International Airport Review Awards
2017

Passenger experience category
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Contents

1  Gatwick’s sustainability strategy – ten targets for 2020
2  Hidden Disability Lanyard
3  Autism Ambassador
4  Staff training, workplace champions and continued learning
Travelling through an airport can be a challenge for people with autism as they often see, hear and feel the world in a different, more intense way, and can be overwhelmed by ‘too much information’.

Gatwick and its partner OCS – which provides the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) service - introduced a series of measures including a Hidden Disability Lanyard, an Autism Ambassador and staff training programmes to better assist passengers with autism.

In November 2016, these measures resulted in Gatwick becoming the UK’s first officially recognised Autism Friendly Airport. Gatwick has since been held up as an exemplar in this respect by both Government ministers and in new guidance issued to all UK airports by the CAA.

Gatwick becomes UK’s first nationally recognised Autism Friendly airport
03/11/2016

- Follows successful roll-out of initiatives like the hidden disability lanyard
- Maria Cook appointed Gatwick’s inaugural Autism Ambassador
- Autism Champions to help with ongoing training of frontline staff

Gatwick has become the UK’s first Autism Friendly airport in recognition of the airport’s commitment to becoming an accessible and friendly environment for autistic passengers. The airport was presented with the award by The National Autistic Society’s Chief Executive at a ceremony to mark the achievement.

The award recognises the successful efforts of Gatwick and its assistance provider OCS to meet a range of Autism Friendly criteria which will benefit autistic passengers, their families and caregivers, including:

- ensuring clear and accessible information is available for autistic passengers about the airport and the assistance available to help plan and prepare for their journey
- a commitment to staff training so that staff are better able to assist autistic passengers
- the successful roll out of new initiatives like the discreet hidden disability lanyard, which is to be rolled out at other UK airports
- the introduction of Autism Champions who will be trained to roll-out further front line staff training.
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

More than 1 in 100 people in the UK are autistic. The National Autistic Society’s Autism Friendly Award recognises organisations who commit to making sure that autistic visitors receive the same warm welcome as everybody else.

Gatwick recognises that travelling through a busy airport can be a challenging experience for autistic passengers and those with sensory sensitivities and that simple steps can make a big difference.

To coincide with the award, Gatwick has also appointed Maria Cook as the airport’s first Autism Ambassador. Maria is the parent of an autistic son and as Chair of Autism Support Crawley has worked closely with Gatwick to promote Gatwick’s hidden disability lanyard and other initiatives aimed at making Gatwick more autism friendly.

The National Autistic Society Chief Executive Mark Lever said:

“Autistic people and their families want to access the same opportunities others often take for granted, and this includes holidays and travel. But many rely on routines to make sense of an often confusing world and can find the busy and unpredictable airport and flight environment distressing and disorientating.

“So we are delighted that Gatwick Airport has put so much effort into improving this situation and have achieved our prestigious Autism Friendly Award. What particularly impressed us is the care they continue to take to incorporate the feedback of autistic people and their families to help improve the service they offer to them and other customers with hidden disabilities. Helpful guidance and information specific to the needs of autistic travellers is available on their website and Gatwick staff will receive our autism training. This means that at every stage of the flight process, from check-in to boarding, staff will be aware of autism and will be able to offer appropriate support and advice.

“We hope that many more major airports will follow Gatwick’s inspiring example.”

Gatwick Airport Chief Executive Stewart Wingate said:

“We recognise airports can sometimes be a stressful environment for autistic passengers, but that simple steps can go a long way in helping to break down barriers and make it easier for autistic passengers and their families or caregivers to travel through Gatwick.

“This award is recognition of the fantastic efforts of many of our staff, volunteers and valued partners like the National Autistic Society, and signifies our ongoing commitment to ensuring Gatwick is an accessible and welcoming environment for the 42 million passengers who use the airport every year.”
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Andy Boyd, Managing Director Aviation and Gateways, OCS Group UK said:
“OCS are delighted to be working with Gatwick to help them deliver such a great initiative. It has been a good team effort and the Autism Access Award is a testament to the commitment shown by all.”

A spokesperson for the CAA said:
“For passengers with hidden disabilities, which includes autism, the thought of travelling through a busy airport can be stressful and confusing, and knowing you will also have to go through security checks, can add an even greater level of anxiety.

“The more information, reassurance and bespoke services airports can offer this group, along with their travel companions, will help ensure passengers can enjoy air travel.”

Gatwick’s newly appointed Autism Ambassador Maria Cook said:
“I have been amazed by the care and commitment of those involved in helping to make Gatwick Autism Friendly who are passionate and motivated about making a real difference.

“As a parent of an autistic son, having dedicated support available makes a huge difference, helping to relieve stress and anxiety so that we can focus on enjoying our journey.

“As Gatwick’s Autism Ambassador I look forward to working with Gatwick and OCS to continue the good work already achieved.”

- Quote below taken from CAA press release: New CAA guidelines: Making air travel more accessible for passengers with hidden disabilities (December 2016)

Daniel Cadey, Autism Access Development Manager, at the National Autistic Society, said:
"The new guidance is an important step towards opening up the world to autistic people and their families.

"Like anyone else, people on the autism spectrum and families want the opportunity to travel and go on holiday. But many rely on routine and find the often busy, loud and unpredictable environment of airports disorientating and overwhelming.

"Helping organisations, including Gatwick Airport, to achieve our Autism Friendly Award, we've seen how small adjustments can often make the biggest difference to autistic people. For instance, making sure that staff are aware of hidden conditions like autism, and that there are quieter places for autistic passengers to go if they're feeling overwhelmed."
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

"We were delighted to have had the opportunity to share our expertise with the Civil Aviation Authority by feeding into their guidelines, which have the potential to make a significant difference to a great many passengers.

"We hope that more organisations, including airlines, will follow this example and do their bit to help make sure autistic people and their families have the same opportunities to travel as everyone else."

Hidden Disability Lanyard:

In May 2016 Gatwick launched a UK first-of-its-kind lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities who may require additional support when travelling through the airport.

It is not always immediately apparent that additional support may be required for passengers with autism and the lanyard acts as a discreet sign that additional help may be needed.

New lanyard launched to assist passengers with hidden disabilities
19/05/2016

- Help for passengers with hidden disabilities who may require additional support
- Voluntary trial product of partnership with UK charities and OCS
- If successful, it could be adopted across the country’s transport network

Gatwick Airport has today launched a first-of-its-kind lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities who may require additional support when travelling through the airport.

The lanyard, which is entirely voluntary for passengers with hidden disabilities and their families, will act as a discreet sign for staff that additional support or help may be required.*

If successful, it could be adopted across the country’s transport network, or other sectors, where passengers with hidden disabilities may benefit from additional support.

The lanyard, which was launched at Gatwick Airport as part of Dementia Awareness Week (15 – 21st May 2016), is being supported by leading charities like the Alzheimer’s Society, The National Autistic Society and Action on Hearing Loss.

Gatwick Airport has been working closely with UK charities and OCS, who provide passenger assistance services at Gatwick, to promote greater awareness and understanding of the challenges passengers with hidden disabilities can experience when travelling through busy environments.
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

As part of the initiative, Gatwick is increasing awareness and training of airport staff and appointing ‘workplace champions’ to provide enhanced assistance for passengers with hidden disabilities.

Gatwick’s commitment follows its support of the Prime Minister’s Dementia Challenge and the airport’s involvement with the Air Transport Group to improve the travelling experience for all passengers with hidden disabilities.

The lanyard will ensure staff are aware passengers may:

- Need more time to process information or more time to prepare themselves at security
- Need to remain with family at all times
- May react to sensory overload i.e. be surrounded by too much information
- Need staff to use clear verbal language as it may be difficult to understand facial expressions and/or body language
- Need staff to be visual with instructions and use closed questions to assist passengers effectively through the airport
- Benefit from a more comprehensive briefing on what to expect as they travel through the airport

Gatwick Chief Executive, Stewart Wingate said:

“We recognise that travelling through a busy airport can be a challenge for passengers with hidden disabilities and we want to ensure that we’re doing everything we can to welcome and assist all our passengers.

An important part of this commitment is ensuring greater awareness and understanding of hidden disabilities across the airport community, alongside improvements to the physical environment and the training of our staff so that they are well-equipped to recognise and respond to the needs of passengers.”

Aviation Minister Robert Goodwill said:

“Air travel can be stressful and confusing for passengers with hidden disabilities and we know that concerns about crowded terminals and security checks can put some people off air travel all together.

That is why I set industry leaders a challenge earlier this year, to see what airports and airlines could do to improve the travelling experience for these passengers with hidden disabilities. Gatwick are already doing great work in this area and it is fantastic to see them collaborating with leading charities to create a practical solution for making journeys better for passengers.”
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Jeremy Hughes, Alzheimer’s Society Chief Executive, said:
“People with dementia and their family carers have a right to travel but often need help to be on hand. The initiative of OCS working with Gatwick Airport is one we applaud and look forward to other airports seeing what they can do.”

Daniel Cadey, the National Autistic Society’s Autism Access Development Manager, said:
“Going on holiday can be difficult for many autistic people where unfamiliar and overwhelming environments - like noisy, bustling airports - can cause extreme anxiety. “We’re pleased to be working with Gatwick to support their lanyard initiative alongside additional staff training and awareness sessions which, taken together, can make a big difference for autistic people and help to better prepare them for their trip.”

Dr Roger Wicks, Action on Hearing Loss Director of Policy & Campaigns said:
“We welcome the introduction of the lanyard scheme at Gatwick Airport which will discreetly identify passengers with hearing loss to airport staff to help them have a smoother journey. Action on Hearing Loss members have told us that missing out on audio announcements at the airport is a real issue which can lead to travel delays. We support this new initiative so that passengers with a hearing loss can be provided with the assistance that they need, especially in emergency situations where they can be particularly vulnerable.”

*The lanyard is purely voluntary and passengers who require assistance are always welcome to approach a member of staff who will be happy to assist. Lanyards will be available free of charge from Gatwick’s assistance desks.

OCS rolls out lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities to other UK airports following success of scheme at Gatwick

25th Oct 2016

A new lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities, first introduced at Gatwick Airport to assist passengers with hidden disabilities, is set to be rolled out to other UK airports following a successful trial over the summer.

The number of passengers with hidden disabilities requesting assistance at Gatwick Airport has risen by 47% year-on-year since the launch of the voluntary lanyard in May this year by OCS Group as passengers and their families feel more confident about flying, or requesting assistance at the airport.

Over 1,000 passengers with hidden disabilities such as dementia, autism or hearing loss use passenger assistance services at Gatwick Airport each month. The introduction of a distinctive
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities enables travellers to discreetly identify themselves to staff to ensure tailored help and support can be offered throughout their journey.

Assistance staff at Gatwick have been trained to provide appropriate assistance when they see a passenger is wearing the unique lanyard or badge. For example, staff are able to support passengers who may need more time to process information or to prepare their belongings ahead of security screening.

The project is part of a wider initiative by OCS Group, who provide assistance services at Gatwick and nine other airports in the UK and Ireland, to deliver improved support services. The Challenging for Change report, commissioned by OCS, recorded the experiences of 543 passengers with disabilities and made recommendations for improvement. The report has been followed up with workshops at airports around the UK at which airlines, airport operators, baggage handlers, disability groups and support service providers exchanged ideas to address the issues. Gatwick Airport and OCS Group have been working with leading UK charities, including the Alzheimer’s Society, The National Autistic Society and Action on Hearing Loss.

Nikki Barton, Head of Terminals and Passenger Assistance at Gatwick said: “We recognise air travel can sometimes be a stressful experience for passengers with hidden disabilities so it is welcome news that more passengers are aware that additional assistance is available at Gatwick since the introduction of the lanyard scheme. An important aspect of the scheme has been the uptake in training for frontline staff so that they can better understand and support the individual needs of passengers when travelling through Gatwick and ensure every journey is memorable for all the right reasons.”

“OCS Group has over 50 years of experience in the aviation sector and we are committed to delivering excellence for passengers requiring additional assistance or support” said Andy Boyd of OCS Group.

“The lanyard scheme is the result of extensive consultations with disability groups and means that misinterpretations of specific travel needs in the case of hidden disabilities can be minimised, ensuring respectful, dignified and efficient support for all passengers.”

OCS has provided persons with reduced mobility (PRM) services at Gatwick Airport since November 2010. The introduction of the lanyard scheme was supported by extensive staff training, with NVQ Level 2 training in dementia care is now standard for OCS teams in the departure lounges. In addition, over 50 Dementia Friends Champions have been trained throughout the airport, who in turn train Dementia Friends, in line with the Alzheimer’s Society’s Dementia Friends programme.

Sue Rennie, Alzheimer’s Society Services Manager for West Sussex North, said: “People with dementia and their family carers often find the prospect of travelling daunting – particularly so when faced with unfamiliar and busy airports. The lanyard scheme for passengers with hidden disabilities introduced at Gatwick offers reassurance to those that choose to use it and helps airport staff be aware that they may require additional support and will improve their travel experience at the airport.”

The Challenging for Change report is available for download from the website below http://www.ocs.co.uk/challenging-for-change-report
Appointing an airport Autism Ambassador

Gatwick also appointed Maria Cook as the airport’s first Autism Ambassador to drive continued improvement in the airport’s efforts to be fully autism friendly. Maria is the parent of an autistic son and as Chair of Autism Support Crawley has worked closely with Gatwick to:

Promote Gatwick’s hidden disability lanyard programme
Extend awareness training programmes to immigration officers and other third party staff
Raise awareness of autism through numerous airport events
Instigated the development of specialist toilet and changing facilities in both Gatwick terminals – both landside and airside – and also sensory rooms in both terminals

5 Apr 2017

GATWICK’S autism ambassador Maria Cook and organisations from the airport marked World Autism Awareness Day.

More than 30 families attended the event, designed to give children and adults with autism, their carers and families an overview of the airport before they travel.

Using an airport can be a challenge for people affected by autism and the event in the North Terminal allowed families to “check in”, ride on assistance buggies, meet trained security dogs and the police, watch the X-ray machines in action and talk with staff.
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Gatwick is the UK’s first officially recognised autism-friendly airport.

Representatives from across its services attended the event, including its autism champions, staff from airlines such as Virgin Atlantic, security and special assistance teams, the police, the fire service and immigration officials.

Autistic people often see, hear and feel the world in a different, more intense way, which can mean they feel overwhelmed by too much information when out in public.

Travelling through an airport can be a particularly challenging experience.

Anyone who requires assistance when travelling through Gatwick is encouraged to contact the airport’s special assistance team or their airline.

Maria Cook said: “I am so proud to be Gatwick’s autism ambassador and to play a part in the airport’s hidden disability assistance programme and official autism friendly accreditation.

“I hope to see other UK airports follow Gatwick’s lead and establish official autism-friendly programmes of their own.”

Mid Sussex Times

Gatwick celebrates World Autism Awareness Day

Staff from the airport and more than 30 families came to the event.

Gatwick Airport celebrated World Autism Awareness Day on Tuesday (April 4).
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

Staff from across the airport came together, including police, firefighters and immigration officers, to show their support.

The event was designed to give children and adults with autism and their carers and families an overview of airport processes before they travel.

More than 30 families attended the event, designed to give children and adults with autism and their carers and families an overview of airport processes before they travel.

Maria Cook, Gatwick’s autism ambassador, said: “I am so proud to be Gatwick’s autism ambassador and to play a part in the airport’s Hidden Disability Assistance Programme and official autism friendly accreditation. “I hope to see other UK airports follow Gatwick’s lead and establish official autism-friendly programmes of their own.

“The number of people in organisations across the airport who have volunteered their free time to be part of the awareness day has been overwhelming, from those working for airlines and security, to the emergency services, special assistance and terminal teams.

“Across the board everyone involved wants to pro-actively improve their provision for people with autism. “It has been a mammoth team effort behind the scenes to make this day happen and I would like to thank everyone involved.”

Travelling through an airport can be a challenge for people affected by autism and the event held in the North Terminal allowed families to ‘check in’, ride on assistance buggies, meet trained security dogs and the police, watch the x-ray machines in action and talk with staff about travelling with autism. Anyone who requires assistance when travelling through Gatwick is encouraged to contact the airport’s special assistance team or their airline

Gatwick Airport and the National Autistic Society team up to host Autistic Awareness Day (2016)

05/04/2016

- Over 50 children and their families attended two sessions
- Designed to give autistic children and their families overview of airport processes
- New autism friendly visual guide produced to help with each stage of the journey

Gatwick Airport and The National Autistic Society have joined forces to mark the start of World Autism Awareness Week (2-8 April) by hosting an Autistic Awareness Day for children on the autism spectrum and their families.
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

On Saturday 2nd April, the airport’s North Terminal hosted two sessions attended by over 50 autistic children, alongside their family and carers, to provide a fun and engaging overview of the airport environment and security processes.

Autistic people often see, hear and feel the world in a different, more intense way, which can mean they feel overwhelmed by ‘too much information’ when out in public. Travelling through an airport can be a particularly apprehensive experience for people with autism which is why Gatwick and the National Autistic Society have teamed up to help provide greater assistance for passengers with autism.

Representatives from across the airport community including airlines, immigration, police, security, special assistance and the terminal team (including airport dogs) were on hand to explain airport processes and answer any questions. The Awareness Day was also attended by the National Autistic Society’s cultural ambassador, Alan Gardner, star of the Channel 4 series, The Autistic Gardener.

To coincide with World Autism Awareness Week, Gatwick has produced an autism friendly visual guide for children travelling through the airport to help guide them through each stage of their journey.

Caroline Emms of Gatwick’s Terminal Team who organised the Awareness Day and is the mother of an autistic son said:

“We want to create a positive environment for all our passengers travelling through Gatwick and to help make their journey memorable for all the right reasons.

Travelling through an airport can be a challenge for autistic people, which is why we’ve teamed up with the National Autistic Society to help families better understand what to expect, while ensuring airport staff are on hand to assist.

I am delighted that with the support of the airport community and NAS over 50 children were able to take part in the sessions helping to make the day a huge success.”

Daniel Cady, Autism Access Development Manager at the National Autistic Society, said:

“Going on holiday can be difficult for many autistic adults and children who can need fixed routines to help them cope with the world around them. Unfamiliar and overwhelming environments - like noisy, bustling airports - can cause them extreme anxiety.
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

“The awareness days that Caroline and her colleagues run at Gatwick are a fantastic initiative. They’re not only hugely beneficial for parents and autistic people, they also raise awareness about autism and are fun for everyone involved.

“We at the National Autistic Society have been working with Gatwick to support all that Caroline is doing, helping them bring in often small changes such as pre-flight information to help people prepare for their trip, clearer signage and increased staff awareness.

“We all expect to be able to take a plane for our holidays or business and it’s important that airports and airlines know what they can do to make the experience as easy as possible for autistic people and their families.”

The National Autistic Society has launched a new three-year campaign called Too Much Information to help the public understand more about autism.

In their launch report they reveal how poor public understanding of autism is pushing autistic people and their families into isolation, in some cases leaving them feeling trapped in their own homes.

To find out more about the Too Much Information campaign, see the campaign film and learn more about autism go to: www.autism.org.uk/tmi.

Gatwick Airport hosts sessions for autistic children for World Autism Awareness Week


Gatwick Airport and the National Autistic Society (NAS) joined forces to mark the start of World Autism Awareness Week (2-8 April) by hosting an Autistic Awareness Day for children on the autism spectrum and their families.

On Saturday April 2, the airport’s North Terminal hosted two sessions attended by more than 50 autistic children, alongside their family and carers, to provide a fun and engaging overview of the airport environment and security processes.

Autistic people often see, hear and feel the world in a different, more intense way, which can mean they feel overwhelmed by ‘too much information’ when out in public. Travelling through an airport can be a
Gatwick – the UK’s first Autism friendly airport

particularly apprehensive experience for people with autism which is why Gatwick and the NAS teamed up to help provide greater assistance for passengers with autism.

Representatives from across the airport community including airlines, immigration, police, security, special assistance and the terminal team (including airport dogs) were on hand to explain airport processes and answer any questions. The day was also attended by the NAS’ cultural ambassador, Alan Gardner, star of Channel 4 series, The Autistic Gardener.

To coincide with World Autism Awareness Week, Gatwick has produced an autism-friendly visual guide for children travelling through the airport to help guide them through each stage of their journey.

Caroline Emms of Gatwick’s Terminal Team who organised the Awareness Day and is the mother of an autistic son said: “We want to create a positive environment for all our passengers travelling through Gatwick and to help make their journey memorable for all the right reasons.

“I am delighted that with the support of the airport community and NAS over 50 children were able to take part in the sessions helping to make the day a huge success.”

Daniel Cady, autism access development manager at the NAS, added: “Going on holiday can be difficult for many autistic adults and children who can need fixed routines to help them cope with the world around them. Unfamiliar and overwhelming environments - like noisy, bustling airports - can cause them extreme anxiety.

“The awareness days that Caroline and her colleagues run at Gatwick are a fantastic initiative. They’re not only hugely beneficial for parents and autistic people, they also raise awareness about autism and are fun for everyone involved.

“We at the National Autistic Society have been working with Gatwick to support all that Caroline is doing, helping them bring in often small changes such as pre-flight information to help people prepare for their trip, clearer signage and increased staff awareness.

“We all expect to be able to take a plane for our holidays or business and it’s important that airports and airlines know what they can do to make the experience as easy as possible for autistic people and their families.”