

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT IMMIGRATION (LEAVE TO ENTER AND
REMAIN) (AMENDMENT) ORDER 2018

Thursday 10 January 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON

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| † Courts, Robert (<i>Witney</i>) (Con) | † Newlands, Gavin (<i>Paisley and Renfrewshire North</i>) (SNP) |
| † Coyle, Neil (<i>Bermondsey and Old Southwark</i>) (Lab) | † Nokes, Caroline (<i>Minister for Immigration</i>) |
| † Dakin, Nic (<i>Scunthorpe</i>) (Lab) | † Percy, Andrew (<i>Brigg and Goole</i>) (Con) |
| † Doughty, Stephen (<i>Cardiff South and Penarth</i>) (Lab/Co-op) | Phillipson, Bridget (<i>Houghton and Sunderland South</i>) (Lab) |
| † Hayes, Helen (<i>Dulwich and West Norwood</i>) (Lab) | † Robinson, Mary (<i>Cheadle</i>) (Con) |
| † Hayes, Sir John (<i>South Holland and The Deepings</i>) (Con) | Smith, Eleanor (<i>Wolverhampton South West</i>) (Lab) |
| † Jones, Mr Marcus (<i>Nuneaton</i>) (Con) | † Syms, Sir Robert (<i>Poole</i>) (Con) |
| † Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab) | Yohanna Sallberg, Medha Bhasin, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Maclean, Rachel (<i>Redditch</i>) (Con) | |
| † Maynard, Paul (<i>Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury</i>) | † attended the Committee |

Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee

Thursday 10 January 2019

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

Draft Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) (Amendment) Order 2018

11.30 am

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) (Amendment) Order 2018.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. The draft order, which was laid before Parliament in December, is necessary to enable nationals of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States of America of age 12 or above who seek to enter the United Kingdom as a visitor under the immigration rules to be granted such leave by passing through an automated gate without having to be interviewed by an immigration officer. This change is needed to give effect to the announcements made by the Chancellor and the Home Secretary that these additional nationalities should be permitted to use our e-passport gates. The House's agreement to the draft order will ensure that the change can be implemented in time for the summer.

The UK already leads the world in the use of e-passport gates for passenger clearance. We have more e-passport gates than any other country and allow more nationalities to use them. We intend to continue to build on their use because they provide a safe, secure means of processing low-risk passengers, allowing our highly trained Border Force officers to focus their efforts on those who seek to abuse or exploit the system and on wider border threats.

The change will have a transformational impact on the border experience for these additional nationalities, providing them with significantly faster entry to the UK, but by removing an expected 6.5 million passengers from the staffed non-EEA queue, it will also have a knock-on benefit for the clearance of other non-EEA passengers arriving at ports with e-gates. Expanding e-gate eligibility to these additional low-risk nationalities will also help us to meet the challenge of growing passenger numbers, ensuring that arriving passengers are dealt with swiftly and securely.

In 2017, there were 137 million arrivals at the UK border, an increase of 5.4% from 2016. Within those figures, the increase in non-EEA passenger arrivals was even more noticeable: more than 17%. The numbers are projected to continue to increase, with the Department for Transport predicting year-on-year growth of 2.8% to 2020 on aviation routes. That is good news for the UK, demonstrating that we continue to be a destination of choice for a wide cohort of nationalities.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister and I have discussed e-passport gates in the Select Committee on Home Affairs, and we

have discussed it with the Home Secretary. How much spare capacity does she believe e-passport gates currently have at the major ports of entry? Frankly, I have seen very long queues at e-passport gates, and often many of them are out of service or unusable.

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that for every bank of five e-passport gates, there needs to be one Border Force officer monitoring them to authorise admission. In addition, we closely monitor the use of e-passport gates and the impact of putting additional numbers through the queues. Our modelling shows that we expect the impact on queues at the gates to be very marginal, but I am very conscious that we will have to keep the issue under review. The hon. Gentleman will know that we are increasing the number of e-passport gates; indeed, the Welsh Government have funded the reintroduction of e-passport gates at Cardiff airport, which I am sure he will welcome.

The draft order will allow us to put a potential 6.5 million additional passengers through e-passport gates, but we are conscious that 85% of passengers arriving at UK ports today are already eligible to use them. Our modelling shows that although the e-passport gates fall outside service-level agreement monitoring, it is very unusual for individual passengers to wait more than 10 minutes to get to one.

Stephen Doughty: I appreciate the Minister's clarification, and I welcome the helpful introduction of e-passport gates at Cardiff airport. However, new e-passport gates at less used airports or ports of entry around the UK are one thing, but Heathrow, Gatwick, the Eurostar terminal at St Pancras and so on are another. Will she make clear how many additional e-passport gates will be opened at those key ports of entry?

Caroline Nokes: We continue to keep that under review with our key partners, including Heathrow Airports Ltd, Gatwick and Eurotunnel. Critically, for some of those locations, I am very alive to the challenge around physical space—I was about to say infrastructure, but it is space—and making sure that arrivals halls can accommodate more gates. We continue to keep that under review, because as far as I am concerned it is absolutely imperative that we make sure that entry into the UK is secure, swift and efficient, and that our passengers have the best experience that they can.

However, the hon. Gentleman is right to make that point, and I reassure him that I continue to meet regularly with our partners to make sure that we can have as many e-passport gates as possible open at any one time, and that they are open at the right times. A key factor is making sure that we work with partners so that we are conscious of the scheduling of flight arrivals and any delays that might build up in the airline system, so that, when people arrive in the arrivals hall, the right number of Border Force officers are present, to enable as many gates as possible to be open.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): If the Government are intent on keeping the policy under review, will they also consider extending access to e-gates to other countries, particularly Commonwealth members, who feel somewhat aggrieved at not being given low-risk status?

Caroline Nokes: The Government consider many factors when looking at which nationalities to open up the use of e-passport gates to. We have consulted very closely with our security partners on this cohort and they are also countries with which we have a long track record of good border co-operation. We will continue to look at the nationalities that can use the gates, and it is absolutely imperative that we look at the impact of the 6.5 million additional passengers. However, it is also important to reflect that we also looked at volumes, and these countries have some of the highest volumes of passengers coming into the UK.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): May I say what a lovely jacket the Minister is wearing?

I welcome what the Government are doing; it is a great step forward. However, when one comes into Gatwick, for example, with children under 12, that is where the queues tend to be. Will these provisions mean that more people will be redeployed in the summer months to ensure that people who arrive with young children after flights from various holiday destinations are swept through quicker, because enough officers will be available to swipe their passports?

Caroline Nokes: I reassure my right hon. Friend—

Sir Robert Syms: Not yet.

Caroline Nokes: Not yet. He should be, and given his proclivity for complimenting me on my jacket, the sooner the better.

It is absolutely imperative that we use this ability to make sure that eligible passengers are put through e-passport gates. My hon. Friend quite rightly raises the point that children under 12 still cannot use e-passport gates. Part of that is about changing biometrics and facial recognition. I am conscious that biometrics work by correctly identifying somebody from not only the photograph in their passport but the chip into which the photo is embedded. Those particular facial characteristics change in children, so we have no plans to put children through e-passport gates.

The provisions will free up capacity by putting more passengers through e-passport gates. In doing so in time for the summer, which is the peak travel time for families, we are optimistic that we will see an impact on the queues that people experience. Part of our motivation for making this change today is to make sure that things change in time for the summer.

Keeping our border secure remains a top priority. I assure hon. Members that this decision has been taken only after careful consideration and in consultation with security partners across Government. Nationals from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the USA have been identified as suitable to use the gates based on several factors, including levels of co-operation of those countries with the UK on border matters.

Part of our long-term vision has always been to make better use of digital technology and greater automation to improve the passenger experience while maintaining security. As hon. Members will be aware, we recently published a White Paper setting out detailed plans for the UK's future skills-based immigration system, which

includes measures to strengthen border security and improve journey crossings for legitimate passengers. This expansion of e-gates needs to be seen in the context of a longer-term programme of work, in which we intend to use the UK's exit from the EU as an opportunity to develop a new global border and immigration system that makes better use of data, biometrics, analytics and automation to improve both security and fluidity across the border.

I reassure the House that this is not a cost-cutting measure—far from it. The Government are increasing Border Force officer numbers, and their powers and responsibilities will remain unchanged. We are committed to ensuring that Border Force has the resources and workforce needed to keep the border secure.

To be clear, the order will allow nationals of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States to be granted leave to enter as visitors for up to six months when they pass through an e-gate at a UK port, including our juxtaposed controls for Eurostar services. Nationals of those countries coming to the UK for other purposes, such as work or study, will also be able to enter using the e-gates, but no change in the law is needed for those circumstances, as they will already hold the necessary leave in the form of a visa or residence permit.

We estimate that up to 6.5 million passengers from those countries will benefit from the change. That expansion in eligibility is therefore a clear signal to the rest of the world that the UK is open for business, and will allow us to control our borders in the UK's best interests. Once approved, we expect the change to be fully implemented in time for this summer. I commend the order to the Committee.

11.40 am

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the Minister for the meeting that we had yesterday to give us a bit more understanding of the instrument, to which the Labour party does not object. The Government have consistently failed to meet their targets for airport queue times, particularly at peak times. We support changes that will hopefully make passing through the border more efficient.

We are, however, concerned about the idea of low-risk individuals. Can the Minister account for why these countries have been chosen, and can she tell us what exactly the risk being evaluated is? The risk associated with travel and tourist stays is very different from that associated with short or long-term work visas. Does the Minister propose that we use the same metric for evaluating risk across all those different considerations?

As we know from the immigration White Paper published last year, the category "low risk" not only will affect who is allowed to use e-passport gates, but will be the basis for who is able to apply for a short-term low-skill work visa. We find that risk-based approach objectionable. First, in its own right it is discriminatory and against basic fairness to judge a person's character on where they come from. The Government's own data shows that, at least for students, 97% of migrants comply with the terms of their visas. Why should the actions of a very small number of people affect the opportunities for a whole nationality? Across all our institutions, the

[Afzal Khan]

UK makes judgments about people at an individual level. We do not make collective judgments based on nationality.

Secondly, the approach is hypocritical. The Government proclaimed in their White Paper that the new system will not be

“based on where an individual comes from”,

but this risk-based approach does just that.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's contribution with care, but surely any Government would look at patterns in different parts of the world. If a pattern could be discerned for applicants from a particular place—be it a country or a particular part of a country—that intelligence would inform subsequent policy. Surely any Government would do that.

Afzal Khan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I am asking the Minister precisely what criteria she is using. We want to have that clarity, which is why I am asking these questions.

Thirdly, there is the potential that effectively 10 or 15 different visa systems could come in to replace the two systems that we have at the moment. The more we segment migrants based on where they come from, the more complex we make the system.

11.44 am

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Robertson. We echo many of the sentiments expressed, and will not vote against the motion.

It is essentially a common-sense motion, given the delays experienced at the border. Those delays will certainly not be improved by Brexit, but to take up some of the comments made by the hon. Members for Manchester, Gorton, for Cardiff South and Penarth, and for Bermondsey and Old Southwark, it is important that we work to ensure the correct balance of e-gates and manned gates, ensuring that there is enough overall capacity at the border.

I know there have been lots of stories about Heathrow and delays there, but in particular I am thinking about the small airports, such as Glasgow airport in my own constituency, where there is clearly a much smaller border area, so these changes will have a much bigger relative impact for someone stuck behind the daily United States and Canada flights all coming at the same time. Has any impact assessment been made of those relative impacts versus the impacts at larger airports, such as Heathrow and Gatwick?

We share some of the misgivings about how the countries have been selected. I hope that is kept under review, and similarly for the points made about Commonwealth countries. Mr Robertson, I could go on about the Government's overall approach, which we would call shameful, to immigration policy—the hostile environment, family reunion rules, and ending freedom of movement—but that would be slightly out of scope for today and given that we have the Second Reading of the Immigration Bill and a Bill Committee to follow, I

suspect that I will have to keep my powder somewhat dry. However, you will be relieved to hear that we are not seeking to divide the Committee today and we look forward to the Immigration Bill next week.

11.46 am

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. Some colleagues might think that when they call a Westminster Hall debate, it has zero effect; I am pleased to say that the Westminster Hall debate that I secured on 12 October 2011 at 4.30 pm, which called for just this change, has finally led to it. I assumed that I had been simply ignored, but it turns out that the report of that debate has gone into the depths of Government and resulted in this very sensible policy.

I specifically welcome this measure in my role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Canada, because one of the principal issues raised with me on my visits by Canadians who come to the UK, not just for business but as visitors, is the delays they experience at the border. In fact, for many visitors, particularly from a country such as Canada, which shares so much with us—intelligence and security, our “Five Eyes” partnership and even a Head of State—it is a very unwelcome feeling to arrive in the United Kingdom and be told that they have to go through this much more strenuous system.

I was surprised to hear the shadow Minister say that we do not make exceptions on the basis of nationality at our border when that is exactly what we do. What we have at the moment is a border system that says, “If you are white, you will be treated differently than if you are non-white”, because we prioritise European Union citizens over everybody else, and that is a—[*Interruption.*] I will give way on that point, of course.

Neil Coyle: It is absolutely outrageous to suggest that there are only white citizens living in EU member states. That is a massive insult to the 40% black and minority ethnic community in my constituency, let alone the BME communities across all the other member states of the European Union.

Andrew Percy: If the hon. Gentleman, instead of shouting, had allowed me to continue to develop my argument, he would have heard me go on to say that, absolutely, the European Union has a diversity of population, but overall it is overwhelmingly a white club and it provides—

Stephen Doughty *rose*—

Andrew Percy: No, no—I will not give way—[*Interruption.*] I am not going to be shouted down and I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman, particularly after the slur on Members yesterday who dared to raise legitimate questions in the main Chamber—[*Interruption.*]

Stephen Doughty: On a point of order, Mr Robertson. I think that is an entirely inappropriate remark for the hon. Gentleman to make, which I urge him to withdraw, and in addition I do not believe that it has anything whatsoever to do with the order that we are discussing this morning.

The Chair: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the point of order. We need to keep this debate relevant to the point we are discussing and we also need to treat each other with respect, because no amount of shouting or inappropriate language will change what the Government are about to do.

I call Mr Percy.

Andrew Percy: Indeed, and I wish we had been treated with that respect yesterday instead of being accused of some sort of co-ordination for—*[Interruption.]*

The Chair: Order. I have just made the point that we have to be relevant and what happened in the Chamber yesterday is not relevant to today's proceedings.

Andrew Percy: The point I was making, Mr Robertson, is that we do have a system that prefers people who come from a continent that is overwhelmingly in one direction and I am not going to apologise for that; it is just a statement of fact. I am grateful that we will now have a system in place that will allow people from different countries to have easier access on the same basis, rather than maintaining that privilege of Europeans over people coming from countries that are clearly not a risk to this country, be that South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand or the United States. That is perfectly sensible, and I make no apology for criticising the current system, which maintains a European privilege over other people. It is ridiculous that we have had a situation in which people from "Five Eyes" nations, where there is clearly no security threat to this country, are made to go through a system that is not commensurate with the security risk that they pose to this country.

I have two specific questions for the Minister on matters that have been raised with me. A number of people who will benefit from the change have applied and paid for trusted traveller status to enter the United Kingdom from the United States, Canada and possibly Australia, too. Presumably, they will now be able to use the e-passport gates, as they can under the trusted traveller programme, so will they be recompensed for the fee?

Secondly, this is a two-way process, so will there be discussions to facilitate easier access for UK nationals on a reciprocal basis into the countries that will benefit from the order? Countries such as Australia and Canada have already introduced terminals that have eased the process, but many business travellers and visitors to the United States find substantial delays at the border because US citizens go down one channel—not even green card holders can use that channel now—and everybody else goes down another. If we are to offer this change, as we should to end this European privilege, can we make sure that discussions are ongoing to ensure there is a reciprocal benefit for UK citizens entering the border in the countries that will benefit from this change?

I hope this is the start of a process to ease access into the United Kingdom for low-risk travellers from a range of countries from different continents that do not enjoy the same demographic and social and economic privileges that the European Union perhaps considers itself to have.

11.52 am

Stephen Doughty: Thank you very much for your chairing today, Mr Robertson. I want to make specific remarks about the technicalities of the order and ask the Minister some questions. Before I do so, I have to say I am deeply disappointed by the highly divisive and inaccurate comments made by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole. Such an attitude is deeply disappointing, especially when talking about whites and non-whites, not least when many European countries have incredibly diverse populations. France has a very diverse population as a result of its history in Africa and its relationship with Algeria. Let us look at the Dutch Somalis and Somalilanders, the Italian relationship with the horn of Africa, and the many different countries across Europe that have a hugely diverse population, just as we do in this country. We should not have comments about whites and non-whites when we talk about mass immigration.

It is also deeply disappointing to hear such comments from somebody who is supposed to be the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Canada. I lived in Canada for some years with a Canadian-British family member and I know the Canadian Government's attitude is very different from the one that the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole seems to represent.

Gavin Newlands: I have been to Canada and I share the hon. Gentleman's thoughts on the Canadian approach to immigration, which is wholly different from the British one. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole talks about Europe being a white club, but I believe Canada's population is 86% white European, so what does that say about his earlier point about Europe being a white club when he talks about Canada?

The Chair: Order. I do want to get back on to the specific elements of this order. I ruled earlier that inappropriate language should not be used and we should treat each other with respect. We also have to stay relevant to this order.

Stephen Doughty: I too want to get back to it, Chair. I appreciate the intervention and I am sure the Minister will want to disassociate herself from the other comments made.

The Minister talked about reviewing capacity and also about potentially transferring up to 6.5 million people—I appreciate it will not be that many—into the e-passport gate system. However, I am not clear about how many additional e-passport gates will be installed at the key points of entry. It is all very well to have something under review as we look at capacity, but I have seen significant delays at e-passport gates. She talked about the arrangements on the other side of the channel in the Eurostar terminal in Gare du Nord and in Brussels. In Gare du Nord there are two sets of e-passport gates that someone has to go through and a series of other checks interspersed between. I have travelled through them on a number of occasions in recent months, and there have been breakdowns and delays. It was actually quicker to walk through the manual checking service than go through the e-passport gate. Unless there is additional capacity and extra e-passport gates, not only to cope with the additional people

[Stephen Doughty]

coming through but to deal with redundancy in the case of any breakdowns or technical malfunctions, I genuinely fear that there is potentially a serious problem. People will understandably opt for e-passport gates. I think they are a fantastic innovation, and I totally agree with what the Minister said about the technology and the digitalisation of these services. We all want to see that, because it makes them more secure.

Sir John Hayes: That is a good point about capacity, and it needs to be considered in the context of this fundamental point: do we want to reduce immigration in overall terms or not? Immigration in this country has been at unsustainable levels for decades. That is not about where people come from, who they are or any or any of the things that were debated earlier. That will have an impact on capacity at airports in exactly the way that the hon. Gentleman describes. I thought that was a commonly held view across Parliament.

The Chair: Order. We are discussing passport gates, not levels of immigration. Again, I ask that we stick to the terms of this order. With that in mind, I call Mr Doughty.

Stephen Doughty: You make exactly the point that I was going to make in response to the right hon. Gentleman, Mr Robertson. This is not a debate about the net migration target. Visitors will come here, regardless of their immigration intentions. We want to encourage people to come to this country for tourism, business and other things, and we need to ensure that that is done in the safest, securest and most efficient way possible. My concerns are simply about the practicalities.

The Minister mentioned the space constraints in the terminals, and so on. That is a real concern, and I have yet to see any evidence to the contrary, despite having had a number of discussions about it in the Home Affairs Committee. We have received significant evidence from airport operators and others, and there are concerns about the capacity at places such as the St Pancras terminal. Any of us who has travelled through there will know that it is a relatively small space. The minute that there starts to be a back-up of queues or a fault in the technology, there is a problem.

We only have to look at what happened in the drone incidents at Gatwick or Heathrow the other day. The potential for technology to go wrong is significant. We therefore need back-up systems, redundancy and additional capacity to cope if we are going to put new people through the system. This is a very reasonable point, and I hope the Minister will explain whether any additional e-passport gates will be introduced. If so, which terminals will they be at? What is the back-up plan for when those systems go down in order to avoid huge queues and problems?

The last point I want to make is about the sharing of data that is inputted into these systems about whether somebody is or is not allowed in. Obviously, we have close data-sharing arrangements with some of the countries that the Minister mentioned through the “Five Eyes” arrangements and other things. It is absolutely crucial that we keep ourselves safe from terrorists, criminals

and others coming to our borders. One hopes that that information is properly put into the relevant databases and used.

On our ability to use the systems for European citizens in the future, there is no guarantee that we will have access to the Schengen information system or the European criminal records information system, which we have discussed multiple times. I know that the intention is there, and I have listened carefully to what the Minister and the Prime Minister have said, but we do not have a guarantee. Surely the Minister must agree that we must have the most accurate information to prevent paedophiles, terrorists, criminals, and individuals involved in organised crime from crossing our borders. Frankly, it does not matter what nationality people are or what the general risk profile is. There will always be individuals, including from the countries we have just mentioned and European countries, who will seek to evade our border and security protections and do harm in this country. Therefore, we must have the strongest relationship possible on security and information sharing.

I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to those points. In principle, I have no objection to the order’s being used. We all agree that e-passports are a good idea, but we need that capacity and security.

11.59 am

Caroline Nokes: I got a bit excited earlier and thought that we were going to finish faster than we have. A range of issues have been raised, and I will try very hard to stay within the scope of the order. However, it would be remiss of me not to reflect, as a number of hon. Members have tempted me to, on the fact that we have many opportunities next week to discuss the Immigration Bill.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): A brief commercial.

Caroline Nokes: Yes—and then it will go into Committee, and I expect that a lot of people will want to serve there. I shall therefore keep well away from the wider immigration issues, save for one thing. The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned how we assess people at the border and whether they are assessed on the basis of their own risk or nationality and so on. The assessment is of course based on a range of factors. However, he will know and will no doubt be as disappointed as I am that there is no mention of electronic travel authorities in the Immigration Bill that is shortly to be considered by the House. That is something that we must bring forward in due course. I do not wish to give any trailer to suggest that there may be an immigration Bill part 2 in the fullness of time—perhaps long after I have finished in this role—but we do intend to introduce the electronic travel authority.

Our European neighbours already have plans in train for the European travel information and authorisation system, or ETIAS, which is the European equivalent. Those of us who have travelled to the United States—we have had some wonderful adverts for the warm welcome given by immigration in the United States—will be very familiar with the electronic system for travel authorisation, the ESTA. Our ETAs will enable both immigration control and our security services to have a very close grasp on who is coming here.

There were some interesting questions about risk. I gently point out that we already determine nationalities that do not need a visa to come here as visitors. We have visa nationals and non-visa nationals and, obviously, currently we also have free movement with the European Union member states. We already assess nationalities against that risk, to determine whether they need a visa to come here as a visitor, or not. That is of course done in close co-operation with our security partners—my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole mentioned “Five Eyes”. That fantastic relationship has been established over many years, enabling us to share information about risk with our close friends and allies.

We also have to consider volume, and that has been part of this equation. People have reflected on the length of queues that are sometimes experienced at some of our major airports. We have carefully balanced those nationalities with whom we have good border co-operation and good security relations and who will play a significant role in getting volumes out of our non-EEA queues.

In terms of capacity, there has been an enormous jump in the number of people using e-gates in the last year. Some of that is about the increasing numbers of passengers and some is about familiarity. I have spent many a happy hour at various airports in the UK that use e-passport gates, and it has been really obvious to me that experienced travellers who come in and out regularly go through the gates with barely a hiccup. Others who are less used to using them sometimes forget to take their glasses off, or put their passport in the slot and look away from the screen, but I am conscious that as people get used to using them, they use them more. That can be seen in the statistics. In the 12 months to June 2018, there was a massive 40% increase in passengers using e-passport gates against the previous 12 months. When e-passport gates became widely used in 2009, only 1 million passengers used them. In the last 12 months, nearly 52 million passengers used them. That increase is in a relatively short space of time.

Undoubtedly, we have seen increases in flows and need to keep pace with capacity, but at the moment we are confident that our e-gate capacity is sufficient for this change. As I have said, we will monitor it very closely. Over the last year, I have had meetings with all of the major airport operators to discuss capacity with them—I am sure that hon. Members can imagine the path to my door that Heathrow and Gatwick use at the peak of summer pressures. I am conscious of the challenges at regional airports, which the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth mentioned, when people find themselves behind the USA flight that has just come in. We are keeping regional airports under close surveillance, but it

is worth emphasising that 64.5% of non-EEA passengers come into Heathrow, and so that is clearly where the bulk of the pressure is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole mentioned the registered traveller service. We recognise that the change means that those who have paid for registered traveller status will now have free access to our e-passport gates. We are considering the arrangements, including potential refunds, for those who may have paid for their annual membership very recently. It is an annual charge, and we have a lead-in of a few months before the necessary changes can be made to the gates to configure them to accept those passports. Hopefully, not too many refunds will be required. I hope he and those registered travellers will regard this draft order as a good thing.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister has been very generous in taking interventions. I really want some clarity on this point: will any new e-passport gates be introduced as a result of this or any other change in Government policy? I understand she says she will keep it under review and she believes there is extra capacity, but will there be any new e-passport gates?

Caroline Nokes: I gently point to the five new ones at Cardiff, which are very generously funded by the Welsh Government—I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I gave them that plug. At the moment, we are keeping them under review; we are confident we can meet demand, but should that not be the case, I will continue my close work with the airport operators and Eurotunnel to make sure there is adequate capacity. As I said, there has been a 40% jump in the last year, and terminals have managed. He makes the point well, and he also made the point about reliability. The technology of the second generation e-passport gates has been much better than the first—he will recall that the first generation ones were removed from Cardiff because they were not as good. I am very conscious that the technology is always evolving. We talk of e-passport gates this year, but who knows what is coming down the track in a few years' time. It is imperative for passengers arriving at our ports to have a 21st century service, and the swiftest and most secure technology. With that in mind, I commend this draft order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Committee has considered the draft Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) (Amendment) Order 2018.

12.6 pm

Committee rose.

