

Airport accessibility report 2017/18

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Executive summary

In 2017 over 3 million requests were made for assistance at UK airports and requests for assistance are increasing at a rate of around double that of general passenger growth. The Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) most recent UK Aviation consumer survey¹ shows that, of recent travellers who received mobility assistance, 42% stated that they had requested the assistance for the first time (up from 34% in the previous survey). Further, 83% of assistance users were satisfied overall with the assistance that they have received, with between 54% saying that they were very satisfied. Good accessibility at airports does not just help the people who use the assistance, but also the family members and friends that they are travelling with. It is a positive story for the aviation industry that disabled people feel increasingly confident to use the assistance provided at UK airports.

However, there still is more to do to improve journeys for disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility. For example, although satisfaction with the assistance service is high, the survey shows that satisfaction with the overall travel experience is slightly lower for disabled people and those with reduced mobility (72% satisfied) than for passengers in general (79% satisfied), and that around half of disabled travellers and those with reduced mobility are worried about how things will go in the future. Our research further shows that, although small in relative terms, there is a minority of disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility that are very dissatisfied with how their journeys went. For example, one out of ten responses to the CAA's own 'accessibility survey'² rated assistance at UK airports as "very poor"; and the numerous comments from passengers suggest that, when things do go wrong, the impact on individuals is significant.

This is the third annual review of the performance of UK airports. Our airport performance framework is designed to encourage airports to provide a consistent and high quality assistance service by highlighting the good performers and the bad. We believe that it has been a success so far, generally driving up standards at many UK airports. For example, we are pleased to be able to report that we have classified 16 airports as 'very good' this year, up from six last year. Most notable in this group is Edinburgh Airport, which we classified as 'poor' only two years ago, and which has made significant progress in improving the assistance service that it provides. The group also includes Liverpool which, like Edinburgh has had an excellent year, providing a very good level of assistance to its disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility. Both airports contract Omniserv as their appointed service provider. We have classified a further ten airports as 'good'. In this group, we are pleased with the progress made by Heathrow, Exeter and East Midlands,

¹ www.caa.co.uk/cap1623

² Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a CAA survey.

which we classified as 'poor' in last year's report. The improvement of Heathrow has been significant, with the airport benefiting from making its assistance more seamless, with fewer breaks in the service and enhancing the disability equality training of its staff and those of its service provider, Omniserv.

Disappointingly we have classified London Gatwick, London Stansted, and Birmingham as 'needs improvement' and one airport, Manchester, as 'poor'. Manchester did not meet its performance targets regarding the timeliness of assisting people through the airport on arrival from inbound flights. Information provided to us shows that disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility took significantly longer to move through the airport than other passengers, with an unacceptable number of disabled and reduced mobility passengers waiting more than twenty minutes for assistance with, in some cases, passengers left waiting for assistance for more than an hour. This is not an acceptable situation for passengers that need to use the assistance at the airport. This has been acknowledged by Manchester and it has implemented a performance improvement plan to bring the quality of the assistance it provides into line with the expectations of users of the services and the CAA. We will monitor closely Manchester's performance and continue to hold it to account for improving its service.

London Gatwick, London Stansted, and Birmingham failed to provide us with sufficient information about the standard of service at their airports. We believe that the issues with data collection at these airports could arise at others in the future. Good data collection is imperative to understand how well an airport is treating passengers requiring assistance, to ensure that service levels are maintained and the airport will meet 'waiting time' targets under our performance framework.

As a result, we want all airports, and the service providers contracted to them, to prioritise making improvements to data collection. We know that solutions are available and we expect airports to invest in these solutions – for example, a number of companies offer facilities that allow for automatic data collection, which reduces the risk of human error. Better data collection would significantly improve the efficiency of staff and will also greatly improve the integrity of the data collected throughout each journey. We are pleased that both Birmingham and Gatwick airports have agreed to invest in this technology. We expect other large airports to follow as we believe that, if they do not, and they continue to rely on manual intervention, they will find it increasingly difficult to meet our performance standards.

Therefore, there is still work for airports and the CAA to do to ensure that the assistance provided is of a consistent and high quality across all UK airports. In order to play our part in this process of continuous improvement, we intend to review our performance framework later this year to ensure that it is appropriately designed to minimise the occasions when things go badly wrong and that it is delivering positive outcomes for *all* disabled passengers, not just the vast majority. We will talk to airports and service providers about the improvement that can be made to the framework. We will also talk to organisations that represent the interests of disabled people, as well as individuals

themselves, who have in the past provided invaluable feedback to support this process and, we hope, will continue to do so in the future.

Airlines also have an important part to play in making airports more accessible. Our performance report is produced against a backdrop of a highly competitive aviation sector that seeks to manage costs effectively. All passengers, including disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility, benefit from cheap fares and therefore it is important that the assistance provided by airports represents good value for money. However, given that the assistance service is fundamentally based on the availability of staff to assist passengers; the quality of their disability training and customer service skills; and the availability of specialist equipment, it is important that costs are not cut in a way that undermines the quality of the service.

In our discussions with airports it is not unusual for them to comment that airlines, which at most airports fund the assistance service through a separate identifiable charge levied on them by airports, and which is negotiated at the local airport level, are more focussed on cost saving than in ensuring a high quality assistance service. If this is happening it is not consistent with the brand values of major airlines. In December 2016, the CAA wrote to airports and airlines, encouraging airlines to put guidelines in place for their procurement teams and local managers to follow in negotiations with airports on the funding of the assistance service. To date, the CAA has seen no evidence that such guidelines have been developed and implemented. We intend to follow up on this issue as part of our work in relation to airlines, which is likely to become a greater focus for the CAA over the next 12 to 18 months.

Introduction

This is the third annual review of the accessibility of UK airports carried out by the CAA. This report covers the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. The results of this review are based on a framework set up by the CAA in 2014 and set out in guidance [CAP1228](#). We assess airport against three criteria; the amount of time that people wait to receive assistance both on departure and arrival; the level of satisfaction with the different aspects of the service; and the quality of the consultation with disability groups and charities, enabling those with a close interest in disability issues to hold airports to account. Background information to the framework is at Appendix A, and more information on the criteria we use to assess airports can be found at Appendix B.

Review of the year

Ranking results

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

Very good

Sixteen airports have been classified as 'very good'. These airports have provided an excellent service to disabled passengers and those with mobility restrictions. **Edinburgh** and **Liverpool** are in this category. Liverpool has provided an efficient, timely service to passengers throughout the year, with 88% of people rating their experience as excellent or good. Edinburgh has created and kept close ties with local disability groups, and has a regular 'Disability Forum'.

The common theme among airports classified as very good is that, against a backdrop of increasing numbers of people using assistance services, the staff at each of these airports have worked hard to ensure standards are maintained; that waiting times are kept short;

and that users of the assistance service are treated with dignity, care and attention. They have also all worked closely with local disability organisations or individuals so that they can better design their assistance to meet the needs of disabled passengers.

For the third year, **Norwich** and **Humberside** are classified as 'very good'. Of all the smaller airports, these two have led the way, demonstrating a consistently strong commitment to accessibility. Staff at both airports are passionate about seeking out ways to always improve the accessibility of their airports.

Good

We have classified ten airports as 'good'. In last year's report, we classified **Heathrow** as 'poor', stating that substantive issues existed with the quality of the assistance service provided at the airport. We are pleased to report that these issues have been, for the most part, rectified. Since last year's report, Heathrow has invested £23 million in the assistance service, covering new equipment, new technology and additional resources. The airport has also embarked on a programme of improvement by initiating greater operational oversight, which has allowed them to better monitor, audit and measure the assistance being delivered by their service provider, Omniserv. In addition, Heathrow has removed the regular breaks in the assistance service, particularly on arrival when people were left waiting in designated areas, that were previously common and had meant that some people were unduly delayed getting through the airport. The passenger journey on arrival is now much quicker and generally seamless from aircraft to final point. Resilience has also been greatly improved meaning the incidents of long delays have become fewer.

The airport has also carried out a comprehensive disability awareness and equality training programme for passenger facing staff at the airport and it has stepped up its system of oversight to ensure that any issues in the quality of the assistance service are identified and addressed in a timely manner. Perhaps the best indicator of the improvement made by Heathrow is its own satisfaction ratings. Last year it averaged 2.9, whilst this year it averaged 3.8³.

Heathrow has also set up the "Heathrow Access Advisory Group", which was established to help the airport improve its accessibility and bring a consumer perspective directly into the airport's decision-making and planning processes. The Group has already been instrumental in many of the enhancements the airport has made to its accessibility throughout the year, including helping Heathrow to design its disability equality training programmes for staff and improving signage throughout all its terminals. It also closely monitors service levels at the airport, providing an enhanced level of oversight over the

³ Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a survey carried out on behalf of Heathrow where users of the assistance service 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 across a number of areas of the passenger journey. Sample size = approximately 2500 passengers.

quality of assistance. It has provided the airport with expert advice throughout the year and is a good example of how a well-functioning advisory group can help to drive improvements in accessibility across all areas of an airport.

However, there is still work to do, and we are pleased to note that Heathrow has committed to trying to improve further next year and we look forward to working with them to help them to achieve it.

We have also been impressed by the progress made by **East Midlands**. Following last year's report, management at the airport have worked with us on an extensive improvement plan covering all aspects of the assistance service. We also carried out an accessibility audit of the airport, providing recommendations on how it can improve its service.

Although we believe the assistance provided by **London City** to be good in general, we advised it of our concerns about the equipment it uses to board disabled passengers onto aircraft, particularly the use of stair climbers which can be uncomfortable for passengers. We accept it has challenges, in particular a lack of space around parked aircraft and some aircraft not being suitable for some boarding equipment. The airport has implemented trials and continues to look for the right solution for passengers and we are pleased that it has now selected a solution which it expects to trial this year with an intention to purchase and roll out post successful trial.

Belfast International had a challenging summer, which put it at risk of failing to meet a number of performance targets, specifically 'waiting time' standards. However, following a CAA accessibility audit last November and subsequent discussions, there was an improved performance in the second half of the year.

Needs improvement

We have classified **London Stansted**, **Birmingham** and **London Gatwick** as 'needs improvement'. For all three airports, we have not received sufficient information about the standard of assistance at these airports to classify them as 'good' or better. In addition, for Stansted, we have concerns about potential delays to passengers' journeys on arrival from inbound flights.

We have classified Stansted as 'needs improvement' because of this lack of data gathering and because, when we audited the airport, we noted that it had introduced a 'transition' area where there was a break point in some passengers' journeys through the airport when arriving on inbound flights. [CAP1228](#) states that "if an airport uses 'holding' areas where passengers with reduced mobility have to wait for further assistance once disembarked from the aircraft, it should set targets for waiting times in these holding areas". We have not been able to come to a view about whether this break in service is unduly delaying passengers due to the lack of data. The airport has told us that 40% of people who use the assistance service use these areas but that the delays are short and that the fast tracking of disabled passengers at UK Border often allows time to be made

up. However, they have thus far failed to demonstrate this to us sufficiently. We are encouraged by the initial discussions with Stansted, who have been quick to act, first by immediately starting to record waiting times for each passenger using the transition area, and second by committing to working with us to introduce a standard.

Gatwick and Birmingham have also had issues with data gathering, which came to light last year, specifically that staff at their service provider, OCS, were not always manually recording how long they were taking to move people who had requested assistance through the airport. This means that we also do not have sufficient information on passenger journey times at the two airports. However, both airports have provided us with commitments that they will install new technology (Gatwick from October 2018 and Birmingham from April 2019). This technology will include the installation of i-beacons at various parts of the terminal, meaning data is automatically collected without the need for manual intervention.

In the meantime, they have both made a number of temporary improvements to their data collection capabilities. Both airports have explained to us how they will improve the robustness of the data by stepping up oversight of manual recording by staff, often on an individual basis. OCS, which is the service provider for Birmingham and Gatwick, has committed to learning from the issues that have arisen. It is reviewing the software in use and its aim for any replacement solution is to automate, where possible, the progress of the passenger journey through the airport. It believes that this automation will significantly improve the efficiency of its staff and will also greatly improve the integrity of the data collected throughout each journey.

Wilson James, who have recently been contracted by Gatwick to provide the assistance service, have teamed up with the IT solutions company, Ozion, as its system is being developed to allow airport and service provider staff to have real time information about where the passenger is. This allows staff to act immediately to prevent some of the bad experiences that can happen when something unexpected occurs, such as a delayed or cancelled flight. It also allows staff to have real time information about whether they are likely to miss 'waiting time' targets for each individual passenger.

Poor

This year we have classified **Manchester** as 'poor'. Through our monitoring of the airport's performance we identified issues in relation to long waiting times for assistance at the airport and issues with the recording and reporting of performance data. We can report that, having raised these issues with senior management at Manchester earlier in the reporting year, the airport has acted swiftly to address them. In relation to waiting times for assistance, the airport worked with its airlines to release extra funds to allow OCS, its service provider, to make more staff available at peak times. The airport has set up a 'Disability Engagement Forum', which is made up of organisations and groups representing disabled people, to help advise it on accessibility matters. In relation to oversight and reporting, the airport has committed to implementing a robust system of oversight of OCS so that any issues in the quality of the assistance service can be

identified early and addressed in a timely manner. This includes ensuring that staff accurately record performance against 'waiting time' targets. Although we welcome this commitment, our view is that, unless Manchester invests in iBeacon technology or contracts a service provider that does so, the airport will find it difficult to demonstrate that it is meeting 'waiting time' performance standards and therefore gain a 'good' rating. We note that work is well underway with the £1bn Manchester Airport Transformation Programme and we expect the airport to ensure that this delivers significant enhancements to their current facilities and major improvements to the customer experience.

The commitments from Manchester to improve the assistance service at the airport have been captured in the form of written undertakings to the CAA. Under these undertakings the airport has been required to produce a performance improvement plan to address the issues identified in this year's report. In developing this plan, the airport has consulted with its Disability Engagement Forum. The CAA will closely monitor the progress of Manchester airport in delivering against its performance improvement plan and in delivering a consistent and high quality assistance service more generally.

Appendix A

Background

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 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.

To ensure that 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. It is therefore imperative that 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 \(provided in CAP1228\)](#) for airports on the obligations under this framework was published in October 2014. The standards are

'hard' metrics relating to the amount of time that people wait to receive assistance both on departure and arrival

'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, by 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 30 airports⁴ over the financial year 2017/18 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 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Levels of satisfaction with the quality of the assistance service at each airport, gathered through a CAA survey or an airport's own 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.

⁴ Under Regulation EC 1107/2006 only airports with more than 150,000 passengers per year must set quality standards.

Appendix B

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.

Needs improvement

- Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to 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; or,
- Over the course of the reporting year the airport has failed to provide the CAA with the required information on its performance.

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.