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| **Culture, Tourism and Major Events Directorate**  Tourism and Major Events Division |  |
| Peter Duthie  Chair  Events Industry Advisory Group  8 April 2021 |  |

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Dear Peter

Thank you for your letter of 5 March 2021 to the First Minister on behalf of the Events Industry Advisory Group (EIAG) in which you express concerns over the Scottish Government’s approach to exiting lockdown and the removal of the current restrictions on events.

I must apologise for the delay in responding to your letter. Ministers had hoped to be able to include in their reply the outcome of their review of permitted attendance numbers at events within the various levels of the Strategic Framework. Unfortunately this review had not been concluded at the time when we entered the pre-election period and Ministers became constrained in their ability to respond to correspondence. I can assure you, however, that the extremely helpful work of the EIAG “Route Back” Working Group has been influential in informing that review and we very much hope that the outcome will be announced in the coming days. We fully understand how vital this information is for event organisers who often have long lead-in times for their events and who are financially exposed by the current uncertainty. As you will know from your discussion with the Cabinet Secretary on 19 March, Ministers recognise this necessity too.

We understand the frustrations felt across the sector, including within EIAG, that there is not yet greater certainty about how and when events may resume in Scotland. As you know there are still significant unknowns, particularly around the impact of vaccines on transmissibility, and the ongoing impact of vaccines on new variants but there have been some encouraging signs recently in our progress in suppressing the virus that should give us grounds to be more optimistic for later this year.

You will be aware that the First Minister has just given the Scottish Government’s approval for the attendance of 12,000 spectators at the UEFA European Championship matches at Hampden in June. This decision was taken on the basis of clinical advice to Ministers and assurances around a series of mitigation measures that the organisers will put in place for the event. It represents a step change in the number of permitted attendees at an organised event in Scotland and should give the sector some confidence that a less restrictive event environment could be possible in the coming months.

In addition, as Ms Hyslop mentioned on 19 March, the First Minister has given her approval for what we are calling a ‘gateway’ process that is intended to allow some flagship events to take place with a limited number of attendees over the summer, subject to epidemiological conditions. The First Minister understands the particular difficulties facing the events sector and this process is an indication that Ministers will look favourably on the return of events in a meaningful way if the conditions to do so in safety can be met. I have set out in an Annex to this letter the criteria agreed by the First Minister for the gateway process and a provisional list of events that has been drawn up with EventScotland for consideration as part of this process. The recent decision on the UEFA European Championships is an indication of a successful outcome to this approach.

As I mentioned at the EIAG meeting on 7 April, in recent days the UK Government has announced a number of studies that have a direct bearing on the events sector. Of particular interest are a review of social distancing and an Events Research Programme which will see a number of trial events take place over the coming weeks that aim to build a strong evidence base to inform decisions on future re-opening. We appreciate the frustrations with the current physical distancing restrictions and their impact on the viability of the sector, irrespective of the numbers permitted in each Level. The social distancing review could find a way through this for us and we are committed to working with the UK Government to support any permissible move to improve this situation.

We are working closely with the UK Government on all these studies and have agreement that the outputs will be shared with us and will therefore be factored into our own decision-taking. Your letter points out the implications of there being significant divergence with England and we acknowledge that this is a real issue and are seeking to take a 4 Nations approach wherever possible, while recognising that Scottish Ministers have devolved authority to take decisions that they believe to be in Scotland’s interest.

Finally, the First Minister indicated this week that she was open-minded on whether there is a place for a vaccine certification scheme for domestic use in Scotland. While there are a number of practical, technical and ethical issues to be taken into consideration in any decision in this area, this could be of significant assistance to allow certain elements of the events sector to reopen more quickly.

We have really appreciated the strong partnership that has been built up over the last year between EIAG, EventScotland and Scottish Government officials. I think this has made a real difference to the profile of the sector and given it a strong voice within Government and access to Ministers in a more focused way than had perhaps been possible previously. The close relationship has also allowed us to secure £31.5 million for tailored financial support schemes as well as provide sector guidance that meets the needs of businesses in the industry. I acknowledge though that greater certainty is required before we can see a return of confidence within the sector and we are doing everything we can to provide that for you.

Pleased be assured of the impact and influence of EIAG to date, which is reflected in the advice which officials put to Ministers to effect policy changes. We have already seen that in evidence in direct working relationship between EIAG members and SG clinicians, which is paying dividends in decisions such as for the Royal Highland Showcase and the European Football Championships. There are some encouraging signs that we are turning a corner and I hope this will allow Ministers to give greater clarity on the route to the full resumption of events in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Bearhop

Head of Events Strategy & Delivery

**Annex**

**GATEWAY PROCESS**

The First Minister has agreed the following criteria to determine how events might be included within the gateway process.

1. The principal criterion to determine whether an event should enter the gateway process is that it is internationally significant and aligns with ‘Scotland The Perfect Stage’, or supports the Government’s broader policy priorities. This would focus on audience reach (including broadcast) and GVA impact for the pre-covid event (including key local economic impact) with consideration also given to the positive impact on the wider supply chain and likelihood of the event (or its content) moving to another country. Fundamentally, the successful delivery of selected events would demonstrate that Scotland is still functioning as a host for world class events, aiming to maintain our reputation for future bids.
2. A secondary criterion that would be taken into account is whether the Scottish Government could provide financial support to help gap fund the event if it is not commercially viable due to covid mitigations. Access to support funding is not the principal rationale for an event’s inclusion on the process; this is to secure agreement for the event to proceed with a limited number of spectators at a point when this might not be permitted generally.
3. Finally, prior to an event entering the gateway process, confirmation would be required from local partners (the local authority, local public health team, Police Scotland and local transport providers) that they are bought into working on delivery of the event.

The Gateway Process would aim to follow the following steps:

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| **Gateway** | **Timing** | **Details** |
| **Inception meeting** | As soon as possible after event agreed to proceed to gateway process | Identify the size of the proposed audience and whether this is a local or domestic Scottish audience, UK if that is permitted later in the summer (international audiences not considered viable at this stage, apart from through broadcast).  Agree the explicit conditions that require to be met to enable that size of audience to attend (local prevalence rates, travel restrictions, test positivity, mortality rates, hospital capacity, etc).  Discuss other details of proposal and clarify any issues.  Confirm whether any funding support is available (agreement of support will be between SG and organiser)  Confirm a key decision points for future meetings and final decision.  Ministerial agreement to proceed |
| **Gateway meetings** | Tied to decision points for the event. Expected to be every 2-4 weeks in run up | Confirm whether or not clinical indicators (local prevalence rates, travel restrictions, test positivity, mortality rates, hospital capacity, etc) are being met to allow the event to proceed.  Discuss detailed COVID-19 risk assessment prepared by the organiser and any areas for amendment.  Update to Ministers. |
| **Final pre-event meeting** | Tied to final go/no go decision for that event (perhaps up to 1 week before) | Final check in about any remaining issues.  Confirmation of current epidemiological conditions.  SG process for final sign off. Policy and clinical recommendation to Ministers. |
| **Review meeting** | 2-3 weeks after the event | Discuss any issues that arose, good practice that can be shared and lessons learnt.  Consider any evidence of an outbreak related to event |

Participants at the meetings would be similar to that at Safety Advisory Groups (with the addition of SG and NDPB reps) and are expected to include:

* Event organiser and key suppliers / venue
* National governing body / federation / sanctioning body
* EventScotland (and / or Creative Scotland or Sportscotland)
* SG policy lead(s)
* SG clinician
* Local authority
* Local public health team
* Local public transport provider and local accommodation providers (if required)
* Police Scotland

The following events are being considered for inclusion or have already embarked upon the gateway process:

* UEFA European Championships 2020
* Royal Highland Show
* British & Irish Lions v Japan, Murrayfield
* ASI Scottish Open Golf
* Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo
* Edinburgh Festivals & Fringe
* Ladies Scottish Open Golf
* World Pipe Band Championships
* All Energy Europe Conference & Exhibition
* AIG Women’s British Open Golf
* TRNSMT
* Offshore Europe Conference & Exhibition