

T: 0300 244 4000  
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Joan McAlpine MSP  
Convener  
European and External Relations Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

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Dear Ms McAlpine,

Thank you for sharing the Committee's recent report, *Brexit – What Scotland thinks: summary of evidence and emerging issues*, on 20 January 2017. As I mentioned in my Committee appearance on 2 February, the Scottish Government appreciates the comprehensive and insightful work the Committee has undertaken since the EU referendum last year.

This report is an especially useful contribution to the analysis of stakeholder views and emerging issues. It covers a very broad range of policy areas, which closely reflect the powers of the Scottish Parliament and Government. The wide array of stakeholders that came forward to provide considered views and analysis is credit to the Committee's standing and excellent public outreach.

The Government has noted the overarching themes and issues which are identified in this report. These broadly correspond with the analysis and stakeholder feedback the Scottish Government has received; in all areas the report provides very useful additional insights. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few, key contributions, without prejudice to the quality and importance of others.

In the chapter on Justice and Home Affairs, the report cites evidence from diverse sources such as Professors Carruthers and Crawford, the Commissioner for Children and Young People Scotland and Money Advice Scotland. They all explain the real-life, human consequences that withdrawal from the European Union may have. They note that current rules provide for increased personal safety and harm prevention. The Scottish Government is fully aware of the need for ongoing co-operation and the avoidance of a regression in this area. The rights of citizens from the EU27 states, as well as the separate nature of the Scottish legal system, have been identified as key issues that are also priorities for the Scottish Government.

On Further and Higher Education, Schools and Skills, the report provides a sound evidence base, highlighting not just the importance of this area to the future economic and social

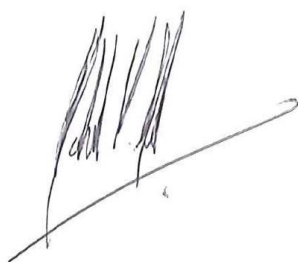
wellbeing of our country but also the disproportionate importance of European co-operation in this area for Scotland, compared to other parts of the UK. The Government shares the respondents' concerns in regards to funding opportunities but also Scottish institutions' international standing and co-operation opportunities, such as Horizon 2020, which cannot be replicated through UK-only, post-Brexit solutions. The University of Edinburgh's evidence refers to the benefits of being able to access European Investment Bank loans. This demonstrates the danger that leaving the EU also means leaving a large number of associated agencies which are vital to continued research excellence in our country. The Scottish Government is also agrees that Freedom of Movement of people is vital for this sector.

The evidence in the area of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is also very useful, thanks to the variety of stakeholders who have given their views on the impact of Brexit and future of their industries. While it is clear from the evidence that the EU regimes are perceived by some to be burdensome, concerns about the continuation of funding as well as risks associated with replacing current policies have been clearly outlined. The Government notes the potential opportunities of Scotland-based governance models but also the associated risks in terms of environmental sustainability and market access. The Scottish Government is increasingly aware of the risk that the Fisheries sector may become a bargaining chip in UK-EU relations without due consideration of the local impacts. Again, it is helpful to note the importance of immigration to this sector, through the Freedom of Movement of people.

The chapter on Climate Change and Environment demonstrates the profound, positive impact the EU's legislative frameworks and funding programmes have had on this sector. For example, the evidence from the Scottish Association for Marine Science highlights how substantial the influence of EU has been. To the Scottish Government, this demonstrates the benefits of European co—operation but also the need to provide legal certainty and to ensure that we can continue to protect our environment. On funding, the Scottish Government shares the concern of respondents such as Scottish Natural Heritage, whose evidence helpfully demonstrates how the the EU's diverse funding streams sustain conservation work in Scotland.

The Scottish Government will give this report and the issues raised in it full consideration, as recommended by the Committee. I look forward to the Committee's forthcoming reports from its current inquiry. Let me take the opportunity to reaffirm the Government's commitment to keep the Committee and Parliament updated on developments.

I should also note that we continue to believe that Scotland's interests are best served by maintaining a close relationship with the EU and membership of the Single Market. I would like to thank the members once again for the opportunity to discuss our proposals with them at their session on 2 February.



**MICHAEL RUSSELL**