

CAA Consumer Panel

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2021



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About the CAA Consumer Panel

Who we are

The CAA Consumer Panel is a group of eight independent experts, who bring together deep consumer expertise and experience along with strategic thinking, applying these in a practical way to improve the aviation experience for consumers. The Panel members' biographies can be found at the end of this document.

What we do

The 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 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 gather intelligence, in order to understand the aviation consumer experience.
- Provide the CAA with feedback from a consumer perspective on the effectiveness of its policies and practices.

Our remit

The Panel focuses on the interests of current and potential aviation consumers. Citizen or community issues, such as noise from flightpaths, do not fall under our remit.

Chair's Foreword

It goes without saying that it has been an exceptional year for the whole of the UK, and the aviation sector has been particularly hard hit. The context in which we write our annual report as the CAA Consumer Panel is unlike any other.

Circumstances have changed rapidly and unexpectedly, and we have adapted our work plan to take into account the changing context. In particular, we devoted a lot of time to researching and evaluating how to rebuild consumer confidence as the sector reopens to ensure a rapid and consumer-focused restart. This work was fed into the CAA, as it considers both current travel and sector restart, and to DfT to contribute to the Global Travel Taskforce report on restarting international travel.

Alongside work driven by the pandemic, we continued to deliver our planned work programme, including on environmental information, vulnerable consumers, and complaints handling. Many of these aspects (in particular the treatment of vulnerable consumers and good complaints handling) are especially important in the context of the pandemic, where consumer problems may be exacerbated by health measures and new travel rules if care is not taken to avoid this.

We have been supportive of a number of areas of the CAA's work this year, particularly work being done to explore consumers' appetite for and understanding of information about the carbon footprint of flying, and work to help the regulator recognise and respond to consumer vulnerability. We also supported some of the amendments the CAA has made to its policy for approving Alternative Dispute Resolution bodies.

But there have been other areas where we have been very disappointed, particularly around how the decision to close Heathrow's Consumer Challenge Board was communicated to the Panel. We are disappointed that decisions about Heathrow's future development will now have less consumer input and will be the poorer for it.

We acknowledge that it has been a particularly challenging year for the CAA and the whole aviation sector. Placing consumers at the heart of decision making will help the sector to be able to restart successfully and build back the market as fast as possible. We look forward to a more positive year ahead.



The Right Hon Jenny Willott OBE
CAA Consumer Panel Chair

Chapter 1

How we work

Our aims

The Panel exists to make sure that the consumer interest is placed at the heart of the CAA's work, helping the CAA to deliver its objective of empowering consumers. We want to see markets and regulation that focus on the clear interests of existing and future aviation consumers and that work well to ensure effective airline competition on price and service quality. Airports should provide an affordable, good quality and consumer-focused service. Empowered consumers should be able to make 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.

How we prioritise our work

The Panel is a small, specialist policy resource for the CAA and delivers high quality, evidence-based advice in a way which is designed to maximise its impact. The Panel therefore prioritises its work carefully, asking four key questions before embarking on any given project:

- Is the issue important for aviation consumers?
- Does it fall within the Panel's remit?
- Is it an area where the CAA is best placed to effect change?
- Is it (or should it be) a priority for the CAA?

The Panel also prioritises the interests of consumers it considers to be at greater risk of vulnerability throughout its work.