Dear xxxx,

I am writing to you regarding the changes to the Immigration Rules, which will mean that workers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) who were granted Tier 2 visas after 6 April 2011 must earn £35,000 or more after six years, before they are allowed to remain in the UK. Most nurses in this category affected by this rule changed earn between £21,000 and £28,000.

RCN research shows that as a result of the change, up to 3,365 nurses currently working in the UK will have to leave the country, and our health service, from 2017. We estimate that the cost to the NHS of recruiting these nurses is £20.19million. If these nurses are forced to leave the UK, it will be an astonishing waste of NHS funds. It will be the health service, and ultimately patients, who will suffer the loss of these nurses’ vital skills and experience. There is already a dangerous shortage of UK nurses and we simply cannot afford to lose experienced nurses from the system. As yet we have had no indication from the Government of how they intend to plug this gap.

The RCN made a submission to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) last year regarding the Shortage Occupation List (SOL). Our evidence highlighted the continuing need for better workforce planning in the UK, and investment in nurse training places, as well as the need, in the short term, for nursing to be included on the SOL to combat current and future workforce shortages.

We were disappointed that the MAC did not heed our advice and we are in continued discussions with them regarding this issue. The Home Office’s own impact assessment of the changes acknowledged that it is highly unlikely that nurses coming to the UK will be in a position to earn this higher level salary within five or six years. The RCN is extremely concerned and we have publicly reiterated our warning that this will exacerbate the current shortage of nurses in the UK. I urge you and your Parliamentary colleagues to make the case to the Home Secretary for reconsidering including nursing on the SOL.

At a meeting of RCN Congress last month, members voted overwhelmingly in favour of a resolution to oppose these changes to the immigration rules. The debate detailed the detrimental impact these changes will have on nurse staffing levels as well as the huge loss of expertise and experience within the workforce, which will compromise
patient care unless nursing is included in the SOL, or the £35,000 threshold is lowered for nurses.

In addition, a significant number of the nurses affected by this rule change will have had children who, as a result of the rule change, would be forced to leave the country of their birth. It beggars belief that this can be happening in the United Kingdom.

If you would like to discuss this with us, please get in touch with my Parliamentary team at stephanie.mcmeeken@rcn.org.uk or 020 7647 3629 who will be happy to set up a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Carter OBE
Chief Executive & General Secretary