

Manchester Airport on the road to recovery after being 'stuck in first gear' amid Covid travel restrictions

The managing director of Manchester Airport has said it is on the road to recovery after being "stuck in first gear" because of the Government's Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Karen Smart, who joined from sister site East Midlands Airport [last summer](#), added the group in the New Year will be calling on the Government to "further simplify the travel system, so that international travel can start to feel as it was before the pandemic".

She also said it will be at least until 2024 that the airport sees a return to pre-Covid passenger numbers.

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Her comments come after [accounts released in July](#) revealed the group, which is also behind Stansted Airport, slumped to a loss of £374m during its latest financial year after passenger numbers fell 89% because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mrs Smart said: "The last 18 months have been the toughest the aviation industry has faced in its entire history, with traffic levels dropping to as low as 5% of usual volumes at the height of the pandemic.



Karen Smart, MD of Manchester Airport
(Image: Nottingham Post)

“It has been heart-breaking to see our once thriving terminals at a fraction of their capacity, and in some cases mothballed completely.

“It has been equally as heart-breaking to see travel return to something much closer to ‘normal’ across the continent, while we have felt stuck in first gear, despite the success of our vaccination programme and low infection rates in the most popular destinations for our customers.

“Prolonged restrictions on travel have undoubtedly held back our recovery to date, as customers found themselves grappling with confusing guidance or requirements, and the associated cost of testing.

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“However, after changes to the Government’s travel restrictions were announced last week, we are feeling a sense of excitement about our airports starting to return to how we knew them before the pandemic.

“Bookings have surged on the back of the simplification of the traffic light system, and again after it was confirmed more destinations would move off the red list and that PCR tests will no longer be required for those returning to the country by the end of the month.

“And our excitement is two-fold, because we have been able to welcome back so many of our colleagues, who have spent time on furlough over the past 18 months or so. Being able to bring them back just at the time we will start to see travel resume in earnest feels extra special.”

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Looking ahead, Mrs Smart added: “Looking ahead as we continue to recover, we can still go further, and so in the New Year we’ll be calling on the Government to further simplify the travel system, so that international travel can start to feel as it was before the pandemic.

“It will be at least until 2024 that we see a return to pre-Covid passenger numbers, but we are hoping for many more new routes in the weeks and months ahead, ensuring we continue to connect the North to key global destinations.

“The next stages of our transformation programme will continue too, with new baggage systems being the next phase.”

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