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Joan McAlpine MSP  
Convener  
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External  
Affairs Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
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8 November 2019

Dear Joan,

In October 2018 I wrote to inform you that I had made appointments to an Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population. I then wrote to you in March of this year when the Group published their first report: *UK Immigration Policy after Leaving the EU: Impacts on Scotland's Economy, Population and Society*. Three members of the Expert Advisory Group subsequently gave evidence to the Committee in April as part of your ongoing inquiry into immigration.

I am pleased to let you know that I have reappointed the chair and each member of the Expert Advisory Group for a period lasting from 25 October 2019 and ending on 31 March 2021.

It is vital that, as a government, we continue to seek to inform our public policy with sound evidence rooted in trusted, independent advice. We must continue to analyse and understand how we can tailor such policy to meet Scotland's needs. Over the next 18 months I intend to commission the Group, in line with their remit, to look at areas of research in relation to their expertise on migration and population and in the context of Scotland's devolved competence.

It is on this note then that I am also pleased to let the Committee know that the Group have concluded their second report: *Immigration Policy and Demographic Change in Scotland: Learning from Australia, Canada and Continental Europe*. In line with the Group's commission, this report details Scotland's demographic circumstance; situating the country's key challenges in a wider, international context. Whilst Scotland has enjoyed significant population growth in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, like many OECD countries, it is facing acute demographic shortages over the next 25 years. Given that natural change has become negative in Scotland over the last few years, increased

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migration from both the rest of the UK and from overseas will act as the sole driver of any future population growth.

Importantly, the size of Scotland's working age population is at risk if immigration drops substantially alongside a declining fertility rate and in the context of Scotland's historical legacy as a country that, up until the advent of freedom of movement, witnessed high levels of out-migration of young adults.

The report then broadens to consider various international examples of immigration systems that – in their design and operation – seek to mitigate demographic challenges and other related shortages. This includes systems that successfully deliver regionally differentiated solutions to counter shortages. The immigration rules and categories of Australia, Canada, Spain and Sweden are all in turn examined; each system aiming to address a range of geographic and labour market shortages. A vital takeaway from the report is that immigration policies explicitly designed to address demographic challenges tend to offer more expansive rights packages in order to encourage permanent settlement.

Both the Scottish and UK Governments can learn from the Group's findings and I recommend careful study and consideration of the report as the debate around the shape of the UK's future, post-Brexit immigration system continues. I will take time to consider and reflect on the report's conclusions, as I am sure the Committee will. I will use this valuable evidence to argue for further policy changes from the UK Government, as well as developing the Scottish Government policy position that there should be a tailored approach to immigration within a UK framework. A policy that recognises and addresses Scotland's distinct needs.

Finally, the Group are due to report on a third piece of research at the beginning of next year. This will be an analysis of migration within the UK, including the demographic and fiscal impacts of UK migration to Scotland. I will write to the Committee to update them at the conclusion of this commission and on any future commissions that are decided in the coming months.

As before and when appropriate the Group are available to give evidence to the Committee as part of your inquiry into immigration.

Best wishes,



**Ben Macpherson MSP**  
**Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development**

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