

# Minutes: Liverpool Airport Accessibility Committee (L.A.A.C.) Forum

Tuesday 14 November 2023 11:00

<b>Location:</b>	<b>Cavern Suite, Liverpool Airport</b>		
<b>Attendees</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Company</b>
<b>Andy Wright</b>	Chair, L.A.A.C.	<b>Paul Staples</b>	Director of Airport Operations, LPL
<b>Debbie Lacy-May</b>	Head of Terminal Operations, LPL	<b>Colin Wainwright</b>	Operations Manager, LPL
<b>Alicia Roberts</b>	Customer Services, LPL	<b>Sam Saunders</b>	Head of Assisted Services, ABM
<b>Michelle Baxter</b>	Regional Manager, ABM, LPL	<b>Jon O'Brien</b>	Training Manager, ABM
<b>Steve Wilson</b>	Accessibility Manager, Jet2	<b>Nigel &amp; Hazel Morley</b>	IAS Support
<b>Julie Simpson</b>	Autism Adventures	<b>Emma O'Connor</b>	Guest
<b>David Eastham</b>	Spinal Injuries Association	<b>Kelly Barton</b>	Thomas Pocklington Trust
<b>Mike Wright</b>	Thomas Pocklington Trust	<b>David Parfett</b>	Thomas Pocklington Trust
<b>Kathleen Hey</b>	NHS Southport	<b>Nikki Shrimpton</b>	The Brain Charity

## Introductions & Airport Operations update

**Andy & Colin** welcomed the Forum members to the Liverpool Airport Accessibility Forum, followed by brief introductions from each, before running through the agenda for the day.

**Paul** then followed with a brief overview of the airport's performance since the group last came together. Which included highlighting the recent continuation of passenger growth, with further rises anticipated leading into summer 2024. Yet he explained how the airport was still focused on delivering a quality airport experience for all its passengers, with fast processing times and shorter queues, whilst maintaining a great on-time performance record.

**Paul** continued by discussing the further developments within the Border Force area, Check-in desks and in and around the gates. As well as enhancements to the retail area and on-site food and beverage facilities that are taking place.

**Julie** emphasised that it is essential that whilst these ongoing arrangements are in place, passengers need to be made aware of them. As well as the impact such changes will have in terms of the airport layout, for example.

**Paul** finished by announcing a recent investment in some new airport technology. Such as ViaGuide designed to help manage passenger flows within busy airport environments, with automated announcements in different languages providing guidance and instructions. He then handed over to Debbie to provide an update on the new security machines that will be introduced into the airport in the months ahead.

**Debbie** informed the Forum members that the airport plans to start installing the new Next Generation machines early in the new year, with full installation completed by June 2024. The new machinery will provide better quality x-rays, allowing liquids and electronics to be kept in passengers' hand luggage. There will also be an increase in the number of body scanners. So as to avoid delays by speeding up the process to try and reduce passenger stress, whilst helping to maintain the airport's ambition to be *faster, easier, and friendlier*.

**Nigel** emphasised the need for the continuation of empathetic security training at Liverpool airport, in order for necessary body searches to be carried out with dignity and respect. As he had received a number of negative comments from ostomates who had been searched insensitively recently at other airports.

**Debbie** said that all security staff receive full training, with annual refresher training, before they are cleared to perform body searches within airport Security and would continue to do so.

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## Assisted Travel update by ABM

**Sam** then started the staff training presentation on behalf of ABM, explaining how the company had been keen to enhance the quality and effectiveness of its in-house staff training course. So decided to turn to leading charity Disability Rights UK to seek advice and guidance. With their support, the disability awareness modules were updated to be more inclusive, supported by video testimonials from disabled passengers talking about the stresses and anxieties they encounter when travelling by air. **Sam** was proud to share that with the support provided by Disability Rights UK, the completed package had then been certified by the charity.

**Jon**, with support from **Michelle**, then shared details of the content and subjects covered within the ABM training material. Explaining how ABM has seen a significant fall in the staff attrition rate since the course was launched. As it had also been designed to engage with and aid staff by providing greater confidence, so they could better understand the needs of their passengers and how best to support them.

The course had also demonstrated the importance of in-person training, as opposed to trainees solely relying upon e-learning courses. Which clearly were not as effective when trying to create empathy with their passengers.

**Jon** further explained how ABM staff training was now delivered over the course of 5 days, split between the classroom and on-the-job assessment in the airport environment. Supported with additional resources, such as simulation glasses, training pens, and various mobility equipment. Enhanced further by including details of previous passenger feedback and incidents that have occurred at Liverpool, as well as other airports. In order to give actual examples on how to overcome certain situations and better support passengers in challenging situations.

**Jon** then finished by describing how ABM's approach was not only to be inclusive in delivering staff training, but also to be an inclusive employer. Giving examples of staff members who had been diagnosed with either ADHD or autism and how ABM had adjusted their job responsibilities accordingly. By perhaps partnering them with colleagues initially, working landside until they became more confident and familiar with their responsibilities. Before then helping them to apply for an airside pass should they wish to further develop their careers at the airport.

**Jon** also referred to a member of staff who had recently been diagnosed with dementia and understandably now required far more support at work in order to perform his responsibilities. ABM had consequently worked out a more appropriate job description for him, in conjunction with his wife, to ensure that he was able to maintain work safely with support for as long as possible. (Further details within ABM Presentation attached).

## Proposed LPL Website update

**Colin** then informed the Forum members that the airport was planning to update its website and would be grateful for feedback on some proposed new styles and designs that were being considered.

**Colin** started with the front-page Navigation slide, which offered two different options, one with icons and one without. It soon became clear that some members found it easier to read a page with black writing on a white background, whilst others found it easier to read white writing on a black background. But all members preferred using icons in conjunction with text.

**David** felt that many visually impaired people have different preferences with background and text colours. Also, for some people with dyslexia, they have a preference for dark print to be placed on a yellow background.

**Kelly** pointed out that many visually impaired people prefer a larger font size such as 14 in an Arial font.

**Mike** suggested that all images are labelled. So, people with a visual impairment who use screen readers would also get a description of the image, rather than the system just reading out the word 'image'. It was felt that the website developers need to ensure that a facility such as *Recite-Me* (used by Gatwick Airport) is considered, as it can adjust text and page format accordingly to suit the reader.

Finally, **Andy** asked if the Forum members could give examples of websites, aviation or otherwise, that were well laid out and functioned effectively to use as examples for Liverpool Airport to consider. Examples included Mersey Travel, Edinburgh Airport and the charity website supporting people with Parkinson's disease.

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## Sensory Room update

**Shaun Gusdal**, Project Manager from Liverpool Airport, then joined the meeting to discuss the plans for the forthcoming Sensory Room which was planned to be operational by Christmas 2023.

**Shaun** explained how the airport had been keen to support passengers with autism, amongst others, who needed a private space in which to relax away from the loud busy terminal. So, it had been decided to create a dedicated room adjacent to the picnic area within the airport, known traditionally to be a quieter part of the terminal.

A general discussion then took place as to how will access to the room be controlled, and how many people will be allowed to use the room at any one time.

**Julie** said not to forget that autism was not exclusive to children and that many autistic adults may benefit by using the room as well.

Also, what would passengers who hadn't thought to book the room or even know of his existence, do if their child wanted to use it on their day of departure?

**Shaun** took note of the comments and feedback, saying that he would liaise with Christina to discuss further before the new Sensory Room was officially launched.

## Jet2 Presentation

**Steve Wilson**, Accessibility Manager for Jet2 then introduced himself to the Forum members, starting by announcing details of a number of new flights which will be operated from Liverpool Airport from March 2024. He explained how he and his team were very excited about this new opportunity and were already working closely with the airport and ABM to familiarise themselves with the airport layout, processes, and procedures.

**Steve** then went on to discuss the level of training provided to members of Jet2 cabin crew, amongst others, which included delivering training on Makaton. As well as the company's exacting standards when it came to customer service and passenger satisfaction. Advising that at all the airport's Jet2 operate from have a high number of additional customer service staff in order to support their operation. This also includes responsibility for their own ground handling agents responsible for loading passengers' suitcases, as well as different types of equipment. Such as electric mobility aids and mobility scooters. Saying that this has considerably helped reduce the level of damage sustained to mobility equipment. As Jet2 agents are encouraged to safely board all mobility and support equipment and ensure that it is secured safely before it is then photographed in situ. Thus, helping the company to identify when and where any possible damage to equipment may have occurred.

**David** said he was very impressed to hear this.

**Andy** then added that Jet2 have a very good reputation when it comes to supporting passengers who require some form of special assistance when they travel, and it would be great if the photographs when taken by their ground handling agents, could then somehow be shared with the passengers on board. Which would greatly reassure those passengers that their equipment had been boarded safely.

**Steve** added that Jet2 was keen to develop and enhance its own website, in which it hoped to provide a facility to create and store passenger profiles. So that a Jet2 passenger with mobility equipment for example, could enter the details of the equipment which could then be shared with the destination airport. All with a view to avoid the repetition of relaying the same information to different stakeholders within the airport journey and to help ensure that equipment was handled properly, with dignity and respect. So, he would certainly ask whether the photographs of the equipment safely secured in the hold could be shared.

**Emma** then asked whether passenger profiles could contain information relating to other preferences such as meals for diabetics for example.

**Steve** concluded by saying he was very excited about the future and would be happy to work with the Forum members in support of the launch of Jet2 at Liverpool Airport.

(Further details within Jet2 Presentation attached).

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There were no further questions from Forum members, so the meeting closed with **Andy** thanking all the members for their continued support. Saying he would be in touch again shortly to share details of the minutes and copies of the presentations shown on the day.

And then once the dates for next year's forum meetings had been scheduled, he would circulate accordingly.

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