

Scottish Affairs Committee

Committee Office House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 8204 Email scotaffcom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk

From the Chair, Pete Wishart MP

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Home Office
Peel Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW14 4DF

21 May 2019

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for the detailed & constructive response to my letter concerning the visa issues Pro-Force & Concordia raised with my Committee last month as part of their recruitment for the **Government's seasonal agricultural workers pilot**. However, I want to follow up on a couple of matters.

In your letter you refer to the fact that 100% of visas related to the pilot have been processed **within the Home Office's 15-day target**, while I am pleased that this process is working in a timely fashion, our understanding is that the issue is not with the processing of visas in Sheffield, but with workers having difficulty booking appointments at the Visa Application Centres (VAC) in Kiev and Chisinau. This appears to be an unresolved issue, with Concordia recently informing us that there is still a 4-week waiting period for a visa appointment in Kiev. Can you update us on what measures are being taken to ensure that there are more appointments available in future?

Secondly, you mention that since the VAC in Chisinau has increased its opening times to two days a week, appointment tables show a number of unused slots last month. When Pro-Force & Concordia gave evidence to my committee, they said this was because the VAC was charging €23 more to book an appointment on this second day than the standard €67 fee. Stephanie Maurel, Chief Executive of Concordia told us that because of this increase, they were telling workers not to apply for the second day:

"We are asking people who are students, who are trying to pay their termly fees and who are coming over here to earn a minimum wage, to pay out quite a lot of money to come over. Our

*recommendation is: don't pay the extra money; we will just have to try to work with growers and see whether we can move workers from somewhere else."*¹

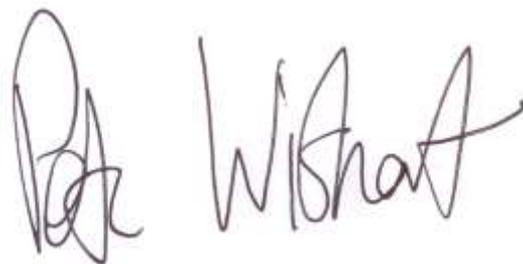
Can you inform us the rationale behind charging extra for this second day, and if the Government would consider reducing this following the remarks made by the pilot operators?

Ensuring that farms in the UK can attract the best workers will be key to the success of this Pilot. While I understand the Government's position that those entering the UK to work should pay a fee, the pilot must be able to compete with similar schemes across the EU such as Germany, who take 60,000 agricultural workers from Ukraine a year and don't charge any application fees.

If the Government is to consider creating a permanent scheme in future, it must look at what measures can be taken to ensure the UK remains an attractive destination for seasonal workers.

I would be grateful for a response to these points by Monday 3 June.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pete Wishart'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Pete Wishart MP
Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee

¹ Scottish Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence transcript 23rd April](#), 2019