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Consumer attitudes to journey disruption

A qualitative research report

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CAA Foreword

The UK has some of the busiest and most productive airports in the world, facing many challenges in maintaining day to day operating resilience. It will be at least 2025 before any new runway capacity in the South East of England will be opened, so the aviation industry must continue to work towards making existing infrastructure more resilient.

In the CAA's Strategic Plan for 2016-2021, we committed to thinking creatively about how existing capacity can be planned and operated to meet stakeholders' expectations, and what the CAA can do to ensure this issue is addressed to further the interests of consumers.

We therefore commissioned an initial, exploratory piece of qualitative research to help us:

- Understand the attitudes of consumers at London/South East airports¹ towards day-to-day journey disruption that results from runway congestion and capacity constraints rather than significant disruptive events, as well as the effectiveness of operational planning; and
- Form a view of how consumers view the trade-offs between capacity, cost and service level and the extent to which resilience (or the lack of it) is an issue at London/South East airports.

There were a number of positive findings from the research. However, the findings also highlighted some issues where improvements are needed.

The findings of this qualitative research will be used to help us develop evidence-based policies which reflect consumers views, and is intended to inform a further dialogue and action with the aviation industry on how to improve airport resilience.

¹ Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton airports.

1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative research has been commissioned by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to update and expand its existing evidence in order to provide:

- A particular focus on consumers' views on *day-to-day* journey disruption, caused by runway and airport congestion, rather than disruption which is related to significant adverse events, as well as the effectiveness of operational planning .
- A better understanding of *informed* consumer perceptions and expectations with respect to journey disruption, including once they have been exposed to materials explaining disruption and possible trade-offs to manage or reduce this.
- Specific intelligence on consumers using *four London airports*: Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton.

A qualitative approach was used for this research and the overall programme comprised of:

- 10 focus groups with a cross-section of local (London/South East-based) recent users of the four London airports.
- 20 depth interviews with additional specific passenger types who recently used Heathrow Airport (passengers with restricted mobility or PRM², international connecting passengers, domestic connecting passengers and foreign resident passengers).

A 'deliberative-style' approach was taken in the research. This involved exposing participants to some facts on journey disruption, as well as ideas for reducing or managing disruption and the associated trade-offs, for their consideration. This material was introduced once an initial unprompted discussion of perceptions and expectations had already taken place so it would be possible to compare spontaneously held views with those that developed in response to the stimulus.

The research was conducted between 16th August and 7th September, 2016 and, in total, 90 consumers took part.

² These passengers are covered by the regulation EC1107/2007 which aims to ensure such people have the same access to air travel as other passengers. Article 2(a) of the Regulation defines 'disabled person' or 'person with reduced mobility' as meaning any person whose mobility when using transport is reduced due to any physical disability (sensory or locomotor, permanent or temporary), intellectual disability or impairment, or any other cause of disability, or age, and whose situation needs appropriate attention and the adaptation to his or her particular needs of the service made available to all passengers.

The findings will be used to help the CAA develop evidence-based policies which reflect consumer views, and is intended to inform a further dialogue with the aviation industry on how to improve airport resilience.

1.2 Key findings

1.2.1 Consumers' understanding of journey disruption

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the extent to which journey disruption was top-of-mind to participants in relation to air travel depended on whether and how recently they had experienced a disruptive issue and how significant this was felt to be. Their extent of focus on disruption was also related to other factors such as how regularly and why they fly, and how they feel about flying. For example, regular flyers were more likely to have been affected by disruption but tended to be less concerned about disruptive events than infrequent flyers.

Notwithstanding these differences, when the term 'disruption' was introduced in the discussions, participants shared a relatively wide definition of the types of issues that could disrupt or cause inconvenience in their journey. This went well beyond flight delays and cancellations to include a range of other disruptive events that could take place within airports, as well as with respect to surface access to airports.

It was understood that both significant events and day-to-day factors could contribute to disruption. Participants were able to nominate a range of possible causes which included a number that were specifically related to capacity constraints (such as staff shortages or knock-on effects from earlier issues).

1.2.2 Perceived impacts of journey disruption

There was a hierarchy of seriousness perceived among the types of disruption participants identified, with flight delays, cancellations and lost luggage believed to cause most ongoing inconvenience and potentially adverse impacts to passengers overall.

However, it was felt that other disruptive issues within airports, such as long waits and queues, could also cause passengers irritation and stress, and detract from the overall travel experience.

With flight delays, arriving late at the destination was perceived to have most impact as this could affect passengers' onward plans. However, a delayed departure time, whether or not this could be made up in flight, could also cause inconvenience, particularly if the passenger is confined to the aircraft or to an area in the airport that is crowded or has limited seating or facilities. This is because such waiting environments lack comfort and make it difficult for passengers to use their time productively.

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The degree of impact of a flight delay, cancellation or lost luggage was also believed to depend on the circumstances of the trip and particularly if there would be knock-on effects, such as to connecting flights or events, and associated consequential loss.

Certain types of passengers, for whom air travel was believed to be more challenging generally, were expected to be particularly affected by any disruption. These included PRM, elderly flyers, those travelling with young children and nervous flyers.

How participants used their time in the event of disruption depended to a large extent on how conducive their environment was to waiting and how much information had been provided to them.

A number had modified their own flying behaviour to avoid or reduce the impacts of any potential disruption. These adaptations included allowing additional time, avoiding certain times of day and taking more or only hand luggage.

Most did not spontaneously consider the impacts of disruption on the aviation industry or consumers generally. When prompted, participants identified that disruption could have a financial cost to industry but they did not make a further connection to the possibility of increased airfares.

1.2.3 Consumers' views on current levels of journey disruption at London airports

Overall, disruption at London airports was not spontaneously identified as representing a major, ongoing problem for passengers currently. This is partly because a certain level of journey disruption was regarded to be both inevitable and acceptable given the complexity of aviation – and this was factored into consumers' expectations and preparations. It also relates to a perception that air travel is more efficient than other types of public transport - for example, rail - and that the incorporation of more technology into the process is helping to increase its efficiency. As such, the prospect of being significantly affected by disruptive events was regarded as the exception rather than the rule.

However, there was seen to be room for improvement across all airports in the efficiency of day-to-day processes, response to problems and, particularly, the quality of information and welfare provided to passengers in the event of disruption.

There were also some differences in how the four London airports were perceived with respect to disruption. Gatwick, Stansted and Luton were each felt to have relatively more budget carriers, short haul flights and inexperienced leisure passengers, compared to Heathrow. This meant that these airports were sometimes seen as being more susceptible to flight delays and other forms of disruption. In addition, disruption levels were linked to the perceived quality of the infrastructure and level of staffing at different London airports, with Luton and Gatwick subject to most criticisms on these aspects.

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When delay statistics were provided, a significant number of participants felt these to be lower than they expected and indicative of good performance. This was particularly the case for Heathrow, given its size, and also once briefed on the capacity constraints it operates under. On the other hand, Gatwick stood out for having comparatively poor performance and this fitted with some people's experience of using this airport. A number were also concerned to know that the incidence of delays is increasing in three of the four London airports explored in this research.

Participants were very nervous about the possibility of airports and airspace getting busier in the future, causing not only more disruption but also more pressure on safety and security measures.

1.2.4 Consumers' views on the current industry response to journey disruption

Participants felt that certain types and causes of disruption were more acceptable than others. They were most likely to tolerate issues related to adverse events that were believed to be beyond the control of airlines or airports, as well as delays in order to fix mechanical problems and ensure the safety of passengers. Conversely, there was a general consensus that 'unnecessary disruption', especially if this was associated with perceived insufficient resourcing, planning or contingency measures, was the most irritating.

A number of parties were perceived to share responsibility for minimising and managing disruption, with both airlines and airports believed to play an important role. It was believed to be sometimes difficult for consumers to ascribe responsibility for disruption so it was seen as critical that there would be good behind the scenes collaboration and no buck-passing of blame.

A key priority for consumers in the event of disruption is to be informed promptly and effectively. Participants were highly critical of how passengers are currently informed, particularly in the event of flight delays. This criticism was levied on all airlines and airports, and was not confined to those operating out of London.

Without adequate information, passengers could feel 'in limbo', and unable to relax, prepare themselves for the flight or do anything productive during the wait period. The absence of a credible explanation of the reason for a delay could also cause passengers considerable stress and anxiety, including about the safety of the aircraft.

1.2.5 Measures suggested by consumers to reduce and manage disruption

Participants had a number of their own (unprompted) ideas about additional measures to reduce journey disruption and minimise the impacts of disruption on passengers.

Suggestions were most frequently made about improving passenger information, both in the event of disruption and as a preventative measure. There was a lot of

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spontaneous interest across all demographic groups in the potential for technology to improve the information they receive – this included SMS, apps and smart signage.

In addition, participants proposed ideas related to:

- More passenger education and stricter/more consistent application of rules;
- Modification of processes that could create disruption;
- Increased target setting and monitoring;
- Faster response to problems and more contingency;
- More consistently applied 'soft compensation';
- Making the space more conducive to waiting; and
- Clearer information on compensation and making it easier to claim.

The appeal of a number of propositions was also tested, including:

- Reducing the number of flights at congested airports;
- Increasing or moving resources to improve resilience;
- Increasing 'block times' (the time scheduled between departure and arrival of flights) to provide more leeway; and
- Improving information provision (both in the event of disruption and more general information regarding on-time performance).

Improved information provision was, not surprisingly, the most popular, although general information regarding on-time performance had limited appeal. A number of participants could also see benefits from increasing or redeploying resources, although participants were polarised on whether they would be prepared to pay extra for this. Increasing block times was unpopular as it was not perceived to address the core problem and could be seen as misleading. Similarly, most rejected the prospect of reducing flights, as they would not be prepared to accept lower choice.

Overall, disruption was generally not seen to be big enough problem currently to warrant trade-offs of either reduced choice or increased prices associated with certain remedial measures suggested. Views on this may change should disruption be seen to worsen. However, consumers would first need to be convinced that what they are 'paying for' will be genuinely effective in improving resilience.

1.3 Conclusions

Consumers' perceptions and expectations with respect to journey disruption were largely consistent across all of the different types of airport users represented in this research. The general consensus was that disruption could take a number of different forms and that all of these have the potential to have deleterious impacts on

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passengers. It was also generally understood that disruption could have a range of day-to-day causes and was not just related to significant adverse events.

While there was not seen to be a major problem with journey disruption currently at London airports, there was felt to be scope to make improvements in a number of areas, including:

- Ensuring efficient management of day-to-day airport processes on a consistent basis;
- Responding to pinch points and problems in a timely way, including by anticipating issues in advance wherever possible; and
- Providing good quality information and welfare to passengers in the event of disruption.

In addition, participants shared the view that it would be important to avoid any future increase in disruption given the expectation of growing capacity constraints and congestion.

Some views on disruption held by consumers applied to all airports and airlines. However, there were also some differences in perceptions of disruption at the four London airports of interest, with Luton and Gatwick subject to most criticism overall.

Improving passenger information was the number one priority of consumers and this was believed to have value both in the event of disruption and as a preventative measure. Benefits from increasing or redeploying resources were also seen, although participants were polarised on whether they would be prepared to pay extra for this. Any remedial measures involving a reduction in choice would be unacceptable to most consumers.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the UK's independent aviation regulator and, across all of its remit, the CAA places the interests of consumers at the heart of its work.

The requirement for this research comes from both:

- The CAA's Price Control Review for Heathrow airport (H7)³ which includes as one of its strategic themes the exploration of how to improve airport resilience in a capacity constrained environment; and
- The CAA's wider work on the operating resilience of UK's aviation infrastructure, focusing on capacity constrained airports in the South East of England.⁴

This research has been commissioned by the CAA to update and expand its existing evidence in order to provide:

- A focus on consumers' views of *day-to-day* journey disruption, caused by runway and airport congestion, rather than disruption which is related to significant adverse events as well as the effectiveness of operational planning.
- A better understanding of *informed* consumer expectations and perceptions with respect to journey disruption, including once they have been exposed to materials explaining disruption and possible trade-offs to manage or reduce this.
- Specific intelligence on users of *four London airports*: Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton.

The findings will be used to help the CAA develop evidence-based policies which reflect consumer views, and is intended to inform a further dialogue and action with the aviation industry on how to improve resilience.

2.2 Aims and focus of this research

This research has sought to explore fully consumers' perceptions of disruption, including:

- How broadly consumers define this term.
- How much of a concern current levels of disruption are to consumers.

³ <https://www.caa.co.uk/Commercial-industry/Airports/Economic-regulation/Licensing-and-price-control/Heathrow-price-control-review-H7/>

⁴ https://consultations.caa.co.uk/policy-development/operating-resilience-of-uk-aviation-infrastructure/consult_view

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- Whether improvements are perceived to be required, either in the reduction or management of disruption.
- What consumers' specific priorities are for reducing or managing disruption.
- How they view possible trade-offs to achieve improved resilience.

As mentioned above, the focus of this research was on users of Heathrow and Gatwick airports (which are both currently regulated by the CAA under an economic licence), as well as two other London/South East airports: Stansted and Luton.

2.3 Methodology

A qualitative approach was used for this research and the overall programme comprised of:

- 10 focus groups with a cross-section of local (London/South East-based) recent London airport users.
- 20 depth interviews with additional specific passenger types who recently used Heathrow (passengers with restricted mobility or PRM, international connecting passengers, domestic connecting passengers and foreign resident passengers).

This weighting towards Heathrow users reflects the fact that this airport is used by a significantly greater number of passengers than other airports in London and the South East. It also relates to the fact that the H7 Review's focus is on future regulatory arrangements at London Heathrow Airport.

The research was conducted between 16th August and 7th September, 2016 and, in total, 90 consumers took part (75 in the groups and 15 in the depth interviews). More detail on the sample design, recruitment and approach to the discussions is provided below.

2.3.1 Sample design

The group programme was designed to include a cross-section of consumers who had used one of four London airports within the past year. The groups were split as follows:

- 4 x 2 hour groups with Heathrow users.
- 6 x 2 hour groups with Gatwick, Stansted and Luton users (2 groups with users of each of these airports).

A range of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic grade) and flying-related variables (e.g. frequent and non-frequent flyers,

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business and leisure flyers, short and medium-long haul flyers) were represented across the group samples, as highlighted in Figure 1 over the page.

In addition, to ensure that this research would represent both the views of those who have been directly affected by disruption and those who have not, a quota was applied of passengers who had experienced some form of disruption in relation to their use of a specific London airport but this was not a requirement for all participants.

Figure 1

GROUP PROGRAMME (10 x 2 HOUR GROUPS)				
	Gatwick	Luton	Stansted	Heathrow
Frequent flyers (3+ times in last year)	Group 1	Group 3	Group 5	Group 7
Non-frequent flyers (<3 times in last year)	Group 2	Group 4	Group 6	Group 8
Used airport for Med-long haul flight (3-7hrs and >7 hrs)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Group 9
Used airport for short haul flight (up to 3 hrs)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Group 10
Additional quotas:	Each group included a mix of: • Gender (at least 3 x women, 3 x men). • Ages (at least 2 x under 30, 2 x 30-49, 2 x 50+). • SEG (at least 4 x ABC1). • Those who used the specific London airport for a business or leisure flight (at least 3 business flyers in frequent flyer groups). • (Except for Groups 9 and 10) Those who used the specific London airport for a short (<3 hours), medium (3-7 hrs) or long haul (>7 hrs) flight (at least 2 medium-long haul). At least 2 per group had incurred some form of disruption when using the specific London airport within the last year. However, a limit of 3 in FF groups and 2 in all other groups was imposed on those who have experienced a significant flight delay or cancellation specifically.			

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The depth programme sought to represent a number of additional types of passengers who had used Heathrow recently:

- 5 x 1 hour face-to-face depth interviews with those who self-classify as being PRM.
- 15 x 45 minute tele-depth interviews, 5 each with international connecting passengers, domestic connecting passengers and foreign resident passengers.

More detail on the depth interview samples is provided in Figure 2 over the page.

Figure 2

F2F DEPTH PROGRAMME (5 X 60 MIN F2F DEPTHS)	
	Heathrow
Have a PHYSICAL disability, long-term health condition or significant mobility issue that makes it difficult to access/use airports	Depth 1 (sought airport assistance)
	Depth 2 (sought airport assistance)
	Depth 3
Have a NON-PHYSICAL disability or health condition that makes it difficult to access/use airports	Depth 4
	Depth 5
Additional quotas:	Broad demographic spread: • Gender (at least 2 x women, 2 x men). • Ages (at least 1 x under 30, 1 x 30-49, 1 x 50+). • SEG (at least 3 x ABC1).
TELE-DEPTH PROGRAMME (15 X 45 MIN TELE-DEPTHS)	
	Heathrow
Foreign residents	5 depths
International connecting passengers	5 depths

Domestic connecting passengers	5 depths
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2.3.2 Recruitment and fieldwork

The participants for the groups and PRM depth interviews were free-found by our specialist recruitment partner, Criteria Research, using a screening questionnaire that we drafted to ensure all participants met our quota requirements. The group discussions were conducted by the Collaborate Research team in conference facilities in Central London (for Heathrow or Gatwick users) and St Albans (for users of Luton and Stansted). We conducted the PRM depth interviews in participants' homes in various locations across London and the South East.

The tele-depth participants were recruited by the CAA's research team airside at Heathrow in early August. This approach was taken in order to find participants who would be otherwise difficult to identify using standard recruitment procedures, particularly connecting passengers who may not have left the terminal. We then re-contacted participants to set up the interviews, which were conducted by telephone or Skype in their home country. We spoke to people in the following countries for this part of the research: Denmark, Dubai, India, Italy, New Zealand, Serbia, the UK and US.

2.3.3 Discussion approach

A 'deliberative-style' approach was taken in the research. This involved exposing participants to some facts on journey disruption, as well as ideas for reducing or managing disruption and the associated trade-offs, for their consideration. This material was introduced once an initial unprompted discussion of perceptions and expectations had already taken place so it would be possible to compare spontaneously held views with those that developed in response to the stimulus.

We drafted detailed discussion guides for the groups and depth interviews, and also prepared a stimulus pack of disruption-related facts and ideas based on data provided by the CAA. The discussion guides have been included in Appendix 1 and the stimulus slides are contained in Appendix 2.

A number of participants in the groups, and a few also in the depths, had recent experience of using more than one London airport. In these cases, their comparative views and experiences were also discussed.

While not all participants had experienced disruption in their recent use of a London airport, most had incurred journey disruption at some point in their air travel history. They drew on this in the discussions, however it should be noted that for some it was not recent or specifically related to a London airport. This report distinguishes views

expressed specifically in relation to London airports from those which were more generally held.

2.4 Structure and contents of this report

This report focuses on the main insights from this qualitative research and, as with any qualitative research study, the findings should be treated as being indicative rather than definitive.

The chapters to follow in this report have been structured as follows:

3. **Consumers' understanding of journey disruption:** How top-of-mind journey disruption is to consumers, how widely the term is defined, and what are believed to be the main causes.
4. **Perceived impacts of journey disruption:** What types and levels of impacts from disruption are perceived by consumers, whether certain groups are expected to be disproportionately affected, and whether participants have modified their own behaviour in response to disruption.
5. **Consumers' views on current levels of journey disruption at London airports:** The extent to there is perceived to be a problem with disruption at London airports, and how participants respond to seeing disruption-related statistics and information.
6. **Consumers' views on the current industry response to journey disruption:** Where responsibility is believed to fall for dealing with disruption, what participants expect industry to do to reduce or manage disruption and how they evaluate the current response.
7. **More detail on how disruption has affected different types of Heathrow users:** More detail on the disruption-related perceptions, expectations and experiences of different types of Heathrow users, including frequent flyers and non-frequent flyers, short haul and medium-long haul flyers, PRM, international connecting passengers, domestic connecting passengers and foreign resident passengers.
8. **Measures suggested by consumers to reduce and manage disruption:** Participants' own suggestions and their reactions to a number of ideas with associated trade-offs.

3. Consumers' understanding of journey disruption

3.1 Key findings

- Perhaps unsurprisingly, the extent to which journey disruption was top-of-mind to participants in relation to air travel depended on whether and how recently they had experienced a disruptive issue and how significant this was felt to be. Their extent of focus on disruption was also related to other factors such as how regularly and why they fly, and how they feel about flying. For example, regular flyers were more likely to have been affected by disruption but tended to be less concerned about disruptive events than infrequent flyers.
- Notwithstanding these differences, when the term 'disruption' was introduced in the discussions, participants shared a relatively wide definition of the types of issues that could disrupt or cause inconvenience in their journey. This went well beyond flight delays and cancellations to include a range of other disruptive events that could take place within airports, as well as with respect to surface access to airports.
- It was understood that both significant events and day-to-day factors could contribute to disruption. Participants were able to nominate a range of possible causes which included a number that were specifically related to capacity constraints (such as staff shortages or knock-on effects from earlier issues).

3.2 Consumers' focus on, and definition of, journey disruption

Not surprisingly, how closely participants associated disruption with London airports depended on whether and how recently they had experienced an issue there, and how significant this was felt to be. How top-of-mind journey disruption was in connection to flying generally related to factors such as how regularly and why consumers fly, and how they feel about flying. For example, frequent and business flyers were more likely to have been affected by journey disruption at some point previously but they may also be more sanguine about it than their less regular or leisure flyer counterparts. Those who described themselves as being 'nervous flyers' tended to be particularly exercised about journey disruption as this could result in them worrying more about their safety or security during their journey.

Despite these differences, when the term 'disruption' was introduced in the discussions, participants shared a relatively wide definition of the types of issues that could disrupt or cause inconvenience in their journey. This spanned such issues as:

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- Problems with travel to and from the airport.
- Flight delays and cancellations.
- More 'indirect delays' such as taking too long to board the plane, on the tarmac before takeoff, or waiting to land or disembark.
- Long waits or queues at the airport, including at security, passport control, waiting for luggage, or even to receive refreshments at concessions.
- Long distances, insufficient signage, last minute notifications (e.g. of gate changes or boarding) or other difficulties in using airports.
- An unpleasant waiting environment (e.g. crowded, with limited seating, insufficient amenities etc.)
- Lost or damaged luggage.

The following selected verbatim comments highlight the breadth of consumers' understanding of what could constitute disruption to their journey:

"(Journey disruption) starts from the start, before you've even parked, or been dropped off! So that tailback of traffic." (Luton users, frequent flyers)

"I think its just wasted time whether it's delays, queuing or getting through security. Disruptions are a waste of time." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

"Security can be an absolute nightmare. You can miss the plane while you're queuing for the security quite easily. I've queued at security sometimes for over 3/4 of an hour. They say you need to arrive at the airport sort of 2 hours before, but really it should be 3 now, because of how long it takes." (Luton users, frequent flyers)

"When you start to walk and it's taken 10 minutes to go past 5 gates and you know you've got another 30 gates to go." (Gatwick users, non-frequent flyers)

"They change the gate as well. They've changed the gate before at the last minute and there was very little communication. I very nearly missed my flight which is really annoying because I looked up the gate, I knew where I was going, then I looked up again and they had changed it." (Stansted users, frequent flyers)

"At the larger airports the larger gates are comfy. At Luton you're at a stairwell and it's not air-conditioned, so if it's hot and because it's all glass-fronted, it's very hot..." (Luton users, frequent flyers)

"It's particularly bad if you're already on the plane with no air conditioning. Sitting waiting on the tarmac is not pleasant." (Heathrow user, foreign resident)

"My experience recently of any of them is that when you come back into the country the passport queues are ridiculous. Coming back into the country now you're knackered. You've travelled back, the excitement of your trip has gone and you have to stand in that line." (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)

"It's always coming back that you have to wait for your luggage and it's that wait. You can wait 10 minutes some days and you can wait an hour another day. It's all variable." (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

"I know mates who have lost their suitcases and never got them back. I thought 'oh the rigmarole, you've got to try and think what clothes you bought, are you going to get all your money back for it?'" (Stansted users, frequent flyers)

3.3 Perceived causes of journey disruption

Participants instinctively understood that both significant events and day-to-day factors could contribute to disruption and they were able to nominate a number of specific possible causes:

- Adverse events such as bad weather, strikes etc.
- Passenger-created issues such as being late for boarding, disruptive or not knowing the correct procedures for security screening.
- Mechanical problems with the aircraft.
- Anti-terrorism measures causing security and passport control procedures to take longer.
- Insufficient staff or staff shortages, particularly at peak times of day or during holiday periods but also late at night or in the event of late arrival of aircraft.
- Missing takeoff or landing slots and generally busy runway schedules.
- Knock on effects from earlier issues at the airport or elsewhere e.g. late incoming flights or baggage not being loaded at origin.

Of all the possible factors, the possible causes that were most frequently mentioned by participants related to capacity constraints. Staff or resource shortages were regarded to be a common and visible cause of disruption, as evidenced by the following quotes:

"There are just never enough people anywhere. There are never enough people in security, passport control... I just feel like it's whenever you need someone, no one's around and the queues are just always big everywhere." (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

"Just whenever there's a delay at Heathrow its because there are staff shortages I think. To me it looks like they've got all of this wonderful state of the art terminals, lovely shops and restaurants and the fact is there are not enough people to man it or cope with the volume of people." (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)

"The last flight I did was [with airline], the machines are automated and there were very limited staff round. The elderly get very confused by these machines and there was literally one woman running about 8 machines. She simply didn't have enough eyes, hands and feet to get round all the people who needed her assistance." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

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"If they had enough staff on and enough equipment in order to deal with (people) quickly then they wouldn't have queues would they?" (Stansted users, non-frequent flyers)

The possibility of earlier disruptive events contributing to further disruption was also identified by a number of participants:

"I think airlines are very, very stretched in terms of planes, pilots.... One delay means that you're over your working hours, so they have to find another pilot, because they can't fly, you know? Everything has a knock on, it's like a domino effect, far more than in other businesses, I think." (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

"There's a pipeline of different tasks which happen in order to make a flight go so smoothly. It could literally be the smallest thing that just has a ripple effect. For example, too many people phoning in sick one day and the whole thing's going to get delayed. Another flight due to come in which was delayed which will have a knock on effect to other people." (Heathrow users, medium-long haul flyers)

"The plane being late. I had it on the way out. It was late coming in so obviously then we were delayed. They have a very tight turnaround now. That seems to get worse towards the end of the day. The delays seem to trickle down until the last flights whereas it might be 20 minutes at a time if you're not flying until the evening that could be 3 hours difference by the time they've caught up." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

"If there's a delay on that at the beginning of the day it has a knock on effect. Sometimes that might not be caused by a delay at Gatwick, it's a delay earlier on in the day in France." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

The other main contributing factor, overall, was believed to be the actions of passengers themselves. This was nominated as a major reason for disruption and seen, especially by frequent flyers, as being particularly associated with inexperienced travellers.

"When you go through security I'd say 80% of the time it's slow, it's because like half the people haven't even travelled before. It's like you see everywhere it's a hundred miles and every time you see someone like 'oh I only just bought this, it's so expensive, please can I take it through?' ...The queues would be half the size if people were actually prepped for it." (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

"If you just generally don't understand how long it takes to do all the things that you have to go through, you might not generally leave yourself enough time, so that can cause problems can't it?" (Stansted users, non-frequent flyers)

4. Perceived impacts of journey disruption

4.1 Key findings

- There was a hierarchy of seriousness perceived among the types of disruption participants identified, with flight delays, cancellations and lost luggage believed to cause most ongoing inconvenience and potentially adverse impacts to passengers overall.
- However, it was felt that other disruptive issues within airports, such as long waits and queues, could also cause passengers irritation and stress, and detract from the overall travel experience.
- With flight delays, arriving late at the destination was perceived to have most impact as this could affect passengers' onward plans. However, a delayed departure time, whether or not this could be made up in flight, could also cause inconvenience, particularly if the passenger is confined to the aircraft or to an area in the airport that is crowded or has limited seating or facilities. This is because such waiting environments lack comfort and make it difficult for passengers to use their time productively.
- The degree of impact of a flight delay, cancellation or lost luggage was also believed to depend on the circumstances of the trip and particularly if there would be knock-on effects, such as to connecting flights or events, and associated consequential loss.
- Certain types of passengers, for whom air travel was believed to be more challenging generally, were expected to be particularly affected by any disruption. These included PRM, elderly flyers, those travelling with young children and nervous flyers.
- How participants used their time in the event of disruption depended to a large extent on how conducive their environment was to waiting and how much information had been provided to them.
- A number had modified their own flying behaviour to avoid or reduce the impacts of any potential disruption. These adaptations included allowing additional time, avoiding certain times of day and taking more or only hand luggage.
- Most did not spontaneously consider the impacts of disruption on the aviation industry or consumers generally. When prompted, participants identified that disruption could have a financial cost to industry but they did not make a further connection to the possibility of increased airfares.

4.2 Perceived impacts of different types of disruption

There was a hierarchy of seriousness perceived among the types of disruption participants identified. Overall, flight delays, cancellations and lost luggage were believed to cause passengers most ongoing inconvenience and potentially adverse impacts, including consequential financial loss and other knock-on effects (see Sections 4.3 and 4.4. for more detail on the perceived impacts of these forms of disruption).

“Most people are accepting of the fact that certain things, like passport control, are going to take time. Collecting your bags is going to take an amount of time but when you’ve lost a bag that’s a nightmare.” (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)

“Waits and queuing are like irritating and wear you down whereas cancellations and delays can ruin your holiday.” (Heathrow users, short haul flyers)

“If your flight is cancelled then there is this helplessness. I think the same helplessness you have when your bag doesn’t turn up.” (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

“(With a lost bag you have) no clean underwear, no toothbrush, all of these things, and you might not be in a place where you can readily get them and that’s going to start your holiday off really bad.” (Stansted users, frequent flyers)

However, it was felt that other disruptive issues within airports, such as long waits and queues, could also cause passengers irritation and stress, and detract from the overall travel experience.

“I might still have been in the airport for 2 hours but I’ve been in the airport for 2 hours getting stressed queuing rather than having cup of tea or beer, and sitting down and relaxing. That’s a difference experience.” (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)

“It’s kind of like you go there with the mindset ‘oh good I’ve got an hour to walk round duty free and do some bits’ and then you know you could be in the security for 40 minutes trying to get through and then you’ve only got like 10 minutes to run around and no time to chill out and relax before the flight.” (Heathrow users, short haul flyers)

In addition, participants perceived that delays in getting through airports could ultimately risk them missing their flight pre-departure or cause issues with their onward transport upon arrival.

“You can get delays at security and then you can see people start to panic. They think they’re not going to get on to the flight on time.” (Heathrow users, medium-long haul flyers)

“It’s quite a stressful experience nowadays with going through security and being alert of what you’ve got to do. I never relax until I’m actually on the plane and kind of go right I’m here everything’s ok now.” (Heathrow users, short haul flyers)

"My gate came up. I watched it come up on the screen and straightaway it said gate closing. I rushed off the gate which was about a 25 minute walk by the time I got there they said 'sorry, you've missed the bus'." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

"I think another important point to mention is if the delay is potentially my delay, I get more stressed. So when I say my delay I mean the security queue and I could potentially miss my flight because of that, that's going to cost me money, but if I'm waiting for the gate and the flights are all delayed, that's the airline, that's not me." (Stansted users, frequent flyers)

With flight delays, arriving late at the destination was perceived to have most impact as this could affect the passengers' onward plans. However, a delayed departure time, whether or not this could be made up in flight, could also cause inconvenience and stress, particularly if the passenger is confined to the aircraft or if the airport they are waiting in is crowded or has limited seating or facilities at the gate (e.g. shops, Wi-Fi, power sockets etc.). One of the reasons for this is that these sorts of environments are uncomfortable and make it difficult or impossible for the passenger to make any sort of productive use of their waiting time.

"It depends where you are in the process when it gets delayed. If you're sat in the lounge having a drink in Wetherspoons then you're probably going to be less annoyed than if you're stuck on a plane on the runway and the air conditioning is not working." (Heathrow users, medium-long haul flyers)

"What's the most frustrating part for me for a delay is if they put you on the plane pretending they're going to go off on time. They know before that that you're not going to go off on time and they leave you on the plane in this position. If they know there's a delay, why can't they keep you in the terminal?" (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

"Not moving and a lack of information drives me insane that they can't tell you what's happening. When you're waiting and sitting on a plane waiting to get off." (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)

"Yeah, it's worse when I'm sitting there ready to go, because it's quite confined and I don't like that, you know, there's not a lot of space and stuff and I just want to get it over and done with... I hate just being like trapped in and people not moving. It just really annoys me." (Gatwick users, non-frequent flyers)

"When you land and steps aren't ready to get off the plane, or the jetty's not ready and everybody stands there with their neck crooked up against the baggage things waiting to get off. And you're just desperate then to get off the flight at that stage." (Heathrow users, frequent flyers)

4.3 Perceived impacts on different types of journeys

One of the factors participants considered was whether delays would affect passengers making longer or shorter flights more. For short haul flights, the degree of impact of a delay was sometimes thought of as a proportion of overall flight length (e.g.

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an extra 25% would not be seen to cause any significant impacts while an extra 50% would be regarded as too long relative to the length of the flight and likely to impact the trip given that the total time away was expected also to be relatively short in most cases). Overall, some were more accepting of a longer delay to a long haul flight, mainly because of the greater potential for making this up in flight. However, others felt that the impact of delays on long haul flyers would be greater given the overall length of the journey and likelihood that they would be tired and jet lagged upon arrival.

"I think it has less impact on longer haul, because if you're on the flight for 10 or 12 hours, a 2 hour delay in the great scheme of things isn't the end of the world, whereas if you're on a 40 minute flight, or an hour flight to Europe and you're delayed for 2 hours then that's a killer." (Stansted users, non-frequent flyers)

"I'd rather be delayed on short than long haul. You're on the flight for so long. If you fly to the States you tend to get there in the afternoon if you leave here in the morning. So if you are delayed you might get there at midnight and you've lost a whole day and you're tired. Short haul you recover quickly. You don't really get jet lag." (Heathrow users, medium-long haul flyers)

"I find that worse (on a long haul flight). You're going to be sat on that for 10 hours but you've been delayed at the airport for 3 or 4 and that just makes the whole thing so much longer." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

The degree of impact of a flight delay, cancellation or lost luggage was also believed to depend on the circumstances of the trip, for example:

- Who the passenger is travelling with and what their needs are.
- Whether there was a business meeting, other event or connecting flight that they risked missing.
- Whether the disruption created any financial cost (e.g. related to connecting flights, ground transport, hotel bookings, needing to buy replacement items etc.) or inconvenience to others (e.g. to a friend or family member who is waiting for them).

"It depends who you are with and what they're doing. If I'm sat on a plane waiting to go to Singapore with a glass of champagne in my hand I don't care. If I've got my son sat next to me on a plane on my way on holiday and they're saying there's a delay. We've got to sit here for an hour kids go crazy. They get bored and it stresses you out. If you're on your own I couldn't care less. It's different circumstances." (Heathrow users, medium-long haul flyers)

"If you're experiencing delays the impact is solely on how much time you have and on your circumstances to your booking. It's hard to say how's it going to impact. Everybody will have a different view." (Gatwick users, frequent flyers)

"People who've got connections it must be so stressful for those guys when they know they've got a tight connection." (Heathrow users, non-frequent flyers)