



Mary Senior
Scotland Official
University and College Union

By email

14 April 2022

Dear Mary,

Thank you for your letter of 24 March 2022 regarding COVID-19 lateral flow testing across the UK. I note you have also copied this letter to Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Further Education who has outlined the Scottish Government's Test and Protect Transition Plan.

Testing and tracing have been important tools throughout the UK Government's response to COVID-19. However, the Government's free provision of testing has come at a very significant cost to the taxpayer during the pandemic response. These costs were deemed necessary due to the severe risk posed by COVID-19 when the population did not have a high level of protection; however, we now recognise we are in a different phase of the pandemic.

I agree that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over; however the population now has much stronger protection against COVID-19 than at any other point in the pandemic, due to the vaccination programme, natural immunity, access to antivirals, and increased scientific and public understanding about how to manage risk. For this reason, the Government now assesses that it is time to transition and focus its COVID-19 response towards guidance, while targeting protection (including testing) for individuals who are at most at risk from the virus.

The UK Government will continue to work closely with both the Devolved Administrations and relevant sectors to identify and understand capacity risks and in the event of a new variant of concern, will of course, be ready to step up any provision necessary to protect the public when needed.

*Yours sincerely,
Alister*

**THE RT HON. ALISTER JACK MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND**