

Interim airport accessibility report (1 April to 31 October 2022)

CAP 2491

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Executive Summary

In 2014, the UK Civil Aviation Authority first published CAP1228¹ “Guidance on quality standards under Regulation EC 1107/2006” which presented a set of quality standards which airports should meet in providing assistance to disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility at airports. This also set out a methodology for rating airports in the provision of this service. Since this first publication, the CAA has published five annual airport accessibility reports setting out ratings against these quality standards for all airports which handled over 150,000 passengers per year.

Under normal circumstances, the CAA usually publishes these airport accessibility reports annually in the summer, after the end of the reporting year in March. However, given the significant challenges faced by the aviation industry in summer 2022, as air travel returned following the lifting of Covid travel restrictions, we have decided to publish an interim report for the period 1 April to 31 October. The intention of this interim publication is to highlight those airports who need to put in place further improvements to ensure that disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility receive the standard of service to which they are entitled as we move into 2023. Whilst we acknowledge that it has been a very challenging time for the aviation industry, at some airports there has been an unacceptable level of service provision and this needs to improve. We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight some airports which have provided a ‘good’ and ‘very good’ service to disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, despite the challenges faced. This interim report is limited to the largest 16 airports (by passenger numbers) and the rankings are based on the performance standards against which airports are measured regarding providing a timely assistance service only.

The aviation industry has faced unprecedented challenges since April this year and although airports have reported fewer passengers overall, the number of passengers requesting assistance has increased overall as a proportion of all passengers. This has impacted some airports more than others. For example, London Heathrow, Manchester and Birmingham reported 20% to 30% increases in most months for the proportion of passengers using the

¹ www.caa.co.uk/cap1228

assistance service compared to equivalent months in 2019. There have been other challenges for airports this summer and many airports struggled to recruit staff, including a lack of qualified drivers for ambulifts, buses and other essential equipment. This affected many airport operations but particularly impacted assistance services which are generally staff and equipment intensive airport services. This was compounded by staffing shortages in other airport operations, such as baggage handling and other operational issues such as poor airline on time performance. The later summer, and the autumn, months have seen these issues ease, which has helped many airports improve performance in the latter part of this reporting period.

In June we wrote to the airports included in this report to inform them that, although we acknowledged this summer had given the UK aviation industry unique challenges, the quality of assistance provided in April and May at some airports was unacceptable. We told the underperforming airports that we expected them to do more to work with airlines and the contracted service providers (that most airports use to provide the assistance service) to shore up the service so the significant service failings ceased and measures were taken to improve the quality of assistance throughout the rest of summer and into autumn. We required underperforming airports to develop action plans and set up operational improvement groups involving a variety of stakeholders from across the airport including service providers, airlines, and ground handlers which would then govern the implementation of measures within the action plans. Generally, these groups have been productive and helped bring about improved performance.

Due to the performance issues over the summer, we also required the airports to provide us with their performance data monthly so we could closely monitor their service. The CAA has sought to be proactive in supporting industry through these challenges. After consultation with airports and the disability community, the CAA produced guidance (CAP2374²) which encouraged airports to make assistance services more passenger focussed and effective. Our colleagues have also spent considerable time at UK airports this summer to better understand the challenges facing airports and offer advice and support as appropriate.

We have used a different rating system for this report in order to acknowledge the initial pressures airports were under and put more emphasis on whether airports could

² [Adapted assistance service under EC1107/2006 \(caa.co.uk\)](https://www.caa.co.uk/consultations-and-guidance/cap2374)

demonstrate progress as the general airport operational issues eased. We have provided rankings for airports for quarters one and two of the reporting period and also October as a standalone month. This enables us to consider which airports have performed consistently well, which have demonstrated significant improvements, and which have performed consistently poorly.

- Six airports have been ranked as ‘very good’ for all periods covered in this report.
- Two airports have been ranked as a mix of ‘very good’ and ‘good’.
- Seven airports have been ranked as a mix of ‘poor’, ‘needs improvement’ and either ‘good’ or ‘very good’ depending on the period assessed. These seven airports can be split in to two groups:
 - i. The first consists of Birmingham, London Gatwick, London Stansted and Manchester, which struggled over spring and early summer, with unacceptable amounts of passengers waiting for long periods for assistance on arrival. However, there have been significant improvements in later months.
 - ii. The second group consists of Bristol, Leeds Bradford and London Heathrow. These airports also struggled earlier in the year although not to the same extent, but unlike the other airports, they have not seen significant improvements in their quality of service.
- One airport, London Luton, has been ranked as ‘poor’. They have failed to reach performance targets and failed to improve over the seven months. In addition, London Luton has failed to record accurate and robust data on their performance.

This report will be followed up by a full year performance report which will include all airports handling over 150,000 passengers per year, to be published in summer 2023.

Review of airport performance

Airport rankings

Airport	Quarter 1 1 April to 30 June	Quarter 2 1 July to 30 September	October
Aberdeen	Green	Green	Green
Belfast International	Green	Green	Green
Birmingham	Red	Red	Light Green
Bristol	Red	Yellow	Yellow
East Midlands	Green	Green	Green
Edinburgh	Green	Green	Green
Glasgow	Green	Green	Green
Leeds Bradford	Red	Yellow	Yellow
Liverpool	Green	Green	Light Green
London City	Green	Green	Green
London Gatwick	Red	Yellow	Green
London Heathrow	Red	Yellow	Yellow
London Luton	Red	Red	Red
London Stansted	Red	Yellow	Green
Manchester	Red	Yellow	Light Green
Newcastle	Light Green	Green	Light Green

Good / very good

We have rated **Aberdeen, Belfast International, East Midlands, Edinburgh, Glasgow** and **London City** as 'very good' over all periods in this report. **Liverpool** performed to a 'very good' rating for quarters one and two and 'good' for October. **Newcastle** performed to a 'good' level in quarter one and October, and to a 'very good' level in quarter two.

These airports have consistently provided a high-quality assistance service, including in the peak month of September. This was an exceptional performance considering the operational challenges experienced by all airports over the summer and these airports, their service providers and the staff, should be proud of their achievements. For London City and Edinburgh this is despite their proportion of disabled and less mobile passengers using the assistance service increasing in some months by around 20% when compared to equivalent months in 2019.

We have been impressed particularly by the efforts made by East Midlands and Liverpool to enhance the customer service aspect of their assistance services, despite the challenges of the summer. We have noted how East Midlands has set up a messaging service for those passengers requesting assistance but who want to be able to use airport facilities independently. This allows these passengers to be in constant contact with airport staff so they can get support when needed. We noted how Liverpool has implemented a new process which allows assistance passengers to request support for only the parts of the passenger journey they need, for example boarding aircraft. Both are examples of the type of services we want airports to offer following publication of CAP2374.

Poor / needs improvement / good or very good (in October)

Four airports have been ranked as 'poor' in Q1 but subsequently showed improvement to 'good' or 'very good'.

Birmingham, London Gatwick, London Stansted and **Manchester** provided a 'poor' or 'needs improvement' level of performance in quarters one and two, with too many disabled and less mobile passengers waiting for unacceptably long periods for assistance on arrival. In addition, we noted that some departing passengers missed flights due to delays to the assistance service. However, following significant efforts to improve performance, for October London Stansted and London Gatwick met the targets for 'very good'. And, despite

having large increases in the demand for their assistance service compared to 2019 figures for all months, Manchester and Birmingham met 'good' targets.

We are pleased that these airports are rectifying their issues with efforts to recruit now progressing well and additional equipment added to the operations, which has led to improvement as the year progressed. We have also noted that these airports have engaged positively with the CAA and airlines, have drafted and implemented improvement plans and have set up operational improvement groups. We noted how Birmingham, following publication of CAP2374, has supported disabled and less mobile passengers in being more independent, so they can make better use of airport facilities and benefit from quicker journey times throughout the airport.

We urge these four airports to continue their hard work and maintain the standard of service shown in October. We also encourage London Gatwick to invest in beacon and location-based technology to record more robust data. It is the only major UK airport to not use this technology meaning future performance assessments risk being affected if issues with manual data recording are identified.

Poor / needs improvement

Three airports have been ranked as 'poor' in Q1 but subsequently showed improvement to 'needs improvement'.

London Heathrow's performance has been disappointing throughout the reporting period. It has consistently failed to meet arrival standards and, on occasion, very long delays were experienced by some passengers. Although the numbers of disabled and reduced mobility passengers delayed as a proportion of all passengers was not as large as at other airports, there has been little progress throughout the reporting period unlike with some other airports. We acknowledge that September and October were peak months for disabled and less mobile passengers travelling, and the airport was assisting an unprecedented increase in the proportion of disabled and less mobile passengers when comparing to 2019 data – in some months both the proportion and actual number of passengers requesting assistance were above pre-pandemic levels. But we note that other operational issues have since stabilised, and we expected performance to improve in quarter two and October.

In Terminal 3, London Heathrow uses handover points for arriving disabled and less mobile passengers because of infrastructure limitations requiring a transfer of passengers from one

piece of equipment to another. CAA guidance prohibits long waits at such handover points and we were disappointed to observe during our audits at the airport, and especially in quarter one, too many arriving passengers' journeys were being delayed at this handover point, sometimes for over an hour. We told the airport that the service to some passengers using Terminal 3 was unacceptable. We are pleased that London Heathrow has now reduced the general waiting times at this handover point for arriving passengers so that the passenger journey is more seamless.

London Heathrow's high number of transit passengers along with multiple terminals caused unique challenges for the assistance service, especially given the poor on time performance throughout aviation this summer. Although we acknowledge that this put additional pressure on the assistance service, an unacceptable number of disabled and less mobile passengers missed flights due to failings in the assistance service. We noted particularly poor performance at Terminal 5, where many passengers missed connecting flights. The closure of security channels at B and C gates at Terminal 5 and B gates at Terminal 2 has meant that all passengers have had to transfer through A Gates at both terminals. The extra journey time resulting from this has disproportionately impacted disabled and less mobile passengers because they are often asked to disembark the aircraft last. The closure of some bus connection routes also affected transfers to Terminal 3. However, we are pleased to note that London Heathrow has now altered the route at Terminal 3 for connecting disabled and less mobile passengers which helps ensure that fewer passengers miss their connecting flights. We are also pleased that Heathrow has committed to re-opening security at Terminal 5B and Terminal 2B gates by at least April 2022.

We are pleased that London Heathrow has recently introduced location-based beacon technology to help to ensure their data is accurately and robustly recorded and, following publication of CAP2374, has implemented new processes for passengers travelling with companions and those able to walk short distances, as well as promoting independence for departing passengers by using a pager system. These improvements should make the assistance service more passenger focussed. We also note the airport's commitment to the recruitment of more agents which will take it above pre-pandemic resource levels.

Bristol has not shown the same improvements over the seven months as other airports and their overall performance for pre booked disabled and less mobile passengers has fallen below our arrival standards. Bristol faced challenges with essential equipment being

unavailable over the summer causing their performance to suffer. Although there was slight improvement from quarter one to quarter two, there was little further improvement in October. However, over the second quarter and October, Bristol has shown commitment to making improvements and engaged positively with the CAA and airlines including implementing an improvement plan and setting up an operational improvement group.

Leeds Bradford has not met the standard for a good rating and too many disabled and less mobile arriving passengers have been unduly delayed. However, we noted that delays were generally not as long as at some other airports and there were no very long delays. In addition, as with some other airports, Leeds Bradford has seen a large increase the proportion of the number of disabled and less mobile passengers it assisted compared to 2019 which has added pressure to their assistance service.

Poor

We have classified **London Luton** as poor for every period. It is disappointing that the airport has consistently missed our arrival standards and shown very little progress through the period of the whole report. Too many passengers at the airport have been waiting for unacceptable amounts of time for assistance on arriving flights on too many occasions. This is despite the number of disabled and less mobile passengers being assisted proportionally remaining about the same as in 2019, unlike at some other airports. Further, we have concerns that some passengers have been additionally waiting for long periods at the Border area where the airport has a handover area and passengers are required to wait for a staff member to take them through to baggage reclaim. We acknowledge that London Luton has been affected by poor airline on time performance and issues with ground handlers which have compounded recruitment issues within the assistance service. But these challenges were not unique to this airport. In addition, performance data provided to the CAA by London Luton has not been collected in an accurate or robust manner. It is important that airports can demonstrate that the data we receive from them is robust. We are pleased to note that London Luton is implementing beacon technology which should improve the quality and robustness of data collection going forward.

ANNEX 1

Definition of rankings

Performance for the three time periods has been broken down into four categories which are defined in the following table –

Very good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 99% of all departing pre-notified³ disabled and less mobile passengers were provided with assistance within 30 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point. • At least 99% of all departing non-notified disabled and less mobile passengers were provided with assistance within 45 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point. • For at least 98% of arriving pre-notified disabled and less mobile passengers, assistance was available for each passenger within 20 minutes from on chocks. • For at least 98% of arriving non-notified disabled and less mobile passengers, assistance was available for each passenger within 45 minutes from on chocks. • The airport consistently met any continuous journey standards for arriving passengers individually agreed with the CAA. • The airport has robust processes in place for overseeing how it measures its performance.
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 99% of all departing pre-notified disabled and less mobile passengers were provided with assistance within 30 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point. • At least 99% of all departing non-notified disabled and less mobile passengers were provided with assistance within 45 minutes of making themselves known at a designated point. • For at least 97% of arriving pre-notified disabled and less mobile passengers, assistance was available for each passenger within 20 minutes from on chocks.

³ When an air carrier or its agent or a tour operator receives a notification of the need for assistance at least 48 hours before the published departure time for the flight, it shall transmit the information concerned at least 36 hours before the published departure time for the flight to the managing body of the airport. Any notification not received at all or received by the airport managing body less than 36 hours before the flight is a non-notified passenger.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For at least 97% of non-notified disabled and less mobile passengers, assistance was available for each passenger within 45 minutes from on chocks. • The airport consistently met any continuous journey standards for arriving passengers individually agreed with the CAA. • The airport has robust processes in place for overseeing how it measures its performance.
Needs improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The airport has failed to meet all the criteria for a good performance standard. • In line with the CAA's guidance over the summer to ensure that quality standards targets are not met at the expense of other passengers waiting for extremely long periods for assistance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at least 95% of pre-notified passengers have waited less than 30 minutes from on chocks for assistance on arrival; and - at least 98% of pre-notified passengers have waited less than 45 minutes from on chocks for assistance on arrival. • The airport has taken the necessary steps during the period to identify the issues with its assistance service and to agree a plan with the CAA to improve its performance.
Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The airport has failed to meet all the criteria for a needs improvement performance standard. • The airport has not taken the necessary steps during the period to identify the issues with its assistance service and to agree a plan with the CAA to improve its performance. • The airport has not implemented robust procedures for monitoring and recording performance.

ANNEX 2

Background

Regulation EC 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility as retained under UK law ('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 and less mobile passengers 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 and less mobile passengers are confident that they can travel, and 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 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 (CAP1228) for airports on the obligations under this framework was published in October 2014, updated in April 2019, and additional guidance to support CAP1228 was published in 2022 (CAP1228a). 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. Please note, this interim report only considers airport's performance data relating to the amount of time that passengers are

required to wait for assistance. The annual report covering the 2022/23 reporting period will take into account all measures.