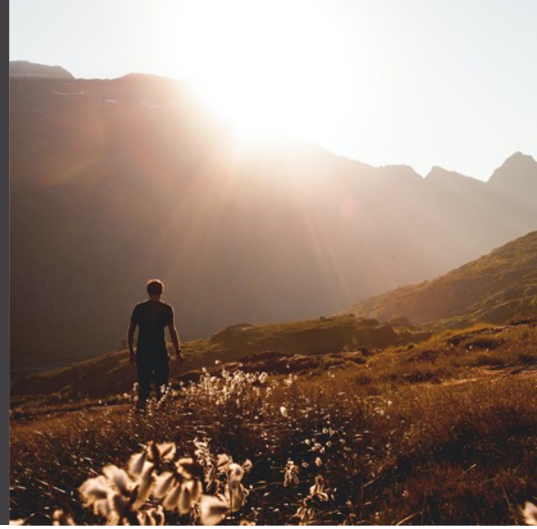


# WEEKLY REPORT

18 February 2022



## COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has decreased in the last seven days by 26.6%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped by 14.1%. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.4% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 84.9% their second and a further 65.9% of the population has received their booster dose.

Transport secretary Grant Shapps' announcement came into effect at 04:00 GMT on 11 February, meaning there is now no requirement for vaccinated passengers arriving in England to do post-arrival lateral flow tests, but they do need to complete a passenger locator form. Those who are not fully vaccinated - two jabs, or a single Janssen jab - need to test before they depart for England, take a post-arrival PCR test, and complete a passenger locator form. They no longer need to isolate, however, or complete a day eight test.

Prime minister, Boris Johnson, is expected to announce new relaxations to COVID-19 rules in England on Monday 21 February, 2022. This could include scrapping PCR test centres and free lateral flow tests as part of a "living with COVID-19" strategy. Throughout the pandemic, the government has spent billions of pounds on testing, and in the future, experts believe it need only be used in hospitals and care settings, or to deal with major outbreaks. However, a group that represents NHS bosses has called for free COVID-19 testing to remain, despite speculation that it could be scrapped. The NHS Confederation has also said 75% of senior staff in England do not want self-isolation rules to end at this point.

On Tuesday 15 February, 2022 Wales announced that children between the ages of five and 11 are to be offered a COVID-19 vaccine, with Scotland following the move on Wednesday 16 February, 2022. This follows the governments' acceptance of a drafting ruling from advisors. Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon has said parents and carers of five to 11-year-olds "need not do anything" and more

information would be announced when plans are finalised. Plans are now being put in place with health boards to deliver the vaccines. Jillian Evans, head of health intelligence at NHS Grampian, welcomed the move as "ending weeks and months of confusion for families".

The Irish Health Minister, Robin Swann, has scrapped all remaining legal COVID-19 restrictions, this action came into effect on Tuesday 15 February, 2022. Instead, regulations are being replaced with advice, although the guidance on working from home remains for now. Masks, COVID-19 certificates in nightclubs and limits on numbers meeting indoors in private homes are among the measures to be scrapped. The removal of legal restrictions leaves Northern Ireland on a par with England, which scrapped most of its rules last month, and ahead of Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, where some rules, including masks, remain.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Storm Eunice: Met Office issues most severe 'red' alert in the UK**

UK government ministers held an emergency Cobra Meeting on Thursday 17 February, 2022, following the Met Office issue of a rare "red" weather warning in London, the southwest and southeast of England and Wales. This comes from growing concerns that Storm Eunice could be the UK's most severe in 30 years. Consequently, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said the army is "on standby" to assist if required, and widespread school closures have been actioned in Wales and Devon for Friday 18 February, 2022. Forecasters predict strong winds could reach 100mph in some parts of the UK causing risk to life, property and powerlines, and consequently, all train services in Wales have been suspended and people in England have been urged not to travel by rail or road if possible.

### **Ireland sees record breaking employment numbers**

The number of people employed in the Irish economy has risen above 2.5 million for the first time and data shows that the largest increase was in accommodation and food services, which jumped by 29.8%. Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures show that 229,100 more people were employed in the Republic last year, up 10.1% on 2020 at 2,506,000, setting a new employment record. The figure is nearly 150,000 higher than total employment pre-pandemic in 2019 and comes on the back of increased participation in the labour force, particularly among women. The CSO's latest Labour Force Survey reveals that there were 2.63 million people in the labour force in the final quarter of 2021, an increase of 214,800 or 8.9 per cent over the year. This included 127,400 people classified as unemployed or in receipt of the Government's Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). The increased number of women in the workforce, has been said to suggest that the shift to remote working is facilitating

greater opportunities for employment, rather than being a constraint.

### **Return to UK offices hits highest since pandemic began**

Offices in the UK have reached their highest occupancy since the pandemic began in March 2020, with workplace occupancy rates rising to 27%. This comes with mandates from employers and easing of COVID-19 restrictions, drawing staff back into the workplace. Between 7 - 11 February, 2022, the average occupancy was 23.3% according to research by property analysts Remit Consulting. On 10 February, 2022, occupancy levels hit 27.5%. Working from home guidelines were lifted in England, Scotland and Wales in late January, 2022, which has since accelerated people's return to the office; the fresh peak was "an important milestone", said Lorna Landells, a consultant at Remit. The increase in office use last week continues a gradual uptick since the start of this year, which has been welcomed by building owners and companies that have committed to long leases. The hybrid way of working between the office and work-from-home could also bring a positive impact for UK highstreet businesses.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **IATA report travel momentum builds as restrictions are lifted.**

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) released data showing growing momentum in the recovery of air travel as restrictions are lifted. IATA reported a sharp 11-percentage increase for international tickets sold in recent weeks (in proportion to 2019 sales).

### **Austria and Switzerland to relax their COVID-19 rules.**

Austria's chancellor Karl Nehammer said the country's government would drop most COVID-19 related measures from 5 March. Although some rules will be eased as soon as this weekend. From Saturday (19 February), those using restaurants, hotels and ski lifts across Austria, except for Vienna, will be required to prove they are vaccinated, recovered from COVID-19 or provide a negative PCR test, known as 3-G arrangements.

### **Finland and Lithuania are the latest European countries to relax their COVID-19 entry rules.**

Finland is the latest country to scrap testing for fully vaccinated UK travellers from Tuesday. Lithuania is no longer requiring travellers to self-isolate, regardless of vaccination status. British nationals require proof of full vaccination against COVID-19, evidence of recovery or a negative PCR test result, taken no earlier than 72 hours before your arrival in Lithuania

**Scottish travel agents to receive £3.5m in funding.**

ABTA says the £3.5 million set aside as direct support for travel agents in Scotland last week was just the devolved administration "catching up". The association hailed the agents' grant and an additional £7.5 million for inbound operators as "fantastic news", and director of public affairs Luke Petherbridge said: "It's brilliant it's travel specific."

**AIRLINE UPDATE**

**EasyJet** - EasyJet is boosting its summer 2022 schedule! It is adding 90,000 seats across 26 routes from UK airports for the summer season, including over the key Easter holiday in April.

**British Airways** - British Airways has become the first UK airline to officially recognise the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard with the new partnership aiming to increase awareness of non-visible disabilities. Wearing a sunflower lanyard is an indication customers may require additional support, assistance, kindness, or more time while travelling.

**Niceair** - Niceair is a new airline which is to offer flights to northern Iceland. A start-up airline offering flights to Akureyri in northern Iceland has recruited a former Superbreak director to represent the business in the UK. Chris Hagan, formerly product director at Superbreak, will start direct year-round scheduled services from the UK, Denmark and Spain in early summer.

**Ryanair** - Ryanair is adding seven summer routes from Cork with support from an Irish government-backed airport COVID-19 recovery incentive scheme. Services to Alghero in Sardinia, Pisa, Valencia, Venice, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh are being introduced. Flight frequency to Stansted is also being increased to three times a day and the no-frills carrier will base a third aircraft at Cork airport, creating 30 direct jobs.

**TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE**

**Expedia** - A sustained demand for long-haul destinations emerged in the final quarter of last year despite the emergence of Omicron, according to Expedia Group. Overall travel searches rose by more than 70% year-on-year, latest data from the online travel firm revealed. Search volumes in the EMEA region were even higher

during the first two weeks of January compared to the last week of December 2021.

**Jet2.com and Jet2holidays** - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have added more flights and holidays to Tenerife as they have seen “strong demand” following the Spanish government’s relaxation of border restrictions. Last week, Spain announced it would not require child visitors, aged 12 to 17, to be fully vaccinated, starting from February 14. The extra Jet2 flights will operate from February 25 to May 23 and mean there will be 7,000 additional seats from five UK airports: East Midlands, Edinburgh, Leeds Bradford, Glasgow and Manchester.

**Norwegian Cruise Line** - NCL has unveiled a new tier system on its Freestyle Rewards platform to mark the first anniversary since its launch. NCL says the new Freestyle Rewards’ tiers – silver, gold, platinum, sapphire and ambassador – allow agents to “gain greater benefits”, based on the number of points earned over a 12-month period.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### Instagram adds Stories likes

Instagram has added a new way for users to engage with Stories through likes. At the bottom of a user’s Stories view, they’ll see a new heart icon which, when tapped, will send the creator of that Story a like without starting a DM conversation, like at present. These likes are not public and only the creator will be able to view them in their Story insights. This option adds a simple, low-touch way to indicate interest, increase engagement and declutter direct message inboxes.

### YouTube adds new Shorts shelf in channel listings

YouTube continues to make Shorts a bigger focus, with a new addition on the desktop version of channel pages. Shorts clips will now be displayed in a separate section on each channel and this layout will give content a more specific focus, driving more viewers. It could also make YouTube Shorts a more critical promotional element, in line with usage trends and engagement around short video clips.

## MICE UPDATE

### Rome hosts IAPCO’s 2022 Annual Meeting and General Assembly

The international PCO association IAPCO hosted the 2022 Annual Meeting and General Assembly in Rome. IAPCO 2022 took place in a hybrid format from 10 - 13 February, it gathered 126 members and partners together face-to-face in Rome. An additional 46 attendees joined online from 34 countries. It was the first time that IAPCO members met in person since the Annual Meeting in Vancouver, 2 years ago. Members discussed the recovery of the global business and professional events

market and the key drivers that will shape the future of the industry.

## LIGHTER NOTE

Dancing dog teaches himself how to tap his paws perfectly in time to music. See more [here](#).