

# Scottish Affairs Committee

Committee Office House of Commons London SW1A 0AA  
Tel 020 7219 8204 Email [scotaffcom@parliament.uk](mailto:scotaffcom@parliament.uk) Website [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

From the Chair, Pete Wishart MP

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP  
Home Office  
Peel Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan KCMG MP  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AH

25 April 2019

I am writing to raise some issues with the Government's support for the implementation of the new seasonal agricultural workers pilot. These concerns were raised with the Committee by Pro-Force & Concordia, the scheme operators, during their appearance as part of our inquiry into *the future of Scottish agriculture post-Brexit*.

Both operators have taken the decision to focus their recruitment in Moldova & Ukraine and have received a large number of applications for the 2,500 Tier 5 (Temporary Worker) visas. However, while recruitment is going well we heard there were problems both with the support available from the embassies and with the Home Office processing times.

Stephanie Maurel, Chief Executive of Concordia said the operators are experiencing a backlog of visa applications partly due to workers finding it difficult to book appointments at the UK visa offices in Ukraine & Moldova, which are managed by a third party. In the case of Moldova, we were alarmed to hear that until a month ago the office was open only one day a week, providing insufficient time for both pilot operators to process the 2,500 pilot workers. While this has now been increased to two days a week, both operators said it would still be a challenge to process their workers in time, particularly as the Moldovan visa office is now requiring workers to pay an appointment fee of €67 on the first day and €90 on the second, an amount some workers are struggling to pay on top of the £244 cost of the visa itself.

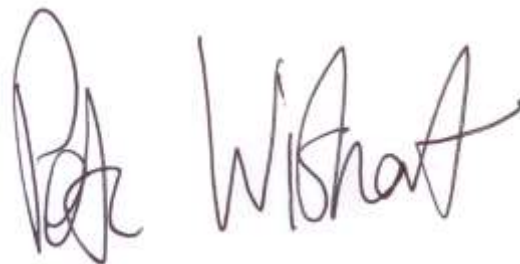
We were told that this has resulted in lengthy delays of visas being processed by the Home Office in Sheffield. While the Home Office has committed to a three-week turnaround, we heard that some visas were taking over 30 days to process. Concordia said this had already resulted in them falling behind orders, with farms not receiving workers on the dates expected. Matthew Jarrett, Director of Pro-Force warned that if these delays were not addressed, some workers would miss the growing season altogether.

Throughout this inquiry, my Committee has heard first-hand about the crucial contribution seasonal workers make to Scottish agriculture and the benefits which a successful pilot could provide. It is therefore important that visas are processed in a timely fashion to ensure workers are in place to support farms during periods of peak production.

Due to the cross-department nature of the visa application process in Moldova and Ukraine, **it would be helpful to the Committee's work if you could outline the support the Government is providing Pro-Force & Concordia, what steps are being taken to speed up the visa applications and whether any additional resources are being allocated to resolve this issue.**

I would be grateful for a response by Wednesday 8 May. Please find enclosed the relevant extracts from the evidence session's **transcript**.

Yours sincerely,

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

Pete Wishart MP  
Chair, Scottish Affairs Committee