Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter on 29 June following my appearance at the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. I apologise for the delayed response and confirm that I am happy to respond to your questions relating to the public health measures at the border.

The relevant regulations, the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, were introduced into the Scottish Parliament and came into effect on 8 June. They contain two main measures; the need to provide your journey and contact details when you travel to Scotland and the requirement to not be allowed to leave the place you are staying for the first 14 days you are in Scotland except in very limited situations (known as ‘self-isolating’). Guidance on these regulations is available at Scottish Government border health measures.

As I said at Committee, these measures will only be in place for as long as is necessary. The measures are required to reduce the risk of importing new Covid-19 cases and seeding new clusters of infection in Scotland. These measures become more, not less, important as the rates of infection within Scotland fall and the relative impact of imported cases becomes more significant. Scottish Ministers have argued for these measures to be introduced at the border since the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic.

We have worked collaboratively with the UK Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce these measures as part of a four nation public health approach. As the Committee correctly observes, international border control is reserved to the UK Government, but these regulations were implemented on a public health basis, and are therefore devolved to Scottish Ministers. As public health measures these changes were introduced through relevant health legislation in each country across the UK, an approach agreed across the four nations. Whilst broadly similar, there are some differences in the regulations across the four nations.
We have reviewed these regulations since they came into force and assessed that the remains a requirement for them to remain in place. Our next review point for these regulations is Monday 10 August as part of a 21 day cycle, however we are continuously keeping countries under review and where there is clear evidence that it is safe to do so, we will add further countries to the exemption list. Likewise, if the evidence suggests an exempt country may provide increased risk, we will not hesitate to reinstate quarantine arrangements

You will be aware that there have been times where the Scottish Government has diverged from the other UK in the course of implementing these measures. Whilst we continue to favour a four nation approach, and will align where possible, we will continue to make decisions that are in the best interests for the people of Scotland, with public health the top priority.

I would like to thank you again for your correspondence and hope you have found this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

FERGUS EWING