

UK Aviation Urged to Mandate Disability Training Across All Staff Levels

July 16, 2025

— Categories: Politics & Government



A government-commissioned task force has issued a strong call for mandatory disability awareness training across the UK aviation sector, urging that all airline and airport staff, from frontline workers to senior management, undergo proper education to enhance services for passengers with disabilities.

The recommendations, outlined in a report by the Department for Transport's (DfT) Access to Air Travel Working Group, aim to address long-standing complaints about poor assistance and inconsistent service. In total, the report outlines 22 proposals, including clearer complaints procedures and improved data collection on service delivery. The central message is that disability training must be embedded at every level of the industry.

Victoria Jenkins, a legal academic and chair of the taskforce, said the aviation sector needs a cultural shift. "Air travel is not a luxury; it is essential for many people. Passengers should never be left feeling stranded or degraded simply because they are disabled," she said. Jenkins emphasised that training must not be optional and that real accountability is needed across the system.

Public frustration has grown over repeated incidents involving disabled passengers being let down. One of the most high-profile cases involves BBC journalist Frank Gardner, who has spoken out several times after being left waiting on planes due to a lack of timely assistance. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the UK's aviation regulator, has acknowledged failings and voiced support for stronger requirements.

While campaigners welcomed the proposals, some in the aviation industry expressed concern over cost and practicality. Airline operators, still recovering financially from the COVID-19 pandemic, have warned that without government support or a phased approach, implementing large-scale mandatory training could prove difficult.

Transport Secretary Louise Haigh, speaking for the newly elected Labour government, said she supports the taskforce's recommendations and is

working with the industry to bring about change. However, critics have raised doubts over Labour's ability to deliver. There is concern that, as with many Labour promises, the ambition may not be matched by effective policy or enforcement, particularly given the current fiscal pressures.

For now, the future of the report's recommendations depends on whether the government will move beyond supportive statements and introduce binding regulations. Without firm deadlines and oversight, there is a risk this initiative will join a long list of well-meaning proposals that failed to deliver lasting impact.