

Accessible air travel: Airport performance report 2015/16

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Executive summary

As the UK's specialist aviation regulator we believe passionately in making aviation better for those who choose to fly. This means using the powers and duties given to us by Parliament to help create positive outcomes that matter to people, including those with a disability or health condition for whom travelling by air is difficult.

Happily, millions of people with such conditions do already fly to and from the UK, either to go on holiday, visit friends and relatives, or to take a business trip. Indeed, in 2015 over 2.7 million disabled people and people with reduced mobility received assistance from a UK airport to help them take their trip.

This assistance is crucial for allowing disabled people and those with reduced mobility to travel by air. The right to receive such assistance is underpinned by Regulation EC 1107/2006, which obliges airports (and airlines) to provide certain forms of assistance for this group of travellers. The CAA is the body in the UK appointed to ensure that those that need this assistance receive it, and it is a strategic priority for the CAA that disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions, including non-visible conditions, know that a high standard of help and assistance is available at the airport and on board and that they are confident to fly.

Satisfaction with the quality of the assistance is generally high at UK airports. Soon to be published consumer research by the CAA found that more than 85% of those surveyed that had used the assistance service at their UK departure airport were satisfied with it, with 59% saying that they were very satisfied. A separate CAA survey at UK airports indicates that the satisfaction levels with the assistance on departure have increased by almost ten per cent since 2010. The success of the assistance service, and its importance for disabled people and those with mobility restrictions, is underlined by the fact that around 40% more travellers now use the assistance service than did so in 2010 (this compares to an increase of around twenty percent for all passengers over the same period)¹. UK airports can be rightly

¹ We hold passenger data from 2010 to 2015 (inbound and outbound) for 20 airports (85% of all passengers in 2015).

proud of their achievements in enabling more disabled people and those with mobility restrictions to fly than ever before.

Our experience is that such high standards are not always universal, however; and, because often disabled people and those with mobility restrictions are totally dependent on airport staff providing the appropriate assistance, when things do occasionally go wrong for disabled people and those with mobility restrictions, they can go badly wrong. Worries over their disability or health condition and how it will affect their flying experience are frequently cited by disabled people and those with mobility restrictions as a barrier to air travel. Further, the CAA's consumer research indicates that disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions fly much less frequently than the population as a whole.

In order to address these issues, and building on the good work already done by UK airports, we have been working with the industry over the past year to embed a regulatory performance framework which we believe will deliver a consistent and high quality service. It will also help the CAA to identify dips in performance so that we can act quickly to target our action on airports that are performing poorly.

This framework is underpinned by EU law, which obliges airports to set "quality standards" for the assistance provided to disabled people and those with mobility restrictions. The CAA has built on these obligations to create a comprehensive performance framework, under which UK airports are required to set, measure and report on their performance against a range of measures relevant to the assistance service. Transparency on performance is a key part of the framework and should help those travellers that need to use the service to understand what to expect when they travel by air, giving them confidence that assistance is available and that it is of a high standard. It will also enable the CAA and others to hold airports to account if the assistance provided does not meet acceptable levels. This report is the first of what we anticipate will be an annual review of the performance of the assistance service at each airport. It covers performance during the period April 1 2015 to March 31 2016.

In terms of the findings of this first review, we are pleased to say that performance over the year has been good overall and, in the case of some airports, very good. These airports have provided disabled people and those with mobility restrictions