

# Letter from Scotland

**Who would have thought we would be entering another year riding out a fourth wave of Covid? And each wave seems bigger than the last, simply because we are getting tired and the damage to our economy and our way of life is catching up with us.**

The world has become a hostile environment in which we struggle to survive. Much of Scotland is currently being battered by snow storms and driving rain, the weather changing by the day, sometimes by the hour. And while we are trying to live with Covid rather than conquer it, it's an added burden to our troubles which have been building up for some time.

The soothsayers in the Resolution Foundation are predicting that a 50 per cent rise in energy costs, a 1.25 per cent rise in National Insurance contributions and a three per cent rise in Council Tax, and general inflation running at four or five per cent, will leave the average household £1,200 a year worse off.



Which way will the wind blow ?

Then there are the global threats of climate change, rumours of wars in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and a migrant crisis with 28,300 asylum seekers crossing the English Channel in the last year. These are just some of the 120,000 scrambling to find a new home in Europe, nearly 2,000 of them dying in the process.

The optimists among us are hoping, first, that omicron will prove to be a milder variant of the virus and easier to live with. And then that governments (and electorates) will take their responsibilities seriously and start funding public services properly, learn to manage the economy for the good of society not the rich or the self-interested and start tackling the approaching dangers of climate change and future epidemics.

Some of us are even hopeful of a renaissance in the arts and culture and sport-for-all after two years of shutdown. It

might begin with Celtic Connections, the traditional music festival in Glasgow, at the end of this month. The Edinburgh Festival organisers are talking of “reimagining” the events in August. VisitScotland and the Museums and Galleries have classified 60 events as “The Year of Stories”, ranging from the book festivals in Dundee, the Borders, and Wigtown, to community camp fires around the country and a series of folk tales at the Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh.



## Year of Stories 2022

If Covid will allow. Currently, the Omicron variant has pushed the number of infections up to around 12,000 a day, though it did reach 20,000 at Christmas, that’s one in every twenty people in Scotland infected. The number of deaths is now down to around 10 a day but more than 1,200 people are in hospital with Covid, double the number of a week ago. There is some controversy over how many of them are in hospital for other reasons and how many are unvaccinated. The health secretary Humza Yousaf says the NHS is facing its severest test yet, with the number of hospitalisations expected to rise

dramatically in the next two weeks. Further analysis of the figures is due out on Friday.

On the other side of Covid's cruel equation is the number of people required to self-quarantine to prevent the spread of the virus. This has caused huge disruption to NHS services, schools, train, bus and ferry companies, hospitality businesses, arts and sports, with some experiencing 20 per cent of their staff off work. This is not "living with the virus" so the Scottish government has joined the UK Government in limiting the quarantine period to 7 days instead of 10 (provided there's a negative later-flow test) and freeing those in Covid households to remain at work provided they are healthy and not testing positive.

Other restrictions remain in force however – mask wearing in schools, buses, trains and shops, the one metre rule in pubs and restaurants, indoor venues limited to 200 people, outdoor to 500. This has thrown the boardrooms in football and rugby into horrible dilemmas – do they play matches behind closed doors (with no ticket revenues) or do they try to play their games in England, where crowds are still allowed, and ask their fans to travel?



Rt Hon Frank Ross. Lord Lieutenant & Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh and Bruce Mouat, World Mixed Doubles Curling champion who is off to Beijing to take part in the Winter Olympics. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com) And while we are on the subject of sport, I wonder how the 50 British athletes will get on in the Winter Olympics in Beijing next month. Scotland's best hope for medals are in the men's and women's curling – not that we do much of this on frozen lochs any more. In March, Scotland's men's football team play Ukraine in the next stage of their pilgrim's progress towards the World Cup finals in Qatar in November. And in the summer, we can look forward to a Scotland team competing in the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Again, all is dependent on the virus behaving kindly. And I guess this is the lesson we have to take into the new year – Nature is in charge of life on Earth and we would be best to live in harmony with it.