

# 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.

## Introduction

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The CAA has set up its airport accessibility framework to ensure that airports give disabled and less mobile passengers the confidence to travel knowing that their assistance needs will be met. We are pleased with the continued success of this performance framework in ensuring a consistent and high quality assistance service. From this reporting year, we had planned to assess airports using stricter waiting time targets for assistance and to require that the number of handovers allowed between staff and equipment be reduced so that passengers experience a more seamless journey. In addition, we had intended to apply stricter customer satisfaction targets and extra requirements on airports in regard to consultation with the disability community.

When it became clear that the assistance service provided at airports could be affected by new health protocols introduced due to the pandemic, we acted quickly to suspend the introduction of the enhanced standards and temporarily amend the application of some of the existing performance standards within our airport accessibility framework. By doing this, we could balance the need to support airports to meet the challenges facing airports of introducing new processes as result of the health protocols with the need to ensure that an acceptable standard was maintained for disabled and less mobile passengers travelling through UK airports. This flexible application of our performance framework has ensured that airports are continuing to provide an acceptable level of support for disabled and less mobile passengers and that actions taken as a result of COVID-19 related health assessments at airports (e.g. social distancing) could be accommodated without disproportionately impacting the assistance service. We are pleased to see that airports have taken practical steps to keep staff and passengers safe, whilst ensuring access for all. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved at airports for helping vulnerable passengers in these challenging circumstances.

We will continue working with airports, who have the primary responsibility, to help make sure that despite the particular uncertainties in the coming year, passengers requiring the accessibility can travel confident that their needs will be met. We will reintroduce the application of the full set of performance framework standards once the situation permits. We recognise that there is a significant amount of uncertainty about the timing and nature

of a recovery in air travel during 2021. This poses challenges for airports to have in place the resources to provide a good quality accessibility service.

## Review of the year

### Rankings

<b>Belfast City</b>			
<b>Bournemouth</b>			
<b>Bristol</b>	<b>Birmingham</b>		
<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>Belfast International</b>		
<b>City of Derry</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>		
<b>Cornwall Newquay</b>	<b>Inverness</b>		
<b>Doncaster Sheffield</b>	<b>Leeds Bradford</b>		
<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>Liverpool</b>		
<b>Exeter</b>	<b>London City</b>		
<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>London Gatwick</b>		
<b>Glasgow Prestwick</b>	<b>London Heathrow</b>		
<b>Humberside</b>	<b>London Luton</b>		
<b>Newcastle</b>	<b>London Stansted</b>	<b>Aberdeen</b>	
<b>Norwich</b>	<b>Manchester</b>	<b>Kirkwall</b>	
<b>Sumburgh</b>	<b>Southampton</b>	<b>London Southend</b>	
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Poor</b>

### Very good

We have classified 15 airports as ‘very good’ including **East Midlands**, **Glasgow** and **Bristol**. These airports have provided a consistent and high quality assistance service over the year. Glasgow and Bristol each provided a consistently on-time assistance service for more than 100,000 passengers throughout the year. Further, more than 90% of passengers who responded to a survey on the standard of assistance rated the service as good or excellent at both airports. East Midlands provided assistance to more than 60,000 passengers and 80% of respondents to their survey rated the service as good or excellent.

We have also classified **Doncaster Sheffield**, **Belfast City**, **Bournemouth**, **Humberside**, **Cardiff**, **City of Derry**, **Cornwall Newquay**, **Exeter**, **Glasgow Prestwick**, **Newcastle**, **Norwich** and **Sumburgh** as ‘very good’. They have also provided a consistent and high quality assistance service. We are pleased to note that Norwich airport inaugurated its Accessibility Committee. Newcastle exceeded all of its performance standards and during

the year we carried out an inspection of Newcastle and we were pleased to see that the airport provides a well-researched and extensive training programme for its staff.

## **Good**

During the year we identified data gathering issues at a number of airports. This includes issues around the implementation of new data collection systems, incorrect interpretation of the requirements in CAP1228, and insufficiently rigorous audit processes in place to oversee the service providers. We are not concerned that the assistance service at these airports was of poor quality, given our observations and other evidence, and following in-depth interrogation of the data that was available we are content to rate the airports as 'good'. However, 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 had discussions with each of the airports concerned and have either had confirmation that the necessary improvements have been made or have received commitments from them that solutions will be found. The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic will prevent progress being made as quickly as would otherwise be the case, but we have made it clear that, when the situation allows, we will be conducting on-site monitoring at these airports to check progress. To support airports, we will publish further guidance setting out expectations in regard to data capture and reporting and airport oversight.

Measuring performance correctly and providing robust data on waiting times is a key requirement for airports to be classified as 'very good'. **London Gatwick, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool and Edinburgh** are classified as 'good' this year. We know that this is a disappointment to these airports but our view is that we do not have sufficient reassurance that the systems and methodologies in place at these airports for measuring performance are sufficiently robust to achieve a 'very good' rating. At Edinburgh, we noted that a robust programme of regular audits and oversight of the airport's service provider had not been implemented. We have advised the airport that if systems are not improved, not only will the airport risk a 'needs improvement' rating in future reports, we will consider requiring the airport to provide legal undertakings to us that it will make the necessary improvements. At London Gatwick, our own monitoring of 50 flights highlighted issues with providing passengers with a seamless service, as required under CAP1228. On some

occasions staff members arrived on time at the gate but without the sufficient buggies to assist all passengers causing passengers to be delayed in their arrival journey. Liverpool and Leeds Bradford had issues with their data collection and reporting but we were pleased to note that these airports have invested in IT solutions which enable more automated data gathering and less manual intervention, which should lead to fewer issues in the future.

This year we have rated **Manchester** as 'good'. Having been classified as 'poor' in 2017/18, the airport committed to improve the assistance service in the form of written undertakings to the CAA. Under these undertakings the airport was required to produce a performance improvement plan to address its issues. The CAA closely monitored the progress of Manchester airport in delivering against this plan and we are pleased to see that significant progress has been made. Arrivals waiting time targets and passenger satisfaction scores have improved compared to previous years. Additionally, during the year we carried out an accessibility inspection at the airport where we noted many examples of good practice. We were particularly impressed by how accessibility had been considered right throughout the design of the new pier at Terminal 2. Passengers will greatly benefit from a quicker and more seamless journey and from extra facilities such as an increased number of disabled toilets and also more call points distributed throughout the pier where people can ask for assistance if needed.

**London Heathrow** is among those airports that we identified some issues with data reporting. We are pleased to say that Heathrow acted quickly to address the issues. For further reassurance, we monitored over 100 inbound flights at the airport throughout the year. We noted that, in general, passengers received an efficient and timely assistance service, particularly important at Heathrow where a large proportion of passengers are connecting onto other flights. **Birmingham** had a difficult start to the reporting year. There were some performance issues, in particular in regard to time spent by passengers waiting for assistance. We are pleased that these issues were addressed and the second half of the year showed a significant improvement in performance.

**London Luton** and **London Stansted** have also each received a ‘good’ rating. Both comfortably met our waiting time standards and although they generally received positive feedback from passengers, they have not performed quite as well as some other airports on customer satisfaction scores.

We have also classified **Belfast International**, **Southampton**, **Inverness** and **London City** as ‘good’. These airports provided high quality, timely assistance but Belfast International and Southampton lacked the range and regularity of their consultation with disability groups to gain a ‘very good’ rating. Inverness and London City did not actively seek feedback from airport users via passenger surveys as set out in CAP1228. However, we are pleased that Inverness airport launched its new Accessibility User Group in order to seek feedback from representatives of disability groups.

### **Needs improvement**

We have classified **Aberdeen**, **Kirkwall** and **London Southend** as ‘needs improvement’. Aberdeen has had challenges with its new system for collecting performance data, which was implemented in April 2019. Although we are not concerned that the assistance service at Aberdeen is of poor quality, given 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. In the case of Aberdeen, the performance data collected by the airport is not sufficiently robust for us to be able to classify it as ‘good’. However, we would like to note positively that, since November 2019, the data collection issues have been resolved and the waiting time standards have been comfortably met for all subsequent months. We also note that responses to the CAA passenger survey on the quality of assistance provided to disabled and less mobile passengers have been generally positive. Nevertheless, we will be closely monitoring the airport to ensure that the system for collecting and reporting on performance data remains robust.

Similarly, for Kirkwall and London Southend, we have not received sufficiently robust information about each airport's performance against the waiting time standards to classify these airports as ‘good’. We have had a number of discussions with these airports and we were advised that they had not collated data on performance against waiting times in a

manner specified by the CAA in its airport accessibility framework. Although we are not concerned that the assistance service at these airports is of poor quality, given the issues with data collection and reporting, we have classified them as 'needs improvement'. In subsequent discussions, Kirkwall and London Southend have advised us that they will implement new long term solutions that will ensure that waiting time data is accurately recorded and collated into a database. We consider these steps encouraging and will closely monitor progress. But, as with other airports, if we continue to identify issues with the collection and reporting of performance data at these airports, it may lead to a 'poor' rating in the future, and potentially formal enforcement action from the CAA.

## Background

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Regulation EC 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility (referred to hereafter as ‘the Regulation’) provides a set of rights that apply when departing from, and returning to, UK airports and on board all flights from the UK and, if a European airline, to the UK. The aim of the Regulation is to ensure that such people have the same opportunities for air travel as those of others, in particular that they have the same rights to free movement, freedom of choice and non-discrimination.

In relation to airports, the requirements of the Regulation deal mostly with the assistance that airports are required to provide to disabled and less mobile passengers to help them move around the airport and embark and disembark the aircraft (usually through a contracted service provider). The Regulation also obliges airports to set quality standards for the assistance provided to disabled people and those with mobility restrictions.

To ensure that disabled and less mobile passengers are confident that they can travel and their assistance needs will be met, it is important that the assistance provided to them is of a consistently high quality. It is therefore imperative airports set appropriate quality standards for this assistance to ensure that it is delivered to a high standard.

The CAA is responsible for enforcing the Regulation in the UK. We have put in place a performance framework for airports to set, monitor and publish a range of quality standards relating to the assistance service. Guidance (CAP1228) for airports on the obligations under this framework was published in October 2014 and updated in April 2019. In addition to ‘hard’ metrics relating to the amount of time that people have to wait to receive assistance both on departure and arrival, we have also incorporated a number of ‘soft’ metrics: first, that airports consult with disability groups and charities in the setting of the quality standards, enabling others with a close interest in disability issues to hold airports to account; and second, through surveying users of the service, that passengers with a disability or reduced mobility are satisfied with the different aspects of the service that they receive, enabling issues such as staff attitudes to be measured and reported on.

Airports are required to make public their performance against these metrics and with whom they have consulted and the outcomes of this consultation.

This report reviews the performance of 31 airports<sup>1</sup> over the financial year 2019/20 and is based on performance data recorded and published by airports on their websites, data submitted to the CAA directly by airports, and data collected by the CAA itself. (More information on this can be found in CAP1228.) The information taken into account by the CAA includes:

- Monthly performance against waiting time standards for the periods 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.
- Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a CAA survey or an airport's own survey. (Surveys ask users of the assistance service to rate the quality of the service provided at the airport on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is extremely poor and 5 is excellent.)
- Information on the consultation undertaken with disability organisations, including the methods used for consultation, actions decided, and any follow up action taken.

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<sup>1</sup> Under Regulation EC 1107/2006 only airports with more than 150,000 passengers per year must set quality standards.

## Definition of rankings

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### **Good**

This means the following:

#### ***Departing passengers***

- Over the whole year, 99% of all departing notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility are provided with assistance within 30 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point.
- Over the whole year, 99% of all departing non-notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility are provided with assistance within 45 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point.
- The airport scores an average rating of 3.5 (where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent) or better in the satisfaction survey of users.

#### ***Arriving passengers***

- Over the whole year, for at least 97% of arriving pre-notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility, assistance is available for each passenger within 20 minutes from 'on chocks'.
- Over the whole year, for at least 97% of arriving non-notified disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, assistance is available for each passenger within 45 minutes from 'on chocks'.
- The airport consistently meets any "continuous journey" standards for arriving passengers individually agreed with the CAA.
- The airport scores an average rating of 3.5 (where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent) or better in the satisfaction survey of users.

#### ***Oversight and engagement***

- The airport publishes on its website, and submits to the CAA, information as set out in paragraphs 37 and 38 of CAP1228.

- The airport has robust processes in place for overseeing how it measures its performance; or, where relevant, the CAA has accepted commitments from the airport to strengthen this oversight.
- The airport routinely collects email addresses and sends satisfaction surveys to users of the service, with both physical and 'hidden' disabilities.
- The airport engages effectively with disability organisations through an 'Accessibility Forum'.

## **Very good**

This means the following:

### ***Departing passengers***

- Over the whole year, 99% of all departing notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility are provided with assistance within 30 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point.
- Over the whole year, 99% of all departing non-notified disabled passengers and passengers with reduced mobility are provided with assistance within 45 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point.
- The airport scores a rating of 4 or better in the satisfaction survey of users (where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent).

### ***Arriving passengers***

- Over the whole year, for at least 98% of arriving pre-notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility, assistance is available within 20 minutes from 'on chocks'.
- Over the whole year, for at least 98% of arriving non-notified disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility, assistance is available for each passenger within 45 minutes from 'on chocks'.
- The airport consistently meets any 'continuous journey' standards for arriving passengers individually agreed with the CAA.
- The airport scores a rating of 4 or better in the satisfaction survey of users (where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent).

### ***Oversight and engagement***

- The airport publishes on its website, and submits to the CAA, information as set out in paragraphs 37 and 38 of CAP1228.
- The airport has robust processes in place for overseeing how it measures its performance; or, where relevant, the CAA has accepted commitments from the airport to strengthen this oversight.
- The airport routinely collects email addresses and sends satisfaction surveys to users of the service, with both physical and 'hidden' disabilities.
- The airport engages effectively with disability organisations through an 'Accessibility Forum'.

### **Needs improvement**

This means the following:

- Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to meet all the criteria for a 'good' performance standard. However, the airport has taken the necessary steps during the year to identify the issues with its assistance service and to agree a plan with the CAA to improve its performance.
- Or;
- Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to provide the CAA with the required information on its performance.

### **Poor**

This means the following:

- Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to meet all the criteria for a 'good' performance standard. Further, the airport has not taken the necessary steps during the year to identify the issues with its assistance service and to agree a plan with the CAA to improve its performance.