

# **Consumer Panel Minutes**

## **1100 – 1600, 9 January 2025**

### **Earhart Meeting Room Westferry/Teams**

#### **Attendees**

##### **Consumer Panel**

Jenny Willott (JW) Panel Chair  
David Thomas (DT) Panel Members  
Helen Dolphin (HD)  
Jacqueline Minor (JM)  
James Walker (JWa)  
Jennifer Genevieve (JG)  
Rick Hill (RH)  
Vaughan Williams (VW)  
Professor Chris Gill (CG)  
Deborah Persaud (DP)

Freya Whiteman (FW) Secretariat

##### **Invited Guests**

Sir Stephen Hillier (SH) (items 2 and 3)  
Rob Bishton (RB) (item 2 and 3)  
Selina Chadha (SC) (items 1 to 4)  
John Cottrill (JC) (items 1 to 9)  
Helen Swanbury (HS) (items 1 to 9)  
Lisa Norris (LN) (items 1 -4)  
Jonathan Spence (JS) (item 3)  
George Singleton, Amy Sams and James Rentoul (Savanta) (item 5)  
Rob Griggs (RG) (item 6)  
Nina Smith (NS) (item 7)

##### **Apologies**

Anna Bowles and Carol Brennan.

#### **Declaration of Interests and Minutes**

The register of interests, as circulated before the meeting, was taken as read and no further declarations were made. The Minutes of the July meeting were approved.

##### **1. Chair's Update**

JW welcomed members to the meeting. JW updated that this was sadly CB and HD's last Panel meeting, noting that Carol sends her apologies for not being able to attend. JW welcomed new Panel members Deborah Persaud (DP) and Professor Chris Gill (CG) whose terms officially start in April but were joining today's meeting as observers as part of their induction.

JW welcomed CAA colleagues, including SH and RB on Teams, and SC, HS, JC and FW in person, and noted that JS would be joining the Panel meeting later in the agenda. LN also joined part of the meeting on Teams as an observer.

JW noted that there would be another round of recruitment in the next few months to provide FW with Secretariat support.

No new interests were declared and no comments were raised by members on the October 2024 Panel meeting minutes.

JW set out the key developments since the last Panel meeting in October 2024, noting that it had been a particularly busy quarter:

- The Panel's two year work programme was published in November 2024. This was accompanied by an internal blog to highlight the work programme and the benefits of engaging with the Panel at an early stage. This was complemented by the launch of the Panel's new accessible intranet page as a 'one-stop shop' on the Panel and a 'lunch and learn' session with the Chair of the Sustainability Panel which AB facilitated.
- A recruitment campaign for CB and HD's positions was launched. 60 applications were received, and 11 candidates were shortlisted for interviews. It was a competitive process and JW noted that it's encouraging so many high-quality diverse applications were received, and congratulated DP and CG on their appointments.

JW updated on her meetings with CAA colleagues. This included meetings with JS, Tim Johnson and SH to discuss what more the CAA could do for consumers including the development of a Panel 'wish list' which is being discussed later on in the agenda. JW also met SC and AB on a monthly basis.

JW updated on her external meetings

- JW met the Chair of the Sustainability Panel in mid-December and had a good discussion on consumer environmental information and some other interesting developments. This includes Glasgow airport becoming the UK's first 'Connected Airport Living Lab', testing new technologies to enhance an inclusive innovation approach to passenger experience and to hit sustainability targets, and the Isambard AI supercomputer at Bristol University.
- JW and FW had an introductory meeting with Consumer Scotland, which JWa kindly facilitated. This included an interesting discussion on possible areas of collaboration.

## **2. CAA Chair and CEO Update**

JW welcomed SH and RB to the meeting who joined on Teams.

RB discussed the recent flight disruption to consumers (due to adverse weather) during the winter 2024 period, noting that it impacted aviation and other modes of transport.

RB noted the change to the Secretary of State (SoS) for Transport and that a strong consumer focus has been reflected in the CAA's proposed Scheme of Charges Consultation, including more resources in AB's team. At the same time, RB noted that the CAA was still focused on working with Government on the case for the CAA being given stronger consumer powers.

RB noted the Panel's 'wish list' was helpful. Both SH and RB agreed that the CAA valued the Panel's role as a trusted critical friend, noting that the CAA welcomed constructive challenge on how it could deliver more for consumers.

RH noted the latest results from the Aviation Consumer Survey (ACS), including ongoing dissatisfaction with complaints handling. It was noted that while this latest wave of the ACS showed some improvement, the levels of dissatisfaction in this area were still too high. This has been a longstanding issue in the ACS, which the Panel has been raising with the CAA for several years, though the Panel recognises that this is a difficult area to improve due to the CAA's limited powers.

SC added that the CAA's new consumer work would likely include a focus on improving overall compliance with Regulation 261, which in turn should help reduce complaints.

VW noted that one of the consequences of poor or absent responses to complaint handling in other sectors, is that consumers end up relying on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which can be costly. There was a discussion about the funding model of the CAA's Passenger Advice and Complaints Team (PACT) who deal with complaints for airlines who aren't signed up to ADR and that the CAA was still pursuing the option of mandatory ADR with the Government.

There was a discussion around winter resilience and disruption, and how to build ex-ante resilience into the aviation-wide ecosystem to reduce the impact of adverse weather events. JW added that the misalignment of incentives across aviation stakeholders was an important issue to address noting the Panel would be happy to support CAA work in this area.

SH and RB thanked CB and HD for their contributions to the Panel over the last six years.

### **3. Consumers & Markets Group (CMG) Update**

JS joined the meeting.

JW welcomed JS and handed over to SC and HS to provide a CMG update. SC noted that the CAA's new consumer work programme was contingent on additional resources materialising from the proposed Scheme of Charges consultation. SC added that this work was aligned with the Government's consumer focus and recommendations in the NATS Independent Report.

HS provided an update on the CAA's recent consumer work. This include the CAA's latest annual airports accessibility report; the new airlines accessibility framework; involvement in the Government's Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group; an industry event to address the issue of increased demand for special assistance services at airports; Regulation UK261/2004 compliance work; and ongoing ATOL compliance work.

HS updated on the CAA's work for the Heathrow price control process (H8), including a requirement for Heathrow airport to undertake consumer research to inform the approach to its business plan. On the NATS Independent Review, the CAA is planning to commission consumer research to understand consumer

attitudes towards communication during disruption. HS noted the Panel's new work programme and JW's attendance at CAA Board meetings.

There was a discussion about additional CAA resources in the area of consumer protection and what additional consumer powers the CAA should ask for, including considering the information gathering powers of other regulators and the approach other jurisdictions have adopted when requesting information. There was a further discussion about the overscheduling and last minute cancelling of flights and the respective roles of ACL, the Government and the CAA.

Overall, the Panel noted its support for the CAA's proposed consumer work programme and additional resources in this area. JW also queried whether the additional capacity required to meet the consumer focused recommendations in the NATS Independent Report had been factored into resource planning. SC noted that this had been considered as part of the new work programme.

The Panel also noted the CMA's competition concurrency review, which recommended that the Government should consider widening the CAA's competition jurisdiction so that it is aligned with its wider regulatory responsibilities.

#### **4. Aviation Consumer Survey Update**

JW welcomed Savanta colleagues to the Panel meeting.

Savanta provided an overview of the key findings from the latest wave of the ACS:

- Consumer attitudes in 2024
  - More consumers are flying than ever, with three-fifths of the UK public having flown in the last 12 months – the highest figure since the survey began (62% in October 2024). JM queried whether the ACS distinguishes between business and leisure travel. Savanta clarified that not at present, but this could be considered in the future.
  - Satisfaction with the overall travel experience on passengers' most recent flight has risen back to the level seen immediately before the pandemic. Satisfaction with complaint handling has improved significantly compared to last year, reversing the post pandemic decline in this area.
  - A new satisfaction metric introduced for this wave suggests that the UK public are satisfied with aviation in higher numbers than other modes of transport in the UK. Savanta noted that while it's difficult to compare across different modes, it is a useful indicator to measure over time. There was a discussion about possible reasons for this and differences between consumers' use of aviation and other forms of transport. Savanta added that this new metric also enables comparison across demographic groups compare to patterns seen in other industries around disability status, digital confidence, age and household income.
- Consumer priorities in 2024
  - Consumers do not perceive the industry's priorities to be aligned with their own, with reducing the cost of flying being the area where consumer priorities are least aligned with levels of trust in the industry's commitment. The 2<sup>nd</sup> most widespread priority area was finding solutions to minimise disruptions and delays.

- Disabled and less digitally confident passengers are significantly less satisfied with value for money than their counterparts, with the gap widening since last year.
- 3 in 10 consumers reported facing a hidden charge on their last flight, though experiencing this has a marked impact on satisfaction with value for money and the overall travel experience. Also, disabled passengers are significantly more likely to report hidden charges than non-disabled passengers, especially drop-off charges.
- Disruption negatively impacts satisfaction on that journey, but also has a cumulative negative impact when faced on multiple journeys.

Members asked a range of questions around the key findings and made suggestions for areas to be explored in future waves of the ACS. JW thanked Savanta colleagues for their update to the Panel.

## 5. Airlines UK Update

JW welcomed RG to the meeting. RG noted that the focus of his update would cover accessibility, Regulation UK261/2004, pricing transparency, disruptive passengers, sustainability, resilience and NATS, innovation and economic regulation.

- There has been a post-pandemic recovery, with strong demand exceeding pre-pandemic levels despite economic challenges. While it's positive that more people are flying, this raises issues around resilience and accessibility.
- RG noted Airlines UK's involvement in the Government's Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group. Airlines UK strongly supports this work and the approach taken by the Group to improve accessibility outcomes for consumers. This is in the context of greater demand for special assistance services, which is a challenge the aviation industry needs to address collectively. RG also noted the introduction of the CAA's new airline accessibility framework, noting that Airlines UK welcomes that the framework will be reviewed on a subject by subject basis.
- On Regulation UK 261/2004, RG noted that it should be clearer and easier to apply, particularly around the definition of 'extraordinary circumstances.' For example, Canada has a list of scenarios which could and could not be considered to be 'extraordinary circumstances.' RG noted that this could be a potential approach to consider in the UK.
- On pricing transparency, Airlines UK recently reviewed drip pricing as part of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCC Act) and RG noted that there were benefits for consumers being able to disaggregate costs and services, as long as this is transparent. JW noted that the Panel agreed there were benefits for consumers being able to choose what they want to pay for, but had concerns around specific areas which appear not to be mandatory, but in reality are. For example, if a disabled passenger requires an accompanying passenger, they have to pay for seats next to each other.
- On disruptive passengers, RG noted that this remains a serious issue particularly around the sale of alcohol in airports. Airlines UK are exploring a more co-ordinated approach across airlines within the scope of GDPR legislation.
- On sustainability, RG noted that the Sustainability Aviation Fuel (SAF) mandate is now in effect, taking airlines to 10% SAF by 2030. This is an important step, alongside other critical work including airspace modernisation. RG also noted the Government's 'Jet Zero Task Force' and Airlines UK's

support for the CAA's work on consumer environmental information if it helps address the proliferation of emissions calculators.

- On resilience, RG noted that unusually bad weather, the closure of airspace due to the war in Ukraine and a shortage of air traffic controllers have had a cumulative impact on resilience. Supply chain issues have also impacted engine production and maintenance schedules, in the context of increased demand beyond pre-pandemic levels.
- On innovation, Airlines UK had concerns about the potential implications of the EU Entry/Exit System which is now expected to be launched in 2025. RG also noted that the phased rollout of Next Generation Security Equipment across airports and the reinstatement of liquids rules creates communications challenges.
- On economic regulation, Airlines UK considers the CAA's economic regulation of Heathrow airport has not delivered value for money for customers. However, RG welcomed the CAA's proposals to boost resources in this area, as part of its Scheme of Charges Consultation.

JW thanked RG for his presentation

## **6. Aviation Security Human Factors Update**

JW welcomed NS to the Panel meeting.

NS explained that the term 'human factors' covers the wide area of human performance. Its overall aim is to support good performance and identify and mitigate human factors which impact performance, such as fatigue. In aviation security, most security decisions are made by humans, either alone or in combination with technology.

NS noted that in May 2024, the Aviation Security department was restructured to drive better outcomes for human factors, which led to the creation of a new division 'human performance and training.'

NS noted that there were several aviation security touchpoints with consumers, including interactions with security staff throughout the airport journey. New technology required more staff to operate, and the sector was struggling to recruit. For example, most airports have increased numbers of security scanners with a need for a male and female security officer in each lane. NS also noted that checkpoint design was an important consumer touchpoint, as where staff are positioned in queues and where equipment is placed can have a big impact on performance.

JW queried whether the rise of AI would lead to less human involvement in aviation security. NS noted that the technology wasn't there yet, and there was still a role for humans. Algorithms need to be certified, and the CAA was still considering the performance difference between algorithms and humans. Some algorithms were very good in some circumstances but not all, so at present the CAA was using a combined human and algorithm approach.

NS added that staff training was also important, especially awareness and understanding of passengers' medical equipment or those who were at risk of vulnerability. HD queried whether there was training to help security staff better

understand and respond to medical equipment such as stomas, as part of the security process. NS noted there is CAA guidance in this area, and staff are required to be trained on medical devices. This was part of a wider module on consumer vulnerability, with another on how to treat transgender passengers with respect and dignity.

NS noted that passenger complaints and transparency around mistakes can be a useful way for security staff to improve their performance and learn lessons as part of a just 'security culture.'

JW thanks NS for her presentation.

## **7. Members' Update**

JW asked members to update on their activities over the last quarter:

- HD outlined how the Government's Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group is progressing.
- On economic regulation, there was a workshop with the Panel on the CAA's approach to consumer research for H8. On NR28, JW noted that NERL had requested the Panel's views on their planned consumer research as part of the price control process. On Gatwick, JW confirmed that the Panel provided comments on the paper discussed at the January Board meeting.
- On innovation, members mentioned the Panel's input to the AI strategy, with the strategy's proposals on integrating the AI strategy with the consumer strategy sounding encouraging. The Panel has also been working with the CAA on a document that considers the interactions between the AI and Consumer Principles, which should be published shortly.
- On sustainability, members had met CAA colleagues on the Aviation Environmental Review in December, which prompted a discussion on how this interacts with the CAA's work on consumer environmental information. The Panel also had a separate workshop with CAA colleagues in October on consumer environmental information, and the Panel submitted a written response, which was well received.
- On the ATOL Claims Portal, members had undertaken user testing and participated in a interactive workshop where feedback was provided on making the new portal more consumer friendly and intuitive.
- Members also met with CAA colleagues to discuss the CAA's People Strategy and the CAA's annual strategic objectives for 25/26.

## **8. Consumer Panel Members' Reflections**

JW thanked CB and HD for sharing their reflections after serving 6 years on the Panel.

Members had a useful discussion around the Panel's key achievements and progress made during this time as well as lessons to learn and advice for the Panel and CAA going forwards.

JW and other members thanked CB and HD for their huge contributions to the Panel and wished them well in the future.

## **9. AOB**

JW thanked members for taking part. The meeting closed at 1600.