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1. Briefing: Migration Strategy: Approach and Prioritisation

Purpose

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(ii), s.28(1)]

Background

5. The UK immigration system is incredibly complex [redacted - s.30(b)(ii), s.28(1)] in terms of the process, IT and bureaucracy that have developed over the years to implement policy. It is also very costly both for employers and for individuals.
6. The main driver of UK immigration policy in recent years has been the desire to reduce net migration. Since the 2016 referendum on EU membership there has been a fall in EU net migration to the UK and since 2021 net EU migration to the UK has been negative.
7. However, this reduction in migration from the EU has been offset by significantly increased migration from non EU nations. Net migration in 2023 was unusually high and prompted the then UK Government to take immediate action to try to reduce immigration. Most of those coming to the UK from outside the EU are doing so on work or study visas.
8. Official net migration estimates are estimates and published figures will be revised. For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has revised the estimate of net migration for 2022 upwards by 26%, or 158,000, since it was first published. However, the ONS estimates that total net migration was 685,000 in 2023. [redacted - s.30(b)(ii), s.28(1)]
9. Scotland has distinct demographic challenges and all of our population growth comes from migration either from the rest of the UK or internationally. Scotland has positive net migration from both the rest of the UK and internationally. People who move to Scotland tend to be younger and don't just support our broader population growth but also specifically our working age population.
10. Migration is positive in every local authority in Scotland but is not sufficient to offset natural change in every local area and the population has fallen in 7 local authority areas. This issue is most acute, although not confined to, rural communities. Further background on Scotland's demographic challenge and the latest immigration data is at **Annex A**.

Strategic Priorities

- [redacted - s.30(b)(ii)]
- Making the most of the existing immigration system – supporting employers to navigate their way through the system and individuals to come to Scotland;
- Building the evidence case and arguing for changes within the UK immigration system; and
- Making the case for tailored migration routes for Scotland which reflect Scotland's distinct demographic challenges.

In our 2020 paper *Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper* we published a set of principles for migration policy [redacted - s.30(b)(ii)]

these principles (**Annex B**) should continue to underpin our approach to immigration policy

Theme 1 - Effective use of Existing Immigration System

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

Theme 2 – making the case for change

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

Tailored Migration Routes

The third strand in our approach to migration strategy is to argue for tailored migration routes which recognise Scotland's distinct demographic challenges. [redacted - s.30(b)(ii), s.28(1)]

16. We have developed two specific proposals:

- **Scottish Visa** which would be linked to a Scottish tax code thereby ensuring that individuals on this visa were directly contributing the Scottish economy. Scottish Ministers would establish the eligibility criteria within a capped visa scheme but work with the UK Government on delivery. This scheme reflects models in place in a number of other countries.
- **Rural Visa Pilot** which would be focused directly on the needs of employers, public services and communities in island and rural communities. The UK Government's Migration Advisory Committee noted that 'the current migration system is not very effective in dealing with the particular problems remote communities experience' and recommended that the UK Government pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas. The Scottish Government has developed a Rural Visa Pilot proposal, backed by a wide range of Scottish and rest-of-UK stakeholders, which we could work with the UK Government to establish as a formal scheme.

Possible Tailored Route for [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

Education

17. The last set of quarterly sats on study visa applications showed a fall of 13% in study visas at a UK level although the numbers of study visas are still 61% higher than in 2019. However, the HE sector are flagging concerns about a range of immigration issues and how the cumulative effect of those issues is negatively impacting on applications from international students. These include the financial impact of the Immigration Health Surcharge; the decision by the previous UK Government to stop international students bringing family members with them to the UK (with some exceptions for postgraduate research students) and the increase in the Skilled Worker Visa Salary threshold which makes it more challenging for students to stay in the UK by transitioning from a Graduate Visa to a Skilled Worker Visa.

18. The changes to student dependent rules; the 66% increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge and 48% in the salary threshold for the Skilled Worker Visa came into force in January; February and April 2024 respectively.

Options

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

- [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
- [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

Scottish Graduate Visa Pilot

24. The two key issues which need to be addressed are the transition from the Graduate Visa to the Skilled Worker Visa (given the significant increase in the salary threshold) and the ability to bring dependents.
25. International students who were willing to stay in Scotland should be able to transition from a Graduate Visa straight to a Scottish Visa or Rural Visa. The offer should be focused on international students who have studied at a Scottish University, thus helping the attraction offer for Scottish institutions whilst also making it more likely that those individuals will want to stay in Scotland longer term. Individuals on a Scottish Visa would be required to have a Scottish tax code thus ensuring that they were employed in Scotland. However, there would be no salary threshold for this route or sponsorship requirement for employers. Further detail on the Scottish Visa is attached at **Annex B** and reflects proposals published in *Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper*.
26. This would help to address the challenges around the transition between a Graduate Visa and a Skilled Worker Visa. Individuals on a Scottish Visa would also be able to bring dependents with them. [redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

Assessment of Options

[redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

The issues which the HE sector have raised are issues which are impacting across a range of sectors [redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

28. Arguing for changes to the starting salary for the Skilled Worker Visa is a key issue across the economy.

[redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

31. [redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

32. [redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

Public Attitudes to Migration

32. There is evidence that public attitudes to migration in Scotland broadly track, while being slightly more positive than attitudes in the UK as a whole. Research from Migration Policy Scotland into attitudes to migration in Scotland published in May 2024 found that around 42% of respondents wanted to see immigration reduced. However, attitudes shift when considering specific visa routes so only 9% wanted to see the numbers of people coming through the Skilled Visa route reduced (against 59% who wanted to see an increase); 18% wanting a reduction to numbers on the health and social care visa route (48% wanting an increase); 18% a reduction to seasonal and temporary routes (45% increase); and 19% a reduction on student visas (37% wanting an increase).
33. There is less support for dependents coming into Scotland with 42% advocating a reduction in the number of student dependent visas (19% increase).

34. While public attitudes to migration can be quite dependent on the wider context and the precise question asked there is evidence that focusing on specific visa routes is important.

Conclusion

35. Migration is a high profile issue which cuts across a range of policy issues. We need to have a coherent approach to immigration policy focused on:
- Evidencing that we are maximising our engagement with the existing immigration system both in terms of supporting individuals; inward investors and employers but also in exploitation to ensure that those who come to Scotland have a positive experience;
 - Advocating for change to the UK immigration rules using an evidence based approach, engaging with a range of sectors to listen to their concerns and publicly advocate for change that will help our economy, communities and public services; and
 - Argue for tailored visa routes for Scotland with a focus on a Rural Visa Pilot and a Scottish Visa or Scottish Graduate Visa.

[redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

Annex A

Scotland's Demographic Challenge

1. The latest population estimates as of 30 June 2023, referred to as 'mid-2023' were published on 8 October. They showed that;
 - **Scotland's population increased by 43,100 people (0.8%)** in the year to mid-2023. This is the largest single-year increase in Scotland's population since the 1940s.
 - **The number of deaths registered in Scotland and all 32 Local Authorities was greater than the number of births**, and the difference is getting wider each year.
 - **Therefore, migration was the main driver of population growth over the latest year (+61,600)**. More people moved to Scotland than left, as has been the case for the last two decades.
 - **International immigration was higher than emigration** in the year to mid-2023 (+47,700). The last two years have been higher significantly higher than previous years.
 - **More people moved into Scotland from the rest of the UK** in the year to mid-2023 than moved the other way (+13,900).

The most substantial notable trend since 2021 has been the rise in **non-EU migration**, especially from countries like China and India, driven by rises in International Students studying in Universities in Scotland.

2. All of our population growth is therefore from migration – either migration from the rest of the UK (which was +13,900 in the last set of data) or international migration. This is true in every part of Scotland. In every local authority area across Scotland the number of deaths outnumbered the number of births leading to negative natural change while migration was positive for every area. However, the level of migration is not sufficient to offset natural change in every local area and the population has fallen in 7 local authority areas. This issue is most acute, although not confined to, rural communities.

Impact of the ending of Freedom of Movement

3. Scottish employers were particularly dependent on freedom of movement. Research by the FSB published in their World of Talent report in 2020 found that small business employers in Scotland were especially reliant on EEA workers. Across the UK as a whole they found that 26% of small businesses employed a non UK/non Irish EEA worker with businesses in London (53%), Scotland (40%) and the South-East of England (31%) employing the most.

4. The FSB also found that small and medium employers were much less likely to have had experience of recruiting through the UK's immigration system. In 2020 only 5% of small businesses had recruited through this route.

Immigration Numbers

5. The ending of freedom of movement coincided with a significant increase in migration from the rest of the world. In 2023 net migration into the UK (migration/offset by emigration) was unusually high at 685,000. The increase in migration was largely driven by people arriving in the UK on work visas and their dependants as well as students.
6. This prompted the then UK Government to introduce a number of urgent measures to seek to reduce migration levels including: raising the salary threshold for Skilled Workers Visa; raising the financial threshold for the family visa; raising the Immigration Health Surcharge; and limiting the number of migrants who can bring dependents with them into the UK. They also launched a review of the Graduate Visa Route, which ultimately concluded that the route should be retained.
7. The new UK Government has retained many of these measures and restated a public commitment to driving down migration numbers.
8. In the latest migration data for the year ending June 2024 the impact of some of these changes are already clear. In the year ending June 2024:
 - There were 286,382 visas granted to main applicants in all work categories. This is a reduction of 11% on the previous year (although it is more than double 2019 levels).
 - There was a significant decrease, 26%, in the number of Health and Care Worker visas granted. However, even more significantly the main fall was in the last quarter (April to June 2024) which was 81% lower than the same period in 2023. This fall coincides with the introduction of the measures stopping people on this route from bringing dependants into the country which has undoubtedly impacted on the attractiveness of the route.
 - There was a 3% fall in the past year in the number of visas granted to those entering the UK through a non-Health and Social Care work related visa route (including the Skilled Worker visa route).
 - There has been a slight increase (3%) in the number of Temporary Worker Visas granted in the last year. While 44% of 'Temporary Worker' visas came through the Seasonal Worker visa route the other main subgroup within this visa route were Youth Mobility Schemes (31%) and there was a 6% increase in the number of Youth Mobility Scheme visas issued which reflects the impact of new mobility agreements.
 - There were 432,225 sponsored study visas granted to applicants, 13% fewer than in the previous year although still 61% higher than in 2019. There are a number of reasons for this fall partly it is a correction after a post covid increase in international students who had delayed their arrival in the UK as a result of the pandemic. It also reflects changes in other countries with big falls in the number of students coming from India and Nigeria. Students from India and China comprise around 50% of the total. Increases in the Immigration Health Surcharge; uncertainty about the future of the Graduate Visa and changes in the rules for dependents have also had an impact. There was an 81% fall in the number of visas granted to student dependants in the first 6 months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.
 - There was a 40% increase in the number of family related visa applications (98,906) compared to the previous year, continuing a trend of increases in this visa route. However, there was a smaller increase (12%) in the number of family related visas that were actually granted (84,403), although there will be a time lag between application and decision. Those entering the UK on a family visa route are more likely to stay in the UK than those arriving on work or study visas.

Annex B

Migration Policy Principles

- i. Migration policy should address the needs of all of Scotland, including those areas most at risk of depopulation.
- ii. Migration policy should encourage and enable long-term settlement in Scotland, welcoming people with the range of skills we need to work, raise families and make a positive contribution to society.
- iii. Scotland should be able to attract talented and committed people from Europe and across the world to work and study here without excessive barriers, and our migration policy should support mobility, collaboration and innovation.
- iv. Migration policy should support fair work, protecting workers rights, pay and access to employment and preventing exploitation and abuse.
- v. People who are entitled to live in Scotland – both international migrants and UK citizens – should be able to bring close family with them and migrants should have access to services and support to encourage integration into communities.
- vi. The migration system should be easy to access and understand and focused on what a prospective migrant can contribute, not on their ability to pay - therefore fees and charges should be proportionate.
- vii. Migration should be controlled to deter and prevent abuse, fraud and criminal activity, including terrorism, human trafficking and other serious offences.

Annex C

Tailored Migration Routes

Scotland faces distinct demographic and population challenges around rural depopulation, population shift and demographic change. Other countries face similar issues.

Places such as Canada and Australia have successfully used regional immigration schemes to allow states and provinces to attract and retain people with the skills and attributes needed to benefit the local economy and local communities and address these challenges.

The current immigration system can broadly be seen within the first circle (although there is a different approach to family migration in Northern Ireland and a slightly different Immigration Salary List for Scotland compared to the rest of the UK).

[redacted - s.29(1)(a), s.30(b)(i), s.30(b)(ii)]

Rural Visa Pilot

A community driven employer based migration route which would be delivered through a partnership between Scottish Government, UK Government and community partners – including employers, local statutory, and third sector services – and employers.

The route would be employment based with employers and partners within designated Community Pilot Areas working together to recruit individuals and provide integrated settlement support.

Migrants would be required to adhere to conditions of employment whereby they are employed within the designated Community Pilot Area, with restrictions easing gradually over a period of four years. Migrants entered on the scheme would be strongly encouraged to live within the Community Pilot Area (with robust measures in place among partners to ensure migrants are supported to settle within the designated Community Pilot Area where possible).

A Scottish Visa

The Scottish Government proposes that Scottish Ministers would set the criteria and rules for a visa to enter the UK that would let migrants live and work in Scotland, with a Scottish tax code. Holders of this visa would have to live in Scotland and could not live elsewhere in the UK. The Scottish tax code is an example of an existing framework based on residence

and would help ensure that people on the Scottish Visa are staying in Scotland and contributing to the Scottish economy.

Under our proposals both migrants and employers recruiting workers would have a choice of routes through the UK immigration system.

A Scottish Visa would present an additional option for people who want to live, work and eventually settle in Scotland. The Scottish Visa would be an extra option in the UK system, and the Scottish Government would work in partnership with the UK Government to deliver this additional Scottish Visa. It would not prevent employers in Scotland or migrants to Scotland applying for any other UK visas.

A Scottish Graduate Visa

Individuals who graduated from a Scottish University, are resident in Scotland and on a Graduate Visa could apply to stay in Scotland on Scottish Graduate Visa. Holders of this visa would have to live in Scotland and could not live elsewhere in the UK.

There would be no salary threshold for a Scottish Graduate Visa and individuals would be able to bring immediate family members with them on the same basis as a Skilled Worker Visa.

2. Briefing: Debate Pack – 9 January 2025

What	Building a Migration System Which Supports Scotland's Economy, Public Services, and Communities
When	9 January 2025
Why	<p>Scotland requires an increase in migration to meet its distinct economic and demographic challenges and to offset the risks of demographic change with all of our population growth projected to come from migration.</p> <p>[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)] This debate provides an opportunity to build support and consensus across the parliament for our strategic approach to migration policy in this context.</p>
Key messages	<p>The Scottish Government is taking a strategic approach to migration policy focusing on 3 key strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the most of the existing immigration system – supporting employers to navigate their way through the system and individuals to come to Scotland; • Building the evidence case and arguing for changes within the UK immigration system; and • Making the case for tailored migration routes for Scotland which reflect Scotland's distinct demographic challenges.
Official support	(Redacted under * s.38(1)(b) Personal Information) , Population and Migration Division
Briefing contents	<p>FOR DEBATES:</p> <p>Annex A Speaking notes (submitted separately) Annex B Motion and Overview Annex C Scotland's Population Key Facts Annex D Population Strategy Annex E Tailored Migration Proposals Annex F Supportive Quotes for Tailored Migration Proposals Annex G Population and Migration Q&A and Top Lines</p> <p>[redacted – not in scope]</p>

ANNEX B

MOTION

“That the Parliament recognises the social, economic and cultural contribution made to Scotland by those who have chosen to live here; notes the establishment of Scotland’s Migration Service at a cost of up to £1.5 million in the draft budget to help employers, investors and individuals navigate the UK immigration system; notes that the Parliament has previously endorsed a motion calling for the development of a differentiated, more flexible migration policy tailored to meet Scotland’s specific needs; calls on the UK Government to accept the Rural Visa Pilot proposal and to work directly and constructively with the Scottish Government to ensure that the needs of Scotland’s employers, communities and public services are fully reflected within the immigration system”

OVERVIEW

The Scottish Government is seeking reform of the UK immigration system so that it meets the needs of our economy, public services and communities is a key Scottish Government priority.

Scotland’s Census 2022 has, along with all other recent National Records of Scotland population and migration statistical publications, reinforced that Scotland has distinct demographic needs, and projected population decline is likely to have far-reaching implications for Scotland’s fiscal position and resultant public service planning and provision.

Migration can help mitigate these risks. All of our net population growth comes from migration, either from the rest of the UK or internationally, and evidence shows that

people who move to Scotland bolster our working-age population and contribute tax revenue to fund the delivery of vital public services.

The Scottish Government aims to support the UK Government to deliver a migration system which supports Scotland's economy, public services, and communities.

The Scottish Government seeks to deliver this aim through:

- Scotland's Migration System which supports employers, investors and individuals to more successfully navigate the existing UK immigration system.
 - Following delivery of the first iteration of the service on 27 March 2024, an expanded version of Scotland's Migration Service launched on 19 November 2024.
- making evidence-based arguments for changes to the UK Government's approach to immigration, and
- continuing to call for tailored migration routes, deliverable within the existing system to reflect Scotland's distinct needs and support our ambitions for economic growth.

ANNEX C

SCOTLAND'S POPULATION KEY FACTS

- Scotland's population is growing. In 2023, Scotland's population was 5,490,100. The population grew by 421,600 (8 per cent) since 2003. It increased by 43,100 people (0.8 per cent) in the year to mid-2023. This is the largest single-year increase in Scotland's population since the 1940s.
- The number of deaths registered in Scotland was greater than the number of births, and the difference is getting wider each year. The number of deaths exceeded the number of births in all 32 Local Authorities.
- The number of births decreased from 51,794 in 2003 to 45,981 in 2023, a decrease of 11 per cent. This is accompanied by an increase of almost 12 per cent in the number of deaths, from 58,328 in 2003 to 65,125 in 2023.
- Therefore, the increase in population in recent years is largely due to net migration. More people moved to Scotland than left, as has been the case for the last two decades.
- This means in-migration (those coming into Scotland) was higher than out-migration (those leaving Scotland). Between 2003 and 2023 average annual net migration has been around +24,000 people. However, in 2023 net migration was +61,600. Overall, Scotland saw positive net migration across all Council Areas.
- International net migration was positive in the year to mid-2023 (+47,700). Since 2003, international immigration has exceeded emigration, except in 2013 when it was slightly lower. Figures for the last two years have been much higher than in previous years.
- More people moved into Scotland from the rest of the UK in the year to mid-2023 than moved the other way (+13,900).
- The most notable trend since 2021 has been the rise in non-EU migration, especially from countries like China and India, driven by increases in the number of International Students studying in Universities in Scotland.
- At a UK level, provisional estimates from ONS found total International Net Migration to be 728,000 in the year ending (YE) December 2024, compared with 906,000 for the YE December 2023, a decline of 20 per cent. This fall is driven by a decline in long-term immigration mainly because of declining numbers of dependants arriving on study visas. It is also driven by a rise in long-term emigration, most notably for those who came to the UK on study-related visas. Figures for this period are not currently available for Scotland.
- Scotland's population is ageing. In 2023, 16 per cent of Scotland's population was under 16 compared to 19 per cent in 2003. And 20 per cent of the population were aged 65 and over in 2023 compared to 16 per cent in 2003.

ANNEX D

POPULATION STRATEGY

In March 2021, the Ministerial Population Taskforce published Scotland's first population strategy, [A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#).

It aims to make communities across Scotland attractive places to live, work, bring up families and move to, so that Scotland's population profile provides a platform for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and wellbeing. The strategy identifies 36 initial actions across four thematic building blocks:

- **'A Family Friendly Nation'** – As Scotland's birth rate is falling (and is the lowest in the UK), we must ensure Scotland is the best place to raise a family.
- **'A Healthy Living Society'** – As Scotland's population lives longer, which is to be celebrated, we must ensure that our people are healthy and active.
- **'An Attractive and Welcoming Country'** – As Freedom of Movement ends, Scotland needs to be able to attract people who can make a positive contribution to our economy, communities and public services.
- **'A More Balanced Population'** – With rural communities and those in the west experiencing population decline, while many in the east experience increased population growth, we must ensure our population is more balanced and distributed so all our communities can flourish.

Both the **Rural Visa Pilot** and **Scotland's Migration Service** were commitments within the 'Attractive and Welcoming Country' strand of the Strategy.

MINISTERIAL POPULATION TASKFORCE

- In 2019, the Scottish Government established a Ministerial Population Taskforce. This is chaired by the Minister for Equalities.
- The Taskforce consists of more than 10 Scottish Ministers across a wide range of portfolios.
- It meets quarterly and aims to deliver the actions set out in the Population Strategy (published in 2021), and identify gaps where new areas of work can support a joined up approach across government.
- Beneath the Taskforce sits a Director-led Programme Board, which includes external partners including COSLA, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and South of Scotland Enterprise.

ANNEX E

TAILORED MIGRATION PROPOSALS

OVERVIEW

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

Tailored approaches to migration are an intrinsic feature of the immigration system as it currently exists, be it in the form of the Health and Care visa, the Skilled Worker Visa, or the Seasonal Worker Visa. Our ask of the UK Government is that a geographical, rather than only a sectoral, approach to tailored migration is introduced which serves Scotland's distinct needs without compromising the wider UK approach to immigration.

The former Fresh Talent Scheme and the former Scottish Shortage Occupation List are two examples of regional differentiation within previous UK Government immigration systems.

- The Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland Scheme, which operated 2005 to 2008, was open to graduates of Scottish institutions who intended to live in Scotland for up to two years after their studies; residence anywhere in the UK was valid for compliance with the visa. It was replaced by the UK-wide Post Study Work Visa which was subsequently scrapped in 2012.
- [redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

SCOTTISH VISA

Our January 2020 paper '[Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper](#)' outlines our position on devolution of new powers on migration.

The paper summarises options for a tailored migration policy for Scotland and advances a reasonable approach with devolution of some powers within a UK framework and partnership working with the UK Government on delivery.

This would be in the form of a Scottish Visa, for which eligibility criteria would be set by Scottish Ministers, according to Scotland’s economic and demographic needs.

However, as drafted, the proposal would require further essential reform of the UK Government’s immigration system and in many cases since 2020 the situation relating to the following list has worsened:

- the removal of unnecessary fees, skills and health surcharges;
- a considerable reduction in visa application costs;
- lowering minimum salary thresholds and reviewing skills qualifications;
- ensuring mechanisms are suitably responsive to shifting labour market requirements;
- a more generous approach to family migration and family reunification;
- safer routes for displaced individuals to settle in the UK;
- a more humane and proportionate approach to immigration enforcement including detention, removals, the right to work and access to public funds.

RURAL VISA PILOT

In 2022, the Scottish Government published a proposal for a Rural Visa Pilot, developed in collaboration with local authorities and business sector organisations, about a targeted migration solution for remote and rural areas of Scotland, to meet the discrete and specific needs of these communities and their local economies. The proposals build on the initial suggestion of the benefits of a rural scheme highlighted in the 2020 Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper paper.

The proposal was endorsed in the Scottish Parliament by 79 votes, with 29 against. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Lib Dems voted in favour alongside the SNP and Scottish Greens. Only the Scottish Conservatives voted against, however remarked that they supported the principle of the Rural Visa Pilot proposal.

Organisations involved in developing the pilot were as follows:

Local authorities	Business partners
Argyll & Bute	Angus Growers
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Grampian Growers
Dumfries & Galloway	National Farmers Union Scotland
East Ayrshire	Scotland Food & Drink
East Lothian	Scottish Islands Federation
Highland	Scottish Rural Action
Moray	Seafood Scotland
North Ayrshire	Highlands and Islands enterprise
Orkney	South of Scotland enterprise
Perth & Kinross	
Scottish Borders	
Shetland	

SCOTTISH GRADUATE VISA PROPOSALS

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

we ask the UK Government to establish a Scottish Graduate Visa route which would:

- Be restricted to international students from Scottish Universities who have a Graduate Visa;
- Require individuals on the route to have a Scottish tax code – linking it explicitly to those living and working in Scotland;

- Be a work visa route so individuals would be required to have a job and probably be sponsored by their employer. However, there would be no salary threshold for the job;
- Be able to bring dependents with them – but those dependents would be required to live and if, appropriate, work in Scotland; and
- Count towards settlement.

This proposal reflects stakeholder engagement while developing our Scottish Visa proposals, although with some notable differences.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

Universities have two significant concerns:

- the restrictions on the ability to bring dependents and
- the increase in the salary threshold for the Skilled Worker Visa

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

- ANNEX G

POPULATION AND MIGRATION Q&A AND TOP LINES

Q: What is the Scottish Government doing to encourage more people to come to Scotland?

- Immigration powers are reserved, but Scottish Government launched **Scotland's Migration Service** in 2024 to support migrants and Scottish-based employers to navigate the UK immigration system to meet their relocation and/or business needs.
- We continue to urge the UK Government to **make vital reforms to the immigration system** to meet Scotland's needs.
- Proposals for a **Scottish Visa** or a **Rural Visa Pilot** are just two practical examples of this, where the UK Government can take productive steps forward.

Q: Is it not the case that differentiated migration schemes put forward by the Scottish Government (such as the Rural Visa Pilot) will just create more bureaucracy, cost, and confusion?

- The evidence is clear. Tailored migration solutions are necessary to meet the needs of Scotland's communities.
- This is not only the view of Scottish Government. It is shared by experts - the UK Government's own Migration Advisory Committee stated in 2019 that the current UK immigration system is '*not very effective*' in facilitating migration to rural areas.
- When designing our proposals, **Scottish Government have actively engaged with and listened to stakeholders**. We have been clear to design schemes which would maximise the benefits of migration to Scotland's communities and economy, while minimising the cost and burden on employers and migrants.

Q: The Scottish Government wants to focus the debate on immigration and blame the UK Government. Yet, does it accept its own responsibility (through Housing, Transport, Planning, and other areas of devolved policy) in failing to make Scotland an attractive place to live and work?

- Our Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, published in February last year, sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach aimed at supporting local communities facing population decline.
- This Action Plan sets out the range of activity already ongoing by the Scottish Government and its partners across a range of drivers of population decline; including housing, transport, education and access to healthcare.
- It also establishes a range of new, locally-driven interventions in support of population attraction and retention, aligned to communities' own ambitions for change.

- Nevertheless, migration is a key part of Scotland's future prosperity, and Scottish Ministers are only acknowledging what the evidence shows, and proposing deliverable solutions.

Q: Lack of housing and critical infrastructure is a key challenge shared by many communities across Scotland, particularly in the context of the recently announced National Housing Emergency. How does the Scottish Government propose to increase migration to rural areas if there is already a lack of housing?

- We recognise that good quality, affordable housing is essential to help attract and retain people in Scotland's rural communities.
- We remain committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes, of which at least 70% will be for social rent and at least 10% in our rural and island communities and this is supported by our Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan.
- In addition to our substantial mainstream investment, demand led funds, such as the £30 million Rural and Island Housing Fund and the £25 million Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund are key elements in addressing specific rural housing issues where they arise.
- It is the responsibility of local authorities, through their Local Housing Strategy, to determine appropriate housing required in their area, informed by a Housing Need and Demand Assessment.

MIGRATION

Evidence shows those who choose Scotland as their home help to grow our economy, increase our productivity and innovation, address skills shortages and make essential contributions to communities.

- Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs require a tailored approach to migration. Scotland needs access to international talent and skills at all levels of the economy, including within our tourism and hospitality sectors.
- Scotland must be able to attract people from all over the world to come here without excessive barriers, and migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation.
- Scottish Ministers are committed to working closely with the UK Government so they deliver an immigration system supporting the prosperity of Scotland's economy and communities

CHANGES REQUIRED TO THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

UK immigration policy must be developed in consideration of the economic impacts on the industries most affected by it and only following meaningful consultation with sector representatives

- The immigration system's main visa routes are for high earners, with few, or no routes, for some of the most vital roles in society.
- Scotland needs people to contribute at all levels of the economy, in vital, challenging roles within sectors including tourism, hospitality, logistics, care, construction and food production.
- Migration also supports many aspects of devolved competency – including higher education, housing, healthcare and the delivery of vital public services.

There must be a complete overhaul of immigration fees and processes.

- We are concerned that the relative cost of these charges make Scotland a less attractive destination for skilled workers and international students.
- The immigration system should focus on what a prospective migrant contributes, not only on their ability to pay – therefore fees and charges should be proportionate, fair and transparent.
- At a minimum, the health surcharge should be scrapped - people effectively pay twice for healthcare services, both through the surcharge and their own tax contributions.

The Immigration Skills List needs to be agile and responsive in addressing the acute skills and labour shortages we face.

- The ISL should align with the labour needs of all four nations, include a wide range of skill levels, be agile and responsive in amending or adding roles.
- Scottish Ministers, should have a formal role in determining the shortage roles in Scotland for inclusion on the ISL.
- We welcome further clarity on the UK Government's approach, aligning migration policy with skills policy and look forward to more detail on the anticipated role of the Devolved Governments in this approach.

SCOTLAND'S MIGRATION SERVICE

Scotland's Migration Service is a new online information and advice resource that helps address skills shortages and demographic challenges. Key outcomes include:

- Attracting talent and encouraging more people to live and work in Scotland.
- Assisting employers in effectively using the UK immigration system to meet labour demands.
- Assisting individuals with their immigration requirements.
- Providing reception support to newcomers to help them settle in Scotland.
- Creating an online platform for employers and individuals to access services.

Scotland's Migration Service helps attract talent to Scotland and remove some of the barriers migrants and employers face when navigating the immigration system to meet their relocation and/or business needs.

- The service contributes to efforts to grow our economy, maximise our existing talent pool, and attract more individuals to Scotland to address skills shortages and demographic challenges.

Inward migration brings significant benefits to Scotland - helping to grow our economy, increase productivity and innovation, address skills shortages and contribute to public services. Migrants are also vital to meeting our population needs.

- The population of Scotland is projected to begin to fall within the next decade. By 2045, the number of working age people is projected to fall by 2.4%.
- To grow the economy and improve prosperity, we need to ensure we have a working age population across our communities that can support our economy and public services.
- For the past two decades, migration has been the main driver of population growth in Scotland. Migration is therefore crucial to Scotland's future growth.
- Scotland must be able to attract international talent and skills at all levels of the economy and from all over the world to come here without excessive barriers.
- Scotland's Migration Service will help mitigate the complexity and bureaucracy of the immigration system to encourage individuals to move to Scotland and support businesses to hire talented people from overseas and expand their operations here.

It is right that the Scottish Government uses all levers at its disposal to make a difference to the lives of people in Scotland and those who choose to move here.

- Immigration impacts on a range of devolved areas, including Scotland's economy, funding and delivery of public services across our communities.
- Until powers over immigration are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, we will do everything we can to make sure the existing system works for our interests.

**We don't need immigration, too many people in Scotland are not working
Attracting people to Scotland and supporting people into work are not mutually exclusive. People that move to Scotland create extra demand for goods and services which in turn create more employment opportunities. New workers contribute to our public finances and boost our economy.**

3. Speech: Debate 09 January 2025

[redacted - s.25(1)] - [Meeting of the Parliament: 09/01/2025 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

4. Briefing: Debate on SHRC ESCR in Highlands & Islands

[redacted – not in scope]

RURAL VISA PILOT

Our proposal for a Rural Visa Pilot, published in September 2022, represents a new, community-driven approach to local migration, which would allow rural communities to attract migrants in line with their distinct needs, meeting labour market demands and addressing demographic challenges felt within communities.

- The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommended in 2019 that the UK Government pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas, highlighting that the current immigration system was ‘not very effective’ in doing so. This was accepted by the then-Home Secretary, Sajid Javid.
- The MAC described the pilot proposal in its 2022 Annual Report as **[QUOTE]: “sensible and clear in both scale and deliverability”**.
- The proposal was endorsed publicly by a range of rural and island stakeholders following its publication, as well as a cross-party majority in the Scottish Parliament including Scottish Labour, and the Welsh Government.

There is long established, broad consensus in Scotland for the need for tailored migration solutions which address the unique challenges facing Scotland’s communities in light of the ending of freedom of movement and demographic challenges.

- Rural and island communities within Scotland have been particularly affected in recent years with challenges around recruiting workers into key sectors, contributing to depopulation in some areas.
- We worked closely with more than 10 affected local authorities and key sectoral stakeholders to ensure this pilot proposal reflects the needs of our communities and industries.
- Our offer is to work with the UK Government and partners to deliver a solution, in the form of this pilot, to address the urgent need for targeted migration solutions to attract migrants in line with communities’ distinct needs. This solution would simultaneously meet labour market demands and support longer term settlement in these areas as a means to address population decline.

Q&A

“Being within the central belt, the Scottish Government is distant from the needs of Highland and Island communities”.

The Scottish Government has taken a genuine partnership approach to the development of our Addressing Depopulation Action Plan which was published in 2024, and represents a key commitment within the National Islands Plan.

As part of this, we have established an Addressing Depopulation Delivery Group as a forum to share learning and best practice, and to ensure that we are working closely with key partners in the delivery of this important programme of work.

In addition to the Delivery Group, the Scottish Government continues to engage with local authorities through the Population Roundtable, which is jointly chaired with COSLA, as well as having representation from COSLA and Highlands and Islands Enterprise at our Population Programme Board.

“The region is experiencing an aging population which is creating pressure on services. Is the Scottish Government working to address this?”

We want Scotland to be a place where everyone can live long and healthy lives, and the 'Healthy Living' strand of our national Population Strategy sets out our ambition to raise both the life expectancy and, critically, the number of years that all of Scotland's people spend in good health. This continues to be a key issue which is considered by our Ministerial Population Taskforce.

“Only 7.5% of Scotland’s population live within the Highland and Island region, despite this area representing over half of Scotland’s land mass. What is the Scottish Government doing to address this?”

The 'More Balanced' strand of our Population Strategy sets out our ambition to ensure that Scotland's population is sustainably distributed. The publication of our Addressing Depopulation Action Plan in 2024 represents the start of the first phase of work we are taking forward in collaboration with regional, local and community partners to support communities affected by population decline. The range of new funding commitments we have established are intended to facilitate population attraction and retention, aligned to local ambitions for change.

5. Briefing: CSSJ Meeting

MINISTERIAL BRIEFING – CABINET SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
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ANNEX A

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ANNEX B

KEY MESSAGES

[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]

Migration

- [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted - s.28(1)]
 - [redacted – not in scope]
 - [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
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ANNEX C

MIGRATION

TOP LINES

The Scottish Government welcomes the comments made by the new UK Government with regards to working together to make a positive difference to the lives of the people of Scotland.

- In particular, with regards to our specific portfolio responsibilities, I am keen that we work to deliver tailored solutions to support rural and island communities within Scotland, who have been particularly affected in recent years with challenges around recruiting workers into key sectors, contributing to depopulation in some areas.

MIGRATION POLICY

Evidence shows those who choose Scotland as their home help to grow our economy, increase our productivity and innovation, address skills shortages, and make essential contributions to communities.

- Migration affects many aspects of devolved competency – including higher education, housing, healthcare and the delivery of vital public services.
- Scotland needs people to contribute at all levels of the economy, in vital, challenging roles within sectors including tourism, hospitality, logistics, care, construction and food production.
- Scotland must be able to attract people from all over the world to work and study here without excessive barriers, and migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation.
- The Scottish Government launched the first iteration of Scotland’s Migration Service on March 27. The service provides information and advice to people who have recently moved to Scotland, as well as international students, employers and inward investors.

TAILORED MIGRATION

There is long established, broad consensus in Scotland for the need for tailored migration solutions which address the unique challenges facing Scotland’s communities in light of the ending of freedom of movement and demographic challenges, including population decline, projected from 2033.

- One example of work the Scottish Government has taken forward in this space is our proposal for a **Rural Visa Pilot**. This pilot would help spread the benefits of immigration to smaller communities, enabling migration – based upon genuine employment opportunity – which would meet the economic and societal needs of those communities, including addressing population decline.
- This proposal, which has been endorsed by the Migration Advisory Committee and welcomed by both Scottish Labour and the Welsh Government, would also help inform future approaches across the UK. It would simultaneously meet labour market demands and support longer term settlement in these areas as a means to address population decline.
- Another solution would be our proposals for a **Scottish Visa**, tied to the Scottish tax code and deliverable within the UK framework, which garnered significant support from stakeholders.
- Our offer is to work together to deliver solutions to address the urgent need for targeted migration solutions to attract migrants in line with communities’ distinct needs.

Background: Rural Visa Pilot

- The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommended in 2019 that the UK Government pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas, stating that the current immigration system was ‘not very effective’ in doing so.
- We worked closely with more than 10 affected local authorities and key industry stakeholders in the development of our Rural Visa Pilot proposal to ensure it reflects the needs of our communities and industries. The proposal was endorsed publicly by a range of rural and island stakeholders following its publication, as well as a cross-party majority in the Scottish Parliament including Scottish Labour, and the Welsh Government.
- The MAC described the pilot proposal as **[QUOTE]: “sensible and clear in both scale and deliverability”**, and stated it was in the UKG’s interest to trial the scheme.

Background: Scottish Visa

- Scotland has the right conditions for a tailored approach to migration.
- Our January 2020 paper, Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper, outlines how a tailored approach could work, within a UK framework, with powers for the Scottish Parliament.
- Our Scottish Visa proposal would be tied to the Scottish tax code.
 - **[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]**

- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

Background

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

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[redacted - s.28(1)]

6. Briefing: Scottish Government's Strategic Approach To Migration

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MIGRATION:

The Scottish Government is seeking reform of the UK immigration system so that it meets the needs of our economy, public services and communities is a key Scottish Government priority.

Scotland's Census 2022 has, along with all other recent National Records of Scotland population and migration statistical publications, reinforced that Scotland has distinct demographic needs, and projected population decline is likely to have far-reaching implications for Scotland's fiscal position and resultant public service planning and provision.

Migration can help mitigate these risks. All of our net population growth comes from migration, either from the rest of the UK or internationally, and evidence shows that people who move to Scotland bolster our working-age population and contribute tax revenue to fund the delivery of vital public services.

The Scottish Government aims to support the UK Government to deliver a migration system which supports Scotland's economy, public services, and communities.

The Scottish Government seeks to deliver this aim through:

- Scotland's Migration System which supports employers, investors and individuals to more successfully navigate the existing UK immigration system.
 - Following delivery of the first iteration of the service on 27 March 2024, an expanded version of Scotland's Migration Service launched on 19 November 2024.
- making evidence-based arguments for changes to the UK Government's approach to immigration, and
- continuing to call for tailored migration routes, deliverable within the existing system to reflect Scotland's distinct needs and support our ambitions for economic growth.

TAILORED MIGRATION SOLUTIONS:

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

Tailored approaches to migration are an intrinsic feature of the immigration system as it currently exists, be it in the form of the Health and Care visa, the Skilled Worker Visa, or the Seasonal Worker Visa. Our ask of the UK Government is that a geographical, rather than only a sectoral, approach to tailored migration is introduced which serves Scotland's distinct needs without compromising the wider UK approach to immigration.

The former Fresh Talent Scheme and the former Scottish Shortage Occupation List are two examples of regional differentiation within previous UK Government immigration systems. The Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland Scheme, which operated 2005 to 2008, was open to graduates of Scottish institutions who intended to live in Scotland for up to two years after their studies; residence anywhere in the UK was valid for compliance with the visa. It was replaced by the UK-wide Post Study Work Visa which was subsequently scrapped in 2012.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

SCOTTISH VISA:

Our January 2020 paper '*Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper*' outlines our position on devolution of new powers on migration.

The paper summarises options for a tailored migration policy for Scotland and advances a reasonable approach with devolution of some powers within a UK framework and partnership working with the UK Government on delivery.

This would be in the form of a Scottish Visa, for which eligibility criteria would be set by Scottish Ministers, according to Scotland's economic and demographic needs.

RURAL VISA PILOT

In 2022, the Scottish Government published a proposal for a Rural Visa Pilot, developed in collaboration with local authorities and business sector organisations, about a targeted migration solution for remote and rural areas of Scotland, to meet the discrete and specific needs of these communities and their local economies. The proposals build on the initial suggestion of the benefits of a rural scheme highlighted in the 2020 Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper paper.

The proposal was endorsed in the Scottish Parliament by 79 votes, with 29 against. Scottish Labour and the Scottish Lib Dems voted in favour alongside the SNP and Scottish Greens. Only the Scottish Conservatives voted against, however remarked that they supported the principle of the Rural Visa Pilot proposal.

SCOTLAND'S MIGRATION SERVICE:

Scotland's Migration Service is a new online information and advice resource that helps address skills shortages and demographic challenges.

Key outcomes include:

- Attracting talent and encouraging more people to live and work in Scotland.
- Assisting employers in effectively using the UK immigration system to meet labour demands.
- Assisting individuals with their immigration requirements.
- Providing reception support to newcomers to help them settle in Scotland.
- Creating an online platform for employers and individuals to access services.

Scotland's Migration Service helps attract talent to Scotland and remove some of the barriers migrants and employers face when navigating the immigration system to meet their relocation and/or business needs.

The service contributes to efforts to grow our economy, maximise our existing talent pool, and attract more individuals to Scotland to address skills shortages and demographic challenges.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

7. Speech: Contributions for FM Speech Jan 2025

Impact of recent migration policies on international higher education

Speech contributions

- In 2024, the Scottish Government launched Scotland's first International Education Strategy setting out the steps we are taking to work collaboratively with the higher and further education sector to increase and diversify our international student population in Scotland.
- The strategy makes clear that Scotland welcomes international students and is grateful for the diversity, knowledge and experience that they bring.
- International students, staff, and researchers have an overwhelmingly positive impact in Scotland bringing social and cultural diversity to our communities; enriching the overall learning experience; supporting local economies, businesses and jobs; and making a substantial contribution to the sustainability of our universities.
- Scotland's offer to international students is truly unique. From the range of study pathways, the choice of institution, to our social contract that makes studying in Scotland even more enjoyable. All of these benefits are featured in our recently launched Come to Study: Find Scotland campaign which has been co-created with universities and colleges.
- Scotland has proved popular as an international student destination with numbers increasing since 2013.72 In 2021-22, more than 82,000 students from over 160 different countries came to study at Scottish universities, and international students made up a quarter of the total student population. However, we know that Brexit and UK Government policies have already resulted in a reduced number of students from Europe opting to study in Scotland, with UCAS Acceptance Statistics 2023 Cycle showing 880 EU students were accepted to Scottish providers. This is a drop of 81% between 2016 and 2023.
- The previous UK Government announced a number of changes to the immigration system which were aimed solely at reducing the numbers of people coming to the UK. These changes were not driven by considerations as to what our economy, our public services or our communities need but rather by the desire to reduce a headline number.
- From January 2024 most international students were no longer allowed to bring family members with them to the UK.
- In April the then UK Government increased the salary threshold for a Skilled Worker Visa by almost 50% to £38,700.
- Changes to the migration system preventing international students bringing dependents act as a barrier. This is particularly the case for post-graduates where students are older and more likely to have dependents. The Scottish Government believes that people who are entitled to live in Scotland should be able to bring their family with them. Family visas support our economy and would help our communities prosper by encouraging families to settle in Scotland.
- We know that a key factor in a student's decision on where to study is the career opportunities available after graduation and the ability of post-graduates to obtain the necessary visa. The significant increase in the starting salary for Skilled Worker visa makes it much harder for international students to see a pathway to stay in Scotland.
- While Scotland's jobs market is thriving, with career opportunities growing in sectors including life sciences, gaming, and renewable technologies, labour and skills shortages remain a challenge. Our international student population present a pipeline of skilled talent that employers should be proactively pursuing.
- In 2005 the then Scottish Government working with the then UK Government recognised that Scotland had distinct demographic challenges and the importance of

encouraging international students to stay in Scotland and launched the Fresh Talent: Post study work visa a tailored migration route for Scotland.

- The post study work visa was a success and rolled out across the UK. I'm pleased that after being removed for a number of years, a graduate visa route was reintroduced across the UK
- The graduate visa route gives individuals the right to work post-study for 2 years for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses, and 3 years for PhDs.
- However, at the request of the previous UK Government, the Migration Advisory Committee undertook a review of the graduate visa route in 2024. The decision to launch the review created deep concern for our institutions, our international students and our employers. Clearly we are pleased that the review did not result in any substantive changes to the visa route but the rhetoric surrounding the review had already done some damage.
- More significantly the changes to the right to bring dependents and the Skilled Worker salary threshold are real disincentives to international students and we are already seeing the impact of these changes.
- Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland share my deep concern about the most recent UK visa changes and the subsequent impact this is having on Scotland's ability to attract international students.
- In 2025 like in 2005 Scotland has distinct demographic challenges. We want to attract and retain international students and just as in 2005 immigration is a key lever, not the only lever, but a key one to address this challenge.
- We therefore propose that the UK Government work with us to develop a tailored visa route for international graduates from Scottish Universities or Colleges who want to stay in Scotland. This Scottish Graduate Visa would be linked to a Scottish tax code and be based on a requirement to live and work in Scotland.
- This would directly support skilled individuals who want to stay in Scotland and will provide a crucial bridge between a Study or Graduate Visa and the Skilled Worker Visa given the significant increase in the salary threshold.
- Following initial consultation with the sectors, I believe that the proposals set out today would go some way in ensuring that Scotland can continue to attract and retain international students, benefiting our institutions, our communities, our workplaces, and our economy.

8. Submission: Migration Strategy Priorities and Proposal

First Minister

**MIGRATION STRATEGY – PRIORITIES AND PROPOSALS FOR A NEW TAILORED
MIGRATION ROUTE FOR [redacted - s.30(b)(i)] EDUCATION**

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

- The attached paper sets out three priorities for our engagement on migration: supporting employers and migrants to navigate the existing immigration system; building the evidence base and arguing for change within the UK system; and making the case for tailored migration routes for Scotland. On tailored migration routes we are continuing to make the case for Rural Visa Pilot.
- The paper also sets out proposals for a new tailored migration route to specifically address some of the issues around a fall in international student numbers. The proposed Scottish Graduate Visa would be aimed at international students at Scottish Universities who wanted to stay in Scotland [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
- I am mindful that whilst lead responsibility for migration sits within the Social Justice portfolio the impact is felt across Ministerial portfolios. [redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)] it is also crucial that these reflect priorities across the Scottish Government.
- I hope this paper is helpful in setting out proposed priorities and next steps.

9. Submission: GIQ - Scottish Graduate Visa Proposal

From: [redacted - s.38(1)(b)]
DCEA: Population and Migration Division
20 January 2025

Minister for Equalities
Minister for Parliamentary Business

MIGRATION STRATEGY: SCOTTISH GRADUATE VISA PROPOSAL – GOVERNMENT INITIATED QUESTION

Priority and Purpose

1. Immediate. Ministers are requested to approve the proposed Government Initiated Question (GIQ) by 21 January, in order to meet timelines for lodging the question in advance of planned publication and announcement on 22 January.

2. [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

Background

3. The First Minister will make a statement on the morning of 22 January on the Scottish economy, which will include a section on migration and the Scottish Government's proposal for a Scottish Graduate Visa. As part of this, a short paper is planned for publication which will support the announcement by setting out how migration can meet Scotland's needs across the following areas:

- Vision and values
- Scotland's population and the demographic challenge
- The economic benefits of migration to Scotland
- Recent changes to the immigration system
- Securing a migration system which delivers for Scotland's economy, public services and communities

4. Within the final section noted above, we plan to announce a proposal for the establishment of a Scottish Graduate Visa to give international students in Scotland an additional two years to develop their career to meet the salary threshold for a Skilled Worker Visa. Delivery of this proposal would require agreement from Home Office Ministers.

5. The First Minister has agreed the outline of the paper and the proposal for a Scottish Graduate Visa is included in the latest draft of his speech. We are still working on a final version of the paper, to include references and be formatted for publishing. However, in order to meet GIQ timescales as set out in guidance, we are sending this GIQ for clearance now.

Options Considered and Advice

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

6. A GIQ is recommended to inform Parliament of the proposal's publication within the context of the broader FM statement and accompanying overview paper.

7. The preferred date and time for the GIQ to be published is Wednesday 22 January 2025 at 09:30, at the same time as publication of the overview paper. Associated comms

would follow from 09:50, alongside the FM statement. Currently there are no other known PQs on migration which are due to be answered on the same day.

8. Special Advisers have cleared the draft GIQ at Annex A and nominated Clare Adamson MSP to ask the proposed question.

Quality Assurance

9. This submission has been approved by **Rachel Sunderland, Deputy Director for Population and Migration.**

Conclusion and Next Steps

10. Ministers are invited to note and approve the draft proposed GIQ and answer. Following this, officials will liaise with Parliamentary Clerks for the question to be lodged by Clare Adamson MSP.
11. The FM has agreed a comms handling plan for the planned statement at JP Morgan Chase on 22 January. That comms plan aligns with timescales set out within this submission.

[redacted - s.38(1)(b)]

[redacted - s.38(1)(b)]

Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers Copy List	For Action	For Information Portfolio interest	For Information Constituency interest	For Information General awareness
First Minister		X		
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice		X		
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills		X		
Minister for Higher and Further Education		X		

Officials Copy List

Permanent Secretary
 Director-General Strategy and External Affairs
[redacted - s.38(1)(b)]
 Shona Riach, Director for External Affairs & Culture
 Rachel Sunderland, Deputy Director for Population and Migration
 Population and Migration Division
 Emilie-Louise Purdie, Special Adviser

ANNEX A – DRAFT QUESTION AND ANSWER TEXT

Question

To ask the Scottish Government for an update on its calls for tailored migration routes to be introduced within the current UK immigration system to support Scotland's economy, communities and public services.

Answer

The Scottish Government continues to call on the UK Government to deliver an immigration system which works for Scotland. As part of this, we have developed evidence-based immigration policy proposals, such as the Scottish Visa and Rural Visa Pilot proposals, which continue to command strong stakeholder support and would respond to specific challenges faced by Scotland's economy, communities and public services.

If we are to meet our ambitions and deliver sustainable economic growth we need to attract and retain international students who can help to grow our economy. The Scottish Government has developed a proposal for a tailored visa route for international graduates from Scottish Universities or Colleges who want to stay in Scotland. This Scottish Graduate Visa would be linked to a Scottish tax code and be based on a requirement to live and work in Scotland. It would give international students in Scotland an additional two years to develop their career to meet the salary threshold for a Skilled Worker Visa.

I encourage the UK Government to engage with what is being proposed, and to discuss with Scottish Ministers how it could be delivered within the current UK immigration system to help meet Scotland's distinct demographic needs.

The publication link will go live at 09:00 at: [URL TBC]

[Please note a link will go live once the publication is available online]

10. GIQ: Migration Strategy: Scottish Graduate Visa Proposal

Question

To ask the Scottish Government for an update on its calls for tailored migration routes to be introduced within the current UK immigration system to support Scotland's economy, communities and public services.

Answer

The Scottish Government continues to call on the UK Government to deliver an immigration system which works for Scotland. As part of this, we have developed evidence-based immigration policy proposals, such as the Scottish Visa and Rural Visa Pilot proposals, which continue to command strong stakeholder support and would respond to specific challenges faced by Scotland's economy, communities and public services.

If we are to meet our ambitions and deliver sustainable economic growth we need to attract and retain international students who can help to grow our economy. The Scottish Government has developed a proposal for a tailored visa route for international graduates from Scottish Universities or Colleges who want to stay in Scotland. This Scottish Graduate Visa would be linked to a Scottish tax code and be based on a requirement to live and work in Scotland. It would give international students in Scotland an additional two years to develop their career to meet the salary threshold for a Skilled Worker Visa.

I encourage the UK Government to engage with what is being proposed, and to discuss with Scottish Ministers how it could be delivered within the current UK immigration system to help meet Scotland's distinct demographic needs.

The publication link is live at: <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781836912729>

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

[Please note the link will go live once the publication is available online]

11. Letter: EHRCJC: Scottish Graduate Visa Proposal

Minister for Equalities

Kaukab Stewart MSP

T: 0300 244 4000

E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Karen Adam, MSP

Convener

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

22 January 2025

Dear Karen

Tailored Migration – Scottish Graduate Visa Proposal

The Scottish Government has long called on the UK Government to deliver an immigration system which works for Scotland. We have developed evidence-based migration policy proposals, such as our Scottish Visa and Rural Visa Pilot proposals. These proposals continue to command strong stakeholder support and would respond to specific challenges faced by Scotland's economy, communities and public services.

If we are to meet our ambitions and deliver sustainable economic growth to enable this Government to deliver on our priorities then we need to attract and retain international students who can help to grow our economy.

Migration is a cross-cutting policy area that impacts on a broad range of devolved and reserved competencies. However, as Minister with lead responsibility for migration in the Scottish Government I am writing to let you know about the publication of the Scottish Government's new Scottish Graduate Visa proposal. This proposal is included in the paper *Migration: Meeting Scotland's Needs* which can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781836912729>

This proposed tailored visa route would be for international graduates from Scottish Universities or Colleges who want to stay in Scotland, and would be deliverable within the current UK immigration system. It would be linked to a Scottish tax code and be based on a requirement to live and work in Scotland. It would give international students in Scotland an additional two years, beyond the existing Graduate Visa, to develop their career in Scotland to meet the salary threshold for a Skilled Worker Visa.

As well as encouraging the UK Government to engage with what is being proposed, and to discuss with Scottish Ministers how it could be delivered within the current UK immigration system to help meet Scotland's distinct demographic needs, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with yourselves to discuss how we can work together to raise awareness and understanding of the proposal, and why its delivery is urgently needed.

If you accept this offer to meet as discuss this important proposal for Scotland's economy, communities and public services, my officials will be delighted to arrange a time for us to meet.

Yours sincerely,

KAUKAB STEWART

12. Publication: Scottish Graduate Visa

[redacted - s.25(1)] - [Migration - Meeting Scotland's Needs - gov.scot](#)

13. FMQ: Migration Meeting Scotland's Needs

22 Jan – First Minister announces new SG proposal for a tailored route for graduates in Scotland to address Scotland's demographic needs, attract and retain international students and grow the economy.

- The proposals are one strand of the SG's wider approach to migration policy: supporting people to use the existing system; seeking changes to the existing immigration system; and highlighting the need for tailored routes to address Scotland's distinct demographic needs.
- Our other tailored migration proposals focused on addressing specific challenges within the immigration system include the Scottish Visa (2020) and Rural Visa Pilot (2022)

22 Jan – Minister for Equalities attended the Interministerial Group on Safety Security and Migration, chaired by the Home Secretary

July 2024 – UKG announce new approach to legal migration including a retained commitment to reducing net migration and a new framework to support a coherent approach to skills, migration and labour market policy.

2024 - Policy changes implemented to reduce net migration include: restricting international dependents, higher income threshold for British citizens' family and higher salary thresholds for workers outside of health and care.

TOP LINES

- Those who choose Scotland as their home help grow our economy, increase productivity and innovation and address skills shortages.
- While immigration is reserved, the Scottish Government is committed to working closely with the UK Government to make a positive difference.
- Migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation and must suitably reflect the skills requirements of all sectors of the economy.
- Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs require a tailored approach to migration.
- Scottish Graduate Visa would act as a bridge between the Graduate Visa and a Skilled Workers Visa allowing us to attract and retain international students.
- I call on the UK Government to work with us to deliver tailored migration solutions.
- The current system is not working for Scotland. Analysis by the Migration Observatory found that between 2016-2020 44% of skilled workers with certificates of sponsorship went to London.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

Migration is vital in combatting the effects of Scotland's ageing population and growing our working-age population

- Scotland's population is growing but only because of migration, either from the rest of the UK or internationally.
- From 2025-75, Scotland's working age population is projected to fall by 14.7%, compared with a 0.5% increase in the working population of the UK.

Scotland faces complex demographic challenges which are likely to have far-reaching implications for Scotland's fiscal position and public service planning and provision.

- Migrants can help mitigate these risks. They tend to be of working age, are likely to be in employment and contributing tax revenues to help fund public services.
- Migration means that our population is made up of a greater proportion of people of working age who can help to fund and deliver public services.
- A taxpayer in Scotland on £38,700 (the minimum salary for someone on a Skilled Worker Visa since April 2024) generates £5,310 in non-savings, non-divided Income Tax, supporting the Scottish Budget.
- Without migration, our population would be declining rather than growing.

TAILORED MIGRATION SOLUTIONS

The Scottish Government calls on the UK Government to work with us to develop and deliver tailored migration proposals which meet Scotland's needs, including for a Scottish Graduate Visa.

- Our proposal, published on 22 January, for a Scottish Graduate Visa would offer a pathway into the workforce for graduates from Scottish institutions, acting as bridge between the existing Graduate Visa and a Skilled Worker Visa.
- This would give international graduates who studied in Scotland an additional 2 years to develop their career to meet the salary threshold.
- **QUOTE:** 'The concept of a new Scottish Graduate Visa, building on the model of Fresh Talent, is hugely welcome.' Anton Muscatelli, 22 January 2025

The UK immigration system is already comprised of a series of tailored migration routes.

- The UK Government could choose to take a geographical approach, rather than the current sectoral approach.
- Our new proposal sits alongside previous proposals for tailored migration routes, including the Scottish Visa and Rural Visa Pilot.
- All of our proposals would be deliverable within the existing framework of the UK immigration system.
- Scotland had a successful tailored migration route – Fresh Talent – launched 20 years ago.

Scottish ministers have been consistently clear about the devastating consequences that the UK Government's approach to migration has had on Scotland's education sector and our economy to date.

- The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting Scotland's international student and graduates who stay on after their studies, continuing their contribution to our economy and communities.
- International students, academics and research staff in our world-class universities make a vital contribution to Scotland's prosperity.
- We need an immigration system that supports our higher education sector to deliver the best learning, the best research and the best experience for international students who choose to study in Scotland.

UK GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

The Scottish Government welcomes renewed opportunities from the UK Government to consult, collaborate, and work constructively with the Devolved Governments to ensure the immigration system is fit for purpose.

- We welcome further clarity on the UK Government's approach, aligning migration policy with skills policy and look forward to more detail on the anticipated role of the Devolved Governments in this approach.
- We need meaningful engagement with the UK Government on migration

MAXIMISING THE USE OF THE EXISTING SYSTEM

The Scottish Government has launched Scotland's Migration Service to attract talent to Scotland and remove some of the barriers migrants and employers face when navigating the immigration system to meet their needs.

- The service is a new online information and advice resource providing support to people who have recently moved to Scotland, international students, employers and inward investors.
- The service contributes to efforts to grow our economy, maximise our existing talent pool, and attract more individuals to Scotland to address skills shortages and demographic challenges.

CHANGES TO THE EXISTING SYSTEM

The Scottish Government is seeking reform of the UK immigration system so that it meets the needs of our economy, public services and communities

- People who are entitled to live in Scotland – both international migrants and UK citizens – should be able to bring close family with them
- The migration system should be easy to access and understand and focused on what a prospective migrant can contribute, not on their ability to pay.
- Scotland should be able to attract talented and committed people from Europe and across the world to work and study here without excessive barriers, and our migration policy should support mobility, collaboration and innovation.

14. Letter: Scottish Graduate Visa

Rt Hon John Swinney MSP
First Minister of Scotland

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

T: 0300 244 4000

[redacted - s.28(1)]

January 2025

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

We need to develop migration routes which are tightly focused on delivering the changes that we want to see and which will drive economic growth, deliver high quality public services and support our communities. We need to attract and retain talented individuals to Scotland and a key first step would be to retain the skills of those who come to Scotland to study at our universities.

[redacted - s.28(1)]

International students need to be able to see a clear pathway to allow them to build their careers in Scotland. Recent changes, in the form of a significant increase to the Skilled Worker visa salary threshold, make it difficult for individuals to see a route for progression from a Graduate Visa to a Skilled Worker Visa. This has clear implications for our ability to retain and to attract talented international individuals.

[redacted - s.28(1)]

With best wishes

JOHN SWINNEY

15. FMQ: Meeting Scotland's needs

28 Jan – Office for National Statistics(ONS) published updated UK population projections

- Scotland's population is projected to grow to 5.8 million people by mid-2047, according to National Records of Scotland analysis of the statistics.
- All of the projected population increase comes from inward migration.
- The projections suggest Scotland's population will not experience 'natural growth' during this period, as deaths are projected to continue to outnumber births each year.

22 Jan – SG publishes overview of our strategic approach to Migration, alongside a First Minister announcement of a new proposal for a 'Scottish Graduate Visa' route tailored for graduates in Scotland to address demographic challenges, attract and retain international talent and grow the economy.

- SG's approach to migration policy covers three strands: supporting people to use the existing system; seeking changes to the existing immigration system; and advocating for routes tailored to Scotland's distinct demographic needs.
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Media briefing – Representing Border interview on Migration and SG call for Family Visa Changes Scottish Government response to Migration Advisory Committee on Family Visa route

Top lines:

- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]
- [redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

Rural Visa Pilot

Top Lines:

- Our proposal for a **Rural Visa Pilot** represents a new, community-driven approach to local migration, which would allow rural communities to attract migrants in line with their distinct needs, meeting labour market demands and skills shortages, and addressing demographic challenges felt within communities.
- We worked closely with key industry stakeholders and more than 10 affected local authorities, including Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders, to ensure the pilot proposal reflects the needs of our communities and industries.
- Our offer is to work together with the UK Government and local partners to deliver a solution, in the form of this pilot, to address the urgent need for targeted migration solutions to attract migrants in line with communities' distinct needs. This solution would simultaneously meet labour market demands and support longer term settlement in these areas as a means to address population decline.

Rural Visa Pilot proposal - background

There is long established, broad consensus in Scotland for the need for tailored migration solutions which address the unique challenges facing Scotland's communities in light of the ending of freedom of movement and demographic challenges, including population decline, projected from 2033.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommended in 2019 that the UK Government pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas, highlighting that the current immigration system was 'not very effective' in doing so. This was accepted by the then-Home Secretary, Sajid Javid.

Rural and island communities within Scotland have been particularly affected in recent years with challenges around recruiting workers into key sectors, contributing to depopulation in some areas.

It was endorsed publicly by a range of rural and island stakeholders following its publication, as well as a cross-party majority in the Scottish Parliament including Scottish Labour, and the Welsh Government.

The MAC described the pilot proposal in its 2022 Annual Report as [QUOTE]: “*sensible and clear in both scale and deliverability*”.

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

18. Speech: Scottish Council on Global Affairs

[redacted - s.25(1)]. Please see the following link: [First Minister and former Taoiseach mark St Andrews leadership of SCGA | University of St Andrews news](#). A link to a recording of this event can additionally be found at the bottom of the linked page

19. Briefing: ARTW Publication engagement

ASYLUM RIGHT TO WORK – POST-PUBLICATION ENGAGEMENT

Aim

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

Group 1: Priority stakeholders

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	• [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	• [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

Group 2 - Stakeholders with a high level of interest

The second group of stakeholders are those with a likely high interest in the proposal. It is important that this group understand the proposal and are able to make connections to their workplans where relevant. [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)] the letter invites them to share the pilot proposal more widely and says that officials would be happy to engage further on this topic.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	• [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	• [redacted - s.30(b)(i)]	[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]
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20. Minute: FM London Visit

**ENGAGEMENT NOTES FOR THE FIRST MINISTER'S LONDON VISIT
12TH FEBRUARY 2025**

CONTENTS

Note	Page number
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Bilateral meeting with H.E Pedro Serrano – EU Ambassador to the UK	5
[redacted – not in scope]	8

[redacted – not in scope]

Minute of the First Minister's bilateral meeting with H.E Pedro Serrano – EU Ambassador to the UK – 12th February 2025.

Summary

[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]

Scotland's Interests:

[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
FM confirmed the SG continue to encourage the UKG to consider a bespoke Scottish graduate visa scheme [redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]

21. Publication: Family Visa Policy

[redacted - s.25(1)] - [Putting families at the heart of family visa policy - consultation: SG response - gov.scot](#)

22. Minute: 17 February 2025

Summary of meeting with Home Office, 17/02/25

Attendees- Migration Strategy- [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)]

Home Office- [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)], [redacted s.38(1)(b)]

Immigration White Paper – [redacted - s.28(1)]

- [redacted - s.28(1)]

BSAI Bill – [redacted - s.28(1)]

IMG / Ministerial engagement – [redacted - s.28(1)]

HO update on recent Scottish Ministerial Visit (Ms Malhotra)- [redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

Immigration Health Surcharge changes – An update from the HO will follow on this, as no more information available to hand at time of meeting.

National sponsorship of GPs – SG position set out, with the importance and effectiveness stressed given that 40% of those on International Medical Graduate (IMG) visa remaining in, and practising in Scotland, with 12% remaining after a period of 7 years. [redacted - s.28(1)]

Exploitation in the Health and Social Care sector for migrant workers – SG highlighted 29th Jan roundtable on Human Trafficking and displaced visa holders

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.28(1)]

23. Briefing: MFE, MFHEFE – 27 Feb 2025

What	University visit with stakeholders from the higher and further education sector to discuss migration needs
When	27th February 2025, 09:30 – 10:30
Where	Edinburgh Napier University- Sighthill Campus 9 Sighthill Court, Edinburgh, EH11 4BN Tel: [redacted – s.38(b)(i)] Upon arrival, Ministers to be met in Main Reception by Ross Burns, Head of Communication for Edinburgh Napier University
Who	Professor Sue Rigby, Principal and Vice Chancellor, Edinburgh Napier Audrey Cumberland, Principal and Chief Executive, Edinburgh College Sir Paul Grice, Interim Convener, Universities Scotland Claire McPherson, Director, Universities Scotland
Why	An Opportunity to: <i>Highlight</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Scottish Government’s strategic approach to Migration our tailored migration proposals, including the Scottish Graduate Visa Scotland’s Migration Service and how it can support the sector <i>Understand</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the needs of the sector and the challenges they face when using the existing immigration system.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While immigration is reserved, the Scottish Government is committed to working closely with the UK Government to make a positive difference. Migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation and must suitably reflect the skills requirements of all sectors of the economy. Scotland’s distinct demographic and economic needs require a tailored approach to migration. The Scottish Government calls on the UK Government to work with us to develop and deliver tailored migration proposals which meet Scotland’s needs, including for a Scottish Graduate Visa. Our proposal would offer a pathway into the workforce for graduates from Scottish institutions, acting as bridge between the existing Graduate Visa and a Skilled Worker Visa. The Scottish Government has launched Scotland’s Migration Service to attract talent to Scotland and remove some of the barriers migrants and employers face when navigating the immigration system to meet their needs. The service is a new online information and advice resource providing support to people who have recently moved to Scotland, international students, employers and inward investors.
Official support	Rachel Sunderland, Population and Migration Division 07837 527 200 Adam Reid, Enabling the Economy: Skills Division 07500 883 212
Agenda	09:30-10:00: Stakeholder discussion 10:00-10:30: Meeting international students and Student Union President Discussion points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scottish Government’s approach to International Education Scottish Government’s approach to Migration Understanding the needs of the sector Working together to support graduates into the workforce

OVERVIEW

LOCATION

The visit will take place at Sighthill Campus. This campus was fully refurbished in 2011 and serves more than 5,000 students and staff of the Schools of Applied Sciences and Health & Social Care. Facilities include life-like hospital wards, a clinical skills suite, sports science labs and a sports centre.

The campus is situated on the main A71 road to the west of the city. It is easily accessible from the M8, M9 and Edinburgh City Bypass. Please note that on-campus parking is strictly by permit only, with limited on-street parking available in the surrounding area. Officials can arrange for a permit for Ministerial Cars if required.

TIME	EVENT
9:30 – 10:00	Stakeholder discussion
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scottish Government’s approach to International Education (5 mins) 2. Scottish Government’s approach to Migration (5 mins) 3. Working together to support graduates into the workforce (15 mins) 4. Understanding the needs of the sector (5 mins)
10.00 - 10:30	Meeting Napier international students and Student Union President
	<p>An opportunity to meet international students studying at Napier, including their Student Union President who also is an international student.</p> <p>You will hear about the students’ experience of studying in Scotland, their experiences with employability and the support they require to stay in Scotland after qualifying</p>

OBJECTIVE

The visit provides an opportunity to outline the Scottish Government’s approach to International Education and Migration, listen to the needs of institutions, and hear directly from international students about their experiences.

The objective of the discussion will be to:

- build a shared understanding of the barriers across the landscape for supporting international students and graduates into the workforce
- explore what practical options within devolved powers there are to improve outcomes for international students looking to stay in Scotland long-term after their studies and support them into the workforce
- highlight our ongoing work to advocate for the distinct demographic and economic needs of Scotland from the UK immigration system in our engagement with the UK Government

[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	• [redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	• [redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]

ITEM 2	Scottish Government approach to migration
Issue/ background	<p><i>The Minister for Equalities may wish to take the opportunity to outline the Scottish Government’s strategic approach to Migration, highlighting our recent publication Migration: Meeting Scotland’s Needs and how this discussion will support the aims of this approach.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scotland has distinct demographic and geographical needs. The current UK immigration system is not meeting those distinct needs. • SG’s approach to migration policy covers three strands: supporting people to use the existing system; seeking changes to the existing immigration system; and advocating for routes tailored to Scotland’s distinct demographic needs. • Our other tailored migration proposals focus on addressing specific challenges within the immigration system including the ‘Scottish Visa’ (2020) and ‘Rural Visa Pilot’ (2022) <p><u>Our offer: Scotland’s Migration Service</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scotland’s Migration Service is an online information and advice resource that provides free practical support to help users navigate the UK immigration system and maximise its use to meet relocation and/or business needs. • The service supports employers to recruit internationally, investors to set up and expand businesses in Scotland, and individuals to relocate and settle in Scotland. • Support is available for people who have moved to Scotland, people who want to move to Scotland, international students/graduates, and Scotland-based employers and inward investors. • Support is provided through a digital platform where users can access information relevant to their needs. Additional resources are also available, including webinars, how-to-guides, and free one-to-one advice appointments. • Scotland’s Migration Service is not designed to help international students to find a job in Scotland. However, it can provide immigration advice to students to help those moving between different visas. • International students are a key customer base for the service, and many international students have contacted the Service for support.
Key message(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who choose Scotland as their home help grow our economy, increase productivity and innovation, and address skills shortages. • We want to ensure that individuals are supported in navigating the current immigration system to support them to stay in Scotland.
Suggested question(s)	<p>Is Scotland’s Migration Service meeting the needs of the sector? How do we work together to raise awareness of the Service to ensure that people can access the Service for support?</p>
Contact point	Rachel Sunderland, Population and Migration

ITEM 3	Working Together to Support Graduates into the Workforce – international Graduates & Scottish Graduate Visa Proposal
Issue/ background	<p>[Suggest we cover Scottish Graduate Visa under this agenda item as being focused on how we attract and retain international students]</p> <p>International Graduate Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action within the IES is to work with higher and further education sectors, and other partners, to identify and promote ways that universities and colleges can work with employers to increase the number of international graduates entering the workforce, to help address skills shortages and meet longer term population challenges. <p>Scottish Graduate Visa</p> <p>The previous UK Government introduced a number of changes to the immigration system, many of which have been maintained by the current UK Government.</p> <p>In January 2024 changes were introduced meaning that most international students are no longer able to bring family members on their visa. Research based postgraduate students are still allowed to bring family members with them to the UK.</p> <p>Further to this, in April 2024 the baseline minimum salary to be sponsored for a Skilled Worker visa increased from £26,200 to £38,700, while the ‘going rate’ minimum salary specific to each job also went up significantly. There is a significant risk that these changes are making the UK, and therefore Scotland, less attractive to international students.</p> <p>The Higher Education sector has highlighted concerns about the impact of these immigration system changes. UK Immigration statistics show that in the year ending September 2024, there were 392,969 sponsored study visas granted to main applicants, 19% fewer than in the year ending September 2023.</p> <p>In January this year, the First Minister (FM) announced a new ‘Scottish Graduate Visa’ proposal which could support students and graduates in Scotland, giving international students an additional two years to stay in Scotland and gather the professional experience required to qualify for roles on the Skilled Worker Visa route.</p> <p>To be eligible for a Scottish Graduate Visa we are proposing individuals should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have completed and been awarded a relevant qualification through an eligible Scottish institution including a Higher National Diploma, UK recognised undergraduate degree, Master’s degree or PhD; • Be currently in the UK on a Graduate visa; • have lived in Scotland for “an appropriate period of time” whilst studying; • intend to live in as well as seek and take employment in Scotland (including self-employment) – linked to a Scottish tax code. <p>A Scottish Graduate Visa would be granted for up to 2 years and would provide a further opportunity for individuals to gain the professional experience required to qualify for roles on the Skilled Worker Visa route.</p> <p>After 2 years individuals would then be able to apply for other visas, such as a Skilled Worker Visa.</p> <p>As migration is a reserved issue, developing and delivering the Scottish Graduate Visa would require the cooperation of the UK Government ahead of it coming into force. The proposal is designed to be delivered within the parameters of the existing UK immigration system.</p>
Key message(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While immigration is reserved, the Scottish Government is committed to working closely with the UK Government to make a positive difference.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation and must suitably reflect the skills requirements of all sectors of the economy. • Scotland's distinct demographic and economic needs require a tailored approach to migration. • Our tailored migration proposals, including our recent proposal for a Scottish Graduate Visa route, provide an opportunity to practically demonstrate how we can work together to deliver for the people of Scotland. • Scottish Graduate Visa would act as a bridge between the Graduate Visa and a Skilled Workers Visa allowing us to attract and retain international students. • The Scottish Graduate Visa would enable Scotland to better retain the skills of talented international students who travel to Scotland to study at college or university, improving the post-graduate employment opportunities of international students whilst helping to tackle Scotland's population challenges in and contributing to economic growth.
Suggested question(s)	<p>Welcome the opportunity to explore the Scottish Graduate Visa proposal. Are there any amendments to the proposal that we should consider? Recognise that any proposal would need the agreement of the UK Government.</p> <p>Explore how we can engage constructively with the UK Government to secure agreement on implementing the Scottish Graduate Visa</p>
Contact point	Rachel Sunderland, Population and Migration

[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]
[redacted – not in scope]	[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted – not in scope]

24. Briefing: Introductory meeting MFE 10 March

What	Introductory Ministerial meeting [redacted - s.28(1)] on matters relating to Migration.
When	Monday 10 March
Where	[redacted – not in scope] [redacted – not in scope]
Who	[redacted - s.28(1)]
Why	An initial meeting to set out priorities [redacted - s.28(1)] and agree ways of working going forward.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration grows our economy, increases productivity, innovation and addresses skills shortages. It also brings richness and diversity and helps to sustain our communities. • While immigration is reserved, the Scottish Government is committed to working closely with the UK Government to make positive differences. • Migration policy should support mobility, collaboration, and innovation and must suitably reflect the skills requirements of all sectors of the economy. • Scotland has distinct demographic and economic needs which require a tailored approach to migration. • I welcome to opportunity to contribute to the Immigration White Paper and see this as an important step towards realising the benefits of a more collaborative relationship between our governments. • I know that the UK Government has reservations about tailored migration routes for Scotland, but we know that the existing system is not working. • If we are to work together to achieve our shared ambitions then we need to be willing to explore options. • I call on the UK Government to work with us within the parameters of the current, reserved immigration system to deliver tailored migration solutions.
Official support	Rachel Sunderland, Population and Migration Division
Agenda	ITEM 1: Scottish Government’s strategic approach and Tailored Migration ITEM 2: UK Government’s new approach, linking migration policy with skills ITEM 3: Immigration and Asylum legislation and the Immigration White Paper ITEM 4: Meaningful ministerial engagement
Main objective	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)] [redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

ITEM 1	Strategic approach to Migration and Tailored Migration proposals
Issue/ background	<p><u>Context:</u> Scotland’s population is projected to continue increasing Scotland’s population is projected to grow by 4.4% in the ten years from mid-2022 to mid-2032, and by 6.2% by mid-2047.</p> <p>Migration is the sole driver of population growth in Scotland High levels of positive net migration are projected to offset negative natural change (births minus deaths), leading to Scotland’s population being projected to increase each year to mid-2047.</p> <p>The proportion of elderly people in Scotland’s population is projected to increase The number of people aged 75 and over is projected to increase by around a third of a million people over the 25 years to mid-2047. Over the same period, the number of children and young adults is projected to fall. Continuing to attract migrants, who are shown to be predominantly of working age, will be imperative to Scotland’s communities and economy. More information on the most recent population projections can be found at Annex A.</p> <p><u>Our approach:</u> Scotland has distinct demographic and geographical needs. The current immigration system is not meeting those distinct needs.</p> <p>The Scottish Government is committed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting employers and investors to navigate the current UK immigration system; • Highlighting the need for change to the UK immigration system; and • Making the case for tailored migration routes for Scotland. <p>The Scottish Government has published a range of evidence-based proposals for tailored migration solutions to meet Scotland’s needs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Scottish Graduate Visa (proposal published Jan 2025):</u> A Scottish Graduate Visa would act as a bridge between the existing Graduate Visa and a Skilled Worker Visa, giving international students in Scotland an additional 2 years to develop their career to meet the salary threshold. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be eligible, individuals would need to have completed, and been awarded, a relevant qualification through a Scottish institution, such as a degree, Master’s degree or PHD. • They would need to currently be in the UK on a Graduate visa and to live and work in Scotland for the duration of their Scottish Graduate Visa. 2. <u>Rural Visa Pilot (proposal published 2022):</u> A community driven, employer-based migration route for rural and island communities, which would be delivered through a partnership between Scottish Government, UK Government and community partners, including employers and local statutory and third sector services. 3. <u>A Scottish Visa (proposal published 2020):</u> A place-based visa restricted to Scotland, linked to a Scottish tax code. Holders of this visa would have to live in Scotland and could not live elsewhere in the

	<p>UK. The Scottish tax code is an example of an existing framework based on residence and would help ensure that people on the Scottish Visa are staying in Scotland and contributing to the Scottish economy.</p> <p>[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]</p>
Key message(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]
Suggested question(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

ITEM 2	UK Government's new approach, linking migration policy with skills
Issue/ background	<p><u>Context:</u> In July 2024, the Home Secretary set out the UK Government's commitment to reducing net migration, maintaining many of the changes implemented by the previous administration in the first part of 2024.</p> <p>The intention is for the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to work with Skills England, the Industrial Strategy Council, and the Labour Market Advisory Board as part of a new framework to support a coherent approach to skills, migration and labour market policy. More information on the progress on the 'quad-partite' framework to date can be found at Annex C</p> <p><u>Our approach:</u> The Scottish Government stands ready to engage with the newly proposed framework and welcomes the intention to link migration policy with skills. Officials have been working closely with the Home Office and the Migration Advisory Committee to understand how this arrangement will reflect the needs of the Devolved Governments.</p> <p>There is a significant strand of work ongoing within the Scottish Government to respond to the recommendations from the 2023, Withers review of the Skills Landscape, leading to a national Skills Planning approach. More information on the Scottish approach to National Skills Planning can be found at Annex B</p> <p>[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]</p>
Key message(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]
Suggested question(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

ITEM 3	Immigration and Asylum legislation and the Immigration White Paper
Issue/ background	<p>[redacted – not in scope] [redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]</p>
Key message(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]
Suggested question(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

ITEM 4	Meaningful ministerial engagement
Issue/ background	<p><u>Context</u> Establishing a programme of regular meetings between the relevant Ministerial counterparts in both governments will represent a welcome commitment to engagement. Regular, meaningful and constructive collaboration on issues relating to Migration will be imperative to achieving our shared ambitions. Regular meetings provide the opportunity to plan strategically, respond to issues and priorities as they arise and before they escalate, and provide officials the opportunity to plan and agree agendas in advance to ensure that effective discussions can be had.</p> <p><u>Our Approach</u> Ideally, in line with the principles of effective intergovernmental relations, we would expect regular engagements below as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Interministerial Group: Four nations discussion with relevant representatives from across portfolios to suit the agenda. Currently matters relating to Migration are part of the IMG on Safety, Security and Migration. B. Bilateral meetings between Home Secretary and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice C. Bilateral meetings between both the UK's Minister for Border Security and Asylum or Minister for Migration and Citizenship and the SG's Minister for Equalities. <p>[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]</p>
Key message(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]
Suggested question(s)	[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

POPULATION PROJECTIONS – ANNEX A

PROJECTIONS FOR SCOTLAND

- Scotland's population is projected to continue increasing. In the ten years from mid-2022 to mid-2032, the population is projected to increase by 4.4% to 5.7 million. In the 25 years from mid-2022 to mid-2047, it is projected to increase by 6.2% to 5.8 million.
- Migration is projected to continue being the main driver of population growth, with more deaths than births projected each year going forward.
- These projections are higher than the last set of projections for Scotland. The main reason for this is higher migration figures, particularly for international migration, over the 25 years to mid-2047.

COMPARISON WITH UK POPULATION PROJECTIONS

- The UK population is projected to increase from 67.6 million in mid-2022 to 72.5 million in mid-2032 (+7.3%). It is projected to increase to 76.6 million in mid-2047 (+13.2% compared to mid-2022).
- Scotland's projected population growth is slower than that of the UK, growing by 6.2% between mid-2022 and mid-2047. The growth in the UK population over this period is driven largely by England (+14.5%) and Wales (+10.3%). Northern Ireland has the slowest projected growth, at 1.1% over the 25 years to mid-2047.
- Due to projected growth rates being slower in Scotland, Scotland's share of the UK population is projected to fall from 8.1% in mid-2022 to 7.6% in mid-2047.
- Between mid-2022 and mid-2047, the number of working age people in Scotland is projected to increase, but at a slower rate than the UK as a whole.

- Over the same period, the number of children in Scotland is projected to decrease at a faster rate than for the UK as a whole, while the number of people of pensionable age in Scotland is projected to increase substantially, but at a slower rate than for the UK as a whole.
- Between mid-2022 and mid-2047, all population increase across the UK is projected to be due to positive net migration with natural change projected to be negative for each constituent country (i.e., more deaths than births); however, levels of both migration and natural change are projected to vary between constituent countries.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The whole UK projections which have been published by ONS signal that, while all countries of the UK are projected to have distinct population trends over the next 25 years, there are similarities which are already occurring in Scotland and which are projected to occur at a wider UK level in future. Namely, migration will fundamentally drive population growth over the projection period and that from 2029, there will be more deaths than births. Both of these are already occurring in Scotland and it is notable that projected trends for the whole UK are, in time, more similar to what is being experienced here presently.

The whole UK projections signal that population growth in Scotland (4.4% over the next 10 years) will be slower than the UK (7.3% over the next 10 years), and that while the working age population will grow here, it will also be slower than the wider UK. Scotland is also projected to see a faster decrease in the number of children than the wider UK, over the projection period. It is this differentiation that requires the discrete Scottish policy response which Scottish Ministers are currently delivering.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i)]

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT APPROACH – ANNEX B

CONTEXT

Scotland's Census 2022 has, along with all other recent National Records of Scotland population and migration statistical publications, reinforced that Scotland has distinct demographic needs, and recent population projections suggest far-reaching implications for Scotland's fiscal position and resultant public service planning and provision.

Migration can help mitigate these risks. All of our net population growth comes from migration, either from the rest of the UK or internationally, and evidence shows that people who move to Scotland bolster our working-age population and contribute tax revenue to fund the delivery of vital public services.

MIGRATION STRATEGY

The Scottish Government aims to support the UK Government to deliver a migration system which supports Scotland's economy, public services, and communities. The Scottish Government seeks to deliver our approach through three key strands of work:

1. Scotland's Migration System which supports employers, investors and individuals to more successfully navigate the existing UK immigration system.

The Service is a new online information and advice resource that helps address skills shortages and demographic challenges. Scotland's Migration Service will help mitigate the complexity and bureaucracy of the immigration system to encourage individuals to move to Scotland and support businesses to hire talented people from overseas and expand their operations here.

2. Making evidence-based arguments for changes to the UK Government's approach to immigration

The Scottish Government is seeking reform of the UK immigration system so that it meets the needs of our economy, public services and communities:

- People who are entitled to live in Scotland – both international migrants and UK citizens – should be able to bring close family with them
- The migration system should be easy to access and understand and focused on what a prospective migrant can contribute, not on their ability to pay.
- Scotland should be able to attract talented and committed people from Europe and across the world to work and study here without excessive barriers, and our migration policy should support mobility, collaboration and innovation.
- Areas of focus include: reducing the risk of exploitation, salary thresholds and minimum financial requirements, dependents rules, improving eVisa rollout, student and graduate routes, safe and legal routes.

3. Continuing to call for tailored migration routes, deliverable within the existing system to reflect Scotland's distinct needs and support our ambitions for economic growth.

The UK immigration system is comprised of a series of tailored migration routes. Currently, those routes are primarily tailored around the needs of different sectors, with no immigration routes tailored on the basis of geography. However, this is a choice by successive UK Governments, and a geographical approach to tailored migration would be deliverable within the existing framework of the UK immigration system.

The UK previously had a tailored migration route based on geography. In 2005, the then Scottish and UK Governments established the 'Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland' scheme. This was a post-study visa route for international students in Scotland. The visa ran from 2005 to 2008, at which point, owing to the success of the scheme, it was replaced by a UK-wide post study work route.

NATIONAL SKILLS PLANNING

The Scottish Government has committed to take responsibility for skills planning at the national level, while strengthening regional approaches. In the Programme for Government, the First Minister reaffirmed this, committing to bring together employers, colleges, universities, and other partners together to ensure the system is responsive to regional and national skills needs.

The SG led skills planning approach will help develop a better understanding of skills needs at the national level, and how we can better address them, particularly where solutions lie within the education and skills system. While government will lead this new national approach, we have been clear that we want to support and empower regions to deliver on their own economic and social ambitions, in line with national priorities.

There are already numerous examples of partners working collaboratively across their region on skills planning, but we know that we can do more to make our education and skills system even more agile and responsive. To explore possible new approaches, we are currently engaging all Regional Economic Partnerships, sharing our initial guidelines for how we might collectively strengthen regional skills planning, building on existing best practice.

It is important to note that ensuring that the necessary education and skills provisions are in place, is only one aspect for meeting our necessary workforce and skills requirements to deliver a more agile and responsive system. A range of other interconnected factors above and beyond skills – e.g. demographic changes, migration policies, housing and accommodation, transportation, location, employer pay and conditions, also have direct impact on labour shortages.

REDUCING NET MIGRATION

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

The previous UK Government introduced a number of changes to the immigration system aiming to reduce net migration. These included: restricting international dependents, higher income threshold for British citizens' family and higher salary thresholds for workers outside of health and care. With the exception of changes to the financial threshold for the Family Visa, which is the subject of a review by the Migration Advisory Committee, these changes have been maintained by the current UK Government.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

LINKING MIGRATION AND SKILLS

The UK Government view is that current levels of work-related immigration are too high and linked to a lack of domestic investment in skills within key sectors, and that it is their intention to more closely link migration and skills policy.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

THE SKILLS-MIGRATION QUAD FRAMEWORK

The Quad is expected to help identify priority sectors for consideration, guided by the government's industrial strategy. The Quad will work collectively to identify any shortages within sectors, help to diagnose the causes of these and devise skills and workforce plans to address them. Once sectors have been identified and skills and workforce plans have been agreed, the Quad can consider the role of migration.

- For sectors which have workforce plans, the MAC could provide advice on the terms for access to international recruitment, e.g. whether it is sensible to allow continued or revised access to international recruitment in the short-to-medium-term while workforce plans are being implemented;
- For sectors identified as having a high reliance on migration, where it is determined this reliance is a problem for the sector or for government's ambitions, consideration will be required of which policy levers might be available to the government to reduce this reliance.

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

BORDER SECURITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM BILL

[redacted – not in scope]

[redacted - s.30(b)(i), s.28(1)]

25. Publication National Islands Plan Annual Report 2024
[redacted - s.25(1)] [National Islands Plan: annual report 2024 - gov.scot](#)