

Instruments on Planes

A report on the challenges facing musicians when travelling with their instruments

Compiled and prepared by Valerie Vaz MP and the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM)

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1. What the ISM is calling for

We call on the UK Government to regulate the aviation industry to ensure a consistent hand-baggage policy across all airlines. Musicians need to be able to travel with their instruments without fear of damage, to travel without prohibitive costs for small instruments and to have the security of a consistent policy, similar to that recently passed in the US.

Whilst waiting for Government regulation we ask that individual airlines follow the lead of easyJet and introduce musician-friendly policies allowing small instruments (117cm or smaller) into the cabin as hand baggage.

2. Foreword by Valerie Vaz MP (Walsall South)

From the internationally acclaimed touring artist to the young child, musicians at all stages in their career need to travel.

The problems musicians then face when travelling are numerous, but there is one which we – as a world leading producer of music – should be able to tackle: can musicians take their instruments with them? For many, at the moment, the answer is no.

Together with the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) – the professional body for musicians in the UK – we have produced this report on the policies and behaviour of airlines in the UK to our musicians.

In the report, we are calling for the publication of non-binding guidance by the Government to encourage transport bodies to allow musicians to travel with their instruments. At the same time we are asking airlines to take a long hard look at their policies and ask themselves whether they are being fair to musicians, and whether their profits are being hit by harmful policies.

We are calling on the Government to bring the UK in line with our closest economic competitor in music – the US – and regulate to ensure that musicians can carry small instruments in the cabin with them.

When first tackling this issue last year, we discovered numerous horror stories of the experiences faced daily by musicians when travelling. Some of these are set out in this document. This has resulted in heartbreak, emotional distress and crippling costs for thousands of musicians as instruments have been damaged or musicians stopped from travelling; and all this, despite the fact that it is not a legal requirement to limit hand baggage to only one item per person.

There is more that airlines, Government and music professionals can all do to reduce the problems faced when travelling with a musical instrument.

We should be under no illusions over the value of music and music touring to our economy and the importance of travelling to musicians working and performing at all levels.

We therefore hope Government, airlines and professional musicians will take notice and read the recommendations contained within this report and work towards a greater understanding of travelling musicians. This will enable musicians to do what they do best: make music and bring pleasure to us all.



Valerie Vaz MP

3. Background: the challenges facing musicians

Musical instruments cannot be carried in the hold of an aircraft as the pressure changes and humidity variation – as well as rough handling – can cause irreparable damage to the shape, sound, and look of an instrument.

If musicians are not allowed to carry instruments in the cabin they risk damage to their instruments worth hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands and sometimes hundreds of thousands of pounds¹ when they travel.

Musicians who are travelling by air need to be allowed to carry their instrument with them in the cabin of the aircraft.

There is little consistency for musicians between airlines, airports, cabin crew, ground crew and check-in staff. A musician can be turned away at the check-in gate on a whim or refused entry despite having bought an extra seat for their instrument.

This makes it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for travelling musicians to prepare sufficiently for travel and can make it impossible for them to travel abroad at all.

The economic impact of this uncertainty and threat of damage is unknown and unknowable.

Following extensive campaigning and thousands of case studies being reported to the ISM, the professional body for musicians, three persistent problems were identified:

1. Inconsistency between airlines and cabin and ground crew.
2. Not allowing instruments on board even if an extra seat has been purchased.
3. Not allowing small instruments such as a violin or guitar c117cm or smaller in the cabin of the aircraft as hand baggage.

The first two are difficult to measure, except by volume of complaints, but the third is easier to assess. We contacted each UK based airline to compare their musical instrument policy with regards to the carriage of small instruments and asked them this question:

Do you allow instruments that are guitar sized or smaller into the cabin of the aircraft as hand baggage?

We then created a league table of airlines based on this crucial hand baggage policy and this table is shown on the next page. Since conducting this survey the situation has got worse, with British Airways taking a retrograde step and removing their hand baggage exception for instruments of 126cm or smaller.

¹ A quote from the ISM survey of professional musicians: 'My instruments (I travel with 2 violins) are worth 200.000 euros.'

4. Headline: a traffic light system for musicians

Airline*	Do they allow small musical instruments in the cabin of their planes as hand baggage?*** e.g. violin (c81cm), trumpet (c60cm) and guitar (c110cm).
easyJet	Yes. Max 117cm.
Loganair	Yes.
British Airways	Maybe. Max 56cm BUT might allow outside these dimensions.
Eastern Airways	Maybe. Max 56cm BUT might allow outside these dimensions.
Jet2.com	Maybe. Max 56cm BUT might allow outside these dimensions.
BMI	Maybe. Max 55cm BUT might allow outside these dimensions.
Flybe	Maybe. Max 50cm BUT might allow outside these dimensions.
Monarch Airlines	No. Max 56cm.
Virgin Atlantic	No. Max 56cm.
Thomas Cook Airlines	No. Max 55cm.
Thomson	No. Max 55cm.

*These are UK based airlines. The highest number of complaints received by the ISM related to Ryanair, a non-UK based airline which has a maximum hand baggage length of 55cm.

**It should be noted that all guidelines are always subject to the captain's final decision.

***Cello Aviation is a charter airline which allows instruments on board, and Astraerus is a leasing airline which may or may not allow instruments on board depending on the lease.

5. Case studies

Whilst collecting petitions signatures and information about airlines, we also received over 1,350 individual reports of difficulties musicians have faced when travelling with a musical instrument. A selection is set out over the next two pages:

A viola player: ██████ insisted on us buying extra tickets for my viola and my husband's violin respectively and then in the event insisted on him putting them in the overhead locker anyway, as they'd overbooked the flight. We were not refunded.

A tour organiser: I have booked musicians to travel abroad and on one occasion a violinist was not allowed to take her instrument on board, and had to put in the hold. The instrument was very badly damaged – beyond repair – when it could have easily been stored in the cabin.

A guitar sized instrument: I have been stopped from boarding to a plane because I was carrying a musical instrument, the size of a guitar and asked to pay for an extra seat. As I didn't have enough money, I had to check it in resulting the severe damage of the instrument. That was a very rare Turkish instrument, especially made for me and it takes at least 6 months to make one, so I also lost the ability to work for months.

A string quartet: I witnessed a string quartet having huge problems - cello was allowed as had bought a seat the other members were having a row - totally unnecessary - violins and violas are expensive and need to go into over head lockers.

A guitarist: In February 2010, ██████ crushed my hand-made concert classical guitar (insured for £900) when travelling from Gatwick to Faro (Portugal) airport. The instrument was a write-off.

A cellist: I was once physically pushed off a ██████ plane with cello, while it pulled away from the air bridge, and [was] left looking down at the tarmac 20 feet below. Then the bridge started to retract and I had to run for it.

A mother of a young musician: After studying at the Guildhall School of Music, my older daughter went on to her degree at the Ivy League Vassar College, in the USA. She took her cello with her and played in several groups during her 4 year stay. On one occasion, on the return to the UK, she actually saw her cello being dropped from one of ██████ planes, onto the baggage cart, only for her instrument to be thrown on to the carousel at Heathrow Airport, like a piece of luggage. This was after she had arranged for it to be picked up at JFK, and told to stand in a certain spot at Heathrow airport, where it would be brought to her. She finally plucked up the courage to open it in my presence. We both cried openly at Heathrow airport, as it was smashed to pieces. I fought ██████ for some kind of compensation, but was told that it was not his responsibility, but that of ██████, re. the staff who handled her instrument ... my daughter with distinctions up to that time in examinations gave up the instrument altogether.

A lute player: I am a professional lute player and have to fly very often to get to the places where I work. Within the last 15 years I very often experienced trouble with the ground staff at the check-in in order to get my instrument (which perfectly fits in the overhead lockers) into the cabin. During this period I lost 2 instruments (completely damaged) because of transport in the [hold] of the plane.

The story of Rich Phillips, cellist:

'In November 2009 I was booked as part of a string quartet for a one-month cruise. Starting in Naples, we took a chartered flight exclusively for cruise passengers and crew from Heathrow. My Cello, after some negotiation, was allocated the spare seat next to me and the British Ambassador for Brazil.

'It was on the return flight we have our case story – again a chartered flight was scheduled, which I'm sure would have been fine. This flight was cancelled and following a protest from passengers, the cruise company attempted to get us all home on time by re-allocating seats to two separate flights with Alitalia, back to London from Buenos Aires via Rome. The Argentinean's from Alitalia would not give my cello a seat for reasons that were unclear. The cruise company representative seemed powerless at this stage and my protests didn't get me anywhere either. I assumed they were struggling to fit everybody on board the two flights, so in fear of being stranded in Buenos Aires, and with work to return home for, I felt my only option was to do as they said and with terror checked-in my cello as hold luggage. As it happened there were a dozen or so empty seats around me for the 14-hour flight to Rome...

'Back at Heathrow I was waiting at the bottom of the luggage 'shoot' with dread as all of the passengers, one-by-one, collected their luggage and left. The conveyor belt was empty and mine still hadn't appeared so I went to the nearest information desk and there it was, waiting for me. Perhaps someone had taken pity and carried it there for me, I'll never know, but the case – brand new one month earlier – was a total mess. It had done a sterling job of absorbing the shock, and had restricted damage to my cello to a 4-inch crack below the f-hole. My reaction was mainly of relief as it could have been so much worse.

'The damage report at Heathrow was only interested in my cello case and made it clear that Alitalia would not be liable for the contents of any 'luggage bags'. I filed 'accidental damage' with Allianz insurance and my repair was covered. They also paid for a new case.'



Rich Phillips with Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive of the ISM (left), and Valerie Vaz MP. Photo: Mark Thompson

6. Campaigning with Valerie Vaz MP and Julian Lloyd-Webber

BBC coverage of a young violinist's problems The ISM launched a new campaign to secure fair treatment of musicians in August 2010 following a particularly unfair incident in which a Cheshire music student was ordered to buy an extra seat for her violin after an airline refused to let her take the instrument as hand baggage. Having been advised to buy an extra seat at a cost of £190, the girl and her family got off the plane to buy the ticket only to find that, in the meantime, they had missed their original flight.

Petition It became clear that professional and amateur musicians were still being mistreated by airlines and the ISM launched a petition calling on the Government to take action. The petition has now gathered over 4,100 signatures and is supported by over 1,350 individual examples of problems musicians have faced when trying to travel by air.

Julian Lloyd-Webber backed the petition saying: 'This indiscriminate victimisation of musicians has to stop. As a cellist I am used to being charged a full fare for my cello even when the plane is half empty. But to expect a violinist to do the same – when their instrument can safely be stowed in an overhead locker – is just plain greedy.'

Government The ISM wrote to the then Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond MP, and drew attention to the growing number of complaints by musicians seeking to travel by air. We received a response from transport minister Teresa Villiers who also responded to a further letter from Valerie Vaz MP saying that policies regarding baggage were 'commercial decisions' and giving no reference to our requests for guidance to be published by the Government and no reference to the minimum standard proposed.

Taking the petition to parliament The ISM took the petition to parliament in January 2011 to call for the Government to publish non-binding guidance. Lord Clement-Jones asked a question in the House of Lords drawing attention to the many items worth thousands of pounds which suffered 'terrible' damage in luggage holds. Unfortunately the minister responded to Lord Clement-Jones' question stating that the Government 'would not legislate on the issue' and sidestepped the possibility of publishing non-binding guidance.

MP Champion Valerie Vaz MP has raised the issue in parliament asking: 'Will the Government make urgent representations to the airlines, which have different policies, to ensure that expensive instruments do not have to be put in the hold and do not have to be classified as hand luggage?' Valerie Vaz MP wrote the foreword to this guide and is now helping to take this issue further, and is supporting musicians in her constituency of Walsall South by backing the calls for the Government regulate airlines to ensure musician-friendly policies.

A traffic light system for musicians Following this extensive work we have produced this report explaining the problems faced by travelling music professionals for parliamentarians, and a traffic light system for musicians who are travelling by air to offer guidance on which airlines are the most musician-friendly. This traffic light system will be regularly updated to track improvements in airlines' policies.

Valerie Vaz MP has now tabled Early Day Motion 107 in Parliament's Session 2012-13 as follows: **MUSICIANS AND AIR TRAVEL**

That this House celebrates the cultural and economic contributions of musicians to society; is concerned that airlines' regulations regarding the carriage of musical instruments remain inconsistent and can even vary within airlines; recognises the intrinsic and crucial value of musical instruments for musicians; notes that damage to these instruments may be sustained if musicians are required to place them in the hold rather than carry them in the cabin; supports the Incorporated Society of Musicians in its campaign for all airlines to adopt a minimum standard agreement to allow musicians to carry a musical instrument as an additional item of hand baggage on flights, if the item is guitar-sized or smaller; welcomes the success of the Instruments on Planes campaign in negotiating with one airline, which announced on 12 January 2011 a new musician-friendly baggage policy; further notes that the US, which is the UK's closest competitor for music exports, has already legislated on the issue under the FAA Modernization and Reform Act 2012; and calls on the Government to publish non-binding guidance for airlines on the carriage of music instruments in the cabin of aircraft.

7. Our recommendations

- **FOR GOVERNMENT:** We are calling on the Government to regulate the civil aviation industry to allow small musical instruments of 117cm or less (at their largest dimension) on their planes as hand baggage and allow musicians with large instrument to carry them on an additionally purchased seat.

The US, our closest competitor in the music industry, has now issued regulation in the *FAA Modernization and Reform Act 2012* and we recommend that the Government rethink its original position which rejected regulation.²

- **FOR AIRLINES:** We are calling on airlines to follow the lead of easyJet in adopting the ISM's minimum standard and allowing small musical instruments of 117cm or less at their largest dimension onto planes and ensuring that musicians who have purchased an extra seat for a larger instrument can take their instrument into the cabin.
- **FOR PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS:** we recommend carefully checking baggage policies beforehand, where possible contacting the airline before you travel and receive written confirmation of the acceptance of instruments, and carrying your ISM membership card with you at all times.

We want airlines and other transport providers to sign up to the ISM's minimum standard to be listed as musician-friendly. This is not an onerous or dramatic shift in policy; *this will benefit their business, support their customers and support a key component of the UK's economy.*

² Commons Hansard, 14 May 2012 : Column 6W

8. A special mention for easyJet

Following ISM's close work with individual airlines, leading UK airline easyJet announced its musician-friendly hand baggage policy which has an explicit exemption for small instruments such as guitars or violins.

This improvement on its previous policy which did not allow these instruments in the cabin was announced in their press release on 12 January 2011:

Music to their ears

easyJet, Europe's leading low-fares airline, today highlighted that its musician-friendly hand baggage policy is one of the best within the airline industry. Over recent months the airline has been in dialogue with the Incorporated Society of Musicians as to how we can best accommodate musicians and their instruments onboard our aircraft.

Musical instruments up to 30 x 117 x 38cm in size, allowing them to comfortably fit within the overhead lockers, will be accepted for carriage in the cabin. Instruments which fit into this category include, for example: guitar, violin, viola, piccolo, flute, clarinet, bugle and trumpet. Larger instruments such as cellos can also be accepted in the cabin by special arrangement.

Dana Dunne, easyJet's Chief Commercial Officer said:

'We are proud to support Europe's rich musical heritage, and recognise that many professional musicians fly to festivals and concerts all over Europe. We value their business and believe that easyJet's policy will be music to their ears.'

Link to the press release: corporate.easyjet.com/media/latest-news/news-year-2011/12-01-2011-en.aspx

easyJet deserve a special mention for their willingness to engage with professional musicians, in stark contrast to their competitors, and they are now – following the retrograde and harmful step taken by British Airways – the only major airline which allows violins and guitars on board without the additional seat purchase.

Additional information

About the Incorporated Society of Musicians

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) is the professional body for music and musicians.

We are independent of government and not financially dependent on any third party; our mission is to champion the art of music and support the music professional.

Founded in 1882, we have over 6,000 members who come from all branches of the profession: soloists, orchestral and ensemble performers, composers, teachers, academics and students. Our corporate membership of over 100 organisations includes the Association of British Orchestras (ABO), Classic FM, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), the International Artists Managers Association (IAMA), the Music Industries Association (MIA), all the UK conservatoires, several universities and our specialist music schools.

The ISM is a member of the Creative Coalition Campaign, the British Copyright Council, the Creators Rights Alliance, and the Council for Subject Associations (CfSA) and provides secretariat support to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education. Our Chief Executive, Deborah Annetts, is Chair of the Music Education Council (MEC) a board member of the National Youth Orchestra and a member of the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

About Valerie Vaz MP

Valerie Vaz was elected MP for Walsall South in May 2010. Valerie qualified as a solicitor in 1984 and has worked as a lawyer in local government in London Boroughs. She set up a community law firm and sat as a Deputy District Judge. In 2001 Valerie joined the Government Legal Service and has worked at the Treasury Solicitors Department and the Ministry of Justice.

Valerie's community work includes being a school governor and a member of a health authority, and she is a member of the National Trust, the Law Society and a Friend of Kew Gardens.

Valerie's interest in music began when her mother Merlyn Vaz taught her to play the piano. She is taking her ABRSM piano grade exams and recently achieved Grade 5.

In Parliament, Valerie serves as a Member of the influential Health Select Committee. In addition to her interest in health policy, Valerie campaigns on diverse issues including libraries and galleries, epilepsy, support for adoptive parents, women in business, science and technology, and human rights at home and abroad.

More information is available at <http://www.valerievazmp.co.uk>

Useful links and references

The Incorporated Society of Musicians website is www.ism.org and up to date information on the instruments on planes campaign can be found in their campaigns page.

Valerie Vaz MP is the Labour MP for Walsall South and has formed a central part of the ISM's campaigning around this issue. www.valerievazmp.co.uk/ She raised the issue at business questions www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110203/debtext/110203-0001.htm#11020321000752 and subsequently

The petition organised by the ISM which has well over 4,100 signatories can be found by visiting www.surveymonkey.com/s/musiciansairlines

easyJet changed their policy following a dialogue with the ISM and their information can be found online as well. http://corporate.easyjet.com/media/latest-news/news-year-2011/12-01-2011-en.aspx?sc_lang=en

Directgov has its own basic recommendations regarding travelling with musical instruments. www.direct.gov.uk/en/TravelAndTransport/Publictransport/AirtravelintheUK/DG_078179

Kerry McCarthy MP asked a question of transport minister Theresa Villiers on 14 May 2012 to which the minister admitted no assessment of the impact of this policy had been made and rejected any legislation from the Government. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm120514/text/120514w0001.htm#12051412000097

If you have any further questions regarding this campaign, you can contact Henry Vann, Public Affairs & Policy Officer on 020 7079 1207 or by email at henry@ism.org