Dear Joan,

I write with reference to the recent Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee and questions regarding the impact of digital connectivity on the tourism industry.

In 2016 the midterm review of the industry-led strategy “Tourism Scotland 2020” highlighted that, in order to support the industry and create the opportunities and conditions for sustainable growth at a national level, the first of four priorities was to strengthen the digital capabilities of the industry.

That’s why we are improving the digital skills and capabilities of tourism businesses to support better visitor experiences and increased productivity through Digital Tourism Scotland - a £1.2 million, 3 year public and private sector partnership project running until 2018.

Digital Tourism Scotland is a partnership of seven organisations: Business Gateway, Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Tourism Alliance, Skills Development Scotland, and VisitScotland. It’s helping deliver a range of services to help individual tourism business make the most of new digital opportunities – including how to identify, engage with and attract new visitors.

In addition we are committed to delivering 100% superfast broadband access across the country by the end of 2021. Achieving 100% coverage (known as the Reaching 100% or R100 programme) will support rural development and enable innovation and growth across the economy, including the tourism industry. Work is already underway to deliver this commitment, the most recent milestone being the publication of the R100 State Aid public consultation earlier this month. Responses to this consultation will allow us to firmly define our intervention area and proceed to procurement later this year.
This, of course, will build upon the success of the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband programme which, by the end of 2017, will have provided fibre broadband access to over 95% of homes and business across the country. Upon completion the programme will have connected over 750,000 premises across 32 local authorities - premises that would not otherwise have been connected. However it is important for business to remember that they still need to sign up to use the superfast service as this doesn't happen automatically.

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

FERGUS EWING