

CBI submission to the Global Travel Taskforce – March 2021

Introduction

The CBI is the UK's leading business organisation, speaking for some 190,000 businesses that together employ around a third of the private sector workforce. With offices across the UK as well as representation in Brussels, Washington, Beijing, and Delhi, the CBI communicates the British business voice around the world. Convening members of all sectors and sizes, the CBI is in a unique position to relay the economic opportunity associated with making the most of the UK's successful vaccination programme and leading the world in reopening international travel. Equally, the breadth of CBI membership means that it understands the wider consequences a badly managed restart will have for firms across the economy.

The Global Travel Taskforce must be viewed as a cross economy priority, not merely for firms directly engaged in the delivery of international travel. Employers across the UK, including world-leading professional services firms, universities, manufacturers, retailers, and hospitality companies, amongst others, will depend on a smooth re-opening process for their recovery from the pandemic. Alongside access to customers and talent, businesses nationwide depend on imports and exports carried in the belly-hold of passenger flights, on Roll-On-Roll-Off ferry routes, and through the Channel Tunnel. Successfully restarting travel will re-open access to world markets. Most of all, UK competitiveness has been underpinned by London's status as the most connected city in the world, while regional hubs have been better integrated with both long and short-haul journeys than rivals. To rebuild connectivity and play its role in business' recovery, the Global Travel Taskforce should deliver:

1. A risk-based roadmap for re-opening international travel developed in synch with the UK's global partners.

- As the domestic economy reopens, business supports removal of current stay-at-home rules which mean it is illegal to travel abroad without one of a few permitted reasons.
- Compared to the last convening of the Global Travel Taskforce, the UK is in a significantly better position to reopen routes to markets across the world. Testing technology and capacity has improved and since December 2020, over 26 million UK residents have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, while over 2 million have received both doses.¹
- Business supports the government's ambition to offer a first dose of a vaccine to all adults in the UK by 31st July. The ongoing success of the UK vaccine programme will ensure that the most vulnerable members of society are protected, while the domestic economy will be able to re-open in full – this should pave the way for a managed restart for international travel.
- Bearing this in mind, the government needs to be ambitious with its strategy for reopening international travel in the interest of the jobs nationwide that depend on access to global markets. This should involve setting out a clear way forward for removing the need to quarantine for travellers to and from the lowest-risk countries. IATA survey data shows that 84% of travellers will not travel if there is a chance of quarantine at destination.²
- Businesses acknowledge the importance of protecting the public from contagion from countries where there is a significant prevalence of Variants of Concern (VoCs). As a result, they accept the necessity of a tiered system of measures in line with international approaches and proportionate to risk levels presented by travel to each destination. Where measures such as testing are required, compliance needs to be easy and affordable.
- If a tiered system is applied, business will expect transparent reporting of the government's assessment of the risks presented by international travel to each destination, as well as clear standards for each level of classification. This will mean that businesses will be able to make better informed choices about travel.
- The UK should benefit from its successful roll out of the vaccine. Those vaccinated should be able to travel into and out of the UK without restriction, although vaccination should not be a prerequisite for all journeys. Rather for travel to/from higher risk-profile destinations, best use should be made of pre-departure testing upstream from ports, airports, and stations, as well as rapid testing for those yet to be vaccinated.
- The CBI will be submitting evidence to the government's [COVID-Status Certification Review](#) and will expect close coordination of any domestic scheme with the Global Travel Taskforce and an internationally-coordinated role for vaccine certificates.
- Any tiering system for travel to different international destinations must be in step with FCDO travel advice guidance.

2. Simple and effective border arrangements that will not obstruct reopening efforts.

- Changes to restrictions on international travel will drive a significant uptick in numbers of people travelling into and out of the UK. To safely meet this demand, current procedures at border points will need to be streamlined, while UK Border Force will need to update practices for best managing resources.
- Testing and checks need to happen upstream from arrival points, while journeys should be frictionless.
- The government must simplify and digitalise Passenger Locator Forms (PLFs), enabling passengers to centralise all required information in one place, as well as providing operators with a 'go', or 'no go' signal before travel.
- Where necessary, or not already covered by mode of travel, arrivals from high and low risk destinations should be segregated at border points to mitigate both the risk of any cross infection at a confluence point of arriving passengers and to avoid un-necessary queues and disruption to passengers requiring greater scrutiny on arrival.
- For travel from low-risk countries, not all PLFs will require inspection and there should be efforts to return to business as usual, including through reopening e-gates. PLFs must be available in a wide range of languages.

¹ UK government data, available [here](#).

² IATA survey data, available [here](#).

3. Consistent communications to business and consumers that can inspire confidence and enable effective resource management.

- To rebuild consumer confidence and give businesses along supply chains time to plan ahead, the government should look to improve how it communicates changes to international travel regulations.
- The uncertainty about when destinations would change status and short notice changes made last year had a massive impact on businesses across the UK. Short notice changes disrupted movements of essential staff, cancelled bookings at short notice, and made it impossible for firms to plan capacity ahead with any certainty.
- Similarly, short notice periods and inconsistent standards about changes to classification of destinations dampened consumer confidence in booking travel to and from the UK, stifling recovery for a longtail of businesses in the supply chain. Businesses that rely on UK-inbound travel were particularly hard hit.
- When the conclusions of the Global Travel Taskforce are made public, businesses involved in delivering international travel need advanced warning of the reopening to ramp up capacity to meet new demand, including by taking staff off furlough and re-engaging mothballed fleets. Business will need a clear road map that sets out when different destinations could be classified as low risk for travel so that they can plan to meet demand.
- Similarly, when government risk classifications for travel to and from countries change, where possible this should be communicated with sufficient notice of at least a week in advance. This can help avoid bottlenecks as UK residents rush back to the country, as well as provide greater certainty for businesses planning travel.
- As far as possible, changes to exemptions to restrictions also need to be communicated with greater notice. The government should consider increasing the number of exemptions for business-critical movements of staff.
- Where possible the government should consider reintroducing exemptions for those that regularly work in the UK, living abroad, as well as for high value business travellers. These travellers will be essential for restarting domestic growth by leading UK business to recovery and bringing foreign direct investment back into the country. The government should also review the long list of other exemptions, ensuring that business critical movements, such as deliveries by freight aircraft, are not impeded by restrictions.
- Alongside all these changes, the government should gradually adjust its messaging about international travel in line with changes to risk, challenging false conceptions and promoting safe travel as an important step in the recovery. Ministerial speculation in public about whether UK residents should book foreign holidays needs to end.

4. A platform for UK leadership in reopening global traffic, supporting, amongst others, the country's world-leading aerospace, international high speed rail and maritime sectors.

- Most of all, firms see reopening international travel to and from the country as a fantastic opportunity for the UK to lead the world and reap the economic benefits of its hugely successful vaccination programme.
- The UK is home to the world's second largest aerospace sector, as well as growing international rail and maritime industries – setting the standards for an international restart to travel is in the interest of jobs across the country, with large concentrations of employment in these industries focussed outside London and the South East.
- Similarly, getting the right procedures in place to reopen key passenger trade routes to the US, the UAE, Singapore and elsewhere will be to the competitive advantage of firms across the country from professional services through to advanced manufacturing. This is particularly true for routes to the UK regions that are more vulnerable to scheduling changes by cash-strapped international operators.
- The Global Travel Taskforce needs to map out a way forward for the government to negotiate both bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements to restart travel. This could involve initially trialling travel corridors to key markets, such as New York, Singapore, Dubai and high-volume leisure destinations, before presenting a set of common standards to the G7 in June.
- Businesses expect the UK to lead on engagement to secure mutual recognition of vaccination and testing standards across the world, including through recognition of health data sharing apps such as IATA's Travel Pass Initiative, Verify and the CommonPass.
- For the benefit of UK exporters, the government needs to build off the conclusions of the Global Travel Taskforce and play a truly activist role at ICAO, the WHO and other international fora in agreeing internationally recognised standards for restarting travel.
- In all of this, the government must act in close cooperation with EU partner countries. This is because these countries represent the vast majority of travel to and from the UK and a large share of the economic value from travel. Working in partnership with the EU, the UK's voice will be louder and global cooperation will be easier – opening the door for a safe international restart to travel in the interest of business and society at large.

Overall, business recognises that the Global Travel Taskforce marks only the beginning of what may be a long and at times difficult road to reopening international travel into and out of the UK, as well as across the world. After the conclusions of the taskforce are published on 12th April, business will expect a similar cross-departmental approach to problem-solving barriers to international travel to continue until travel returns to some level of new normal across the world.

For businesses across the economy, the stakes could not be higher, while for firms involved in the delivery of international travel the re-opening process represents their opportunity to trade their way to recovery. A successful reopening during the summer of 2021 will be essential for the survival of many international travel operators that continue to face significant cashflow pressures and have been unable to secure sufficient support to meet high fixed costs while restrictions are in place. Businesses of all sectors and sizes will be watching the conclusions of the taskforce closely, as well as supporting the government as it takes steps to lead the world on restarting international travel.