

Passenger experiences during flight disruption

Consumer research report

CAP 1258



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Summary

This report analyses the results of consumer research carried out by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the first half of 2014. The objective of the research was to better understand consumers' experiences of disruption to their journeys, and to help inform our approach to enforcing Regulation (EC) 261/2004, known as the Denied Boarding Regulations (DBRs). We carried out two different surveys:

- Questions were added to the main CAA Passenger Survey, asking passengers at five UK airports whether they had experienced a disrupted flight in or out of the UK over the last three years. If they had, they were asked further questions about their most recent experience. The interviews were carried out during the first six months of 2014. 2,553 respondents were interviewed, of which 749 said they had experienced disruption.
- An online survey was posted on the CAA website. The survey was launched in December 2013, and 884 responses from the public received before the end of March 2014 have been analysed and reported. The survey was promoted primarily via the passenger advice pages of the CAA's website. Consumers contacting the CAA's Passenger Advice and Complaints Team (PACT) were also informed of the survey.

Key findings

It is important to be cautious about over-interpreting data from consumer surveys. However, the results do give us some cause for concern. Not only do they suggest that airlines' attempts to look after disrupted passengers fall well below the expectations of those passengers, they also suggest that airlines are not meeting their basic legal obligations under the DBRs. This in turn implies that disrupted passengers are at a substantial risk of being left out of pocket or otherwise unduly inconvenienced than would be the case if the standard of compliance was good.

The report is divided into chapters, each of which deals with a different aspect of the consumer experience of disruption. The key findings from each chapter are summarised below.

Type of disruption

- According to both surveys, delays were by far the most common form of disruption experienced by passengers. Weather and problems with the aircraft were the most common reasons given for disruption.

- Responses to the airport survey indicate that the average wait for delayed flights was four hours. For cancelled flights, passengers waited 13 hours on average.

Flight status information

- In both surveys we found considerable levels of dissatisfaction with the provision of information about flight status. This was particularly high for the online survey, perhaps due to the likelihood that consumers were completing that survey at the time of making a complaint about disruption to the CAA. This information is not covered under the DBRs, but is considered very important by passengers.

How passengers were looked after

- Around half of passengers who said they'd waited more than two hours for their flight told us they received no assistance from their airline. All of these passengers would have been entitled to assistance of some form under the DBRs.
- The online survey looked specifically at the provision of information about legal rights (as required under the DBRs) and found that almost four in five passengers did not receive this information.
- The airport survey found that a third of passengers were dissatisfied with how they were looked after during disruption. The corresponding figure from the online survey (which was completed by consumers who were most likely making a complaint about disruption to the CAA) was nine in ten. Again, this suggests that dissatisfaction with the actual disruption experience may be amplified by poor airline complaint handling.

Consumer needs and awareness of rights

- The most important need identified by respondents to the airport survey was information about the status of their flight. However, as noted above, there was considerable dissatisfaction with how this information was provided.
- Despite public information campaigns and significant media coverage of passenger rights, almost one in five respondents to the airport survey said they do not know what they are entitled to if their flight is delayed or cancelled.

Complaints

- The findings in this section are more open to interpretation due to the complexity of the issue and limitations of the survey approach (which we will seek to address in future surveys). However, the results suggest that passengers were dissatisfied with how airlines handled complaints at the time of disruption.

Comparison of issues covered in both surveys

The two surveys asked different questions – the airport survey add-on focused on the experience of disruption in general, while the online survey focused specifically on passenger rights under the DBRs, particularly the right to information about legal rights. We have therefore analysed the results separately and not attempted to combine them. However, we have identified some common issues that were covered in both surveys. Table 1 describes the findings from the surveys in these areas.

Table 1: Comparison of common issues in each survey

	CAA Passenger Survey	Online survey
Number of responses	2,553	884
Proportion who had experienced disruption in last 3 years	30 per cent	100 per cent
Proportion who had experienced a delay	73 per cent	81 per cent
Proportion who had experienced cancellations	20 per cent	19 per cent
Satisfaction with treatment during disruption	Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied = 34 per cent	Treatment by airline poor or extremely poor = 92 per cent
How satisfied were you with the information about flight status provided during disruption?	Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied = 41 per cent	Provided by airline poor or extremely poor = 89 per cent

Chapter 1

Introduction

About the CAA

- 1.1 The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the UK's independent specialist aviation regulator. Our work is focused on:
- Enhancing aviation safety performance by pursuing targeted and continuous improvements in systems, culture, processes and capability.
 - Improving choice and value for aviation consumers now and in the future by promoting competitive markets, contributing to consumers' ability to make informed decisions and protecting them where appropriate.
 - Improving environmental performance through more efficient use of airspace and make an efficient contribution to reducing the aviation industry's environmental impacts.
 - Ensuring that the CAA is an efficient and effective organisation which meets Better Regulation principles

Policy and legal framework

- 1.2 Our work on disruption is highly relevant to our strategic objective to improve choice and value for aviation consumers. Although disruption is relatively rare, it can cause major problems for aviation consumers when it happens. Delayed, cancelled, diverted or overbooked flights cause significant financial and non-financial harm to passengers, such as missing business meetings, losing valuable leisure time and discomfort and stress caused by waiting around in airports or in cramped conditions on board aircraft.
- 1.3 Once passengers are caught up in disruption, there is often little they can do to resolve the problem themselves. Nor is it likely that they would have been able to fully anticipate the disruption happening at the time of booking. The European Commission has therefore introduced a range of passenger rights through Regulation (EC) 261/2004 (the Denied Boarding Regulations). These rights are intended to ensure that, if passengers are unlucky enough to be affected by disruption, they are looked after properly and provided with the assistance they need. We are responsible for enforcing the Denied Boarding Regulations (DBRs) for flights departing from UK airports or arriving at UK airports from non-EU states.
- 1.4 The DBRs give passengers rights to the following things:

- Information on their legal rights
 - Care and assistance (e.g. meals and refreshments, overnight accommodation and access to telecommunications)
 - Reimbursement or re-routing
 - Financial compensation
- 1.5 In order to meet Better Regulation principles, we take a proportionate and risk-based approach to regulation. Such an approach requires reliable and robust evidence of consumer needs and detriment. Consumer research, such the surveys we describe in this report, helps us to both identify the areas we should focus on and monitor the market thereafter to ensure that any interventions we make are having the desired effect. We also aim to be a transparent and accountable regulator and enable our stakeholders to scrutinise and challenge the basis for our decisions, so we publish the findings of the consumer research we carry out.

Research aims and objectives

- 1.6 During 2014, we commissioned an online survey and a face-to-face survey at UK airports during 2014 to help us understand the experiences of passengers during disruption and inform our approach to enforcing the DBRs. Our approach to enforcement has recently changed, the main difference being an increased focus on the systems and processes airlines have in place to ensure they comply with their legal obligations, and this research has provided some of the evidence base for that change.
- 1.7 This research did not look in detail at the consumer experience of making a complaint to an airline and claiming financial compensation once they have returned home from their trip. As a complaint handling body, we already have access to extensive intelligence on the problems consumers face in this area.
- 1.8 Instead, the research sought primarily to improve our understanding of the consumer experience at the time of disruption, specifically what assistance and information disrupted passengers received and how satisfied they were with it.

Chapter 2

Methodology

- 2.1 This report presents the results of two separate pieces of research carried out by the CAA in the first half of 2014: an add-on to the CAA Passenger Survey at airports (which we refer to as the airport survey); and an online survey on the CAA's website, which was specifically targeted at consumers contacting the CAA's Passenger Advice and Complaints Team (PACT). In summary, the airport survey add-on is more representative of consumers at UK airports, while the online survey is more representative of consumers that have complained, or were in the process of complaining, to the CAA.
- 2.2 Due to the significant methodological differences between the two surveys (see below) and the fact that they did not ask the same questions, we have not combined the results in our analysis. However, because there is significant overlap between the two surveys in a number of areas, we have chosen to present the findings thematically rather than separately. Each thematic chapter begins with a short discussion of the findings and, where relevant, the policy implications. Where our discussion of a theme includes results from more than one survey, we have been clear at each point which survey's results we are referring to.
- 2.3 With one exception (see Chapter 4), it has also not been possible to draw any meaningful conclusions about the performance of individual airlines or airports from the results of the two surveys. This is due to limitations of the survey design, not least the small sample sizes involved.

Airport survey

- 2.4 The airport survey is a large-scale survey of departing passengers at UK airports. In 2014, the CAA interviewed around 230,000 passengers at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Manchester, Luton, Birmingham, East Midlands, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool and Doncaster Sheffield. In addition to the main questions asked by the survey, we are able to include ad-hoc questions on a particular topic of interest. In this instance, we added a set of questions to understand passengers' experiences of flight disruption. This data is available on the [CAA website](#), and it can be combined with the main airport survey data.

Weighting

- 2.5 The main airport survey interviews are weighted to be representative of the number of passengers at low levels of aggregation (e.g. route - airline - quarter). This is possible because of its large-scale at the covered airports. However, only a small subset of respondents was asked the questions for the disruption add-on. Therefore, applying the standard survey weights to a small subsample for which they were not intended would not be appropriate, as they could generate distortions. Therefore, we report the results using un-weighted data.

Sample description

- 2.6 The disruption add-on interviewed 2,553 passengers at Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Luton and Leeds Bradford airports. All passengers surveyed were asked Q1 (“Have you had a flight leaving a UK airport delayed or disrupted in the last 3 years?”). Nearly 30 per cent replied that they did, giving a sample base of 749 respondents for questions 2 to 9. For those questions, passengers were asked about their most recent disruptive event.
- 2.7 A subsample of the passengers – 17 per cent of those experiencing disruption – said they made a complaint relating to the disruption event. Those passengers were asked Q10-12. All passengers interviewed, regardless of whether or not they had experienced disruption in the last three years, were also asked Q13 and Q14 on their expectations of care and assistance in the event of disruption.

Table 2: Summary of airport survey interviews

Airport	Nr of Interviews	Nr Experienced Disruption	Proportion who experienced disruption
Leeds Bradford	176	67	38 per cent
Gatwick	635	164	26 per cent
Heathrow	989	332	34 per cent
Manchester	413	109	26 per cent
Luton	340	77	23 per cent
Total	2,553	749	29 per cent

Online survey

- 2.8 Since December 2013, we have provided a link from the CAA website to an online survey hosted by SurveyMonkey, and have encouraged passengers contacting PACT to answer it. The survey remains open at the time of publishing this report. However, our analysis covers 884 responses which were received between December 2013 the end of March 2014.
- 2.9 The results from the online survey should be treated with particular caution as they are not representative. Instead, they are based on a self-selecting sample of passengers, predominantly complainants, and who are likely to have been particularly dissatisfied with how they were treated at the point they completed the survey.

Chapter 3

Type of disruption experienced

Discussion

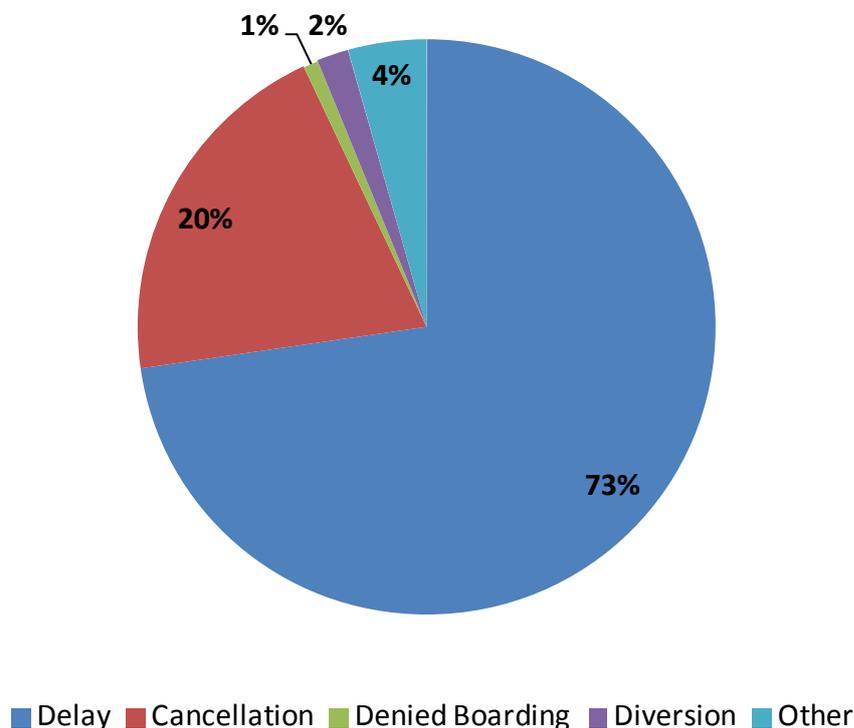
- 3.1 Both surveys found that delays were by far the most common form of disruption experienced (73 per cent in the airport survey, 81 per cent in the online survey). In both surveys, around one in five respondents said their flight was cancelled. The airport survey also found that weather (38 per cent) and technical problems with the aircraft (24 per cent) were the most commonly reported causes of disruption.
- 3.2 The airport survey also asked passengers whose flights had been delayed or cancelled how long they had to wait. The results allowed us to calculate an average wait when a flight was delayed of four hours and an average wait following a cancellation of 13 hours.
- 3.3 This means most respondents to the airport survey would have been entitled to assistance under the DBRs. Unfortunately, due to the small sample sizes involved, it has not been possible for us to analyse whether they actually received the assistance they were entitled to. (A significant proportion would have also been potentially entitled to financial compensation, although this would depend on the particular circumstances of the flight they were taking and these were not covered in the survey).

Airport survey analysis

Type of disruption

- 3.4 Of the passengers that told us they experienced disruption in the last three years, 73 per cent of respondents said that their most recent disruption experience was a delay, while 20 per cent said they experienced a cancellation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: What type of disruption did you experience? (Q3a)



Note: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 732.

3.5 Due to the low sample sizes for other forms of disruption¹, we have limited our analysis by type of disruption to delays and cancellations.

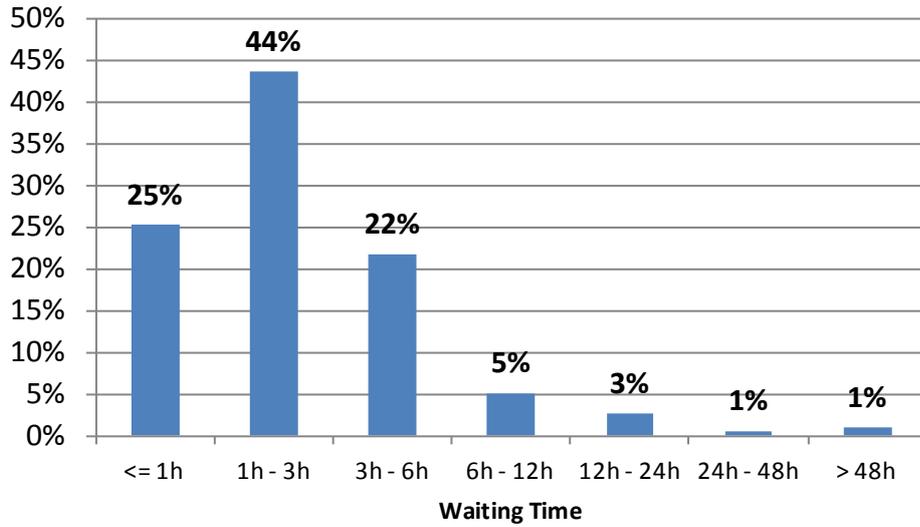
Length of delay

3.6 Figures 2 and 3 show how long passengers who said their flight had either been delayed or cancelled had to wait:

- Of the passengers whose flights were delayed, 31 per cent said the delay was more than three hours, 44 per cent said the delay was between one and three hours, and 25 per cent said it was less than one hour.
- Of the passengers whose flights were cancelled, 21 per cent said they waited for three hours or less, 21 per cent said they waited between three and six hours, 11 per cent said they waited between six and 12 hours, 23 per cent said they waited between 12 and 24 hours, and 23 per cent said they waited over 24 hours or did not travel.

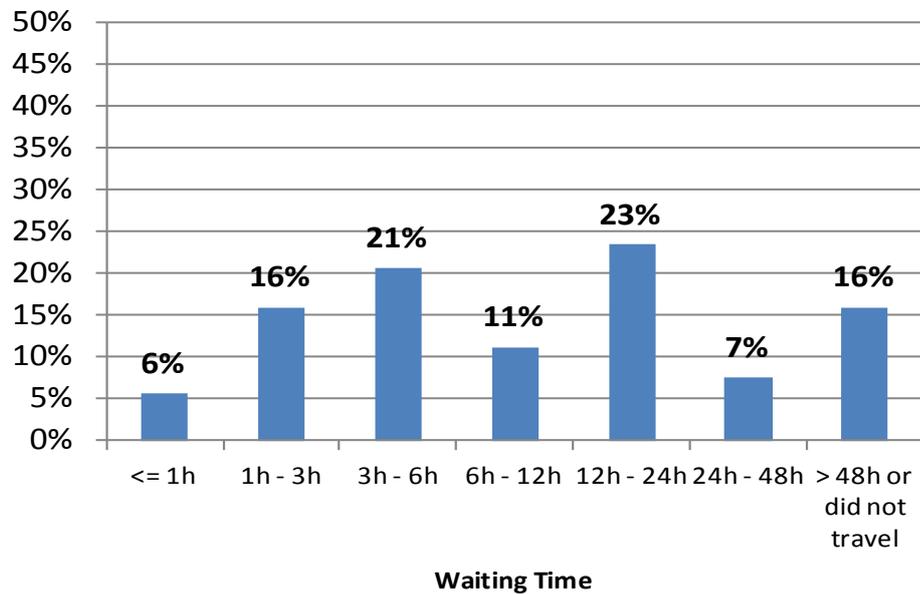
¹ Diversion (13 responses); denied boarding (6); other reasons (32).

Figure 2: If you experienced delay, approximately how long was it? (Q3b-1)



Notes: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 523.

Figure 3: Alternatively, if your flight was cancelled, how long did you have to wait before you were flown to your destination? (Q3b-2)

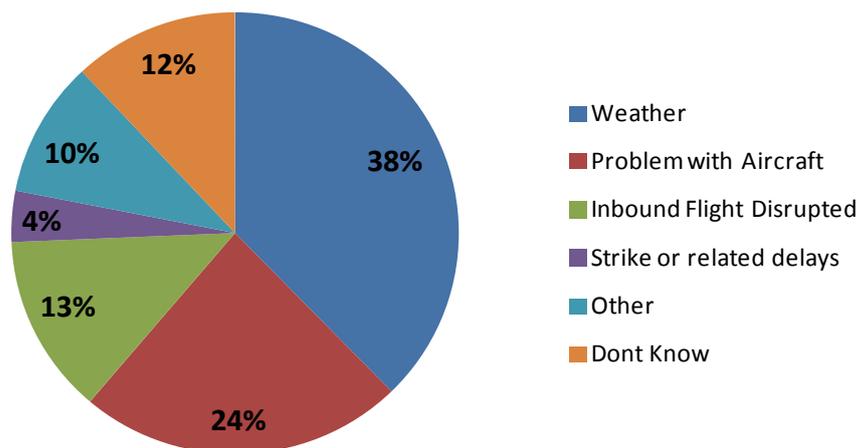


Note: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 98.

Reason for disruption

3.7 Figure 4 shows that the main reason given for both delays and cancellations was weather, with 38 per cent of responses overall. A problem with the aircraft was cited in around a quarter of cases (24 per cent). 12 per cent of passengers did not know what the reason for their disruption was.

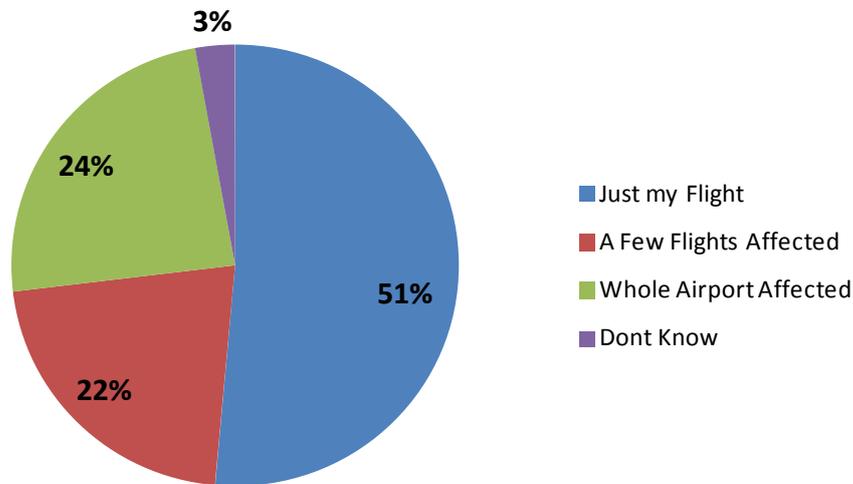
Figure 4: What was the reason for the disruption? (Q4a)



Note: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 725.

- 3.8 Around a half of disrupted passengers said that just their flight was affected by disruption at their departure airport, whereas almost a quarter stated that the whole airport was affected by disruption (Figure 5).
- 3.9 In cases where, the whole airport was affected, the disrupted flight was more likely to be cancelled than delayed (35 per cent compared to 65 per cent. However, if only the respondent's flight was affected, it was more likely to be delayed than cancelled (14 per cent compared to 86 per cent).

Figure 5: What was the extent of the disruption at the airport? (Q4b)



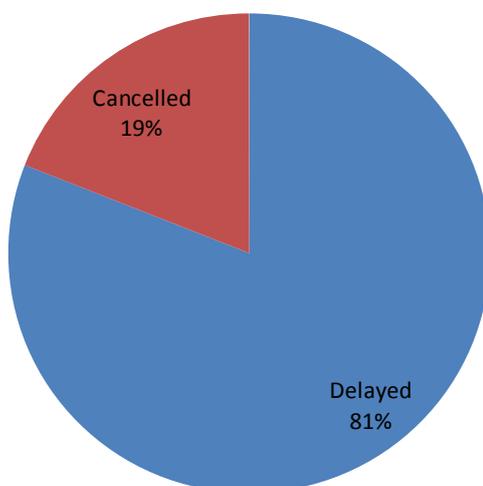
Note: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 729.

Online survey analysis

Type of disruption

3.10 Passengers were asked about what type of disruption they had experienced. Figure 6 shows that 81 per cent of respondents said that they had their flight delayed and 19 per cent had their flight cancelled.

Figure 6: Was your flight cancelled or delayed? (Q2)



Note: Number of respondents: 869.

When passengers were informed of disruption

Delayed passengers

3.11 89 per cent of passengers who said their flight was delayed were already at the airport when they found out about the delay. 7 per cent said they were at home when they found out and 4 per cent were on their way to the airport. Almost all of the delayed passengers continued their journey, with only 2 per cent opting to get a refund instead.

Cancelled passengers

3.12 Of the passengers that said their flights were cancelled, 81 per cent learned about the cancellation at the airport, whereas the rest were at home or en-route to the airport.

3.13 Following the cancellation of their flight, 79 per cent said they were re-routed whereas 21 per cent said they decided not to travel and got a refund instead. Of the passengers that were re-routed, 79 per cent were re-routed on the same airline, 20 per cent on a different airline and only 1 per cent on a different form of transport. With regards to the suitability of the re-route, 70 per cent rated it as poor at best, while only just 6 per cent rated it as good or better.

Chapter 4

Flight status information

Discussion

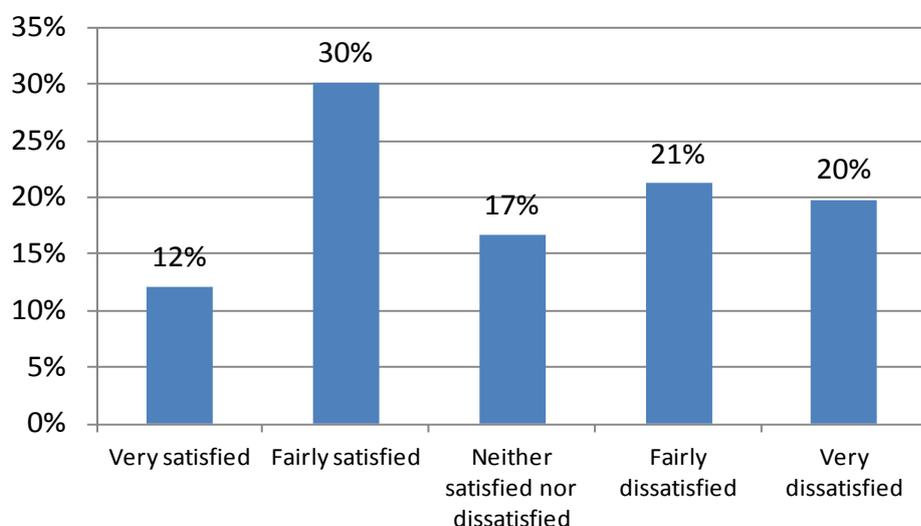
- 4.1 Clear and accurate information about the status of their flight – particularly when any disruption is likely to be resolved – can provide certainty and reassurance to passengers. Providing information at the earliest possible opportunity can prevent people travelling to the airport before they need to. If passengers are already airside then clear and timely information can provide reassurance and help keep them calm.
- 4.2 Correspondingly, we found that 33 per cent of respondents to the airport survey identified having information about flight status as the most important thing to them if they were delayed by over three hours. When asked the same question about a cancelled flight, this figure rose to 44 per cent. We report on these findings in Chapter 6.
- 4.3 There is no specific requirement under the DBRs for airlines to provide information to disrupted passengers about the status of their flight. This is partly because it should be in airlines' own interests to keep passengers informed and calm, but also because airlines may not always have the information themselves. However, in situations where little information is available, airlines should provide what information they have and commit to communicating more information as and when it becomes available. Openness and honesty in communication is important in building confidence from passengers and users.
- 4.4 Although the questions on satisfaction with information about flight status were asked differently in the two surveys, both point to considerable levels of dissatisfaction. However, we found dissatisfaction to be particularly high among respondents to the online survey. This may be because respondents had come to the CAA at the point they completed the online survey, implying that they had already complained to the airline but not received a satisfactory response. Being in this situation may have exacerbated their dissatisfaction with their airline and possibly led to them giving it a lower rating in this area that would otherwise have been the case.
- 4.5 The findings on the experience of making a complaint are covered separately in Chapter 7. A relevant finding from the airport survey to the discussion on flight status information is that the majority of complaints (52 per cent) were about the provision of flight status information (Figure 19).

Airport survey analysis

Satisfaction with information about flight status

4.6 Figure 7 shows that when asked how satisfied passengers were about the information they received during disruption, 42 per cent said they were either satisfied or very satisfied. A similar proportion (41 per cent) said they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 7: How satisfied were you with the information provided during disruption on the status of your flight? (Q5)



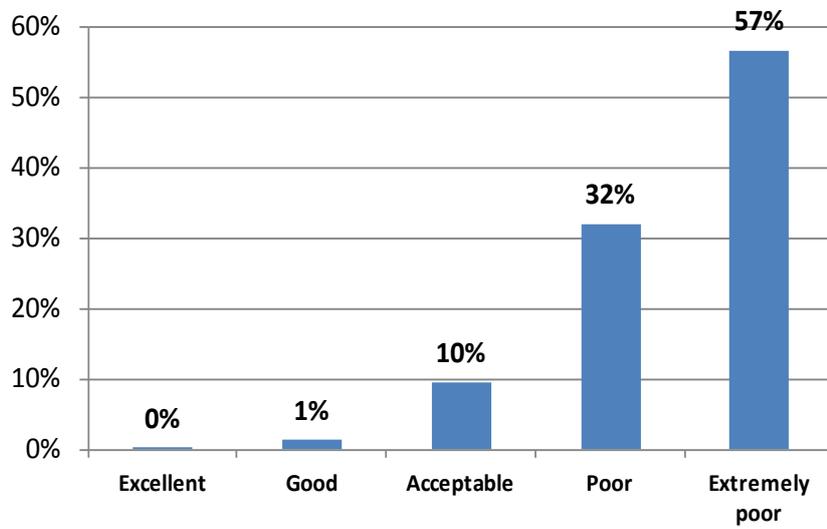
Note: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 726.

Online survey analysis

Satisfaction with information about flight status

4.7 Figure 9 shows that 89 per cent of delayed or cancelled passengers said the information provided by the airline was either poor or extremely poor, while just 1 per cent said that information provision was good.

Figure 8: How would you rate the information provided by your airline on the status of your flight? (Q9)



Note: Number of respondents: 765.

Chapter 5

How passengers were looked after

Discussion

- 5.1 Passengers whose flights have been disrupted are entitled to certain assistance from their airline under the DBRs. Depending on the extent of disruption, passengers should be provided with meals and refreshments, hotel accommodation (and transport between the airport and hotel) and the means to communicate (e.g. telephone calls, emails, etc.). Airlines must also provide passengers with information about their right to assistance, as well as their other rights under the DBRs.
- 5.2 The most concerning finding is that 40 per cent of respondents to the airport survey who waited three hours or more for their flight said they received no assistance. The vast majority of these passengers would have been entitled to assistance, which for delayed flights becomes due after two hours for short haul flights (up to 1,500km) and three hours for medium haul flights (1,500-3,500km). Delayed passengers on the longest flights (over 3,500km) must wait for four hours until assistance has to be provided.² However, all of these passengers should have at least been provided with information about their rights, as this is required after two hours, whatever the flight distance.
- 5.3 The question in the airport survey on what passengers were provided with during disruption was an open-ended question, and only the first response was recorded. It is therefore possible that respondents said they received more than one form of assistance, but only the first one they named was recorded. We intend to correct this for future surveys as it is important for us to understand whether passengers are receiving all of the assistance and information they are entitled to.
- 5.4 Results from the airport survey also appear to suggest that airlines are worse at providing food and drink to disrupted passengers when disruption is widespread (i.e. multiple flights or the whole airport is affected), presumably because their resources are spread much more thinly.

2 Passengers on cancelled flights or those denied boarding are entitled to assistance in reasonable relation to the waiting time.

- 5.5 The online survey looked specifically at the issue of whether passengers received information about their legal rights and the results give us significant cause for concern. Almost four in five respondents (78 per cent) said they didn't receive any information. Of the 22 per cent who said they did receive information, 5 per cent said it was provided verbally – this would not meet the requirement in the DBRs, which require a “written notice”.
- 5.6 Both surveys asked passengers how satisfied they were with how they were treated by the airline. However, the airport survey focused on satisfaction with how passengers were looked after during disruption, while the online survey looked at passengers' overall satisfaction with how they were treated by the airline. The airport survey found that around one in three passengers (34 per cent) were either fairly (17 per cent) or very (17 per cent) dissatisfied with how they were treated. However, the online survey found that 92 per cent were dissatisfied with how they were treated by the airline – one likely explanation for this is that respondents were probably completing the online survey around the same time as making a complaint to the CAA, meaning that they were thinking not only about the disruption experience but the subsequent experience of failing to resolve their complaint satisfactorily with the airline.

Airport survey analysis

What passengers received during disruption

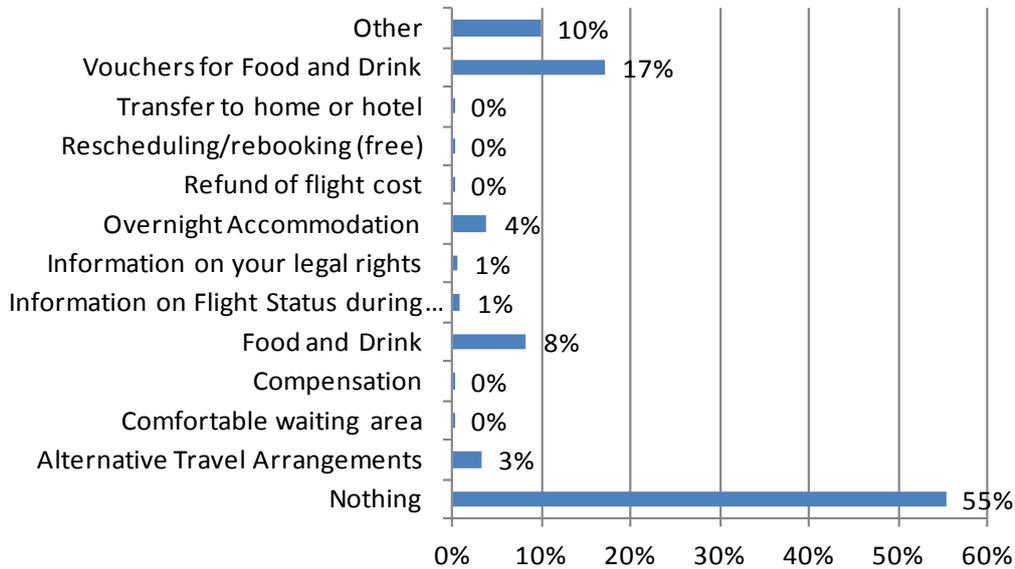
- 5.7 As Figure 10 shows, 55 per cent of disrupted passengers said that they received nothing during the disruption.³ 26 per cent said they were given food and drink (or vouchers for food and drink). Less than 1 per cent said that they received information about their legal rights. The proportion who said they received nothing was not affected by the extent of disruption (i.e. just one flight, a few flights, the whole airport), but the proportion receiving food and drink was higher for isolated instances of flight disruption than in situations where lots of flights were disrupted (28 per cent compared to 22 per cent).
- 5.8 Not all passengers that said they experienced disruption were in fact entitled for assistance under the DBRs. Figure 11 presents responses from those who experienced waiting times of three hours or more for their flight.⁴ 33 per cent of respondents who waited three hours or more said they did not receive anything,

3 However, some of this group wouldn't have been entitled to anything under the DBRs. If flights where the wait was less than two hours are excluded then the proportion claiming to have received nothing falls to 48%.

4 A wait of three hours would cover entitlements for delays on all but the longest flights. For flights over 3,500km, passengers on delayed flights must wait four hours until assistance is provided.

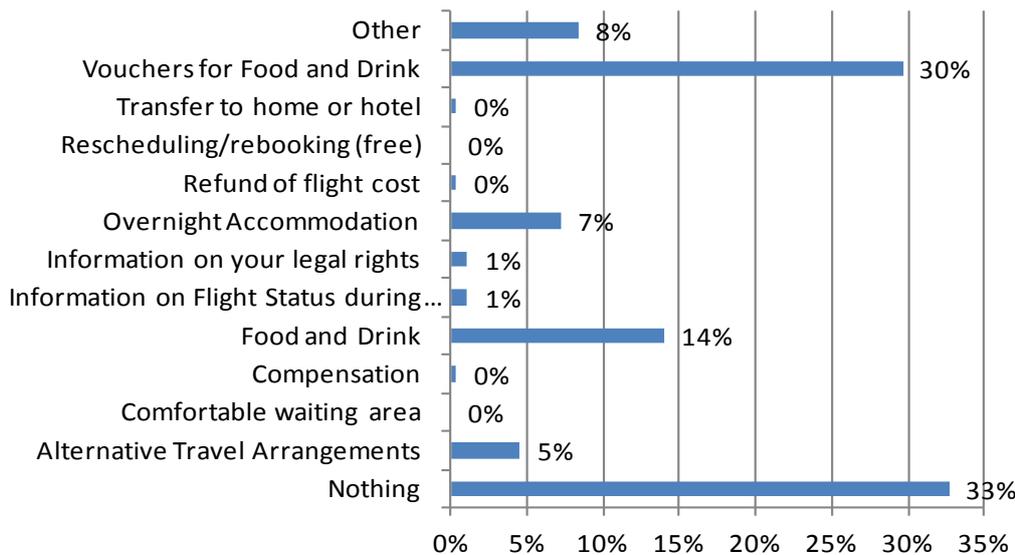
while 44 per cent said they received either food and drink or vouchers for food and drink.

Figure 9: What was provided to you during the time of disruption? (Q6)



Notes: Question asked of all passengers that experienced disruption. Only one answer allowed. It is possible that people received more than one thing, but only the first recorded. However, over half indicated they didn't receive anything. Number of respondents: 713.

Figure 10: What was provided to you during the time of disruption? (Q6, waiting time >3h)

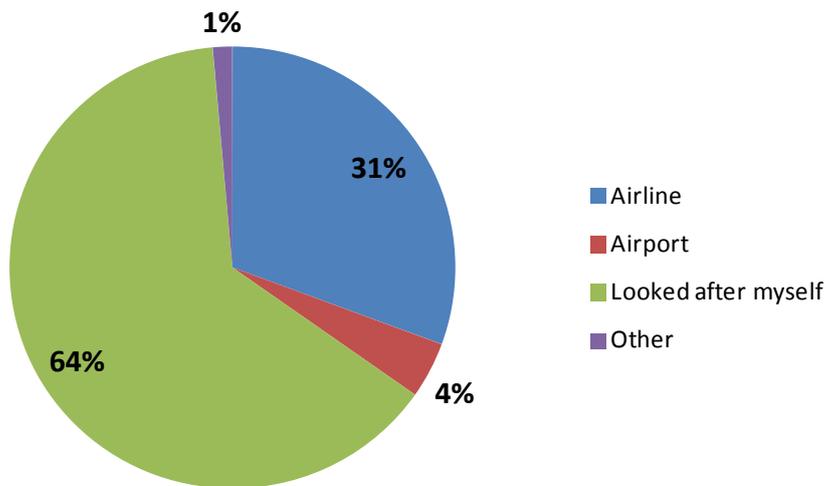


Notes: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption with **waiting times > 3h**. Only one answer allowed. Number of respondents: 263.

Who looked after passengers during disruption

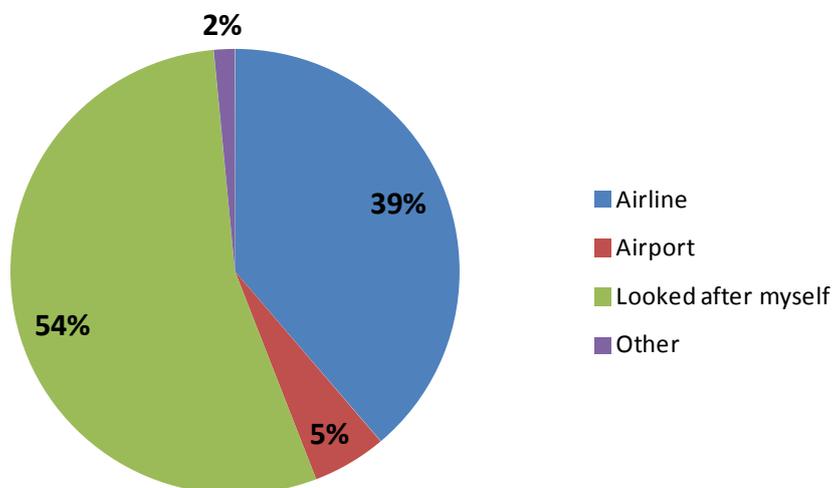
5.9 Figure 12 shows that nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) said they looked after themselves during disruption, while less than a third (31 per cent) said they were looked after by their airline. A small minority (under 5 per cent) said they were looked after by the airport. Figure 13 shows that the proportion of passengers who said they were looked after by their airline rose to 39 per cent, among respondents who waited more than three hours for their flight.

Figure 11: Who took responsibility for looking after you at the time? (Q7)



Notes: Question asked of all passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 708.

Figure 12: Who took responsibility for looking after you at the time? (Q7, waiting times >3h)

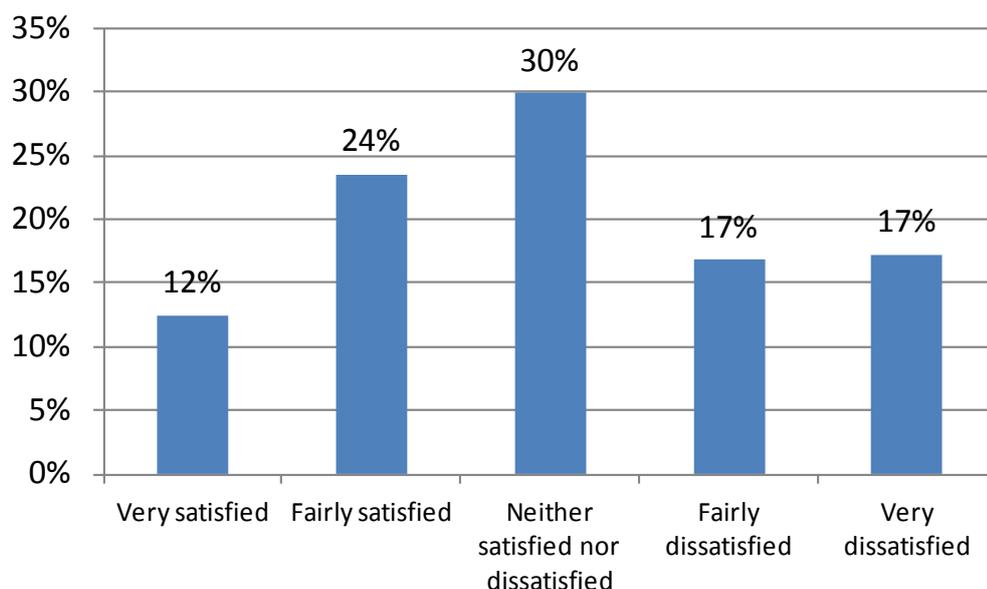


Notes: Question asked of passengers that experienced disruption with **waiting times > 3h**. Number of respondents: 263.

Satisfaction with how passengers were treated

5.10 34 per cent of disrupted passengers said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with how they were looked after. A slightly higher proportion (36 per cent) said they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were looked after (Figure 14).

Figure 13: How satisfied were you with how you were looked after during the disruption? (Q8)



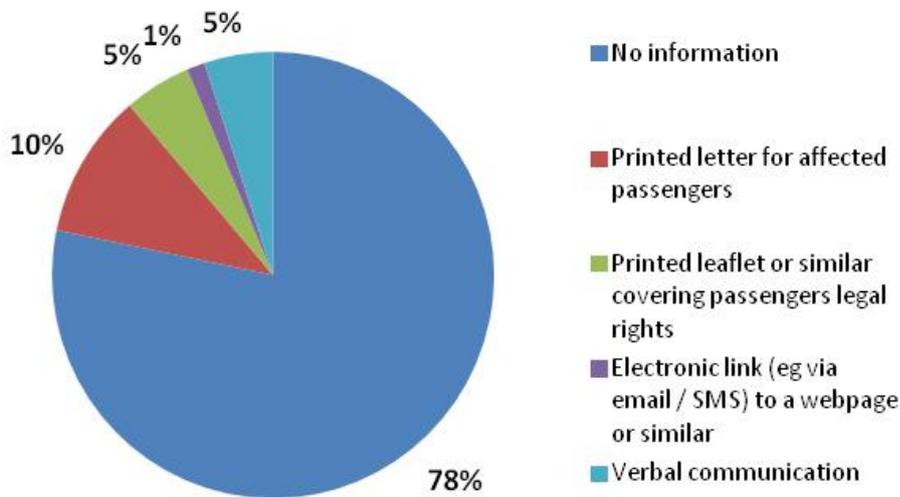
Question asked of all passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 649.

Online survey analysis

Whether passengers received information about their legal rights

5.11 Figure 15 shows that 78 per cent said they did not receive any information about their legal rights from their airline. Of those that said they did receive information, 5 per cent said it was provided verbally, while 17 per cent said they received printed or electronic information.

Figure 14: Did you receive information from your airline on your legal rights (for instance a leaflet or an electronic link to a webpage covering your rights)? (Q10)

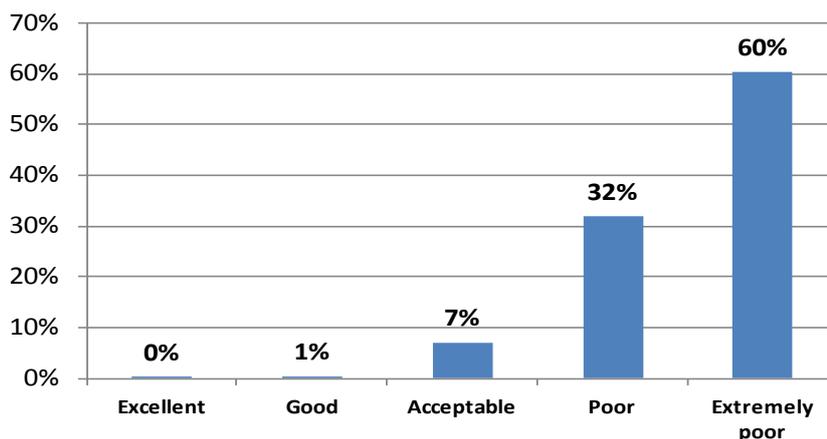


Note: Number of respondents: 753.

Satisfaction with how passengers were treated

5.12 Figure 16 shows that 92 per cent said that they were treated either poorly or extremely poorly by their airline.

Figure 15: Overall, how satisfied were you with how your airline treated you? (Q11)



Note: Number of respondents: 759.

Chapter 6

Consumer needs and awareness of rights

Discussion

- 6.1 The airport survey sought to understand whether the DBRs covered the things that passengers said would be most important to them if their flight was disrupted. We also used the survey to test passengers' understanding of their actual rights in the event of a delayed or cancelled flight.
- 6.2 On passengers' needs, we presented respondents with a list of choices of things that could be provided during disruption, but only allowed them to choose one. This was to avoid the risk that, if passengers were told about everything that could be provided to them, they might say everything is important to them. Instead, we were looking for an indication of what passengers considered the single most important thing that could be provided to be.
- 6.3 For both delayed and cancelled flights, the most important thing for passengers was information about the status of their flight (identified by 33 per cent for delayed flights and 44 per cent for cancelled flights). This is significant because the DBRs do not require airlines to provide flight status information – as discussed above, it may be assumed that it is simply in their interests to do so – yet the analysis in Chapter 4 suggests high levels of dissatisfaction with how this information is provided.
- 6.4 On passengers' knowledge of their rights, it is a concern that 17 per cent of passengers do not know what their rights are if they are delayed or cancelled. Also concerning is that one in 25 respondents (4 per cent) thought they have no rights if they are delayed. This is despite public information campaigns by the European Commission and significant recent media coverage of passenger rights issues, particularly compensation claims under the DBRs.

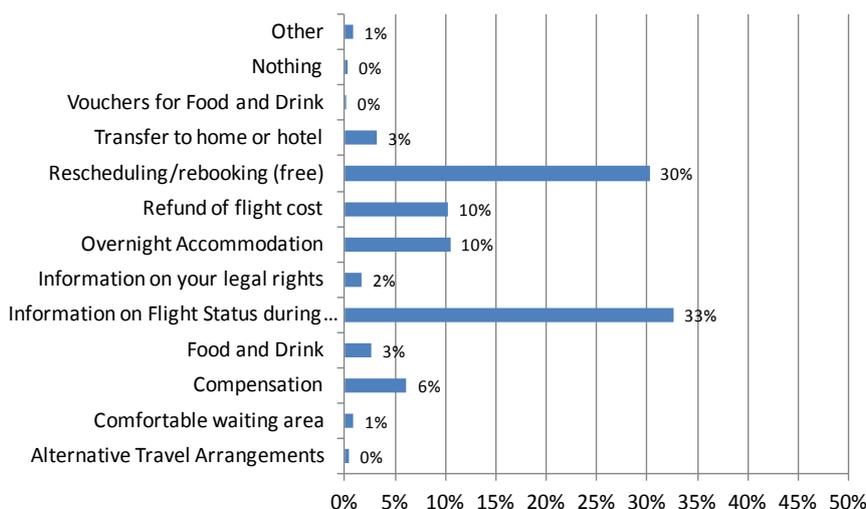
Airport survey analysis

What passengers think they should receive during disruption

- 6.5 All respondents — both those that said they experienced disruption and those that said they did not — were asked what would be most important to them if their flight was either delayed over three hours, or if it was cancelled. They were also asked about what they thought they would be entitled to if their flight was delayed over three hours, or if their flight was cancelled.

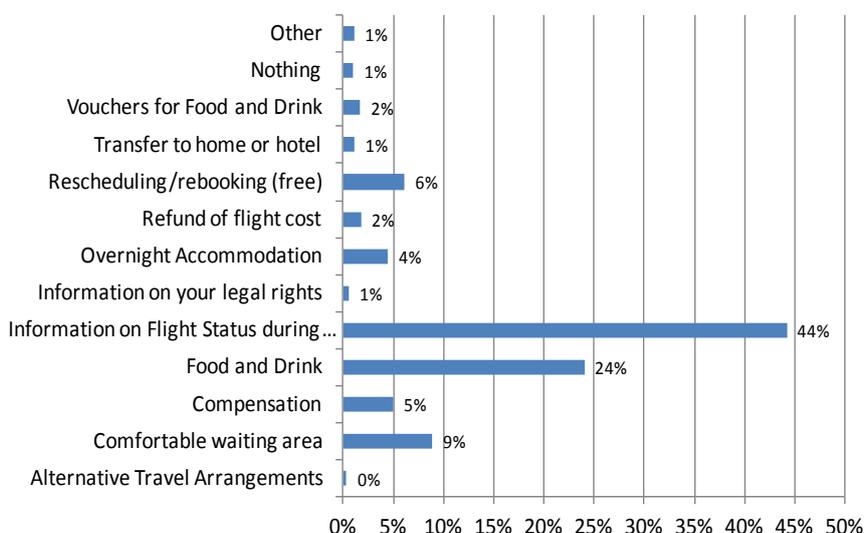
6.6 For delayed flights (Figure 23), flight status information (33 per cent of respondents) and the ability to reschedule or rebook flights (31 per cent) were identified as the most important things. Flight status information was considered to be even more important (44 per cent) for cancelled flights (Figure 24), followed by provision of food and drink (24 per cent).

Figure 16: What do you think would be the most important to you if you were on a flight which was over 3 hours late? (Q13a)



Notes: All Passengers interviewed were asked this question; not only those that were disrupted. Only one answer was allowed. Number of respondents: 2,467.

Figure 17: What do you think would be the most important to you if you were on a flight which was cancelled? (Q13b)

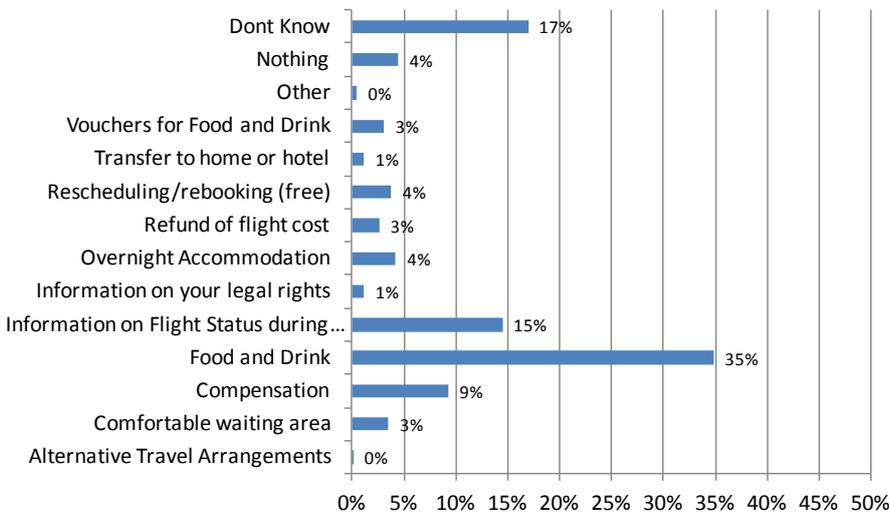


Notes: All Passengers interviewed were asked this question; not only those that were disrupted. Only one answer was allowed. Number of respondents: 2,454.

Whether passengers are aware of their rights

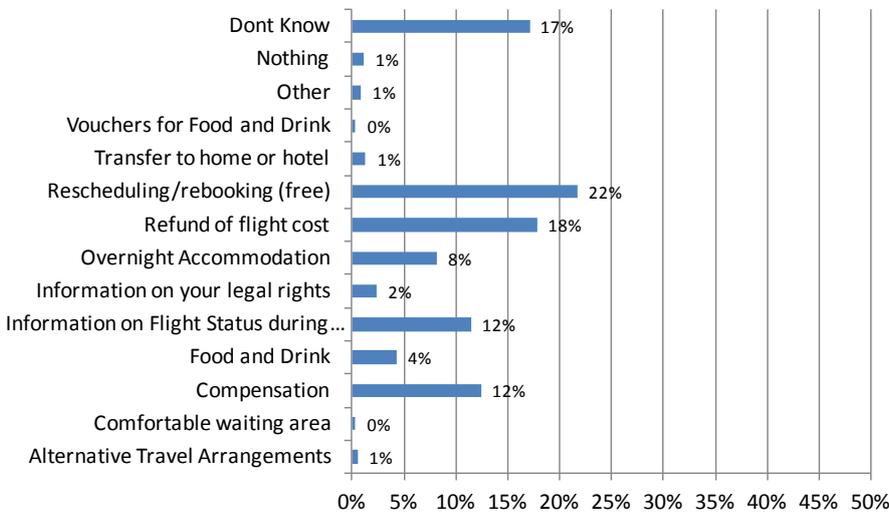
6.7 For both delayed (Figure 25) and cancelled (Figure 26) flights the majority of respondents identified at least one entitlement that could apply under the DBRs if their flight was disrupted. The proportion was slightly higher for cancellations (68 per cent) than delays (60 per cent). However, for both types of disruption, around one in five (17 per cent) said they did not know what they were entitled to.

Figure 18: What do you think you are entitled to if your flight is over 3 hours late? (Q14a)



Notes: All Passengers interviewed were asked this question; not only those that were disrupted. Only one answer was allowed. Number of respondents: 2,478.

Figure 19: What do you think you are entitled to if your flight is cancelled? (Q14b)



Notes: All Passengers interviewed were asked this question; not only those that were disrupted. Only one answer was allowed. Number of respondents: 2,467.

Online survey analysis

6.8 The online survey did not cover consumer needs and awareness of rights.

Chapter 7

Complaints

Discussion

- 7.1 Complaints handling matters to consumers. When things go wrong, they want the issue resolved as speedily as possible, with the minimum of fuss, time, effort and personal expense, and to be treated fairly. Effective complaints handling also supports proportionate and effective regulation: if consumers feel able to complain about the problems they have, and businesses handle those complaints fairly and professionally and improve their practices as a result, there should be less need for regulatory intervention in the market.
- 7.2 We therefore wanted to use the two surveys to understand more about whether disrupted passengers complained about their experience. However, this is a complex issue to investigate through quantitative research, as the approach may not allow the nuances of the situation to be captured adequately. For example:
- We shouldn't expect that every passenger experiencing disruption will complain – in fact, if passengers are looked after well by their airline during a stressful situation then they may even view the experience positively. Passenger rights play an important role in ensuring passengers' needs are met and reducing the prospect of complaints against the airline.
 - There may be a difference between a complaint and a claim for financial compensation. The DBRs give passengers a right to assistance during disruption, but they may also have a right to compensation (which must be claimed after the event). So, even if they were not dissatisfied with how they were looked after at the time, passengers may nonetheless make a claim to their airline for financial compensation if the circumstances of the disruption mean they are legally entitled to it.
 - Complicating things further, a claim for financial compensation by a consumer who was not dissatisfied with how they were looked after at the time may escalate into a complaint. This may be because the consumer felt the airline had not dealt with the complaint properly (e.g. refused to pay, took too long, poor communication, etc.).
- 7.3 We do not feel that the surveys provided enough information to draw any conclusions about the experience of complaining to an airline about disruption – although there are some interesting insights (from the airport survey in particular) so we have chosen to publish the findings. We have also learnt more about how future surveys might be designed to obtain better intelligence.

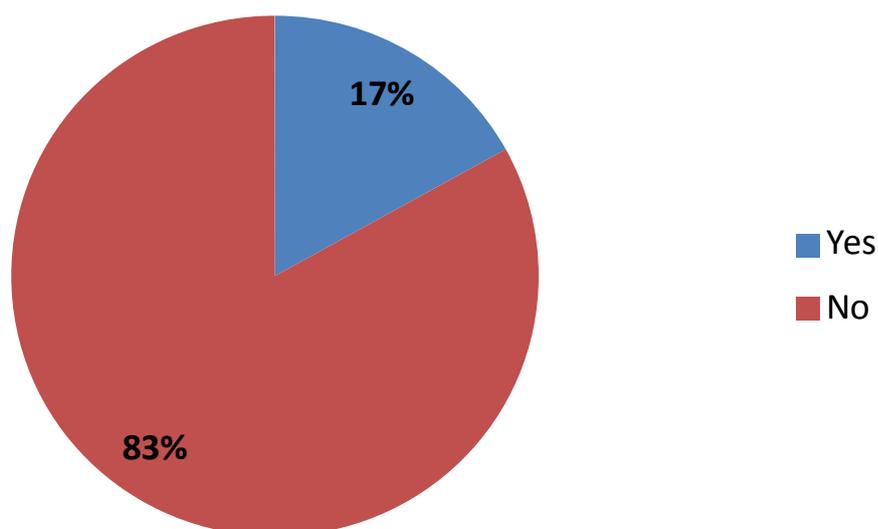
- 7.4 Most respondents (83 per cent) to the airport survey said they did not complain about the disruption they experienced – although, as discussed above, this needs careful interpretation. Of the 17 per cent that said they did complain, over half (52 per cent) said they complained about flight status information (Figure 19). The second largest category was “other” (25 per cent), with entitlements under the DBRs (e.g. information about rights, food and drink, re-routing, compensation, etc.) accounting for less than a quarter (23 per cent) of complaints.
- 7.5 Because information is an immediate need, it is possible that respondents may have been thinking about complaints made at the time of disruption and in person to airline or airport staff, rather than complaining after the event. If this was the case then the findings on satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint indicate that airlines need to improve the way they handle complaints during disruption: just one in five said they were not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Airport survey analysis

Whether passengers complained

- 7.6 Figure 17 shows that around 17 per cent of passengers that experienced disruption complained about their experience.

Figure 20: Did you complain? (Q9)

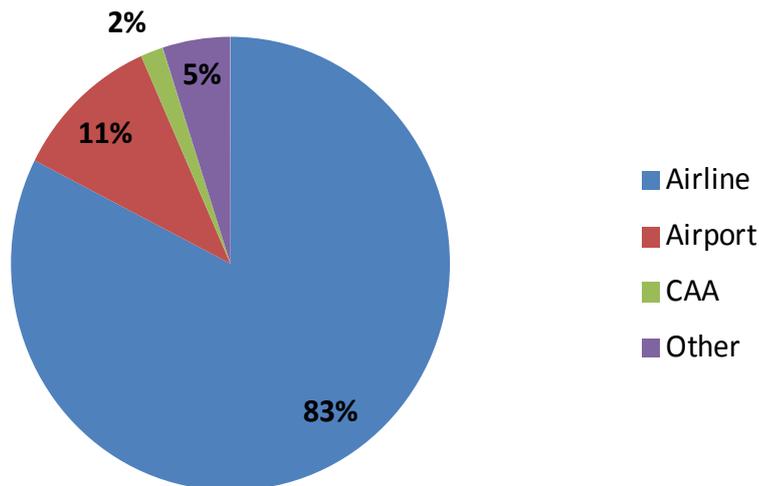


Question asked of all passengers that experienced disruption. Number of respondents: 731.

Who passengers complained to

7.7 As Figure 18 shows, the majority of respondents complained to the airline (83 per cent), with 11 per cent saying they complained to the airport and 2 per cent saying they complained to the CAA.

Figure 21: Who did you complain to? (Q10)

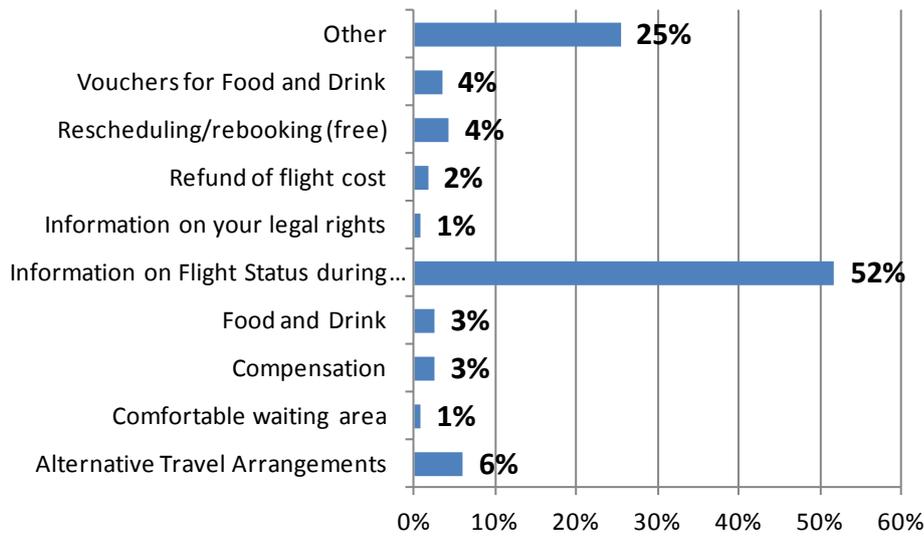


Notes: Question asked of all passengers that complained. Only one answer allowed. Number of respondents: 120.

What passengers complained about

7.8 Information on flight status was the most complained about issue – 52 per cent of those who has complained said they complained about this issue (Figure 19).

Figure 22: What did you complain about? (Q11)

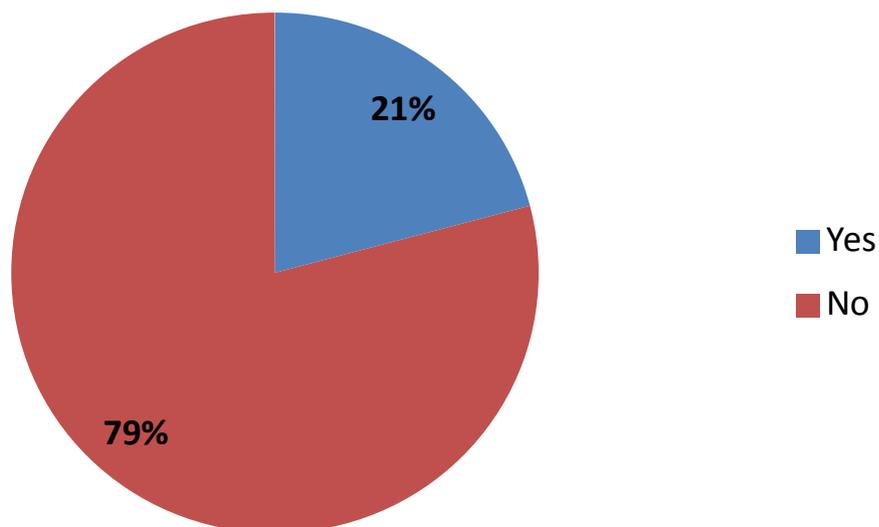


Notes: Question asked of all passengers that complained. Only one answer allowed. Number of respondents: 116.

Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint

7.9 79 per cent of those who complained said they were not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint (Figure 20).

Figure 23: Were you satisfied with the outcome of the complaint? (Q12)



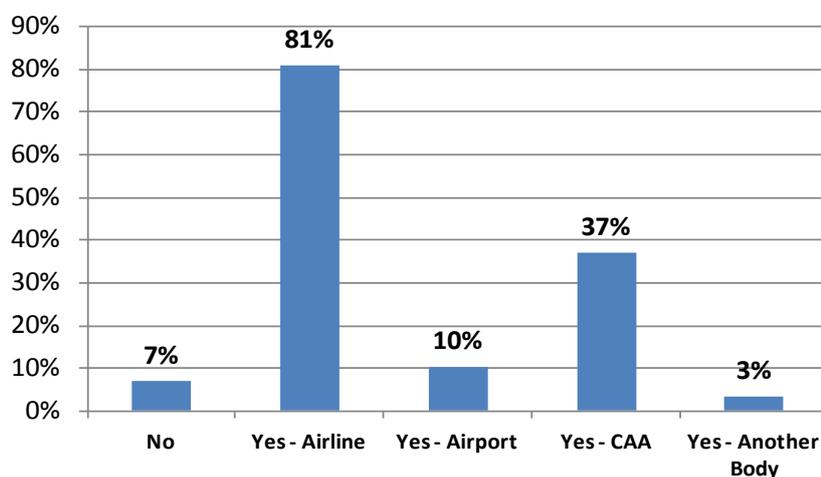
Notes: Question asked of all passengers that complained. Number of respondents: 115.

Online survey analysis

Whether passengers had complained and who to

7.10 Figure 21 shows that at the point they completed the survey, 81 per cent of respondents said they had complained to their airline and 37 per cent had complained to the CAA. 10 per cent said they had complained to an airport and 3 per cent said they had complained to another organisation, such as a consumer organisation. Only 7 per cent of respondents said they had not made any complaint at all. This was a multiple choice question, allowing for the possibility that some respondents would have complained to more than one organisation.

Figure 24: Who did you complain to about your experience? (Q12)



Notes: Multiple entities allowed (e.g. Airline & CAA). Number of respondents: 802.

	<p>Q4a. What was the reason for the disruption?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weather ▪ Problem with aircraft ▪ Inbound flight disrupted ▪ Strike or other airport/airline staff related delays ▪ Other (please specify) ▪ No information given ▪ Don't know/Can't remember 	
	<p>Q4b. What was the extent of the disruption at the airport?</p>	
	<p>Q5. How satisfied were you with the information provided during the disruption on the status of your flight?</p>	
	<p>Q6. What was provided to you during the time of disruption?</p>	
	<p>Q7. Who took responsibility for looking after you at the time?</p>	
	<p>Q8. How satisfied were you with how you were looked after during the disruption?</p>	
	<p>Q9. Did you complain?</p>	<p>Yes →Q10 No →Q13</p>
	<p>Q10. Who did you complain to?</p>	
	<p>Q11. What did you complain about?</p>	
	<p>Q12. Were you satisfied with the outcome of the complaint?</p>	<p>Yes No</p>

<p>Q13. What do you think would be most important to you if you were on a flight which was disrupted (i.e. over 3 hours late or cancelled)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information on flight status during disruption ▪ Information on legal rights ▪ Rescheduling/rebooking (free) ▪ Refund of flight cost ▪ Compensation ▪ Food and drink ▪ Overnight accommodation ▪ Comfortable waiting area ▪ Transfer to home or hotel ▪ Other (please specify) ▪ Nothing 	If flight is cancelled...
	If flight is delayed...
<p>Q14. What do you think you are entitled to if your flight is disrupted (i.e. over 3 hours late or cancelled)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information on flight status during disruption ▪ Information on legal rights ▪ Rescheduling/rebooking (free) ▪ Refund ▪ Compensation ▪ Food and drink ▪ Overnight accommodation ▪ Comfortable waiting area ▪ Transfer to home or hotel ▪ Other (please specify) ▪ Nothing 	If flight is cancelled...
	If flight is delayed...

CAA Passenger Survey add-on — show cards

 Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5

 Airport	1
Airline	2
I looked after myself	3
Other (please specify)	4

 Airport	1
Airline	2
Civil Aviation Authority	3
Other (please specify)	4

Appendix B

Online survey questionnaire

Introduction

The CAA is the National Enforcement Body for Regulation EC 261/2004, the Regulation covering passengers' rights in the case of denied boarding, cancellation, and long delay.

If you have been on a flight in the last three years that was cancelled or delayed for over 3 hours, the CAA is keen to hear how satisfied you were with the response of your airline, in particular how effective your airline was in rerouting you, whether you were given information at the time on the status of your flight, and whether you received information on your legal rights.

Questions

Q1) Your flight

- Departure airport: [Choose from: list of all major UK airports; other UK airport; EU airport; airport outside the EU]
- Arrival airport: [Choose from: list of all major UK airports; other UK airport; EU airport; airport outside the EU]
- Airline: [Choose from: dropdown list of all major airlines; other UK airline; other non-UK airline]
- Month of travel: [Choose from list of months, including 'Not known' at the bottom of the list]
- Year of travel: [Choose from list of years]

Q2) Was your flight cancelled or delayed

- Cancelled [Go to Question 3]
- Delayed [Go to Question 7]

Q3) When you heard that your flight was cancelled, were you at home, en route to the airport, or at the airport?

- At home, or in accommodation (e.g. hotel, etc)
- En route to the airport
- At the airport

- Q4) Were you rerouted or did you opt for a refund?**
- Rerouted [Go to Question 5]
 - Refund [Go to Question 9, and complete the survey from that point]
- Q5) Were you rerouted on the same airline, a different airline, or a different mode of transport (e.g. train)?**
- Same airline
 - Another airline
 - Another mode of transport
- Q6) How would you rate the suitability of the reroute provided by your airline?**
- Please rate your satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = extremely poor, 2 = poor, 3 = acceptable, 4 = good, 5 = excellent.
 - Free text box
 - [Go to Question 9, and complete the survey from that point]
- Q7) When you heard that your flight was delayed, were you at home, en route to the airport, or at the airport?**
- At home, or in accommodation (e.g. hotel, etc)
 - En route to the airport
 - At the airport
- Q8) Did you travel on the delayed flight or did you opt for a refund?**
- Travelled on the delayed flight [Go to Question 9, and complete the survey from that point]
 - Refund [Go to Question 9, and complete the survey from that point]
- Q9) How would you rate the information provided by your airline on the status of your flight?**
- Please rate your satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = extremely poor, 2 = poor, 3 = acceptable, 4 = good, 5 = excellent.
- Q10) Did you receive information from your airline on your legal rights (for instance a leaflet or an electronic link to a webpage covering your rights)**
- No information
 - Verbal communication, for instance from a representative of the airline at the airport
 - Electronic link (e.g. via email / SMS) to a webpage or similar

- Printed letter for affected passengers
- Printed leaflet or similar covering passengers' legal rights
- Other [Free text box]

Q11) Overall, how satisfied were you with how your airline treated you?

- Please rate your satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = extremely poor, 2 = poor, 3 = acceptable, 4 = good, 5 = excellent.

Q12) Did you complain to about your experience?

- Yes, to the airline
- Yes, to the airport
- Yes, to the Civil Aviation Authority
- Yes, to another body e.g. ABTA, CCNI, Which?, etc
- No

Q13) Free text box for any other comments.

Closing remark