

[Blue Sky Thinking](#) [1]

Written by [Jan Boucek](#) [2] | Tuesday 1 May 2012

Long queues are a clear indication of supply failing to meet demand. In the Soviet Union, you queued for bread and butter. In the UK not too long ago, you queued for the GPO to install a telephone. The mismatch was usually due to some government agency mucking things up.

So it is now with Britain's airports where arriving passengers have faced queues of up to two hours due to an inefficient UK Border Force. The solution is obvious ? privatise the UK Border Force. Let the airports, airlines and passengers sort out amongst themselves how to deliver an efficient immigration service. Let them decide how much to spend and how much to charge and when and where to staff.

In the government's defence, they've been forced to slim staff numbers as part of its overall priority to get a grip on the nation's finances, but that's why more imaginative thinking is required. That process may have started amid reports of talks to increase charges on airlines to hire more Border staff. That makes eminent sense ? users and beneficiaries should pay.

Willie Walsh, head of the company that owns British Airways, has said that airlines would be prepared to pay for the right service but then hit the nail right on the head with his comment that this willingness disappears if the government was wasting money. Indeed, as Labour proved with health and education, you can't just pour endless cash into a government agency without accompanying structural reforms.

Unsurprisingly, Ryanair's Michael O'Leary weighed in with his claim that ?The big problem with the queues at Heathrow and at Stansted is they are treating EU citizens like potential bloody terrorists and they are not.? He claimed it wasn't short-staffing as a result of budget cuts but rather a work-to-rule mentality.

So don't offer the government more money to carry on as is; privatise the whole process.

In the spirit of airline pricing, there could be first, business and economy immigration lanes or the equivalents of easyJet's Speedy Boarding and Ryanair's Priority Queues. A really clever company would roll out trolleys with refreshments when queues do build up or maybe offer up work experience students to hold your place in any queue while you take a toilet break. How about immigration hall buskers?

Private companies have a much better record in chopping and changing to altered circumstances and in adopting and adapting modern technology. Let them get on with it.

Oh, the vested interests will squawk that national security is too important to be left to the private sector, just like teachers claim that children cannot be entrusted to anyone but their own guarded priesthood. However, assorted government agencies over the years don't have a spotless record when it comes to keeping out undesireables.

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