

LOCAL RULE 4

HEATHROW PROCEDURES FOR TEMPORARILY REDUCED CAPACITY

EFFECTIVE FROM: 23 March 2026

ISSUED BY: HEATHROW CAPACITY PLANNING

1. POLICY

- 1.1. This document outlines the procedures for constraining demand during periods of reduced capacity.
- 1.2. The aim of a demand reduction is to restrict air traffic or passenger flows to ensure a deliverable schedule for all airlines that falls within the normal operating constraints of the airport.
- 1.3. A low impact / short term event will trigger a **Stage 2** capacity (either ATMs or seats) intervention, where typically a schedule reduction of 10% or less is required and the event is expected to last less than a day. A Stage 2 intervention may be instigated by calling an Extended HOCC call or convening the Capacity Intervention Cell (CIC). In the event of a capacity reduction of greater impact (more than approx. 10%) longer term (normally lasting more than 24 hours) the Capacity Planning Cell (CPC) will be convened to discuss a **Stage 3** planned capacity reduction. **Stage 1** refers to any on-the-day interventions that can be tactically managed with limited impact to the operation. Both Stage 2 and Stage 3 events requiring schedule cancellations by airlines will be enacted under Local Rule 4.
- 1.4. The schedule that remains after the required number of cancellations has taken place constitutes an additional permission to operate under Heathrow Airport Limited's Conditions of Use (Section 9), during the period of reduced capacity. (Note that additional permissions to operate may not be granted to General Aviation and Freighters during the period of operation of a reduced schedule).
- 1.5. The Heathrow Coordination Committee (HCC) is accountable for the ongoing development of these procedures and Heathrow Airport Limited is responsible for updating and communicating the content working with all the key stakeholders, namely NATS, Heathrow Airport Scheduling Committee (HASC) and Airport Coordination Limited (ACL).
- 1.6. Heathrow Airport Limited, working with a representative body consisting of Heathrow Airline Operators' Committee (AOC), HASC Chair / Committee, NATS, ACL and airline representatives may agree amendments to these procedures from time to time to take immediate effect. Any such amendments will be presented to the HCC for endorsement at its next full meeting.
- 1.7. The procedures outlined in this Local Rule shall be reviewed at least annually and if required at any seasonal series of scheduling limit meetings.
- 1.8. If the Procedures for Temporarily Reduced Capacity are initiated, the airport coordinator will consider the specific circumstances when applying the regulation (Article 8) around slot use.
- 1.9. This Local Rule is designed to provide all airline operators with the greatest opportunity to collaborate to ensure the impact on the Heathrow schedule is mitigated as far as is reasonably practicable. Where evidence is presented to Heathrow of intentional abuse of a decision on revised capacity then the carrier concerned may become subject to the extent of any available remedies which may include (but is not limited to) those set out in Heathrow Airport Limited's Conditions of Use or in any relevant legislation.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. To maintain as much of the planned flight schedule as possible during periods of reduced capacity.

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- 2.2. Apply fair, proportionate, and coordinated demand-reduction measures (ATMs or seats).
- 2.3. Protect safety thresholds, customer confidence and ensure the terminals / airfield can retain a good flow of aircraft / passengers.
- 2.4. Minimise disruption to airlines, passengers, ground handlers, and other stakeholders.
- 2.5. Keep airlines, passengers, ground handlers and other stakeholders well-informed.
- 2.6. Support a managed and efficient return to normal operations once capacity allows.

3. DEFINITIONS

In this document, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

ACL	<i>Airport Coordination Ltd – the Coordinator of Heathrow Airport</i>
CIC	<i>Capacity Intervention Cell – convened for Stage 3 events</i>
CPC	<i>Capacity Planning Cell – convened for Stage 2 and/or Stage 3 events</i>
HOCC	<i>Heathrow Operational Conference Call</i>
Flow Rate	<i>a restriction imposed by NATS on the number of aircraft permitted to depart or land per hour</i>
HASC	<i>Heathrow Airport Scheduling Committee</i>
HCC	<i>Heathrow Coordination Committee</i>
MDI	<i>Minimum Departure Interval</i>
Night Jet Movement	<i>An aircraft take-off or landing during the Night Quota Period</i>
NOTAM	<i>Notice to airmen – issued upon confirmation of a capacity intervention</i>
Stage 1 Intervention	<i>tactical same-day intervention measures (such as aircraft flow rates)</i>
Stage 2 Intervention	<i>short-term planned demand reductions – typically a reduction of under 10% of the schedule</i>
Stage 3 Intervention	<i>larger or longer-lasting reductions requiring structured coordination – typically a reduction of over 10% of the schedule.</i>

4. PROCEDURES FOR TEMPORARILY REDUCED CAPACITY

- 4.1 This document sets out the procedures for controlling air traffic and/or passenger demand at Heathrow Airport during periods of temporarily reduced capacity. It sits alongside Airport Operations – Local Operating Procedures.
- 4.2 Heathrow occasionally suffers events which cause disruption and for which the time required for the airport to recover can be significant. Often the level of delay and congestion can be mitigated to allow the operation to be recovered on the day. On occasion there are events when the impacts restrict capacity to a level that same day recovery cannot be achieved. These events may either be forecast or may occur without notice.
- 4.3 In response to an unforeseen event impacting runway capacity and before any formal process has been prompted, major airlines may invoke a series of cancellations. The revised level of the planned operation shall be scoped prior to demand being constrained: as the planned cancellations may be sufficient to reduce pressure on runway capacity, hence negating the need for a forced constraint policy. The success of this will be wholly dependent on airlines cancelling

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slots and their associated flight plans or reducing seats, in order that Heathrow can review an accurate schedule and NATS can predict demand accurately and apply the necessary flow rate.

4.4 It is not expected that seat reductions would be made in advance of a formal process being prompted but if any schedule reductions/amendments are made Heathrow would make an assessment to ascertain whether the remaining schedule is deliverable.

4.5 If expected demand still exceeds available runway capacity - or if a seat reduction is required - the response to such an event under this Local Rule is detailed at a high level in **Appendix A**.

4.6 This document describes a process by which a demand constraint could be implemented, should all other measures have been insufficient in achieving a balance between demand and capacity relating to either aircraft movements or passengers that are allowed to travel. The application of the process will vary depending on the scale of the incident, the duration of its impact and any advance notice.

4.7 The following illustrates the stages of capacity reductions and their mitigating actions.

Incident Recovery Matrix

Capacity Reduction	Impact	0 – 4 hours	4 – 10 hours	10 – 24 hours	> 24 hours
	Approx. Duration				
	<3%	Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 1/2
	<=10%	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 3
	10 – 25%	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2/3	Stage 3
	25 – 50%	Stage 2	Stage 2/3	Stage 3	Stage 3
	>=50%	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3

Event Duration

Typical Mitigating Actions

Stage 1 event

- Maximise resources (all stakeholders)
- Implement arrival flow rate (NATS)
- Impose MDIs (NATS)
- Restrict ad-hoc slots (Heathrow / ACL)
- Approve Night Jet Movements - if appropriate (Heathrow)

Stage 2 event

- In addition to Stage 1 actions
- Use Enhanced HOCC / Convene Capacity Intervention Cell to communicate Stage 2 event details (Heathrow)
- Mandate % demand reduction (Heathrow)
- Extend operating hours (pre-06:02 / post-23:30) (Heathrow / DfT)
- Stop all diversions (for non-based carriers) except emergencies (Heathrow)
- Issue and promulgate associated NOTAMs (Heathrow / NATS)

Stage 3 event

- In addition to Stage 1 & Stage 2 actions

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- Convene Capacity Planning Cell to agree Stage 3 event (Heathrow)
- Hold Enhanced HOCC / CIC to communicate Stage 3 (Heathrow)
- Hold Enhanced HOCC / CIC to resume normal operations (Heathrow).

5. DEMAND CONSTRAINT TRIGGERS

- 5.1 In all cases the initial response to a crisis event would be to recover capacity through the effective deployment of mitigating measures and inbuilt business resilience. The level of mitigation will vary accordingly, and a three-level approach is proposed.
- 5.2 **Stage 1:** the first level of mitigation will involve tactical aircraft flow management by NATS to align demand with available capacity on the airfield and, where necessary, a fixed response from the airline community in line with their existing internal processes. It is envisaged that this mitigation would normally be in place from the start of the operational day during which the event takes place up to a maximum of 24 hours.
- 5.3 **Stage 2:** the second level of mitigation will only be implemented where a tactical response by NATS and the airlines would not achieve the balance between capacity and demand required because of the scale and duration of the capacity loss. This mitigation will be decided by Heathrow Airport who will declare an initial plan of whatever runway scheduling limit or passenger flow is required to align demand on a planned basis to match available capacity. An example of an event causing significant delays would be forecasted poor weather, e.g., fog, snow, storm.
- 5.4 If this or another similar weather situation is predicted to occur NATS will impose flow restrictions on the rate of arriving aircraft. NATS will then monitor actual flow rate against the published flow rate restrictions and keep Heathrow Operations informed of any deviation from plan. A sudden and extended period of departure constraint could result in Heathrow declaring “Full House” with the diversion of residual traffic.
- 5.5 If a reduced passenger flow rate is required Heathrow will monitor passenger flows across relevant terminals - or the wider airport - assessing congestion / delay to ensure a safe and manageable outcome.
- 5.6 **Stage 3:** the third level of mitigation might be implemented either for an event where the impact is or was expected to last for longer than 24 hours, e.g., significant snow fall, or as an escalation from a second level mitigation. A mitigation of this scale will also be implemented in response to a loss of resource, infrastructure or systems and restrictions to passenger processing capacity where the impact is significant. This could include industrial action where processing capacity is impacted and forecast passenger volumes not able to be delivered.

6. CIC AND CPC ACTIVATION

- 6.1 A **Stage 2** event will often be communicated using an extended HOCC call if it follows a discussion / decision made at an earlier HOCC call. It may be communicated by convening the Capacity Intervention Cell (via a conference call) where the event will be explained and the required intervention (ATMs or seats) shared. Timescales and frequency of communication etc will also be agreed.
- 6.2 Membership of the Capacity Intervention Cell is detailed below:
- a) Heathrow (Chair)
 - b) Heathrow Operational Planning and Operations representatives
 - c) NATS
 - d) AOC Chair
 - e) ACL representative
 - f) All airlines network and/or operational representatives
 - g) NATS General Manager
 - h) DfT and CAA representatives if required

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- i) Met Office representatives if required.
- 6.3 The group will meet virtually via a conference call and receive details (including reductions required and timescales for actions to be taken) related to a **Stage 2** event – including the revised capacity declaration for the airfield made necessary by the circumstances of the event. For ATM reductions, Heathrow Operations and/or Operational Planning shall be responsible for the construction and dissemination of any details. When the reduction is required to passenger volumes Operational Planning shall be responsible. Heathrow Operation shall share aeronautical communications such as NOTAMs which are required for all events.
- 6.4 In anticipation of a **Stage 3** event occurring which will result in a reduced (ATM or seat) capacity, any airline, Heathrow AOC, NATS, ACL or Heathrow Airport Limited may request to initiate the establishment of the CPC (virtually via a conference call or series of calls) whose purpose is to examine the likelihood and consequence of the event and the scale of disruption that might be caused. Having agreed this, the group can then discuss Heathrow’s initial plan and agree an appropriate level of demand constraint where the objective is to maintain a reduced level of activity on an equitable basis without unduly exacerbating operational delay and minimising passenger disruption.
- 6.5 Membership of the Capacity Planning Cell is as detailed below:
- a) Heathrow (Chair)
 - b) Heathrow Operational Planning and Operations representatives
 - c) NATS
 - d) AOC Chair or Committee
 - e) ACL representative
 - f) Home based (British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Aer Lingus) network/operational representatives
 - g) NATS General Manager
 - h) DfT and CAA representatives
 - i) Met Office representatives if required

Note: other airlines may be included at the discretion of the Chair.

- 6.6 Once the CPC has discussed Heathrow’s initial plan and agreed an appropriate level of demand constraint the CIC is convened. The members of the CIC include (network and/or operational) representatives from all airlines operating at Heathrow Airport as well as members of the CPC.

7. CPC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 Heathrow Airport Limited

1) Chair shall act as the coordinator of the group and will consult members on the appropriate response to the imbalance between capacity and demand caused by the event in question, briefing the Group so that they may understand all relevant data on planned and actual flows, process times, actual and predicted delays and any other information relevant to the incident on which to base decisions on declared or revised capacity. The Chair shall decide on the measures necessary to restore balance and progress towards a managed resumption of normal operations.

2) Heathrow Operational Planning shall complete the review of airline proposed ATM or seat cancellations to ensure that the required mitigation is achieved, and passenger service optimised. Heathrow Operations /Operational Planning shall be accountable for communicating the required reductions directly with the airline members.

- 7.2 **Airport Coordination Limited (ACL)** shall remain within Council Regulation No 95/93 of 18 January 1993 on common rules for the allocation of slots at United Kingdom airports (Retained EU Legislation) as amended by the Airports Slot Allocation (Alleviation of Usage Requirements) (No.2) Regulations 2021.

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- 7.3 **NATS Services Limited** shall advise the group on the status of inbound flow to Heathrow, feedback from NATS En Route Limited (NERL) and Eurocontrol operations and any feedback from Air Traffic Services (ATS) led conference calls. NATS (if required in conjunction with representatives from the **Met Office**) shall provide an interpretation of all available weather information to the group where this could have a material impact on the quality of the group's decisions. NATS will also take direction from the group on any alternate action required, promulgation of information via NOTAMs.
- 7.4 **DfT** and **CAA** representatives shall remain informed and aware of the event, its implications, the actions being taken and the proposed timeline to resume normal operations. The CAA shall receive a list of all cancellations that are made and share these details on their website.
- 7.5 **The airline members of the CPC and the Heathrow AOC** shall decide on the course of necessary action collectively and individually on the degree to which schedules should be altered to make maximum use of the available capacity. These stakeholders shall be accountable for communicating decisions made to their Airlines and shall ensure that whatever decisions are made, their airline uses best endeavours to comply without exception including the cancellation of both flight plans and slots for operations that will no longer take place and seat reductions or changes to airline gauge where passenger reductions are required.
- 7.6 Where the actual or predicted level of congestion/delay exceeds the expected / planned criteria noted and/or demand is considered likely to exceed capacity, the CPC group will, with the assistance of various information sources, predict the additional demand constraint required to achieve a safe, secure and managed end to the day's operations (and beyond).
- 7.7 Where the reduction relates to a flow control on arriving aircraft, this will be implemented through NATS who will be responsible for communicating this restriction through their normal channels. Where this restriction relates to arriving/departing passengers or aircraft, the CPC Group shall consider the data available for the airfield and/or each terminal and consider the type of flights being operated. The objective will be for a proportionate reduction in passenger or aircraft movements to be applied evenly to all carriers across the affected period.

8 COMMUNICATION OF EVENTS

- 8.1 **Stage 1** mitigation will use "business as usual" communication channels with direct access available between NATS and the airlines on the level of flow control being put in place.
- 8.2 **Stage 2** mitigation actions agreed by Heathrow Operations/Operational Planning shall be notified to the Heathrow community, including Communications teams. Heathrow Operations/Operational Planning shall be responsible for communicating constraint decisions to CIC Group members. All members shall be responsible for ensuring that their individual websites and those of airlines they represent are aligned to the new schedule without delay Where appropriate, NOTAMS will be issued by Heathrow Operations and promulgated by NATS.
- 8.3 **Stage 3** mitigation actions agreed by the CPC Group shall be notified to the Heathrow community, including Heathrow's Communications team. Heathrow Operational Planning shall be responsible for communicating constraint decisions to airline planning and scheduling departments wherever they are located. All members shall be responsible for ensuring that their individual websites and those of airlines they represent are aligned to the new schedule without delay Where appropriate, NOTAMS will be issued by Heathrow Operations and promulgated by NATS.

9 MANAGED RESUMPTION OF NORMAL OPERATIONS

- 9.1 When the level of business recovery achieved is sufficient to allow a return to normal aircraft or passenger flow rates the CPC and/or CIC will formally return the management of the flow rate

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back to NATS. It is anticipated that this will require a managed return to normal operating practice will be communicated at the earliest opportunity, to the community via a CIC call for a Stage 3 event (and if required for a Stage 2 event).

10 POST-IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

10.1 Following an event, a review will be held to investigate both the cause and the ability to manage using the contingency plans in place. The same principles apply to all activations of the CPC: each activation will be reviewed against this policy with members of the Group invited to participate in the session. The Policy and/or associated Appendix will then be revised /reissued as necessary.

11 FRAMEWORK OF CONSEQUENCES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

11.1 Assurance regarding compliance with this requirement will be achieved through a review of actual operations by carrier against the slots or seats in the revised capacity declaration. This function will be performed by Heathrow Operational Planning working with ACL.

11.2 Six stages of compliance checks shall be followed and details can be found in the *Appendix 5 of the Capacity Constraint Policy*.

12 EXEMPT FLIGHT TYPES

12.1 A limited set of flight types are Exempt Flights and will be permitted to operate when slots are not available. Details of Exempt Flight types are provided in **Appendix C**.

12.2 Except for Emergency Operations, operators must notify ACL in advance of any Exempt Flights and provide the information necessary to verify their status. Emergency Operations must be notified to ACL as soon as possible for monitoring purposes.

12.3 ACL will allocate an available slot for Exempt Flights where possible. Operators should accept an available slot time when they have the flexibility to do so.

12.4 When an Exempt Flight is planned at a time when no slots are available, ACL may block an adjacent available slot to minimise any adverse impact on airport operations.

13 SLOT ALLEVIATION

13.1 Heathrow will share relevant evidence on the necessity of an intervention and required reduction with the coordinator to assist with determining slot alleviation.

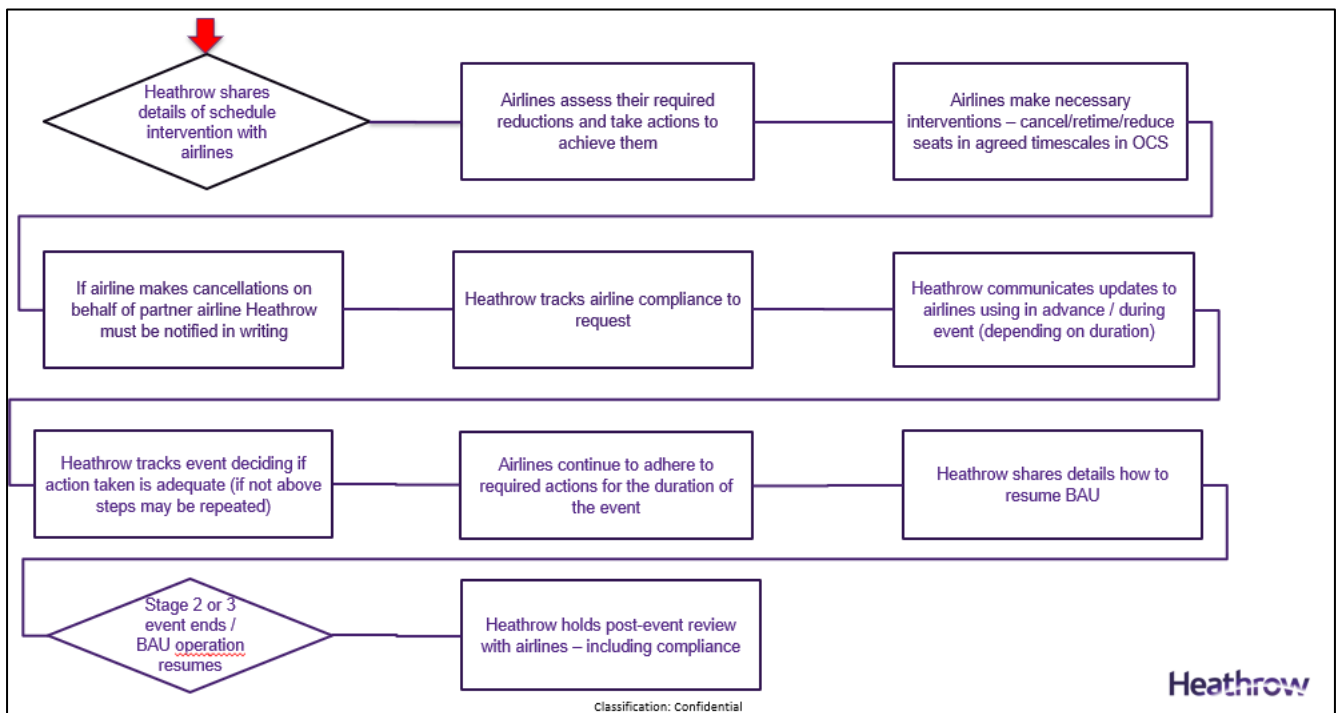
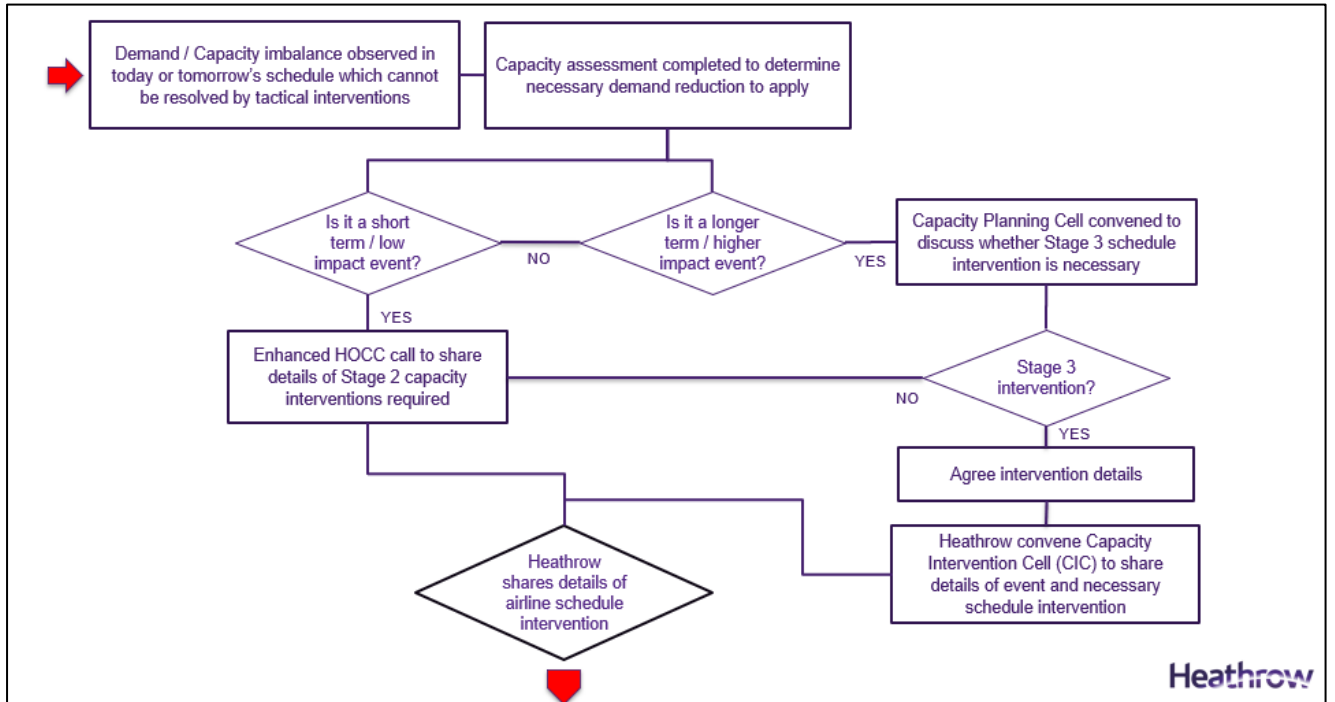
13.2 Airlines should refer to ACL's Guidance on the Interpretation of Justified Non-utilisation of Slots (Force Majeure), and on the Treatment of Cancellations due to Bad Weather.

Date of Local Rule	March 2026
Version Number	2
Previous Version Date	September 2025

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APPENDICES

A. CAPACITY INTERVENTION PROCESSES – STAGE 2 & 3



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B. TRAFFIC TYPE PRIORITIES

The priorities used for the allocation of slots to revised runway scheduling limits are:

Priority	Description
1	Commercial Passenger flights*
2	Positioning flights to enable a planned commercial service with passengers
3	Positioning flights to enable a planned commercial service without passengers
4	Commercial all cargo flights
5	Ambulance flights **
6	Air Taxi or General / Business Aviation flights

*Commercial airlines that have met the required cancellation %, have reflected seat reductions in OCS, have notified ACL of such cancellations and have withdrawn flight plans associated with the cancellations

**Urgent ambulance flights may be exempt where no feasible slots are available, and the use of alternative airfields is not possible.

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C. EXEMPT FLIGHT TYPES

1. Emergency Operations

Diversions / Quick Returns; Police Emergencies, Search and Rescue Operations

Note: - all Emergency Operations must be notified to ACL as soon as possible for monitoring purposes:

- departures to continue the planned service following a Diversion or Quick Return on the same day do not require the prior approval of ACL
- departures delayed to the following day or positioning flights (i.e. after the passengers / freight are offloaded) require prior approval.

2. Medical Emergencies

Donor flights; Flights where safety of life is involved; Humanitarian flights.

Note: Ambulance flights are not exempt type flights

- Ambulance flights may be exempt where the need to move the patient by air transport is urgent and
- the use of an alternative airfield (e.g. Northolt) is not possible and/or
 - the patient is connecting to/from commercial Heathrow service.

A positioning leg associated with an exempt ambulance flight may also be exempt where the medical crew is aboard and required for other emergency services.

The operator/ handling agent is responsible for obtaining information on the patient's condition, use of alternative airfields and any connecting commercial flights.

The patient's condition should be indicated using the NACA international scoring system to give an overall description of the patient's condition. This is the same system used by CFMU for ATFM slot exemption. The NACA categories are:

- NACA I: minor health disturbance
- NACA II: out-patient check-up needed
- NACA III: hospital treatment needed
- NACA IV: possible health threatening
- NACA V: acute critical condition
- NACA VI: resuscitation
- NACA VII: death.

NACA categories V or VI qualify for slot exemptions. NACA category IV qualifies where the patient is connecting to/from a commercial Heathrow service.

The NACA category should be included as SI text in the slot request. For organ donor transports, the word DONOR should be included as SI text.

3. Recovery Flights

Operating an aircraft made necessary by an unforeseeable schedule disruption (e.g. severe weather) and resumption of a planned commercial service.

Note: The exemption applies only to

- resumption of a service to carry passengers originally destined for Heathrow, which has diverted to another airport where a significant proportion of the passengers do not have right of entry at the diversion airport;
- an inbound positioning flight to recover a planned Heathrow departure service;
- an outbound positioning flight of an away based airline's aircraft where the aircraft is urgently required to resume planned commercial operations;
- an outbound positioning flight to recover a Heathrow based airline's own service;
- the return of a Heathrow based recovery aircraft to resume planned commercial operations.

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It does not apply to circumstances such as:

- outbound positioning to recover another airline's service (e.g. sub charter);
- positioning to replace an aircraft undergoing planned maintenance, including instances of a maintenance overrun;
- any planned positioning of an aircraft to operate a commercial service.

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D. CONTACT DETAILS

Airport Coordination Limited
Rourke House
Watermans Business Park
The Causeway
Staines-Upon-Thames
TW18 3BA

Office Hours: Monday-Friday (excl. Bank Holidays)
0900 – 1700 local time

Telephone: +44(0)20 8564 0613

Email: LONACXH@acl-uk.org

Website: www.online-coordination.com (for Slot Availability)

Heathrow Aircraft Operations Unit

Contact for requests outside ACL office hours to operate on the same or next day of the out-of-hours period. Note for weekends this includes flights on a Monday.

Email: OCS@heathrow.com

Heathrow Aircraft Operations Duty Managers (AODMs)

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