


Recommendations from the Independent Review of NERL's August 2023 Flight Planning System Failure: update on progress

CAP 3109

A large, abstract graphic in shades of blue and purple, featuring a curved, layered design that occupies the bottom half of the page.

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Civil Aviation Authority
Aviation House
Beehive Ring Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH6 0YR

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Foreword



Commercial aviation that is safe, secure and resilient is vital to underpin consumer confidence and trust, enhance the aviation sector, and drive economic growth.

On 28 August 2023, a major failure occurred in NATS' flight planning system which triggered a fail-safe mode in both the primary and backup systems, leading to a temporary halt in flight plan processing. The incident, which coincided with the busy late summer bank holiday, resulted in significant disruption across UK airspace. Over 700,000 passengers were affected, with over 1,600 flights cancelled, and costs across the sector of up to £100m.

The failure of the flight planning system on that day had significant repercussions, affecting numerous stakeholders and highlighting the critical importance of robust contingency planning and effective communication. The Independent Review, published in November 2024, offered 34 recommendations aimed at enhancing the resilience and reliability of NATS' systems and the wider aviation infrastructure.

When the Independent Review was published in November 2024, the CAA committed both to learning the lessons contained within for the benefit of passengers and the sector, and overseeing the industry's response to the review and its recommendations. We also committed to updating stakeholders on progress against these objectives with this report to Parliament.

This Progress Report, detailing the status of these recommendations as of April 2025, comes in the aftermath of another major aviation disruption – the power outage at Heathrow Airport caused by an off-airport fire on 21 March. We do not deal directly with that incident within this report, as both the fire and the consequences are already being independently reviewed.

I would like to thank the sector for its engagement with the issues laid out in the Independent Review and commitment to delivering its recommendations. We intend to publish a further report by the end of this year, when we expect all recommendations to

either be closed, fully built into ongoing multi-year programmes, or embedded in business as usual practices. We will also consider in that report whether the reviews of the more recent Heathrow incident tell us anything about the lessons learned from the NATS one.

Resilience is not just a technical requirement; it is fundamental to maintaining the trust and confidence of consumers. This report places our actions within the broader context of our ongoing commitment to safeguarding the interests of air passengers and ensuring the highest standards of service and safety. We cannot now, nor will we in future, draw a line under resilience and conclude we have done all we can. We will continue to implement and oversee the Independent Review's recommendations, and will report again, but even then, our commitment and work to deliver resilience, secure consumer trust, and support confidence and economic growth will not cease.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rob Bishton', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rob Bishton,

CAA Chief Executive

Executive Summary

Following a failure on 28 August 2023 of the flight planning system operated by National Air Traffic Services Ltd (NATS), the CAA commissioned an independent review into the technical issues that occurred on the day and how the aviation system as a whole subsequently managed the consequences for consumers (and others) of those technical issues.

In response to the request of the Secretary of State for Transport, this report details the progress on the recommendations from that review as at the end of April 2025.

The review's final report was published in November 2024, containing 34 recommendations for NATS, the CAA, airports and airlines, and Government. In total, 18 have been completed; work is well underway for the remaining 16 and is progressing to schedule and in line with wider dependencies.

NATS were the sole subject of 11 recommendations and subject of two recommendations with other parties. These were primarily focussed on changes to systems, processes and communication with stakeholders. NATS has completed all of its recommendations. The CAA is using its Aerodromes and ATM team to validate this fully.

The CAA were the sole subject of nine recommendations and subject of four recommendations with other parties. Two of these recommendations are complete. Work on the remaining eleven is progressing to schedule and in line with wider dependencies. The five related to safety regulation and expanding resources in the consumer team will be complete by the end of this year. In addition, the CAA continues to test and hold airlines to account for how they meet their obligations to consumers, for example during the recent disruption at Heathrow caused by a fire at a local substation. Of the remaining six, four are subject to the NATS price control timetable, which has not yet been set, and two will be addressed through seeking to establish an industry Code of Conduct.

Airports and airlines were the sole subject of five recommendations and subject of four recommendations with other parties. These were primarily focussed on support and communication with consumers, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances. Seven of these recommendations have now been completed. The CAA will use its enlarged compliance programme to validate this, alongside reviews of subsequent incidents, including the Heathrow power outage in March 2025. The remaining two could be addressed during 2026 through the establishment of an industry Code of Conduct.

There were five recommendations that were solely focused on the Government and one combined with other parties. The Government is actively considering these recommendations, but as they require primary legislation, they are subject to the parliamentary timetable. The Government remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that air passengers receive robust and effective protections and will seek to introduce

reforms at the earliest opportunity to provide the highest level of protection for air travellers.

A further progress report will be produced by the CAA before the end of 2025.

Chapter 1

Background and introduction

Background

- 1.1 Following a failure on 28 August 2023 of the flight planning system operated by National Air Traffic Services Lrd (NATS), the CAA commissioned an independent review into the technical issues that occurred on the day and how the aviation system as a whole subsequently managed the consequences for consumers (and others) of those technical issues.
- 1.2 The review's final report¹ (hereafter referred to as "the NIR Report") was published in November 2024, containing 34 recommendations for NATS², the CAA, Government, airports and airlines.
- 1.3 The then Secretary of State for Transport, in a written statement to Parliament, welcomed the NIR Report and said "Air passenger rights are a priority for my department, and we will look to introduce reforms when we can to provide air travellers with the highest level of protection possible."
- 1.4 The Secretary of State also asked the CAA to take responsibility for monitoring delivery against the Report's recommendations and to provide an update on progress six months after the NIR Report's publication, in May 2025. This report sets out the status of the implementation of the recommendations at the end of April 2025.

Introduction

- 1.5 Alongside the publication of the NIR Report, the CAA wrote to NATS, and, by passenger volume, the top 29 UK airports and the top 18 airlines serving the UK, highlighting the NIR Report's recommendations that were relevant to them and asking that they provide the CAA with details of how they intended to implement those recommendations. The responses to this letter are summarised in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.4 below and in the appendix.

¹ [CAP2993: Independent Review of NATS \(En Route\) Plc's Flight Planning System Failure on 28 August 2023 – Final Report | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

² The NIR Report's recommendations referenced 'NERL' rather than 'NATS'. NERL (NATS En Route plc) is the subsidiary of NATS which operated the system that was affected in the August 2023 incident, and is economically regulated by the CAA. For the purposes of this report, we shall use NATS throughout.

- 1.6 A further progress report will be produced by the CAA before the end of 2025, by which time most of the recommendations will be expected to have been assessed and conclusions drawn.
- 1.7 The remainder of this report is structured by the entity for which the recommendations were addressed. Some recommendations were addressed to multiple entities in which case, for ease of reading, the entries have been duplicated in all relevant chapters.
- Chapter 2 considers recommendations for NATS
 - Chapter 3 considers recommendations for the CAA
 - Chapter 4 considers recommendations for airports and airlines
 - Chapter 5 considers recommendations for Government

Chapter 2

Recommendations for NATS

Overview

- 2.1 NATS was the sole subject of 11 recommendations from the NIR Report, and was one of a number of subjects for a further two recommendations (R7 and R8).
- 2.2 Following the incident in August 2023, NATS set up its own review of what had happened to cause the system failure and how the subsequent events were handled. The preliminary report³ was published in September 2023, with the final report⁴ published alongside the NIR Report in November 2024. In its review, NATS identified five major findings, five minor findings, and 10 further opportunities for improvement in its systems and processes and has been implementing these changes.
- 2.3 NATS considers that it has completed all the recommendations for it from the NIR Report and has submitted evidence to the CAA for our validation. The CAA is still considering this evidence and expects to sign off the NATS recommendations within the next few months.

Validation process

- 2.4 NATS has provided the CAA with evidence to review for each of its recommendations. This evidence is at the same level as that which would be provided for the closure of a safety finding following a CAA audit. The CAA's Aerodromes and ATM team are reviewing this evidence to judge whether it represents a satisfactory implementation of the recommendation.
- 2.5 The timescales for the CAA validation described below are set so as to include any further work which NATS needs to do before the recommendation is completed. If this is not the case, then we would expect completion to occur well within the milestone date.

³ [CAP2582: NATS \(En Route\) Plc Major Incident Preliminary Report | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

⁴ [CAP2993C: NATS Major Incident Investigation Final Report | UK Civil Aviation Authority](#)

Milestones and progress for each recommendation

ToR #1 Causes and Prevention

R1: NERL should review in detail its contingency arrangements for significant disruption to ensure that maximum airspace capacity continues to be available without the need for flight restrictions for as long as possible, and if restrictions are required, that they are kept to a minimum

2.6 NATS considers it has met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own investigation into the August 2023 incident, including a review of its systems and the appointment of a new role of Traffic Volume Manager. It provided the CAA with evidence of its progress in **March 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R2: NERL should reconsider its engineering resource management arrangements to provide timely onsite coverage with engineers of sufficient skill levels that are matched to aviation system demand

2.7 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including revisions to its command structure during incidents and changes to its role profiles. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R3: NERL should undertake a review of its software assurance process

2.8 NATS considers it partially met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, and has produced a separate review to fully meet the recommendation. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response so that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R4: NERL should review its policy for the diversity of software, including an evidenced explanation of which systems have such diversity and which do not

2.9 This recommendation was not covered in the actions NATS took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, but it has produced a policy document and review which it believes meets the recommendation. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response so that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #2 Industry Communication and Engagement

R5: NERL should consider the need to give earlier notification to airlines and airports of possible disruption, together with frequent updates, ideally this should be based on pre-arranged timings and frequencies

- 2.10 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including its amended escalation processes as part of its command structure during incidents. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **March 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R6: NERL should review all aspects of its procedures for communicating with stakeholders during periods of significant disruption, and in particular its operation of ATICCC

- 2.11 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including its amended escalation processes as part of its command structure during incidents. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R7: All relevant parts of the aviation sector should meet on a regular basis to conduct rehearsals of major incident management. The CAA should consider taking a role in facilitating this activity

- 2.12 This recommendation is being taken forward through a subgroup of the Operations Directors Liaison Group (ODLG), support by NATS, CAA, DfT and industry. The first such rehearsal, led by NATS, was **completed on 24 February 2025** and further rehearsals are being planned on an annual basis, with a nominee already identified to lead the exercise in 2026.

R8: NERL and its customers should consider how best to achieve a more collaborative relationship through establishing a senior leadership forum in which matters of resilience and customer experience can be addressed. The CAA should consider how it could facilitate and encourage this process

- 2.13 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including setting up a daily call with stakeholders, and through engagement at the ODLG. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #3 Resources and Resilience

R9: NERL should review change notifications previously submitted to the CAA and which have been noted as having an impact upon Cyber Security controls, and bring these to the attention of its Cyber Security Responsible Manager for any necessary actions to be completed

- 2.14 NATS considers its existing processes already meet this recommendation. It submitted evidence of these processes to the CAA in **March 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.
- 2.15 It should be noted that neither the independent review nor NATS own internal review considered that cyber security played any part in the August 2023 incident.

R10: NERL should review its processes for the submission of change notifications to the CAA, to ensure that all necessary internal coordination is completed prior to submission

- 2.16 NATS has reviewed its existing processes and considers that they fully meet this recommendation. It submitted the evidence of this to the CAA in **mid February 2025**, and we are validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #4 Investment

R14: NERL should review its level of strategic oversight in relation to its change programme

- 2.17 NATS has completed a review and considers it fully meets this recommendation. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response so that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #5 Performance and Incentives

R17: NERL should consider formulating (after discussion with its major customers and stakeholders) an ambition in terms of comparative performance as against other ANSPs

- 2.18 NATS has undertaken discussions with its major customers and stakeholders on this question, and reports that they consider the existing metrics are sufficient to compare NATS's performance against other ANSPs. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response so that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

R20: NERL should review its strategic approach to resilience, as is common among other safety-critical regulated sectors, recognising the importance to the public of resilience alongside safety and efficiency

- 2.19 NATS considers it has reviewed its strategic approach, partly through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident and subsequently. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response so that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

Chapter 3

Recommendations for the CAA

Overview

- 3.1 The CAA was the sole subject of nine recommendations from the NIR Report, and was one of a number of subjects for a further four recommendations (R7, R8, R30 and R31).

Validation process

- 3.2 The CAA is using its independent Consumer Panel as a means to validate the delivery of its recommendations.

Milestones and progress for each recommendation

ToR #2 Industry Communication and Engagement

R7: All relevant parts of the aviation sector should meet on a regular basis to conduct rehearsals of major incident management. The CAA should consider taking a role in facilitating this activity

- 3.3 This recommendation is being taken forward through a subgroup of the ODLG, support by NATS, CAA, DfT and industry. The first such rehearsal, led by NATS, was **completed on 24 February 2025** and further rehearsals are being planned on an annual basis, with a nominee already identified to lead the exercise in 2026.
- 3.4 The CAA and DfT took an active part in planning and participating in the first such exercise. Through the ODLG, we will ensure that these exercises occur annually and reflect a range of incident scenarios.

R8: NERL and its customers should consider how best to achieve a more collaborative relationship through establishing a senior leadership forum in which matters of resilience and customer experience can be addressed. The CAA should consider how it could facilitate and encourage this process

- 3.5 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including setting up a daily call with stakeholders, and through engagement at the ODLG. It submitted

evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #3 Resources and Resilience

R11: The CAA should review its resources for the oversight of NERL's safety critical systems to ensure these remain sufficient

3.6 The CAA's review of its resources for the oversight of NERL's safety systems was **completed in late 2024**. The employment market for specialists with the appropriate experience to carry out this role remains challenging, and the CAA continually monitors its competitiveness in attracting sufficiently qualified candidates. This exercise will be repeated by **end 2025** to take account of the impact of implementing recommendation 13.

R12: The CAA should review its processes for the sampling of new and changed NERL air traffic systems to ensure these remain sufficient to inform its view of NERL's safety performance

3.7 The CAA's review of its processes to ensure they remain sufficient to retain oversight of NERL's safety performance was **completed in late 2024** and the actions are being taken forward. This exercise will be repeated by **end 2025** to take account of the impact of implementing recommendation 13.

R13: The CAA should ensure that the impact on airspace capacity of contingency mode operations is given sufficient importance when selecting air traffic control systems for audit in advance of approval

3.8 The CAA reviewed its approach to regulatory oversight to understand the resource implications of undertaking this new requirement alongside its day-to-day regulation, which was **completed in late 2024**, and the actions are being taken forward. Some funding for increased resources was included in the November 2024 consultation on our scheme of charges for 2025/26. The recommendation is expected to be fully implemented by **end 2025**.

ToR #4 Investment

R15: The CAA should consider how best to ensure that the interests of consumers are taken into account in setting the regulatory framework on investment and incentives for NERL

3.9 This recommendation is being taken forward as part of the NR28 price control review (the current price control review period is 2023 to 2027) that at its conclusion will set NERL's charges and service level obligations to airlines. We are reviewing this timetable to explore options for completing this important work in a timely way. This will include options to reduce the overlap with key outputs for the current Heathrow price control review and capacity expansion, to allow an

appropriate degree of focus on air traffic services issues. We anticipate engaging further with stakeholders on the timetable during the remainder of **2025**.

- 3.10 This recommendation was considered in CAP3000, the lessons learned publication for H7 and NR23⁵.

ToR #5 Performance and Incentives

R16: The CAA should explore ways of measuring cancellations and knock-on delays attributable to NERL for use in its incentive framework

- 3.11 This recommendation is being taken forward as part of the NR28 price control review (the current price control review period is 2023 to 2027) that at its conclusion will set NERL's charges and service level obligations to airlines. We are reviewing this timetable to explore options for completing this important work in a timely way. This will include options to reduce the overlap with key outputs for the current Heathrow price control review and capacity expansion, to allow an appropriate degree of focus on air traffic services issues. We anticipate engaging further with stakeholders on the timetable during the remainder of **2025**.

R18: The CAA should review the quantum and mechanism of incentives on NERL, with a view to strengthening the incentives to provide a resilient as well as a safe service

- 3.12 This recommendation is being taken forward as part of the NR28 price control review (the current price control review period is 2023 to 2027) that at its conclusion will set NERL's charges and service level obligations to airlines. We are reviewing this timetable to explore options for completing this important work in a timely way. This will include options to reduce the overlap with key outputs for the current Heathrow price control review and capacity expansion, to allow an appropriate degree of focus on air traffic services issues. We anticipate engaging further with stakeholders on the timetable during the remainder of **2025**.

R19: The CAA should ensure that its NERL business plans guidance includes a clear focus on outcomes associated with resilience and consumer impact, as well as safety and efficiency

- 3.13 This recommendation is being taken forward as part of the NR28 price control review (the current price control review period is 2023 to 2027) that at its conclusion will set NERL's charges and service level obligations to airlines. We are reviewing this timetable to explore options for completing this important work in a timely way. This will include options to reduce the overlap with key outputs for the current Heathrow price control review and capacity expansion, to allow an

⁵ CAP3000, 'Setting future price controls – lessons learnt from the review of approach', August 2024.

appropriate degree of focus on air traffic services issues. We anticipate engaging further with stakeholders on the timetable during the remainder of **2025**.

- 3.14 This recommendation was considered in CAP3000, the lessons learned publication for H7 and NR23⁶.

ToR #6 Consumer Impact

R22: The CAA should consider expanding the resources devoted to consumer rights enforcement and stepping in more readily in response to intelligence of a flagrant breach, not just in response to overwhelming and recurring evidence of breaches over a period

- 3.15 The CAA has already been expanding the resources it devotes to consumer rights, after consulting upon this in its Scheme of Charges consultation for 2025/26. The CAA will complete the recruitment of these extra resources, and commence its compliance work programme by the **end of Sept 2025**.

ToR #7 Aviation System Response

R27: The CAA, as part of its licensing arrangements, should consider whether major airports should develop a consumer resilience plan which identifies risks, contingencies and mitigations to deal with major disruptions

- 3.16 The CAA has two types of airport licensing arrangements, neither of which seem well suited to the spirit of this recommendation. Economic licenses are held by airports for which we have made a market power determination – at present this is only Heathrow and Gatwick, who both already have license conditions which require them to maintain operational resilience including a requirement to produce an operational resilience plan. Airport certification applies to the over 40 UK aerodromes that have major commercial passenger operations, but its requirements are laid down in law and therefore it does not easily allow the CAA to include resilience conditions.
- 3.17 However, the responses to the CAA's letter showed that most airports already have such plans in place. This is something that could be validated, although not mandated, through the CAA's aerodrome inspections. The CAA has also put this issue on the ODLG agenda to understand whether the industry can be helped to share best practice. This piece of work, if instigated, would be expected to be completed by the **end of 2025**.

⁶ ibid

R30: Airlines and airports should develop a comprehensive suite of tools for communicating with consumers, for example using tannoy announcements at airports alongside emails, text messages and information boards to be used whenever a major incident occurs. The CAA should have a guiding hand in ensuring the coordination and delivery of this recommendation and should wherever possible promote standardisation of both the means and the content of these communications

- 3.18 In early 2025, the CAA commissioned consumer research to understand better consumers' needs and preferences during periods of disruption. This work will be completed by **end May 2025**, and its outputs will be available and discussed with industry in the **second half of 2025**. The CAA's aim is to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.

R31: The CAA should develop and promote the use of a standardised form of communication about consumer rights under Regulation 261. All airlines should use the communication consistently and it should be available at all airports, at all times, overseas (for passengers flying to or from the UK) as well as in the UK. Government should consider amending UK261 to require this standardised communication, which would then be enforced by the CAA

- 3.19 In early 2025, the CAA commissioned consumer research to understand better consumers' needs and preferences during periods of disruption. This work will be completed by **end May 2025**, and its outputs will be available and discussed with industry in the **second half of 2025**. The CAA's aim is to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.
- 3.20 The Government has indicated that it will consider any such recommendations as and when it may undertake a review of UK261.

Chapter 4

Recommendations for airports and airlines

Overview

- 4.1 Airports and airlines were the sole subject of five recommendations from the NIR Report, and was one of a number of subjects for a further four recommendations (R7, R8, R30 and R31).

Responses to the CAA's letter to industry

- 4.2 The CAA's letter to industry referred to in paragraph 1.5 above was sent to the 29 largest UK airports in terms of passengers served in 2023 and which, combined, served over 99% of all passengers at UK airports in 2023. The CAA received responses from 19 airports which, combined, served 89% of passengers in 2023.
- 4.3 The CAA's letter to industry was also sent to the 18 largest airlines (both UK and foreign) in terms of passengers served at UK airports in 2023 and which, combined, served 86% of all passengers at UK airports in 2023. The CAA received responses from 10 airlines which, combined, served 73% of passengers at UK airports in 2023.
- 4.4 The CAA considers this to be a level of response sufficient to assess the reaction of airports and airlines to the NIR Report's recommendations, which are summarised in the relevant sections below. A fuller summary of the responses to the CAA's letter is contained in the Appendix to this report.

Validation process

- 4.5 Whilst it is impractical for the CAA to validate the responses for each airport and airline, we expect that the planned expansion to our compliance programme will validate key elements of the recommendations. This programme will be ongoing from later in this year and we would expect the first round of reviews to take place through 2026.
- 4.6 On 21 March 2025, a power outage caused Heathrow Airport to be closed for a day, requiring airports and airlines to manage the passengers affected. This incident is currently the subject of two reviews, and the CAA has written to UK airlines and the Heathrow AOC to understand how passenger were treated. We will review the outcomes of these investigations, and any other subsequent

disruption, in our next report to inform whether industry performance was better than in 2023.

Milestones and progress for each recommendation

ToR #2 Industry Communication and Engagement

R7: All relevant parts of the aviation sector should meet on a regular basis to conduct rehearsals of major incident management. The CAA should consider taking a role in facilitating this activity

- 4.7 This recommendation is being taken forward through a subgroup of the ODLG, support by NATS, CAA, DfT and industry. The first such rehearsal, led by NATS, was **completed on 24 February 2025** and further rehearsals are being planned on an annual basis, with a nominee already identified to lead the exercise in 2026.

R8: NERL and its customers should consider how best to achieve a more collaborative relationship through establishing a senior leadership forum in which matters of resilience and customer experience can be addressed. The CAA should consider how it could facilitate and encourage this process

- 4.8 NATS considers it has fully met this recommendation through the actions it took following its own review of the August 2023 incident, including setting up a daily call with stakeholders, and through engagement at the ODLG. It submitted evidence of this to the CAA in **April 2025**, and we are now validating its response with the target that it can be closed by **end July 2025**.

ToR #6 Consumer Impact

R25: Airports and airlines should review their arrangements for meeting the needs of passengers in vulnerable circumstances during periods of significant disruption, including those travelling with children

- 4.9 Responses to the CAA letter indicate that airports and airlines all have such arrangements in place and report that they have reviewed or intend to review them in the light of the NIR Report. This response accords with the CAA's knowledge of the industry, and so we consider this part of the recommendation to have been **completed**.
- 4.10 The provision by airlines for passengers with special needs will also be validated by the CAA's forthcoming expanded compliance programme, the resourcing for which is covered by recommendation 22. Although the schedule for the expanded compliance programme is yet to be established we would expect the first round of reviews to have been completed in the **second half of 2026**.

ToR #7 Aviation System Response

R26: Airports should review and aim to improve their arrangements for making extra support available for passengers during periods of significant disruption

- 4.11 Responses to the CAA letter indicate that airports all have such arrangements in place and report that they have reviewed or intend to review them in the light of the NIR Report. This response accords with the CAA's knowledge of the industry, and so we consider this part of the recommendation to have been **completed**.

R28: Airlines operating flights to, from or within the UK should always have sufficient staff or authorised representatives at the departing airport (not just check-in staff employed by other airlines who are not authorised to do anything else) who can speak on behalf of the airline and support passengers in need of information or assistance

- 4.12 Responses to the CAA letter indicate that airlines all have such arrangements in place and report that they have reviewed or intend to review them in the light of the NIR Report. This response accords with the CAA's knowledge of the industry, to the extent that it is practical for airlines to do so, and so we consider this part of the recommendation to have been **completed**.
- 4.13 Additionally, the CAA's consumer research described in paragraph 3.18 above will focus on communication during disruption. Its results will be reviewed with airlines in the **second half of 2025** with the aim to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.

R29: Airlines should review, together with the relevant airports, the adequacy of any food and drink vouchers offered to passengers, to ensure they are sufficient to cater for likely needs and are accepted at a sufficiently wide range of outlets within or near the airport

- 4.14 Responses to the CAA letter indicate that airports and airlines all have such arrangements in place and report that they have reviewed or intend to review them in the light of the NIR Report. This response accords with the CAA's knowledge of the industry, and so we consider this part of the recommendation to have been **completed**.
- 4.15 Voucher provision by airlines will also be validated by the CAA's forthcoming expanded compliance programme, the resourcing for which is covered by recommendation 22. Although the schedule for the expanded compliance programme is yet to be established we would expect the first round of reviews to have been completed in the **second half of 2026**.

R30: Airlines and airports should develop a comprehensive suite of tools for communicating with consumers, for example using tannoy announcements at airports alongside emails, text messages and information boards to be used whenever a major incident occurs. The CAA should have a guiding hand in ensuring the coordination and delivery of this recommendation and should wherever possible promote standardisation of both the means and the content of these communications

- 4.16 In early 2025, the CAA commissioned consumer research to understand better consumers' needs and preferences during periods of disruption. This work will be completed by **end May 2025**, and its outputs will be available and discussed with industry in the **second half of 2025**. The CAA's aim is to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.

R31: The CAA should develop and promote the use of a standardised form of communication about consumer rights under Regulation 261. All airlines should use the communication consistently and it should be available at all airports, at all times, overseas (for passengers flying to or from the UK) as well as in the UK. Government should consider amending UK261 to require this standardised communication, which would then be enforced by the CAA

- 4.17 In early 2025, the CAA commissioned consumer research to understand better consumers' needs and preferences during periods of disruption. This work will be completed by **end May 2025**, and its outputs will be available and discussed with industry in the **second half of 2025**. The CAA's aim is to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.

R32: Airlines should review their claims processes to ensure that information given to passengers about how to claim (under Regulation 261 or other consumer rights legislation) is clear and provided in a timely fashion, and that all claims are processed with pace and courtesy

- 4.18 Responses to the CAA letter indicate that airlines all have such arrangements in place and report that they have reviewed or intend to review them in the light of the NIR Report. This response accords with the CAA's knowledge of the industry, and so we consider this part of the recommendation to have been **completed**.
- 4.19 Rights information provision by airlines will also be validated by the CAA's forthcoming expanded compliance programme, the resourcing for which is covered by recommendation 22. Although the schedule for the expanded compliance programme is yet to be established we would expect the first round of reviews to have been completed in the **second half of 2026**.

Chapter 5

Recommendations for Government

Overview

- 5.1 Government was the sole subject of five recommendations from the NIR Report, and was one of a number of subjects for a further one recommendation (R31).

Progress for Govt's recommendations

- 5.2 All of the sole recommendations to Government require primary legislation, and therefore are dependent on the parliamentary timetable for legislation.

ToR #6 Consumer Impact

R21: Government should, as a matter of urgency, introduce legislative change to enhance the CAA's information powers to assist the enforcement of breaches of consumer rights laws in the aviation sector, to make them comparable with those available to other sector regulators

R23: Government should promote legislation to enable the CAA to take consumer enforcement action without recourse to the courts.

- 5.3 Evidence suggests that, unlike other consumer regulators, the CAA lacks the ability to act flexibly and would benefit from additional administrative powers.
- 5.4 The Government remains firmly committed to ensuring air passengers benefit from strong and effective protections and will continue to pursue legislative reform in this area.

R24: Government should consider the appointment of a statutory consumer body to collect, research and represent the views of air passengers and air freight users.

- 5.5 While there are existing advisory bodies – such as the CAA Consumer Panel and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) – that provide valuable insight into consumer interests, the Government recognises the potential benefits of a dedicated statutory consumer body.
- 5.6 The Government continues to actively review this recommendation. This includes exploring the feasibility of expanding the remit of the newly established Passenger Standards Authority beyond rail to cover other modes, including aviation. This reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring that all transport users, including air passengers and freight customers, are effectively represented.

ToR #7 Aviation System Response

R31: The CAA should develop and promote the use of a standardised form of communication about consumer rights under Regulation 261. All airlines should use the communication consistently and it should be available at all airports, at all times, overseas (for passengers flying to or from the UK) as well as in the UK. Government should consider amending UK261 to require this standardised communication, which would then be enforced by the CAA

- 5.7 In early 2025, the CAA commissioned consumer research to understand better consumers' needs and preferences during periods of disruption. This work will be completed by **end May 2025**, and its outputs will be available and discussed with industry in the **second half of 2025**. The CAA's aim is to establish an Industry Code of Conduct which stakeholders can commit to by the **end of 2026**.
- 5.8 The Government has indicated that it will consider any such recommendations as and when it may undertake a review of UK261.

R33: Government should implement as a priority making ADR membership mandatory for all airlines operating to, from and within the UK

- 5.9 Evidence strongly points to the need to ensure all UK passengers have the ability to escalate individual complaints in the event they cannot resolve the issue directly, regardless of which airline they chose to travel.
- 5.10 The Government remains fully committed to strengthening passenger rights, including through reforms that will ensure consistent access to dispute resolution. It will look to introduce reforms when it can to provide air travellers with the highest level of protection possible.

ToR #8 Allocation of Financial Risks

R34: Government should ensure that existing consumer rights protections, including those embedded within Regulation 261, are not diluted in any future reviews of the legislative framework

- 5.11 The Government is fully committed to maintaining strong protections for air passengers, including those set out in Regulation 261.
- 5.12 The compensation framework is complex, and any future review will be approached with careful consideration of both its merits and areas for improvement. Crucially, any proposed changes will be subject to public consultation.
- 5.13 The Government's priority remains to deliver a regulatory framework that is robust, fair, and responsive to the needs of today's travellers.

APPENDIX A

Responses to the CAA’s letter

- A1

Alongside the publication of the NIR Report, the CAA wrote to NATS, and, by passenger volume, the top 29 UK airports and the top 18 airlines serving the UK, highlighting the NIR Report’s recommendations that were relevant to them and asking that they provide the CAA details of how they intended to implement those recommendations.
- A2

The table below lists the entities which provided us with a response.

Entity	Respondents
ANSP	NATS
Airline	British Airways easyJet Ryanair Virgin Atlantic Jet2 TUI Aer Lingus Vueling Qatar Airways United Airlines
Airport	Heathrow Gatwick Manchester Stansted Edinburgh Birmingham Bristol Glasgow Newcastle Liverpool East Midlands

Entity	Respondents
	Aberdeen
	Belfast City
	Bournemouth
	Southampton
	Prestwick
	Exeter
	Norwich
	City of Derry
Trade Body	AirportsUK

- A3 The CAA received responses from 19 airports which, combined, served 89% of passengers in 2023. The CAA received responses from 10 airlines which, combined, served 73% of passengers at UK airports in 2023.
- A4 The response from NATS has been detailed in Chapter 2.
- A5 AirportsUK, which represents over 50 airports across the UK, was informed of the CAA's letters to its members and invited to comment. It committed to collaborating with government bodies, regulators, and stakeholders to enhance the resilience of airport operations and the passenger experience, which is a shared priority. It also noted that:
- whilst airports have contingency plans to mitigate disruption impacts, their effectiveness is dependent on timely and accurate dissemination of critical information;
 - whilst airports have a role to play during disruption, it was the airlines and groundhandlers which have a contract with the passengers, and therefore hold contact information for them; and
 - it supported a more centralised approach to information sharing, media and public communications during events such as the August 2023 incident.
- A6 The responses from airports and airlines for each of the recommendations that are relevant to them are detailed below.

ToR #2 Industry Communication and Engagement

R7: All relevant parts of the aviation sector should meet on a regular basis to conduct rehearsals of major incident management. The CAA should consider taking a role in facilitating this activity

- A7 **Airports:** all respondents reported holding or taking part in local exercises of this type and would be amenable to (or already are) taking part in national exercises.
- A8 **Airlines:** there was general support from respondents for such exercises, and many were taking part in the ODLG-led exercise in February 2025 or a European Aviation Crisis Coordination Cell exercise.

R8: NERL and its customers should consider how best to achieve a more collaborative relationship through establishing a senior leadership forum in which matters of resilience and customer experience can be addressed. The CAA should consider how it could facilitate and encourage this process

- A9 **Airports:** whilst many respondents commented that airports are not direct customers of NERL, there was a general acceptance of the value of this recommendation and using the ODLG as such a forum.
- A10 **Airlines:** most respondents saw a benefit in this recommendation, but warned that it could or should be done through existing forums such as the ODLG, and only if there were a defined, useful output.

ToR #6 Consumer Impact

R25: Airports and airlines should review their arrangements for meeting the needs of passengers in vulnerable circumstances during periods of significant disruption, including those travelling with children

- A11 **Airports:** all respondents reported having plans in place for meeting the needs of vulnerable passengers and those travelling with children. Most of the respondents indicated that they had either reviewed these plans in the light of the NIR Report, with many indicating that their plans were reviewed on a regular basis. There was a suggestion that this recommendation could also be addressed through the Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group.
- A12 **Airlines:** Most respondents reported regularly reviewing their provisions for passengers in time of disruption and especially those for vulnerable passengers. Such reviews have or will take into account the findings of the NIR report.

ToR #7 Aviation System Response

R26: Airports should review and aim to improve their arrangements for making extra support available for passengers during periods of significant disruption

A13 **Airports:** all respondents reported having plans in place for meeting the needs of passengers. Most of the respondents indicated that they had reviewed these plans in the light of the NIR Report, with many indicating that their plans were reviewed on a regular basis.

R28: Airlines operating flights to, from or within the UK should always have sufficient staff or authorised representatives at the departing airport (not just check-in staff employed by other airlines who are not authorised to do anything else) who can speak on behalf of the airline and support passengers in need of information or assistance

A14 **Airlines:** All airline respondents reported that their arrangements at departing airports are sufficient to support passengers in need of information or assistance. Whilst staff from other airlines or groundhandlers may be used, training or online tools are available to enable them to speak on behalf of the airline. One foreign airline also suggested that UK airports could develop task force disruption teams to support non-home-based airlines.

R29: Airlines should review, together with the relevant airports, the adequacy of any food and drink vouchers offered to passengers, to ensure they are sufficient to cater for likely needs and are accepted at a sufficiently wide range of outlets within or near the airport

A15 **Airports:** Although provision of food and drink vouchers is mainly the responsibility of the airlines, most airport respondents indicated that they can also provide vouchers to passengers during disruption. In the light of the NIR Report, many respondents indicated that they have or will review voucher arrangements with their airlines.

A16 **Airlines:** All respondents reported that their provision of food and drink vouchers is adequate, with many having reviewed the provision recently or since the NIR Report came out. Comments included that it was important to ensure airport outlets accepted airline vouchers, and one airline noted that its vouchers are incorporated into its boarding cards.

R30: Airlines and airports should develop a comprehensive suite of tools for communicating with consumers, for example using tannoy announcements at airports alongside emails, text messages and information boards to be used whenever a major incident occurs. The CAA should have a guiding hand in ensuring the coordination and delivery of this recommendation and should wherever possible promote standardisation of both the means and the content of these communications

- A17 **Airports:** All respondents reported currently using multiple channels including tannoy announcement, flight information displays, passenger ambassadors, social media, local traditional media, the Airport Communities App⁷ and their website. Many respondents would welcome joining a working group to establish best practice. One airport reported having software that could be used for providing messages in multiple languages.
- A18 **Airlines:** Respondents reported using various methods for communicating with passengers, mainly through emails, SMS messages and their website. Airlines could also coordinate with airports to communicate through tannoy announcements and flight information displays. It was noted by some respondents that, if passengers had booked their flight through a travel agent, then the contact details held by the airline might be that of the travel agent and not the passenger.

R31: The CAA should develop and promote the use of a standardised form of communication about consumer rights under Regulation 261. All airlines should use the communication consistently and it should be available at all airports, at all times, overseas (for passengers flying to or from the UK) as well as in the UK. Government should consider amending UK261 to require this standardised communication, which would then be enforced by the CAA

- A19 **Airlines:** Respondents were split between those supporting a standardised form of communication about consumer rights under Regulation 261 and those which saw benefits in being able to tailor the communication to the particular circumstance. Some respondents noted that, for bookings made through travel agents or other third parties, the airline may not have the same range of contact details as for passengers who had booked directly.

⁷ An app which can be accessed by all workers at an airport including airline, groundhandler and retail staff.

R32: Airlines should review their claims processes to ensure that information given to passengers about how to claim (under Regulation 261 or other consumer rights legislation) is clear and provided in a timely fashion, and that all claims are processed with pace and courtesy

A20 **Airlines:** Some respondents reported reviewing their claims processes recently or regularly. All respondents consider their current processes are adequate and that claims are processed as quickly as is possible. It is noted that the complexity and volume of cases which need to be processed may affect the pace with which that can be done.