



**Consumers' Awareness of the Rights of Passengers with
a Disability or Reduced Mobility when Travelling by Air
December 2015**

A) Introduction

The Consumer Council is non-departmental public body (NDPB) established through the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. Our principle duty is to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland.

The 1984 Order also places a duty on the Consumer Council to make recommendations with respect to any matter affecting road or railway passenger transport services and facilities in Northern Ireland (NI) and services and facilities provided for passengers travelling to and from Northern Ireland.

Under Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 the Consumer Council is the designated body that handles passenger complaints relating to an NI airport or flight departing from a NI airport.

The Regulation requires all airports and airlines operating in the European Union to assist passengers with a disability and passengers with reduced mobility when travelling. Airlines licensed in the EU operating flights from a non-EU country into the EU must also assist passengers who require special assistance.

The Consumer Council undertook this research in October 2014 to highlight consumers' awareness of the rights of air passengers with a disability or reduced mobility in order to inform our work and identify where improvements can be made.

This survey follows on from a similar survey carried out in 2012. This report will highlight changes in consumer awareness since the initial research was undertaken.

The Consumer Council works to promote awareness of passengers' rights under the Access to Air Travel (ATAT) Regulation by working with NI's airports, engaging with disability organisations and undertaking awareness campaigns. The Consumer Council's own [*Access to Air Travel*](#) guide provides practical advice to passengers with a disability and less mobile passengers.

The guide is available from the Consumer Council website (www.consumercouncil.org.uk) and an audio version can also be downloaded. Hard copies are available on request and are available at NI's three airports.

B) Recommendations

1. Information regarding the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility should be highlighted at the booking stage (via the travel agent or the airline's/travel agent's website).
2. Airlines and travel agents have a role in highlighting pre-notification requests for special assistance. Booking special assistance 48 hours in advance ensures that passengers with a disability or reduced mobility receive the help they need during their journey.
3. Airports, airlines and other relevant organisations, eg Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), have an important role in promoting the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility.

C) Methodology

The Consumer Council launched its second Air Passenger Rights survey in October 2014 to examine consumers' awareness of the rights of air passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. The survey asked respondents to state if they are aware or unaware of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility and tested their knowledge of these rights.

The survey (Appendix 1) ran for five weeks. Responses were sought from both consumers with and without a disability or reduced mobility to enable an assessment to be undertaken of overall public awareness of the rights of these passengers. A total of 310 responses were received.

The survey was conducted mainly online¹. However, in order to ensure accessibility for all consumers the online survey was supplemented by an identical survey which was available in large print hard copy. In addition, consumers were provided with the opportunity to complete the survey by telephone. The survey was also made available on the Consumer Council's Facebook and Twitter pages.

To increase our survey base, details were provided to key stakeholder organisations and Section 75 groups, as well as members of the NI Assembly's All Party Working Group (APWG) on Disability.

¹ The survey was conducted to capture a "snapshot" of public awareness of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility and the findings cannot be guaranteed to be representative of the NI population.

The survey was highlighted in the UTV Blog and appeared in several e-bulletins and newsletters including; NI Travel News, Community NI, Disability Action and Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). The survey was promoted at various Consumer Council events, talks and exhibition stands that we attended throughout the duration of the survey period.

The Consumer Council would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who promoted the survey and took the time to complete it.

D) Survey Results

Table 1 shows respondents' awareness of the rights of air passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. Participants were asked a series of questions to test their knowledge of these rights and the table shows the percentage of respondents who answered correctly.

Table 1: Overall survey results

Question	2014	2012	Difference
<i>Number of respondents</i>	310	306	
In last 6 years travelled when mobility was reduced because of a permanent disability, or because of an illness, an age related condition or a temporary injury such as a broken limb?	45%	41%	+4%
Aware of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility when travelling by air	28%	16%	+12%
Aware of the need to request assistance 48 hours in advance in order to guarantee that it is received during their journey	33%	26%	+7%
Aware that to request assistance they should contact the airline, travel agent or tour operator from whom they booked their ticket	46%	39%	+7%
Aware that passengers with a disability or reduced mobility are entitled to assistance from point of booking their ticket	26%	21%	+5%
Aware that an airline is required to provide essential information in an accessible format	31%	22%	+9%
Aware that an air passenger with a disability or reduced mobility can bring up to two items of on the aeroplane free of charge	52%	44%	+8%
Aware an airline must make all reasonable efforts to provide an air passenger with a disability or reduced mobility with appropriate seating, subject to safety requirements, free of charge	50%	39%	+11%

The survey shows that there has overall been an increase in awareness since the survey was originally carried out in 2012. This is pleasing and reflects the work the NI airports and airlines have undertaken, alongside that of the Consumer Council. However, as the Table 1 shows overall awareness is still relatively low and further work is needed to ensure all consumers are aware of their air passenger rights.

E) Key Findings

- **45%** of respondents had travelled at a time when their mobility was reduced;
- **28%** of respondents are aware of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility when travelling by air. This is higher than 2012, when 16% of respondents indicated that they were aware of their rights;
- Of respondents with a disability, only **31%** were aware of their rights when travelling by air;
- **One third** of respondents were aware they needed to book special assistance 48 hours in advance to guarantee that it is provided; and
- **46%** of respondents knew who to contact to request assistance.

F) Conclusion

While the findings of the Consumer Council's 2014 survey encouragingly show that there has been an increase from 2012 in consumers' overall awareness of the rights of disabled and reduced mobility passengers, overall awareness still remains disappointingly low.

Since the introduction of Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 there has been improvement in the level of assistance provided and the information that is available to passengers.

The increase in the number of assistance requests² and level of awareness of consumers in NI of these rights reflects the work that has been done by the Consumer Council, airports and airlines to promote air passenger rights. There is, however, still more that can be done to promote these rights especially among those passengers who have a disability or reduced mobility.

The need for information was reflected in the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) 2014 notice to all airlines and airports requiring them to provide certain information on their websites for passengers with a disability or reduced mobility travelling by air. The CAA's notice highlighted the importance of having this information visible at the early stages of the booking process and will help towards raising awareness that these services are available for air passengers.

² NI airports have seen an increase in the number of requests for assistance from passengers. In 2014-2015 there were over 58,000 requests for special assistance, an increase from 2012-2013 when approximately 54,000 requests were received.

Following our research, and the CAA's notice, we propose the following recommendations in order to further improve consumer's awareness of disabled and reduced mobility passenger rights:

1. Information regarding the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility should be highlighted at the booking stage (via the travel agent or the airline's/travel agent's website).
2. Travel agents and airlines have a role in highlighting pre-notification requests for special assistance. Booking special assistance 48 hours in advance ensures that passengers with a disability or reduced mobility receive the help they need during their journey.
3. Airports, airlines and other relevant organisations, eg ABTA, have an important role in promoting the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility.

Appendix 1

Air Passenger Rights Survey

Travelling With a Disability or Reduced Mobility

Question 1

In the last six years, have you travelled when your mobility was reduced because of a permanent disability, or because of an illness, an age related condition or a temporary injury such as a broken limb?

Yes

No

Question 2

Are you aware of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility when travelling by air?

Yes - Go to Question 3

No - Go to Question 6

Question 3

Are you aware of the Access to Air Travel Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air?

Yes – Go to question 4

No – Go to question 5

Question 4

Has the introduction of the Access to Air Travel Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 made you feel more confident to travel by air?

Yes

No

Not applicable

Question 5

How did you learn about the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility when travelling by air?

- From an airline
- From an airport
- From a travel agent
- The media
- Word of mouth
- Consumer Council literature
- Online please state
- Other please state

Question 6

Must a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility, intending to travel by air, request assistance in advance in order to guarantee that it is received during their journey?

- Yes, assistance should be requested at least one week before travelling
- Yes, assistance should be requested at least 48 hours before travelling
- No, there is no need to request in advance
- Don't know

Question 7

If a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility wishes to request assistance for their journey, who should they contact?

- The airline, travel agent or tour operator from whom they booked their ticket
- The airport they will be travelling to and from
- Both of the above
- Don't know

Question 8

If a passenger with a visual impairment is booking a ticket, which of the following is the airline required to do?

- The airline is required to provide essential information, for example, flight schedule and boarding pass in a format accessible to the passenger
- The airline is required to provide all publicly available information in a format accessible to the passenger
- The airline is not required to provide any information in a format accessible to the passenger
- Don't know

Question 9

From what point is a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility entitled to assistance?

- From the point of booking the ticket
- From arrival at the airport
- From arrival at the check in desk
- From arrival at the departure gate
- Passengers with a disability or reduced mobility are not entitled to any assistance when travelling
- Don't know

Question 10

If a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility needs to travel with their mobility equipment, for example, their wheelchair or mobility scooter, must they pay an additional charge to their airline?

- Yes, they must pay a set fee per every additional item
- Yes, they must pay a fee if their airline imposes one
- No, they are entitled to take up to two pieces of mobility equipment free of charge
- Don't know

Question 11

If a passenger with a disability or reduced mobility requests a particular seat on the plane, what action must the airline take?

- They must reserve any seat that the passenger feels best meets their needs free of charge
- They must reserve any seat the passenger feels best meets their needs but can charge for this
- They must make all reasonable efforts to provide appropriate seating, subject to safety requirements, free of charge
- Passengers with a disability or reduced mobility have no right to request a particular seat
- Don't know

Question 12

What do you think would be the most effective way of informing people of the rights of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility when travelling by air?

- Information leaflets
- Billboard advertising
- Radio advertising
- Online information
- Newspaper articles
- Information sessions with local disability groups
- Information stands at airports
- Other please state.....

Question 13

Age

Under 16

16 – 24

25 – 34

35 – 44

45 – 54

55 – 64

Over 64

Question 14

Gender

Male

Female

Question 15

What county do you live in?

Antrim

Armagh

Derry / Londonderry

Down

Fermanagh

Tyrone

Question 16

Do you have a disability?

Yes

No

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines disability as “**a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities**”.

Question 17

What is the nature of your disability? Please tick all that apply

Physical or mobility impairment

Learning disability or difficulty

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Speech impairment
- Mental health condition
- Other physical or medical conditions, e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, arthritis, asthma, cancer

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. All data gathered will be used for research purposes only. If you would like any further information on Access to Air Travel Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 or would like to request a free copy of our Access to Air Travel guide, please contact us on 0800 121 6022 or by e-mail at info@consumercouncil.org.uk

The Consumer Council can also support you with making a complaint if you are unhappy with the assistance you have received.



Making the consumer voice heard and making it count

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