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Home Secretary

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Joan McAlpine, MSP
Convenor
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh,
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Sent via email.

15 February 2019

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter of 14 November 2018 regarding the final report of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) on EEA migrants in the UK ('the report'). I am sorry for the delay in replying.

I am indebted to the work of Professor Alan Manning and his Committee in producing this expert analysis. The MAC provided an opportunity for stakeholders to submit evidence in an objective and transparent way. Over 400 organisations and individuals did so and I am satisfied that the MAC gave all available evidence due consideration.

The Government accepts the MAC's analysis and will seek to give effect to it in the design of the future system. After the UK's exit and following the Implementation Period, we will end the current free movement system imposed by the EU so that the UK Immigration Rules will apply to EU and non-EU migrants alike in a single skills-based system, as opposed to being based on where an individual comes from.

In the MAC's interim update, prior to the publication of the final report, they specifically considered the position of Scotland, in particular the issue of population decline in Scotland. The Committee were clear that sectors of the economy that normally employ lower skilled migrants, such as tourism, hospitality and agriculture, should compete on wages and work conditions in order to make their sectors attractive to workers. Prioritising some sectors over others would not achieve this.

I'm sure the Scottish Government recognises that immigration alone cannot sustainably address regional or local depopulation. The 'offer' in terms of employment, infrastructure, education, lifestyle, public services etc. all play a major role and we will continue to work with the Scottish Government on these issues. While we will examine the specific needs of every part of the UK, we are clear that the Government is committed to a single, skills-based future border and immigration system.

Nonetheless, the Scottish Government and businesses in Scotland can, and have, influenced the determination of the UK-wide list of shortage occupations and have assisted the introduction of a Scotland specific shortage occupation list to cater for its particular labour market needs. This will continue after EU Exit.

We are continuing to engage and work with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Devolved Administrations, to ensure we understand their unique perspectives and the special challenges they face. However, we are clear that the reasons for local leaving must be addressed and immigration must be considered alongside investment in the skills and productivity of the UK's workforce.

As you will be aware, on 19 December 2018, the Government published a White Paper setting out its proposals for the United Kingdom's future skills-based immigration system after our exit from the European Union which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-future-skills-based-immigration-system>.

Proposals in the White Paper provide a platform for further discussion. The Home Office will launch an extensive 12-month programme of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the UK, including with the private, public and voluntary sector and local government, as well as industry representatives and individual businesses.

We are clear that our future system must work for every nation, region and community in the UK: all parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is an opportunity to build an immigration system that works for all, and we will continue to engage with the Devolved Administrations, in the EU Exit process and on wider immigration issues.

With regards to your specific concerns on visa efficiency. UK visa applications are processed quickly and our service compares very well with other countries. UK Visas and Immigration commit to specific service standards for the processing of applications and in the year ending June 2018, 96% of non-settlement visa applications were decided within our standard 15 working days processing time. In 2016 Deloitte completed a Global Immigration Study which ranked the UK third in the world in terms of speed of processing times for visas for skilled workers. I have full confidence that we will be able to replicate this speed and efficiency, and indeed improve on it, in any future system.

As the Immigration Minister made clear in her evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee in March, we do not recognise the case for putting a Scottish Government official on the Migration Advisory Committee. The MAC operate and produce their work independently of Government and they have a very clear remit to consider the whole of the United Kingdom in their analysis. I am sure that the MAC will consider all evidence put forward by the Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population in due course.



Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP