



HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

Catherine West MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Your ref: ZA11189

20 August 2021

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your email of 23 June to the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage on behalf of a number of your constituents about support for the travel sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your email has been passed to the Treasury and I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area. I am sorry for the delay in my reply.

I want to first say that the Government recognises the extreme disruption that the pandemic has had on businesses across the UK, including those in the travel industry. The pandemic brought about the largest peacetime economic shocks the world has faced since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the Government has provided an unprecedented economic support package to mitigate this, costing over £352 billion since the start of the pandemic.

In your letter, you raise concerns about the traffic light system for travel. The traffic light system categorises all countries based on risk to protect public health and the vaccine rollout from variants of COVID-19. The Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) produces objective risk assessments of countries and territories. Decisions on red, amber or green list assignment and associated border measures are taken based on the JBC risk assessments, alongside wider public health factors such as genomic surveillance capability, COVID-19 transmission risk, and variant of concern transmission risk. A summary of the JBC methodology is published alongside key data that supports our decisions. The summary of the JBC methodology can be found at:
www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-biosecurity-centre.

All of the latest advice about red, amber and green list countries can be found on the UK Government's website at:
www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england.

The allocation of countries will be kept under regular review and respond to emerging evidence, with a particular focus on variants of concern. As set out in the Global Travel Taskforce report, a further formal review will take place at a checkpoint no later than 1 October 2021. This will take account of the domestic and international health picture and consider whether current measures could be rolled back. Country allocations are subject to change and can be changed with limited notice.

The latest classification changes have been decided by Ministers, informed by the latest data and analysis by the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) and wider public health considerations, to help the public understand the risks to public health of travelling to different destinations. These measures are designed to give travellers and the travel sector more certainty, will be kept under review, and further action may be taken to protect public health.

In your letter, you suggest sector-specific financial support for the travel industry. It would be challenging to target support to the travel sector in a fair and deliverable way, and it may not be the case that this is the most effective or sensible way to provide help for those sectors most affected by COVID-19. It would also be difficult to target assistance at specific sectors without creating distortion, particularly as some firms work across multiple sectors.

We have introduced an unprecedented package of support, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, a range of Government-guaranteed business loans, and a significant package of direct business grants for businesses that were required to close, or which are severely affected by the restrictions put in place to tackle COVID-19 and save lives.

Further funding has also been made available via the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) to support those businesses that have had their trade adversely affected by the local and national restrictions. The ARG is a discretionary fund and is also administered by Local Authorities to support businesses in the way they see fit. Local Authorities in England have been allocated £2 billion in additional funding to provide support that best suits their area.

The Government is confident that the Restart Grant and ARG awards, alongside the extension of business rates relief, the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the announcement of the new Recovery Loan Scheme, will provide substantial support to businesses as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and trade begins to pick up. Details of this further support can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>

You also ask about affordable and proportionate testing requirements. COVID-19 tests are a vital part of how we protect both travelers and the UK public. Only essential travel should be undertaken during the pandemic; it is therefore right that people who travel, and who are already paying for this, should also pay the costs of their COVID-19 tests. Free NHS tests should therefore not be used for the purpose of travel. Further information can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): Test to Release for international travel'.

NHS Test and Trace provides tests for international arrivals for a charge, alongside private providers. Its charges are at the mid-point of the market, which ensures private providers can compete fairly. We are carefully monitoring issues raised by the public about private test providers, raising every complaint with them and taking rapid action with companies where appropriate.

The department does not endorse or recommend any particular private test provider or regulate the cost of tests or test services provided. We cannot comment directly on individual companies, as we do not hold any contractual agreements with them. However, private testing providers must meet the minimum standards for COVID-19 testing services, including being at the relevant stage of United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accreditation.

I hope you find this information helpful. I would like to thank you for taking the trouble to make us aware of these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kemi Badenoch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

KEMI BADENOCH
EXCHEQUER SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY