



TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO

PASSENGERS' EXPERIENCE OF AIR TRAVEL

Response from Amicus

1. Amicus is currently the second largest trade union in the UK and the largest in the Private sector. We are currently in the process of merging with the Transport and General Workers Union which will result in the new union becoming the largest over all with over 2 million members. Amicus currently represents more than 12000 cabin crew and has recognition agreements for Cabin Crew, ground staff and engineers employed by 30 UK based carriers including BA Virgin, BMI My Travel, Monarch, GB Airways, First Choice, JAL, BMed and New Zealand Air. Amicus is also an affiliated member of the European Transport Workers' Federation and ITF.

Executive Summery

- A passengers experience of air travel begins with their movement through the airport which can all too often can become an adventure all of its own.
- Cabin Crew are not just there to serve passengers, they are there as safety professionals and to deal with disorderly conduct.
- Despite this they are the only part of the air travel industry that does not require a license or certification of competence.
- Air crews spend the majority of there working day in international airspace and hence according to most airlines are not covered by the working time directive in terms of breaks and paid holiday entitlements.
- The management of the atmosphere in an aircraft cabin can lead to detrimental effects on the health of passengers and crew, which is why some passengers are advised to seek a doctor's approval prior to boarding.

Passenger experience

2. All air travel begins with their journey to the airport. The provision of good public transport links to an airport is essential in order to reduce congestion on the surrounding surface infrastructure. Despite this in some cases travel times and conditions on our public transport network are encouraging many into using their own vehicles. If you are travelling by rail from the south west of England to Heathrow for example, your journey requires you journey into Central London first.
3. On arrival at the airport where they are subjected to the stresses of finding their check in desk and the queue to get through security before arriving in the oasis of the departure lounge.
4. This journey has become significantly more stressful of late primarily due to the increased level of security and the lack of trained staff to man the X-ray and scanning equipment. This was highlighted dramatically in August of last year with the introduction of additional restrictions on the grounds of a security alert, requiring many staff to work way beyond their allotted working days in order to clear the backlog of passengers. It can also be an embarrassing experience for both passenger and security staff to have a case opened and to be asked to place some items in a clear plastic bag.
5. Once you arrive at the boarding gate, some airlines only allow a ten to fifteen minute window in order to disembark passengers clean the aircraft and board the next cargo of travellers. Once you have reached your seat the aircraft trundles out to the runway where, due to a lack of available departure slots, your flight might sit for up to 45 minutes before take off.
6. These problems are particularly acute at the UK's premiere international airport, Heathrow. Its current facilities are woefully lacking due to lack of investment and expansion. In 2006 alone **67,530,223** passengers passed through Heathrow making it the third busiest airport in the world. That is almost double the number who flew from Gatwick, which is ranked 24th in the global statistics compiled by the Airports Council International. The existing two runways to at Heathrow operate at 98.6% of capacity in segregation mode leaving little space for error. This was clearly illustrated recently when fog reduced the number of aircraft movements at the airport to just 20 per hour creating several days of disruption.
7. Heathrow is one of five world hub airports, acting as an interchange for passengers from numerous locations. This activity generates approximately 1.5% of the UK's GDP and over 100,000 jobs for the local and nation economy.

8. This world status airport is facing stiff competition from other airports in Europe and further afield for this coveted title that have far more capacity in terms of physical runway space. This reduces delays and more often than not allows aircraft to not only taxi straight to the runway and depart but also land without the need to stack in a holding pattern before arrival. It is therefore believed by many that without expansion at Heathrow, the UK will lose this most valuable asset primarily due to dissatisfaction amongst travelling public and business community.
9. This is one reason why Amicus is a supporter of the Future Heathrow campaign for the implementation of mixed mode operations on the existing two runways and the construction of a third short runway for short haul flights.

Safety of passengers (The role of cabin crew)

10. Cabin Crew are the all too often over looked safety professionals of our airways, ensuring that should an emergency arise they will be able to guide and assist passengers in reaching safety. These men and women are trained, not just in first aid but beyond this basic level of care, to ensure that the patient is maintained and treated swiftly, during the first vital minutes, following an incident, until proper medical attention can be obtained, once back on the ground. Crew are also trained in evacuation procedures to assist passengers out and away from aircraft in the event of an emergency landing, be that on land or on water.
11. Although it is an offence to be drunk on board an aircraft, passengers on occasion, behave in a threatening, abusive, insulting or disorderly manner towards members of the crew, and have been known to intentionally interfere with their performance. Although this can result in a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine and/or two years imprisonment such incidents are all too common. If there is a disruptive passenger it is the role of cabin crew to attempt to defuse the situation and only where absolutely necessary to restrain the individual until the authorities at the nearest airport can remove this passenger into their custody. In the vast majority of cases no immediate action is taken as the crew are successful in their endeavours. It is only where the actions of the passenger go beyond what could loosely be called acceptable that action is taken to divert the flight.
12. In extreme situations such as a hijacking or a terrorist incident it is the role of cabin crew to try and instil an air of calm and manage the situation. At the other end of the spectrum Cabin crew are trained to assist passengers in combating their fear of flying.
13. Training for this demanding role is normally provided in house by the respective airline with the standard varying considerably between employers. As a result the qualifications obtained for one airline are

non transferable to the next. In the case of Ryanair crew which have been formally accepted for consideration, are obliged to pay for the training, and uniform with no guarantee of a position at the end of the course.

Licensing

14. Amicus and its sister unions throughout Europe have called on a standardised system and a licensing arrangement to enable crew to be trained to a level which is consistent throughout the industry.
15. All sectors of the Civil Aviation activity are based on the certification by the competent Authority of all aircraft, products, entities and personnel involved in the safety and security chain, with one exception: Cabin Crew.
16. The outcome of Regulation 3922/91 (EU OPS) acknowledges the role of cabin crew as safety professionals through training and operational requirements but amendment 1592 as it stands reduced the cabin crew standards to a level where they are the only group which does not require certification by the EU.
17. Currently the National Civil Aviation Authorities license or certify their cabin crew in half of the EU member states. These are tied to a certificate of medical fitness. Proposed changes to subpart O of the current EU-OPS regulations relating to Cabin Crew Licensing will have the effect of lowering the safety standards in 50% of the EU countries as it relaxes the requirements on training, fitness and other key criteria.
18. This changes risks distorting competition given that some airlines will staff cabins with little more than waiters and waitresses. Given the fact that the market competition in aviation is ruthless and that the EU is one single market, the pressure will affect all the employees. The EU has already opened its aviation market for further overseas' competition from the US in agreeing to the Open Skies agreement. In this respect the pressure on the employees as well as on standards will only increase. Amicus is of the firm opinion that the EU authorities have seriously underestimated the consequences of the commercial pressure in the airline market, specifically on cabin crew because of their dual role "safety and service".

Working conditions

19. Unlike other groups of UK employees, the basic provisions for rest and nourishment under the Civil Aviation Working Time Regulations 2004 are not seen by some employers as compulsory, and have not therefore applied the provisions to employees who spend their working day primarily in the air. Nor are they covered by the Health and Safety Executive provisions once the wheels of the aircraft leave the tarmac as that role is performed by the Civil Aviation Authority. It is often the

case therefore that breaks for cabin crew are determined by the chief steward or stewardess and can lead in busy flights to crew not receiving a break throughout the duration of their flights even to long haul destinations. Some airlines currently do not even provide staff with paid annual leave arguing that as the crew work in international airspace that these basic provisions do not apply. These circumstances are largely unknown by passengers who see cabin crew as airborne waiters

20. The industrial limit for all long range sectors is a duty period of 19 hours 15 minutes. On a non-bunked aircraft it is not possible to achieve a 19 hour 15 minute duty day; however, as most employers would agree that some provision needs to be made for rest. It is possible however in some cases to find crew performing up to an 18hour 30minute duty day. On a typical 777 service, 12 crew will be responsible for all 300 plus passengers on board, split 6 in first and 6 in standard class. The BA scheme by way of example provides for a maximum of 14 hours based on a report time of between 13.00 and 17.59, plus a maximum of 3 hours rest taken in one go at the captain's discretion, plus the 30 minutes debrief time added to end of the duty day.
21. Previously crew were provided with rest between the periods of disembarkation and embarkation of the next set of passengers, while the plane was cleaned and refuelled. Due to the demand to cut costs and keep aircraft flying, however, these periods have been shortened and the crew themselves now have the additional duty to clean the aircraft between flights, in many cases. In the case of some low cost carriers the turnaround time has been reduced to just 10 minutes from arrival at the stand to departure.
22. Additional to the above cabin crew duties include the role that they are most commonly associated with, in the distribution of food, drinks and duty free. They are responsible for not just ensuring that their tills balance at the end of the flight but also the inventory on board, having, with some employers, discrepancies deducted from their wages.
23. These wages are generally low by comparison to many industries and are only compensated by the provision of discounts and upgrades (where available) to crew if they wish to take a flight on that airline on a standby basis and were there is spare capacity. Crew additionally work on a shift pattern and generally are on call to provide cover for other crew who are ill etc often at very short notice. This may also mean that they spend a considerable amount of time away from home, especially to long haul destinations.

Health (In-flight air quality)

24. On board air quality has dropped since the advent of non smoking aircraft, resulting in more common occurrence of the spread of colds to

and from crew. Thus even if a cabin crew member has even the mildest of colds they may be restricted from flying. There are, however, no statutory protections in place for cabin crew when assigned to fly to areas which may be affected by disease such as the areas affected by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) for example. The World Health Organisation recognises cabin crew as potential “close contacts” yet this is not reciprocated by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the US for example.

25. The CAA state that although not required for aircraft certification, on modern airliners the high efficiency filters are used for filtering recirculated air which will filter out most bacteria and viruses. As in other forms of public transport, the risk of an infection being spread from one passenger to another is more likely to be by close proximity rather than by recirculated cabin air.
26. Previously the air was circulated far more frequently to remove second hand tobacco smoke from the cabins. With the advent of non smoking aircraft the need of this rapid air exchange was reduced which in turn reduced weight and cost to the airline. The typical proportions are 50% outside air and 50% recycled air in most modern airliners, and the number of exchanges of air, usually equates to about 20 per hour, taking into account of the maximum number of passengers for which the aircraft is approved.
27. This exchange of air at low pressure reduced the amount of moisture in the atmosphere. This drop in moisture content can result in about 100ml being lost from the body via respiration and via the skin over an 8 hour flight. A glass of water and the body's normal control mechanisms can easily cope with this by adjusting the concentration of urine produced, which is why crew ensure that water is always available on demand except during periods when the seat belt sign is illuminated. Long term exposure to such an atmosphere has, however, been seen to cause dry skin amongst cabin crew.
28. During flights, the aircraft is maintained at a reduced pressure, generally equivalent to an altitude of 7,000 to 8,000 feet although sometimes higher. The oxygen content of the ambient air in flight is also reduced by 25% relative to sea level which is the standard first issued in 1957. The 'thin' air at this altitude can cause problems for people with some medical conditions, such as chronic lung or heart disease.
29. Some countries require that incoming aircraft are sprayed with pesticides to kill any insects that may be on board and may carry disease. These sprays are applied in occupied or soon to be occupied aircraft cabins without any measures to inform or protect the health of passengers or crew.

Summary

30. Amicus is campaigning to improve the experience of the air traveller in their journey to and from the aircraft. Be that by improved facilities or better trained, equipped and motivated staff.
31. Once onboard cabin crew become the face of their employer and have a duty to be professional at all times. Although the role of a cabin crew steward or stewardess may seem glamorous from the outside, this generally far from the truth.

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