



Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Global Travel Task Force](#), HC 1341

Wednesday 14 April 2021

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Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Simon Jupp; Chris Loder; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–111

Witnesses

I: Brian Strutton, General Secretary, British Airline Pilots Association; Simon McNamara, UK & Ireland Country Manager, International Air Transport Association; Mark Tanzer, Chief Executive, Association of British Travel Agents; and Chris Garton, Chief Solutions Officer, Heathrow Airport.

II: Robert Courts MP, Minister for Aviation, Maritime and Security, Department for Transport.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Brian Strutton, Simon McNamara, Mark Tanzer and Chris Garton

Q1 **Chair:** This is the Transport Committee's oral evidence session on the Global Travel Task Force report into the ability for international travel to be opened up. We are very grateful that we have four witnesses on our first panel this morning, and I will start by asking them to introduce themselves.

Brian Strutton: Good morning, Chair and everybody. I am Brian Strutton. I am the general secretary of the British Airline Pilots Association.

Simon McNamara: Good morning, Chair and Committee members. I am Simon McNamara from the International Air Transport Association, IATA. I am responsible for IATA's UK and Ireland activities.

Mark Tanzer: Good morning, everybody. I am Mark Tanzer, chief executive of ABTA, the travel association.

Chris Garton: Good morning, Chair and Committee members. My name is Chris Garton. I am the chief solutions officer at Heathrow airport.

Q2 **Chair:** Good morning to all four of you. Thank you very much for being with us.

The Transport Select Committee held an inquiry last year and published a report in July with regard to the support that might be required for international travel and the travel industry. We followed that up with another report in March, in anticipation of the Prime Minister's road map and the Global Travel Task Force reporting.

We are grateful that we have another session this morning. We want to talk with you about what the task force report means for your industry and your members. We also want to drill in on some detail with regard to testing requirements, certification of vaccination, what the summer will look like for travel and what support the industry may need, if indeed travel is still very difficult to deliver.

You will have obviously been through the travel task force report. Can I ask for your views on the report and whether it will allow for summer travel to be unlocked? Going in reverse order, I will ask Chris for Heathrow's perspective.

Chris Garton: Certainly. Thank you. We welcome the Global Travel Task Force report and adopting a risk-based approach to restarting travel. We have some concerns to ensure that the controls applied to those risks are consistent with the risk. As you mentioned, Chair, we would seek further discussion with Government about the testing regime that is proposed.

Our biggest issue, in terms of the summer particularly, is performance at the border. We need to see a dramatic improvement in border



performance if we are to increase passenger numbers travelling through Heathrow. Our other comment would be that the report does not clarify who is travelling where and when. We are seeking more detail as quickly as we can, so that we can plan and be ready for 17 May onwards.

We are hopeful that the report will enable passengers to return to flying, because it is in the best interests of all of us to have passengers safely flying again.

Q3 Chair: Thank you very much. I will continue with my reverse order, which I have forgotten actually, but I think it would be you, Mark Tanzer.

Mark Tanzer: Our members welcome the report as a step forward, but the devil really is in the detail and there is a lot of detail that is still needed. It is not just a list of countries, and which countries are green, amber and red, but how the framework is actually going to be used in practice. How countries will be moved from one category to another is important for the industry's planning and for consumer confidence.

Of course, there is an enormous amount of work that still needs to be done to operationalise—to use that word—what is in the report, and to enable the industry to get started after 17 May. We welcome recognition that vaccine certification is an important part of the solution, but moving from that recognition to an actual working system is an awful lot of work. I guess I cannot emphasise enough the urgency of pushing forward with this, given the state of the industry, which has been in suspension for over a year. The fact that we have gone through Easter and out the other side with international travel being illegal means that there is even more pressure on the summer season. A week lost is vital for a lot of members who could be teetering on the brink.

We welcome the report. There are some good things in it that we had called for, but there is still an awful lot of work to be done.

Q4 Chair: Thank you. Simon, moving over to you, Mark touched on the fact that the report is welcome but there are still many questions that arise in terms of allowing you and your members to fly over the summer. Is that a real concern for you and your members?

Simon McNamara: It is, Chair. There was a tremendous amount of expectation from the report. We expected it to be, if you like, the start of the sprint to the finish, but it has turned out to be another milestone. That is the disappointment in it.

It has provided a framework and some clarity, but there are many areas that are still unanswered. Some of those were alluded to by Heathrow and ABTA. It is very vague in many areas, such as the timescales for when the border will be ready and which countries will fall into which category. Crucially, we believe that the approach to reopening is still too complex and too cautious. We have to call that out. We are approaching a point where the pandemic in the UK is under control. We have good protections in place, with testing and with vaccination, and we think that



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we can open in a faster but safe way. That is the detail we are lacking and that we need to get into.

From our perspective, it is especially about the green and amber categories. It is about the cost types and frequency of testing. It is particularly about the lack of recognition of vaccinated passengers, which there is no reference to at all in the report, and alleviating those vaccinated passengers from any quarantine. Finally, there is the point that Chris raised, which is the ability of the border to handle any scale-up in operations. It is unable to cope at the moment, so we are very concerned about that too.

Q5 Chair: Simon, thank you. Brian, are your members gearing up to do more work over the summer? I bumped into one of your members—a pilot for British Airways—who is just flying once a month. What do you think the expectation will be now for your members in terms of flying hours?

Brian Strutton: The report was a bitter disappointment to everybody working in the industry. The expectation was that it would be the blueprint to get summer flying going again. In fact, it is not. It is a jam tomorrow report: “We might let you know next month where you can fly to.” As to when, there is no specificity in it at all. As a result, many airlines have already told us that they will be curtailing the plans that they had for the summer.

As you know, aviation is already 95% down on passenger flying compared to the pre-coronavirus crisis. This means that it is going to continue. There have already been 3,000 pilot job losses over the past 12 months. We have had two airline failures. I am really concerned for our airlines and our whole aviation sector this summer.

Q6 Chair: Thanks to all of you for the opener. I will ask two specific questions before I hand over to Members.

Simon, you touched on this. Were you very surprised that we have a traffic light system by 12 April, but we do not know which countries go into which light? It is going to be incredibly difficult for anyone to book a holiday for summer if they do not know what the rules of the road are going to be.

Simon McNamara: Yes, I mentioned that. The report talks about early May; it does not even give a hard date for when the classification will be set. We accept that the list of countries is going to change between now and 17 May, for sure. Hopefully, it is going to get better and more will move into amber and green, and so on, but we would like that as early as possible.

Airlines cannot just turn on flight operations at the drop of a hat. They cannot just sell tickets at the drop of a hat. They need a lead time, just as we do as consumers and ordinary people. We do not choose to go on a business trip or to visit friends and relatives, or even a holiday,



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tomorrow. We need several weeks as a minimum. The earliest opportunity that that list can be published will give assurance, both to business and to customers, as well as to the flying public.

Q7 Chair: The next question may be for Mark and Chris. The Government have talked about partnership with industry in coming up with this report. I want to ask you a little bit about the interaction you had. First, did you have discussions with Government? Does this report lend itself to what you thought it would be from those discussions?

Mark Tanzer: Perhaps task force is the wrong definition in terms of our engagement with it. I felt that we were a large audience who were allowed to give our views about the challenges and the urgency, but then, from our perspective, it was taken away from that group and the Government decided to do what the Government have decided to do. I do not feel particular ownership of the conclusions of the report as a member of the task force, if I can put it like that. It was done in a short time, but I felt that there could have been a deeper level of engagement in the solutions than perhaps we were given, given the timeframe.

Q8 Chair: Chris, can I take you to the task force terms of reference when it was set up? According to the Government, "we'll work with a range of businesses covering aviation...and the tourism sector to develop the report." That lends itself more to the fact that this was a report formed in partnership with industry. Has it really been the case that you have just given your views, and those may or may not have been accepted?

Chris Garton: We have definitely supported the work of the Government in this, and we have really tried hard to play our part. Last summer, we were working hard on testing. We subsequently worked on the risk-based process. It was something that we had been advocating for a while.

I would agree with Mark on the recommendations of the report. Although we accept the recommendations, what we do not see is the action to now implement those recommendations, particularly against the timescale. That is our major concern. How do we now get action so that we get passengers flying safely again?

Chair: Thank you all. We are going to continue with the questioning on the report itself. I will hand over to Lilian Greenwood to do just that.

Q9 Lilian Greenwood: Thanks, Chair. Good morning to all our witnesses. I want to ask you about the impact of the traffic light system on your services and your customers. First, I wondered whether you had any sense of how often the traffic lights might change.

Simon, as you just said, we do not know at the moment who is in which category. Potentially, the categories might change in the month ahead. Do you have a sense of how often the traffic lights might change? I am presuming that they might change more frequently than the three checkpoints that the Government have set out; those seem to be broader. Is that your understanding?



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Simon McNamara: Yes. As far as we understand it from the report and our discussions with Government, those three checkpoints are to look at the overall policy. We would expect the traffic light system to change frequently, depending on the evidence from other countries.

What we asked for specifically on that was a number of things. The first was that the Government are very transparent with it and publish where countries are moving—their direction of travel. Are they moving from amber towards green? In other words, is travel there becoming more likely, or indeed are they moving the other way? That is why we welcomed the green watchlist, for example, that is mentioned in there.

Equally, what is very important is when the roll-over happens. I do not know if you remember last year when we had travel corridors. We had 48 hours' notice and a roll-over on a Saturday morning, so you had people rushing for flights. We asked for a week's notice minimum and a roll-over on a Monday or a Tuesday to allow people to have enough time to plan, if their trips were going, and to keep it stable. Stability, predictability and transparency are absolutely key, for customers as well as businesses.

Q10 Lilian Greenwood: What will it mean for your customers if a country changes from, say, green to amber while they are away on their visit or holiday? What is your understanding?

Simon McNamara: Obviously, the regime would change. I guess that we are going to get into the detail of the two regimes for green and amber. The reason we asked for maximum transparency is that people need to know what the risk is. If they go away on a trip, is there a risk that that country may move from green to amber and, if so, what are the consequences for them, whether that be testing or quarantine? People need to be able to make informed decisions and understand that. We did not really have that last year. I do not know if you remember Spain coming off the travel corridor list at the drop of a hat. People had to have 14 days' quarantine. We need transparency, so that people understand very clearly what happens when countries move between categories.

Q11 Lilian Greenwood: Mark, would you advise people not to book a holiday on the green watchlist? What resources do you have if a country changes designation while someone is away on their trip?

Mark Tanzer: The most immediate impact would be that they were subject to quarantine on their return. I think if a country is on a green watchlist and people think it might move into amber, they will certainly take that into account when they make their booking, or not.

There are two things. One is that we want to avoid the sudden stop-start that we had last summer, when we were turned on and off. Every week we looked at the list to see where we could fly, and that did not really work for the industry or customers.

The other point is that the amber category is everything in this report. Green, amber and red sounds like something we are all familiar with in



traffic lights, but actually amber, in the way it is described at the moment, is a light red. It is a big deterrent to people to have 10 days' quarantine on return, with testing and everything else. The step up from green to amber is not a modulated progress to red; it is a big step. It is understanding what is going to go into that decision and how often it will be reviewed.

What we have found is that, once something is put into a higher risk category, it tends to stick there because the political and health consequences of moving it back down to green are seen as quite debilitating. We have found that with Foreign Office advice previously. The decision to move something from green to amber, or to put it in amber in the beginning, is critical for how quickly travel will be able to get going and how much confidence consumers will have in the booking process.

Q12 Lilian Greenwood: There was some suggestion in the media that only the USA, the Maldives, Israel and Malta might be in the green list. How concerned would you be if that was the case? Presumably very, because that does not include some of the major tourist destinations from the UK.

Mark Tanzer: That is absolutely correct. Those countries are desperate to have us, and we are desperate to go there. We would like to see the green category as expansive as possible. We understand that from a health perspective it is a kind of "Proceed with caution" time, and I hope it will develop over the summer. I think, if we err too much on the side of caution, it will have some very devastating effects on the travel and aviation sector. Getting that balance right and keeping it under review, but recognising the developments in vaccine levels here and overseas, is critical to get the green category as expansive as possible.

Q13 Lilian Greenwood: What resources do you have to deal with the situation? If a country moves from green to amber while someone is away, presumably a lot of people would think, "Oh my goodness, I can't afford to take 10 days off work or 10 days self-isolating when I get home. I want to get home quicker." Would you be able to deal with that, or would you be saying to people, "Look, if you go I am afraid—"? I don't know. What would you say to customers who asked that question?

Mark Tanzer: There are customers who are yet to go. What we have found is that a lot of our members have introduced more flexible booking conditions because they recognise that the situation changes from country to country, so the ability to rebook is easier than it has been historically for people who are yet to travel. Those who are already out there can, if they want, try to get home before the gate comes down. If it was like last year, when you had 48 hours' notice, you would try to jump on a flight, but otherwise you will come back as per your travel arrangements and you will then have to go into quarantine. That is why amber is such a big step up from green. We need to be very watchful about how ready we are to put people into that situation and countries into the amber category.



Q14 Lilian Greenwood: Is it the notice period between saying that something is going to move and it actually moving? That seems pretty critical. If it is a week, there is probably a reasonable chance that people might be travelling back, although I guess most people go on holiday for two weeks. If it is a couple of days, that really puts pressure on, doesn't it?

Mark Tanzer: That was the situation last year. We would get a notification on the Thursday and at the weekend the gate would come down. There was very little ability for people to get back.

My understanding is that the Government are aware that that is damaging. Some of the factors that are going to be taken into account in categorising countries, such as the quality of data, the ability for genome sequencing in the destination and the existence of variants, are slower moving than last year's infection rates, when suddenly you would get a spike and everything changed.

I hope that, however the categorisation works, they will be able to take a more measured view of how it is developing, and the industry and customers will be able to see the direction that things are moving, rather than just waiting every week for a Government report on which country is in which category. I hope we will not have the spiking effect that we had last year of people rushing home. They will be able to see more clearly what the trajectory is.

Q15 Lilian Greenwood: Chris, I could see you nodding. In recent weeks, we have seen some chaotic scenes at airports—for example, in Islamabad when the designation there changed, such that people would have to go into a quarantine hotel when they returned. Do you think that countries moving from one traffic light to another could spark such scenes at other international airports under this system?

Chris Garton: Yes, I do. I think we saw some of that, as Mark was describing, last year. As the rules changed, there was a scramble for passengers to get home, for whom the consequences of quarantine were not going to be acceptable. We have seen some of that this year as well.

It puts additional pressure on the border. The point all of the witnesses this morning have made is that aviation is one of those industries that relies a lot on planning. The longer the lead time we can have, the better prepared and ready we are to serve customers. Obviously, if the rules change overnight that is very difficult for us.

Part of what we are pushing for with the GTTF is to argue that, if the risk is very low, let's make sure that the controls are correspondingly low in their impact. There is no benefit in having really tight controls in a very low-risk environment. Just as we have suggested that amber has shades of red, we believe that the green category has shades of amber. We have a lot of testing. We know that that is to do with variants of concern, but we all aspire to a category beyond green, where we return to safe travel



not based on testing and quarantine. We have yet to reach that category, but we want to start on that path this summer, to get back to travel as we know it.

Q16 Lillian Greenwood: You are very concerned about lack of certainty, but isn't there a danger that the Government might almost move more quickly to put something from green to amber to avoid having to make a more rushed decision? They might become more ultra-cautious. Is that a danger? Is that a worry?

Chris Garton: The worry of any risk-based process is if we adopt a zero-risk approach. That is when you will see those sorts of changes occur. This is where we need to get the criteria established to say, "What are we going to use to change the risk category?" As I think Mark said, some of the criteria that we would now use—vaccination rates and so on—are slower moving than the infection rates we saw last year. Potentially, last year was a worst case for us. Hopefully now, with the watchlist, we will get more notice, but something we would really welcome is having more notice to be able to plan our changes and to be ready, so that we offer the service to the passenger.

Q17 Lillian Greenwood: That leads me to my final question. Was the Global Travel Task Force an effective way of facilitating communication between the aviation and travel industries and the UK Government? Simon, you said to them that certainty is key. Has this worked as a way of ensuring that your concerns and priorities are going to be addressed in the policy?

Simon McNamara: Certainly, we had good engagement. At the end of the day, what came out was less than we hoped. I think that is where everything that we wanted has not been taken into account, but by all means we were able to have our opportunity to input. Government then went away and wrote the report. There was a period when we had no influence and no ability to debate before the GTTF report was published. There was a gap when we were not with them all the way to the end. I think there is now a lot of work to be done and questions still to be answered.

Coming back to Chris's point, the key thing is the quarantine requirement in amber, which we think could be removed with a sensible, rapid, testing-based regime. That is the killer; people will not travel if there is a risk of quarantine. We see that from polling. Approximately 84% of passengers that we polled said they would not travel if they were subject to quarantine on return.

Q18 Lillian Greenwood: But that part of the task force report is clear on what the three categories require. You are right that it is a massive step up from green to amber. The difference between amber and red is that one is quarantining at home and one is quarantining in a hotel. That is a big difference, particularly in relation to cost and convenience, but both of them require you to have 10 days where, potentially, you would not be able to go out.



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Brian, how do you see the task force operating? Has it been effective, or was it not the best way to do it?

Brian Strutton: As a trade union group in the aviation sector, led by the TUC, we had one meeting with task force officials. It was a pretty perfunctory meeting. That was all the input and the consultation that we had. I think across all the unions I can safely say that we were pretty disappointed with the level of engagement, let alone, as other contributors have said, whether we were listened to or not. We did not have much contact or engagement.

I will give you a practical example. On 29 March, it was announced that, for the first time, pilots and other crew would have to go through testing, and that that would start in seven days' time on 6 April. We did not even know about it, let alone have any consultation about it. It is not just task force discussions, but the practicalities around it as well. It has been very disappointing.

Lilian Greenwood: Thanks.

Q19 **Chair:** Simon, I want to touch on one point before I move to specific requirements for travel and the impediments. The Government are obviously saying that they are looking to open up flying, but do you think there is a danger that they are paying lip service to opening up in circumstances where they are actually making it impossible for people to do so because of the need to self-isolate? As you said yourself, your sampling suggests that people just will not fly if there is a requirement to self-isolate.

Simon McNamara: It comes back to my point at the beginning. What we have is an overly cautious approach. We have effectively got red and amber as they were and as they are now, and a new green category that has testing still in it. It is an overly cautious approach.

The point Chris made was that, by definition, there will be countries where the risk is extremely low. Therefore, you want interventions that are equally low and reflect that. This framework moves the dial too much towards the zero-risk side. Zero risk is not something that we can accept for every sector of business. We have to get back to some—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: You warned me that your alarm would go off, Simon, and it did so just as you were speaking, but we got the gist of what you were saying. We will move on and go into some specifics. First, we will look at the testing regime, which has been touched on, and I am going to hand over to Ben Bradshaw.

Q20 **Mr Bradshaw:** Before we come to testing, could I ask for clarification from one of you? Is it your understanding that the legal ban on leaving the country will be lifted on 17 May? *[A witness says "Yes."]* So we will be able to get out, but how do we get back in? What is your best model for safe inbound travel at the moment in the Covid world? Where is it, and how does it work better than what the Government are proposing? I don't



mind who answers that first.

Chair: Perhaps we will go to Chris, seeing as logistics is your part.

Chris Garton: I can cite a couple of examples of the risk-based model being used elsewhere in the world. Between Australia and New Zealand, travel is just restarting with no testing and no quarantine because the risk in both countries is deemed low. I think the virus has been eliminated there. We have seen examples of the United States to Hawaii, where pre-departure testing was used.

The reason that we, as an industry, are interested in pre-departure testing is that it fits with the way that aviation has inherently been designed to operate, with all of the processes carried out pre-departure to enable frictionless travel through the rest of the journey. Our preference is towards pre-departure testing, where testing is needed, but as the risk reduces, and vaccination and so on increases, we would argue that the need for testing can in turn be reduced. That was my point. As we safely restart, and we all share that objective, we need to keep under review the controls that we are using to make sure that they are appropriate for the risk that we are facing.

Q21 **Mr Bradshaw:** Part of the Government's proposals is what I call pre-return testing. One of the problems we had last summer was that the Government were insisting that those tests could only be in English, French and Spanish? Is that still the case, and will it remain the case? How much of a problem does that present to you in countries like Greece and Italy, where it is very difficult to get test results in English?

Chris Garton: It is difficult, and there is more work needed to make sure that passengers who are travelling, whose first language is not one of the languages that you mentioned, have the ability to understand the rules in their own language. Pre-departure testing is widely available now, but we have some concerns about the type of test.

Testing technology has moved on massively in the last 12 months. It has been really impressive to see how that has changed. The Government, in their report, have returned to talk about PCR testing, which needs a laboratory and trained medical staff. It takes lots of time and it is very expensive. If PCR testing becomes our standard for this summer, my fear is that it will dissuade hard-working families from wanting to travel because of the sheer cost of testing.

We have tried to advise as much as possible that there are alternatives. We could use cheaper tests to understand whether a particular person is infectious or not, and then, if necessary, to find out about variants. By all means follow up with a PCR test, but we think that a blanket approach of applying a PCR test to every traveller, when many of them will be negative by the very nature of vaccination and the reduction in infection rates, is a waste of money, particularly for travellers.

Q22 **Mr Bradshaw:** There have been reports overnight about the potential of



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the price of PCR tests coming down. I think £60 was quoted in today's press. Is there any truth in that, and how widespread could it be? Our PCR tests seem to be much more expensive than PCR tests in most of the rest of Europe.

Chris Garton: I am sure there are opportunities, particularly as the scale increases. The fixed cost of the PCR test, as I understand it, is for the laboratory to do the analysis work. Other testing techniques do not require the same fixed-cost infrastructure, such as lateral flow testing. There are other versions of PCR. There is a type known as LAMP, which is more self-contained and quicker to perform. Those are beginning to have similar levels of accuracy, so that safety is ensured but at greatly reduced time and cost. PCR suffers from the cost element. Making it cheaper won't make it faster. It still takes time to get the results. We believe there is work that we can do as an industry, together with Government, to improve the testing regime.

Q23 **Mr Bradshaw:** As you say, other countries use lateral flow or antigen tests. Indeed, we do too for lorry drivers coming in from France, which has very high levels of infection and relatively low vaccination rates at the moment.

Chris Garton: Yes. There are a number of testing techniques available. We hope that the Government will review the testing regimes that they propose under the different traffic light categories. Our ambition is, clearly, to ensure safety for passengers to travel, but also to make sure that the risk is commensurate with the control. A PCR test for somebody travelling from a green country with very low levels of infection and high levels of vaccination does not seem an appropriate control for the risk.

Q24 **Mr Bradshaw:** Can I ask all of you how surprised and disappointed you are that what the Government are currently proposing, now that we have the vaccine, is more restrictive than the system we had last summer with air corridors? That seemed to work perfectly well for most of the summer. In a green country, for example, you could go to and fro pretty freely last summer, whereas now you will be required, potentially, to take a test before you leave for the host country, a test before you come back and then another PCR test after you get back. Wasn't the vaccine supposed to lead us to enjoy more freedom?

Mark Tanzer: I completely agree with that. It is over-cautious and does not recognise the huge change that vaccination has created. Last year, they were concerned about the specificity of lateral flow tests, but you are now laying that on a population who have been increasingly vaccinated. Probabilities will multiply, so the chance of a lateral flow test and a vaccination programme letting someone through are very much reduced. Certainly, for the green category, the PCR test is a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

We would like to have no testing, but in the short term a cheaper and faster test, and if that were positive you could then proceed to a PCR test



if necessary. Otherwise, you are going to hobble the industry and stop people travelling, even though they have been vaccinated. They will say, "I've been through the vaccination process. You wanted me to get vaccinated and nothing has changed from last year." You will have a job explaining that to customers, as well as to the industry, which is really wanting to get moving.

Q25 **Mr Bradshaw:** Simon, do you have anything to add?

Simon McNamara: Yes. I want to make the point that the UK is absolutely not taking advantage of, first of all, the fact that it has protected the most vulnerable categories, one to nine, as was announced yesterday. It has an opportunity to lead. We have seen the US Centers for Disease Control say on 2 April that vaccinated passengers are no longer subject to any restrictions on quarantine. A further 22 countries globally are already announcing the easing of testing and quarantine restrictions for the vaccine. It seems illogical that the UK, which has such an advanced vaccine roll-out, is not doing the same. I think a key missing element from the road map is how vaccinated passengers are treated, and the fact that the UK is better protected.

We will probably come on to variants in a minute, which is one of the concerns, but there will be testing regimes. Testing picks up variants. We have very good track and trace controls in the UK to deal with that as well, as we have seen in the latest outbreak. The lack of treatment of vaccinated passengers is key, I think.

Q26 **Mr Bradshaw:** While we are on variants, Simon, isn't the Government's argument for the PCR test that it potentially picks up the new variants, whereas the lateral flow and antigen tests would not, and that is why they are insisting on the PCR test?

Simon McNamara: Yes, but we have worked with a couple of specialist health advisers, Edge Health and Oxera. They have done some work for us which shows that lateral flow testing is as good as PCR in picking up cases.

What we are saying is that, if you get a positive lateral flow or antigen test, you then have to go and have a PCR. Then you would capture the sequencing data. There is a confirmatory PCR test, and we think that is the right way of doing it. We must remember that the vast majority of people will be negative, and they have to have a simple, cheap and easy-to-administer test. Those who test positive will then have to go for the PCR test and the Government will capture the data.

Q27 **Mr Bradshaw:** We are, are we not, facing the extraordinary position where countries like Greece, Portugal and others will welcome us, either vaccinated or with a pre-arrival test, yet our own country will not take us back if we are vaccinated, without a test? It does not seem logical to a lot of people.



Simon McNamara: Even the report acknowledges that. Section 5 talks about the fact that the Government will facilitate passengers travelling to other countries in terms of vaccine certification and so on. It seems odd that it is not the other way round. There is a hint that they are looking at that. There is a promise there, and I think we need to capitalise on that and see if we can achieve something, ideally before 17 May, but at the very latest by the 28 June checkpoint.

Q28 Mr Bradshaw: We are going to come on to vaccination certificates in a moment. Before we do, I know that the red and orange is less of a concern immediately than the green because we want to get people flying again. How satisfied are you with the operation of the testing regime for people who have to quarantine, and the test-to-release scheme? Many of us have had constituency cases where people have gone through that experience, and the companies that the Government seem to have put on their approved list have not delivered. It has been chaotic and shambolic. People have had to stay in quarantine much longer than they otherwise would have done. Do any of you have any views or comments on your customers' experiences?

Simon McNamara: We have heard anecdotally that often tests have not been delivered on time or have been late. I think the way that the private testing providers are displayed on gov.uk, for example, could be improved a lot so that people can find out where their nearest test centre is, and so on.

It was stated last year that NHS testing capacity would not be used. There is an excess now. If there is an excess of testing capacity, there is a case to be made for allowing NHS capacity to be used, even if it is at cost. It could be charged, if that is the model they want to go down. The advantage there, of course, is that the Government quickly capture the data.

The other difficult thing for us, which has come out in the media in the last few days, is the levying of VAT on testing. That is another additional 20% cost on top, whereas if it is Government supplied or provided that problem does not occur.

Q29 Mr Bradshaw: Is it your impression that test to release is actually working? In my experience, most people seem to get to the stage where they do not think it is worth the money to have three fewer days in quarantine. Would you rather they got rid of that and had a shorter quarantine period, if there is a quarantine period at all?

Simon McNamara: We made the case last year that the maximum quarantine necessary would have been three days. We have evidence to show now that a single antigen test and zero quarantine is sufficient risk mitigation for lower-risk countries. I think test to release had its day last year. It has probably been slightly superseded now with the day two and eight tests, although of course for some people it will be a benefit to be able to get out earlier.



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Q30 **Mr Bradshaw:** Would you like to see the cost of the PCR test capped at the level that seems to be common in most other European countries, at £50 or £60?

Simon McNamara: Anything to drive down the cost. There is an issue in the UK. In some other countries, and in some work that we have done as well, typically a PCR test is between 50% and 80% cheaper, so something needs to happen about the cost of testing in the UK.

Q31 **Mr Bradshaw:** Chris, you mentioned the horrendous queues at immigration. What is the solution? Is it reopening the e-passport gates once people start travelling again? People are already, as I understand it, waiting six hours. Is that a common waiting period at immigration at the moment?

Chris Garton: We have typically had queues well in excess of two hours and up to six hours in recent days. There are two major steps. One is to try to reduce the transaction time at the border. What has happened is that there is a whole host of new checks; 100% checking of everybody has been introduced. That has obviously put a tremendous burden on the officers who work at the border. The Home Office has not provided them with additional officers.

The second area is that it always was a problem to process passengers at the border from a resource point of view. We would like to see more resources at the border anyway, but Covid has just made that so much worse than it was before. The situation is becoming untenable. We are starting to see disruption among some of the arriving passengers. If you are made to queue for two to three hours, it is not something you want to do. We are even having to involve the police service to help us. We want that bottleneck removed as quickly as possible. It is a problem today, but it will become a much bigger problem after 17 May.

As you say, the solution is to make sure that before you travel to the UK your entry is assured. That is where the risk-based process is best applied. You make sure that you have filled out your passenger locator form and that it is automated so that, if you have put the wrong reference in, it is corrected before you submit it; and it is linked to the e-gate so that when you arrive you flow, as you would normally, through the e-gates rather than having to line up and present your paperwork to a rather overstretched border official.

Q32 **Mr Bradshaw:** There is just one other question I forgot to ask of either Simon or Mark. Would you favour an islands policy again, like last year, so that, if there were low cases and high vaccination rates in the Greek Islands or the Balearics, they would be treated differently from the Spanish or Greek mainland?

Mark Tanzer: Yes, we would. Beyond the islands, a more regional approach to risk definition is required. In America, they have very different situations across the whole continent. To have one category for the whole of America does not make sense. We would welcome that.



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Last year, there was a sense in the Government that people would game the system, and that if you did it on a regional basis someone might go to Seville and fly from Seville if there were a high infection rate in Madrid to beat the system. The chances of that happening are very remote for the mass of tourists. They are going to a place and they are coming back from a place. It goes to how you manage the risk around this. If you really want to stop anybody trying that, you will not have international travel.

They have to let travel breathe, let people behave responsibly and put in place the right level of controls. I think a whole country definition is last year's solution to this year's situation.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you.

Q33 **Karl McCartney:** Ben asked a question of you, Chris, about queues. Is there any separation of the queues when people arrive into Heathrow? Are there any priority lanes for people who have British passports, or is everybody lumped together?

Chris Garton: From the point of view of the checks, everybody is lumped together to be assessed in terms of their compliance with the paperwork, but some travellers can use the e-gates after the check has been performed. On the issue of passengers in the arrivals hall, we as an airport have to maintain social distance. Obviously, the airport was never built to have so many people held up. Our traffic figures are typically 10% or 15% today of what they would normally be, yet we are experiencing these tremendous queues.

Q34 **Karl McCartney:** Percentages are fine, Chris, but how many people do you have travelling through Heathrow daily?

Chris Garton: Typically, we have 10,000 to 15,000 arriving passengers.

Q35 **Karl McCartney:** How many of those are experiencing delays of longer than two hours and up to six?

Chris Garton: Certainly, more than half of them are experiencing delays in excess of two or three hours each day. It is a daily occurrence because the 100% check has been introduced at the border. We can find ways to automate, which is part of the recommendation of the task force report, but our concern is that the automation is not coming fast enough. We want more rapid progress to automate the process, to enable those travellers to keep flowing. The best solution is that their details are checked before they arrive, and that we know that they can safely travel into the country whether as a visitor or as a returning citizen coming back from holiday.

Karl McCartney: Thank you for that information. Contrary to popular European opinion, we are not a nation that enjoys queuing. I do not know if any of the other witnesses would like to add anything to what Chris has just told me. I am just giving you the option. If not, I will hand back to



the Chairman.

- Q36 **Chair:** Thank you, Karl. Before we move on from testing, Ben touched on this and I want to drill in. I am sure we will hear from the Minister on this point. Over the weekend, the Secretary of State talked about taking measures to bring down the price of PCR testing. You have made it quite clear that you feel that antigen testing, and then moving to PCR, is the right way to deal with this. The price being mooted by Randox is £60. First, we do not know which airlines are partnering with them, so I hope that you can provide a little more information, Simon.

Chris touched on the fact that the reason why it is so expensive in this country is the Government lab requirements for that test. Is it £60 because the airline might have to put the price of the ticket up to subsidise the cost of the price offered by Randox? I am hoping you can provide a bit more information because we will want to ask the Minister about this.

Simon McNamara: I am not familiar with that particular company and the product that it offers, but I read the same media reports overnight. It is possible that operators and tour operators would subsidise it because they are keen to get people flying again, but it is a fact that PCR, if that is the chosen route, which as you rightly said we do not support, is a lot cheaper in other countries. I think I mentioned that it was between 50% and 80% cheaper in other countries. It is the same technology, so there is something different. Yes, it needs a lab so that is definitely going to add cost, but there is something different.

We have VAT in this country, which is levied on top of the testing. That is very often not the case in other countries. That is adding 20% on top as well. There is a clear difference in the UK pricing model compared with other countries globally. That is for sure.

- Q37 **Chair:** Chris, I am keen to understand whether the UK Government requirements of a PCR test mean that it costs a lot more in this country than it would in Europe or in Dubai, where it is a third of the cost. It is not just the VAT element.

Chris Garton: That is not my understanding. I agree with what Simon said. The type of test is very similar, so I am assuming that what will drive the cost of that test is the volume. I am sure that, with scale, prices will come down. Equally, it is the cost of the laboratory facilities. I suspect that to recover the cost of the lab on a small number of tests means that the individual price per test is higher. That is the point we were making about different types of testing technology allowing us to safely test passengers. Then, if somebody tests positive, you follow up, as Simon was explaining, with a PCR test that is designed to maybe identify the variant rather than just to confirm whether they are infectious or not. I cannot see anything in the UK that is different about PCR testing that would mean that it is automatically more expensive here than anywhere else.



Q38 Chair: If a lateral flow test is about £30 and a PCR test can be £60, I am not underestimating the cost differential for a traveller, but it is nowhere near as prohibitive as £30 versus £120. Shouldn't the focus, as well as being on persuading the Government to move towards the lateral flow test as you have just mentioned, be on working with industry to drive the pricing down, given that there will be a bigger market for it?

Chris Garton: Yes, and to drive the volume up because it has the same effect. If we get more passengers flying, I am sure there are ways in which the price can then come down. I support Simon's point; we would like to see the lowest possible cost levied on passengers travelling, particularly this summer when many families in the UK will be looking forward to trying to get a break, which they were not perhaps able to do last year. The thing that will dissuade them is the high cost of testing. If that testing leads to a risk of quarantine, for all the reasons we have previously discussed, it would have a major effect in stemming people's travelling.

Mark Tanzer: Sixty pounds is better than £120 but it is still a lot of money for people in their holiday budget, and, if you are a family, it is a £60 test for everybody coming back from a green zone. The industry does not have the margins to be able to swallow that, so the customer is going to end up paying one way or the other. It will be built into the price of travel, or they will have to pay separately. We should not be misled by saying that it is good to have come down from £120 to £60. A better solution is not to have a PCR test and to allow people either to use lateral flow or, ideally, to have no testing. That £60 in a family holiday budget is a very significant cost.

Q39 Chair: On that basis, Mark, do you believe that the Government are still amenable to change, and will not require a PCR test for the countries on the green traffic light and will move to lateral flow, as you advocate?

Mark Tanzer: I hope so. I imagine the Minister will say that this is an evolving picture, and that as the evidence accumulates maybe they will review the policy and that is what the review points are about. They certainly recognise in the task force report that the cost of testing is a restriction and that, if their goal is to have a safe restart of international travel, the cost of testing is a very important component that is blocking that.

I think they understand at an intellectual level, if I can put it that way, that there is something to be resolved. If they are to have a Government-approved list, they have a certain amount of control over what the pricing can be, I would say, in order to be able to get on the list, and to get people moving again. At the moment, as I say, I think the system is designed on an overly cautious basis for the green category, but while a PCR test is required we certainly need them to be driving the costs down, with the industry trying to drive volume through it as well.

Q40 Chair: I want to move on to another subject, but Brian had his hand up.



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Brian Strutton: It is just a quick point. I was told yesterday of a firm offering a very cheap PCR test. I looked them up, and they are not on the Government-approved list. I would be very wary of some of the cheap offers around. As the requirement seems to be that people have to source their own test, there is a real danger that the market could overtake some of this and some unscrupulous players could be trying to come in on it. I just thought I would mention that experience.

Chair: Our research shows that Randox is on the approved list, but what is not clear to me is which airlines it is partnering, and whether you will have to pay an increased cost on the ticket in order to get a £60 test, in which case the consumer is still paying the £120 overall. What we need to drill into is exactly what are the cost components of these PCR tests and why they are more expensive in this country. Is it because of the country requirements or because the industry is charging too much? If anyone is listening to this, perhaps they can help us with that.

Let's move on. We have also heard a lot about vaccination certification, and less so when it came to the traffic lights themselves. I will hand over to Greg Smith.

Q41 **Greg Smith:** Good morning, witnesses. I want to delve into the subject of health certification or Covid passports, call them what you will. There is an enormous amount of confusion about how such a certificate could work. Obviously, there is a precedent. I have had to prove my vaccination status for yellow fever to get into Tanzania in the past, and I have no problem with that. When building a system up from scratch, I do not think there is much clarity over what could and would work in order to get passengers travelling quickly.

Simon, could you give us an outline of where any discussions you have had with the Government, Governments overseas or other bodies currently sit on what these things could look like? Equally, within that, could you give your opinion on whether they will even work, especially as to whether they should be paper-based or technology-based? If they are technology based, will Apple and Google even let us have them on our phones in the first place?

Simon McNamara: From IATA's perspective, travel certification is something we support as a means of reopening borders. We are developing a tool for our airline members called an IATA travel pass, which is effectively a digital travel certification product that can consume testing results or vaccine certificates and allow them to be displayed and shown to the airline or at the border.

Countries want to see evidence of vaccination status. We can debate whether that is right or wrong, but it is a fact. There is a precedent for international travel, as you mentioned, with yellow fever, typhoid, cholera and others. Countries ask for it. If they ask for it, we should facilitate it. That is what we think will happen.



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Initially, it will probably be paper. Let's be brutally honest. It is happening now, but we need to rapidly move towards digital solutions. There are many being developed by industry that will satisfy the need. We need the Government to start issuing certification status, particularly for vaccines, to individuals. That is mentioned in the GTTF report; that will be facilitated. It is something we support for international travel.

It is a totally different debate—I note that in the UK that it gets confused—when talking about the domestic use of Covid status. That is very different from international travel, where there is a precedent already.

Q42 Greg Smith: I think you are right to draw the distinction between domestic use to enter a shop, a pub, a theatre or whatever it may be, and for international travel. Would it be fair to say that perhaps we are trying to bite off more than we can chew and to come up with a global system here? Would it work better if the United Kingdom Government set out what it will take in terms of certification to come into the United Kingdom, and allow other Governments to set their own regimes—as currently happens with some of the examples we have given earlier with yellow fever, typhoid, and so on—in countries that require that certification, so that we can have confidence to get people flowing into the UK, and have clarity on that point? Then, if I want to go to America, Kenya, Australia or wherever it is I want to go, when I book my ticket, I will have to comply with what that country is asking of me, just as I did in the past?

Simon McNamara: Certainly, from IATA's perspective, we are absolutely not advocating that vaccination should be a condition of travel. In fact, quite the opposite. It is one of the tools that allows borders to reopen, as does testing and general observations of Covid in the country. We think it is a tool. It should not be a blanket requirement. In other words, you should not have to be vaccinated to travel, but it may give you alleviation from restrictions. That is in the Global Travel Task Force report. We want to see that reflected in the UK's traffic light system; if you are vaccinated, just like in the US, you are free from quarantine, for example.

It should be down to individual member states to develop their own criteria and conditions. Equally, it should be down to individual states to enable their citizens to gain access to their records to show that they have been vaccinated. If a third country needs that for entry, they should be able to show that. Industry products like the travel pass and some of the others out there will allow that to happen, both for the airline journey and, critically, at the border. That will help reduce some of the queues we were talking about.

Q43 Greg Smith: On the point of proving it at the border, obviously there is a big mismatch of various things that need to be proved at the border today. Chris, from your experience at Heathrow, if international health certificates were to be introduced, how quickly could the border at Heathrow scale up to be able to take them? What sort of additional



delays, or indeed cuts in delays, would bringing in those certificates mean for passengers coming into Heathrow airport?

Chris Garton: Theoretically, if passengers were cleared to enter the UK before they arrived, passengers would be able to use the e-gates and they would flow through as they would have done pre-Covid. A major part of the queuing issue would disappear.

I strongly support what Simon was saying, but, if we start with a nation-by-nation approach, we have to work towards a common international standard through time. It might be pragmatic to start by each country declaring what it needs, but aviation by its nature is international. Trying to make sure that we have harmonised approaches at each end of the route will help both the operators in aviation and the travellers in aviation to understand what rules they need to follow. If the rules change and they are different for every country, it is quite a tricky prospect to work out what you need to do in order to enter country X or country Y this week, as opposed to maybe the same country even last week.

We think the UK Government are in a great position, given that our aviation sector is among the biggest in the world. We have had a leadership role in aviation for many years. I think the Government could take a lead, with international Governments, to start to bring about a common international standard. We would really support such a move.

Q44 **Greg Smith:** Thank you; that is a helpful answer. If I could drill in a little bit on the practicalities, when you talk about someone arriving pre-cleared, if it is a paper-based certificate there has to be a delay at some point, either at check-in or at arrival. What do the practicalities of that look like for someone travelling? Let's say that they have had both doses of Pfizer or AstraZeneca and the three weeks' clearance since their second dose. They have their bit of paper that shows it, so where does the delay come in that, being properly inspected to check that someone has not knocked it up in Word at home and printed it out—that it is real? Does it happen at departure or at arrival, and how long does it take?

Chris Garton: Today, most of that is occurring pre-departure when travellers leave the UK, for example, to go to countries that have entry requirements, like having a negative test, vaccination or whatever. The airline collects that information, often before the traveller leaves home to set off for the airport. That is the best place to put any kind of processing, pre-departure, to enable the remainder of the passenger's journey to be safe and frictionless. It is good to know that all passengers on an aircraft are either vaccinated or have tested negative before they set off for their intended country. We would push strongly for pre-departure processing.

We are working with our airline partners to trial a lot of these solutions—Simon mentioned some of them; IATA has taken a big lead—to try to make sure that passengers have the ability to submit their certification. It might be paper initially. It is submitted to their carrier. What we would



like to see, particularly for the UK border, is that that information then flows through to the border and there is not another duplicate 100% check on arrival in the UK of somebody who perhaps just left the country a week or two ago, travelled out and is on their way back in again.

Q45 **Greg Smith:** That is not the way existing health certificates for other vaccinations work, is it? I still have a bit of yellow card in my passport wallet that I had to physically produce on arrival, in my case a few years back, in Tanzania. If other countries are not geared up for acceptance of pre-departure checking, and their border requires it, this is going to significantly delay the passenger journey, is it not?

Chris Garton: That is correct in the example you give. If the scale is such that it is not something that every traveller is expected to be able to show, because it is a particular type of infection that is perhaps pertinent to one part of the world and therefore only needs travellers entering that part of the world to demonstrate their compliance, a paper-based system could work. For Covid and the scale that we are talking about, with potentially everybody who travels needing to show some sort of either testing or vaccination, or both, a paper-based system is not going to work at 100% check level. It is not scalable.

Q46 **Greg Smith:** Do any of the other witnesses have any points to make on that?

Mark Tanzer: I think there is a bit of an 80/20 rule here. If you are trying to come up with a certification system that works across the world, you are going to stumble across countries that are not prepared to receive it. If you look at where the majority of leisure travellers go, a lot go to the EU, and the EU is developing its own digital green vaccination certification for travel within the EU, with, I believe, a target of June to be operational. Obviously, the member states then have to put in place their own arrangements about how they are going to get their nationals certificated and how they are going to recognise that. There is growing awareness that for travel to get going within the EU zone they are going to need that system.

It would be good for us to push on, as I said right at the beginning. Operationalising this in a really short timeframe is absolutely essential, but with an eye to what is happening in the EU and how we can match that to have as little friction as possible for travellers going in and out of what are still our largest destinations.

Q47 **Greg Smith:** Thank you very much. Brian.

Brian Strutton: One of the possible countries to be on the early green list is the US. We know how vital that market is. I think the future of all these arrangements will have to be bilateral, particularly for this summer. There isn't time, as you rightly point out, to do anything consistently globally. It might be worth, when you speak to the Minister later, asking him what progress has been made on these arrangements with that critical market—the transatlantic one.



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Greg Smith: That is a fair point. Mindful of time, I will pass back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you, Greg. We have 20 minutes before the Minister comes before us and two sections left. I will ask Members to try to split those. First of all, we want to focus on what this all means for summer 2021. I will hand over to Ruth Cadbury.

Q48 **Ruth Cadbury:** If aviation opens up this summer, there is going to be a real issue of skill fade among people such as pilots, and in the many other safety-critical roles that people have in aviation. Brian, what are airlines doing to ensure that pilot skills are up to date when they start flying regularly?

Brian Strutton: Thank you for that. One area where all this is working very well is in our co-operation with airlines and with the CAA. An enormous amount of work has been done to ensure that critical staff, like pilots and others, retain their ability to fly properly, even when they have been furloughed or laid off in other ways, so that their recency checks, their Sim checks and everything else are being kept up to date.

The Civil Aviation Authority are adding an additional layer to that. They are helping to ensure that airlines understand that they need to take account of people coming back to work who may not be entirely match fit, so defensive flying, proper risk management and those kinds of things are the subject of discussion between the CAA and the airlines. I am pretty confident, certainly from a pilot point of view, that people are ready to get back to work, even though they have been laid off for a considerable amount of time.

Q49 **Ruth Cadbury:** Thank you very much. Chris, airports are big operations with a large number of companies, many of whom are at breaking point economically and financially. Addressing skill fade is a cost. What are airports doing to ensure that skills in safety-critical positions, such as ground handling, are up to date and ready to go as and when aviation reopens?

Chris Garton: We have remained open throughout the pandemic, which has allowed us to maintain a rotation of colleagues for training purposes and to keep skills up. You are right that a number of our partners have reduced the size of their workforce as a result of the impact of the pandemic and are now looking at training and recruitment. This goes back to the point I was making earlier: the more notice we can have of what will happen when, the more we can be ready to deal with it.

There are all sorts of potential pitfalls along the way, if all of the UK airports start to recruit. We are aware that obviously for critical roles on the airfield the Government have a role in vetting, to make sure that appropriate colleagues are airside. We need the Government's own readiness to support that, because we anticipate a surge of applications. If we are unable to get back the colleagues who are needed airside, it could potentially impact the capacity we have in the airports.



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For most colleagues, certainly in the airport safety-critical roles, by remaining open we have been able to retain their skills. Therefore, we are ready, and we now want to get enough detail to be able to get ready properly for a restart from 17 May.

Q50 Ruth Cadbury: Thank you very much. Shall I continue, Chair?

This is a different question. Generally, in most summers more UK residents holiday abroad than overseas residents holiday in the UK by quite a large factor. This is going to be a rather unusual summer in terms of the UK economy.

Mark, I do not know how many of your members are UK based or whether you primarily represent travel agents who send tourists out of the UK. Do you think that revenues from domestic tourism in summer 2021 will make up for lost revenues from international tourism, or will there be a disjoint this year and a long-term impact for international tourism by UK residents in future years?

Mark Tanzer: Our members do both. The majority of their business, you are quite right, is what we call outbound, sending British tourists overseas, but we do domestic tourism as well. They are not substitute products, if I can put it like that. On the idea that if everybody had their holiday in the UK the world would be a better place, we have not really built the infrastructure for accommodating the 40 million people who travel overseas. Of course, it is a very different experience. Although we are very glad to see the UK tourism industry as the focus of staycation this year, it is important economically and socially that we get back to international travel as quickly as possible.

Outbound travel creates a huge amount of GDP within the UK before people go, in the sum of £37 billion. Companies are making arrangements and there are products that people buy before they go, so it is a very important part of our economy here, as well as employing half a million people.

Yes, there could be dislocation this year while people are edgy about travelling overseas, or it is not clear how the traffic light system is going to work, but I believe that the pent-up demand is still there. We are seeing, from our members, that longer-term bookings are coming through for 2022 and 2023. People want to get back to travelling. The sooner that we can get back to normal, if I can put it like that, the better for passengers and for the industry.

Ruth Cadbury: Although, of course, the overall economic impact is that we have a £32 billion a year tourism deficit, or we did in 2019. I will hand back to you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you. The final section is the long-term recovery of the UK aviation and travel sectors. We will start by handing over to Gavin Newlands.

Q51 Gavin Newlands: I think Chris said that the UK aviation sector is one of



the biggest in the world. It is well known that the UK industry was the third biggest in the world going into the pandemic. What do you think the potential long-term effects of the pandemic might be on the competitiveness of the UK aviation sector? What size will it be coming out of it, relative to other countries? What will be the impact on international connectivity and domestic or regional connectivity, however you want to describe it? Can I start with Simon?

Simon McNamara: Thank you very much. This is a very important point. As you have said, the UK was the third biggest aviation market in the world in 2019. It dropped to fourth in 2020, and in January 2021 it was 15th. We are closed for business. I want to make the point that travel is not all about leisure. The ONS data shows that 60% of journeys were a mixture of business, studying and visiting friends and relatives. That is a key point. Families have been separated for over a year, and people want to travel for that reason. That is a really important point. People are not just travelling for holidays. Sometimes, I think the narrative is a little bit about every journey being discretionary.

We are still forecasting a five-year recovery to get back to where we were in 2019. The data we have show that bookings for this summer are sitting at somewhere around 18% of 2019 levels, so it is still very low. There is pent-up demand. We see that with examples where countries have been added to what was the travel corridor list, and bookings increased very rapidly. Even the 22 February announcement by the Prime Minister about the GTTF report produced a trebling of demand, but from a very low base.

It will be a slow recovery. There is not going to be a flood of people coming back. It is going to take time, but the sooner we can reopen, the sooner we can start that flow coming back, which is vital for our economy as well.

Q52 **Gavin Newlands:** Do you agree with those people who say that airports, particularly those outside the south-east—don't worry, Chris; I will come to you to answer about Heathrow as well—regional airports, such as Glasgow airport in my constituency, are going to take longer to recover than the Heathrows of this world? If so, what can be done about that?

Simon McNamara: The whole regional connectivity review was something that the UK Government were looking at. It is vital that all parts of the UK are reconnected to the aviation network. Scotland plays a key role in that. Many international carriers provide direct services to first-tier airports outside the south-east, and second-tier airports outside the south-east, which provide vital connectivity. I point, for example, to the network through places like Amsterdam, Dubai and Qatar. They are direct regional points, so it is just as important to reopen all sectors of the transport industry and not just the south-east.

Q53 **Gavin Newlands:** Thanks, Simon. Chris, I will come to you to answer both those points, if you can.



Chris Garton: I definitely support what Simon said. We are very keen to see all airports restart travel. We are connected to most of the UK airports. We have, I suppose, a slight additional interest in that as a hub airport up to 30% of our travellers are passing through Heathrow. Obviously, we try to encourage them to stop off on their way and spend time in the UK. Many, if they are travelling for business reasons, choose which hub they will make their journey through. Simon mentioned some of our competitor hubs. There is both threat and opportunity. I think we are in a great place going forward to try to make sure that Heathrow, as the UK's hub airport, is the choice that an American traveller would make if they were heading towards Europe, for example, particularly if they are then flying into the UK and there isn't a direct connection. They would probably fly via Heathrow and then on to Glasgow and other airports within the UK.

Our international competitive position is something that we also look at. Simon mentioned the stats on how we are doing. We were disappointed that Paris Charles de Gaulle airport overtook Heathrow last year as Europe's busiest hub. We would like to regain our position as the number one because it is the right thing for the UK economy.

Q54 **Gavin Newlands:** From a Heathrow point of view, do you think we will recover quicker? This will largely depend on Government decisions and what have you, but do you think regional/domestic connectivity or international connectivity will recover quicker?

Chris Garton: It absolutely depends on Government policy. This is our reason for asking for as much clarity as possible as soon as possible. Both need to recover for us to be successful.

Q55 **Gavin Newlands:** I suppose from a hub airport point of view, they go hand in hand. Brian, can I come to you on that issue?

Brian Strutton: We have a lot of members based in Scotland who are worried about their local airports. We have lots of members based around some of the fringe UK airports, if I can call them that, who are concerned in a similar way. I struggle to see how some of those regional airports are going to survive this summer. I think that the programme we are looking at for summer flying is going to be so low, based on what we are seeing from Government policy, that whereas many of the regional airports, and the smaller airlines, have been holding on, waiting and hoping for an opening of summer flying at scale, they are not going to see that. I really fear for some of those regional airports this year.

Q56 **Gavin Newlands:** That is a fair point. It brings me to the second issue I was going to bring up, which is the impact of this. If international travel does not reach that scale from 22 June, will the sector require additional support? I think a number of you were in the room when the Secretary of State said, when Flybe was struggling, that he would stand by the industry's side.

Do you think that the Government have stood by aviation's side?



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Obviously, as outlined this morning, aviation has lost a substantial amount of its workforce already. A lot of companies have lost a third of their workforce and some even more than that, despite the fact there has been a furlough scheme in place. If it does not restart to scale, what further support do you think is required? I will start with you, Brian, given that you raised the issue of regional airports potentially struggling.

Brian Strutton: Very briefly, a third of pilots have lost their jobs. I think it is the same proportion for the whole of the aviation sector workforce. We have seen two airlines fail: Flybe and Norwegian Air UK. When I saw the task force report last weekend, I immediately wrote to the Chancellor because I thought it was not going to be good enough, and the sector was going to need more direct financial support than it has had. I am very clear about that in my mind. I do not see the policy direction that we are on actually allowing any kind of return to scale this summer. I think we are at risk of more company failures. I hope that the Government will, alongside everything else, consider more support for the sector.

Q57 **Gavin Newlands:** Simon, if there is to be further support from Government, must it be in grant form? Obviously, the sector has become massively indebted over the last year with the loans it has taken on. If there is further support, would it have to be grants rather than loans? That is an additional question for you.

Simon McNamara: I think the UK has been different from many other countries in its approach to supporting the sector. It has not given grants in general. It has given loans and the furlough scheme. If you look to other countries, other Governments have stepped in, in a very much more aggressive way, to support their sector. That is a policy choice that was made by the UK, and that is to be debated separately.

The key thing is that international travel will be one of the last sectors of business to get going again. We have to accept that. We see the domestic situation in the UK, with un-lockdown coming, and bars and restaurants and non-essential retail opening. Travel has not started yet, and it will not start until 17 May at the very earliest.

The Government have to look at something for this sector in the medium term because we are not going to get going. It will be a slow recovery. Aviation, certainly the airline sector, is an extremely capital-intensive business, and I think Chris would say the same. It is not all about staff costs. Servicing the capital and making sure that the businesses keep going is very important for UK plc. I think Mark mentioned the value of aviation, and what is to be gained if we get the business going again. There is lots of data out there. We have a statistic that about £49 billion-worth of UK GDP has been lost because of this pandemic, as a result of international travel stopping. Getting it going is essential, but supporting industry through that process is equally important.

Mark Tanzer: Could I briefly add something?



Chair: Briefly, if you can, because we are running out of time.

Mark Tanzer: I'll pass. I basically wanted to re-echo what Simon said. If you want long-term recovery, you need to get through this short-term survival. A lot of these companies have been living on thin air for over a year. They need support to get through before volumes come back.

Q58 **Gavin Newlands:** Chris, before we move on to the Minister, in terms of the Government support that you have had, the support for rates was quite late in the day. It is capped and has been extended, but only for six months. The Scottish Government have extended it for a full year and it is uncapped.

In answering the overall support question, what proportion of your rates bill is covered by the Government scheme? Do you think that the Government should be looking at areas in terms of geography, and the impact that this had had on constituencies such as mine and those of other Members on the Committee? It is not just the impact on the airport but on the areas themselves. Should the Government be looking at that issue as well?

Chris Garton: In answer to your question, to date Covid has cost us over £2 billion, and our typical daily losses are running at around £5 million. The only access to support that we have really had is the furlough scheme. You mentioned the rates relief. We have been offered £8 million per annum rates relief, but our rates bill is typically £120 million a year.

Covid has reduced passenger traffic to the extent that we are running about 50% of our infrastructure. We run a single runway and two operating terminals, but we are still paying 100% rates. We have seen typically a 5% or 6% reduction in the rates bill, but a 50% reduction in the premises that we are using. For us, the future is about getting a safe restart of aviation. That is what we are looking for. That will cure the issues that we are all dealing with at the moment.

Q59 **Gavin Newlands:** Lastly, to follow up on that, had you had full rates relief from the Government, might that have mitigated your need to put fire and rehire in place for a lot of the Heathrow workforce?

Chris Garton: Can I be clear that we did not fire and rehire? We promised every frontline colleague who wanted a job at the airport that we would retain a job at the airport. We had no enforced redundancies of colleagues.

Q60 **Gavin Newlands:** But on different terms. That is fire and rehire.

Chris Garton: No. We made a change to the terms of some colleagues who, through legacy arrangements, had different pay for the same job as other colleagues. Through that, we have been able to keep the colleagues who wanted a job at the airport. We are deeply conscious in our community, an aviation-based community in west London, that unemployment has soared. We felt that it was right and proper that we



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try to retain many jobs at the airport. Those jobs are all above the London living wage, so that has been our approach.

Gavin Newlands: I think we have danced enough on the head of that particular pin, Chair. I hand back to you for the Minister.

Chair: We have not heard from the voice of the north-east, Grahame Morris, and I am very conscious of that. As we are over time, I will bin my final question for Grahame to come in.

Q61 **Grahame Morris:** Thanks, Chair. I think we have covered the area in relation to support. I just want to ask, particularly Mr Garton, about the levels of support that the industry should have.

Many of us on the Committee feel that support is vital, but it should be conditional. One of the conditions we are very concerned about is the use of fire and rehire by companies like Heathrow and others in the sector. I wondered what your views are in terms of the level of support that is required, and what the workforce should expect from levels of Government support to the sector.

Chris Garton: I would re-echo the point that, although we adjusted about 50% of our frontline colleagues' terms, all colleagues maintained above the London living wage. In fact, more recently, in discussions with our trade unions, we have actually come to an agreement where colleagues are now being balloted with a recommendation to accept the company's proposals. At the time, 100% of colleagues accepted the proposals.

It is not a question of fire and rehire based on support from the Government. What we want to see is passengers flying again safely, so that we protect not just the passengers but the colleagues who work at the airport as well. That is the way to give long-term, sustainable employment to our colleagues and to give them the security that they need. Job security in aviation at the moment is hugely threatened. Passenger numbers are so low that it really is an issue, but the solution is in the discussions that we have been having this morning about getting more passengers flying again and getting back to a more normal travel environment, making sure that safety is our top priority.

Grahame Morris: Thank you. I am afraid that we cannot agree on that. I think permanent reductions in wages and terms and conditions are really quite alarming. It is very worrying. People are left with no alternative. You mentioned that colleagues were happy to accept the new contracts, but they had no choice but to do that. We need to disagree on that, Mr Garton. I am going to hand back to the Chair because I know that there are more questions in the second section.

Chair: Thank you, Grahame. I am sorry that you did not get longer. You will, hopefully, get longer with the Minister.

Can I say a big thank you to Brian Strutton, Simon McNamara, Mark Tanzer and Chris Garton for giving us so much detailed evidence? You



can rest assured that the questions you have posed will now be put to the Aviation Minister. Thank you, and I wish you a good rest of your day.

Examination of witness

Witness: Robert Courts.

Q62 **Chair:** Before I ask the Minister to introduce himself, I want to pay tribute, on behalf of the Transport Select Committee, following the passing of the Duke of Edinburgh. This is a terribly sad time, and we send our condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family. I also note the fact that the Duke was a great pioneer when it came to science and innovation and pushing new forms of transport. We are opening an inquiry on the roll-out of electric vehicles. Forty years ago, the Duke of Edinburgh was driving around in an electric Bedford Lucas van. He had an eco-vehicle as well. He was a remarkable man and a big supporter of innovation in transport. We send our condolences both to the royal family and to the nation as a whole.

Welcome, Minister. Can I ask you to introduce yourself for the record?

Robert Courts: I am Robert Courts, the Aviation, Maritime and Security Minister.

Q63 **Chair:** A very warm welcome to you. As an opener, I will put to you the last question I was going to put to the industry representatives we had. The Global Travel Task Force report appears to be lacking in some detail. Passengers do not know which countries they can fly to and what the rules will be, nor does the industry. It appears that there will be cost implications of testing and it will therefore make travelling very difficult and perhaps prohibitive on cost. Was it the intention of the Government to restrict the numbers who can fly, and is that the reason why we are lacking in detail and experiencing barriers?

Robert Courts: Before I answer that question, may I also associate myself with your comments about the sad passing of the Duke of Edinburgh? He was an absolute pioneer both in aviation and maritime, and a great example for us all. Thank you for those comments.

Turning to your question, can I answer it first by looking at what we are trying to do? We are trying to protect public health, but we are also seeking to unlock international travel. From my own perspective, I am absolutely passionate about the industries that are part of this sector. I am the aviation and maritime Minister, and I want to see people flying again and I want to see people going out on ships again and I want to see people on trains again. The incredible travel sector that we have has always been a world leader, and I want it to be again.

There were some comments made about this by the other panel; it is not just about holidays. This is about the way the country sees itself. It is about businesses that need to get out and connect around the world. It is about families and people who have been apart for years. We want that



to happen again, but it must happen in a way that is robust and sustainable because we do not want to go backwards.

We have a twin balancing act of the two things we are trying to achieve. We are protecting public health but also looking to get international travel up and running again. The framework that we have laid out is the way that we do that. It is a framework that balances the twin imperatives of getting people moving again but doing so in a way that protects public health—I am sorry for repeating this, but it bears repeating—because it has to be robust and it has to be sustainable. None of us wants to be going backwards either on the domestic road map or on the international road map.

In terms of some of the questions you have asked more specifically, this report lays out the framework. It lays out the framework in terms of the traffic light system that we will be following, but you are right, Chairman; there are a number of other things that we are still working on. There are a number of things that we will be providing further detail on—for example, the countries that will be in each channel when we get to the stage of unlocking international travel. We have acknowledged in the report that there is work to do, and we will be doing that work, on bringing down the cost of travelling. This is a complicated matter. We have worked closely with industry thus far and we will continue doing so. With their help, we will be unlocking international travel, but doing so in a way that is safe, structured and robust.

Q64 **Chair:** Given that the aim is to allow people to travel from 17 May, why have you taken the decision to put traffic lights in place and rules on each traffic light, but not which country sits per traffic light?

Robert Courts: Because there is a tension between giving certainty and being accurate. We have said that in any event there will be no international travel before 17 May. That is the earliest date, assuming that the roll-out continues to go as planned and assuming that we continue to make the good progress that we have. We need to be in a position whereby when we make those decisions it is on the data that exists at that time. We are still some distance away from that date at the moment.

Q65 **Chair:** We have heard about the logistics that are involved for the aviation and cruise sectors to be able to plan ahead. When will you put those countries into the traffic light classification?

Robert Courts: I anticipate that in the early part of May we will be able to give some more detail into which category each country will fall. I acknowledge and I accept that there is a logistics issue. You are absolutely right. I am conscious of that, acutely so. You are quite right to mention cruise as well; cruise, airlines and rail alike will need to bring people back. There is an element of planning involved. We would clearly like to give them as much notice as we can, but that has to still be within the confines of ensuring that we protect public health, which means that



we have to make sure that the decisions we make are accurate at the time. The alternative is that we might have to revisit it.

Q66 **Chair:** Would you acknowledge that it is going to be harder for the industry, and indeed passengers, to get themselves organised in knowing what the rules are from the beginning of May to then be able to fly out on 18 May? That might be harder than if you had given that firm detail in April.

Robert Courts: I acknowledge that there is a tension. I know that there is a challenge for the sector, and I am acutely aware of the fact that all sectors have to plan, and they require that logistical warning time. For the reason I have given, we are giving as much notice as we can but commensurate with the duty of ensuring that, as we make those decisions, we are doing it on the basis of relevant, accurate data at the time.

Q67 **Chair:** I would contest that because, if you were giving as much notice as you could, you would have given the notice by 12 April when many expected to see it. It comes back to my question that this all seems a rather clever way of making sure that people are not flying or travelling by cruise on 17 May because it is too logistically difficult to do so. It is not an unreasonable suggestion to say that it is the Government's plan to stop people being able to travel.

Robert Courts: No, Chair, I would not agree with that at all. Of course, we want people to be able to travel. I accept this is a cautious unlocking of international travel. It is meant to be because it is meant to be robust. It is meant to be something that is sustainable, protects public health and ensures that we do not have to go backwards again. It is intended to enable people to travel, but to do so in a way that is safe, secure and not reversible.

Q68 **Chair:** You talked about not wanting to go backwards. We are now at a stage where the Government, by many commentators' accounts, have done a fantastic job with the vaccination roll-out, and 99% of mortality risk in the UK has been vaccinated. When you look at the amber list for this year, it looks like the red list of last year. Where is the vaccination distribution for those who want to travel and for those who work in the tourism and international travel sector?

Robert Courts: You are quite right to pay tribute—may I join you in doing that?—to the extraordinary success of the vaccine roll-out and to everybody who has been a part of it, from scientists within Government to the NHS, which is rolling it out. It is clearly a huge success for the country.

We will of course be looking, and we are looking, to see what part vaccination may be able to play in both outgoing travel and incoming travel, but it is right that we take a cautious approach, because we do not yet understand everything about the way vaccines work. Of course, there are different vaccines, and they all work in a slightly different way and



have different benefits and effects. Science, to a certain extent, has to catch up with the vaccine roll-out, in terms of how the vaccines work. You also have to factor in the fact that other countries, sadly, are not as well advanced as we are with our vaccine roll-out. You have to factor that in as well. We say in the report, in the last section that deals with certification, that we will continue to look at what part vaccine certification can play. We will look to talk about that more in due course.

Q69 Chair: Where are the risks? If you look at the fact that 99% of the mortality risk has been vaccinated, you have reduced the risk on that basis. Both vaccines, AstraZeneca and Pfizer, are reported as effective against all known mutant strains. We know that Covid will continue to mutate. It will always be a battle with the vaccines, as it is with flu. At what point in time, now that we have vaccinated 99% of the mortality risk, and that will increase to 100%, do we say that we return to normal? That is what people thought the vaccination programme was going to do for the people in this country.

Robert Courts: You are right to draw attention to mutants, variants of concern as they tend to be called. It is in that area where science is still catching up with the vaccine roll-out. Science has to catch up and inform the decisions that we will make, and that is something that will happen over the course of time. We will continue to look to see what part vaccination can play.

I also stress at this point that we have laid out what is a framework for the unlocking of international travel. I can be quite clear that the point of reopening is not the end state of international travel. We have laid out in the report at paragraph 28 that there are three checkpoints when we will review policy. There is an opportunity to look at those things at that stage. At the moment, it is a cautious approach because we want to protect the critically important vaccine roll-out, which has done very well, with the most vulnerable vaccinated, but we still have many more people to go in this country before we start thinking about variants of concern and before we start thinking about the position in other countries.

Chair: Thank you for the opening exchange. I must not hog all of the questions. We will stay on the focus of the report and then we will look at testing, certification and what the future looks like for summer 2021 and the industry as a whole. Let's stay on the current topic. I will hand over to Simon Jupp.

Q70 Simon Jupp: Good morning, and thank you, Minister, for joining us. I am really pleased to hear you say, in response to the Chair's question, that you want people to travel, but people question that because of the creation of a task force in the first place. Why did the Government decide to form a task force rather than simply articulating and implementing a clear policy on restarting international travel?

Robert Courts: It is a great question. The purpose of the task force is a group of people from across Government, but also crucially involving the



sector. A great deal has changed since this time last year. It has changed a great deal since the first task force; we have seen, for example, the emergence of variants of concern and we have seen the great roll-out of the vaccine. It is right that we come together, with close engagement with sectors, and work across Government to ensure that we get this right.

I come back to the point that is critically important. Yes, we want people to travel—I absolutely do—for all the reasons I have given, for reasons of business, for reasons of culture, and because it is a great sector for bringing families back together, but ensuring that we protect public health and that it is robust and sustainable. You see the things that the sector has been saying reflected in the report. That is why we have had a task force and that is why it is the right approach.

Q71 Simon Jupp: The sector keeps talking about clarity. So far, we have not had that in terms of when countries can be travelled to again. All sorts of things have been said to us on this Committee and in other places in the media. The industry itself—the travel industry and the aviation industry—is screaming out for clarity at every turn. To what extent has evidence drawn from focus groups informed policy making on international travel?

Robert Courts: It depends on what you are referring to in terms of focus groups. There is of course a wide range of factors taken into account by Government at any time. Certainly, when the task force was going on it was informed on things like demand and people's views as to whether they would be happy to travel. Those sorts of things were fed in as well. It depends exactly what the question means in terms of the focus of the focus group, but it has been a wide-ranging piece of engagement.

Q72 Chair: Are these focus groups made up of people who are not part of the demand structure, in that they are not intending to fly, but they might have a political view that the Government might listen to if they want their votes in the future?

Robert Courts: The engagement that has taken place, which is listed at annexe B, is very wide-ranging. It encompasses all parts of the sectors, operators, travel and wider.

Q73 Simon Jupp: Thank you, Chair. It is good to clarify that point. Why was the publication of the Global Travel Task Force report not accompanied by a statement to Parliament? What plans do you have to engage with parliamentarians on this matter? As you know, many parliamentarians have constituencies with or near airports, for example. Many constituencies across the country have travel agents in their high streets. What are your plans to engage with Parliament on this vital issue, which could cost, if it goes wrong, thousands of jobs?

Robert Courts: Travel is of critical importance to all of us. You quite rightly put your finger on a number of issues. There are constituencies with travel agents and travel companies—I have some in my own



constituency, so I entirely understand the importance—and likewise aviation. Many have a maritime focus.

Parliament's role in this is absolutely critical. I am absolutely committed to engaging, as of course I am doing now. I have an open-door policy. If people want to talk to me about something, I will absolutely take that on board. Whoever they are, wherever they represent, whatever their point of view, I want to hear it. That is absolutely critical. In terms of the report, you will know the report was published towards the end of recess, which was the reason for that. Now that Parliament is back, I am committed to involving myself with everyone and hearing their views, no matter where they come from.

Q74 Simon Jupp: Will there be further statements to Parliament, for example, when the countries listed are announced, so that, when we know where we can fly, it is clear to Parliament, and we can ask questions to probe into the science behind the decision making?

Robert Courts: At the moment, I cannot give a commitment on exactly how we will do it, but there will be a programme of communication with parliamentarians and the public. The communications point is absolutely key. You are quite right to draw attention to it because there needs to be clarity for parliamentarians, for the people they represent and for the people who will be travelling.

Q75 Simon Jupp: If you had your time again in this role, looking at the way that this has been carried out over the last six months—the Global Travel Task Force—what would you have done differently? Would you have done it the same way that it has been done this time around?

Robert Courts: I think we have had a process of wide-ranging engagement, and I will always do that. I am always very keen to make sure that I am taking on everybody's views, no matter who they are and what they represent, to make sure we have that wide range on board. That is what we have done. That is absolutely right. I would do that all over again.

Q76 Simon Jupp: Despite the fact that the industry is crying out for clarity within a month, potentially, of people being able to fly abroad, you would not change any of the steps you have taken?

Robert Courts: For the reasons that I have given, I do not accept that this does not provide clarity. It is a very clear framework for international travel, and I suggest that it provides precisely the clarity that people are looking for. It shows the framework within which international travel will restart in a safe and secure fashion. That is what this Global Travel Task Force report was always intended to do.

You are quite right to point out that there are some other aspects that we have to deal with, but in terms of operationalising it and showing how it is going to work, that is the work that we are doing now and going over in the run-up to the review period that starts at the beginning of May.



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The report did what it was always intended to do, which is to lay out a robust, clear framework for the restart of international travel, but there is more in terms of internationalising this to be done.

Simon Jupp: Thank you, Minister.

Q77 **Chair:** In a way, this builds on Simon's point, because the task force's terms of reference were to "report on 12 April with recommendations aimed at facilitating a return to international travel," yet—again I come back to this—there is no detail as to which country rules will apply per traffic light. I find it incredible that we do not know, even on a provisional basis, what the rules will be if you want to travel to Greece on 17 May. You will not know until some time in May. That does not give information that facilitates a return to international travel.

Robert Courts: We will probably have to agree to disagree on that point. I hear the force in the point that you make, clearly. In terms of the rules facilitating the restart of international travel, I suggest that is what this does. I accept that, at the moment, we do not have the categories, and which country will be in each category. We will be providing that detail. It is too early to do so at the moment. I understand that others feel they would prefer to have it now. For the reasons I have given, that will come. We do not have it yet.

Chair: I will zip it on that front. I have pushed it as much as I can. Lilian Greenwood, over to you.

Q78 **Lilian Greenwood:** Good morning, Minister. It sounds like industry will get, maybe, two weeks' notice of the initial allocation of countries to green, amber and red. How quickly might that change? If a country changes from green to amber, could that happen while people are away? How much notice will they have of that change? If they are away when it changes, will they have to comply with amber list quarantine restrictions when they return to the UK?

Robert Courts: This is an absolutely key point. In terms of which country falls into which categorisation, as you would expect, we will keep that under constant review. We will make sure that we are constantly looking at the data as it comes in. I think that is what the public would expect us to do and you would expect us to do. We are acutely aware of the potential situation where someone could be away and find themselves in some difficulty. That is why we are introducing the concept of the green watchlist, which you will have noticed plays a prominent part in the report, to ensure that people have some notice at that stage of whether they are likely to be in a country that is going from a green list to an amber list.

Q79 **Lilian Greenwood:** Are you envisaging a minimum time period that you would give of notification that a country is going to move and that move taking place? In recent weeks, we saw a change, for example, in the designation of Pakistan, and it happened at very short notice. Would you anticipate being able to give more notice, because of the factors that you



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set out—things like the percentage of population vaccinated and countries' access to reliable scientific data and genomic sequencing? Those things are not going to change rapidly, are they? Do you think you will be able to give more notice under your new system?

Robert Courts: Sometimes things change rapidly. We have seen that particularly with variants of concern. The public would expect us to keep a constant, vigilant eye on the situation that appertained at any particular time, particularly abroad. If we have to act rapidly to protect public health, we will have to do that. I accept of course that there is a tension; ideally, we would prefer to give notice, for all the reasons that I know you are driving at, but sometimes we have to protect public health, which is the reason why we have taken that approach.

Q80 Lilian Greenwood: Have you made an assessment of what impact it will have on travellers' behaviour when a country's rating changes, and indeed where countries are allocated in the first place? We heard pretty much that, if a country is not green, it is a deal-breaker. People won't book a holiday in an amber country because they have to go into quarantine for 10 days on their return. What assessment have you made of the impact of the system on travellers?

Robert Courts: That is the purpose behind the green watchlist section that we have introduced. It is intended precisely to give that element of granularity, so that people can see where there is a country that perhaps is moving in the wrong direction but is not yet at the stage when we have to take further restrictions. That is why we introduced that.

It is a balance. You could have much more granularity. You could have greater categories and countries falling into more categories. That makes it harder to operationalise. That makes it harder for people to understand. There is a tension between trying to make it simple and easy for people to understand and giving them the information they need. I think we balanced that right because we have given the green list countries. You have the amber list, which has the quarantine, as you say, but you also have the green watchlist, which means that you know if you were to book a green watchlist country that it is one we are concerned about.

Q81 Lilian Greenwood: How will the green watchlist operate in practice? What should people expect? Is it essentially saying, "Don't book a holiday to one of these places because you might get stuck"?

Robert Courts: It is quite important that we tackle this question. It is a very good point. Should people book a holiday? What people ought to do, I suggest, is look at the situation that exists at the time and look at their own circumstances, and look at the terms and conditions of the holiday that they have booked. Government cannot say, "You should book this. You shouldn't book that." What Government can do is say, "This is the situation that exists in this country and this is the information you need." Then people have to go away and consider their circumstances: for



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example, what their working practices are, whether they can afford to carry on working at home—some people can, some people can't; it is not the same rule for everybody—and then look at what kind of holiday, if it is not a work trip or a family trip, they are talking about booking. Can they get refunds? Can they move their holiday if they have to?

There are so many different variables that it is not something where Government can say, "You should do this and you shouldn't do that." There is always an element of risk involved in international travel in any event. What we can do is provide as much information as we can and allow people to make an informed choice. That is what we are seeking to do with the green watchlist.

Q82 Lilian Greenwood: Our previous witnesses said that your policy is capable of creating chaotic scenes in international airports, like we saw recently in Islamabad. How do you respond to that?

Robert Courts: I do not accept that at all. We are seeking to give people as much certainty as possible, but at the same time protect public health. I cannot emphasise that point enough. There is a tension of course. There is a balancing act for Government to undertake between seeking to allow travel as much as possible, but to do so in a safe way and to take steps to protect public health, as is required. We are seeking, in operationalising things, to ensure that our border, the one we have control over, operates as smoothly as possible. What happens in other countries is something that is not entirely amenable to our control.

Q83 Lilian Greenwood: Where does vaccination fit into this? As I understand it from the report, you will be able to travel to green list, amber list and even red list countries if you want to. You will just be subject to restrictions when you return. Have you considered whether folk who have had two vaccinations could travel to, for example, an amber list country without having to be subject to those restrictions?

Robert Courts: We are continuing to look at what part vaccination can play for both outgoing and incoming travel, although you will appreciate that to a certain extent you have to address both in any event. We will look in due course to have some certification that deals with testing as well as vaccination. It is not all about vaccination, because we need people to be able to travel in any event. That is why we have always said that testing still has an important part to play. It is always an important part of the suite of measures that we have in place. We are continuing to work with countries, both bilaterally and on a multilateral basis, to see what part vaccination can play. It is important to bear that in mind.

Q84 Lilian Greenwood: In terms of people returning to the UK, at the moment there is no advantage to them in having had their full two vaccinations, is there? Are you planning to change that?

Robert Courts: In part, that refers back to the point I made earlier about variants of concern in particular and about understanding the medical effect of a vaccine. There are different vaccines. They all operate



in a slightly different way. Science is still catching up. We still need the evidence base in order to understand what effect having a vaccine has on you, what beneficial effect—

Q85 Lilian Greenwood: Does that mean it is something you might consider in the future, but not at the moment?

Robert Courts: I will come back to that in just a second. I will answer the question, but I want to finish making the point.

Everything we are doing is based on data. It is based on scientific understanding. When we are looking at vaccines, what effect does it have on transmissibility, for example? Are you able to still carry the virus if you are vaccinated and to what extent? All those questions are important. We also have to make sure that the international world is in a similar place.

You asked me whether this is something we would look at doing in the future. Again, I refer back to the point that the point of reopening is not the end state for international travel. We have checkpoints at which we will look at the policy in the round and consider, when we look at other countries' vaccination standards and how they have ramped up, and the effect of the vaccine in practice, what we can then do. As I say, we are continuing to look at what part vaccination may be able to play.

Lilian Greenwood: I will try to be quick. I have two more questions.

Chair: Lilian, can you be really brief? I have just clocked the time, and we are having a shocker in terms of the brief.

Q86 Lilian Greenwood: Okay. One last question. Will you treat islands differently? For example, the Canary Islands are part of Spain. Will they be treated the same as Spain or differently? What about the United States? Will you treat all states exactly the same, even though North America is a continent? What is the situation in relation to that?

Robert Courts: I will try to be quick with my answers as well, Chairman. We have had a policy throughout all of this that has to evolve, because we will learn more about virus and its behaviour as we go along.

Last year, we had the gradation of policy evolving. We had the islands policy then. At the moment, we have laid out the framework, as we have seen, but we will continue, at the checkpoints, to look at the situation that exists in other countries as we see their vaccine roll-out, as we see their prevalence of the virus, and as we see whether they have any variants of concern, for example. We will keep considering all those things at all points.

You mentioned the United States. The United States has a ban on UK citizens coming in at present. It is worth dwelling on that. This is an international market, and not everything that affects what we do is controlled by this Government.



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Chair: I will move us on, if I may. We have a number of sections to go through. In fact, we have only just finished the first. In fact, we have not quite finished, because Ruth wants to come in.

Q87 **Ruth Cadbury:** I have a very quick question on airports and queuing in this country. Previous witnesses said they were very concerned about the border issues at Heathrow and other international UK airports. There is not the capacity and there is very long queuing. That doesn't help anybody, least of all UK plc. What conversations have you had with the Home Office about this issue?

Robert Courts: It is an excellent point, and it is one of the things that is really critical in terms of operationalising this and getting it right. We have said in the report that we will set up a separate group to look at the operationalising of the border with the Home Office and with industry. I cannot emphasise enough how important the work with industry has been that we have had up till now. I thank them for everything they have done. That absolutely will continue in terms of engagement.

We are taking a number of steps. We are, for example, simplifying the passenger locator form. We are pushing the compliance up so that carriers—

Q88 **Ruth Cadbury:** It was more about the Border Force issue. I am just conscious that we are in trouble over time.

Robert Courts: I am sorry. We will continue to talk with the Border Force, of course.

Ruth Cadbury: It was just what conversations you have had with the Home Office. Do write to us with the detail.

Chair: Perhaps we will exchange correspondence on that basis. We have also written previously as well.

Let us go to what this all means for summer 2021. I will hand back to Simon Jupp. You are on mute, Simon.

Q89 **Simon Jupp:** A classic 2020 move. I apologise, Chair. Before I continue, I would like, for the record, to declare that my family owns a business in the travel industry, although I have no financial interest in or direct involvement with it.

Minister, many people watching and across the country will want to holiday abroad this year. Following the publication of the Global Travel Task Force report, what is your advice to them about booking an overseas holiday this summer?

Robert Courts: This is one of the most important questions on everybody's lips. I repeat again that I am absolutely passionate about this wonderful industry in terms of the travel sector, aviation, maritime and international rail. I want to see people moving around and going away as quickly as we safely can.



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Now that we have published this framework, instead of saying that people should not be booking—although they should not be until 17 May comes round in any event, as you know—we are in the position where we can say for the first time that people can start looking to book. I would advise people, certainly for now, to wait until they understand which category each country falls into, because there is a risk of disappointment.

If I may revert to the point I made a moment ago, it is not for me as a Government Minister to tell people exactly what they should be doing. I would advise people to look at the circumstances of the booking to ensure that they will either get their money back or be able to transfer the booking, or, if, for example, they have to self-isolate on return if there were to be a change in country categorisation, that they are able to work and continue doing so during that time. We are able to offer more optimism now than we were because of the clear framework that we have laid out. None the less, it is still important that everybody who is considering travelling—because there is an element of risk in international travel in any event—looks at the terms and conditions of their contract and they consider what would happen in the event of a difficulty.

Q90 Simon Jupp: You will understand, Minister, that that optimism is not shared by the industry at the moment for the reasons we have already covered this morning. Are we on track to restart international travel for business and leisure on 17 May?

Robert Courts: We have said thus far that there will not be any travel before that. We have to have a review point, and it is in line with the domestic road map, as you know. It will depend on all the factors that we have set out. They are listed in paragraph 29 of the report. It is the vaccine deployment. It is showing the evidence that the vaccines continue to reduce hospitalisations, infection rates and the assessment of variants of concern. We will have to look at that at the relevant time.

Q91 Simon Jupp: When is that review taking place?

Robert Courts: I would expect that review to happen around the beginning of May.

Q92 Simon Jupp: You can understand the frustration, because, at the moment, people can travel overseas to conduct property deals but not visit their families. This has a huge impact on so many people.

Robert Courts: I entirely understand the impact it is having. That is why I am keen to stress that this is not just about people going on holiday. This is about people needing to go abroad for business—people who have spent years building up international businesses; many of us represent internationally minded constituencies in many ways—and the critical impact on families. I think 27% of mothers in the UK were born outside the UK.



We have an incredibly internationally minded, interconnected global society, and it is critically important that people can travel. I am acutely aware of that. That is why we are trying to unlock international travel as quickly as we can—but safely. The one thing we do not want to do from a constituency MP perspective, a travel sector perspective or the airlines' perspective is to undermine the success and go backwards, after everything we have been through over the course of the last year, after all the sacrifices the country has made, and after the incredible success of the vaccine programme. Yes, we are unlocking travel, but it has to be robust, it has to be safe, and it has to be, hopefully, irreversible.

Simon Jupp: Thank you, Minister. I am conscious of time, so I will hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you. Let us focus on testing and quarantine, and I will go to Ben Bradshaw.

Q93 **Mr Bradshaw:** Minister, the head of easyJet, Johan Lundgren, said today that he thought that most of Europe would be on the green list by 17 May. Is he being over-optimistic?

Robert Courts: I know that is the question that everyone wants to know about at this stage. I cannot commit to that, I am afraid, and it would not be right for me to speculate as to which countries in which areas of the world are likely to be on which list. We will have to look at the right time. It is too early to say at the moment.

Q94 **Mr Bradshaw:** When the UK now has negative excess deaths, and hospitalisations and deaths from Covid are now lower than they would be in a normal seasonal flu situation, why are your travel restrictions this summer more restrictive than they were last summer?

Robert Courts: A great deal has changed since last summer. The vaccine but also the emergence of variants of concern are key factors in that. We need to understand the importance of what the vaccine does scientifically—on the data—and we need to ensure that the rest of the world catches up as well. Although we are doing very well, others are not. The point about transmission and the effect of variants of concern is critically important.

Q95 **Mr Bradshaw:** The vaccine has been shown to be effective against transmission and effective at preventing serious illness and death, and against all new variants. People still do not quite get this: why is it more restrictive than it was last year?

Robert Courts: A number of studies have suggested a number of things. That is still something that is being considered. Everything that we do is done on the basis of data and medical science. We will continue to review this. It is important I say this again. The point of reopening of international travel is not the end state. We have the review points. We will consider all of these points, as we have been, and we will continue to do so. I entirely share your ambition for international travel. It has to be



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safe and secure. I know you will pardon me for saying that again. I share your ambition, but it has to be done robustly.

Q96 Mr Bradshaw: Why are you insisting on very expensive and slow PCR tests for people returning to this country from a trip abroad when lorry drivers arrive from France every day, currently with very high rates in France, and you allow them to come in using lateral flow tests? Will you please consider changing that policy? Lateral flow tests are used in schools all the time. They are now used in the general population here all the time. Why are you insisting on this massively expensive barrier for British people coming back from a trip abroad?

Robert Courts: PCRs, as you know, are the gold standard. They particularly help us with keeping tabs on variants, which is critically important for all the reasons that I have explained and that you understand. We have said in the report that we will be looking to see what we can do to help with the cost. We are aware of that. I am acutely aware of the fact that there is a cost that goes along with that gold standard. We will be looking at doing that, as we have said in the report, over the course of the next few weeks.

In terms of emerging technology, we will continue to see what part that might play. We have always said that we want to be flexible enough to enable new technology to play a part when it is able to do so. I do not think we are there at the moment, but obviously we will keep reviewing. Everything we do is under review and there are the checkpoints in place.

Q97 Mr Bradshaw: Will you cap the cost of the PCR test at a level similar to the normal rate in Europe, about £50 or £60, half of what it costs in this country?

Robert Courts: It would be premature of me to say at the moment, given that we have said that we will see what we can do over the course of the next few weeks to help with the cost of tests. There are a number of different ways we can do that. We can look at both the possibility of Government-provided tests for the pre-departure test or, as you called it, the pre-arrival test coming back in, for ease of clarification, but also with the costs here. We will be looking at that. I am sorry I cannot give you any further details at the moment, but I am very aware of the point.

Q98 Mr Bradshaw: One of the idiosyncrasies of your system last summer was that you insisted that the tests before you came back were in English, French or Spanish, which made it very difficult for people coming back from Germany and Italy. Will you review that? How will you get over the problem of the non-availability of tests in English, French and Spanish from a large number of destinations?

Robert Courts: I can understand entirely where your question comes from. It has to be operationalised and easily understood at the border, which is the reason why we have taken the approach that we have. It has to be simple enough to work. Equally, I understand that we have to



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ensure that languages are facilitated where possible. We are continuing to evolve the policy. We will continue to review all things as we go.

Q99 **Mr Bradshaw:** The word “negative” is the same in German, Italian, Spanish and pretty much every European language, and not that difficult for Border Agency staff to understand.

Robert Courts: With regard to one word, that may be the case, but these are complicated matters. You have more than one word on a form, and I think it is important that border staff are able to understand what they are given to make sure that it is easily operational.

Q100 **Mr Bradshaw:** Can I ask you about quarantine? A number of us have had constituency cases of people who have come back into quarantine. They have done all the pre-booking of the tests using one of your accredited providers; tests have not arrived; they have arrived late; they have only got results for some of the families; the second tests have not arrived on time; they have done the test to release; it has all been very late and delayed; it has cost them thousands of pounds; and they have had to stay in quarantine longer than the 10 days because of this fiasco. What due diligence do you do before appointing these Government-approved companies to provide the testing, and what plans do you have to make the quarantine period both shorter and much more efficient than it currently is?

Robert Courts: All the accredited providers are accredited by UKAS, United Kingdom Accreditation Service, which sits under the Department of Health and Social Care. It is a stringent test before you are able to get on the list in the first place. They are continually reviewed. Any such cases as the ones you mentioned are listened to, taken into account and reviewed. We keep that list under review. If necessary, people are removed from it. I am very concerned to hear about any inefficiencies there have been. I do not think that is reflective of the system as a whole, but if there are some cases we will continue to look at them and take action as required.

Q101 **Chair:** In terms of the commitment on Ben’s evidence gathering there, will you look again at the concept of requiring a PCR test? It seems absolutely ludicrous that 99% of the mortality risk in this country going abroad has to get an expensive PCR test and yet hauliers coming in from countries where they do not have the vaccination programme in place get the lateral flow. Surely, you could review it and say, take the lateral flow, and, if that comes up positive, then take a PCR, because that goes to the lab. Will you commit to having a look at that again, Minister?

Robert Courts: The concern is around variants of concern and whether they are picked up, and the data that has to be gathered. We have a great success in this country. As you know, even now we do about 40% of the entire world’s genome sequencing, which is why we are able to pick up the variants. We are nationally leading. That is why there is the



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importance of the PCR tests. The whole of the policy that we have is subject to ongoing review at the checkpoints in any event.

Q102 **Chair:** Are you not concerned about variants of concern coming in from hauliers from Europe on that basis?

Robert Courts: There is the issue around the free flow of freight and traffic, which is why we take that slightly different approach there.

Chair: Time defeats us from probing further. Greg Smith will deal with certification requirements.

Q103 **Greg Smith:** Good morning, Minister. When it comes to the issue of health certification, Covid passports, call them what you will, how much interaction has there been so far between you, the Department for Transport and the Cabinet Office, which are leading on the concept of these passports?

Robert Courts: We work hand in glove, as you would expect, across Government. The Cabinet Office runs the overall accreditation certification programme. As you know, the four reviews sit under the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's responsibility with regard to domestic accreditation. We feed into that, and we are a part of that. We also engage in our own right to see what part certification may play in international travel.

Q104 **Greg Smith:** I do not know how much of the evidence you heard from the previous session. In order to scale up something quickly, it cannot be a whole, globally agreed way of doing something, because that will take a very long time. From the Department for Transport's perspective, does the DFT support the concept of international travel vaccination passports, and if so, what, in an ideal world, would they look like to you? Are they paper-based? Are they tech-based? Will it be a condition that is placed from the perspective of what we require for anyone, whether they are a citizen or a visitor coming from abroad into the UK, or do you want to look at them from a global perspective of what we expect others to equally want at their own borders?

Robert Courts: You have put your finger on some of the complexities of the international work. I heard your question earlier. I will try to address it in the round. Essentially, we are doing all of that. Long term, we will want to move to a position where there is an international standard. Travel by its very nature is international and flexible, and we have a patchwork of different rules. That will of course be slower. I would like to concentrate on the work we are doing. We are international leaders through, for example, ICAO, because we sit on that panel and are key leaders in the CART process around Covid-secure travel. We drive forward that international agenda as well as working with other organisations like OECD, G7, and Five Eyes, to look at the multilateral picture, because, ultimately, in the long run, that is what we will want to see.



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In the short term, we are also open to bilateral arrangements and we will look to work with like-minded partners, whether they are ambitious like us, who are technologically minded, or whether they might be important for the purposes of industry or culture. We will look at all of those as well and see what we might be able to do, particularly with regard to pilot schemes.

As to what form we see it taking, in the long run, ideally, we would like to see something as digital as possible because we want to see a free flow at both borders—the other country's border and coming back in. We also have to bear in mind that there will be some people who might not have a smartphone, or the battery might run out or something, so you need a paper-based possibility as well. We are working very closely with NHSX, which holds the data in this country, and looks to extract that and use it in the best possible way. We will also work with countries and other organisations—you have heard from IATA already around travel passes; there are others as well—and look at what part they may be able to play.

Greg Smith: Mindful of the time, I had better pass back.

Chair: That is very kind of you, Greg. I hope I was not nudging you in that direction.

Let us look at the long-term recovery of the aviation and travel sectors with Grahame Morris.

Q105 **Grahame Morris:** When is the medium to long-term recovery plan for the aviation sector likely to be published? Minister, I am sure you heard the previous panel giving evidence to the Committee. What they are after is an end to the uncertainty. I know you explained that you could not go into granular detail to give some clarity, but when is this plan likely to be published? Do you have any indication?

Robert Courts: At the moment, our focus is wholly on restarting the international travel sector in the safe, robust way that I have referred to. That is what you see us doing with the GTTF, and that is what you will see us doing at the checkpoints as well. We will later this year publish a strategic framework for the sector. That will cover other wider things in the aviation sector as well. It will include things like green aviation, air space modernisation and general aviation—a wider strategic framework for the sector.

Q106 **Grahame Morris:** We are all hoping that the road map to recovery is on track, but if for any reason the international travel date is postponed and summer holidays abroad cannot go ahead, are you anticipating that the publication of the aviation recovery plan will slip once again?

Robert Courts: I am not wishing to be evasive, but it is very difficult for me to speculate about what might happen in circumstances in the future that have not yet happened. We are looking to publish a strategic framework for the sector later in the year, but that comes after the GTTF work that we are doing with regards to restart.



Q107 **Grahame Morris:** I am sure you are not intentionally being evasive, Minister. The previous panel that gave evidence to the Committee talked about how important it is that, if there are any further delays, there is a recognition in Government of the need for additional support for the sector. We have already heard that over a third of jobs in the sector have gone. Is it your intention to be arguing with Treasury in this eventuality for additional support for the sector?

Robert Courts: As you will know, the sector has been a beneficiary of the wide, recognised, economy-wide support that the Treasury has rolled out throughout the whole of this to the tune of approximately £7 billion. I will not get into speculating about what we might do under certain circumstances if they were to happen in the future. I absolutely commit to continuing to engage very closely with the sector—the people on your earlier panel, for example—and to hear what they have to say at all times. I have always done that, and I will continue to do it.

Q108 **Grahame Morris:** Minister, can I ask you about the effectiveness of the Department for Transport in advocating on behalf of aviation and tourism? On this Committee, we have been quite charitable, and we have always blamed the Treasury for the lack of support. Reflecting on some of the earlier answers to colleagues' questions in relation to the passport and the PCR testing arrangements, is it fair to say that you are doing the very best to support the sectors of aviation in tourism?

Robert Courts: Yes, absolutely. You have a group of Ministers in the Department for Transport who are absolutely passionately devoted to the industries they represent.

Grahame Morris: Thanks very much for your response, Minister. I will hand back to the Chair. I have had a good go there. Thanks very much indeed.

Chair: Gavin Newlands has just rejoined us, so over to you, Gavin.

Q109 **Gavin Newlands:** Given that we have only a few minutes left, I only have one question and it follows on from Grahame's last question and your response, Minister. I take you at your word, Minister, that you and colleagues at the DFT are passionate about the industry and looking to support it, and what have you. But, looking at it from our point of view, it seems like the Treasury has been ignoring you and has not been listening to your calls, assuming that they have been made, about the aviation sector and how big it is. We have heard this morning, if we needed further evidence, that a third of the jobs in the sector have already gone. Two airlines have gone. If aviation does not get going in any real meaningful way in the early summer, there could be airports at risk of closing.

There is a crisis in this sector. The Secretary of State said that he would stand by the industry's side. I have not spoken to one person in the sector who thinks that the Government have stood by their side throughout this process. What do you say to them?



Robert Courts: There is no doubting that these are difficult times, not just for aviation but for maritime, rail and international travel in its broader ecosystem as well. These are challenging times. These are challenging times that have been brought to us by the global pandemic. Let us never forget that. The Government have responded with a plethora of different schemes all addressing things in a cross-economy sector. The aviation sector alone has benefited to the tune of about £7 billion. I entirely reject any suggestion that the Government have not stood by the sector. They have and they will continue to do so.

Q110 **Gavin Newlands:** What other sector has lost as many jobs as the aviation sector in this pandemic? Is there any other sector that has lost as many jobs?

Robert Courts: As I say, this is a challenging time for the sector. I cannot get away from that. It is challenging because of the demands of a global pandemic with a new disease that we have not come across before, and we have had to learn how to deal with it. The Government have stood by and responded with an unprecedented measure of billions of pounds of cross-economy support, and the aviation sector has benefited from £7 billion of it. The Government are, through the Global Travel Task Force, looking to respond further to get people travelling again, protecting public health, as you would all expect me to do, but making sure we get people flying, sailing and on trains again as quickly as we possibly can.

Gavin Newlands: I do not think I am going to get any further, Chair, so I will hand back to you. Thank you very much.

Q111 **Chair:** I am interested in one part, Minister. I spoke to one leading executive on the business side of aviation, who, having read that the Government had nursed the international travel and aviation sector through this pandemic, remarked that it felt more like being waterboarded. Why is it the case that the international travel business sector feels as if it has not been given support over the past year, that it does not feel like it has the confidence to really get going again and is really concerned about its survival?

Robert Courts: I cannot, again, emphasise enough how difficult this is for the sector. It is a new disease we have been facing, and this has been a massive challenge for every country in the world, particularly for a sector that by its very nature is international. I do not for a minute underestimate how difficult this has been. What we are doing is standing behind them through the hundreds of billions of pounds of cross-economy support. We are now seeking to get them to restart in a safe way that is robust and sustainable. That is what we are entirely focused on doing. We are absolutely passionate about this sector. It means a huge amount to the United Kingdom, to our place in the world, to the families who have people abroad, to businesses and to jobs. We are doing that by making sure that what we have in place is clear, sustainable and robust.



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Chair: Time defeats us. There is even more we could go through if time permitted. I want to thank you very much indeed. It will be the intention of this Committee to issue another report with some recommendations. You can probably sense the direction of travel that we would like the Government to follow. We will send that over to you. I formally close the meeting.