

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Wales as a global tourist destination](#),
HC 220

Wednesday 1 February 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 February 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Simon Baynes; Virginia Crosbie; Wayne David; Geraint Davies; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Rob Roberts.

Questions 209 - 249

Witnesses

[II](#): Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Minister for Sport, Tourism and Civil Society, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Duncan Parish, Deputy Director for Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy, Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Patricia Yates, Chief Executive, VisitBritain/VisitEngland.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Office of the Secretary of State for Wales and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport](#)
- [VisitBritain](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Duncan Parish and Patricia Yates.

Q209 Chair: We are going to move seamlessly over to our second panel now, where we will be joined by the UK Government Minister, Stuart Andrew, Minister for Tourism, who is joining us virtually from Liverpool, where he has been on important Eurovision business. Minister, I do not know how much of the previous session with Minister Gething you heard, but, hopefully, you have picked up a flavour of what we have been discussing.

Can I ask you as well to introduce your officials, one of whom is here in the Committee room—it is good to see you—and another one is joining us virtually?

Stuart Andrew: Thank you. Diolch yn fawr, Mr Cadeirydd. Mae'n ddrwg gen i bod dydw i ddym yn bod gyda chi yn bersonol heddiw, ond mae'n wych i mi ymuno â'ch felpwyllgor heddiw. Thank you, Mr Chairman. It is great to join your Committee. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person, but, as you said, I have been dealing with the launch of the Eurovision Song Contest here in Liverpool.

I am pleased to be joined today by Duncan Parish, who is the deputy director for tourism and cultural diplomacy at DCMS, and Patricia Yates, who is chief executive at VisitBritain.

Q210 Chair: Minister, diolch yn fawr, and a very impressive Welsh introduction there. Thank you for that. Let us start with what you are working on currently. Today, you are busy promoting the Eurovision opportunities in Liverpool, which is not that far from north Wales. What are the potential benefits that you see for Wales in terms of tourism, and perhaps investment as well, stemming from this Eurovision opportunity?

Stuart Andrew: I have had tourism in my portfolio for literally just a couple of months now. Clearly, one of my personal priorities is how we really spread the benefits of the visitor economy right across the United Kingdom.

I see events like the Eurovision Song Contest, for example, as a perfect opportunity for us to showcase other parts of the UK that, frankly, are not getting enough of the fair share of that visitor economy. Much of the discussion that I had yesterday was with business leaders here in Liverpool and with a number of the mayors here, talking about how we can encourage people who come to the Eurovision Song Contest to then enjoy not just Liverpool and the wider region, but going to my old home stomping ground of north Wales and enjoying the wonderful cultural experiences that they can have there.

Q211 Wayne David: Minister, I will not embarrass you by asking you how your audition has gone this morning, but I will ask you a general question to begin with about how you see Wales's particular niche within your



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portfolio. Do you see Wales as being a central element of the VisitBritain offer, or very much as a secondary consideration?

Stuart Andrew: You will be pleased to know that there is no way that I am going to audition for the Eurovision Song Contest, unless we want to guarantee that we get nul points this year.

Wayne David: I am glad to hear that.

Stuart Andrew: How could I possibly consider Wales as secondary, having grown up in Wales and understanding and appreciating the huge amounts it has to offer?

I see it as very much complementary to much of the work I will be doing in my role of encouraging English tourism. If we can get as many tourists as possible to spend longer here, they will spend more money. If we can get them to other parts of the country and see the great diversity we have to offer, I can only see that benefiting the whole of the UK economy.

Q212 **Wayne David:** All too often I would imagine that you and your team have to make choices. Sometimes the choice might not be to Wales's advantage. How do you deal with the competing demands of different attractions in different parts of the United Kingdom?

Stuart Andrew: That is exactly why we do quite a lot of collaboration. It is important that we work with the Welsh Government. Of course, tourism is devolved to the Welsh Government, but we have strong relationships with them. We have the devolved Administrations' interministerial group on tourism. That will be meeting again on 2 March this year, and I certainly see my role as working very much hand-in-hand with Vaughan Gething and with other tourism Ministers in the other devolved parts of the UK.

Yes, of course I will have issues I will have to deal with for England, but many of those will be shared issues. We can come together and find shared solutions to those.

Q213 **Wayne David:** It is clear that you have a good working relationship with the Welsh Government. On our Committee, we have been struck by the number of Welsh tourist organisations saying that they have absolutely no contact with VisitBritain. Is that helpful? If it is not, what are you doing about it?

Stuart Andrew: Patricia can say a bit more, but my understanding is that there is a lot of good working going on with VisitBritain. If there is more that we need to do, I am really keen that we do that. There is so much to offer to international tourists that will benefit us all.

If we can learn from the evidence you have been getting today, of course we will do so. We recently held a UK Government interministerial group on tourism meeting where we had representatives from all of the various Departments within the UK Government. Again, we are keen to learn



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from each other and see where we can reach further. That will be a priority for me going forward.

Q214 **Wayne David:** I suspect that one of the unintended consequences of devolution might well be that organisations involved with the tourist industry in Wales make representations to VisitWales rather than VisitBritain. It is understandable if you were to take the view, "Tourism is devolved. Therefore, you need to speak to them". In a sense, we are part of the United Kingdom; there need to be representations made to the Welsh level and the UK level.

Stuart Andrew: That is absolutely right. People should come and speak to VisitBritain, but there is a very good and strong relationship between VisitBritain and VisitWales. Hopefully the representations that are made to VisitWales will also then be relayed to VisitBritain.

Q215 **Wayne David:** Can I mention one example that caused me some concern? The Committee went to the United States a few weeks ago. We met representatives of VisitBritain there, who proudly told us they were organising a visit of tourist chiefs to different parts of Wales. They mentioned that they were going to visit Chepstow Castle. I asked, "Why are you visiting Chepstow Castle when your itinerary means you are going past Caerphilly Castle, which is one of the largest castles in the whole of Europe?" There was no answer. That causes me some concern because it may well be indicative of a lack of understanding of what the real attractions of Wales are or that the relationship with the Welsh tourist industry and VisitWales is not as strong as you might think.

Stuart Andrew: That certainly gives me some homework to do, but I hope you will have some reassurance that my Welsh roots mean that I understand exactly the point you are making about understanding the real opportunities that exist in Wales.

Q216 **Wayne David:** Maybe the message from yourself needs to be permeated down into the organisation as a whole.

Stuart Andrew: As a consequence of this discussion, that will happen.

Chair: Thank you, Wayne. I should have introduced Patricia Yates properly because you are the chief executive of VisitBritain.

Patricia Yates: Yes. If I could supplement what the Minister has said, we work through VisitWales. We absolutely expect that the relationship that tourism businesses in Wales have with VisitWales is their first-level relationship, and then we work with VisitWales. As Heledd has just said, we have people in markets; we bring buyers over. This weekend we have brought Brazilian, German and Canadian buyers around Wales. They have been to Zip World, which I know you have had taken evidence from. The Germans went to Zip World.

The programme that was put together will be put together in consultation with VisitWales. We have a joint marketing board. We work very



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collaboratively. We are all trying to do the same thing. We are all trying to increase value, get people to travel around more and spend for longer, and to come out of season. The working relationship is very close with VisitWales. As I said, the first-line relationship you would expect Welsh businesses to have would be with VisitWales. Then businesses come on our trade missions, meet our international buyers and take advice from our international network.

Q217 **Chair:** Ms Yates, VisitBritain is independent of Government, is it not?

Patricia Yates: It is an arm's-length body.

Q218 **Chair:** Yes, it is a standalone body. VisitWales is very much embedded within the Welsh Government. There is a difference in how the two organisations are set up. In your experience, does that translate to any different ways of working or different cultures? Does that present any difficulties or obstacles in the way you seek this collaboration you talk about?

Patricia Yates: No, it does not. As an arm's-length body, we are the interlocutor between Government and industry. For example, during Covid we were pulling together the industry's views on what Government policy needed to be implemented and then talking to Government about the unintended consequences of some of the policies. We were helping that discussion. We have a statutory role to advise Government so we absolutely fulfil that.

I would say that we look to supplement our Government money with private sector money. We have many commercial partners. It is possibly easier to do that as an ALB than it is as part of Government, but that is a "possibly".

Q219 **Virginia Crosbie:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Patricia, for joining us today. The first question I want to ask you is about St David's Day. This is a huge opportunity for Wales to celebrate our Welshness. With St Patrick's Day, Holyhead is twinned with Greystones in Ireland. That is a massive celebration there. We can see people in New York and all around the world celebrating this. I wanted your thoughts on how we can make more of St David's Day and your thoughts on it being a national holiday.

Stuart Andrew: Much of the work that we have been doing is recognising that, as a country, we are starting to have a good reputation for many of the events we organise. We need to use that as a way of showcasing the country to international visitors. You are absolutely right: using great events like St David's Day is something we need to do a bit more. It is a great way for us to showcase the heritage of Wales and the great culture that Wales has to offer. Of course, being a keen baker myself, it is a great day for me to be baking Welsh cakes that day.

There is so much that I remember as a child, growing up in Wales, that helped us to celebrate those great cultural benefits of Wales. We could



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probably use that as a marketing tool, just as we do with many of the events that we are currently under way with, as I mentioned a moment ago, such as the Eurovision Song Contest.

Patricia Yates: I would echo that. We know the reason people choose destinations is, first of all, value and, secondly, welcome. Britain as a whole does not do so well at welcomes. Events and times when we can tell more of the story of Britain and more of the story of welcome, getting people talking about what they are doing in their local area, is a really important part of our marketing campaign. I agree with you.

Q220 **Virginia Crosbie:** Minister, I wanted to talk about the cruise market. Holyhead is the second-busiest port in the UK. Around 40 cruise ships came to Wales last year. That means over 55,000 visitors. When we were in New York and we spoke to the Welsh office and the tourism office there, that was something that did not really seem to resound with them. This is a market where we could do an awful lot more to promote Wales. We have talked about some of the issues about the transport sector and getting to Wales. Having the ports we have is a great opportunity, which I believe we could do more with to attract visitors. How are you addressing that?

Stuart Andrew: You raise a really valuable point. It is about exploring all of the many opportunities that exist and getting better at advertising what is on offer. That is why that recent interministerial group that I was talking about a moment ago was really helpful. It is about bringing all of the Government Departments together to look at how we can make all aspects, including the ones you describe, easier for us to include as part of our determination to improve the visitor economy.

The points you have just raised are probably something we could add with our discussions with DfT in the next meeting.

Q221 **Geraint Davies:** In terms of getting people to Wales in the first place, many may arrive at ports or Cardiff Airport, but the majority will probably come in through Heathrow, certainly the US holidaymakers. To get to Wales is expensive and takes a lot of time. The UK Government have underinvested in Welsh rail infrastructure over many years. We have had about 1.5% of the enhancements for 5% of the population. This Committee has argued that we should get a 5% share of HS2.

In the meantime, as the Tourism Minister, is there a case to be made to provide perhaps subsidised travel to get to Wales, to make it easier, quicker and more cost-effective to get to Wales so that we can show off what we have and people can enjoy what we have to offer?

Stuart Andrew: This is exactly why, at that recent interministerial meeting we had, transport was a key subject that we discussed. Connectivity was very much one of the issues that we agreed to focus on in terms of how we help many of the people who come to the UK to get around the UK once they are here. At the moment we are at an early



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stage in those discussions that we will be having with DfT, but I do recognise that this is a very important issue.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that about £5 billion has been invested in the Great Western route so far, but I recognise there is more to do. When people get to the UK, if they are travelling to London, I want them to enjoy the benefits of London, of course, but I also want them to go and see what else is on offer. If that is not easy for them, it could become a barrier. It will be and is a key focus of the interministerial group we have convened.

Q222 Geraint Davies: You might want to mention at that interministerial group that after HS2, instead of it taking two hours and 10 minutes to get to Manchester, it will take one hour and 10 minutes, but it will still take three hours to get to Swansea. Putting yourself in the position of a tourist arriving in London, it will become relatively easier to go up into England than come across to Wales. It seems to me there is a compelling case, from your point of view, that we do get our fair share of HS2 and infrastructure in the future.

In the meantime, would you agree that there is a case to be made to get people across to Wales more cost-effectively to stimulate the tourist economy there?

Stuart Andrew: This is exactly why we are having these discussions with DfT and colleagues there. We recognise the importance of that connectivity question in terms of helping our tourists get around the country. I will certainly raise the point you have highlighted to me today.

Q223 Geraint Davies: I want to ask about branding very briefly because we do not have much time. I know the Welsh Government will be in charge of Wales branding, but Wayne David mentioned Caerphilly Castle by way of example. We have the most castles of anywhere in the world. Castles are romantic adventurous places, highlighted in Disney and all the rest of it. How should we be marketing Wales? Should it be with the dragon, the flag, the language or the castles? How is that embedded in the broader strategy of marketing Wales within the marketing of Britain?

Stuart Andrew: I am not a marketing expert, and I would probably be the last person you would want to come up with a marketing strategy. You highlight many of the great things Wales has to offer. All of those need to be a focus of it. Of course, how to market Wales is a matter for the Welsh Government because tourism is devolved. Whatever they do, we are keen to work with them to promote that marketing, whatever they come up with.

Q224 Virginia Crosbie: I just wanted to delve a little bit deeper into how you are working together as a group and how it is working logistically with each other.

Stuart Andrew: Do you mean with the Welsh Government?



Virginia Crosbie: Exactly, yes.

Stuart Andrew: As I mentioned a moment ago, we do have another group, which is the devolved Administrations' interministerial group on tourism. That will begin meeting again at the beginning of March. I also chair the Tourism Industry Council. That meets quarterly, and Wales is represented on there. They are also represented on the Events Industry Board. That is looking at all of the events that are happening here in Wales.

VisitBritain and VisitWales will work very closely together. They certainly did so as we were coming out of the pandemic with various programmes of promotion. I am sure Patricia could highlight some more of that work. There are a lot of good working relationships. I have not had the chance to work with them yet because that meeting is in March, but I see it as a key part of my role to make sure that working relationship continues and is as strong as it can be.

Q225 **Virginia Crosbie:** Will you be working together on the plans for the coronation on 6 May?

Stuart Andrew: We will certainly be discussing that because it is an opportunity for us to again showcase the UK. The coronation is a unique opportunity. People across the world will already be thinking about coming to the UK for part of those celebrations, but we also need to use it to promote future visitors to come.

One of the other responsibilities I have is as Minister for the coronation. I am really keen that we have a wide programme of events all over the country, so that it is not just the coronation in London that people see but a host of events happening in communities up and down the country, which I hope will get that wider spread of promotion to people around the world and encourage them, when they come to the UK, to experience those other communities too.

Q226 **Virginia Crosbie:** My last question relates to the Welsh Government's tourism tax. How do you see that affecting tourism in Wales, when we will not have this tourism tax in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Stuart Andrew: These are matters for the Welsh Government, frankly. We have no intention of introducing a tourism tax in England. When you compare with other countries, with air passenger duty, et cetera, our levels of tax in some cases may be higher than other destinations. We would not want the introduction of a tourism tax in England to deter anybody from coming here as a destination.

Q227 **Wayne David:** Just as a supplementary, Minister, you mentioned the tourist potential of the coronation. Would it be a good idea to make a big thing of the investiture ceremony of the Prince of Wales?



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Stuart Andrew: You are pulling at my strong monarchist heartstrings. I would say yes. Unfortunately, I was not around at the time of the last one. It would be great to see one whilst I am around now.

Q228 **Geraint Davies:** Hopefully you will be around a little longer. I want to ask about the different overseas markets that have been identified for priority in terms of inbound tourism into Wales. A lot of people come to Wales from England, Ireland or Germany. We have talked about the United States. What are the priorities, in a nutshell, and why? What are you doing about getting more people into Wales in terms of where you are prioritising different countries?

Stuart Andrew: Yes, you have mentioned a number of the top-five countries for coming to Wales. Of course, France and the Netherlands are also in that list. If I could, I would ask Patricia to give a bit more detail on the countries that are being targeted to come to Wales.

Patricia Yates: Our focus is to drive value back as quickly as possible. I know you have discussed the American market. The latest figures on the American market suggest that it is 40% up on value from pre-Covid. You would be mad not to be focused on the American market. We are looking at America and then, in Europe, we are looking at France, Germany and Spain. We are just going to launch in the GCC as well.

I would say the campaign we are launching in America is totally different from the campaign we are launching in Europe and the GCC. Those are the markets we are concentrating on at the moment. There is, of course, the question of China. When is that going to come back? Australia is also coming back quite strongly. When do we invest in Australia?

The market I have not mentioned that is very important for Wales is Ireland. That is because VisitWales takes the lead in promoting to Ireland.

Q229 **Geraint Davies:** Of course, we have seen the United States economy grow quite rapidly; the projections are fast. In Britain, the projections are negative. Of course, the value of the pound plummeted in particular in 2016 and since, and the dollar has appreciated. Presumably, it is a lot cheaper for people from America, and indeed from Europe, to visit Wales.

Patricia Yates: It is. Tourism is an industry that benefits from a weak pound, so yes. People tend to spend in their own currency, so they spend more when they come. The worry for the tourism industry is that, if you think of inbound tourism as being the icing or the cherry on the cake, the domestic industry and domestic visitors are the people who are going to be most hit by cost of living concerns.

We can see that people are already talking about trading down, going to cheaper places and not going out on day trips so much. It will be a bumpier year on domestic, but we are quite bullish about inbound.

Q230 **Geraint Davies:** In the round, when you look at the contraction of the



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ability of British people to spend money in Wales versus more power in their pocket from the Americans and Europeans, I suppose you would say the tourism industry will be facing a fairly tough time because we rely on our own people to go to see our own things.

Patricia Yates: The domestic industry will be tough. Getting international visitors to come, partly to fill that gap, is really important. There is opportunity there. That is what I would say.

Q231 **Chair:** Just talking about trends in passenger flows, what are you seeing in terms of the European market?

Patricia Yates: France is coming back quite strongly. I am off to Paris this afternoon. Germany is interesting, in that they are very focused on value for money. What we are starting to hear from German tour operators is that they can see costs rising because of the challenges on the supply side that you have mentioned.

Q232 **Chair:** Are the numbers still lower than pre-Covid?

Patricia Yates: We are still slightly lower in those markets than pre-Covid, yes, but we can see growth coming back. We reckon that by the end of the year we will be about 85% on volume from where we were pre-Covid.

Q233 **Chair:** What has had the bigger impact: Covid or the changes resulting from Brexit, for example young people in France no longer being able to travel to the UK with a carte nationale d'identité and needing a full passport instead?

Patricia Yates: Some sectors of the market have been hit by the changes in ID cards, particularly school trips. Overall, the market sentiment is much more positive now. The Britain-France relationship looks very positive, and you can see the numbers are building back very steadily from there.

Chair: That is encouraging.

Q234 **Rob Roberts:** No disrespect to the Minister—I shall have some questions for the Minister on a different topic shortly—but I want to finish off on this by asking Patricia a question, if I can. I am interested to know how you are using social media to promote Wales abroad? In the last panel, we heard about the huge social media presence of the WWE, for example, around the thing that happened at Cardiff Castle. What is our social media strategy specifically for Wales, from VisitBritain's point of view?

Patricia Yates: The social media strategy—and we get over 3 million views on our social media posts—is to drive that message of welcome and immediacy: “We have great history and heritage, but you need to come and see it now”. We tell that surprising story through social media. That aligns very much with the Wales brand as well and what they are trying to do.



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Q235 Rob Roberts: When it comes to your social media posts, do you allocate and say, “We must make sure we give a certain percentage or this much coverage to Wales”?

Patricia Yates: Yes, we make sure that nations and regions are covered. Of our last 10 Instagram posts, three of those were around Welsh attractions. We are very conscious of our responsibility, as a British body, to promote all of the nations and regions.

Q236 Rob Roberts: That is wonderful. I appreciate you may not have the statistics with you now. If you do have them, great; if not, could you write to the Committee and let us know the difference in engagement between the posts of different regions?

Patricia Yates: I do not know that. We will certainly send that to you.

Rob Roberts: That would be very kind. Thank you.

Q237 Ruth Jones: Minister, you have already alluded to transport links between Wales and England. We have already heard from Geraint about Heathrow. You have mentioned the DfT communications you have. How often and how urgently are these talks ongoing? What are you doing in terms of talking to the Welsh Government—some of it is devolved and some of it is not—in terms of ensuring that our public transport system is fit for purpose? Getting links into and out of Wales is vital for the tourist industry.

Stuart Andrew: Yes, the first meeting I chaired happened about a fortnight ago. We made sure that transport was one of the key issues and areas we were focusing on. We set a number of challenges to look at this: what are the obstacles to helping the visitor economy and where could improvements be made?

Officials between my Department and DfT are furthering those discussions now. We will get a report back at the next interministerial group. I would expect that then to come up as a topic for discussion in the other interministerial group that we have with the devolved Administrations. I hope we could link those two pieces of work together, if you see what I mean.

Q238 Ruth Jones: That makes sense. I am just worried about the timelines. In this place, we do a lot of talking and there are a lot of reports. In terms of action plans, what sort of timescales are you looking at?

Stuart Andrew: I am afraid I cannot commit the DfT to any timelines. I can commit that I recognise it as a priority. I recognise that we have to address many of the issues you have highlighted. I will certainly do what I can, from my angle, to ensure that. I know it will help make the job of trying to promote the rest of the country as a destination for tourists a lot easier if they can get there simply.

Q239 Rob Roberts: Minister, just following on from some of the questions of my colleagues about getting into Wales and the simplicity of it, you are in



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Liverpool now. Every week I go up and down the country on Avanti trains. The difficulty they have is that, once you want to go into north Wales, they have to use different trains because the north Wales coastline is not electrified. They have to buy hybrid trains that will do both jobs. How much conversation have you had with the DfT about things like the electrification of the north Wales coastline? That would be of huge benefit and make it much easier for people to get to north Wales.

Stuart Andrew: There has been some working in partnership with Network Rail, for example, to develop the online business case to look at reducing the journey times on the north Wales coastline, particularly between Chester and Holyhead. That work is ongoing, I understand. It was one of the points that was coming up in those discussions I have had outside of those ministerial groups with colleagues in Government.

We are currently engaging with the Welsh Government—that is what we will be doing next—to talk about those transport issues and see whether we can come up with further consideration of that scheme.

Q240 **Rob Roberts:** Loth as I am for people to flash by north Wales quickly—the slower people can enjoy the scenery, the happier we will all be—it would certainly make a huge difference, I am sure.

In September 2021, this Committee concluded that HS2 should be an England-only project. At its closest point, it is still about an hour's journey outside Wales. It is not really an England-Wales project, is it?

Stuart Andrew: I am not going to get drawn into that debate. The way I look at it is that at the moment it is going from London to Manchester. I will leave it there.

Q241 **Chair:** Ms Yates, can I come back on something I thought I heard you say earlier? Did you say that we do not do welcome very well in the UK or that we need to improve on that? What did you mean by that?

Patricia Yates: The international perception is that we do not do welcome very well.

Q242 **Chair:** What does that mean?

Patricia Yates: The country that normally rates top on welcome is Canada. International perceptions had a lift post Olympics. Think about all those images of the street parties in London or people on the streets helping people.

We are very conscious that it is a huge draw for whether you choose a destination or not. We really need to up the volume and tell the story about the welcome, and the very distinctive welcome in Wales. Wales tends to do slightly better than Britain overall on perceptions of welcome, so we need to use that strength.

Q243 **Chair:** Exactly, yes. That is the reason I ask. Gavin Landry, your New York colleague, shared some data with us. He is excellent, by the way.



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Please take back our thanks as a Committee for the time your team gave us when we were there. Some of the data they shared with us suggested that the visitor experience for North Americans going to Wales was a very positive one. Afterwards, they would tend to report back very favourably on things like welcome.

Patricia Yates: Yes, and the rating of welcome improves once people have come, but you need to get them here first. Wales tracks better in perceptions. Once people come, the ratings rise.

Q244 **Chair:** Linked to that, is there an issue around skills? We have not really talked about this today, and whether people are being trained to see the tourism industry as a career path rather than just a temporary summertime holiday job. Are people in the industry really being skilled up to deliver a consistently excellent experience for visitors?

Patricia Yates: That is a constant challenge for tourism. It has been thus ever since I have worked in tourism. There has been a challenge in getting young people in schools and their parents to see tourism as a career and a job where you can start at the bottom and work your way up. We are all working on that. UKHospitality is working in Wales as well with the Hospitality Rising campaign, which we absolutely support.

Yes, skills development is really important. We do a lot of work on upskilling SMEs, particularly in the digital area. That is as VisitEngland. We work alongside VisitWales to help SMEs internationalise and sell in international markets.

Q245 **Chair:** Minister, I want to ask you about the skills challenge and how we can ensure that we have a tourism workforce that is skilled up to deliver really excellent experiences, whether it is in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. Where does the balance of responsibility lie? Is it on the shoulders of the companies operating in those sectors or is it on Government to improve skill levels?

Stuart Andrew: This is one of the areas where I get a lot of lobbying from industry. Improving skills is something they want to see. That is a collaboration between Government and industry.

I had a really interesting meeting with people at Leeds Beckett University who have been doing a great deal of work in this area. Patricia is right: it is about raising the bar in terms of understanding what great careers are available within the tourism industry. Sometimes that is not fully realised. Listening to those experts at that university, it was good to see that many of the people they have been educating and upskilling have gone on to have some really great careers. We probably need to get better at advocating that.

Q246 **Wayne David:** Can I just return to what we were saying about the importance of the American market? When the Committee was in America a few weeks ago, we met innumerable people who had been to the UK on holiday. Not only had they not come to Wales; they had not



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even heard of Wales. We know there are plenty of examples where marketing does work. For example, after the NATO summit in Newport in 2014, there was a concerted effort to market Wales in London. It paid dividends, with more people coming to Wales.

Are there any instances where you can say you have deliberately made an effort to target Wales in the same way as you target Scotland or promote the Cotswolds?

Patricia Yates: We absolutely target Wales in the same way we promote Scotland or the Cotswolds. Wales is always part of our offer. That is absolutely the case in America. We try to raise the aspiration to come, but we also work with businesses to make sure there is a saleable product to get people to Wales.

Our emphasis there is very much on building product that takes people outside the central belt and gets them to new destinations. That is why we brought trade people over the last weekend to see Wales for themselves and experience the welcome and the product. We will go back to those people and say, "What have you put in your programmes?" and track that through.

We also had Destination Britain North America, to which we took companies from across Britain. VisitWales was a sponsor of that. We had a good contingent of Welsh businesses there. We invite the buyers from America to come and do business again. Wales is absolutely seen as part of our activity.

Q247 **Geraint Davies:** Minister, to what extent have you found that tighter immigration controls are a constraint on tourism? Historically, a lot of younger people are prepared to come over and do seasonal work to support the industry while the sun is shining. Are you doing anything about that to help people from Europe and elsewhere come over, perhaps for the summer, to help out our tourist industry?

Stuart Andrew: Of course, the UK keeps its visa system under regular review. One of the key elements from our last interministerial group was to charge Home Office with a set of issues to look at and report back on at our next meeting. That is what we will be doing as a key focus of that meeting to see what the barriers are.

Q248 **Geraint Davies:** It is the case, is it not, that there is a labour and a skill shortage in the sector now it is beginning to take off slightly? It is now being held back by the cost of living crisis. Is there more that could be done?

Stuart Andrew: You are right: in the discussions I have had with industry, they have talked about a shortage of labour. This is one of the reasons why we are trying to get people who are economically inactive to consider that as an option. It is not just about looking for those abroad to come and fill those gaps. There are other opportunities.



That goes back to the point about raising the level of attraction to a career within this industry, which is very wide and varied. I have met a number of people who started off perhaps in a relatively junior position and who are now really quite senior within the tourism industry. We need to package it more as a career option for our domestic market.

Q249 Virginia Crosbie: Minister, I just wanted to speak about the Welsh language. It was fantastic to hear you making your introduction in Welsh. I know you grew up on Anglesey. I have heard many fantastic stories from constituents about you. You worked in a petrol station, apparently. Seriously, though, we have St David's Day on 1 March. I really hope your team are listening here and they are going to be putting together a video of you speaking in Welsh for that very special day.

The Welsh language is really important. The evidence we have had in this Committee is that it is something to celebrate. It differentiates us from other tourist destinations. How are you working to celebrate the Welsh language and get increased tourism?

Stuart Andrew: First of all, you have made me extremely nervous about the stories you have heard about me in Anglesey. I will skip over that one.

You are absolutely right. We need to be shouting about anything that is an asset or is unique to Wales. The fact the Welsh language is thriving is testament to much of the work that has gone on over many years. Whilst my Welsh is slightly rusty these days, it is something we should be using. People are fascinated by exploring other countries' and other nations' heritages. For us, Wales not only has great historical assets that can become great attractions; the fact we have a language that is used day in, day out in many communities across Wales is something that we should feature highly as something to explore and experience.

Virginia Crosbie: Thank you. Diolch yn fawr.

Stuart Andrew: Croeso.

Chair: We have just gone over 11.30 so that brings us to the end of our session. Minister, thank you so much for giving us your time from sunny Liverpool there. Your Welsh did not sound rusty at all. In fact, the next time you appear in front of us we should do a full bilingual session. That would be very good.

Thank you very much. Thank you also to Patricia Yates. Thank you for giving us your time here in the committee room. Again, please take back our thanks and appreciation to your team in New York, who we met with a couple of weeks ago. On that note, thank you to my colleagues for making it a very useful and interesting session. We will bring the meeting to a close.