Scottish Chambers of Commerce welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s inquiry into VisitScotland’s Winning Years strategy. We will deal with each of the questions in turn.

**How many of your members are directly involved in the tourism industry? Has this number increased or decreased in recent months and years?**

Scottish Chambers of Commerce does not have a direct membership as such. We are an umbrella organisation for 21 local Chambers of Commerce across the length and breadth of Scotland. Within our network, there are a large number of tourism businesses who are members of their local Chamber of Commerce and many of these participate in the Scottish Chambers of Commerce Quarterly Business Survey, which includes the tourism industry as one of its key sectors. We do not have an aggregated figure for the overall number of tourism businesses within our network.

**What trends in visitor numbers and turnover these members are detecting and what the perceived reason for these changes are.**

Through our Quarterly Business Survey, our members reported an average occupancy rate of 64.4% in Quarter 2 of 2012. This compared to 68% in Q2 2011 and 71.4% in Q2 2010. Lack of demand was highlighted as the primary constraint to business. Almost 40% of businesses reported reducing their daily rate in a bid to stimulate demand. Expectations were that domestic tourism would increase over the summer period but that demand from abroad and business demand would remain weak.

**What involvement your members have had in the Winning Years strategy and its early implementation and whether they have benefitted from VisitScotland’s activity in this area?**

Anecdotally, many of our members in the tourism sector, particularly smaller businesses, have not felt engaged in the Winning Years/Homecoming strategy. They appreciate the focus that is being pursued at a national level and understand the aims and objectives of this. They often do not feel engaged in terms of the input from and benefit for their own business and this may be symptomatic of the disengagement many smaller businesses have felt since the reform of the area tourist board structures.

**What your members’ experience is of the way in which the support available from public agencies for those operating in the tourism sector is aligned?**

Most businesses feel that public sector tourism policy is focused at a national level and that there is very little visible support for tourism at a local level. Tourism businesses regularly tell us through our Quarterly Business Survey that poor transport infrastructure, high fuel costs and weak marketing of their local areas are among their major concerns in terms of the policy agenda.

Scottish Chambers of Commerce
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