

INDEPENDENT REPORT INTO BALPA'S CULTURE

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Section 1: Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the BALPA Culture Commission, requested by the General Secretary (GS) and the National Executive Council (NEC). Its purpose is to examine the cultural dynamics shaping how BALPA functions — what is enabling progress, what is getting in the way and what must shift if the organisation is to fulfil its potential for members, staff, and the public.

It reflects a presentation to the NEC and Leadership Team (LT) in August 2025 and is the result of extensive engagement, observation and review.

Why the Culture Commission Was Launched

The Commission was initiated in response to a shared recognition by the GS and NEC that BALPA's culture was not only failing to support performance — in many cases, it was actively undermining it.

The Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1) acknowledge progress under the current leadership — including the appointment of the new GS, Amy Leversidge, and the election of the NEC — but also note that this progress has been constrained by persistent patterns of mistrust, conflict and disengagement.

How to Read This Report

It is inevitable given the Terms of Reference that this report focuses on challenges. Before reading, I suggest taking note of two contextual elements that frame findings and recommendations:

1. The courage and openness with which leadership (the GS, NEC and Leadership Team) have approached this work. It was undertaken entirely voluntarily and at leadership's instigation. It was not prompted by scandal or member activism — often the factors that drive trade unions to undertake similar reviews. Throughout the process I encountered openness and a willingness to be prodded and challenged.
2. The importance of being realistic about the timeframes for making transformational change in respect of systemic dysfunction that has likely been decades in the making. During the short time I have spent on this Commission, BALPA has been seeking to address capability (skills, knowledge), capacity (the amount of resource) and culture (how work happens). This was only ever going to be a heavy lift. In the respect that it has now restructured and, subject to accepting the recommendations of this Commission, can hold a vision for the organisation's future, BALPA is now ready to be at 'the beginning of the beginning' of becoming a high-performing organisation in which good people can do good work and feel belonging. With concerted effort and a willingness of all to lean into further challenge and consequent development, BALPA could feel like a wholly different place by the end of 2027.

This report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2: Executive Summary** — Overview of findings and priority recommendations
- **Section 3: Core Patterns** — Culture patterns at work in BALPA
- **Section 4: Deep Dive** — Insight into relationships, leadership and decision-making
- **Section 5 and 6: Implications and Vision** — Impact on members and path forward
- **Appendices** — Supporting material including commission Terms of Reference.

Section 2: Executive Summary

I agree with the Terms of Reference that, despite the strength of BALPA's membership, the professionalism of its staff and the commitment of many representatives (reps), the culture of the organisation has not kept pace with its potential or ambitions - nor with the dynamism and complexity of the environment in which it operates.

This report draws on a literature review, semi-structured interviews, internal documentation, written submissions and direct observation of BALPA in action. Its conclusions are presented with confidence and I consider that they are robust enough to inform immediate action, guided by three core themes - **trustworthiness, clarity, and equity**.

A Call for Change

Pilots make an extraordinary contribution to the world. Their expertise enables people to explore, do business, reunite with loved ones and experience the world at a scale unimaginable a century ago - when the pilot identity first took root in a promise of excitement, innovation and overcoming the impossible.

But the world is changing - fast. No one can be certain what aviation will look like in the face of shifting technologies, climate crisis or geopolitical instability. That's why it is encouraging that, through this work, I have seen *glimpses* of BALPA holding to that original promise: not only defending the profession, but operating with insight, energy and the capacity for innovation. I have also seen *fragments* of what it could mean for BALPA to re-energise industrial relations from a position of pride and influence, strengthening the financial and societal value of the pilot identity itself.

At the same time, I encountered strong evidence of the cultural challenges described, or alluded to, in the Terms of Reference. In interviews, people described patterns of exclusion, power-hoarding, favouritism and political behaviour that seemed entirely divorced from purpose or institutional goals. Documentation and discussions suggest that the costs and benefits of taking on rep roles are distributed inequitably. In some cases, reps receive little benefit, tangible or otherwise. In other cases, the role appears to confer influence, lifestyle control and/or access - at levels that raise legitimate questions about integrity and motivation.

Observation revealed further patterns: inconsistent expectations, uneven access to information and unclear role boundaries, all of which breed mistrust and friction. This report does not aim to list every symptom. Leadership is already aware of many of the issues and should be congratulated for naming many of the areas of concern when commissioning this work, as well as the openness with which they received outline presentation of findings earlier this month. My role is to explain *why* these issues persist - and what to do next.

What Kind of Culture Change?

Cultural change must not be treated as a side project. It is integral to BALPA's ability to deliver strategy, uphold democratic legitimacy and build trust with members. To create a strong future, BALPA must embed three interlinked themes at the heart of its operations (see Figure 1 below):

1. **Trustworthiness**

Trust between committees, teams, staff and volunteers is low. Leadership must take control of the trust agenda - by demonstrating trustworthiness and dismantling systems and behaviours that erode it.

2. **Clarity**

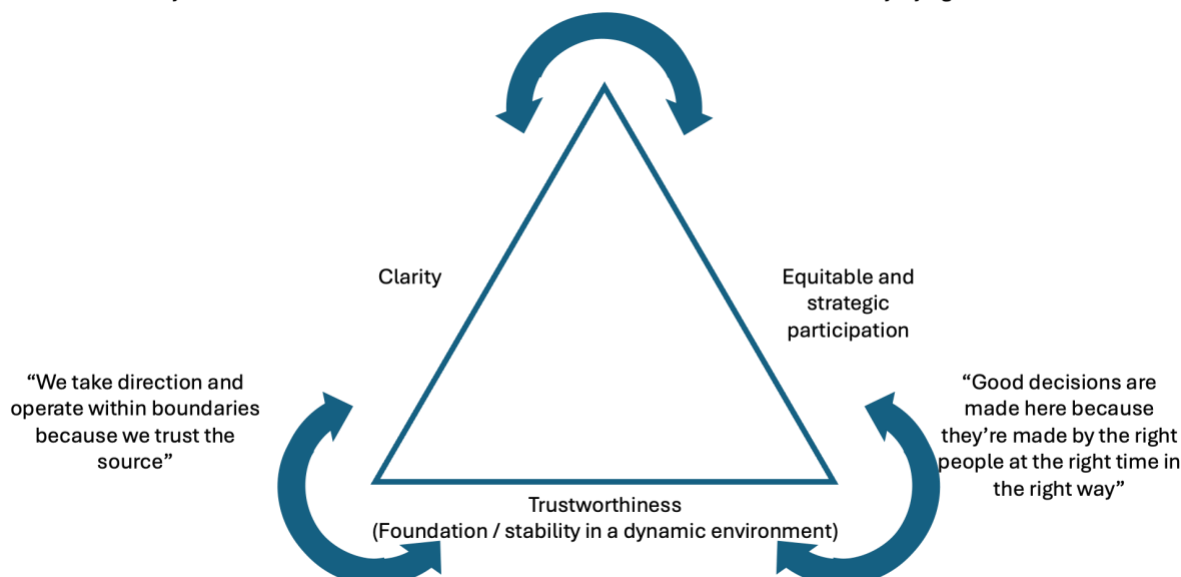
BALPA needs a shared language of purpose, vision, values and goals - a framework that guides decisions and aligns effort. Roles and responsibilities (individual and collective) must also be clarified.

3. **Equitable and strategic participation**

Whether elected, selected, or employed, people need support, voice and opportunity. Voice should be valued based on role, competence and contribution - not informal access or positional power. Participation must be designed, not assumed. In fast-moving complex environments, like industrial relations, overly centralised or top-down decision-making excludes key insight and reduces pace and performance.

Figure 1: Key themes for BALPA culture change

"My contribution is valued and will make a difference to what we're collectively trying to achieve"



These are not simply technical fixes. They are the foundations of a healthier, more effective organisation.

Culture is systemic - and individual accountability matters

A key message of this report is that culture is not just a collection of behavioural problems. It is systemic; an entanglement of stories, incentives, habits and norms that persist beyond any one individual or role.

But systems do not operate in the abstract. They shape, and are shaped in part by, individual behaviour. Some of the patterns explored in this report have enabled, overlooked or excused conduct that has caused real harm. I heard and read about instances of racism, misogyny, ableism, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and other forms of exclusion that, whilst not investigated as part of this work, would, I believe, be naive or disingenuous to dismiss as interpersonal misunderstandings.

Culture change requires honesty, about both individual and systemic dynamics. Dismantling discrimination, as well as the opaque or exclusionary systems that allow it to continue, must be part of BALPA's strategy for change. Equity is not a nice-to-have. It is foundational to trustworthiness, safety, participation and legitimacy.

This report focuses on systemic patterns, not individual blame. That is not to deny harm or the need for accountability. But much of the work needed is to understand how culture is maintained, often unconsciously, through power, habit and omission. Those with more influence carry more responsibility. Accountability at the individual level still matters - but it cannot replace the need for systemic change.

Highest Priority Actions

The following actions are prioritised not because they are “easy,” but because they offer the greatest leverage. They will unlock other reforms, reduce wasted effort and lay a foundation for longer-term change. Leadership should commit to and plan for:

A. A Radical Shift in Transparency

Commit to regular, clear reporting of:

- Use of union time
- Costs and expenses
- Strategy, plans, and delivery progress
- Agendas and minutes of NEC meetings

B. Collaborative Development of Three Core Tools

1. A strategic framework (purpose, vision, mission, values, goals) – see example in Appendix 2
2. A clear map of responsibilities and contributions across the NEC, CCs, and staff
3. An equity and participation plan that strengthens democracy and elevates equity as a principle

C. Renewed Onboarding for NEC and CCs

Use the frameworks above to create consistent expectations, support, and induction.

D. Role Manifestos

Develop templates for NEC and CC candidate election manifestos that reflect the strategic framework and nudge candidates to pitch for roles based on the requirements of the strategy and role, as well as personal motivations.

Medium-Term Actions

Once the above foundations are in place, BALPA should introduce tools, methods and templates to support planning, collaboration and organisation performance — helping embed consistency and reduce over-reliance on individuals' personal knowledge and histories.

Governance Recommendations

BALPA is currently conducting a governance review. This Commission touched on governance, leadership and strategy as none of these can be disentangled from culture. Accordingly, I propose that the following recommendations are integrated into the governance review:

- 1. Diversifying NEC Skillset**
Include experience in communications, financial oversight, organisation development, and systems leadership, delivered for example through lay committee members.
 - 2. Aligning Foundational Documents**
Update the Rule Book and Ethics Guide to eliminate contradictions and align with equality principles and organisation values. (Please note a summary of issues arising when reading the Rule Book and Ethics guide through a culture lens has been provided separately to this report).
 - 3. Improving Decision Making Methods**
Adopt consent- or consensus-based decision making for complex or high-stakes issues, to protect minority voices and build broader commitment.
 - 4. Consider Time Distribution of NEC**
Reduce the frequency of NEC governance meetings to 4 – 6 per year, with a focused agenda on reviewing progress against annual goals, including progress reporting from CCs. Use additional NEC time for leadership and organisation development, initially focused on implementation of recommendations from this Commission.
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Delivery of recommendations will necessitate collaboration across the ecosystem of reps, staff and committees. To my mind there are two immediate opportunities, or pre-conditions, to making progress collaboratively:

1. Sharing the findings and recommendations from this report with the intention - and plan - to do so in a way that demonstrates trustworthiness and commitment to change; and

2. An NEC stock-take of urgent and important challenges with a view to 'clearing the decks.' This should include, but may not be limited to:

- Resolving, with the BA CC, publication (or not) of learnings from the 2019 strike, which appears to be a longstanding bone of contention, impacting trust and relationships within a critical mass of members and reps.
- Rapidly building connection between the Leadership Team, NEC and CC reps - particularly between individuals and committees where there is little or no contact, (which creates near-impossible conditions in which to make institutional progress).
- Collectively reflecting on - and committing to learning from - the recent staff restructure - to ensure that those who carried (or continue to carry), for example, the brunt of short-staffing feel heard and so that future changes incorporate lessons learnt.

The sections that follow unpack the five cultural patterns at play (Section 3), explore their deeper roots (Section 4), explain the culture's impact on member experience (Section 5) and offer a vision for a more aligned future (Section 6).

Section 3: Cultural Patterns Shaping BALPA

In this report, “culture” is not shorthand for behavioural issues. It refers to how people relate to one another, how work gets done, and how meaning is created across BALPA.

A culture of trust and purpose doesn’t arise by chance - and it cannot be expected as a by-product of appointing the “right” individuals. Culture is the result of intentional choices: making space for individual and collective change, clear values, thoughtful design and aligned habits and decision-making.

Culture is the key determinant of whether people can work together in shared endeavour. That is what an organisation is after all: people - both staff and volunteers - working collectively toward a vision and goals. Culture, therefore, directly shapes trust, productivity and performance. It can either hold an organisation back or drive it forward.

Culture also matters externally. It does not stay contained within the organisation’s walls or digital boundaries. It shows up in every interaction - including how members experience reps, staff, committees and services. For BALPA, where much of the brand is delivered through people, culture is inseparable from impact, i.e. from the attraction, retention and engagement of members - as well as the achievement of advocacy and industrial relations goals.

What Was Observed

Through this work, five interlocking cultural patterns consistently emerged. These patterns do not exist in isolation - they reinforce one another and shape how BALPA functions day to day. Each is explored in greater depth in Section 4.

1. Relationships Built on Grievance, Not Shared Purpose

Many BALPA relationships appear to be shaped by what psychologists call **common enemy intimacy** - fast bonding through shared complaint. This creates alliances based on opposition rather than vision.

In this context, trust is fragile. Conflict is more avoided, personalised or escalated than it is resolved. As a result, much of BALPA’s energy is consumed in managing emotions and mistrust, rather than in moving forward together.

2. Decisions Made Without Strategy, Anchoring or Equity

Decision making is often slow, reactive and disconnected from a clear strategy or purpose. Discussions frequently default to personal opinion, informal influence or historical grievance - not shared goals or agreed criteria.

Without strong frameworks to guide judgment or support participation, people feel excluded and decisions are questioned. This fuels cycles of frustration and drama.

3. Narratives Shaped by the Past, Not by Purpose

The dominant stories within BALPA tend to look backward - centring on past events, past leaders and unresolved hurts. These narratives shape expectations and alliances today, often in ways that inhibit forward movement.

Celebration and storytelling about current strengths are rare. Many struggle to see a shared, forward-facing vision that connects effort to purpose.

4. Identities That Collide, Not Align

Pilots and staff both bring deep expertise, but from different professional worlds. Pilots often operate in high-stakes, fast-decision environments. Organisation leadership requires tolerance for ambiguity, collaborative planning and slower consensus-building.

This cultural mismatch creates mistrust. Staff are too often perceived as challengers or second-best (because they are not pilots), rather than as expert partners.

5. Power Held Tightly, Not Shared Transparently

Power is concentrated in a few individuals and structures - and is often seen as opaque or self-serving. Decision-making is overly escalated, dissent is discouraged and access to influence often depends on proximity or favour, not contribution.

This erodes trust and reinforces inequity.

The Underlying Pattern: Unclear Design

Across all five dimensions, a consistent root cause emerges: **a lack of shared clarity** - about strategy, roles and purpose - combined with **uneven access to power and participation**.

This produces:

- **Uncertainty:** people don't know where decisions come from or how to influence them.
- **Emotional strain:** reactive behaviours emerge as people try to navigate without clear rules.
- **Burnout:** effort feels uncoordinated, unrewarded, or disconnected from impact.

When clarity and equity are missing, predictable coping patterns take hold:

- **Drama triangles:** cycles of blame, rescue, and helplessness replace constructive problem-solving.
- **Common enemy intimacy:** trust forms around shared frustration rather than shared direction.
- **Erosion of trust:** people begin to question others' motives, assuming self-interest over shared mission.

Understanding the symptoms is essential. But to change them, we must explore the deeper systems that keep these patterns in place. That is the focus of Section 4.

Section 4: Root Causes - Deep Dive

Culture is shaped not just by values or vision, but by deeper, often invisible systems. In BALPA, three major cultural forces emerged from the evidence: how people relate, how decisions are made, and how power and identity interact. These dynamics are not surface-level behaviours - they form the operating system of the organisation.

4a. Relationships and Drama

In pressured environments, people form relationships quickly. In the flight deck, I heard that trust is often built through what psychologists call “**common enemy intimacy**”: bonding through shared complaint. In aviation, it’s likely instinctive and may be harmless. But when this same instinct spills into BALPA culture, it can be damaging.

This method of relationship building risks connection built on **opposition, not purpose**. Trust becomes conditional: “I trust you because we dislike the same thing.” This leads to:

- Negativity crowding out ambition (for example, long meetings chiefly focusing on what’s wrong, not what we’re trying to achieve).
- Alliances forming around resentment, not vision (‘who can we take down?’).
- Messaging that is oppositional, not propositional (focusing on what we’re against, not what we’re for, or ‘populist’ narratives of ‘tear it down’ / ‘blow it up’ that lack systemic approaches to building the new).

Over time, even those committed to change get drawn into criticism, defensiveness and disillusionment. Organisational energy is drained not through work, but through managing fractured relationships and unspoken tensions.

Most concerningly, many reps describe **BALPA itself as the common enemy** - ineffective, untrustworthy; far from being the object of pride.

This dynamic often mirrors another pattern: the **drama triangle**. In this cycle, someone feels wronged (the “victim”), blames another (the “persecutor”), and someone else intervenes to fix it (the “rescuer”). Each role enables avoidance and provides a sense of control or belonging - but the cycle quickly becomes toxic:

- Issues are not resolved but retold and replayed.
- Grievance becomes collective memory.
- Trust erodes and productivity suffers.

In BALPA, this cycle is deeply embedded. Past tensions are passed along through stories, shaping perceptions long after relevance fades. As a result:

- Decision-making slows as ideas may be filtered through old resentments.
- Reputations are haunted by history, not current contribution.
- Talented people burn out, withdraw or leave.

- The space to create strategy or talk about what matters shrinks to almost nothing.

It doesn't have to be this way. Where conflict is surfaced and resolved - with **curiosity rather than blame** - it becomes a source of resilience, not drag. Teams learn that disagreement is not disloyalty. Robust challenge coexists with trust. Energy moves from the past to the future.

This shift won't happen on its own. BALPA's leaders need the insight and skill to move from drama to dialogue - and to model a more constructive, trust-building approach to conflict and difference.

4b. Stories and Strategic Drift

Another root cause of cultural drag is the absence of a strong decision-making framework. BALPA has extraordinary institutional memory - but little future-focused strategic anchoring. Past decisions, conflicts and personalities are discussed as if they were still live issues. Former staff and reps are still treated as heroes or villains. Stories about events from even 20+ years ago hold power.

This is partly a result of drama triangles. But it is also a sign of **strategic drift** - the absence of strong processes to define goals, align resources, and track impact. Evidence of this includes:

- Meetings that stall over first principles instead of enabling urgent decisions.
- Debates based on opinion, not data or insight.
- Promising ideas delayed due to lack of anchoring in clear strategy.
- Knowledge hoarding under the guise of confidentiality.
- Cabinet responsibility cited without the skills or structures to support collegiate, 'cabinet' decision making.

Another recurring concern is the **overuse of majority voting**, especially for complex or sensitive issues. Voting can be useful where decisions are simple or reversible. But many of BALPA's key decisions require **consensus or consent** - because they demand buy-in, shared responsibility and ongoing commitment.

Defaulting to majority vote leaves many feeling excluded, unheard or sidelined. Opportunities to build trust, advocacy, and positive stories are lost. Worse, it reinforces a cycle of drama and disengagement.

Cultural Narratives That Reinforce Strategic Drift

In addition to stories of the past, two other dominant stories appear to be helping to keep the system stuck:

1. **The Super-Talent Myth**

This narrative claims: “If we just had the right leader / National Officer / department head, everything would work.” This story ignores the reality that no one individual can thrive in a dysfunctional system. When “the system” resists or exhausts good people, it wins.

2. **BALPA = British Airways Pilots’ Association**

Depending on interest, some say BALPA is too dominated by BA; others say BA’s needs are underserved. What’s missing is a clear strategy to balance BA’s financial and membership importance with the needs of the broader union. The absence of that strategy is both a strategic risk and a cultural own goal.

These stories are not insurmountable - but they are powerful. They seem rarely to be treated as perspectives to explore, or the beginning of a discussion, but more often as facts to be accepted. Until challenged, they will block imagination and progress.

4c. Identity and Power

At the heart of the third pattern is a clash of **professional instincts**.

Pilots operate in high-stakes environments, where decisions are fast and outcomes are binary: success or failure. Organisation leadership, however, lives in ambiguity. Progress is slower, influence replaces control. It requires drawing others in, for the long term and for sometimes intangible gains, or gains beyond the tenure of individual leaders.

When flight deck instincts dominate union culture, they create pressure to:

- Act fast, rather than think long.
- Control, rather than collaborate.
- Simplify, rather than engage with complexity.

These behaviours risk poor decisions, suppressed voice and rapid burnout. Control leads to blame; strategic work is crowded out by tactics and ‘emergencies.’

Institutionally, this manifests as the perception of “**Big BALPA**” - seen as obstructive, risk-averse and controlling. But here lies a paradox: in many ways, in my view, there is **no Big BALPA**. The centre is underpowered, not overpowered. The idea of “Big BALPA” seems to have become a **controlling myth** - a story that prevents people from stepping into their own leadership and misdirects effort away from creating strategic anchoring and supporting whole organisation development.

The solution is not to shrink the centre further - but to clarify its role.

The centre should not sit at the top of a hierarchy, issuing approvals. It should sit at the **heart of a network**, enabling trust, clarity and cohesion. That means:

- Supporting distributed leadership, for example within the CCs and staff, not trying to control it.
- Offering rhythm, structure, and strategic coherence.
- Acting as a trusted point of connection internally and externally.
- Strengthening accountability and learning.

This shift requires cultural change and structural design. Shared tools, clearer expectations, and spaces for learning must be put in place.

From Insight to Action

Together, these three dimensions - relationships, decisions, and power - form the cultural core of BALPA. They shape how people experience the organisation and what they believe is possible. Understanding them is essential to changing course.

The next section explores those consequences from the members' perspective.

Section 5: Implications for Member Experience

The cultural patterns described above cannot remain internal. They will be shaping how members experience BALPA every day.

Many (my assumption would be **the majority**) of members do not engage directly with BALPA strategy, policy or governance. Instead, they experience BALPA through day-to-day interactions - with reps, ex-reps, elected leaders and informal conversations in flight decks, hotel bars and online. The **words, tone and behaviour** of these interactions become the culture that members absorb, a significant determinant of the **brand experience** in other words.

When interactions are with people who are burned out, disengaged or mistrustful, the version of BALPA that members encounter is one of dysfunction. A **feedback loop** emerges: disaffection spreads from reps to members and back again; trust and energy diminish; and leadership becomes harder to sustain.

This is not a communications problem. It is a **leadership challenge**. The goal is not to script tightly a message and expect people to stick to it, but to build a culture that people want to represent - where the strategy is believable, the values are visible and the experience is positive and at least somewhat consistent.

Section 6: Vision for the Future

The BALPA of the future must feel different - not simply in structures, but in tone, rhythm and trustworthiness.

A stronger culture will not eliminate disagreement or conflict. But it will make more room for difference without fear. It will establish clear roles and values. It will support alignment and accountability. And it will replace confusion and mistrust with shared purpose.

This is an organisation with new values that have a greater dynamism than the current 'safety, strength, unity,' where:

- **Strategy is lived** - not just a document, but a compass for decisions and priorities.
- **Participation is equitable** - accessible, supported, and valued.
- **Tools and systems are consistent** - promoting fairness, learning, and performance.
- **Leadership is distributed** - not reliant on heroics or proximity to power.
- **The centre empowers** - supporting innovation and learning across BALPA.

Building this kind of organisation is possible — but it requires discipline, reflection and shared responsibility from everyone, especially those with formal power or cultural influence.

Making Space for Transformation

Real change doesn't just happen in systems or structures, it happens also in people. And for this work to succeed, every person with a role in BALPA, especially those in leadership, will need to make space for something new. This isn't just about space in the diary for workshops or plans, but space in yourself; to work differently, to listen more, to be challenged and to be changed.

One of the cultural habits in BALPA is a tendency toward certainty and binary thinking: '**pilots always...**' '**pilots never...**' '**staff can...**' '**staff can't.**' This mindset closes down learning and possibility. It locks people into assumptions and patterns that may feel safe but limit growth.

No one, no matter how experienced, has all the answers. Sometimes leadership means holding space, not filling it. Sometimes the best contribution is to let others lead, or to be led. Sometimes clarity only comes through working together.

I want to be clear that this is not a call to soften expectations or lower standards. It's about creating the conditions where people can grow into a different kind of performance individually and collectively. Where trust builds, ideas circulate and collaboration becomes a source of momentum rather than fractious impossibility.

That kind of transformation begins not in a document or strategy - but in what each person is willing to make space for, in themselves.

What Must Shift: Five Cultural Shifts

If BALPA is to become more trusted, resilient, and relevant, it must embed new mental models and ways of working. These five shifts summarise the cultural change required:

1. From Ambiguity to Clarity

Confusion and conflict thrive where roles, goals and expectations are unclear. A shared strategic framework — purpose, mission, vision, values, and goals — must anchor decision-making and guide day-to-day work.

2. From Personality to Trustworthy Systems

Trust shouldn't depend on knowing the right person. Members need to trust the system - and that system must demonstrate competence, integrity, and fairness through how people are selected, supported and held accountable.

3. From Insider Advantage to Equity

Influence must not flow through informal networks or proximity to power. A fairer culture supports broad participation in ways where costs and benefits of being a BALPA rep are clear to all, actively includes historically marginalised voices and shares labour and access more evenly.

4. From Reactivity to Strategic Discipline

When decisions are rushed or politically driven, trust breaks down. Strategy must be an active, real-time tool - not a retrospective justification - guiding effort, resource and alignment.

5. From Disconnection to Shared Endeavour

Trust and energy shrink away from the centre. A healthier culture connects staff, reps, and members through shared work - supported by systems, rooted in values and focused on collective goals.

Where to Focus: Three Organisational Priorities

To embed the cultural shifts above, BALPA must focus on three organisational building blocks:

A. A Strategic Framework That Anchors the Organisation

BALPA needs a shared framework that everyone — staff, reps, elected leaders — can align with. This includes:

- A compelling **purpose**
- A clear **vision** for impact
- A unifying **mission**
- A small number of shared **values**
- Long-term **goals** and annual **priorities**, translated into CC and staff plans

This framework must be used in how BALPA plans, meets, reports, and evaluates - not just discussed at away days.

B. Equitable and Strategic Participation

Democracy at BALPA must be based on **equity**. That means:

- Representation operates as a **trustworthy system**, with clear and transparent data made available on the distribution of the costs and benefits of getting involved and **strong commitment to gaining more support for participation from companies** (via strong facilities agreements).
- Role design that **shares workload** and prevents burnout.
- **Supported progression** and leadership development.
- Actively enabled access - especially for those historically underrepresented.

Participation must be possible, not just available - and never come at the cost of wellbeing.

C. Transparency That Builds Trust and Fairness

Right now, the costs and benefits of participation - in time, influence, and reward - are uneven and largely invisible. People cannot trust a system they cannot see. Transparency means:

- Clarity on **how roles are assigned** and **how influence is exercised**
- Visibility of **what people give and receive** through participation
- Shared tools and routines for **planning, decision-making and accountability**

Transparency is not surveillance. It is how BALPA demonstrates fairness, integrity, and collective ownership of its future.

Recommendations

Before diving into recommendations, it is important to reflect on the kind of conditions required to lead transformational change, which inevitably requires, at different points, co-creation, collaboration and co-operation. Given the current environment at BALPA, it would be unwise to leap straight in. Rather, I advise a short period of reflection and repair, considering, at a minimum:

1. Sharing the findings and recommendations from this report with the intention – and plan – to do so in a way that demonstrates trustworthiness and commitment to change; and

2. An NEC stock-take of urgent and important challenges with a view to ‘clearing the decks.’ This should include, but not be limited to:

- Resolving, with the BA CC, publication (or not) of learnings from the 2019 strike, which appears to be a longstanding bone of contention.
- Rapidly building connection between the Leadership Team, NEC and CC reps - particularly between individuals and committees where this is little or no contact, (which creates near-impossible conditions in which to make institutional progress).
- Collectively reflecting on – and committing to learning from – the recent staff restructure – to ensure that those who carried (or continue to carry), for example, the brunt of short-staffing feel heard and so that any future changes incorporate lessons learnt.

To embed the five cultural shifts and deliver the three strategic imperatives of **trustworthiness**, **clarity**, and **equity**, the following recommendations are structured around four pillars of trustworthy leadership:

Competence, Integrity, Benevolence, and Predictability

Recommendations in **bold** represent the highest priorities in terms of assets and foundations to develop. These offer the greatest leverage: they will unlock momentum for broader reform, reduce wasted effort, and lay the foundation for long-term change.

1. Demonstrate Competence

Build confidence through visible capability and coherence.

Assets to build

- **A clear strategic framework:** purpose, mission, vision, values, long-term goals
- **An organisation map of responsibilities** (NEC, CCs, staff), showing role clarity and how they interact
- **Onboarding materials** for NEC and CCs based on the frameworks above
- A shared decision-making framework (e.g. consensus, consent, or vote)
- Planning templates that link local and functional goals to wider strategy

Behaviours to strengthen

- Focus on governing strategy and culture, not operations
- Invest in skills development: leadership, conflict resolution, and DEI

- Respect others' expertise; admit mistakes and share learning
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2. Demonstrate Integrity

Create alignment between values, structures and actions.

Assets to build

- **An equity and participation plan:** grounded in BALPA's equality commitments, designed to strengthen access and accountability and to bring greater equity to taking on rep responsibilities (through improved facilities agreements for example).
- **A structured manifesto template** for all leadership roles, testing alignment and deliverability
- **A transparency plan**, with meaningful and regular reporting on:
 - Union time and expenses
 - Strategic priorities and delivery
 - Meeting agendas and decisions
- Refresh the rulebook to align with cultural goals: e.g. revising tenure and election timelines
- Appoint a (lay) ethics advisor and integrate ethics into training
- Introduce standard transparency mechanisms for financial and strategic governance

Behaviours to strengthen

- Honour democratic outcomes, even when personally inconvenient
 - Prioritise commitment to underrepresented or marginalised members
 - Anchor decision-making in shared values and member outcomes
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3. Demonstrate Benevolence

Show up with care, accountability, and respect for others' time and effort.

Assets to build

- **Regular, two-way reporting and feedback loops between committees and staff**

Behaviours to strengthen

- Be visible and accessible to those you lead
 - Keep commitments and communicate with purpose
 - Engage with professional advice openly and respectfully
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4. Demonstrate Predictability

Create consistency through routines, boundaries, and transparency.

Assets to build

- Codify standard practices for governance, communications and decision-making
- Establish reliable rhythms for strategy development, review and accountability

Behaviours to strengthen

- Use templates and tools consistently, not selectively
- Set and maintain clear boundaries on time, scope and tone
- Model values through consistent behaviour and decision-making

Conclusion

This report is not a final word on BALPA's culture - it's a starting point for renewed alignment and honest leadership. The hard work lies ahead: in implementation, in consistency and in the everyday choices that either reinforce the system or change it. But the opportunity is real - and I hope now that the path is clearer.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank reps and staff for their candid contributions to this Commission. I would also like to thank the BALPA leadership team and NEC for the openness with which they received presentation of findings from this work. Thank you also to Virginia Phillips for her organisation skills.

Whilst I authored this report and am responsible for its findings and recommendations, I am grateful for the contributions and insights of Nicke Adebawale, Martha Spurrier and Dr Ksenia Zheltoukhova provided throughout this Commission.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

BALPA Culture Commission Terms of Reference

Introduction

BALPA's General Secretary and National Executive Council (NEC) are announcing a commission into BALPA's culture. We have independently made the decision that we must improve the culture within our organisation, in particular to improve working relationships. While we have made efforts to address poor behaviours and conduct on a case-by-case basis over a number of years it is clear that there is a more widespread issue, hence the need to address this more strategically and looking at the culture of the Association. The vast majority of our members and representatives uphold the values of integrity, decency and professionalism that we would expect of pilots. However, it is an unfortunate truth that there have been poor behaviours in BALPA, particularly around managing conflicting ideas, which have led to working relationships breaking down and cases of bullying. Too many times we are seeing issues that are rooted in a lack of trust; a lack of willingness to listen; a lack of willingness to learn and change; a lack of respecting other's contributions; and a lack of willingness to accept differing points of views and decisions. This culture is causing our Association to be distracted. We have secured significant wins for members and we do much good work every day for our members but it is a sad truth that this good work is overshadowed by some poor behaviours, arguments and bullying. We can and we must be better.

This culture commission is not about finding fault or blame with matters in the past but seeks to take an honest look at our past to give us direction and make recommendations about how we can improve our future ways of working to move forward working together so that our focus can be improving the working lives of pilots and ensuring the professional voice of pilots is heard to make our industry stronger and safer.

BALPA was founded on the principle of making every flight a safe flight and we need to ensure that a just culture runs through every part of our Association.

The Chair of the Commission

Laura Harrison has been appointed to lead the independent commission.

Laura is an independent consultant who has spent thirty years in the field of organisational development, strategy and change leadership. Ms Harrison has worked for various organisations including the Royal College of Surgeons and the RSA and assisted Baroness Helena Kennedy, KC in the culture inquiry at the TSSA union. Laura previously worked for the CIPD, a members' organisation with 150,000 members where she was Strategy and Transformation Director.

Issues to be Reviewed

The commission will review conduct and culture issues at BALPA.

The objectives of the commission are to:

- (i) identify themes around culture and their implications for governance and other institutional processes;
- (ii) make practical recommendations as to how BALPA can resolve any such issues moving forward;

(iii) highlight good practice as it relates to these issues.

Scope of the Commission

The commission will work in three phases.

Phase One – ‘The Detailed Design Phase’ - Laura Harrison will work independently of BALPA to conduct background research, including speaking with key stakeholders, to design a bespoke process and methodology that will enable the commission to gather the insights we need to improve BALPA’s culture.

Phase Two – ‘Deep Dive’ – During this phase Ms Harrison will follow the methodology designed in phase one and examine the culture of BALPA, this will include encouraging written and oral evidence from BALPA members and former members, officials, representatives and employees (both current and former) so that she can listen to the experiences of a wide cross section of relevant stakeholders. In doing so, Ms Harrison will take a proportionate approach in terms of the number of individuals she meets with and/or seeks evidence from.

The commission does not replace or provide an alternative to the current complaints procedure. It is not the purpose of the commission to reopen past complaints or to investigate new ones. The Chair will not therefore investigate or adjudicate on any individual complaints.

BALPA will provide all reasonable cooperation to the Chair in relation to any documentation it wishes to examine as part of its review.

Phase Three – Report and Recommendations – Ms Harrison will submit her report to BALPA with recommendations for measures to improve our culture.

The Commission Report

The Chair will, on the conclusion of her review, produce her findings and recommendations and submit this to BALPA’s General Secretary and its NEC.

To the extent that the report refers to any evidence provided to the Chair this will be anonymised.

The report will not attach to it any notes of meetings with relevant stakeholders or any other specific evidence.

Timeframe for the Commission

Ms Harrison has been asked to complete her review and submit her report in summer 2025.

Appendix 2

Example of strategic framework (not a prescription)

- Purpose:** A safe and future-ready aviation industry and deal for pilots
- Vision:** To be the most trusted, authoritative voice on aviation in the UK
- Mission:** To uphold the professional value and values of pilots
To advocate for safe and sustainable flight
To be a career partner for pilots
- Values:** Safety
Strength
Unity
- Goals (LT):** To increase membership in category xx airlines by y%
To retain membership in category xx airlines
To campaign successfully on a, b, c
To operate as a healthy, sustainable organization, becoming a great place to work and delivering an annual surplus of xx
- Plans:** **Staff and CC team translation of LT goals into annual plans, NEC governs delivery**