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Dear Huw,

Thank you for your letter of 9 December, seeking further information on Government support for the UK travel industry.

You have raised a number of key issues across a range of areas and we are keen to address these matters. The COVID-19 pandemic is proving to be an existential threat to many otherwise strong businesses within these sectors. We can reassure you that the Government continues to actively engage with industry and the regulator on a number of critical issues.

We are under no illusions about the significant challenges that the sector faces during these difficult times. COVID-19 has profoundly changed the nature of international travel. It remains vitally important that we manage the risk of COVID-19 and keep the number of cases in the UK as low as possible. The Government's approach balances the risks of imported COVID-19 cases whilst supporting the travel and tourism sectors which have been severely impacted by the pandemic.

Travel advice and quarantine

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (England) Regulations 2020, which came into force on 8 June 2020 have helped to reduce the risk of importing cases into the UK. The Government has kept these measures under regular review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

Decisions on International Travel Corridors (ITCs) are informed by risk assessments provided by the Joint Biosecurity Centre, working closely with Public Health England, using a methodology endorsed by the four UK Chief Medical Officers. Decisions on ITCs are reviewed weekly and data is kept under constant review to determine whether it is safe to add a country or territory to the Travel Corridor list.

These decisions consider the relative risk of imported cases of COVID-19 through incoming international travellers, and places restrictions on those incoming travellers to mitigate the risk of imported cases transmitting the virus more widely.

Separately to this, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice considers the absolute risk that a UK citizen may face when travelling to another country. This considers such things as the risk of contracting COVID-19 abroad, but also other matters such as the availability of healthcare in another country, the safety of any local quarantine measures, and the resilience of transport options. It can also consider other measures outside of COVID-19, such as ongoing conflicts or geopolitical issues, which may impact the safety of a UK citizen if they were to travel to that country.

The Government has been clear that where the data, science, and evidence show that there is an unacceptably high risk of either imported COVID-19 cases, or a risk to UK citizens in another country, the relevant advice will be amended to reflect that. This can mean that countries would be added or removed to the list of Travel Corridor countries, or FCDO travel advice can be changed, at very short notice. This is critical to supporting public health in the UK, and protecting UK citizens abroad.

Government action

Despite the challenges that the virus continues to present, the Government is doing all it can to tread a careful balance between protecting public health and promoting economic recovery. In response to public health risks, we are extremely grateful to the many businesses who continue to adhere to the Government's travel advice and changes to the travel corridors, and dedication to being fair to consumers.

As part of continued efforts to protect travel whilst safeguarding public health, the Government launched the COVID-19 Test to Release for International Travel scheme on 15 December. International arrivals into England from countries, territories or regions that are not included in the Travel Corridor list can opt into this scheme. Passengers can pay for a privately provided test to be taken five days after leaving the location that is not in the Travel Corridor list and can end self-isolation following a negative result.

Passengers who test positive must self-isolate for a further ten days and will be subject to existing domestic support and enforcement measures. A test on day five of self-isolation provides a strong level of protection against transmission of COVID-19 acquired abroad amongst the UK population, while allowing for much greater freedom for those seeking to travel.

In response to COVID-19, the Government has established an extensive fiscal support package to support businesses that have been impacted. As part of this critical work, HM Treasury (HMT) continues to work closely with industry as this pandemic continues and evolves.

Accessing Government support

You raised the difficulty by the travel sector in accessing Government support. To support companies in accessing Government support, HMT and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have launched a variety of support schemes, including the Business Support Finder Tool, which helps businesses and self-employed people to determine what financial support is available to them at this time. This tool provides a lifeline to numerous businesses of all sizes across the UK, protecting millions of jobs and helps ensure as many as practical remain after the pandemic.

BEIS, HMT, and DfT will endeavour to fully engage with travel providers on where businesses are unable to easily access critical support.

Insurance, refunds, and compensation

With respect to insurance, the Government is engaging with the insurance sector on its response to this unprecedented situation and is encouraging insurers to do all they can to support consumers during this difficult period. The Association of British Insurers estimate travel insurers paid out at least £275 million to consumers with valid travel insurance policies who experienced disruption or cancelled travel due to COVID-19. The Competition and Markets Authority has issued guidance on consumer contracts, cancellation and refunds during COVID-19 and continues to keep the situation under review as this pandemic continues to evolve.

Turning to the issue of refunds, the Civil Aviation Authority is continuing its extensive engagement programme with airlines to ensure they are meeting their obligations. As Minister for Aviation, I recently wrote to airlines raising the issue of refunds, and asked them to do more to support businesses and consumers during this unprecedented time.

The Package Travel Regulations

Finally, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has no plans to temporarily suspend the application of the Package Travel Regulations (PTRs) at this time. At the start of the pandemic, the Government received representations from both consumer groups regarding potential changes to the PTR regulations. The Government was clear that we needed to balance ensuring that consumers were protected, whilst recognising the huge challenges that businesses were facing.

At that time, the UK was still in EU Exit Transition Period, with consumer rights – including the PTRs - enshrined in EU law. The Government was for this reason not able to amend or suspend the PTR regulations. Now that the UK has left the EU and the Transition Period has ended, we are keen to learn lessons from this past year to inform our future work. The Department for Transport will feed into any review that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy undertakes into the PTRs, and I would encourage companies in the travel sector to continue to work with BEIS on the matter of PTRs.

The DfT is also proactively engaging with BEIS, the package travel sector and consumer advocacy bodies to assess the impact of cancellations made in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We are grateful for your ongoing support and engagement on key consumer issues as part of our vital work to boost and restore consumer confidence in the aviation and travel sectors during these challenging times.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Courts'.

ROBERT COURTS MP

**MINISTER FOR AVIATION, MARITIME
AND SECURITY**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Scully'.

PAUL SCULLY MP

**MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS,
CONSUMERS & LABOUR MARKETS
AND MINISTER FOR LONDON**