Joint Committee on Transport and Communications
8th December 2021
Opening Statement from Department of Justice –
Deputy Secretary General Oonagh Buckley

Thank you Chair and Committee Members for inviting the Department to address today's session.

While the Department of Justice does not have a lead role in the matters being discussed today, we do have an important contribution to make to the Government's overall response, through the work of our Border Management Unit team at Dublin Airport.

The core function of the BMU is to immigrate passengers arriving into the State at Dublin Airport and to decide if a person should be allowed to enter the State and for how long. An Garda Síochána currently undertakes these immigration duties at all other ports of entry to the State.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, in addition to their core immigration duties, the BMU has performed an important role in conducting checks of health documentation. This includes Digital Covid Certificates, HSE Vaccination Certificates, NHS Vaccination Certificates, State issued vaccination certificates from other third countries and negative PCR test results across all passenger cohorts in Dublin Airport. The BMU also had a significant role in the operating of the Mandatory Hotel Quarantine system.

All passengers arriving into Ireland were checked for health documentation until the 19th July when restrictions on non-essential international travel

were eased and passenger numbers rose significantly thereafter. To avoid lengthy queues at immigration, spot checking of health documentation was implemented.

In recent days, this spot checking role has been expanded to include PCR and antigen tests in line with the latest public health advice and Government travel restrictions.

The BMU has significantly increased the level of spot-checking of arriving passengers in recent days – both at peak and non-peak times.

It is important to say that this increased spot-checking has not resulted in any significant increase in detections of non-compliance. We know that the compliance rate is very high and we thank the travelling public for their cooperation with this.

Passengers can expect to see higher levels of checking as they travel through Dublin Airport in the coming days and weeks and should leave additional time for their journey, both at departure and on arrival.

Carriers are obliged to check each passenger's health documentation prior to boarding. There are penalties in place for passengers that arrive without the requisite documentation. This system has worked well and there has been a high level of compliance.

The BMU team works very closely with Daa colleagues, who are responsible for managing the queues on arrival to the immigration hall. Our shared objective is to ensure that queuing time is minimised and that

passengers are immigrated quickly and safely on arrival, while also carrying out all of our important public health functions.

A very important part of our efforts to keep a smooth flow of passengers through immigration at Dublin Airport is the operation of the eGates. A total of over 733,000 eGate transactions took place between August and November 2021. Approximately 30% of these transactions were unsuccessful, leading to further checks by the BMU team.

I am happy to answer any queries that Committee Members may have on the BMU role.

Thank you.

Briefing Note –

Department of Justice Border Management Unit Role

The Border Management Unit (BMU) is part of the Immigration Service Delivery function of the Department of Justice.

Any non-EU, non-EEA or non-Swiss national must present to an Immigration Officer on their arrival at a port of entry to the State.

At Dublin Airport, the BMU undertakes the role of immigrating arriving passengers. An Garda Síochána currently undertakes these immigration duties at all other ports of entry to the State.

The Border Management Unit and the Garda National Immigration Bureau have a role to play in spot-checking PCRs and antigen tests on arrival, in line with the latest public health advice and Government travel restrictions.

They currently conduct spot checks of health documentation which includes:

- Digital Covid Certificates;
- HSE Vaccination Certificates;
- NHS Vaccination Certificates;
- State issued vaccination certificates from other third countries; and
- Negative PCR test results across all passenger cohorts in Dublin airport and other ports of entry.

Passenger numbers have steadily increased since international travel recommenced. The BMU is currently immigrating up to over 30,000 passengers per day at Dublin Airport, with this number set to increase in the run up to Christmas.

eGates

The total number of eGate transactions between August and November 2021 was 733,301.

In addition to the increase in spot checking of documentation at the manual booths, the BMU also checks unsuccessful eGate transactions. An unsuccessful eGate transaction can be due to the following reasons:

- Face covering not removed.
- Baggage stuck in gate.
- Passport upside down.
- Genuine rejection as not EU citizen / under 18/ or trying to use EU ID card.

Of those transactions, 30.4% or 222,723 were unsuccessful transactions meaning the passenger was referred to see an officer and their health documentation was checked. The graph below gives a monthly breakdown between August and November.

Dublin Airport - eGate Transactions
August - November 2021

Month	Successful Transactions	Unsuccessful Transactions
Aug	81,520	43,250
Sep	128,115	53,846
Oct	152,904	66,279
Nov	148,039	59,348