

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Tourism and the Common Travel Area, HC 1242

Wednesday 20 April 2022

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Members present: Simon Hoare (Chair); Mr Gregory Campbell; Stephen Farry; Mary Kelly Foy; Sir Robert Goodwill; Claire Hanna; Fay Jones; Ian Paisley.

Questions 1 - 24

Witnesses

[I:](#) John McGrillen, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism NI; Shane Clarke, Director of Corporate Services, Policy and Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland; Dr Joanne Stuart OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: John McGrillen, Shane Clarke and Dr Joanne Stuart OBE.

Chair: Good morning, colleagues, and good morning to our witnesses, John McGrillen, Shane Clarke and Dr Joanne Stuart. The three of you are very welcome. You will be aware of legislation going through Parliament at the moment with regard to proposals for an electronic travel authorisation scheme for movements on the island of Ireland and then into GB. There are some on this Committee, and indeed in Parliament, who have concerns about that.

We are not going to ask our witnesses this morning to dilate upon the attractiveness of Northern Ireland and the wider island of Ireland as a tourism destination. We have all been there, it is self-evident, and we are not going to cover that ground.

We have the Minister before us at about 10.30 am, so in the interests of time, we will go straight into our questions. I will ask Dr Farry to open the batting.

Q1 Stephen Farry: Good morning to all our witnesses. Before we talk specifically about the proposed ETA, it would be useful to take stock of the current situation. Perhaps I could ask each of you to comment on how you manage the current situation of a mixed border entry system whereby some tourists will require a visa for the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and some will not. How does the current system work? Are there any problems with it, just so that we can establish the baseline?

Dr Stuart: At the moment, we have really seamless travel across the island of Ireland. Our main gateway for overseas travellers is via the Republic of Ireland, and particularly with tour operators, people come and arrange their trip based across the island of Ireland.

The Irish Government and the UK Government are currently aligned with regard to non-visa nationals. If you look at the list of countries, they are the same. If anybody is able to come into the Republic of Ireland, they are therefore able to travel seamlessly up to Northern Ireland.

We did have some challenges through covid, where we had different regulations, particularly around international travel. We saw the impact of that, particularly with tour operators cancelling the Northern Ireland elements of their trip due to the additional testing requirements, the additional administration with the UK passenger locator form and the additional cost. We have seen the impact that it can have when there is not alignment across the island.

John McGrillen: I do not have much to add, other than that on occasion there are spot checks by border control that take place on buses and



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trains for people travelling north and south. That would be the extent to which controls are in place at this point.

Q2 **Chair:** Sorry, those are border checks undertaken by whom?

John McGrillen: My understanding that is they are by border control, but those would be on a very irregular basis—spot checks that do not take place very often at all.

Shane Clarke: Over the past 20 years, since Tourism Ireland was established in 2002, we have probably invested about £1 billion in marketing the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland, primarily on the basis of completely unfettered and easy access right across the island for everybody. Any change to that is going to be quite a change in the way we would market the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland going forward. Finally, I should say that about 62% of the non-GB people who arrive in Northern Ireland come from the ROI.

Q3 **Stephen Farry:** Under the status quo, is there any particular bureaucracy that tour operators moving tourists between the two jurisdictions encounter? Is it an entirely seamless process, even around things like insurance? How does all that work?

Shane Clarke: Broadly speaking, it is a completely seamless process. Certain things are different because of the two jurisdictions, such as car hire—an independent traveller cannot just pick up a car in Dublin and drop it off in Belfast without incurring certain costs—but generally it would be fair to say that it is fairly unfettered in terms of the ease of getting around the island. There is not really very much regulation in that regard.

Q4 **Chair:** Could you give us some indication, if you have it, of the numbers who arrive in the Republic, travel to Northern Ireland and then either go back to the Republic and come into GB or go straight to GB from Northern Ireland?

John McGrillen: In 2019, which was probably the most recent year in which we got reasonable statistics, about 780,000 visitors out of the 3 million overseas visitors who visited Northern Ireland came from outside the common travel area. The estimations, which Shane might want to speak about, are that about 60% of those people spent time on both sides of the border on the island of Ireland.

We do not necessarily have statistics for people who have arrived in the Republic of Ireland, travelled into Northern Ireland and then travelled on to GB, but I would say that the numbers of people doing that would be minimal because people typically come for a visit to the island of Ireland. The tour operators, for the most part, certainly tend to operate on an island of Ireland basis, although there are a number who would operate on the island of Ireland, then go into Scotland and then perhaps return to Dublin to fly home again. If we are looking at total numbers, there are



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about 780,000, of whom 60% would access Northern Ireland via the Republic.

Q5 Chair: What is your assessment of the average per capita spend?

Shane Clarke: Just to add to what John said, typically about 60% of the non-GB visitors into Northern Ireland come via ROI. That goes up to about 77% from North America: of the North Americans who go into Northern Ireland, 77% come through the Republic of Ireland. In terms of the scale of spend, non-GB visitors would typically spend around 5.4 nights or £281 on a short stay in Ireland.

The next point to make is that Dublin airport is a major gateway: 180 locations are served via Dublin airport. In terms of getting visitors to the north of Ireland, it is a massive gateway and a massive opportunity.

Q6 Sir Robert Goodwill: We have established the baseline of the current situation, which is that the majority of tourists see both north and south as part of their holiday and that there have been no problems or bureaucracy involved in travelling north. What assessment have you made of the potential effect of the introduction of the electronic travel authorisation and how that might affect the tourism industry on both sides of the border, but particularly in the north?

Dr Stuart: We have engaged with our membership, which covers all the different sectors of tourism and travel in Northern Ireland. The first thing I would say is that we are scrabbling for information. There has been no consultation at all with the industry or with us regarding the introduction of the ETA and the impact in Northern Ireland.

Q7 Chair: Sorry, could I just pause you there? There has been no consultation by the Home Office with your sector?

Dr Stuart: Absolutely. Where I found out and started to get the details was as part of the Home Office national advisory SME group set up to look at all the issues around the new points-based immigration system. As part of that, something came up around the Nationality and Borders Bill. We have not had any engagement; I have raised a number of questions seeking clarification, but we really do not have any information, so we have to base this on what is in the Bill and our interpretation of that.

One of the really concerning things is that it seems to be a single-entry ETA. As you will be well aware, given all the ways you can cross the border multiple times on a trip, a single entry would just be unworkable and completely impracticable. It could also cause huge cost to tourists travelling across the island.

With regard to the perception, as I said, we saw the impact when we had different regulations throughout covid-19. People want hassle-free travel. Tourism Ireland has done plenty of research on our overseas markets. If anything is perceived to be an additional obstacle or barrier to a trip,



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people will decide to stay within the Republic of Ireland, where they can travel around and do not need any additional administration or cost to go into Northern Ireland.

There are also some challenges with regard to people who are living legally in the Republic of Ireland through their EU membership but are not Irish citizens. Obviously, through the EU settlement scheme and that side of things, people who work on a full-time basis in Northern Ireland have been covered; a lot of coach drivers and tour guides who will come over with the tours will not be in that situation. Again, it is about understanding how that will work in practice, particularly around the single entry.

Those are some of the things. Obviously, there is a financial implication. We reckon that about £160 million of visitor spend is at risk. It could impact on about half a million visitors. It is not just leisure tourism; we have also just launched a 10-year growth strategy for business tourism in Northern Ireland. A lot of people will travel via the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland to attend international conferences. Any additional administration or barrier to entry could have an impact on our competitiveness to attract those conferences to Northern Ireland.

Q8 Sir Robert Goodwill: Mr Clarke, many coach trips will start off in Dublin or in the Republic, so tourism in Northern Ireland may impact companies based in the Republic. Have they looked at the additional bureaucracy or some of the pitfalls—for example if the coach enters Northern Ireland twice and it is only a single-entry visa, as we have just heard from Dr Stuart?

Shane Clarke: Tourism Ireland undertook some research recently through our research partner. It is hot off the presses, and I have just shared it with the Committee secretariat. It basically asked tour operators and industry how aware they were of the impending change and what the implications associated with that change were. We spoke to four in industry on the island of Ireland—two based in Northern Ireland, two based in the south—as well as eight tour operators based across France, Germany and North America, and then also global inbound.

The first thing to say is that they were completely and utterly unaware. I fully agree with what Joanne said about not being consulted. There has been no consultation with us, and it would appear that the awareness among industry about this on the island of Ireland, let alone tour operators overseas, is very scant.

In the reaction we got when we asked the question, to be honest there was a degree of incredulity that this was being proposed. The industry has been on its knees for the last two years with covid and it cannot really believe that this kind of regulation is being brought in. It is looking for good news, not for barriers or uncertainties to be put in its way.



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They felt that it would be not only very damaging to the island of Ireland proposition, in terms of free and unfettered access right across the island, but extremely damaging to Northern Ireland. In effect, they were saying that Northern Ireland is a very exciting part of the island of Ireland itinerary, but it is not a stand-alone destination. Not only does introducing these additional requirements add complexity and potentially cost, but there are lots of other places that near-to-home potential visitors can go. This is just going to add a barrier to their potential to visit the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Q9 Sir Robert Goodwill: Do you think that people will be deterred, particularly independent travellers or people on organised tours? Do you think that they may well end up being deterred from going to Northern Ireland because of the additional bureaucracy or the confusion?

Shane Clarke: Yes, absolutely. That point came across very strongly in the research feedback that we got, both from tour operators and from the industry.

Q10 Sir Robert Goodwill: If I were an airline operator or a ferry company and I brought somebody into the UK who had no right to be here, I could get a £2,000 fine for every one. Has any communication been indicated? If one does bring a coach of 50 people into Northern Ireland without the correct ETA and documentation, are there any penalties or is there any offence that might be committed by that tour operator in organising that trip?

Shane Clarke: For all tour operators and for us as the tourism body, if there are laws, we have to promote them and make sure that people are clear on them, because nobody will want to break any laws. At this point in time, we do not know what the consequences are going to be, because it is not clear.

Q11 Chair: The Bill very specifically says that if you are an airline carrier, a ferry operator or a boat operator, there is the £2,000 fine to which Sir Robert referred. Have you any handle—I certainly have not—on why the coach operator, the taxi driver, the inland waterway company or the train or other public transport company taking somebody in good faith from the Republic into UK jurisdiction in Northern Ireland without the relevant paperwork should be exempt from the same offence of which an airline, ferry or cruise liner operator would be guilty? I cannot understand the rationale for that. It should be everybody or nobody; this rather arbitrary differential does not seem to make sense. Have you any glimmer that could enlighten us on that?

Dr Stuart: One thing to remember is that those airlines and ferry operators are the direct point of entry into the UK. They are going into an official port and will therefore be checking that everybody has the right documents to get in. We talk about independent travellers as a growing trend. When they book their flight to Dublin, the airlines will tell them what the requirements are to come into the Republic of Ireland, not



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Northern Ireland. This is part of the challenge that we have: how will people know that they require this entry? As far as they are concerned, it is one island of Ireland, and they can therefore travel throughout the island. There is a major communication issue with how you are going to monitor that.

There is also the fact that it is a land border—you are not coming directly into the UK via an official port. We already have a precedent with the EU ID cards, where the Home Office has said that it is not going to carry out any checks on the land border. If anybody is travelling with a valid EU ID card, they are okay to use it to travel within Northern Ireland as well if they are coming over the land border. We have a precedent, but part of the challenge that you are raising is that we have not had an opportunity to talk through these issues or understand the detail of how this would work in practice.

Shane Clarke: Just to add to that, a lot of visitors can be spontaneous in what they decide to do when they come here. An independent traveller may well originally plan to come to Dublin, and then hear about the *Game of Thrones* attraction in Banbridge and want to go up there. You get a lot of that activity. Similarly, people who wanted to go to Donegal would really need to transit through Northern Ireland in order to get there. Introducing this kind of regulation is going to be quite an inhibitor.

John McGrillen: Many people who will be travelling will book through an agent who is sitting on the other side of the desk or the phone and is having to explain all this to the potential customer. Many of those agents have been selling the Republic of Ireland very successfully for years with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the itinerary. The fact that this ambiguity exists or this level of explanation is required will make it much easier for that agent to simply say, "I don't need to be bothered with this hassle. It's much easier for me to sell a trip to Cork, Galway, Kerry or wherever."

It has taken us a long time, as Shane will know from working with his colleagues, to build up the level of business that we have. Our fear would be that if we do not make this simple and easily understood, there is a potential for that business to be lost in those destinations where we have had to struggle to build it up. At this point in time, our estimation is that Northern Ireland appears on only about 10% of all the itineraries on the island of Ireland that are currently operated by tour operators.

Q12 **Mr Campbell:** I wonder whether any of our witnesses are aware that a couple of weeks ago the Government Minister in the Lords said: "We accept the need for further dialogue with interlocutors, including the Irish Government". I presume that that means with people like yourselves. Are you aware that the Government have committed to that dialogue, which has not taken place yet?

Dr Stuart: From my perspective, no. I was not aware of that, but obviously that is very welcome and is something that we have called for,



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so we are very happy to engage. As you can hear from the discussion, there are a lot of nuances that need to be thought through from a Northern Ireland perspective.

Chair: It may be naive of me to say this, but picking up on what Mr Campbell said about what the Minister in the Lords had to say, it would not be an illegitimate expectation that those conversations might have taken place before the legislation was tabled. Call me revolutionary if you will.

Q13 **Fay Jones:** Although we have discovered that you have had no opportunity to comment on these proposals throughout recent weeks and months, what mitigations might you have suggested if you had had the chance to have input? How could this be implemented but improved?

John McGrillen: It is probably worth saying that the day after the second hearing in the House of Commons, Shane and I did have the opportunity to speak to some colleagues within the Home Office who sought our views on the subject. If this is to be implemented and we cannot have the exemption that Joanne mentioned, which would make a huge difference if it were in place, it would clearly be beneficial if these were multiple-entry visas over a lengthy period of time or as long a period of time as possible. The ESTA that you typically get to travel to the United States tends to be multiple-entry and last for a two-year period, and the cost tends to be kept relatively low.

If this is going to come into force, which it looks like it is, we need to make sure that we make it easy for the tour operators to explain, easy to access online, and easy and quick to fill out; that the costs are not significant; and that it is a multiple-entry visa. Coming back to the point that Joanne made, 9% of the population of the Republic of Ireland are non-UK or non-Irish nationals. For those people, who typically travel regularly across the border, it would be impractical, as Joanne said, for it to operate on a single-entry access basis.

Q14 **Fay Jones:** Dr Stuart, would you mind going over your exemption suggestion again for me, just so that I have it to put to the Minister later on?

Dr Stuart: We are suggesting an exemption for those people who arrive in the island of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland and travel across the land border to Northern Ireland so that they do not require the ETA. Their trip is within the island of Ireland. We do have people who arrive directly into Northern Ireland from European countries. We have some European flights, and as they are arriving in an official port of entry, they will be aware that they will need an ETA and will have to have that. Also, if anybody were coming from Dublin to Northern Ireland and then on into GB, they could only get into GB via an official port of entry. At that point, they would need the ETA, which would be checked.



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Our challenge is that there are no checks, and we have been told by the Home Office that it does not intend to have any checks on the land border. Our concern is whether we are going to start having ad hoc checks and how they will determine who they check for an ETA, which could cause some problems around how they identify who they want to check. The exemption is very much specified as, or restricted to, those who are travelling from the Republic of Ireland across the land border into Northern Ireland.

- Q15 Chair:** Can we just pause there? You will appreciate the huge political sensitivity when talking about GB, the UK and the Republic. This Committee conducted a fairly lengthy inquiry on citizenship not that long ago and came to the view that the Home Office effectively needed to carve out an island of Ireland-wide policy rather than treating the Republic as the rest of the world, given the geography and so on and so forth.

People who live in the Republic but work in the tourism sector in the north will also be caught by this, it would seem. In essence, the Home Office cracks this nut, if indeed there is a nut to be cracked at all, by saying that you require this to enter GB, not the UK, if you have landed or arrived legitimately—that is the key thing—within the Republic of Ireland for the purposes of tourism or you are resident in the Republic with residency status and working in Northern Ireland. That surely cracks this problem, if indeed there is a problem to crack. I do not think that many of us are convinced that there is a problem to crack in any event. Is there merit in that?

Shane Clarke: I would think that there is merit in that.

Dr Stuart: Yes, there absolutely is merit in that, but we have to be aware of those who come in directly to Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK. As I said, because of the way that that would be communicated, that would be very clear to people coming into Northern Ireland booking via the airlines. We know that, so that can be managed.

From a tourism perspective, we are promoted as the island of Ireland overseas. Very little is done via VisitBritain as part of the wider UK proposition, so that makes sense, and that certainly is the exemption that we would be looking for.

Chair: Mr McGrillen, is that your view as well?

John McGrillen: We are familiar with the political aspects of all this, and it is not for us to comment on those, but certainly from a tourism perspective, those practicalities would work.

- Q16 Chair:** Let us just recap. There has been no engagement from the Home Office with your sector at all. Our witnesses this morning have expressed significant concerns—correct me if I am wrong in my summation—not so much about destination visitors coming to the Republic, but about those who arrive in the Republic and are going into Northern Ireland as part of



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an all-Ireland visitor experience, with the potential that that could have.

Shane Clarke: It will be damaging not only to visitors who go to Northern Ireland, but to visitors considering the island of Ireland, because it will just be seen as another barrier. It has implications not just for Northern Ireland but for the whole island.

- Q17 **Chair:** I think it has been put quietly by different voices in and around the Home Office that international travel is rather expensive, that the people who come to visit the island of Ireland are not on the breadline, if I can use that phrase, and that 18 or 25 quid or something for a piece of paper that you need legally but that nobody ever looks at is a drop in the ocean compared with all the other costs entailed for a visitor from the States, New Zealand, Australia or wherever. What is your assessment of that? Do you have a concern about the cost, or do you just have a concern that it is another piece of paper that we need in what is a very complex travel world in any event, and this might just act as an inhibitor?

Shane Clarke: You need to look at the types of visitors that you are talking to. If you are talking about a family who are coming, it is going to be cost and complexity, because one income earner might pay for three or four ESTAs, so it adds up. Similarly, for a tour operator that is programming tours, it is a multiple of that and there is clearly complexity.

For your older traveller, through covid we have all grown to hate the passenger locator forms and all that came with them, so that complexity is going to be an inhibitor as well. People coming from North America are well used to bureaucracy, form filling and things like that, but they might be scratching their heads if they have to comply with an ETA-style requirement but it is never actually checked—there is a kind of anomaly there. One of the big growing areas is intergenerational travel from the States with large groups of grandparents, parents and children. Again, the cost is a factor.

It depends on the length of holiday as well. Joanne made a point about somebody flying in from Germany to Belfast. Not only will they have the additional APD to pay by flying directly to Belfast, but they will now also potentially have the cost and complexity around the ETA. All those things add up. Are they the straw that breaks the camel's back? I cannot really be sure in every instance, but they are not going to help.

- Q18 **Chair:** What about those businesses operating within your sector that are looking to a workforce who may be Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland, Irish citizens living in the Republic but crossing the border to go to work, or non-Irish citizens with perfect legitimacy to live within the Republic and cross the border to go to work? Even if there are random, ad hoc tests, one would have thought that if you are crossing the border twice a day, five or seven days a week, there is a potential that you are going to be nabbed at some point, if there is to be any purpose in this piece of paper or documentation.



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Are any of your hotel operators and others saying that that may have an impact on workforce availability? We are undertaking another inquiry, and we heard on a recent visit to Northern Ireland that access to workforce is one of the great problems.

Dr Stuart: It certainly is, and it is certainly something that the sector is struggling with at the moment, as are all economic sectors. The introduction of the new immigration rules has not really helped from a Northern Ireland perspective or taken in the fact that we are on a land border and we may therefore have people who want to come to Northern Ireland to work. However, a lot of that has been resolved with the EU settlement scheme. Those who were already in that situation have all the documentation and approvals that they need to stay and work in Northern Ireland. As we move forward and want to attract more people to work in Northern Ireland, that is another consideration, but it is more for people who are also travelling for health. We have a connected health system, and people could find themselves in that situation without even realising it.

The single entry is the real challenge, in that people who decide to travel across the border, whether for leisure, for medical reasons or for some other reason, may find themselves breaking the law without even realising it.

John McGrillen: It is an issue for coach tour operators because that sector is very dependent on migrant labour, particularly in the Republic of Ireland. They would employ lots of Poles, Lithuanians and suchlike to drive their coaches. Imagine a coach driver who currently crosses a border 70 to 80 times a year bringing a coachload of people from Dublin to the north and back again. It is an issue for the coach tour operators, and they have raised it with us.

Q19 **Chair:** Maybe you have given thought to this, or maybe not, but what about access to services? Let us say that I am a coach operator, taxi business or minibus company taking people from the Republic to the north, and I am involved in some sort of road crash or accident. In essence, I have been people smuggling, because I have brought people into Northern Ireland from the Republic who do not have the right to be there because they do not have this piece of paper. Are there any concerns that we should be conscious of in asking the Minister about the implications for insurance for those people who provided the mode of transport and/or access to victims of an accident, with regard to access to the National Health Service?

Dr Stuart: I have to say that we have not gone into that level of detail, but again it raises the question of where the responsibility lies. Where it is an official port of entry, it should be expected that those airlines or ferry operators are responsible and checking that documentation, but what about a taxi driver in Dublin who picks somebody up to take them to Northern Ireland? If you had a similar scheme between England and Wales it would get into the realms of being impossible for everybody to



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know what they would require. I cannot see how putting the responsibility on a taxi driver, for example, would work. You are absolutely right that we have to work through these scenarios to understand the consequences.

Q20 Chair: So the insurance companies have not indicated anything at this juncture?

Dr Stuart: We certainly have not engaged with the insurance companies yet. With more consultation and direct communication with the Home Office on the practicalities and the detail, that would be something that we would have to look at. Shane, I do not know whether you have had any feedback.

Shane Clarke: The only feedback from the research that we did is that tour operators and industry clearly want to be compliant with the applicable laws. That means that, from a marketing point of view, we would need to tell people that there was a difference and they needed to be compliant with the laws.

Clearly, that would mean people being less likely to want to travel into Northern Ireland. The tour operators would be less willing to programme it because of the associated complexities and costs, and because they would not want their coach driver to be breaking the law inadvertently in any way. Northern Ireland is also a transit point for people going from the south of Ireland up to Donegal, so there is all that complexity.

Q21 Chair: Is there anything, witnesses, that you wish we had asked you or hoped we would ask and that you would like to raise now? You can use this as a conduit directly to the Minister. You are all busy flicking through your briefs.

Mr Campbell: Short, sharp, succinct answers, Chair—that is what we like to hear.

Dr Stuart: I think the Committee has covered all the main points. I would just make the point that the tourism industry has come out of the last 24 months having not really been operating for 12 of them. We estimate that we have lost around £1 billion in visitor spend to tourism and the tourism economy. We are an export industry, so we are bringing money into the economy. When tours and conferences are being planned, we are looking three to five years out. The uncertainty about what the requirement is going to be and how it is going to work in Northern Ireland can be very off-putting. We ask that it be considered as a matter of urgency so that we can clarify the situation and have the opportunity to work through the detail of what, as currently laid out, we think is unworkable for us in Northern Ireland.

Shane Clarke: I will just summarise some of the findings from our research with the tour operators and the industry. They said that this was a bad idea for tourism for the island of Ireland and a really bad idea for tourism prospects into Northern Ireland. From our point of view, it is



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value-destroying. We have invested over £1 billion in marketing the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the last 20-odd years as a place where people can come with unfettered access across the island. That would need to be reworked to add in these complicating factors.

Joanne made the point that the industry has been on its knees for the last two years. We have something here of our own making that is going to potentially impede prospects into the future, and not just for a year or two; the damage could be done in perpetuity. Those are the sentiments of the feedback.

John McGrillen: The industry over the last two years has survived on visitor numbers from the Republic of Ireland and staycations. As our routes open up, those people who have been locked into the island of Ireland for the last two years will want to travel abroad. The recovery and growth of the sector will really be dependent on the numbers of visitors we attract from the rest of the United Kingdom and further afield in the years ahead. From our perspective, the growth of the tourism sector is going to come from those overseas markets.

It is a really important industry. It employs lots of people, as Joanne said: around 72,000, of whom 70% are employed outside the Belfast City Council area. It is a very important rural employment generator and a really important part of the rural economy, so it does have significance.

Q22 Sir Robert Goodwill: We have been talking primarily about non-visa nationals—people from places like the United States, Canada and Taiwan, and EU citizens, who obviously do not need a visa to visit either the UK or the Republic of Ireland. Could I ask how the system has worked in the past with visa nationals? For somebody who has come from China, for example, and has a visa to go to the Republic, what checks have been in place? If a Chinese person wants to get a taxi to the UK, presumably it is already not possible for them to enter the UK in that way. Are there any parallels with that situation?

Shane Clarke: There is a British-Irish visa waiver programme that is there for short stay and has been quite successful. I am not sure what the implications associated with this change might be for that, but there would be implications. It was a successful development, particularly in attracting Indian and Chinese visitors, because selling the whole of the British Isles was a greater proposition. Clearly, this might add a degree of complexity.

Q23 Sir Robert Goodwill: Would that mean that an Indian person coming to Ireland could freely travel to Northern Ireland, whereas an American person would need to get an ETA? Are we putting those people at a disadvantage?

Shane Clarke: Potentially. I do not know the inner workings of that at this point in time. It was not clear to me.

Sir Robert Goodwill: We have the immigration Minister coming up next,



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so maybe he will be able to shed some light.

Q24 **Chair:** You can answer this with one of three words. Are the proposals set out in the Bill good for the tourism prospects of Northern Ireland and the associated economy? "Yes", "no" or "uncertain"?

Dr Stuart: No.

Shane Clarke: No.

John McGrillen: I would say "uncertain".

Chair: That is a useful split. Thank you very much indeed for your attendance this morning.

attendance.