Consumer and Markets

Airport accessibility report 2017/18

CAP 1679

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Executive summary

In 2017 over 3 million requests were made for assistance at UK airports and requests for assistance are increasing at a rate of around double that of general passenger growth. The Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) most recent UK Aviation consumer survey[1] shows that, of recent travellers who received mobility assistance, 42% stated that they had requested the assistance for the first time (up from 34% in the previous survey). Further, 83% of assistance users were satisfied overall with the assistance that they have received, with between 54% saying that they were very satisfied. Good accessibility at airports does not just help the people who use the assistance, but also the family members and friends that they are travelling with. It is a positive story for the aviation industry that disabled people feel increasingly confident to use the assistance provided at UK airports.

However, there still is more to do to improve journeys for disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility. For example, although satisfaction with the assistance service is high, the survey shows that satisfaction with the overall travel experience is slightly lower for disabled people and those with reduced mobility (72% satisfied) than for passengers in general (79% satisfied), and that around half of disabled travellers and those with reduced mobility are worried about how things will go in the future. Our research further shows that, although small in relative terms, there is a minority of disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility that are very dissatisfied with how their journeys went. For example, one out of ten responses to the CAA's own 'accessibility survey'[2] rated assistance at UK airports as "very poor"; and the numerous comments from passengers suggest that, when things do go wrong, the impact on individuals is significant.

This is the third annual review of the performance of UK airports. Our airport performance framework is designed to encourage airports to provide a consistent and high quality assistance service by highlighting the good performers and the bad. We believe that it has been a success so far, generally driving up standards at many UK airports. For example, we are pleased to be able to report that we have classified 16 airports as 'very good' this year, up from six last year. Most notable in this group is Edinburgh Airport, which we classified as 'poor' only two years ago, and which has made significant progress in improving the assistance service that it provides. The group also includes Liverpool which, like Edinburgh has had an excellent year, providing a very good level of assistance to its disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility. Both airports contract Omniserv as their appointed service provider. We have classified a further ten airports as 'good'. In this group, we are pleased with the progress made by Heathrow, Exeter and East Midlands,

[1] www.caa.co.uk/cap1623

[2] Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a CAA survey.

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which we classified as ‘poor’ in last year’s report. The improvement of Heathrow has been significant, with the airport benefiting from making its assistance more seamless, with fewer breaks in the service and enhancing the disability equality training of its staff and those of its service provider, Omniserv.

Disappointingly we have classified London Gatwick, London Stansted, and Birmingham as ‘needs improvement’ and one airport, Manchester, as ‘poor’. Manchester did not meet its performance targets regarding the timeliness of assisting people through the airport on arrival from inbound flights. Information provided to us shows that disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility took significantly longer to move through the airport than other passengers, with an unacceptable number of disabled and reduced mobility passengers waiting more than twenty minutes for assistance with, in some cases, passengers left waiting for assistance for more than an hour. This is not an acceptable situation for passengers that need to use the assistance at the airport. This has been acknowledged by Manchester and it has implemented a performance improvement plan to bring the quality of the assistance it provides into line with the expectations of users of the services and the CAA. We will monitor closely Manchester’s performance and continue to hold it to account for improving its service.

London Gatwick, London Stansted, and Birmingham failed to provide us with sufficient information about the standard of service at their airports. We believe that the issues with data collection at these airports could arise at others in the future. Good data collection is imperative to understand how well an airport is treating passengers requiring assistance, to ensure that service levels are maintained and the airport will meet ‘waiting time’ targets under our performance framework.

As a result, we want all airports, and the service providers contracted to them, to prioritise making improvements to data collection. We know that solutions are available and we expect airports to invest in these solutions – for example, a number of companies offer facilities that allow for automatic data collection, which reduces the risk of human error. Better data collection would significantly improve the efficiency of staff and will also greatly improve the integrity of the data collected throughout each journey. We are pleased that both Birmingham and Gatwick airports have agreed to invest in this technology. We expect other large airports to follow as we believe that, if they do not, and they continue to rely on manual intervention, they will find it increasingly difficult to meet our performance standards.

Therefore, there is still work for airports and the CAA to do to ensure that the assistance provided is of a consistent and high quality across all UK airports. In order to play our part in this process of continuous improvement, we intend to review our performance framework later this year to ensure that it is appropriately designed to minimise the occasions when things go badly wrong and that it is delivering positive outcomes for *all* disabled passengers, not just the vast majority. We will talk to airports and service providers about the improvement that can be made to the framework. We will also talk to organisations that represent the interests of disabled people, as well as individuals

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