

EasyJet's plan to axe 30% of workforce is 'a real kick in the teeth', says union leader

Joanna Partridge

EasyJet has announced plans to cut up to 30% of its workforce, or 4,500 employees, as it prepares for lower customer demand when it resumes flying in the shadow of the coronavirus crisis.

The airline expects passenger demand to return slowly, reaching only 30% of capacity in the final quarter of the year compared with the last quarter of 2019. It does not expect demand to reach 2019 levels for about three years. The Luton-based airline employs 15,000 people and will start a consultation process with staff in the coming days.

EasyJet plans to reduce its fleet of aircraft to 302 planes, 51 fewer than it had planned before the outbreak of Covid-19. The airline has been heavily criticised by its biggest shareholder and founder, Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou, for refusing to scrap a £4.5bn order for more than 100 new aircraft from Airbus, which he believes jeopardises the airline's future.

The carrier said yesterday that it also intended to reduce costs by revising its contracts with airports and ground handling, reassessing what it spends on maintenance as well as renegotiating its marketing budget.

The airline had previously said it would resume flights on a small number of routes from 15 June, with increased onboard safety measures, including the mandatory wearing of face masks.

Johan Lundgren, easyJet's chief executive, said the airline was focused on "doing what is right for the company and its long-term health and success". He added: "We realise these are very difficult times and we are having to

consider very difficult decisions which will impact our people - but we want to protect as many jobs as we can for the long term."

The British Airline Pilots' Association (Balpa) criticised easyJet for not discussing its plans with the union and said it would need "a lot of convincing" that the airline needs to make "such dramatic cuts".

The Balpa general secretary, Brian Strutton, said: "Only two days ago staff got a 'good news' message from their boss with no mention of job losses, so this is a real kick in the teeth. Those staff have taken pay cuts to keep the airline afloat and this is the treatment they get in return."

The airline's job cuts go further than its low-cost rivals - Ryanair said it would lose 15% of its staff, and Wizz intends to reduce its workforce by 19%.

EasyJet will initially restart domestic routes in the UK and France in June, along with flights from four destinations elsewhere in Europe, where it says there is sufficient demand to support profitable flying.

Further routes will be added as and when passenger demand rises and lockdown measures ease further across Europe. However, the airline would not fly to Italy if the government prolonged physical distancing rules on planes beyond 15 June, Lundgren told an Italian newspaper.

"It would be impossible for companies to operate with only a third of the seats sold, it would be harmful to the recovery: the country risks falling behind," he was quoted by Corriere della Sera as saying yesterday.



▲ As well as shedding nearly a third of its staff, easyJet is scaling back its fleet

