



Home Office

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Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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15 July 2020

Dear Chair,

I am writing at the request of the Home Secretary in response to your questioning today at the Select Committee session around the assessment of people coming across the border who could potentially have COVID-19.

As you know, I have been clear that any estimate of absolute numbers is highly uncertain due to the number and nature of the assumptions that would need to be made. SAGE's assessment came back as a proportion of the number of cases in the UK. While the calculations can be done to produce an absolute number, I do not believe that any resulting estimate would be reliable.

I do understand that it is very important to understand whether potential cases crossing the border have any meaningful impact on the progression of the disease in the UK. On 23rd March, SAGE advised that the numbers of cases arriving from **other countries were estimated to be insignificant in comparison with domestic cases**, comprising approximately 0.5%.

Since that time, we have continued to monitor whether the proportion of cases at any time has likely become significant, defined as being greater than 0.5% of UK cases. Due to the considerable drop in passenger numbers, we are confident that this did not happen between 23 March and 8 June, and the proportion remained less than 0.5%. On June 8, mandatory self isolation was put in place, in which case, this mitigated any risk. On July 10, countries with lower risk were exempted from the regulations, and we continue to be confident that the proportion of cases coming from other countries not subject to mandatory self isolation remains insignificant compared to domestic cases, as it is less than 0.5%.



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The Home Secretary has asked for regular updates on this data and continues to monitor this closely, including as part of wider discussions across Government. It should be noted that the Joint Biosecurity Centre in the Department of Health and Social Care is now responsible for assessments concerning the risk of COVID-19 from overseas

The Department will be providing further updates to the Committee as discussed in the session in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Aston', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor John Aston