The Ceilidh Place in Ullapool is a small family business that employs approximately 50 people. We have been very dependent on Europeans, mainly from Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain, Italy, Germany, Slovakia and Czech Republic to run the business. We look for staff on the internet mostly. It is a rare occurrence to have Scottish or English people apply for work.

The business has had no direct information from the UK Government with regard to the status of our staff. There has been a great deal of nervousness, particularly with those staff who have settled in Ullapool, some have bought property and considered themselves as permanent residents. While we do employ a number of ‘seasonal’ staff, it is no longer the case that our permanent staff (no.30) are all ‘local’. At least half of those are now Europeans who have settled here. We have tried to follow the Home Office website information (although this has changed in the past six months and is more favourable) but we are very aware that this could change again when (if) there is (or isn’t) a formal agreement made with regard to Brexit. We have had to try and combat the ‘hostile environment’ to maintain good relationships with our staff.

Ullapool is very dependent, more now than ever before, on tourism. For a village of some 1600 permanent residents, there are nine hotels, 10 independent café/restaurants, 27 guest houses, a youth hostel, numerous bed & breakfast establishments and self catering houses, a large caravan park and air b&b offers growing rapidly. All of the other hotels and restaurants employ a staff as diverse in nationality as the Ceilidh Place. It might be a good place for serious research as to how we will operate and at what level, post Brexit. A microcosm of the country as a whole maybe.

We do our best to reassure staff that at the very least, we will be making a strong case on their behalf, but already we have seen staff head to different parts if the EU for work if they don’t actually head home. They are aware that the Scottish Government is supportive of them staying in Scotland, but aware that it may make no difference in the event of Brexit.

We have not made any contingency plans for losing half of our staff, we cannot see, at this stage, what we would do. If anything we will at least try to keep most of our staff until the end of 2020 with a guarantee of employment; but hope things may have changed for the better by then.

In addition, the past few years have seen a growth in European visitors; and the frequently ask us ‘Why are you leaving?’ The Ceilidh Place has a European flag showing our support for remain.

We are equally concerned that we will see a serious reduction in the number of visitors from other European countries if/when we leave the EU. As they make approximately 35% of our business this is another major concern. Recent reports from airlines with regard to the difficulty and expense of flying in and out of the UK are not reassuring. This is harder to qualify, and as yet unknown; but it doesn’t feel good. Tourism has always been a bit buffeted
by weak/strong pound and exchange rates, whether, the economy generally and we are used to having to ride the storm to a certain extent; but we are watching the approaching mega-disaster over which we have no control.

The long term effect ma be a contraction of our business; less employment, less employment tax, less income tax, less business for everyone.

Although the business organisations, FSB and others are making representations to the UK government I don’t think here is any particular data of the effect on Scotland, or Scottish businesses.

There has been no information from the IL government with regard to Brexit on our industry and therefore we assume that this is not a priority for them.