

31 March 2021

Simon Coveney TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Department of Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
80 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2.
D02 VY53

By email

Re: Business concerns in relation to extension of mandatory quarantine regime for international travel

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you in relation to the concerns of business following reports of the proposed extension to the list of Category 2 countries requiring mandatory hotel quarantine for international travel. The current quarantine requirements have already caused severe disruption to essential business travel and the extension of the list of countries covered to include other EU and non-EU countries would significantly exacerbate these challenges.

Ireland is already an outlier in the EU and internationally as a result of the draconian travel restrictions in operation here. Any extension to the list to include more significant trading and investment partners involving higher volumes of essential business travel would cause deeper business disruption and would escalate the reputational damage which Ireland is already facing as a result of the regime. Business is also particularly concerned that the addition of a number of EU countries to the list would significantly undermine Ireland's support for the internal market and the fundamental freedom of the movement of people. At a time when strong EU support is required on a range of issues, it appears very unhelpful for Ireland to pursue a regime without any coordination with other Member States.

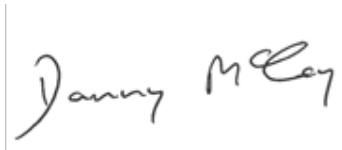
Ibec has appreciated the support of Government in ensuring that subject matter experts can travel to Ireland in order to deliver essential repair, maintenance and related activities in supporting production processes and equipment. This exemption to quarantine requirements, however, is very narrow in scope and doesn't facilitate travel for essential commercial and business management purposes that cannot be carried out through virtual engagement.

Our indigenous and FDI sectors are now finding that Ireland's comparatively restrictive quarantine requirements are placing Irish based firms at a competitive disadvantage. It is impacting the ability to win new mobile investment projects and for indigenous companies, already struggling with Brexit related disruption, it is damaging their prospects in winning new contracts and customers in international markets. For SMEs, in particular, it is extremely disruptive for senior business managers to quarantine for periods of up to two weeks following an essential international business journey. It is severely challenging the management capacity of these firms at a time when they are facing so many other Covid related difficulties. Through a combination of testing and the restriction of movement, safe access to the workplace for essential purposes could be facilitated.

Ibec urges Government to adopt a travel regime which is coordinated at EU level and is more consistent with our main trading partners. We are particularly concerned that an extension to the existing list of mandatory quarantine countries will be very damaging from a business and investment reputational perspective and that Ireland will be perceived to be 'closed for business'.

I would welcome your support with this important matter and colleagues, and I am available to provide further information and insight on the risks to the economy and jobs arising from any extension of the mandatory quarantine regime.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Danny McCoy", enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Danny McCoy
Ibec CEO