

9 June 2022

Dear Colleague

Providing assistance to disabled and less mobile passengers

The CAA is responsible for the enforcement of Regulation EC 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled and reduced mobility passengers, as retained under UK law. The CAA has always taken its responsibility towards enforcing the legislation, and its general remit to support disabled and less mobile passengers, very seriously and it has long been a priority area for us. We know that airports and airlines share our commitment to helping to ensure fair access to air travel. In recent CAA reports we have highlighted the improvements made across UK airports, and pre-pandemic we had seen a lot of positive improvements in the service provided, while recognising that there was always scope for further improvement.

We recognise the efforts made by airports to ensure that, for the vast majority of passengers, assistance is continuing to be provided in a timely manner this summer, despite the current challenges. It is, however, disappointing that in recent months there has been a dip in performance at some airports. Our own reporting framework tells us that many more disabled and less mobile passengers have had to wait longer for assistance than usual. Although obviously a concern to us and frustrating for those passengers it has affected, we do understand the recruitment challenges for staff to provide the assistance service as part of the general recruitment challenge in aviation.

The information provided to us also indicates that as a percentage of total passengers travelling, a higher proportion of passengers at some airports are using the assistance service. It is not clear what is causing this increase in demand for the assistance service, but through working with airlines, airports should ensure that support offered meets the particular need of each passenger, both to ensure that the assistance is appropriate but also to make the general operation more effective. In addition, passengers' pre-notifying the requirement for the service should help ensure that a better service can be provided, particularly in a period of greater use of the service and resource challenges. We would encourage airlines, working with airports, to consider any further actions that can be taken to support encouraging more passengers to pre-notify. We will also consider what information we can provide to encourage passengers to pre-notify.

More effort is needed from all parties through local operational working groups to ensure that operational resilience is enhanced so that the current general disruption does not unduly impact assistance provision. It is important that effective assistance service provision is a key feature of further work all parties do to enhance resilience, and that there is a high degree of assurance about the assistance service over the rest of the Summer season.

The CAA's absolute focus here is on improving the assistance service and getting the whole industry back to, and beyond, the performance levels achieved before the pandemic. We want to support you in helping to achieve this and will continue to work closely with you to help deliver improved service and operational resilience in this area.

Notwithstanding the challenges noted above, the CAA is very concerned about the increase in reports that we have received of significant service failings, some of which have been highlighted through the media. These significant service failings are simply unacceptable. There have been several accounts of the impact these failings have had on individuals. Incidents include a passenger's wheelchair not being unloaded in a timely manner and passengers being disembarked hours after other passengers. These incidents are very distressing for the individual concerned. It is also self-evident that those with less mobility will find it more difficult to access support at airports when things go wrong (as compared to a passenger who might be able to seek out airport staff to assist with baggage delays, for example).

It is our view that, despite the current disruption, these incidents could have been avoided by better management of the assistance service function by airports and their contracted service providers and better co-ordination between all parties - airports, airlines, and contracted service providers - across the entire passenger journey. **We will be asking all airports with a high number of passengers using the assistance service, having worked with their airline and ground handling partners, to write to us by 21 June to set out what further assurance they have, and additional measures they have taken, to stop the significant service failures happening in the future.** We will continue to closely monitor the quality of service provided and if these significant service failures continue, we will consider whether further action is needed, including using enforcement powers.

I know that you will share our view, that the provision of the service to disabled and less mobile passengers is something that the industry must get right as quickly as possible. We must ensure that vulnerable passengers regain confidence so that, after two years of restrictions, they are able to enjoy the benefits of air travel. For this to be achieved, all parties must work together to deliver an improved performance throughout the rest of the summer and beyond.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Paul Smith
Group Director of Consumers & Markets