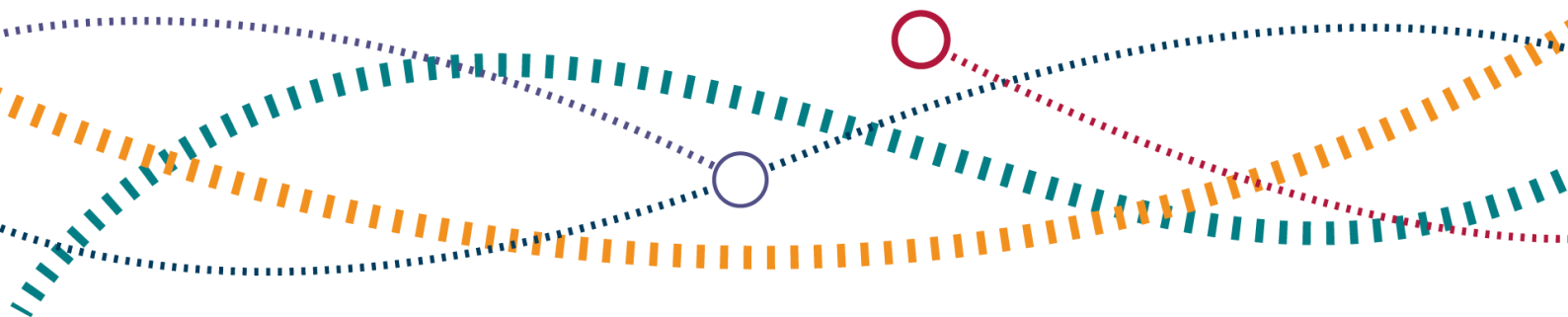




Making the Grade

Staff disability awareness training obligations: a progress report on train and station operators

02 March 2021



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Acknowledgement

ORR would like to dedicate this report to Margaret Hickish MBE, who passed away on 26 January. Margaret was a great champion of accessible travel and led the way in developing a more inclusive railway culture. A wheelchair user herself, Margaret worked in the field of inclusive design for more than 20 years. She was awarded an MBE in 2016 for her services to disabled people.

In 2018, Margaret undertook on behalf of ORR to analyse train and station operators' disability awareness training materials and to propose a new framework for the industry. This work formed the basis of the revised ATP Guidance staff training requirements. We hope she would have been pleased to see the great strides the industry has made since, and we have no doubt she would have encouraged us all to even greater efforts.

Executive Summary

As part of the revised Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) guidance published in July 2019¹, ORR introduced enhanced obligations on train and station operators to provide up-to-date, regular disability awareness / equality training to their staff by 31 July 2021. To provide assurance that these requirements would be met, the Guidance obliged train and station operators to submit a report to ORR by 31 July 2020, setting out their progress in complying with these commitments.

Overall, we are pleased that, despite the challenges of COVID-19, train and station operators have been able to adapt their training plans and have provided evidence they are broadly on track to meet the commitments they set out in their ATPs.

We particularly welcome the following:

- over 29,000 members of staff that interact with passengers in the course of their normal duties will receive refresher disability awareness / equality training;
- around half of train and station operators report they have developed brand new courses to be used in staff inductions and for refresher training;
- at least 11 operators are extending their frontline staff refresher training to all staff;
- GWR has already met its training commitments ahead of the July 2021 deadline; and
- the lived experience of people with disabilities has been embedded in the development and delivery of staff training.

However, because of the challenges posed by COVID-19, five train operators have been granted an extension to the deadline for providing refresher training to their frontline staff to enable them to meet their obligations, having set out clear evidence for why they need additional time and how they will make best use of it – all have committed to meeting the requirements by 31 December 2021.

¹ https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/accessible-travel-policy-guidance-for-train-and-station-operators_2.pdf (September 2020 update.)

Initial findings

The good progress that has now been made follows ORR's work with operators to address the initial concerns we had following our review of the training materials and plans that we received in July 2020, which in some cases had contained significant gaps:

- only four operators had submitted sufficient evidence to assure us that they would meet the mandatory training requirements by July 2021;
- a further eight were in a position to meet the requirements, pending submission to ORR of additional supporting material; and
- the remaining 12 operators either required an extension to the July 2021 deadline for frontline staff to receive refresher training or had submitted plans and materials with significant gaps.

In the light of these results, ORR requested further information and evidence and held follow-up meetings with many operators to clarify our findings, to ensure that staff training obligations would be met and to discuss next steps. We are now confident that all operators are on broadly on track to meet their commitments.

Next steps

ORR will continue to monitor operators' progress throughout 2021, and where necessary take action to ensure they meet their obligations. Passenger Assist volumes have been significantly reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and have been particularly low during the periods of lockdown. As and when restrictions ease it is vital that railway staff are able to provide the appropriate assistance, support and confidence to users of the service. When the volumes begin to rise, we will be able to measure the impact of operators' training programmes on passenger satisfaction via ORR's regular passenger assist user survey.

Alternative Formats

ORR has actively considered the needs of blind and partially sighted people in accessing this document in PDF format. The text is available in full on the ORR website, and may be freely downloaded. Individuals and organisations can use free Adobe Reader accessibility features or screen readers to read the contents of this document.

Background

1. Train and station operators must as a condition of their operating licence, publish an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) setting out a range of commitments to disabled and older people travelling by rail and provide useful information for passengers. In July 2019, ORR published revised Guidance on how to write an ATP (since further updated in September 2020). This included significant new requirements for rail staff to receive ongoing training in disability awareness or disability equality.

ORR research

2. These new requirements were first prompted by several pieces of research commissioned by ORR into the experience of passengers that request assistance to travel by rail, summarised in our November 2017 Improving Assisted Travel consultation (<https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-consultations/improving-assisted-travel-consultation>). This research indicated that whilst passengers' experience of staff providing assistance was generally good, there was room for improvement – particularly when assisting people with less visible disabilities, including hearing impairments.
3. ORR's own review of training materials in 2018, highlighted in our November 2018 consultation on specific changes to the guidance for train and station operators (<https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-consultations/improving-assisted-travel-consultation-changes-guidance-train-and-station>), found significant discrepancies in the quantity and quality of training provided. Responses to this consultation reinforced the need to make improvements in this area and supported the proposals for new training requirements ORR had developed with the help of disability and training experts.
4. ORR's consultation proposals were then refined and finalised in the ATP Guidance published in July 2019.

New staff training requirements

5. As required by the ATP Guidance, train and station operators have now publicly committed in their new ATPs to deliver improvements in three key areas.

- **Induction training for new staff**

By July 2021, all new staff, including senior and key managers, will as part of their induction, receive relevant disability awareness training or disability equality training in a predominantly classroom-based setting. This will ensure they:

- understand disabled people and their everyday challenges;
- are aware of the Equality Act and its requirements for ‘reasonable adjustments’;
- know the definition of disability, explore the social model of disability, and use appropriate language;
- recognise that passengers with a wide range of impairments and needs (including those that may not be visible) may require assistance;
- are introduced to the relevant regulations and policies; and
- are aware of the Passenger Assist process (including Turn Up and Go), how it works for disabled passengers, and how staff play an important part in delivering the service.

In addition, all new frontline staff that interact directly with passengers at any time as part of their duties will, as part of their induction, also receive training to ensure they:

- communicate effectively with disabled people, treating them with respect and dignity;
- can identify the accessible features of the stations in which they work and of the key destination stations on the network; and
- provide safe assistance.

- **Refresher training for frontline staff**

By July 2021, all current frontline staff (not only those new to the business) to receive training in the nine areas set out above.

- **Involvement of disabled people**

The lived experience and expertise of people with a range of disabilities is always utilised in disability awareness or disability equality training course development and delivery.

6. In addition, agency staff and staff contracted on a temporary basis that interact directly with passengers at any time will receive a condensed version of the disability awareness training or disability equality training, to cover the Passenger Assist process, effective communications and providing safe assistance. Anyone employed

at a contact centre that provides information or advice directly to passengers on behalf of the operator, whether directly employed by the operator or not, will also receive a condensed version of the disability awareness training or disability equality training.

Staff training progress report

7. Train and station operators were required to submit a report to ORR by 31 July 2020, setting out their progress in meeting these commitments. Prior to this deadline, we wrote to them requesting a delivery plan and supporting materials.
8. Between August 2020 and January 2021, ORR reviewed responses and, where necessary, requested further information and evidence. Initially, only four operators submitted sufficient evidence to assure us that they would meet the mandatory training requirements by July 2021. A further eight were in a position to meet the requirements, pending submission of additional material, but the remaining 12 operators either required an extension to the July 2021 deadline for frontline staff to receive refresher training or submitted materials and plans with significant gaps.
9. We then had follow-up meetings with a number of operators to clarify our findings and discuss next steps. We also met with a third-party provider of the Passenger Assist booking service to discuss the training provided for staff at its contact centre.
10. In December 2020, we wrote to each train and station operator setting out our updated view of their progress and followed this up with further discussions with each operator to monitor progress, explore any additional evidence that was subsequently provided, and to discuss next steps. This report summarises our key findings and outlines our next steps.

Key findings

11. The key findings of our review of train and station operators' progress towards meeting their staff training commitments are set out below.

GOOD PRACTICE

13 train and station operators have developed brand new courses

- We are pleased that around half of train and station operators have taken the opportunity to work with disabled people to develop new disability awareness / equality training courses, for use in the induction of all new starters and for delivery to frontline staff. The remaining operators have updated and supplemented their existing materials to ensure they meet ORR's mandatory outcomes.

All passenger-facing staff to receive refresher training

- By the end of 2021, operators have confirmed that every single member of staff on the GB national railway network that interacts directly with passengers as part of their duties – over 29,000 platform staff, ticket office staff, contact centre staff, conductors, guards, onboard supervisors and other frontline staff – will have received refresher training in disability awareness / equality and will achieve our mandatory training outcomes.
- GWR has already provided newly developed induction training as a full day refresher course in the classroom for all 4300 frontline staff by November 2019, and is the only operator to have done so.

Extension of refresher training to all staff, not just frontline staff

- At least 11 train operators plan to extend this refresher training to all staff by July 2021. This is a moving picture, as the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on some operators' original delivery plans. Where this is creating pressure on the July 2021 deadline, operators may prioritise frontline staff if needed.

Retraining contact centre staff

- At the time of review, nine train and station operators used the same outsourced contact centre to provide the Passenger Assist booking service. Following receipt of operators' responses to our request for a progress report, we engaged directly with the contact centre provider to explore the disability awareness / equality training provides to its staff engaged in Passenger Assist roles and review whether it met our mandatory training outcomes. We were broadly encouraged by its responses. The provider is now working with the train and station operators that use its service to provide refresher staff training.
- Other operators are also working with their in-house or outsourced contact centres to ensure the mandatory training outcomes are met.

Flexible approach to technology

- Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for the rail industry, it has also created opportunities to use modern technology to deliver training, including to staff that are working from home. We have seen innovative and effective use of e-learning, webinars, video clips and other forms of interactive remote learning, in place of or to supplement more traditional classroom methods.

Lived experience of people with disabilities

- Staff must be able to explain the social model of disability, understand its implications for the provision of rail services and use appropriate language when describing disability and talking to disabled people. To deliver this effectively, and to ensure staff hear from disabled people about their lived experiences of using the railway, we are pleased that operators have developed their course content and material with a range of disabled people and organisations, such as Enhance the UK (Arriva Rail London, Chiltern, Northern) and Inclusion London (c2c, London Underground).

AREAS OF CONCERN

Delays in producing material

- There were significant gaps in much of the training materials and plans that we received by the end of July 2020. Only four of 24 operators had submitted sufficient evidence to assure us that they would meet the mandatory training requirements by July 2021; at that point we were confident that a further eight were in a position to meet the requirements, pending submission of further required material. However, the remaining 12 operators were not in a position to submit all the materials and plans as requested, of which six required an extension to the July 2021 deadline for frontline staff to receive refresher training.
- Following our initial concerns, the picture has become much more positive over the last six months as these 12 operators' have developed and begin to implement their plans – as set out in more detail overleaf.

Refresher training deadline extensions

- Six operators (Greater Anglia, LNER, Southeastern, SWR, Transport for Wales and West Midlands Trains) requested that the deadline for demonstrating all current frontline staff have met mandatory training requirements be extended to 31 December 2021, citing the impact of COVID-19 on their plans. Having considered their responses to our information requests, our subsequent correspondence and discussions, and the additional evidence provided, ORR has granted this extension to five of these operators, but deferred a decision on whether this is justified for Greater Anglia until our next meeting with the company in April.
- We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted operators' plans for the delivery of disability awareness / equality training, and we note that Southeastern's preparations could not be finalised until the award of its current franchise on 30 March 2020. However, having set out the requirements in July 2019 and provided two years for compliance to be achieved, we are disappointed that the deadline of 31 July 2021 could not be met by the other four operators, and we consider that more preparatory work could have been done prior to the onset of lockdown in March 2020 in order to do so.

Summary of individual operator progress towards compliance

12. Operators have evidenced a range of approaches to meeting their staff training commitments. The approach chosen has depended on a range of factors, including the scope and content of previous training packages, staff responsibilities, and pre-existing training commitments. We wrote to operators in December 2020 setting out our view of their plans to date and, where supported by delivery plans, granting extensions to the July 2021 deadline for refresher training to frontline staff. In a small number of cases, we were waiting for further evidence to be provided in January 2021. This evidence has now been provided.
13. **We therefore have good confidence that all operators are broadly on track to meet their commitments, as summarised in Table 1 overleaf.**

Next steps

14. We will continue to monitor delivery of refresher training, to ensure a compliant induction training package is ready for implementation in July 2021 if not already in use, and to hold operators to account for the training of contact centre staff and, where deployed, agency and temporary staff. This will be primarily through the quarterly meetings we hold with each and every operator. In addition, we will request refresher training progress reports.
15. We will request documentary evidence of the mandatory training outcomes having been met by all frontline staff following the July 2021 and December 2021 deadlines for refresher training. In addition, we will use ORR's regular passenger assist survey to measure the impact of operators' training programmes on users' satisfaction with staff. We will follow up with individual operators to discuss the results.
16. Beyond 2021, we will use our regular meetings with operators to ensure they have plans in place to deliver their commitments to providing ongoing refresher training at least every two years to frontline staff.

Table 1 ORR view of progress towards meeting July 2021 commitments

Full compliance achieved

- GWR

Fully on track to achieve compliance

- Caledonian Sleeper
- CrossCountry
- Hull Trains
- TransPennine Express

Broadly on track to achieve compliance

- Arriva Rail London (Overground)
- Avanti
- c2c
- Chiltern Railway
- East Midlands Railway
- Grand Central
- Govia Thameslink Railway
- Greater Anglia*
- Heathrow Express
- London Underground
- Merseyrail
- Network Rail
- Northern Rail
- Scotrail
- TfL Rail

Granted an extension to December 2021

- LNER
- Southeastern
- SWR
- Transport for Wales
- West Midlands Trains



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