

Tens of thousands of railway staff trained in understanding disabled people's needs

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Tens of thousands of railway staff are being trained to communicate effectively with disabled passengers, understand the challenges they may face when travelling, and to refresh their knowledge and skills to provide any assistance needed.

By the end of 2021, almost 30,000 passenger-facing staff will have undertaken disability awareness and equality training as part of requirements set out in the Office of Rail and Road's (ORR) Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance.

The rail regulator welcomed this progress made by all 24 train and station operators in its review of ATP commitments. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, most operators are broadly on track to meet their commitments by the end of July.

Great Western Railway has already met its commitments, having trained all of its 4,600 frontline staff.

ORR's monitoring of the roll-out has also seen 13 train and station operators develop brand new courses to be used in staff inductions and for refresher training.

Key to successful delivery has been the involvement of disabled people in the development and delivery of training – making their experiences of using the railway a central focus.

And 11 train operators are extending the training from frontline staff to all colleagues.

The good progress has been made following initial concerns ORR had about gaps in training materials and plans received from operators in July 2020.

Initially although only four of 24 operators submitted sufficient evidence to assure ORR they would meet the mandatory training requirements by July 2021, ORR were nevertheless confident that a further eight were in a position to meet the requirements pending submission of additional material.

Following subsequent discussions and the receipt of further evidence, ORR is now confident the remaining 12 operators are able to meet their ATP commitments.

Stephanie Tobyn, Deputy Director, Consumers at ORR said: “ORR wants all passengers to be able to travel safely with confidence and with ease. Introducing obligations on train and station operators to provide up-to-date, regular disability awareness and equality training to their staff is part of our broad package of measures to improve the experience of disabled passengers.

“Despite our initial concerns about progress in designing and delivering compliant training packages, the picture has become much more positive over the last six months, with the process of training tens of thousands of staff now well under way.”

Neil Craig, Mobility and Inclusion Manager at Great Western Railway, said: “As lockdown is eased and people start to use the railway again, it is more important than ever that we do everything we can to ensure that the services we offer are accessible to all passengers.

“We are immensely proud to deliver this new disability awareness training, ensuring that all of our helpful and friendly frontline staff, have the knowledge and training required to give customers with disabilities the time, support and assistance that they require.”

Sarah Rennie, accessibility specialist and trainer, who has been delivering training to a number of train operators, said: “It’s a privilege to lead teams of disabled trainers to facilitate discussions which challenge outdated perceptions, and support staff to understand what the 21st century disabled consumer expects. As a disabled rail passenger myself, I’m confident that with the right supportive culture, rather than seeing us as ‘tasks’, we’ll see a stronger shift to valuing our end-to-end customer experience.”

Photo credit: Office of Rail and Road