

# A FUTURE FOR UK AVIATION

safety and resilience  
- not a race to the bottom



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# A FUTURE FOR UK AVIATION

## safety and resilience - not a race to the bottom



Civil aviation is a vital part of the UK economy. In 2016, it contributed over £52bn to GDP and supported almost a million jobs. UK airports are ports – processing £140bn of tradeable goods, as well as over 250 million passengers, via more than two million aircraft movements every year.

Aviation will become even more important to the UK if we are to maintain and strengthen our global connections and relationships after Brexit. But Brexit forces us to confront the many challenges facing the industry and debate its future direction.

Our airspace is full and our airports are at capacity. The pursuit of free market models and cut-price competition has led to fragmentation and instability. Many parts of the industry are understaffed and face looming skills shortages.

As this feeds through into deteriorating service quality and increasing delay and disruption, the real risk is that the search for superficial, cheap, short-term solutions will mean compromises to safety that could one day be fatal.

Prospect represents over 5,000 professionals working across the industry for airlines, airports, air traffic control services and the Civil Aviation Authority.

The Government has failed to describe what a post-Brexit aviation industry will look like. This manifesto sets out the principles and priorities that should be our starting point.

*Mike Clancy*

Mike Clancy, Prospect general secretary



## A SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

Air traffic levels are growing. But signs of strain are showing in an industry that has not planned or invested in the skills, technology, systems or infrastructure we now need.

Recent years have shown increasing symptoms of deteriorating resilience, including:

- increasingly congested airspace and infrastructure
- concerns over cuts to the capacity of safety regulators
- a looming shortage of qualified aircraft engineers
- reports of fatigue amongst over-worked pilots and maintenance workers
- delays and disruption caused by staff shortages, from pilots to air traffic controllers.

Issues like these are having an immediate impact on passenger experience and the wider economy. They will make it harder to meet our climate change obligations. And they could threaten our safety.

Prospect believes that these problems have clear causes:

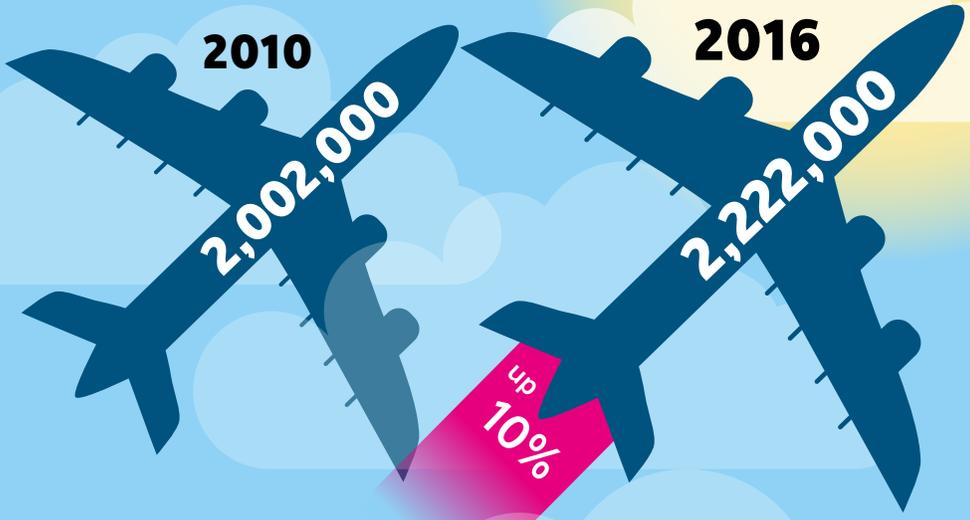
- prevailing business models, pioneered by low-cost carriers and now widespread budget airlines, that prioritise short-term cost-cutting, outsourcing and dubious employment practices over long-term investment, workforce planning and sound employee relations
- regulatory approaches, at national and European levels, that combine a light touch attitude to safety with the imposition of liberalisation and free market models
- a political failure to match levels of demand for air travel with delivery of the necessary infrastructure – including in regions outside London and the South East.

As a direction of travel for the industry,  
this is not sustainable. Nor is it safe

# AIR TRAFFIC AT UK AIRPORTS

Aircraft landings and take-offs

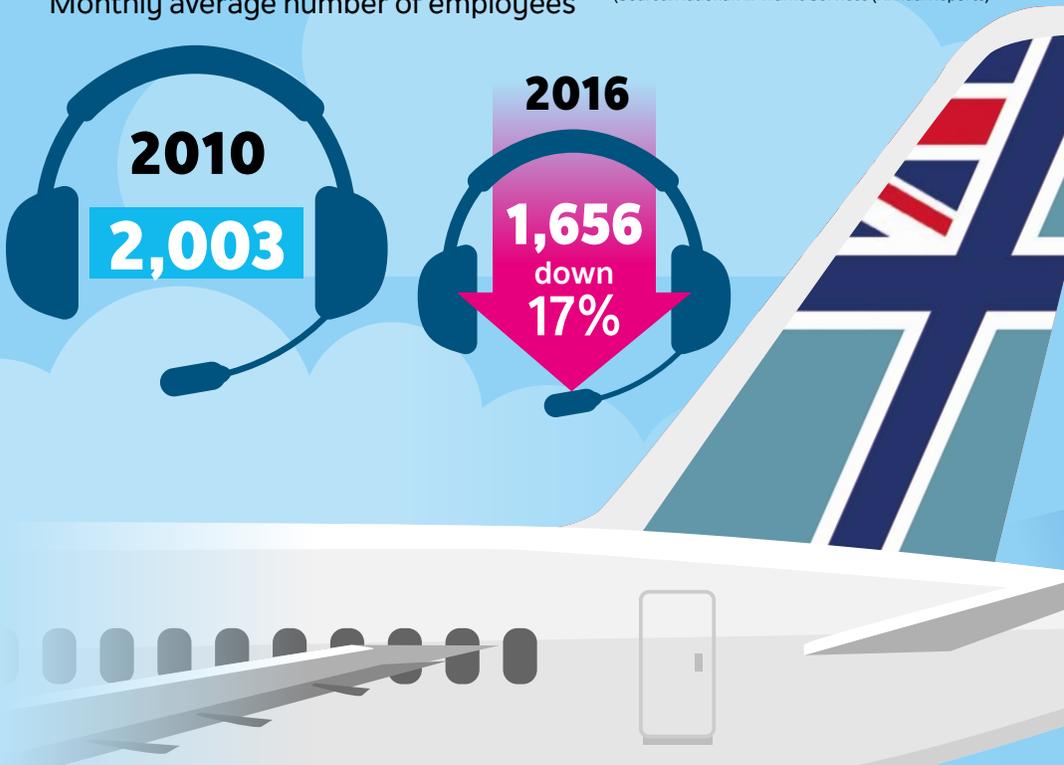
(Source: Department for Transport Aviation Statistics)



# NATS AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Monthly average number of employees

(Source: National Air Traffic Services (Annual Reports))



# THE CHALLENGE OF BREXIT

The UK's imminent exit from the European Union forces us to confront these issues and decide how we want the industry to develop in the years ahead.

Aviation is arguably the most European of all UK industries, and has been shaped for decades by a framework of European regulation and policy making. Now much that has been taken for granted is in question.

The possibility of changes to the current rules on **flying and landing rights** if the UK leaves the Common Aviation Area are already leading airlines to restructure their operations, and could have a dramatic impact on routes, timetables, and the location of facilities.

It is also unclear what will happen to **UK economic and safety regulation**, which is currently set at European level:

- as the UK economic regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) currently implements a regime set by the European Commission. This has entailed the imposition of deep cuts to the funding received by National Air Traffic Services from airlines
- the CAA also relies heavily on the European Aviation Safety Agency to set safety standards in the industry. Over the past fifteen years the CAA has reduced its number of safety regulators by around a third, and there are concerns in the industry about the feasibility of rapidly scaling up its capacity in this area if the UK is forced to leave EASA.

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# UK REGULATORY CAPACITY

Average monthly number of employees working on safety and airspace regulation at the Civil Aviation Authority



## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Prospect wants to see a strong and successful aviation sector built on the highest possible safety standards, a skilled and committed workforce, and the best available technology and infrastructure.

That's the best way forward for the passengers and businesses that rely on the industry as well as the people that work in it.

This is our manifesto for taking the industry forward to a better future.

### Reasserting the primacy of safety

Safety is fundamental to aviation – the precondition for its success, even its existence. To maintain and improve its

excellent safety record, we must never allow complacency to set in. In particular, we must ensure safety is never sacrificed – wittingly or otherwise – as a shortcut to cutting costs or meeting punctuality targets. That means:

- **breaking up the Civil Aviation Authority and establishing a new UK Aviation Safety Agency** so that the responsibility for UK safety regulation is independent from the market regulator
- **reversing cuts to the staffing and expertise of the CAA's Safety and Airspace Regulation Group** and strengthening its capacity to inspect everything from manufacturing through staff training to maintenance operations

# Safety is fundamental to aviation – the precondition for its success, even its existence

- **preventing an international race to the bottom** by ending airlines' use of 'flags of convenience' to 'shop around' for the weakest safety and employment standards
- **maintaining and strengthening the 'Just Culture' approach** to ensure that aviation workers are not inhibited from raising safety concerns and risks.

## Investing in resilience

Punctuality, reliability, service quality and environmental sustainability can only be improved through long-term investment in the staff, skills, technology and infrastructure we need. That means:

- **prioritisation of operational and service resilience** across the industry in place of the short-term cost-cutting and outsourcing that has led to so many recent breakdowns
- **a strategy to address skills and capacity gaps** in areas like aircraft engineering, with proper funding for training without punitive and damaging 'bonding' arrangements
- **a new focus on ensuring air traffic control services have the staff and technology they need**, instead of imposing market models that fragment and risk destabilising services

- **an end to the planning blight that holds back infrastructure development** in the UK, with a more integrated and region-friendly approach to transport planning.

## The right Brexit deal

The outcome of the Brexit negotiations is of critical importance to the airline industry and our ability to set it on the right path for the future. Prospect wants to see a Swiss-style bilateral agreement that means:

- **an agreement on landing rights for UK aircraft EU member states, on the continent, and intra-EU flying rights for UK operators**, that minimises disruption and damage to UK jobs and investment
- **continued membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency**, so we continue to benefit from shared capacity and expertise, instead of seeking to evade or undercut European safety standards
- **taking back control of economic and market regulation** by exiting the EU performance regime and designing a new framework that supports the safety, quality and employment standards of UK aviation.

Trade unions have a critical role to play on all these issues: upholding safety standards, holding powerful interests to account and championing the commitment and expertise of aviation workers.

**PROSPECT WILL BE WORKING TO ENSURE ITS MEMBERS' VOICES ARE HEARD IN THE DEBATE TO COME**



**JOIN PROSPECT AND MAKE  
SURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD**

For more info, to get involved or to join online, visit  
**[prospect.org.uk/joinus](http://prospect.org.uk/joinus)**