

Accessible air travel: Airport performance report 2015/16

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Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to: James Fremantle, james.fremantle@caa.co.uk

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Executive summary

As the UK's specialist aviation regulator we believe passionately in making aviation better for those who choose to fly. This means using the powers and duties given to us by Parliament to help create positive outcomes that matter to people, including those with a disability or health condition for whom travelling by air is difficult.

Happily, millions of people with such conditions do already fly to and from the UK, either to go on holiday, visit friends and relatives, or to take a business trip. Indeed, in 2015 over 2.7 million disabled people and people with reduced mobility received assistance from a UK airport to help them take their trip.

This assistance is crucial for allowing disabled people and those with reduced mobility to travel by air. The right to receive such assistance is underpinned by Regulation EC 1107/2006, which obliges airports (and airlines) to provide certain forms of assistance for this group of travellers. The CAA is the body in the UK appointed to ensure that those that need this assistance receive it, and it is a strategic priority for the CAA that disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions, including non-visible conditions, know that a high standard of help and assistance is available at the airport and on board and that they are confident to fly.

Satisfaction with the quality of the assistance is generally high at UK airports. Soon to be published consumer research by the CAA found that more than 85% of those surveyed that had used the assistance service at their UK departure airport were satisfied with it, with 59% saying that they were very satisfied. A separate CAA survey at UK airports indicates that the satisfaction levels with the assistance on departure have increased by almost ten per cent since 2010. The success of the assistance service, and its importance for disabled people and those with mobility restrictions, is underlined by the fact that around 40% more travellers now use the assistance service than did so in 2010 (this compares to an increase of around twenty percent for all passengers over the same period)¹. UK airports can be rightly

¹ We hold passenger data from 2010 to 2015 (inbound and outbound) for 20 airports (85% of all passengers in 2015).

proud of their achievements in enabling more disabled people and those with mobility restrictions to fly than ever before.

Our experience is that such high standards are not always universal, however; and, because often disabled people and those with mobility restrictions are totally dependent on airport staff providing the appropriate assistance, when things do occasionally go wrong for disabled people and those with mobility restrictions, they can go badly wrong. Worries over their disability or health condition and how it will affect their flying experience are frequently cited by disabled people and those with mobility restrictions as a barrier to air travel. Further, the CAA's consumer research indicates that disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions fly much less frequently than the population as a whole.

In order to address these issues, and building on the good work already done by UK airports, we have been working with the industry over the past year to embed a regulatory performance framework which we believe will deliver a consistent and high quality service. It will also help the CAA to identify dips in performance so that we can act quickly to target our action on airports that are performing poorly.

This framework is underpinned by EU law, which obliges airports to set "quality standards" for the assistance provided to disabled people and those with mobility restrictions. The CAA has built on these obligations to create a comprehensive performance framework, under which UK airports are required to set, measure and report on their performance against a range of measures relevant to the assistance service. Transparency on performance is a key part of the framework and should help those travellers that need to use the service to understand what to expect when they travel by air, giving them confidence that assistance is available and that it is of a high standard. It will also enable the CAA and others to hold airports to account if the assistance provided does not meet acceptable levels. This report is the first of what we anticipate will be an annual review of the performance of the assistance service at each airport. It covers performance during the period April 1 2015 to March 31 2016.

In terms of the findings of this first review, we are pleased to say that performance over the year has been good overall and, in the case of some airports, very good. These airports have provided disabled people and those with mobility restrictions

with a consistently high standard of assistance, have demonstrated a commitment to consulting regularly with disability organisations on the design and management of the assistance service, and have published all the required information on their websites. We have categorised a number of airports as 'taking steps'. Some of these airports have experienced difficulties in embedding the performance framework over the year. Others have had dips in performance over the year but are now meeting the acceptable performance standards. We have made it clear to these airports that we will be a close eye on how things progress and that we expect their performance to continue to improve. Taking into account the airports where performance has been good or very good, and those that have taken steps of the year to improve their performance, these airports account for 97% of all travellers that use the assistance service at airports.

Only Edinburgh airport has performed poorly over the period. This is due principally to the poor performance of the previous assistance provider at the airport, Amey, and a lack of proper oversight by the airport of this performance. In March this year the airport took the decision to terminate the contract with Amey and appointed Omniserv, one of the specialist assistance service providers operating in the UK, as its new supplier. In appointing Omniserv, the airport also significantly increased the budget available for the assistance service to fund new equipment purchases and to increase staff resource levels so as to ensure that it can provide a consistent and high quality service. Further, in order to improve its oversight of the assistance service, the airport has created a new management role to support its commitment to the CAA to improve the service. We welcome the steps Edinburgh airport has taken and we will continue to monitor the airport's performance closely.

Overall we are pleased with how the performance framework has developed over the year. We have had to work closely with a number of airports to embed the framework, talking through issues and giving practical guidance where needed, and we are satisfied now that every airport understands what is required of it and the consequences for them if performance standards fall. The framework has proved to be effective in identifying issues at airports, and the requirements for oversight set out in the framework mean that airports are taking action without the need for the CAA to intervene, except in the most serious of cases. The requirement on each airport to make its performance public, combined with our annual report comparing

performance, is also helping to drive the right behaviours at airports, ensuring that delivering a high quality assistance service is a priority for each airport. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved for their hard work in helping us to establish the performance framework and making its first year a success.

Chapter 1

Introduction

- 1.1 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 also 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.
- 1.2 In relation to airports, the requirements of the Regulation deal mostly with the assistance that airports are required to provide to disabled people and people with reduced mobility 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.
- 1.3 To ensure disabled people and people with reduced mobility are confident that they can travel and that their assistance needs will be met, it is important that the assistance provided to them is of a consistently high quality. Given this, it is imperative that airports set appropriate quality standards for this assistance to ensure that it is delivered to a high standard.
- 1.4 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](#) for airports on the obligations under this framework was published in October 2014 and is at annex 1. 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 also with whom they have consulted and the outcomes of this consultation.

1.5 This report reviews the performance of 30 airports² over the financial year 2015/16 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 the CAA [guidance](#).) The information taken into account by the CAA includes:

- Monthly performance against 'waiting time' standards for the periods 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015 and 1 October 2015 to 31 March 2016.
- Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a CAA survey. (The CAA survey asks 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.)
- If applicable, responses to airports' own surveys.
- Information on the consultation undertaken with disability organisations, including the methods used for consultation, actions decided, and any follow up action taken.

² Under Regulation EC 1107/2006 only airports with more than 150,000 passengers per year must set quality standards.

Chapter 2

Airport rankings

Definition of rankings

Good

This means the following:

- The airport publishes on its website monthly information on its performance (by a specified time and in the correct format). Submission to the CAA of the same data.
- The airport has robust processes in place for overseeing how it measures its performance; or, where relevant, the airport has committed to strengthen this oversight.
- The airport consistently meets, or is close to meeting, monthly 'waiting time' performance targets.
- The airport pro-actively promotes the satisfaction survey of users of the service.
- The airport scores a rating of 'acceptable' or better in the satisfaction survey of users.
- The airport engages with disability organisations.

Very good

In addition to those set out for 'good', this means:

- The airport consistently exceeds, meets, or is very close to meeting, monthly 'waiting time' performance targets.
- The airport scores a rating of 'good' or better in the satisfaction survey of users.
- The airport engages very effectively with disability groups.

Taking steps

Over the course of the reporting year the airport has not met one or more of the criteria for a 'good' performance standard. However, the airport has taken steps during the year to improve its performance and is on track to deliver a 'good' performance standard.

Poor

Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to substantively meet the criteria for a 'good' performance standard. Further, the airport has not taken the necessary steps during the year to address in a timely way the failings and to improve its performance.

Ranking results

2.1 Based on the criteria above, the overall performance of each airport can be seen in the figure below.

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

Very good

- 2.2 Ten airports, accounting for 16% of people that use the airport assistance service, demonstrated a very good level of performance throughout the year. These airports have provided disabled people and those with mobility restrictions with a consistently high standard of assistance (as measured by the performance targets for providing timely assistance). Users of the assistance service at these airports have consistently rated the assistance on offer as either 'good' or 'excellent' across a range of aspects of the passenger journey. These airports have also demonstrated a commitment to consulting regularly with disability organisations and to ensuring that the views of these organisations are properly considered when designing and managing the assistance service.
- 2.3 The airports vary in size, suggesting that providing assistance to a large number of people is not a barrier to providing a high standard of service. For example, **Manchester** provided assistance to nearly 300,000 users in 2015. Not only did it provide assistance in a timely manner, it was regularly rated as excellent by users of the service, with courteousness and helpfulness of staff rating most highly. Manchester also conducts its own extensive survey of users of the service, allowing it to identify potential pinch points in the service and to act quickly to rectify them.
- 2.4 **Newcastle, Belfast City** and **Belfast International** also provided a high standard of assistance in 2015/16; as have, on a smaller scale, **London Southend, Southampton, Norwich, Humberside, Newquay Cornwall** and **City of Derry**.
- 2.5 In addition to providing a high quality service, each of these airports demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that local charities and disability organisations are closely involved in the development of the assistance service at the airport. Of particular note were Norwich and London Southend, who focussed on consultation with organisations representing non-physical disabilities over the year and, as a result, have already implemented a number of initiatives designed to improve the service for this group of passengers and their families and friends.

Good

- 2.6 All seven of these airports have met, or have consistently been very close to meeting, their monthly performance targets throughout the year. Users of the assistance service rate it as at least 'acceptable' on average, with many aspects regularly being rated as good or excellent. This group accounts for 35% of people that use the assistance service.
- 2.7 **London Gatwick** is in this category. Despite the logistical challenges of such a large operation, with the high numbers of service requests requiring significant staffing levels and large quantities of equipment, we are pleased to report that Gatwick has met, or has been very close to meeting, its 'waiting time' targets for the year and its service is regularly rated as good by users. We are also pleased to note that it is considering introducing further targets for the end to end passenger journey, to provide more accurate guidance to the passenger as to how long the overall journey through the airport should take once disembarked.
- 2.8 Other airports within this group include **Bristol, East Midlands, London Stansted** and **Glasgow**, which have consulted widely with a number of disability organisations in addition to consistently providing a good service. Of particular note are **Birmingham and Liverpool**, whose consultation of disability organisations has been far reaching and has resulted in a number of enhancements to the assistance service at these airports.

Taking steps

- 2.9 For many airports, meeting the Quality Standards framework has involved the implementation of a number of new processes and changing of others. Some of these airports have experienced problems embedding the framework, resulting in them submitting and publishing data either late or not in full. The CAA has worked closely throughout the year with these airports to help them embed the framework and over the year they have put in place processes to improve performance. This includes **London Heathrow, Cardiff, Exeter, London Luton** and **Sumburgh**.

2.10 By focussing on outputs and outcomes (i.e. indicators of quality of customer service functions), the performance framework is designed to allow individual airports to design their assistance service in a way that provides them with efficiencies, so long as it also benefits the users of the service. **London Heathrow**, due to the size and complexity of its operation, uses arrival hosts points within the airport where users of the service have to wait for further assistance once they have disembarked from the aircraft. In order to ensure that waiting times for assistance are not increased as a result, the airport has set standards for waiting times in these areas. We are pleased to report that the airport has consistently met, or come very close to meeting, its target. It has also performed well against other performance targets. However, it scores less highly in regard to the 'softer' metrics. Ratings are below average for a number of aspects of the assistance service in both the CAA survey and the airport's own satisfaction survey of users of the service. Further, significant numbers of comments from respondents to the surveys highlight customer service issues, such as a lack of understanding of the assistance needs of users by frontline staff. The size and complexities of the operation at Heathrow will always present the airport with inherent challenges. We know, however, that Heathrow is committed to taking steps to improve this area of its performance. We are pleased to note that Heathrow has already made good progress. It has introduced its own comprehensive surveying of users of its assistance service so it can be more focussed in terms of identifying trends and dealing with issues. It has also introduced a number of staffing initiatives. These include improved training for senior specialist staff, who will provide more tailored assistance to people with more complex needs and an increase in the numbers of "welcome hosts" at the airport, who have enhanced customer service training and will provide extra assurance and support for disabled people and those with reduced mobility at key points in the passenger journey. We welcome the steps it has taken so far and with further work planned, we are confident that the airport can improve its performance in this respect in the future.

- 2.11 **London Luton** also uses arrival host points. We requested that the airport put in place a suitable performance measurement system for the assistance provided during the arrivals part of airport journey. We were disappointed that no such system was put in place initially. However, the airport took steps to rectify this and a standard has been in place since January. Further, we note that the airport has consistently met the required the standard so far.
- 2.12 This group also includes airports that have missed a number of performance targets by significant margins early in the reporting year, but where measures were put in place to improve performance over the year. For example **Aberdeen**, which repeatedly missed its arrivals performance targets in the first six months of the reporting year, has shown significant improvement since and in the latter part of the year met, or was very close to meeting, its targets on a regular basis.
- 2.13 Airports which have met other performance targets, but who have yet to consult sufficiently with disability organisations, also fall into this category. It is disappointing that these airports do not list any consultative activity on their websites but we are pleased to report that all the airports have provided us with details of how they plan to meet this obligation in the near future. This includes **Bournemouth, Doncaster Sheffield, Glasgow Prestwick, Inverness, London City** and **Leeds Bradford**. We expect these airports to demonstrate progress on this in the coming months and to publicise progress on their websites.
- 2.14 This group accounts for 46% of of people that use the assistance service.

Poor

- 2.15 Only one airport is in this category – **Edinburgh** (which accounts for 3% of people that use the assistance service). This is due principally to the poor performance of the previous assistance provider at the airport, Amey, and a lack of proper oversight by the airport of this performance. We raised concerns with the airport over performance in November last year, and in March this year the airport took the decision to terminate the

contract with Amey and appointed Omniserv, one of the specialist assistance service providers operating in the UK, as its new supplier. In appointing Omniserv, the airport also significantly increased the budget available for the assistance service to fund new equipment purchases and to increase staff resource levels so as to ensure that it can provide a consistent and high quality service. Further, in order to improve its oversight of the assistance service, the airport has created a new management role to support its commitment to the CAA to improve the service. We welcome the steps Edinburgh airport has taken and we will continue to monitor the airport's performance closely.