

Consumer Panel minutes

12-4pm Thursday 23 January 2020

Attendees

Consumer Panel

Jenny Willott (JW) Panel Chair

Trisha McAuley (TM)
David Thomas (DT)
Walter Merricks (WM)
Jacqueline Minor (JM)
Claire Whyley (CW)
Carol Brennan (CB)
Helen Dolphin (HD)

Carol Cairns (CC) Panel secretariat

Invited guests

Tim Johnson (TJ)	CAA, CSP (Item 3)
Nic Stevenson (NS)	CAA, CSP (Item 4)
Helen Swanbury (HS)	CAA, CSP (Item 5)
Paul Smith (PS)	Group Director, Consumers & Markets (Observer)
Matt Buffey	Head of Consumer Protection (Observer)
Anne Lambert (AL)	Non-Executive, CAA Board (Observer)
Kee Kras (KS)	CSP (Observer)

Declaration of interests

None.

Chair's Update

JW opened the meeting and welcomed speakers and observers and gave an overview of the work of the Panel since the last meeting in October.

JW and CB attended a meeting with members of the CAA's Community Discussion Forum, DfT and ICCAN.

CB also attended the Aviation Consumer Survey working group and has had a preview of the headline results of the survey.

Harriet Gamper had a meeting with the Malaysian Aviation Commission to share information on setting up and running a consumer panel.

JW congratulated HD who has been appointed joint chair of the Heathrow Accessibility Action Group.

Members updates

CB pointed out that interest in carbon metrics and related consumer behaviour was being looked at for train travel by the Trainline company. NS said that the CAA is also challenging itself on this subject in relation to flying.

CW highlighted the lanyards scheme that some supermarkets have been developing following the success of similar schemes at UK airports to help consumers with hidden disabilities identify themselves. To promote inclusion for customers, the lanyards are a discreet sign that the wearer has a hidden disability and so could require additional assistance.

HD mentioned the recently closed CAA consultation on the issues faced by assistance dog users and the organisations that are required to help their carriage by air. She asked if CAA would be taking a lead on this work? MB reported that the Call for Evidence has now closed, and the CAA are reviewing responses. A summary of responses and details on next steps will be available in due course.

Strategic Update

TJ provided an overview on wider CAA activities with a focus on the new Government, Brexit, Thomas Cook claims, Flybe and organisational coherence.

New Government and Brexit

The same set of transport ministers continue in post under the new government. The Secretary of State has asked that a higher profile is given to issues impacting on general aviation given its wider importance to the sector. Other first term issues will include responding to the Committee on Climate Change report in spring, and a decision on the future of the Aviation Strategy following consultation on that response. Brexit is going ahead, pending Royal Assent. The focus will now be on what happens after December 2020 when we are no longer members of the EU. The CAA will be supporting the Government on what happens next, either following EASA rules or formulating a new rule book for the UK.

Thomas Cook

The CAA have to date paid out £320m in refunds and have closed 320,000 claims, 96-97% of claims received have been processed. The remaining 3-4% have required a great deal of manual intervention. The CAA did not meet the commitment to turn around claims in 60 days for all claims but on the positive side checks put in place meant that no fraudulent claims were paid. The CAA are still receiving around 100 claims a day, following the pattern seen in failures of all sizes. Customers of Thomas Cook have a year to submit their claim to the CAA.

Flybe

Flybe operations are different to Thomas Cook and when deciding what to do about Flybe, the Government had to consider a different factors. Regional airlines operate in a challenging market

and a number of airports are heavily dependent on Flybe. The airline operates intra-UK routes with little alternative forms of travel.

Organisational coherence

TJ and PS put forward a proposal concerning the future ownership and placing of the consumer panel secretariat and consumer policy work. It was proposed that a single team would manage this work based in the Consumer and Markets group (CMG.) PS stressed the value of consumer panels and said that he felt that CMG would be a good fit for the CAA Consumer Panel.

CB asked about work on the Aviation Strategy, PS said there was enthusiasm to push the consumer strategy forward within Government and the CAA and CB suggested that the panel could give support on this.

JM asked about progress on the Airline Insolvency Review considering recent events. TJ said that there was a team in the DfT preparing the required Bill, but no dates have been given yet.

CW asked if Government was supporting the whole Flybe airline rather than just the routes the airline operates? PS pointed out that a couple of routes were categorised as Public Service Routes (e.g. Newquay to Heathrow.) but that Government was seeking a solution to support the whole airline. Government is also carrying out a review of regional airports.

JW asked if an assessment has been carried out looking at the possibility of the Boeing 737 Max aircraft not being re-introduced? PS said that UK airlines are not heavily reliant on operating the Max.

TM asked if non-ATOL consumers received compensation in the Thomas Cook failure. PS said that 60% of Thomas Cook passengers were ATOL protected and that the remaining 40% were provided with repatriation at Governments request but are not entitled to a refund.

CAA Consumer Update

1. Aviation Consumer Survey

NS took the Panel through the results of Wave 8 of the UK Aviation Consumer Survey. The full report is due from ComRes on January 24th. Headline results included:

- A drop off in satisfaction over the handling of complaints.
- Satisfaction with the overall travel experience has increased to 84%.
- Recent passengers are least likely to have been satisfied with the amount of choice between airlines for their most recent flight. CW pointed out that this may have indicated choice of routes rather than choice of airline.
- A high level of awareness of special disability assistance amongst disabled UK adults. HD suggested that the survey had only posed this question to passengers with a disability, rather than asking all passengers.
- Satisfaction with Terms and Conditions – awareness has fallen except in the areas of rights to compensation for cancellations, delays and denied boarding and split ticketing. CW asked if the CAA were planning to do any more work on contract terms. MB said that the CAA have probably pushed as hard as they can in this area.

NS pointed out that in the last wave of the consumer survey passengers were asked ‘if you haven’t flown why? Concern about carbon emissions jumped by 5%. A question regarding consumer sentiment for the environment is being taken to the CAA Board to get their steer on this subject.

CW said that Heathrow have carried out research on consumer views on the environment (mainly related to expansion.)

The next tracker survey will be carried out in April 2020 and will report in August 2020.

2. Strategy refresh

An update and outline of the CAA Strategy was presented to the Board on the 22nd of January. This included a CAA vision and what we are trying to achieve. Proposed themes were outlined including protecting and empowering consumers and the public and consumer focussed activities of securing consumer rights, ensuring access to timely and accurate information and supporting government and delivering best outcomes for industry and passengers through Brexit. The strategy paper will be presented to the Board again in February and is due for publication in February/March.

The panel challenged whether the interests of consumers were made central enough by the revisions to the strategy, and what would be done to ensure that consumer issues cut across all the CAA's work. NS highlighted the intention to develop a separate but linked consumer strategy to sit alongside other area strategies and provide a vehicle to achieve these objectives.

When feeding into its work programme the panel were asked to consider the proposed themes and to consider the need to prioritise work given limited resource.

Consumer Information

JW introduced a paper detailing part of the Panel's current work programme setting out what data is currently available for aviation consumers and what more could be made available. The paper gave the following recommendations for the CAA:

- To take a leadership role in calling on industry to publish data in an open and reusable format
- To continue to publish regulatory data
- To improve the publication of complaints data

Regarding publishing complaints data JW said this should still be progressed and WM asked if the delay in completing this work was related to waiting for legal advice regarding CAA powers in this area? JW said the secretariat would update on this.

NS asked how to prioritise what parts of information we should be looking at and the capacity of CAA resource to work in this area.

CB suggested that the panel produce a blog as other panels have done. HD thought that a position paper would be more appropriate. It was agreed that both ideas were good but that the top priorities on what information could be used more effectively would be summarised in a position paper.

- Consumer Panel to develop a position paper

• Draft work programme

JW presented the Panel's work programme for the next two years. The programme is organised under three new themes; Building the evidence base, Driving better outcomes for passengers and Influencing future frameworks. The panel need to think about the balance between new projects and keeping a watching brief around BAU activity in the work programme such as the consumer tracker, vulnerable consumers and consumer complaints.

JW asked the panel if they were happy with the general shape of the work programme.

TM asked if the title 'Driving better outcomes for passengers should read Driving better outcomes for consumers. JW agreed to this change.

JM asked if the panel could be updated on the progress made on the vulnerability toolkit that the CAA were developing. A progress update will be included on the agenda of the next panel meeting. Regarding information, the focus should be on what information would be useful to consumers. Third party suppliers of information could be asked what information they have that would benefit consumers.

NS suggested that the panel's input on environmental information would be useful.

WM asked what we are trying to achieve in terms of environmental information. UK consumers can reduce emissions by choices they make, what are these choices and what information about type of planes etc. JW pointed out that the Secretariat had done some work on carbon calculators and discovered that there is currently no standardised method for measuring carbon emissions.

CB suggested that the outlines in the programme could be linked to consumer principles. CB will send notes to JW re this.

Next Steps JW and Secretariat will look at timelines and actions against the work programme and prepare for its launch which will include how to raise the profile of the panel internally.

Actions:

- Driving better outcomes for passengers to read 'Driving better outcomes for consumers' (Chapter 3, Work plans 2020-2022, p.8).
- Progress on the Vulnerability Toolkit to be put on the agenda of the next panel meeting.
- CB to send notes on linking outlines to consumer principles to JW.

A.O.B

JW thanked HS for her work for the Consumer Panel and presented her with flowers and chocolates on behalf of the Panel.