

British Air Line Pilots' Association
BALPA House
5 Heathrow Boulevard
278 Bath Road
West Drayton
UB7 0DQ

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8476 4000
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8476 4077
Email: balpa@balpa.org

www.balpa.org
www.facebook.com/BALPApilots
www.twitter.com/BALPApilots



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Rd
Westminster
London
SW1A 2HQ

SENT VIA EMAIL

4th May 2020

Dear Chancellor

CRISIS IN AVIATION

BALPA is the UK's recognised professional association and trade union for commercial airline pilots with 10,600 active pilots in membership and negotiating rights in all major UK airlines. BALPA is the largest national pilot association in Europe and the second largest in the world. Our focus is on the safety and standards of aviation as well as the employment and careers of professional airline pilots.

I am writing to you to highlight the crisis in aviation caused by the state and public responses to the Coronavirus which have resulted in an enforced reduction in passenger air travel and the near grounding of UK airlines. Not only has this meant short term pay reductions for pilots and other aviation workers – up to 70% reductions for pilots in some cases – it has also seen airlines taking the opportunity to bring forward proposals for job losses and attacks on terms and conditions while their employees are still furloughed. I believe Government has not recognised the crisis in aviation and has not done enough to prevent what is now happening, a death spiral that could severely damage UK aviation. Given the need for this critical sector to help the economy out of the Coronavirus paralysis and the imminence of full Brexit there must be a role for Government to play.

At the start of the Corona Virus crisis in February one of the first industries to be affected was aviation. Flybe's collapse on 6 March was precipitated by the Coronavirus crisis and despite promises of help from several Secretaries of State¹ none was in fact forthcoming and Flybe went into administration on 6 March, with the thousands of jobs there being the first significant casualties of this current crisis.

¹ Flybe saved as ministers agree last-ditch £106m rescue deal, *The Times*, 14 January 2020;
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/flybe-saved-as-ministers-agree-last-ditch-106m-rescue-deal-f32tnwzwb>

On 17 March you said:

“Some sectors are facing particularly acute challenges. In the coming days, my colleague the Secretary of State for Transport and I will discuss a potential support package for specifically airlines and airports.... we will do whatever it takes.”

But no specific support for aviation has emerged. So that is twice the Government has reneged on vital promises made to the aviation sector.

Instead airlines are being treated like every other firm despite unique long-term vulnerability, and high importance to the UK economy and to our recovery. Aviation is, in the Government’s own words, “at the heart of the United Kingdom’s economic success” and that it contributes “at least £22 billion to the UK economy, along with over 230,000 jobs.”²

On 20 March 2020 you said:

“To all those at home right now, anxious about the days ahead, I say this: you will not face this alone.

“But getting through this will require a collective national effort, with a role for everyone to play – people, businesses and government.

“It’s on all of us.

“...The first part of our plan is to protect people’s jobs.”³

In the past week companies in the aviation sector have announced 23,000 proposed job losses. What is more, these were announced without consultation, in breach of long-standing agreements, in a way which is potentially unlawful and contrary to the terms of the JRS. In good faith pilots and other staff agreed to accept pay cuts to protect their jobs and keep their airlines running only to be faced with savage job cuts anyway. This surely goes against everything the Government has said.

On 26 April 2020 the Department for Transport repeated that individual airlines could apply for help individually through the normal schemes⁴. This change of approach both fails to meet your 17 March promise and is in any event surely flawed. A piecemeal approach is not going to do it. Aviation is highly competitive and commercial decisions are taken based on a myriad of factors including slots availability, route demand, economic outlook and crucially competition. How can the Government properly evaluate a support application from one airline in isolation from what other airlines are doing or without even knowing if and when countries will reopen their borders?

This is an industry crying out for strategic, sector-level support from Government and a period of calm and stability during which an holistic assessment can be made of the pathway through and out of the COVID crisis covering airlines, airports and the aviation supply chain. Indeed the

² *Aviation 2050: The future of UK aviation*, HM Government, Cm9714, December 2018, pg 6; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/769696/aviation-2050-print.pdf

³ The Chancellor Rishi Sunak provides an updated statement on coronavirus, 20 March 2020; <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-chancellor-rishi-sunak-provides-an-updated-statement-on-coronavirus>

⁴ Branson’s Virgin Atlantic in virus bailout talks, BBC News; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52431290>

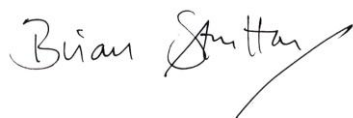
Government has started to establish such a body (although I suggest it is an error that only one seat is available for all the trade unions covering the whole of aviation).

I therefore call for the Government to insist on a moratorium on job cuts and opportunistic attacks on terms and conditions while a proper plan for aviation is drawn up and agreed among all stakeholders. This will ensure that airlines do not damage themselves by precipitately overcorrecting to this crisis at the wrong time; do not put the whole UK economic recovery at risk; and will ensure fair competition across the industry and protect the hundreds of thousands of jobs which make aviation a UK success story.

As the Prime Minister has said to businesses, “I hope you stick by your employees, because we’re all going to need them” and I trust this applies to the aviation sector too.

I look forward to your reply and stand ready to talk further to you and your officials on this as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Brian Strutton'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Brian Strutton
BALPA General Secretary

Cc The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, The Prime Minister, 10 Downing Street
The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, Department for Transport
Kelly Tolhurst MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Aviation, Department for Transport