

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP,  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP,  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

6 January 2022

Dear Secretaries of State,

We are writing as leaders of the Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) across the North of England, representing tourism businesses and destinations which have a keen interest in international markets. We work together and collaborate to encourage more international visitors to the North of England for business and leisure.

We have become increasingly concerned that the Government's policy on international travel in response to COVID-19 does not appropriately reflect the significance of inbound business and leisure tourism for the North and the UK's economy.

The focus of the Government's announcements on international travel has been almost exclusively on whether British people will be allowed to go abroad on holiday or to visit friends and relatives. As the impact of the spread of the Omicron variant becomes clear, we write to support calls from the travel sector to remove international travel restrictions and help rebuild the **inbound** tourism sector.

The restrictions carried out their role in slowing the arrival of the Omicron variant, but public health experts have accepted the measures serve little purpose once community transmission is established. As the increased testing requirements to deal with Omicron were introduced, Manchester Airports Group saw passenger numbers across their three airports reduce by an average of 13% week-on-week. Similar reductions have been experienced by Leeds/Bradford Airport, Newcastle International Airport and Liverpool John Lennon Airport. Whilst we welcome that some of these requirements have now been removed, the remaining restrictions will continue to have a real impact on an already struggling inbound travel sector.

The North of England had 5.31 million inbound tourists in 2019, up 2.3% on 2018, with a combined total expenditure of £2.63 billion, up 2.9% on the previous year. Manchester Airport has a major role to play as the primary gateway to the North of England. International connections have grown over the last decade – with new and expanded routes from Manchester to the USA, China, GCC and India, and from Newcastle to Dubai.

marketing | visit | invest | meet | study

Lee House,  
90 Great Bridgewater St,  
Manchester, M1 5JW

+44 (0)161 237 1010  
info@marketingmanchester.com  
www.marketingmanchester.com

Marketing Manchester is the agency charged with promoting Greater Manchester on a national and international stage. We are proud to be part of The Growth Company.

The importance of direct connectivity for the inbound market is huge. The number of Chinese tourists grew by 38% from 2015, the year the direct flight was established, to 2017 – with visitor spend increasing by 120% across the same period. In addition, inbound tourists from USA to Manchester Airport increased on average 10% year on year from 2014 to 2019.

We therefore share the view that the Government should recognise the impact these measures are having and urgently:

- Use the January Review of the international travel framework to implement fundamental change and create and communicate a clear system and roadmap, giving inbound visitors the confidence to book international travel in advance.
- Provide support to promote that the UK is fully open for business and welcomes international visitors through all of its Gateways.
- Respond to the long term damage that has been inflicted on the travel sector by providing direct, targeted support to recover our inbound markets through our Gateway airports, inbound travel operators and DMOs.

Every day the restrictions remain in place represents another dent in consumer and business confidence, along with a damaging the long-term recovery of the inbound tourism market at a vital time of year.

Yours sincerely,



Sheona Southern  
Managing Director, Marketing Manchester

Welcome to Yorkshire  
Marketing Cheshire  
Cumbria Tourism  
Marketing Peak District and Derbyshire  
Marketing Lancashire  
Visit County Durham  
Visit Leeds  
Make it York  
Marketing Liverpool  
Newcastle/Gateshead Initiative  
Visit Northumberland