

# Scottish Affairs Committee

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From the Chair, Pete Wishart MP

Rt Hon Alister Jack MP  
Dover House  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AU

24 September 2020

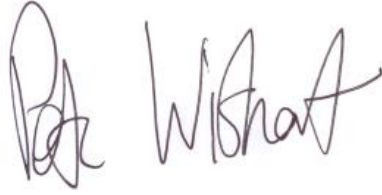
Dear Rt Hon Alister Jack MP,

Thank you for coming to give evidence on 17 September. Our discussion with you was extremely informative and will be considered during our deliberations on the governance around the coronavirus pandemic in Scotland. Unfortunately, there were some topics that we did not have a chance to discuss during the session, and we were hoping that you could provide us with the information in response to this letter:

- On Immigration and seasonal workers: We heard evidence that Scottish farmers need a higher number of seasonal workers allowed through the seasonal worker programme. What consideration has been given to increasing the numbers of people allowed onto the seasonal workers scheme?
- On immigration and key workers: We heard compelling evidence, during our key health sector workers session on 10 September, that care sector workers are not sufficiently valued, that there are significant workforce shortages across all care sectors and that job vacancies are rising. What is your assessment of the assertion that, due to gaps in data, the Migratory Advisory Committee's exclusion of health care workers due to salary thresholds should be reversed?
  - What is the Government's view on whether care sector workers ought to be included on the Scotland only Shortage Occupation List?
  - What is the Government's view on the addition of social care staff to the health and care visa (considering the evidence received by this Committee)?
- On Exports: The pandemic has affected UK exports, and the sectors we have heard from have told us that they would like a "strong bounce back". What are you doing to promote Scottish Exports and how are you representing Scottish industries in future trade deals? Are you communicating with the Scottish Government on this issue?

We would appreciate your thoughts on these key matters, which are likely to have clear implications for Scotland and the country's ability to get through these challenging times. We look forward to hearing from you, preferably by return, or ideally, by 2 October.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pete Wishart'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

**Pete Wishart MP**  
Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee



Pete Wishart MP  
Chair  
The Scottish Affairs Committee  
Committee Office  
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05 October 2020

Dear Pete,

## **RESPONSE TO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS ON IMMIGRATION AND TRADE**

Thank you for your letter of 24 September to request further information. The answers to your questions are set out below.

Question: We heard evidence that Scottish farmers need a higher number of seasonal workers allowed through the seasonal worker programme. What consideration has been given to increasing the numbers of people allowed onto the seasonal workers scheme?

Answer: From recent conversations with the National Farmers Union of Scotland, I fully appreciate that the horticulture sector is keen to learn the outcomes of the seasonal agriculture workers pilot as soon as possible. The Home Office is working closely to evaluate the findings of the pilot and, in the interim, ministers and officials from this department remain in close contact with counterparts in the Home Office and in Defra. We hope to be able to say more on this matter soon.

Question: We heard compelling evidence, during our key health sector workers session on 10 September, that care sector workers are not sufficiently valued, that there are significant workforce shortages across all care sectors and that job vacancies are rising. What is your assessment of the assertion that, due to gaps in data, the Migratory Advisory Committee's exclusion of health care workers due to salary thresholds should be reversed?

- o What is the Government's view on whether care sector workers ought to be included on the Scotland only Shortage Occupation List?
- o What is the Government's view on the addition of social care staff to the health and care visa (considering the evidence received by this Committee)?

Answer: I would like to put on record that the UK Government does very much appreciate the significant contribution of the social care sector, whose value to this country has never been better demonstrated than during the COVID-19 crisis. The UK Government is working alongside the social care sector to ensure the workforce has the right number of people to meet increasing demands, with the right skills, knowledge, and behaviours to deliver quality, compassionate care. We have recently launched a new UK-wide recruitment campaign, Every Day is Different, to run across broadcast, digital, and social media. This campaign highlights the vital role the social care workforce is playing right now, during the pandemic, along with the longer-term opportunities for working in care settings.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) has just published its report on the Shortage Occupation List for the UK's future points-based immigration system. I note that it has, in fact, recommended the inclusion of the following social care roles on the UK Shortage Occupation List: residential, day and domiciliary care managers and proprietors; nursing auxiliaries and assistants; and senior care workers. The key benefit to employers of having these occupations included on the SOL is, of course, the lower associated salary threshold. We will consider all of the MAC's recommendations carefully.

Nevertheless, the MAC is also very clear in its report that the solution to the recruitment and retention challenges which the care sector currently faces does not lie in migration, and that all of the UK's governments must look for a long-term solution where employers are not reliant on a steady flow of migrants working at minimum wage. This does not necessarily mean that migrants will no longer be able to come to the UK to work in social care in the foreseeable future - there will still be routes for people which contain general work rights such as dependants, family routes or youth mobility. Separately from this, we intend to review the list of eligible occupations able to benefit from the Health and Care Visa, to reflect the introduction of the expanded skills threshold in the new immigration system.

Question: The pandemic has affected UK exports, and the sectors we have heard from have told us that they would like a "strong bounce back". What are you doing to promote Scottish Exports and how are you representing Scottish industries in future trade deals? Are you communicating with the Scottish Government on this issue?

Answer: The UK Government is committed to delivering Free Trade Agreements that will benefit all parts of the UK. The Department for International Trade (DIT) has led a comprehensive programme of engagement on the UK's trade policy, including Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), with the Scottish Government and other Devolved Administrations, and over the last year and a half, DIT has built close relationships with colleagues in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These discussions will continue to develop as the UK pursues an ambitious independent trade agenda.


The Minister of State for Trade Policy also holds regular discussions with his counterparts in the Devolved Administrations to keep them informed of developments in DIT trade policy, through regular calls and a quarterly Ministerial Forum for Trade. This close working relationship also enables the sharing of information between officials, for example, through a senior officials group that meets once every six weeks.

While DIT has developed a New Export Strategy, they have enjoyed collaborative discussions both at official and ministerial level. They have also held virtual workshops at official level to ensure the UK Government's future policies capture the export priorities of each Devolved Administration, including the Scottish Government.

DIT has also established a Strategic Trade Advisory Group which provides a forum for high-level strategic discussions between government and stakeholders, representing a cross-section of interests from all parts of the UK on trade policy matters. In addition, the new Trade Advisory Groups allow DIT to engage with businesses across the whole of the UK, including Scotland. The UK Government wants every business and nation in the United Kingdom to feel engaged with our trade policy.

Most recently, DIT has also announced the opening of a new Trade Hub located in Queen Elizabeth House, Edinburgh. This new hub will provide businesses in Scotland with improved access to DIT export and investment support, as we seek to increase trade and prosperity across Scotland and the whole of the UK. This is especially vital as we enter the recovery phase of Covid-19 and reach the end of the EU transition period. Businesses will be able to better utilise the UK Government's global networks, expertise and influence, as well as our world-leading credit agency, UKEF, to grow their exports and overseas trade, allowing them to thrive as we recover from the effects of Covid-19.

I hope this information is useful.

*Yours sincerely,*  


**THE RT HON. ALISTER JACK MP  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND**