

UK Government will help businesses address recruitment difficulties in Edinburgh

During the election campaign Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar said that the Scotland Office will be “Scotland’s voice at the heart of the UK Government”.

The Scottish Office lies in the heart of the Old Town where Edinburgh South MP, The Rt Hon Ian Murray, has now moved in along with his new ministerial staff.

Mr Murray has been appointed Secretary of State for Scotland, and told us he and the UK Government are already addressing some of the problems which have caused difficulties for people working in Edinburgh businesses.

Recruiting staff has been a post Brexit and post Covid hurdle for many Edinburgh employers, particularly in the hospitality sector. But Mr Murray said the government is making moves which should address some of the issues.

Speaking in a recent interview, Mr Murray highlighted the steps the new Labour government will take to tackle workforce shortages, especially in key sectors such as hospitality.

He said: “The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which advises government on what we should be doing in terms of

visas and numbers and skills, will be expanded – and there will be Scottish representation on the Committee.”

In the Labour manifesto the government promised to reform the points-based immigration system and said it would require MAC to partner up with other government bodies to ensure joined up action “delivering the skills needed for growth”.

Mr Murray also confirmed this point. He said: “The MAC will look at sectors and also geographies, feeding into policies of what we need when in relation to economic needs. Economic needs in Scotland – and particularly in hospitality – are a real problem.

“But the second part of that is our own workforce and the big skills agenda. Are we teaching the right things? Are we training the right people? There will be a really different focus on getting business, our education system and people together to decide how we are going to grow the right workforce for the future.”

Marc Crothall, Chief Executive of Scottish Tourism Alliance said the organisation set out its demands in its own manifesto ahead of the election. The manifesto asked for “An urgent review of the UK immigration system to ensure it is fit-for-purpose for the needs of the tourism and hospitality sector and that it values the contribution that an international workforce brings to the industry, particularly in rural and island communities.

“The STA further supports the introduction of a Scotland-specific visa that takes into consideration the country’s unique geography and circumstances.”

The Edinburgh-based hospitality group, Signature, with its 20 venues in Scotland including for example the Cold Town House and The Rutland in Edinburgh, recognises the challenges of recruitment in the Scottish hospitality industry, but says it is committed to creating working environments that attract and

retain hospitality professionals, as well as providing long-term hospitality career opportunities for its entire team. The business offered training courses for junior and senior managers and employee benefits including free food on shift.

Nic Wood, Owner and Managing Director at Signature Group, said: "Hospitality has evolved in the last few years. Our customer needs have changed, sometimes beyond recognition, and our teams are continuously adapting to ensure their needs are always exceeded. Our teams reflect the success of our business – and it's become increasingly apparent we truly are nothing without our people. We aim to promote from within and provide excellent progression opportunities and careers – this is something we champion and are proud of. It's also vital that people have fun along the way whilst feeling cared for and empowered."

A spokesperson for Edinburgh Hotels Association said: "We are delighted that the new Government is putting the uniqueness of the situation in Scotland to the fore.

"The MAC's current scope is far too restrictive and Scotland needs its own set of levers to help with current occupation shortages.

"Through UK Hospitality we have lobbied UK Government on setting up temporary occupation lists, abolition of the Shortage Occupation List and relaxations within the tier system, so they are well aware of the issues facing us.

"The abolition of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund put many businesses' training budgets under severe pressure and of course, many planned training courses and skills upgrades, were abandoned or reduced.

"Let's hope this "Scottish representation" has teeth and is able to push for speedy results."



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Secretary of State for Scotland The Rt Hon Ian Murray MP on the rooftop terrace at Queen Elizabeth House Picture Alan Simpson