



2 April 2024

Dear BIPA Committee A Members,

I am writing following our meeting on 19 February. It was a pleasure to meet you all, and I found your emphasis on the practical points affecting people living and working near the UK/Ireland border particularly helpful.

I have asked my officials to consider several of the topics raised, which are also set out in your report 'Protecting the Common Travel Area in the post-Brexit era'.

We discussed Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) commencement, with a focus on your concerns about the impact on tourism on the island of Ireland. I appreciate the points made around the success of the 'all Ireland' approach to tourism and your collective reservations around the ETA being a potential barrier to people considering visiting Northern Ireland at short notice.

As is currently the case, individuals arriving in the UK, including those crossing the land border into Northern Ireland, will need to continue to enter in line with the UK's immigration framework, which will include the requirement to obtain an ETA. I would like to clarify that transport operators who travel between Ireland and Northern Ireland, such as coach companies and taxi services, are not required to check if their customers have an ETA.

The UK Government listened carefully to concerns raised about cross border travel within the Common Travel Area (CTA) and in response to those concerns agreed to exempt those third country nationals who are legally resident in Ireland from the ETA requirement for journeys within the CTA; this does include, for example, non-visa nationals living and working near the land border and those living in Ireland who want to enter the UK. In order to benefit from this exemption, non-UK visa national Irish residents, if asked, are required to provide the physical evidence which demonstrates that they are legally resident in Ireland. The Home Office has published guidance on acceptable physical evidence to ensure those benefitting from this exemption are aware of the requirements.

The Government remains committed to working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the 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. My officials are engaging with the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and tourism bodies to formulate a comprehensive communications plan, and as I mentioned during our meeting, I am keen to amplify this messaging.

We spoke at some length about British resident and Irish resident school children, including concerns that visa-national resident pupils are unable to participate in school trips available across the island of Ireland. I do appreciate the points made and should the Irish Government wish to pursue consideration of this, I will ask my officials to provide policy options for my consideration.

We also discussed the practical concerns applicable to UK visa nationals living near the land border, including your recommendation about short-term visa exemptions for a variety of groups, including healthcare workers. While I understand the practical points raised, at present, the UK position is the same as the requirement set by the Irish Government for visa nationals who wish to travel to Ireland from the UK, who must also seek a visa to enter Ireland before doing so. This is a well-established principle of the operation of the CTA and applies when travelling in both directions.

My officials and I are committed to continuing the conversation with Ireland on cooperation regarding visas and have established a subgroup to the long-standing joint UK/Ireland Common Travel Area Forum (CTAF). The CTAF Visa-Subgroup specifically focus on discussing our visas policies, the rationale behind them, and areas of potential mutual benefit. I am conscious of the practical considerations highlighted when we met and your ask that the UK consider short-term exemptions or a joint visa for some professions in line with the Memorandums of Understanding in place for some sectors, such as health and education. The Irish Government has not requested a joint-visa or short-term exemptions, but this is something our respective officials would co-ordinate via the Visa-Subgroup, if raised.

Thank you again for joining me in Westminster. I would like to conclude by emphasising the existing, strong cooperation and working relationship that my officials in the Home Office share with Ireland on the operation of the CTA.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Tom Pursglove', written in a cursive style.

Tom Pursglove MP
Minister of State for Legal Migration and the Border