

<i>Special Assistance Services at UK Airports</i>
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What this paper is about

This paper reminds delegates of the outcome of the CAA's 2016 performance monitoring results and provides an update on the issue of hidden disabilities. James Fremantle, Consumer Enforcement Manager, CAA is to give a presentation at the meeting on the CAA's work.

Points for discussion

- How ACCs and their airports have addressed the results from the performance monitoring in 2016?
- Are there any issues arising from the CAA's update that need to be pursued further/clarified with the CAA?
- Are there any issues of concern arising at individual airports?
- Is pre-notification still an issue?
- Are there any initiatives implemented at airports that could be promoted as best practice?
- What specific action have airports taken to assist passengers with hidden disabilities?
- Have airports taken any action to provide tailored hidden disabilities training for staff?

Points for possible action

Dependent on the discussion at the meeting and any issues arising from the CAA's presentation.

PRM Services Monitoring

1. At last year's meeting, delegates considered the Secretariat's paper and the CAA's update on its PRM service monitoring at UK airports. It was noted that the CAA's report on the 2016 monitoring results was expected to be published after the Annual Meeting. The Meeting agreed that the Secretariat would keep ACCs informed as to when the CAA had issued the results of the 2016 monitoring. This report was subsequently published in August 2017¹. The 2017 monitoring report is expected to be published in the summer.
2. The CAA ranked airports into three categories (very good, good and poor). Throughout the year the CAA had worked with airports throughout the year, providing support where appropriate and had kept relevant staff updated on how their airports were performing against quality standards framework.
3. In its introduction to the report that the CAA states that the number of disabled people and those with mobility restrictions using air travel has again increased, with over 3 million people requesting extra help at UK airports in 2016, up from 2.7 million the previous year, easily outstripping general passenger growth.
4. The CAA believes that the higher number of people using assistance is often a direct result of the high quality service generally found at UK airports and onboard UK originating aircraft. Their indicators consistently show satisfaction levels with the assistance service at well above 80%.
5. The CAA comments in the report that those passengers who requested assistance consistently rated their airport experience higher than that for passengers overall. However the CAA also notes that the focus from airports has sometimes been more on operational efficiency rather than customer service. The CAA states that they were encouraged by a recent general trend that is rebalancing this emphasis at many airports. The CAA's performance framework is designed "*to achieve a consistent and high quality assistance service, carried out by friendly, approachable and dedicated staff, who are able to understand the needs of the passengers using the service and who can provide help with a minimum of delay*". In the CAA's view, the vast majority of UK airports provide just this. The report stated that satisfaction ratings received through passenger surveys indicate this, but the report was also informed by positive feedback directly from passengers advising of the kindness, understanding and patience shown by individuals.
6. One of the key themes to emerge from the report was the need for airports to carry out effective and meaningful consultation with organisations and groups representing disabled people and those with reduced mobility. The CAA consider that regular consultation with such bodies not only helps to ensure that an airport operates a service that meets the needs of disabled people but also, through establishing a regular two-way dialogue, ensures that airports are held to account directly by users for the quality of the assistance.
7. A particular issue that has been previously highlighted by delegates is pre-notification. This is seen as a key area that impacts on the quality and efficiency of the service provided. Delegates have noted that there has been some recent improvement but considered that more needed to be done to inform and educate the traveller.
8. Passengers requiring special assistance have also advised that the international requirement that they should be boarded first is not being observed at all airports. In particular it is suggested that this requirement represents a challenge for low cost carriers who operate on a minimal turnaround basis.
9. It is understood that airports have responded to observations in the CAA's report by taking remedial action.
10. Delegates are invited to comment as to how airports are responding locally to the CAA's monitoring report.

Hidden Disabilities

11. Delegates will recall that the CAA introduced guidance (CAP 1411)² for airports in December 2016 which set out how UK airports should support people with hidden disabilities. The aim of the guidance is to help improve journeys for those people with conditions including dementia, autism, mental health

¹ https://publicapps.caa.co.uk/docs/33/CAP1577_Airport_Accessibility_Report_FINAL.pdf

² <http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/modalapplication.aspx?appid=11&mode=detail&id=7390>

problems, hearing loss and visual impairment. The CAA asked the UK's 30 largest UK airports to make the necessary improvements to their special assistance service as required by the guidance and aims to publish a report on the changes this summer. The CAA will give an update on this work at the Annual Meeting.

12. The CAA advised that the term “hidden disabilities” included but was not limited to, dementia, autism, learning disabilities, anxiety issues, mental health impairments and hearing loss. A significant proportion of the UK population is affected by such disabilities and conditions.

13. According to the relevant charities, 700,000 people live with autism, 1 million have learning disabilities, 850,000 have dementia and 11 million people have some sort of hearing loss. In addition, many more friends and families of people with hidden disabilities are also affected (for autism, this is an estimated 2.8 million people).

14. CAA passenger research suggests that many Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) with hidden disabilities lack the confidence to travel (around 30% of PRMs have a non-physical disability which makes air travel difficult). In addition the CAA has been contacted by charities and individuals with regard to problems that have occurred when people with such disabilities have travelled by air.

15. The CAA is also continuing its work on hidden disabilities across the industry and last November, it launched a consultation³ on its proposed guidance for airlines with a focus on information and communication prior to travel; boarding and on-board the aircraft; staff training; and priority following disruption and on the minimum compliance standards in relation to providing assistance to people with hidden disabilities. This consultation closed in February 2018. The CAA is expected to publish their response to the consultation in the near future.

16. As a result of the significant amount of consultation with both internal and external stakeholders, the CAA have sought to ensure that the requirements within the guidance are focused on providing practical benefit to passengers, airlines and airports (and service providers) particularly with reference to the section on additional information during the pre-notification process.

17. The CAA advised that it has met with a number of leading organisations representing the interests of people with hidden disabilities, including the National Autistic Society, the Alzheimer's Society, Epilepsy Action, Mental Health Working Group, RNIB and Action for Hearing Loss, as well as attending meetings of Prime Minister's Dementia Challenge Air Transport Task and Finish Dementia Group. In addition, the consultation has been informed by the CAA's Consumer Panel.

Comment

18. In previous discussions, delegates have acknowledged that hidden disabilities was a sensitive issue and that some passengers might not wish to declare a disability. It is understood that airports will always endeavour to ensure all passengers are assisted in the best way for their needs, whether they are visible or not. PRM assistance will vary from airport to airport depending upon local circumstance and the volume of passengers seeking assistance.

19. At some airports, there has been co-operation with local organisations to produce full access maps and guides to the airport linked to the special assistance section of the airport website. Airports have worked alongside specialist organisations; e.g The National Autistic Society, to create an autism awareness booklet and guide. This can be available in a video format, which can be displayed on the airport special assistance website.

20. Some airports have also created identity wristbands or lanyards. These help staff to identify those with autism and how to deal with the associated needs of the passenger.

21. With regard to full hidden disability training, a number of airports are taking action (including a guide in training for security and airport staff and considering how best to rollout the training to the airport community.) Some airports seek to ensure that all security staff are currently trained to identify the airport awareness wristband and the associated requirements to handle these passengers. This may involve developing current layouts in security enable passenger who require extra assistance to be guided to the

³ <http://www.caa.co.uk/News/Consultation--CAA-proposes-guidelines-for-airlines-on-improving-assistance-to-people-with-hidden-disabilities/>

front of the queuing systems. This helps by removing as best as possible stress and anxiety on special assistance passengers, while still ensures full security screening compliance. In addition to airport staff, some airports have encouraged handling agents to rollout hidden disability training to their staff and this is done on induction and on annual refresher training. In addition some airports are reviewing signage to ensure that all passengers can easily transit the airport and its facilities.

Discussion

22. Delegates are invited to comment on any particular issues at their airport

Frank Evans

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