
CAA Consumer Panel

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2018



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About the CAA Consumer Panel

The CAA Consumer Panel acts as a non-statutory critical friend, giving expert advice to the CAA as policy is being developed, and making sure the consumer interest is central. The Panel's objective is to champion the interest of consumers. The Panel focuses on the interests of current and potential aviation consumers. Citizen issues, such as noise from flightpaths, do not fall under our remit.

The key activities of the Panel are to:

- Help the CAA to understand fully, and take account of, the interests of consumers in its policy development and decisions.
- Use existing CAA research, request the CAA undertakes new targeted research, and to gather intelligence, to understand the aviation consumer experience.
- Provide the CAA with feedback from a consumer perspective on the effectiveness of its policies and practices.

Chair's Foreword

This year has been one of renewal for the CAA's Consumer Panel, and I want to pay tribute to the work of Keith Richards and the Panel over the last six years. Huge progress has been made within the organisation and consumer interests are far more at the heart of the CAA's operations than when the Panel was formed. Amongst a number of successes, the Panel worked with the CAA to introduce the Aviation Consumer Survey, which gives a solid evidence base for both the CAA and the work of the Panel.

Following a review in Summer 2017, changes have been made to the way the Panel works and the focus of our work, and the recruitment of a number of new Panel members has given us a chance to put together a new work plan for the next 18 months, taking advantage of the experience of existing Panel members and the new perspective of the members joining this year. I want to acknowledge the excellent secretariat support provided by Harriet Gamper, and during the review of the Panel, by Anne-Marie Hopcroft.

In October 2017 Monarch Airlines ceased trading, leaving 110,000 customers overseas and in the region of 300,000 future bookings cancelled. The Government asked the CAA to charter more than 30 aircraft to bring back to the UK Monarch Airlines customers who were overseas. The Panel was enormously impressed with how the CAA rose to this challenge and saw the way the repatriation effort was set up as a testament to the CAA's focus on the consumer interest.

The main focus of our work in the second half of this year has been the Department for Transport's Aviation Strategy. This presents an opportunity to reshape a number of areas of aviation policy and we are pleased that the Department has placed the consumer interest as a key priority in the Strategy. We have been engaging with the Department's team to ensure the consumer voice is at the heart of the future strategy and we will continue to do so.

Much of our focus over the next year will be on the experience of consumers who complain to airlines and airports and how lessons are learned to improve services. We also look forward to continuing to build on our constructive relationship with the CAA so we continue to contribute to the organisation, working to help ensure consumers, both current and future, are at the heart of all its operations.



Jenny Willott
CAA Consumer Panel Chair

Chapter 1

Strategic themes

Our aims

We want to see markets and regulation that have the clear interests of existing and future consumers at their heart, that work effectively to ensure effective airline competition on price and service quality, airports that provide an affordable, good quality and consumer focused service, and empowered consumers making informed decisions about which companies to use. Airline services and airport environments should be designed and delivered to ensure accessibility to everyone, and people who may need extra help should be supported to make sure they can effectively access the market. And when things go wrong, consumers should have quick, fair and easy access to redress. This will in turn help the CAA to deliver its strategic objective of empowering consumers.

Our work is grouped under the following three strategic themes:

Access

What we want to see:

The experiences and needs of consumers at risk of vulnerability are well understood and taken into account in the design and delivery of services. Everybody who wants to do so is able to access the market and has a good experience when they do so.

Quality

What we want to see:

Airlines compete on both price and service quality, and consumers are able to make easy and accurate comparisons. Airports provide more transparency about service quality. Digital innovation is harnessed to positive effect for consumers. Information is transparent and easily available, including in formats which can be used by third parties to give effective advice and make accurate comparisons.

Redress

What we want to see:

When things do go wrong consumers should have quick, fair and easy access to redress, with equitable outcomes. Both airlines and airports use consumer complaints to learn lessons and improve service quality and provision. This will make things better for everybody, including those who do not complain. Reform of airline insolvency arrangements should be cognisant of consumer needs and ensure consumers are adequately protected.

Chapter 2

Our work

This report covers the year ending 31 March 2018. During this time the Panel has undergone a series of internal changes, including a new Chair, new members, and a new secretariat. Nevertheless, we have been keen to continue with our priority work areas and to keep the focus firmly on the consumer interest. This section sets out the cross-cutting work undertaken by the Panel throughout the year along with our work in our priority areas.

New faces

Over the year we said goodbye to our founding Chair, Keith Richards, as well as to founding Panel members Sarah Chambers, Robert Laslett and Anthony Smith. We welcomed our new Chair, Jenny Willott, in January 2018, along with five new members, who started across the year.

Recruitment required a substantial investment in terms of the Panel's time and resource. However, we are confident that the Panel continues to be in safe hands with our new members.

With a refreshed Panel, the time was right to review our priorities and set out a new Work Programme. We therefore held an away day with both existing and incoming Panel members, alongside CAA staff. We identified priority work areas and the outputs we plan to produce over the next 18 months. More information can be found below, and the full Work Programme was published in August 2018 and is available on the CAA website.

Panel review

As the Panel approached its fifth anniversary and a period of member turnover, the CAA felt that the time was right to reflect on the effectiveness of the Panel in supporting the CAA to deliver its strategy. A review was therefore launched in March 2017 and concluded in July 2017. This consisted of an effectiveness survey of Panel members and CAA colleagues who had recently engaged with the Panel alongside gaining external perspectives from other Consumer Panels and their associated regulators.

The Panel supported the review and its conclusions. We were pleased to see recognition of the positive contribution that the Panel has made overall to making the CAA more consumer focused. The review also recognised the Panel's impact in specific areas such