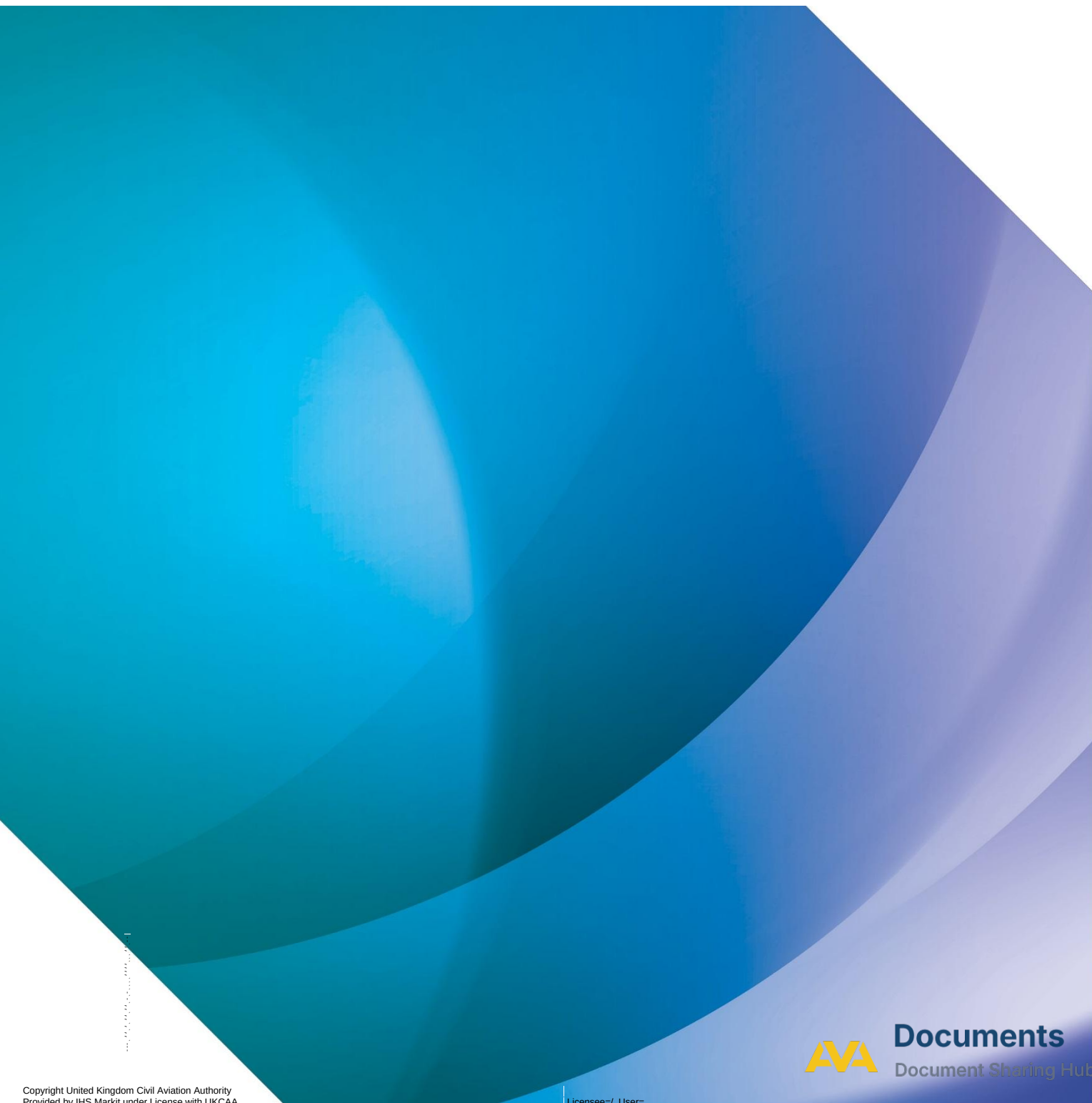


Airport accessibility report 2016/17

CAP 1577



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Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to: James Fremantle, james.fremantle@caa.co.uk

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Executive summary

Improving the accessibility of air travel, so that greater numbers of disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions are able to travel by air, is a key priority for the CAA. In this, the second of our annual reviews of accessibility at UK airports, we are pleased to be able to report that the number of disabled people and those with mobility restrictions using air travel has again increased in the past year, with over 3 million people requesting extra help at UK airports in 2016, up from 2.7 million the previous year, easily outstripping general passenger growth.

The increase in numbers is good news and something the UK aviation industry should be rightly proud of. We believe that the higher number of people using assistance is often a direct result of the high quality service generally found at UK airports and onboard UK originating aircraft. Our own indicators consistently show satisfaction levels with the assistance service at well above 80%. And other research bears this out; for example easyJet, in its own surveying of its passengers, found that at its airports those passengers who requested assistance consistently rated their airport experience higher than that for passengers overall. We have noted that the focus from airports has sometimes been more on operational efficiency rather than customer service. But we are encouraged by a recent general trend that is rebalancing this emphasis at many airports. Our performance framework is designed to achieve a consistent and high quality assistance service, carried out by friendly, approachable and dedicated staff, who are able to understand the needs of the passengers using the service and who can provide help with a minimum of delay. The vast majority of UK airports provide just this. The satisfaction ratings received through passenger surveys indicate this, but we also hear positive feedback directly from passengers telling us of the kindness, understanding and patience shown by individuals. This feedback shows that the impact of the human element to the service should not be underestimated.

It is no coincidence that those airports that we classify as 'very good' and 'good' in this report are those which demonstrate that they value this aspect of the customer service. They have regularly consulted with people that use the assistance service,

asking them what they need to do to design it to meet their needs; their staff are regularly praised by passengers for their understanding and patience; and the assistance is efficient and well organised, meaning delays are minimal. In contrast, for those airports that we have classified as 'poor' in this report, namely London Heathrow, Manchester, East Midlands and Exeter airports, attention to this aspect of the assistance service has been lacking. In relation to Heathrow, for example, the results of its own passenger survey show that a substantial proportion of respondents rate the quality of the assistance service as unsatisfactory. Further, there have been instances of unacceptable levels of customer service where passengers' needs have not been met and, in some instances, where passengers have not been treated with dignity and respect. In relation to Manchester, East Midlands and Exeter airports, each of these airports failed to consult with organisations and groups representing disabled people over the course of the reporting year. In addition, East Midlands failed to be effective in seeking feedback from users of the service directly, for example via a passenger survey. In each case we have secured commitments from the airport concerned that it will make the necessary improvements so that it is able to deliver a consistent and high quality assistance service.

Overall we continue to be pleased with how the performance framework is driving continued improvement across the UK's airports and, where necessary, is identifying issues at those airports where standards have dipped. In last year's report we expressed concerns that a number of airports had been slow to embed the framework. We are pleased to be able to report that we are now satisfied that every airport understands what is required of it and is clear that it will be held to account for any shortfall in performance. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved at airports for helping to make the performance framework a success. Further, we would like to thank the groups and organisations that represent the interests of disabled people, as well as individuals themselves, who, often on a voluntary basis, have travelled to meet with airports, and also with ourselves, to provide invaluable feedback to support this process.