



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Communities

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Licensing and Registration of Clubs  
(Amendment) Bill:  
Tourism NI

18 February 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Tourism NI

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Ms Paula Bradley (Chairperson)  
Ms Kellie Armstrong (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Andy Allen  
Mr Mark Durkan  
Mr Alex Easton  
Ms Sinéad Ennis  
Ms Karen Mullan  
Mr Robin Newton

**Witnesses:**

Ms Rosemarie McHugh	Tourism NI
Mr Gary Quate	Tourism NI

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** I welcome Gary Quate and Rosemarie McHugh to the meeting. Gary, I think that it is you who will begin the briefing. You have up to 10 minutes to brief the Committee, so please go ahead.

**Mr Gary Quate (Tourism NI):** Good morning, Chair and Committee. Can everyone hear me OK?

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** We can indeed, Gary.

**Mr Quate:** Thanks very much. Tourism NI is delighted to be here today to offer evidence on the proposed Bill and to demonstrate how the proposals for changes have the potential to enhance the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a tourism destination. I am the food and drink experience development officer at Tourism NI, and I am joined today by Rosemarie McHugh, who is the director of product development in the organisation.

The Committee will be aware that Tourism NI has been supportive of changes to liquor licence legislation since the original consultation in 2012. We believe that the introduction of a number of measures that are proposed in the Bill has the potential to provide vital support to business and will help to rebuild the tourism and hospitality industry in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our submission to the consultation really focuses on those aspects of the licensing laws that we feel, with greater flexibility, can facilitate further tourism development and improvement of the experience that we offer to visitors. That includes the proposals to modernise the licensing laws around the Easter period, which is a key holiday in the tourism calendar for Northern Ireland, and the proposed introduction of the producer's licence to support the award-winning distillers, brewers and cider producers right across the country, in addition to recognising the contribution that events have played in the growth and visibility of Northern Ireland.

At this point, I feel that it is important to highlight that tourism in Northern Ireland reached a significant milestone in 2019, when over 5 million overnight trips were taken and, for the first time, associated spend from those trips broke the £1 billion barrier. Rebuilding the tourism industry in the post-COVID environment will require us to be continually reflective and challenging of the tourism offer to ensure that we meet and manage the expectations of visitors, both those at home and those who travel from abroad. We know that food and drink is an essential part of that tourism offer and is a key element of the holiday experience. Our research continues to tell us that food and drink consumption accounts for almost £350 million per year, which equates to around one third of annual visitor spend, and that that number continues to grow.

Northern Ireland has been on a transformative food and drink journey over the past five years. We had the massive success of the Year of Food and Drink 2016 initiative, which really put us on the world stage and did much to enhance our reputation as a world-class food and drink destination. Ultimately, that success led to Northern Ireland being awarded the prestigious accolade of "Best Food Destination" at the International Travel and Tourism Awards in 2018.

We have a strong history of distilling and brewing, and the growth in craft drink production is revitalising local communities and creating jobs right across Northern Ireland. For the most part, however, unless they are covered by an appropriate or occasional licence, producers are unable to sell directly to the consumer. Currently, if a tourist visits a distillery, they might have the opportunity to sample the products but are unable to purchase directly from the producer. That is a really frustrating experience for both the visitor and the business owner. In most cases, visitors will have travelled some distance to take a distillery tour or experience that is centred around drink production. They will have had the opportunity to meet the makers and the people behind the brand but are prohibited, under current legislation, from buying a bottle as a gift or souvenir of their time in Northern Ireland. That likelihood of a purchase whilst on the premises is much greater than that of a chance encounter in the nearest off-licence or, if we are lucky enough, an online purchase when they arrive home again. That online sale brings with it third-party markups, which are detrimental to small, craft producers. Therefore, the ability for visitors to purchase on-site is not just highly desirable, tourists and visitors expect to have the opportunity to do that. We support the introduction of a producer's licence that would permit the craft drinks sector to be able to sell products directly to the consumer as part of their visitor experience and also at festivals and events across Northern Ireland.

At this point, we also want to draw attention to the opportunity to support and develop the microbrewery sector. We believe that the Bill could go a little further to support producers who may wish to innovate to develop new tourism experiences and potential future revenue streams. We feel that the current proposal would prohibit the opportunities for on-premises consumption and is, potentially, restrictive to enabling that growing market, which might want to diversify, to look at creating a taproom experience, particularly for the tourism market that has an opportunity to motivate visitors to travel, stay longer and spend a little bit more in Northern Ireland.

We have conducted extensive research into the needs and motivations of our close-to-home markets. The availability of food and drink experiences and the opportunity to meet those makers continue to dominate factors in decision-making to travel. Tourism NI feels that if the proposals were extended to permit direct to consumer sales, it would help consolidate its efforts and objectives to further develop tourism experiences that will support regional spread across all parts of Northern Ireland, extend the tourism season and, hopefully, help build and create a more vibrant and sustainable local economy. I thank the Chair and the Committee for the time this morning. We are happy to take any questions you might have on the written submission and the oral evidence.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Thank you for your submission and briefing, Gary. I absolutely agree with you. Northern Ireland has wonderful offerings for tourism. As you were talking, I was reminded of pre-COVID Sunday mornings in St George's marketing, where you could hear accents from not only all over the UK and Ireland but all over the world. I remember looking at a TripAdvisor post written by people who had come here for an Easter weekend, and it was about what to do on a Sunday in Northern Ireland as the shops and bars only open at a certain time, and there were issues with that.

I know that you are very much in favour of Easter opening and the removal of those restrictions. We have heard from the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches and Unite, the union, about people of faith who have to work over the Easter weekend. Can you make any comments about that? I do understand the requirement for the easing of those restrictions for our tourism model.

**Mr Quate:** Easter is a significant holiday for the tourism calendar in Northern Ireland. We are supportive of the relaxation of the hours, particularly at a time when visitors have decided to travel to Northern Ireland. Now, the case is very much made to stay at home and support the local economy by taking a staycation. However, we have to take a balanced approach, and the scrutiny of the Bill is important. Tourism NI believes that the removal of those restrictions can enhance the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a modern tourism destination. You spoke a little about the pre-COVID days, but moving forward, it is going to be a very competitive marketplace.

From a tourism perspective, we feel that the removal of the restrictions will bolster Northern Ireland's competitive edge and help the growth of the tourism and hospitality sector. There is also concern that, if we do not look at that framework now, Northern Ireland could be placed at a competitive disadvantage, particularly as the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and other close-to-home destinations of choice have made those legislative changes to permit extended trading hours over Easter. For us, it is really about managing visitor expectations, and research tells us that visitors talk about Sundays. Our visitor attitude survey tells us that we are not meeting the expectations of visitors who travel to Northern Ireland at Easter.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Yes. Thank you. I know that you are supportive of giving powers for major events to the Department. Have you any concerns about how those events might be defined?

**Mr Quate:** Yes. Not so much concerns; our events play a significant role in the promotion and development of Northern Ireland. Previous events might have been impacted by the inability to vary the hours for the sale and consumption of alcohol, as it fell outside the Department's remit. Tourism NI's message is that it would like to see a framework around special or major events that can help Northern Ireland come out on the front foot post pandemic. The commitment from Tourism NI is that it will continue to be very supportive of the ongoing conversations about the framework and what it will look like when it is applied on the ground. There is a commitment, from our perspective, to work with the Department to try to roll that out and to make sure that it supports Northern Ireland's transformative journey. The Open in 2019, the Giro and the MTV Europe Music Awards were phenomenal successes, and we delivered those great events. We have a real opportunity now to take some of the lessons learned and apply them to Northern Ireland to see how we can move forward more strongly as a destination that can continue to attract inward investment.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** You are absolutely right. You mentioned some events, and they seem like a lifetime ago now. They were major events that we held here very successfully, so, as a country looking forward, we need to look at what we can do to boost people's confidence and get them out to attend events again. It is important that we get that right in the legislation.

I will open it up to members now, Gary.

**Mr Durkan:** Thank you, Gary and Rosemarie, and thank you, Chair. Gary, you listed some of the great events that you were involved in the delivery of. I am sure that you, as an organisation and as individuals, are extremely frustrated that you have not been able to do any of those important and ultimately, I dare say, enjoyable pieces of work over the past year. We look forward to you getting back to doing what you do extremely well.

The Bill has taken on a new dimension and urgency given the financial issues that the pandemic has caused and the threat that it has posed to the industry patrons here and, of interest to you, tourists. In 2016, Hospitality Ulster carried out research on the Easter liquor licensing restrictions that suggested that they were costing £16 million to our economy, and it suggested that that could now be up to £20 million following the changes in the South in 2018. Has Tourism NI done any research on the economic impact of the current licensing framework on tourism? Is that something that you might consider doing?

**Mr Quate:** Mark, that is a really good point. Hospitality Ulster took the lead in that space of looking at direct impacts on the hospitality businesses. From a tourism perspective, there are a number of proposals outlined in the Bill that we have not been able to consolidate into a discussion of what the opportunities coming from them might look like because we have not previously had the chance to move into that space. We are picking up elements of the Bill and very much support producers being able to sell direct. Since they have not had the opportunity to do that, we cannot quantify what that leakage or loss could look like.

You picked up a lot of the great stuff on the events and their delivery, but it is important to say that Tourism NI delivered those through working with a number of the stakeholders that you mentioned. It is very much about not only sharing information and bringing totality to the Department in order to help identify what the loss has been in the significant Easter period but helping to identify what opportunities there are if we come out on the front foot post pandemic and support the industry to tap into new experience developments and, off the back of that, new revenue streams. It will be great for us to capture the gaps in the Bill so that we can say how it might work and translate. As an organisation, we will be very keen to showcase the positive changes that will directly result from the Bill to tourism and in increased revenue.

**Ms Rosemarie McHugh (Tourism NI):** I will add to what Gary said. Our research does not look at the quantification of the economic losses but focuses mainly on visitor expectation. We know that food and drink is a significant driver in visitors' choice of destination. It is one of the top five factors. From our research, we also know that, although tourism in Northern Ireland has grown significantly, we have a huge opportunity to extract more value from every visitor who comes to Northern Ireland. As Gary mentioned, it is about developing those high-quality experiences that can really deliver value to the economy through enhanced spend by every visitor. Some of the proposals for modernisation and flexibility are an opportunity to do that and to drive up the value that we get from every interaction or visitor engagement.

**Mr Durkan:** It is all about driving value. I will have to relook at those Hospitality Ulster figures. Its business is hospitality, but are its figures based solely on accommodation, food and drink? That is a prime factor in people deciding to come or stay here, but people spend money on a lot more than food and drink when they are here. If they stay an extra night, they are out and about the town the next day and buy this, that and the other and help all sorts of local businesses.

Gary outlined Tourism NI's support for a local producer's licence and the logic behind that, which I agree with entirely. I do not know whether you guys have been following our evidence gathering over the past number of weeks and months now. The Department, albeit in a cursory manner, suggested to us that taprooms might adversely affect existing licensed premises, as if it is some sort of zero-sum game rather than helping to create a more attractive and vibrant environment that benefits the whole industry and area. Do you guys have any thoughts on that?

**Mr Quate:** From our perspective, this is about the ability to develop the sector to create those new and compelling experiences and to try to motivate people to travel across all parts of Northern Ireland.

There is an opportunity for us to look at that to see if there is a sensible approach or an opportunity for the industry to get talking about the opportunities with taproom creation. It is important to suggest that not everyone who has the ability to create a taproom experience would want to do it. Those businesses would need to have done research on viability, asking these questions: how much would it cost businesses to move into that space? What does the regulatory framework look like?

It is about exploring opportunities to level the playing field a little bit for front-line tourism from an experiential perspective as the craft breweries and drink sector are going after that niche market. Visitors to them are highly motivated to travel to find out a little bit more about the product and where and how it is produced. There are opportunities to uncover the stories about flavour profiles. What ingredients are used? What is unique to Northern Ireland and to the processes or methods that are used?

When we look at all that, we see that there are real opportunities to pass all that knowledge on to visitors. What is the opportunity now for us for those who maybe want to move into that space? If they want to move into that space, they need to have a viable business proposition. From a tourism perspective, we would be very keen to see if the conversations with industry could be ignited to discuss what that framework could look like and what the potential responsibilities are for craft brewers who want to develop a taproom experience for the tourism and the very niche markets.

It must be understood that holding a licence for any alcohol consumption comes with some level of responsibility. There are opportunities for conversations there. Our research tells us, and we know this, experiential tourism will be important for our recovery post COVID. It is about looking at what other destinations offer, and it is almost about asking these questions: what are the opportunities for Northern Ireland, and how can we rebound stronger? How can we look at all that research, the opportunities in driving up that value and the visitor spend that Rosemarie alluded to? There is a great opportunity to explore that a little more.

**Mr Durkan:** Do you think that the more strings to our bow, the better because of that visitor experience and bringing people here for that?

**Mr Quate:** It is about offering variety and choice. We touched on that in other sessions, but it is about that support for local. Our home market is probably our biggest opportunity for storytelling, driving experiences and tapping into additional revenue streams, but, when we look at it, we see that it is quite a barrier for some of the small producers, so how can we make sure that that money is going back into the local economy? What are the potential benefits of looking at taprooms and the whole tourism element for job creation, local investment and localism, which is that circular economy that we have heard a lot about over the past number of weeks and months?

The COVID pandemic has totally changed how we view the quality of our food and drink. When supply chains were interrupted in those early months, our producers worked so hard to get us access to great-quality food. I think that there is a real drive and a movement towards supporting our industry as we move out of this, but how can we use tourism and experiences as the hook? What is the additionality? Where are the opportunities to encourage people to travel, to hear about those stories and to have the opportunity to transact and increase [*Inaudible*] on the back of that?

**Mr Durkan:** If people are travelling here for that experience, it is unlikely that they will confine their trip solely to taprooms. It will be for the benefit of the wider economy and other pubs and hospitality venues as well.

**Mr Quate:** We have heard about that balance. As I said, just because the permissions might be there for the craft sector to look at diversification into taprooms, not everyone would want to do it. Not everyone wants to move into that space.

**Mr Durkan:** It is not there for them. It is not even in the Bill.

**Mr Quate:** I think that it is about the choice not only for businesses but for visitors. I work very closely with the sector. I am the food and drink experience development officer, so it is my job to get out with industry and to talk about the opportunities in tourism. The craft drink sector in particular does not really see that fit between product and tourism yet, and a lot of those that offer tours do it from a brand-awareness perspective. Given that they cannot sell directly to the consumer and that the captive audience has left the building without putting any additional cash in the till, they are not making huge margins from putting on tours and a 90-minute or two-hour visit around the distillery. Taking a balanced approach to the Bill, there is great scope to tap into those producers and to look at starting to drive that experiential element forward.

**Mr Durkan:** OK. Thank you, Gary.

**Ms Ennis:** Thanks, guys. Mark covered the majority of what I wanted to say to you about taprooms. I fully concur with what Gary said about the Bill and the tourism sector more broadly being a massive tool for us when we emerge from COVID and build back our economy. It will be a massive part of it. That is why it is incumbent on us, as a Committee, to get a move on with scrutinising the Bill and, hopefully, bringing it through the Assembly.

As I said, Mark covered a lot of what I wanted to say, but in South Down we have lots of taprooms and craft brewers, and we are really well placed for the emergence of all the craft brewers given our location right on the shores of Carlingford lough. They have told me that they have had tour buses pulling up outside their brewery expecting to get a tour and a sample, and they have to be turned away. We cannot afford for that to happen in the time ahead if we want to compete with other tourist destinations.

You said to Mark that you cannot estimate the economic impact of not having those taproom experiences or being able to buy directly from producers. Is that something that you get in feedback from visitors? Are they disappointed that they cannot have that experience here? Do visitors expect it when they come here? Locally, we have experienced it, but, more broadly, do tourists say that they are disappointed that they cannot have that experience? If there was an amendment to the Bill to introduce that, would Tourism NI support it? Obviously, you will have to have a marketing strategy for it and will have to be able to promote it. Is that something that you guys are thinking about?

**Mr Quate:** We get that sort of feedback from visitors and business owners alike. We talk about the Year of Food and Drink, the best food destination and the Taste the Island initiatives that Tourism NI has been pushing. We have done a lot to push media and journalist visits throughout Northern Ireland. When we bring in media and journalists, we want them to write about the great quality of our food and drink. Sinéad, you said that there is an abundance of those in your constituency. I know that because I work with the sector. However, there is disappointment that we cannot showcase it. We work very closely with Food NI. We even bring international buyers to some of those events, and there are barriers there, even from a showcase perspective. Visitors have to be told, "We cannot sell you anything. There are no opportunities for you to taste." When they leave Northern Ireland, they can refer to these great producers and makers, but we are not bridging that gap.

I will go back to your point, Sinéad, and say that, when we focus strategy and put up development opportunities in the craft drink sector, we certainly will use tourism and experiences. There is a commitment from Tourism NI to work with the sector to bring those experiences to the fore. However, it is difficult at the moment, because when they cannot sell directly to the consumer, they are not sure what the tourism benefits are to their business. In some cases, there are quite low levels of engagement. If certain proposals were introduced, we would be keen, as an organisation, to pick them up and run forward with the potential.

**Ms McHugh:** You raised a very interesting point, Sinéad, about the tour buses of visitors that come. We have not quantified the potential economic losses in that. While Northern Ireland has come a long way, we still have a huge amount of work to do on those experiences that really stimulate demand for Northern Ireland and enhance the experience when visitors are here. We get continual feedback from our visitor attitude surveys.

Overall, we have come a long way, but we need a huge raft of those authentic quality experiences. A lot has been done, but there is a lot still to do. It comes to the point of stimulating private sector investment in the development of tourism experiences, whether it is for food and drink or something else.

Gary referred to the work that he does across the sector. There are two elements that may give you some indication of that. Gary works very closely with a group of about 15 distillers across Northern Ireland. As he mentioned, we are engaged with the microbreweries. Many of them are now popping up; there are about 20 of them. Gary can correct me on that one. However, our engagement with them is very low. That is probably very much due to the lack of opportunity to have revenue streams, viability and sustainability when moving into that tourism base. There is a real opportunity here in the development of not only experiences but experiences in that domain. The key point is how that can be done in a fair, proportionate and fit-for-purpose manner that can deliver on those objectives.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Sinéad has gone.

**Ms McHugh:** I was not sure whether it was me or Sinéad who went.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Sinéad has dropped off. I will move on. If Sinéad comes back, I will bring her in again.

**Mr Easton:** Thank you both for your presentation. Gary, thank you for the positive language that you are using. I particularly liked the way that you mentioned enhancing the attractiveness of Northern Ireland. That is a very positive thing to do and to try to do for the future. That was quite refreshing, so thank you.

I have a quick question about your support for the Bill. Obviously, it will have a benefit for the economy, jobs and tourism and so forth. Are there any rough estimates of how much it could help the economy with potential new jobs and how many new tourists it could attract if it is got right? Have you any figures that you could give us on that?

**Mr Quate:** That is a very good question, Alex. Obviously, we do not have all the answers to that at the moment because a lot of what is proposed in the Bill is about the opportunity. We have been on this transformative journey, particularly from the food and drink perspective, since 2016. We have done monumental things within the parameters of the legislation that we can work with. It is about asking these questions: what we can do further? How we can bolster all the great work that has been done? It goes back to really uncovering and unlocking those new tourism experiences and driving them

forward, Alex. Hopefully, that will then start to translate into cash going into tills, with impacts on job creation, overnight stays and additional spending.

If the Bill's proposals as they stand or as they are developed are introduced, we in Tourism NI would be able to look at our visitor attitude survey and at all our consumer-sentiment research and bring it to the Department at a much later stage to say that, prior to COVID and the Bill being introduced, food tourism and job creation linked to that time were at x level but that, with some of those positive measures being embedded in local communities, we could bring the information on how they had changed to you at that point.

Alex, we do not have figures, but it is about the opportunity that there is in that. We are very supportive of putting in some measures and quantities so that we can report back to the Department on the direct impacts that the Bill has had on tourism, job creation and creating a more sustainable local tourism economy.

**Ms McHugh:** There are a number of ways to look at it, and the important context, which Gary mentioned, is the headline figures of £1 billion per annum being spent on overnight trips, with £350 million of that being spent on food and drink, which is a third of the overall total. One of the key things in the development of food and drink experiences in particular and what we call those demand generators is that they have a very strong ripple effect into the wider economy. They are demand generators, so they benefit the wider sector.

There has also been a huge amount of collaboration, particularly over the last number of years, between food and drink producers, food and drink experience producers and providers and others. We have combinations of experiences where activity providers are coming together with food and drink providers and so on. There are a whole lot of different ways that you can look at it, but, essentially, the story is that one third of overall revenue is generated from food and drink. The fact that food and drink is in the top five factors shows that it is fundamental to the tourism economy. We could probably provide further context if that were useful by bringing some of those types of examples to life.

**Mr Easton:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** I will bring Sinéad back in. I realise that you dropped out there. Do you have anything to add?

**Ms Ennis:** Thanks, Chair. I caught most of Gary's response. Before we talk about bringing tourists into South Down, we need to sort out our broadband. No, that is fine. I am done, Chair. Thanks a million, and thanks to Rosemarie and Gary.

**Ms Armstrong:** Thank you very much for your presentation, Gary and Rosemarie. I would like to go back to the provision in the Bill to do with major events. The Bill states:

*"Where the Department considers that an event which is to take place in Northern Ireland will attract significant public interest".*

It then lists all the things that can happen. The Department in question is Communities, as opposed to the Department for the Economy. Have you experienced any rub there to date? I know that we do not yet have these licences, but I am wondering how that works for you. There were so many vested interests involved with the Open. Is it easy enough to manage or is it introducing another layer of bureaucracy? How does different Departments being involved with major events fit in? Do you envisage that being a problem that could delay the issuing of a licence? I am aware that events take a long time to plan, so there should not be any problems, but do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms McHugh:** It is important that there be clarity around the framework and that the process be a simple one. Fundamentally, when it comes to major events, we all know the outcome that we are trying to achieve, which is for Northern Ireland not to be seen as being a less competitive or less easy place for event organisers and, as you mentioned, Kellie, the host of partners involved to do business. Without getting into the detail, clarity is very important so that international investors, event organisers or whomever it may be do not see Northern Ireland as a more difficult place to do business or carry out transactions. Having a clear and simple process should be the overall outcome, but we can have faith that we can do that when we are working together. If we focus on the outcomes of having absolute clarity and, as you pointed out, a fairly streamlined process, and then put them together, all the key partners can work to deliver on that.



**Ms Armstrong:** Changes were made to the legislation by the then Secretary of State to facilitate the Open. Who will be the licence issuer for a major event? Who is the licence issuer at the moment? Is it the Department for Communities, the Department for the Economy or the police?

**Ms McHugh:** My understanding is that it is the Department for Communities, but I will need to double-check that.

**Ms Armstrong:** That is fine. I just wanted to get that clear in my head.

I also wanted to ask you about the major event order conditions that are included. That comes from experience, and you guys have all the experience in the world with this. We know that if, on the same evening, two major events are taking place — an event in the Odyssey or elsewhere in the Titanic Quarter and a football match at Windsor Park, for instance — the flow of traffic through different areas is incredible. If there are any breakdowns on the Westlink, heaven help Belfast.

On conditions for major event orders, proposed new article 48B(5) of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 states:

*"A major event order which authorises the sale of intoxicating liquor for consumption in a place or premises also authorises, during the first 60 minutes after the conclusion of the hours specified in the order, the consumption of intoxicating liquor in the place or premises."*

The article goes on to state that that can be reduced to 30 minutes. We have heard comments that extending hours could help with moving people out so that, rather than having a mass of people coming out at 1:00 am, it could help break down the number of people coming out at the same time. As far as the management of major events is concerned, will that provision have any impact, given that we know that Belfast can become completely snarled up after events happen? From looking at what happened with the Open, I think that a joined-up public transport offer could certainly help. We could be talking about the very early hours of the morning, when public transport may not necessarily be readily available. How will that work for major events, and is there anything missing in the legislation around that?

**Ms McHugh:** Apologies, but I went offline there for a huge amount of what Kellie was saying. Gary, did you pick up on some of the content?

**Mr Quate:** Kellie, it is good to detail that. It is right to scrutinise all of that when we are looking at the Bill. It will probably come down to what the event management plan looks like and how that translates to the logistics on the ground. As you rightly said, Kellie, and Rosemarie and I have brought this up on a number of occasions today, it is all about the visitor experience. It might be locals going down to the Odyssey or Custom House Square and taking in a concert at a music venue. We do not want that then to translate into a really poor experience at the end of the night because the local infrastructure does not support the footfall or because the dots have not been joined up.

From our perspective, regardless of who holds the powers to designate special or major events, Tourism NI, at this point in the Bill consultation, wants to say that we are very supportive of improvements being made to the framework and how it lands. If elements in the Bill are to be scrutinised further or more clarity is needed around who dots the i's and crosses the t's, Tourism NI is very keen to be part of those discussions, in addition to our local authorities, the PSNI, traffic management and other stakeholders. I appreciate that that will be in the detail, but I get it, Kellie. There is nothing worse than being a spectator or enjoying a concert and then not being able to get home because the infrastructure is not there. That, in itself, is like checking out of a hotel early and having a poor breakfast. That is what you will remember. You might then not do it again, because you remember not being able to get home or there being challenges. I totally get that, and we will help provide support in any way that we can.

**Ms Armstrong:** You are absolutely right, Gary. It is not part of this, but it is an unintended consequence that may come up. On the drinking-up time at the end of the night after a concert or a match, I am not wholly convinced that it will not just move the time that people leave premises out from 1.30 am to 2.30 am. I do not know how gradually people will leave the premises. That is just something in the back of my mind. I have known Belfast to get snarled up and I was part of the transport discussions for the Open. If you therefore add on another hour, will that make the situation easier? Given the infrastructure, I do not know, but I was just interested to hear what you had to say.

The legislation can be amended to bring the drinking-up time down from 60 minutes to 30 minutes, and we will be able to see how that works.

This move forward for major events can be nothing but good for Northern Ireland, however. It gives us another option. I welcome your comments on microbreweries and local breweries. It helps set in context some of the comments that we have already received from witnesses that it is not to negate what we already have but to add more to our offer. Thank you both very much. That was really helpful today.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Our next witness session will be with the Institute of Licensing. Stephen and Eoin are listening in, so they may be able to answer some of the questions about responsibility for major events and permitted hours.

Thank you very much, Gary and Rosemarie, for your time today and your submission on the Bill. It has been a very worthwhile session.

**Mr Quate:** Chair, may I make two quick points about the producer's licence before we leave?

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Yes. Absolutely.

**Mr Quate:** This is in the written submission, but I want to tack something on to the bit about how the Bill's proposals for the producer's licence should encompass all facilities associated with drink production. The proposals should have awareness of production sites at which visitor servicing and retail elements take place to make sure there is no ambiguity in how that is presented. We have heard from others, particularly in the ROI, where the producer's licence has been made available but has had really low uptake. That low uptake may be a cost consideration, but it may also be that producers are thinking, "How do I interpret the legislation, and how does it apply to me as a business owner?". I thought that I should touch on that again.

You will have heard from others about the concerns and potential challenges in and around the collaborative product space. If two breweries want to come together to create a product or a brewery and a local cidery want to bring together certain special ingredients to create a product, how will that translate to the producer's licence? What has been outlined is really positive, but you need to make sure that small producers are not overwhelmed when they read the legislation and that they know how it translates to their production premises and any collaborations.

**The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley):** Thank you, Gary. The Committee Clerk had asked me to ask you that question, and I did not ask you. I am glad that you have cleared that up a little for us. We have had witness sessions at which it has been said that there has been very low uptake in the Republic of Ireland. We do not know whether the low uptake is reflective of bureaucracy or cost. It would be worthwhile for us to find that out. Thank you for clearing that up, and thank you for your time today.

**Mr Quate:** Thank you, Chair and Committee.

**Ms McHugh:** Thank you.