

# Airport accessibility report 2019/20

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## Executive summary

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This is the fifth annual review of accessibility at UK airports, covering airports which handled over 150,000 passengers during the period of 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020. In this period 4 million passengers were assisted at the 31 airports covered by this report, up from 3.7 million the previous year and 2.5 million in 2014, the first year such statistics were collected. The Airport Accessibility Reports are traditionally published in the summer months following the closure of the reporting year on 31 March. The end of this reporting year was marked by the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) decided to delay publishing its annual report allowing more time for airports to report on their performance.

Although flying activity is much reduced from pre-pandemic levels, we have continued to monitor the performance of airports in assisting disabled and less mobile passengers. The aviation industry faces unprecedented challenges as a result of the crisis and we have been impressed how airports have adapted so that disabled and less mobile passengers have continued to receive high quality assistance throughout the past six months. This has been particularly important as substantial numbers of disabled and less mobile passengers have continued to travel by air, particularly during April to June, when many were returning on 'repatriation' flights from all parts of the world. Most of these flights landed at Heathrow, which despite often having little advance warning of flight arrival times, provided excellent support to inbound disabled and less mobile passengers. Other notable examples include Glasgow airport, which has provided an additional seating area solely for disabled and less mobile passengers to enable social distancing; Heathrow and Gatwick airports, which have installed perspex screens in their assistance buggies to enable social distancing whilst maintaining almost the same capacity; Bristol airport, which has relocated the Special Assistance desk to a more central area to reduce the walking distance; and London Luton airport, which has used the accessibility software Recite Me to create a fully accessible COVID-19 information page for all passengers.

Except for a few weeks at the end of March, this report covers the period prior to aviation being significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rankings that follow therefore only take into account performance from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This year we

have classified 15 airports as 'very good', 13 airports as 'good' and 3 as 'needs improvement'.

We are pleased to report that, for the second consecutive year, we have classified no airport as 'poor'. We are also pleased to be able to report that Bristol and East Midlands are in the 'very good' category for the first time since we began publishing these reports in 2016. This year has also seen further improvement from Manchester. It was the only airport in the 'needs improvement' category last year and the year before had been rated as 'poor'. We are pleased to be able to classify the airport as 'good' this year following further progress made by the airport and its service provider, ABM. Further, we would like to recognise Manchester for its assistance to passengers when Thomas Cook ceased operations. Thousands of passengers had to be repatriated by the CAA in September and October, which are traditionally the busiest months for disabled and less mobile passengers. We were impressed how Manchester drew much of its available resource together to ensure that Thomas Cook passengers who needed assistance received appropriate support, particularly important when many passengers were often not returning to their intended airport and needed to transfer to other transport to reach their original destination.

A key requirement of the CAA's airport accessibility framework (which is set out in [CAP1228](#)) is for airports to provide robust and complete data to the CAA on the 'waiting times' experienced by disabled and less mobile passengers. This enables the airport and the CAA to monitor performance so as to ensure that passengers that need assistance are not unduly delayed on departure and on arrival. Unfortunately, this year we are reporting that Kirkwall, London Southend and Aberdeen were not able to provide us with sufficiently robust data for us to be able to classify these airports as 'good'. Although we are not concerned that the assistance service at these airports is of poor quality based on our observations and other evidence, the ability on the part of airports to collect and report on how well they are assisting disabled and less mobile passengers is a critical part of the airport accessibility framework. We have therefore classified these airports as 'needs improvement'.

For other airports, we have identified smaller, but still material, issues with how performance data is collected and reported. We have therefore decided that these airports should not be classified as 'very good'. We have reminded these airports that to qualify for

a 'very good' rating from the CAA, we expect them to provide not only a consistent and high quality level of assistance, but also to have in place systems for capturing and reporting on performance data, and processes and procedures for overseeing this (e.g. audits). We will closely monitor the progress of these airports in this regard and have made it clear to all airports that, where we continue to identify issues with the collection and reporting of performance data, in the future it may lead to a 'poor' or 'needs improvement' rating for the airport, and potentially formal enforcement action from the CAA.