



60 SECONDS WITH GERALDINE LUNDY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING HIDDEN DISABILITY IN TRAVEL

Nearly 20% of the population has a registered disability while only 2% of those flying through Heathrow airport report a disability when making their booking. We speak to Geraldine Lundy, Virgin Atlantic's Accessibility Manager about the steps they are taking to make travel more accessible.

VIRGIN ATLANTIC HAS RECENTLY LAUNCHED A NEW SCHEME FOR TRAVELLERS WITH HIDDEN DISABILITIES. WHAT PROMPTED THIS?

“Accessibility across the board is important to us at Virgin Atlantic, but when it comes to providing support, visible disabilities are more obvious which enables us to know when a passenger may need help. If you have a hidden disability you don't have those visual clues, from autism to dyslexia, to IBS. We wanted to do more to make travel accessible for everyone”

IS THE SCHEME WORKING?

“Before the scheme launched we had about 50 people per month classified as having a hidden disability - we now have over 500. To some extent this likely represents increased business. However, it also shows that by putting an improved experience in place for travellers with hidden disabilities and making them aware of the benefits we have increased the comfort levels in sharing sensitive information with us.”

HOW HAS THE HIDDEN DISABILITY SCHEME IMPROVED WHAT WAS PREVIOUSLY IN PLACE?

“We have one frequent business traveller with a hidden disability which made them very anxious when travelling. The disability wasn't always there but the sporadic nature caused a lot of stress and the previous workarounds meant widespread communication. For instance, it meant letting the special assistance team and everyone else that the passenger would come into contact with throughout his journey know of his needs. This wasn't ideal. We wanted to provide a solution that felt less invasive. With the new scheme in place he travels with his disability alert and if he needs assistance he simply shows his symbol. It has actually reduced his anxiety.”

SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT BE DOING MORE?

“For the first time the government recognises the importance of this area and are encouraging the aviation industry to be truly accessible for passengers. It's a positive step forwards but there's a lot more to do”

If you missed Reed & Mackay's Diversity and Inclusion webinar you can watch it [here](#), or access the full report [here](#).