



Simon Hoare MP
Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

2 February 2023

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 29 November 2022 about the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme in which you have asked a number of questions about our plans for ETAs and in particular how they will operate between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

I wish to emphasise the UK Government's commitment to maintaining the Common Travel Area (CTA) and to upholding the crucial, reciprocal rights to travel, live, work, study and more. The Government fully recognises that the operation of the CTA is of immense importance to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the UK, the Crown Dependencies and Ireland and the cross-border nature of life on the island of Ireland.

Whilst the CTA has never required the UK and Ireland to have harmonised immigration arrangements, we have a high level of cooperation on border security to ensure that legitimate travel is facilitated, while those who intend to abuse the arrangements are prevented from entering.

Under the ETA scheme, individuals will be able to continue to enter from Ireland without passing through routine immigration controls. They are nonetheless required to meet our immigration framework, and this is a long-standing principle of the CTA which operates in all directions. We also recognise that our relationship with Ireland is unique and that, despite the categorisation of Ireland as noted by your letter, we wish to ensure the realities of daily cross-border travel are acknowledged in the ETA scheme.

As you note, the Home Office and the Irish Government agreed to consider whether there is scope for a workable UK-Ireland data-sharing solution to determine if a person is a lawful resident of Ireland and could, therefore, potentially be exempt from the ETA requirement. I can confirm that detailed discussions have been taking place and I will provide an update in due course.

In the meantime, I would like to reassure you that for those that require an ETA, the process for obtaining one will be quick, light touch and it will not be onerous or burdensome. Whilst there will be a requirement to provide biometrics as part of an ETA application, the process for submitting biometrics will be straightforward and will not require the applicant to visit a visa application centre. Moreover, the cost of an ETA will be competitive with that of equivalent systems run by other countries.

The Home Office continues to consult the tourism and travel sectors in Northern Ireland as it develops the ETA scheme. We are already in active discussions with the travel and tourism sectors, some of who I have met with, and have agreed to consider any proposals they wish to make. The Government recognises that tourism is advertised on an all-island

basis and that a clear communications strategy will be key to tackling any misunderstanding about the final agreed requirements for travel into Northern Ireland.

This will include ensuring that foreign nationals visiting the island of Ireland, who enter via the Republic of Ireland, are aware of the ETA requirements affecting them if they wish to cross the border. To this end, the Government remains committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the final ETA requirement is communicated effectively through targeted messaging and a variety of channels and to mitigate against any risk of it being seen as an increased barrier to cross-border tourism on the island of Ireland.

Finally, you have asked how the Home Office plans to determine who might be checked for their ETA and what measures are in place to ensure that such decisions by Border Force are fair and non-discriminatory. Even with the introduction of ETAs, as now, the UK will not operate routine immigration controls on journeys from within the CTA, with no immigration controls whatsoever on the Ireland/Northern Ireland land border. Whilst the UK conducts intelligence-led controls, I want to be clear that racial profiling, or any profiling using protected characteristics, does not form part of any intelligence-led checks.

Border Force and Immigration Enforcement operate under the powers and provisions established in the Immigration Act 1971, Border Force Operating Mandate, the Immigration Rules and the Immigration Enforcement general instructions. The power to examine, detain, refuse entry, arrest, deport and remove is based on the applicant's identity and nationality, never their race.

I hope this information is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration