

The Right Honourable Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33, Horseferry Road
London SW1P 2AA



By email: transportsecretary@dft.gov.uk

2 December 2021

Dear Mr. Shapps

Aviation, Omicron and Winter 21/22

Despite welcome progress in the summer towards normal travel regulations, the latest Covid variant and increased restrictions have shattered the already fragile confidence that the public and businesses had in air travel. BALPA supports the Government's desire to protect the population through effective measures and without needlessly causing economic harm, so we welcomed the Health Secretary's assurances that these additional restrictions would be removed if this variant is no more a threat than the Delta variant.

You will be fully aware of the challenges faced by aviation as a result of this pandemic and that we are far, far from being in the clear yet. As an example, this week EasyJet announced losses of over £1bn sustained over the last year and its shares fell close to their lowest level in more than a year, following the announcement of more stringent restrictions.

The challenges to our industry look set to worsen, so it is right that Government takes new action to support us through these uncertain weeks and months ahead. BALPA's immediate asks of Government are:

1. All mandatory tests for travellers to be provided free by the NHS and not 'cowboy' private testing companies, whose profits will largely be made off the backs of families re-connecting over the holidays, many for the first time since Covid. The cost to Treasury would be negligible and the expensive, inconsistent and poor reputation of private testing providers has long been an inhibiting – and at times entirely prohibitive - factor for travellers.
2. Additional restrictions must be only data led, ensuring effective border controls do their job whilst allowing safe travel to resume. The Government has published no data to justify the latest restrictions, which the World Health Organisation has spoken out against.
3. Provide a Winter Resilience Fund to provide an 'airbridge' of funding for cash strapped airlines and other aviation companies that continue to be loss making, yet need to provide high levels of regular training to maintain vital skills with expensive to run equipment, such as cockpit simulators.

Support to aviation dried up at the end of Summer, yet the principle of supporting loss-making industries whilst Government restrictions prevent business as usual applies as much now as it ever did. These support measures will carry us through this uncertainty and ensure we are able to compete with the rest of the world come Summer 2022, when we hope to take the UK's ambitions to every corner of the globe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Chalk". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Captain Martin Chalk
BALPA General Secretary

cc: **The Right Hon Sajid Javid MP**, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Robert Courts MP, Minister for Aviation at the Department for Transport
Lord Balfe, BALPA Honorary President
Lord Whitty, BALPA Honorary Vice-President