

Letter to Airlines - 7th April 2022

Operational Impacts of Staff Shortages

I am sure you will share my concerns about the experiences that many consumers flying from the UK have experienced in recent days. As we emerge from the worst of the pandemic and consumers take advantage of the freedom to travel, instances of late notice cancellations and excessive delays at airports are not just distressing for affected consumers but have the potential to impact confidence levels across the industry, at just the point when passengers are returning to flying.

The last two years have been very challenging for the industry and the large fall in traffic volumes has led to many colleagues leaving the industry. We are aware that many of you are having to recruit large numbers of new colleagues to provide a good service to passengers as traffic volumes return this Spring and Summer. We know that you are working hard to recruit these new colleagues, but it is clear that this has not always happened sufficiently quickly to cope with the increased passenger travel in recent days. Given the consequences for passengers of cancelled and disrupted journeys I encourage you to do all you can to ensure that you have the necessary level of appropriately trained and cleared staff resources in place.

I am writing to you today to set out the CAA's expectation that airlines and airports will work closely together to manage the resourcing challenges, whatever the cause, to ensure that the required capacity levels are achieved, and disruption is kept to a minimum. We appreciate that it is not always possible to anticipate all the challenges that may arise on any particular day, but where capacity constraints can be predicted in advance, we would expect co-operation between all parties to determine the best outcomes for consumers.

It is also very important that airlines are setting their own schedules on a basis that is deliverable given available staff (including contractors), and has resilience for staff sickness, including from Covid. Airlines need to be working particularly closely with their contractors, such as ground handlers, to have confidence that they have staffing in place to deliver your planned schedule.

Where capacity is unavoidably restricted, we expect this co-operative planning to identify problems sufficiently in advance so as to allow pre-emptive cancellations. At a minimum, we would like to see passengers given notice so that they do not travel to airports unnecessarily and are able to make alternative arrangements where possible and appropriate. I would also like to take the opportunity to remind you of your legal obligations to provide passengers with information about their rights when flights are disrupted, to provide care and assistance during the disruption and to offer passengers a choice of refund or alternative travel

arrangements at the earliest opportunity, including flights on other airlines, or a new flight at a later date at the passenger's convenience.

As you will be aware, this legal obligation also covers the right to claim compensation where the flight is cancelled with less than 14 days' notice and passengers are not offered re-routing within the required timeframes. We expect this obligation would apply where you have cancelled the flight due to your own staffing issues. Where the cancellation has been made at the request of the airport, depending on the particular circumstances, extraordinary circumstances may apply if you could not have avoided the cancellation even if you had taken all reasonable measures. Where such issues are ongoing, and cancellations are repeatedly being requested by airports, this could be a failure of planning and co-operation, which may have consequences for whether compensation is payable. Please find attached guidance on this law, also available on our website.

I am also writing to the airports today to set out our expectations on co-operation and will be stressing the importance of accessibility provisions for passengers with reduced mobility. We also expect airlines to be mindful of those who require additional assistance and to act to the best of their abilities to provide the required support.

My colleagues will be in touch shortly to seek more information on your experience of staffing issues and the measures that you are taking to avoid disruption, including in relation to co-operation with airports.

In the meantime, I hope that through effective planning and resilience management, any staff related disruption that you are experiencing is short lived. After the stress and constraints of the last 2 years, millions of UK consumers are looking forward to getting away and I am sure that you share our vision for hassle-free, accessible air travel for 2022 and beyond, and please feel free to get in touch if you wish to discuss these issues with myself or the team.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Moriarty
CHIEF EXECUTIVE