

WEEKLY REPORT

3 September 2021



COVID-19 UPDATE

This week, the UK has seen a slight decline in the number of people diagnosed with COVID-19, with numbers down by -0.2% and daily numbers averaging 35,693. Hospital admissions have increased slightly, but deaths have declined (-0.5%) this week compared to last week. Despite witnessing a rise, these figures are not unexpected or causing concern.

NHS organisations in England have been told to prepare for a possible extension of the COVID-19 vaccination programme to all 12 to 15-year-olds. Almost two-thirds of 16 and 17-year-olds in Wales have had a first dose of a coronavirus vaccine, while half of this age group in England and Scotland have been jabbed. The figure is 40% in Northern Ireland. Nearly 88% of over-16s have had the first dose of a vaccine, while 77.4% are fully-vaccinated.

According to the Republic of Ireland's COVID-19 DataHub, there have been 354,236 confirmed cases in the country as of Tuesday 31 August. There have been 5,112 deaths, including probable and possible deaths, as of Wednesday 1 September.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Afghanistan evacuation

Under 'Operation Pitting', the UK evacuated 15,000 people from Afghanistan in a fortnight - including 5,000 British nationals and more than 8,000 Afghans who worked for the UK and their families, as well as many highly vulnerable people. The final flight last weekend ended the UK's 20-year military involvement in Afghanistan.

Survey finds UK business confidence jumps to more than four-year high

British business confidence hit highs not seen since April 2017 on hopes the economy is recovering strongly to pre-pandemic levels. Employers in England's north west and east registered the biggest jump in confidence, according to the latest Lloyds Bank Business Barometer. There was caution among companies about inflation and staff shortages but firms in manufacturing, services and construction all posted greater optimism that recovery would continue. The monthly survey of 1,200 firms, conducted between 2-16 August, also saw business confidence in Northern Ireland turn positive after a negative response in July's poll. The barometer found that overall business confidence among UK firms rose by six points to +36% in August, driven by improvements in companies' trading prospects and expectations of stronger growth in the year ahead.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATES

Consumer confidence 'boosted by traffic light list stability'

Travel agents attributed strong sales over the August bank holiday weekend (25-27 August) to growing consumer confidence following a lack of major upheavals in the latest traffic light update. MidCounties group reported "a boost in bookings and enquiries for September and October 2021" with interest in Malta, Croatia and Majorca as well as mainland Spain, the Balearics, Canaries, Greek islands and Cyprus. Major retail consortium The Travel Network Group and tour operator Gold Medal both unveiled marketing campaigns in anticipation of growing confidence and sales this month.

Transport secretary's advisors warn against end of financial support and changing travel advice

The Air Travel Insolvency Protection Advisory Committee (ATIPAC) has issued a series of warnings to the government on the impact of changing travel restrictions, imminent withdrawal of financial support and proposed ATOL reform. The committee, which advises the transport secretary, has warned last-minute changes to travel restrictions risk "a higher level of travel organiser insolvency" and that if the furlough scheme and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans (CBILS) cease from the end of September "many businesses could fold". Its report argues the furlough scheme and government-backed loans "have been crucial in ensuring companies with no other source of income have continued to operate. If this financial support were to cease in September or before international travel resumes at scale, many businesses could fold." ATIPAC comprises trade, Civil Aviation Authority and consumer group representatives.

Portugal eases entry rules so only negative test is required

Portugal has eased entry restrictions for travellers from the UK, so any visitors with a negative COVID-19 test result can enter. Changes to the rules were announced in Portugal on Tuesday (31 August) and came into effect on Wednesday (1 September). The tourist board in the UK welcomed the move but warned the travel trade that the short notice might cause confusion for travellers.

'Scrap red list and be like other countries,' says ex-BA director

Ex-British Airways commercial director Robert Boyle, who now runs GridPoint Consulting, said the red list was only designed to work in countries with "Covid-zero" strategies like Australia and New Zealand. "If the red list was abolished completely and only amber and green were retained, the UK's border controls would still be more restrictive than Germany's are today," he said, adding the number of UK red-listed countries "seems excessive". Boyle said there was a logic for the red list in countries where there was a high risk of a dangerous new variant emerging, and for countries where infection rates are known to be very high or could be very high and which have poor sequencing data, however Boyle thinks that the red list should be "...dismantled, or at least put into standby mode to be reactivated if a new scary variant is discovered before it has already arrived in the UK."

AIRLINE UPDATE

Emirates - Emirates Airline will receive three more A380 aircraft from Airbus this year, with its final plane joining the fleet in November, earlier than the original delivery date of June 2022.

Qatar Airways - The airline has increased services from Edinburgh and Manchester airports "to meet pent-up demand following the lifting of travel restrictions". From Wednesday (1 September), services from Edinburgh increased to three flights a week, with a further increase to four flights a week from the beginning of October. From 1 September, Manchester airport sees an increase from three flights a week to 10, then 14 flights a week from October. Passengers of the oneworld alliance member will be able to connect through Hamad International Airport (HIA) in Doha to more than 170 destinations.

Ryanair - The Irish no-frills airline group flew 11.1 million passengers in August, against seven million in August 2020, with an improved load factor up nine

percentage points year-on-year to 82%. Ryanair operated more than 71,000 flights in the month as it said EU COVID-19 certificates stimulated recovery.

Wizz Air - In August, Wizz Air carried more than 3.5 million passengers, up by 50% on the number of people flown in the peak summer month last year, as the first travel curbs started to be lifted.

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Hays Travel - The UK's largest travel agency chain is no longer using the furlough scheme in its retail shops and currently has 400 vacancies nationwide, whilst recruiting for 450 apprentices. Hays Travel chair Dame Irene Hays told Travel Weekly: "It wasn't the summer we wanted, and we're nowhere near where we were in 2019, but August has been stronger for us," noting they returned to profitability last month.

Ice Travel Group - Icelolly.com has merged with TravelSupermarket to form the Ice Travel Group. The deal, first proposed in mid-May, has now been completed. Both holiday comparison brands are to be retained.

Jet2 Holidays - Jet2holidays and Jet2, the UK's second largest travel group, reported optimism for summer 2022 with a rise in average load factors over the same period for the pre-pandemic summer of 2019.

Trailfinders - Trailfinders is bucking the demands of most of the sector by urging a rapid ATOL reform process and variable ATOL Protection Contribution (APC) payments by April next year. In its response to the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) ATOL reform proposals, Trailfinders criticised the two-week extension of the consultation deadline in August, suggesting it "delayed further" the process.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

TikTok shares new insights into usage trends

TikTok carried out a survey of 7,000 global users to find out whether they considered their time on the platform as 'time well spent'. Key findings were:

- Users are spending more time on TikTok and less time with other forms of entertainment such as TV, podcasts, streaming videos or reading
- TikTok's algorithms keep its audience logged in, interacting with each other with

- higher attention rates than other video platforms
- TikTok prompts people to act. It said "Users find a constant stream of joyful entertainment, liberating creativity, and inspiration that's tailored just for them. It's a positive experience that primes people to join in and take action. For brands, TikTok's proactive population can have a huge effect"

Facebook tests new ad automation flows

Facebook is testing a new option to help advertisers automate their Facebook ad campaigns, with a process it's calling 'Ad Strategies'. The concept looks to simplify the ad creation process, asking more questions about what is being sold and the campaign goals. The system will measure response over time, and optimise ad spend accordingly. This puts more trust into Facebook's systems to detect the best ways for brands to optimise campaigns, without them having to set up individual targeting for each stage of the sales funnel.

MICE UPDATE

International Confex opens its doors

International Confex, one of the first large scale events for the business events industry, took place from 1-2 September, at ExCeL London. The conference brought together top-class speakers and exhibitors, allowing attendees to stay ahead of the curve with the largest sourcing floor for event tech and solutions and to be part of the movement that shows the government the value of events to economies, communities and the supply chains they serve. The speakers at the conference came from a range of companies including: Diversity Ally, Identity, TikTok, Smyle, Event First Steps and Carnival UK among others. In order to gain entry to the event, attendees were required to show proof of either double vaccination, a negative lateral flow test (within 48-hours) or the presence of COVID-19 antibodies.

LIGHTER NOTE

Gossiping raccoons and laughing snake among finalists for world's funniest animal snaps. See [here](#).