guaranteed, and we want those EU midwives who are trained and have all the necessary skills and experience and who may want to come here in the future to be free to do so.

These points were made repeatedly in the Commons debate, including by MPs Ben Bradshaw and Paul Williams, both of who sit on the Commons health committee. The shadow health minister, Justin Madders, also spoke about midwifery, as well as citing our national

shortage figure.

Events often move fast, and within a few days the secretary of state for health and social care Jeremy Hunt was announcing a substantial expansion in the number of training places for student midwives. This will start with a 25% increase in places this autumn, rising to an extra 1000 places next year. Currently, around 2500 students start their midwifery training annually.

Overall, the Conservative party used the announcement to promise '3000 extra midwives for the NHS' in 'the largest ever increase' in midwife numbers.

Getting these commitments is a real achievement for the RCM. We have been campaigning and lobbying for this kind of substantial commitment for several years now.

But it is only half the job. It is really important now that the RCM keeps a watchful eye on what happens next. Words and commitments and promises are great, but far more important is what actually happens on the ground.

The government has made clear, specific commitments. We have them in writing, in black and white, and they set out large and specific numbers of extra training places to be commissioned. We will be watching and counting – and reporting back. If there is any backsliding from the government, we will be ready to pounce. But if these increases happen we will be equally ready to highlight that too. Watch this space. 📢

[Read more on midwife numbers in the cover feature on page 40.](#)