

Industry Profile

Employment

Aviation is a major UK industry, carrying over 180 million passengers a year and over 2.1 million tonnes of freight. Demand for air travel is growing. The Government's aim is to develop a long-term framework that will maximise the beneficial aspects of aviation and minimise the negative ones. Air travel remains crucial to our growing economy. 200,000 jobs depend on it directly, and some 600,000 depend on it indirectly.

The growth in passengers travelling in the low cost - no frills - sector has been dramatic. 6 years ago just 7 million people flew on low cost airlines; this year we expect the number to reach in excess of 47 million. A third of the goods we export by value go by air, and that figure is increasing. Indeed the amount of airfreight at United Kingdom airports has doubled since 1990.

Trade Unions

Amicus has approximately 18,000 members in the sector. Other unions within the Civil Aviation sector are the TGWU and GMB. The vast majority of engineers are represented by Amicus.

Employers

The employers in this sector include: BAA, Britannia Airway, British Airways, British Midland, Easy Jet, First Choice, KLM, Monarch Airlines, My Travel, Thomas Cook, Virgin Atlantic, plus many more.

Current Issues and Activities

Technology changes have and continue to drastically reduce the number of engineers in aircraft maintenance, for example 20 years ago British Airways employed in the region of 17,000 engineers, out of approximately 50,000 staff. Now BA has a similar number of staff but only 6,000 are employed in aircraft maintenance. This figure is likely to drop as new aircraft come on stream, as they require much less labour to maintain. Thus despite the expansion of the number of aircraft there is no consequent increase in the numbers needed to maintain, in fact there is a decline. An additional problem is countries such as China and other eastern countries are also setting up maintenance facilities.

Many of the established carriers are struggling to make enough profit to make a return on capital and replace assets. For example, BA have not purchased any new aircraft for 4 years, generally 5% of the fleet needs to be replaced every year, taking into account the average 20 years service per aircraft. There is also continued pressure within the "ground support" staff, along with other methods of reducing cost the overall numbers of staff are being cut.

Criminal records check has been an issue and is continually being monitored by the union.

The Government's White Paper, "The Future of Air Transport" published on 16th December 2003, sets out a strategic framework for the development of airport capacity in the UK over the next 30 years, against the wider context of the air transport sector. This is much welcomed news within the industry and should see much more needed investments and improvements to facilitate future expansion. Many new carriers are utilising this opportunity and expanding their operations, as a result Cabin Crew numbers continues to grow.