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8<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### **GREAT programme funding reduction for VisitBritain**

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you as Minister with responsibility for the GREAT Programme. We have been made aware of the decision of the GREAT Programme Board to drastically cut funding from that programme for VisitBritain by 41% compared to last year.

As organisations representing the broad and diverse tourism industry across Great Britain, you will not be surprised that we are extremely disappointed and concerned about this substantial cut in VisitBritain's GREAT funding, which has been an important source of funding for our national tourist board, with a demonstrably healthy Rol.

We expect that the implications of this reduction will be significant, especially on VisitBritain's recently launched and widely heralded 'Starring GREAT Britain' international campaign which is promoting British film and TV tourism locations as ideal places to visit. The Tourism Alliance has written to Patricia Yates, CEO of VisitBritain, to understand the precise implications that this funding decision will have on the organisation's tourism marketing activity, from which countries and markets campaigns will have to be pulled, along with other potential impacts such as a possible hit to the regional gateway activities that GREAT has historically supported.

Given the Government's stated ambition to grow inbound tourism to 50m visits by 2030, there could hardly be a sharper example of willing the ends not the means. The tourism industry stands ready to help the Government with its economic growth mission, but it seems that at each step, Government decisions are taken which will hamper us.

This latest decision comes on the back of others recently made such as the announcement by the Home Office to increase the cost of an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) by 60%, a further increase in our already uncompetitive visitor visa fees by 10%, and Air Passenger Duty increases which we have seen twice in the last year.

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There is a strong sense that UK tourism is being hit from all sides. Amongst others, it is suffering from two important ills. On the one hand we are trailing as far as cost competitiveness is concerned: the World Economic Forum ranks the UK as 113<sup>th</sup> out of 118 countries for the price competitiveness of our tourism offer. Increasing the cost of visiting the UK, as recent decisions will do, will simply compound this problem when we need to be tackling it.

And on the other hand, the ability of our national tourist board to stimulate demand and compete with other countries for valuable inbound visitors is hampered by their already small budget, which this decision to reduce further, again, simply compounds. It is worth noting that even based on existing modelling, the UK is currently set to lose market share globally, but more importantly also to lose market share of inbound visits to Europe.

A Tourism Alliance report published in 2024 found that compared to nine other global competitor destinations the UK performs poorly in terms of investment in international tourism marketing, amounting to just £0.81 per head of population.

- Pre-Covid funding of VisitBritain was 26% below the average of the UK's competitor destinations.
- The UK only allocated an additional £1.6m per annum (3% of the DCMS tourism budget) to support tourism Covid recovery compared to the average of £126m in competitor destinations.
- Due to a lack of tourism recovery funds, funding of VisitBritain is now 35% below the average of the UK's competitor destinations.

The Tourism Minister recently announced his intention to develop a new national tourism strategy. It is clear that one aspect of that strategy must be a root-and-branch evaluation of tourism policy decision-making within Government so that decisions such as slashing GREAT funding for VisitBritain, and further increasing our visa and ETA fees, all of which fly in the face of growing inbound tourism, in future be considered in their proper context, and ensure that these short-sighted decisions are not repeated.

It would also be helpful for us to understand the reasoning behind the decision to make this level of cut, and to understand how the industry can assist the GREAT Board in future decision-making given the importance of building back up our national tourist board's modest funding.



Yours sincerely,

**Richard Toomer**

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cc **Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP**, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport  
**Sir Chris Bryant MP**, Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport