



Department
for Transport

Guidance on Assistance to Air Accident Victims and their Families

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THIS GUIDANCE IS ANNEX A OF THE UK NATIONAL AVIATION EMERGENCY PLAN (NAEP) AND IS AVAILABLE VIA GOV.UK, THE CAA WEBSITE AND RESILIENCE DIRECT

THIS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT THAT WILL EVOLVE WITH TIME, EXPERIENCE AND FEEDBACK TO INCLUDE IMPORTANT LESSONS AND BEST PRACTICE IN SUBSEQUENT UPDATES AS REQUIRED

Contents

Contents	4
Introduction	6
Scope	7
Legal Framework	8
UK legislation	8
The Montreal Convention 1999 (MC99)	9
ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS)	10
Assistance in Action	11
Response phases	11
Communication and Information Management Strategy	13
Responsibilities of Public & Private Assistance Providers	16
Responsibilities of the State	16
Responsibilities of other states involved in an accident	17
Responsibilities of airport operators	18
Responsibilities of airline operators	18
Additional assistance providers for accidents over UK waters or covered by UK Search and Rescue Region (SRR)	19
Assistance by third parties	19
Family Associations	20
Types of assistance to be provided	21
Confirmation of involvement	21
Provision of immediate information	21
Assistance with Immigration and Customs Formalities	23
Provision of information about financial services	24
Provision of privacy and security	24
Provision of Information about the Accident Investigation	26
Identification, Protection and Return of Human Remains and Personal Effects	27

Memorials and memorial services	28
Cultural, philosophical and religious considerations	28
Lessons learned	28
Airline AAVF Guidance	30
Principles Applicable to all Requirements	30
Requirement 1 – Communication from the Airline to Family Members	30
Requirement 2 – Data Management of Passengers, Crew and Family Members	32
Requirement 3 – Centralised family support locations and in-person care for families	32
Requirement 4 – Victim Identification and Return of Human Remains	34
Requirement 5 – Personal Property of the Victim	34
Requirement 6 – Access by Families to Investigations and Hearings	35
Requirement 7 – Financial and Logistical Support to family members	35
Requirement 8 – Memorials and monuments	36
Requirement 9 – Compensation by the Airline to Third Parties	36
Requirement 10 – Accounting for air accident survivors	37
Training and Exercising	38
Review	38
Training of personnel	38
Cross-cultural competence of assistance providers	39
Compliance and Assurance	39
Resource preparedness	39
Conclusion	41
Glossary	42

Introduction

The following guidance on Assistance to Air Accident Victims and their Families (AAAVF) is a companion document to the Department for Transport's National Aviation Emergency Plan (NAEP) and sets out the roles and responsibilities of aviation stakeholders, government departments and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) in the aftermath of a major air accident occurring within UK airspace, involving a UK airline or involving British Nationals abroad. It also provides clear guidance for operators on the levels of support that should be provided to victims and their relatives in the event of an accident.

AAAVF can be defined as the supporting efforts that address the fundamental concerns of survivors and/or family members following a critical incident. This definition includes passengers, crew, people on the ground, emergency responders, victims' families and/or close relations. It is important to note that different groups may have very different needs in terms of assistance and that sensitivities should be considered when coordinating reception areas for these groups in the aftermath of an accident to ensure the best level of care for all.

AAAVF assistance programmes require cooperative planning and response across multiple stakeholders. These include the aircraft operator, the airport operator - around 94% of air accidents occur in flight phases carried out at, or close to, an airport (*Boyd, D.D. A review of general aviation safety (1984–2017). Aerosp. Med. Hum. Perform. 2017, 88, 657–664*) - the state of occurrence, other affected or involved states, non-governmental organisations and specialised commercial crisis management companies employed by operators to deliver assistance on their behalf. Such planning is essential to ensure that, in the event of a major aircraft accident, the assistance provided to the victims and their families is effective and timely.

Scope

This guidance covers accidents involving both national and international commercial aviation but is not intended to cover military aircraft or general aviation. For consistency, it utilises the event categorisation system used by the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA):

1. UK registered aircraft in UK airspace
2. UK registered aircraft outside UK airspace
3. Non-UK registered aircraft in UK airspace
4. Non-UK registered aircraft outside UK airspace

The majority of the information contained in this annex relates specifically to accidents involving UK and non-UK registered aircraft in UK airspace (Categories 1 & 3) with some additions to cover accidents outside UK airspace (Categories 2 & 4) as required.

Legal Framework

UK legislation

Current [UK legislation](#) stipulates the following requirements in relation to AAASF:

- *A national civil aviation accident emergency plan which includes AAASF*

The UK National Aviation Emergency Plan includes this assistance guidance as an annex.

- *All UK airlines should have a plan for AAASF, audited by the CAA, which includes psychological support for victims of civil aviation accidents and their relatives and allows the airline to react to a major accident*

The CAA ensures that all UK airlines have an assistance plan which includes psychological support, as per the legislation. A checklist comprised of key points from this guidance forms part of the CAA's Flight Operations Safety Management Systems (SMS) oversight procedures to review airline emergency response plans. The CAA can then issue observations to suggest improvements and any areas of future focus. In practice, the majority of UK airlines have very robust emergency plans that include assistance to victims and their families.

- *Third country airline operators are encouraged to similarly adopt a plan for AAASF*

The following text is included in CAA communication to international operators applying for issuance of seasonal permits, new Foreign Carrier Permits (FCPs) and Third Country Operator (TCO) licences:

The Government of the United Kingdom expects third-country airlines which operate in the UK to adopt a plan for the assistance of victims of civil aviation accidents and their relatives, in line with UK guidance and ICAO standards and recommended practices (SARPS). This plan should include psychological support for victims and their relatives. Plans should make provision for local arrangements to be implemented promptly, accompanied by clear and accessible communication to victims and their relatives in the event of an accident.

- *The appointment of a reference person as a point of contact and information for the victims and their relatives following an accident*

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has appointed Cindy Butts as the standing Independent Public Advocate (IPA), as mandated in the [Victims and Prisoners Act 2024](#), to support the victims of major incidents in England and Wales – this will include the victims of aircraft accidents. Guidance on the IPA role is included alongside the [Policy Statement](#). Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate arrangements that are situation specific.

A major incident is defined in section 34(2) of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 as “an incident that (a) occurs in England or Wales after 18 September 2024, (b) causes the death of, or serious harm to, a significant number of individuals, and (c) is declared in writing by the Secretary of State to be a major incident for the purposes of appointing advocates for victims of major incidents”. Only incidents falling within section 34(2) of the Act qualify as major incidents for IPA purposes.

Similarly, in the event that an aircraft incident is the result of terrorism, the Home Office has a [Victims of Terrorism](#) Unit to assist those affected and the IPA may also be stood up in response to terrorism.

- *Third countries with citizens fatally or seriously injured in a UK accident may appoint an expert to visit the scene of the accident, access relevant information on the incident and progress of the investigation, as well as receiving a copy of the final report*

The Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) would facilitate third country investigators travelling to an accident in the UK, as well as sending an expert team of investigators to travel to an accident site outside the UK if a significant number of British Nationals were impacted overseas. *The above expert may also assist in the process to identify victims and attend meetings with the survivors of its State*

The police force’s Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) unit may be activated and may send representatives to assist in victim identification. A Coroner will be appointed to investigate the deaths of the UK victims. Police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) will be appointed to assist UK victims’ families. FCDO would lead on any memorial events.

- *All air carriers and aircraft operators, including those from third countries, must have sufficient insurance in place*

[UK Regulation \(EC\) 785/2004](#) requires all air carriers and operators to hold insurance at levels consistent with the Montreal Convention. All commercial operators (UK and foreign) are required to provide independent confirmation of compliance.

The Montreal Convention 1999 (MC99)

[MC99](#) is designed to be a single, universal treaty to govern airline liability around the world. Article 17 establishes airline liability in the case of death or injury to passengers, as well as in cases of delay, damage or loss of baggage and cargo. Article 21 sets out that, although there are no limits on how much compensation can be paid, airlines are not allowed to dispute claims up to the strict liability limit. Where the injured party or the family

of the deceased suffer losses greater than the strict liability limit, the airline is only able to avoid paying for the entire compensation if they can prove the accident was not caused by their negligence or was caused by a third party.

As a result of the fourth review of the limits of liability conducted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in accordance with Article 24, the strict liability limit (effective as of 28 December 2024), in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) is 151 880 SDR for each passenger for damage sustained in case of death or bodily injury (for the first tier) (Article 21, paragraph 1). SDR is not a currency but rather an international reserve asset created by the International Monetary Fund in 1969. Its value depends on a basket of five currencies - the US dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling. Its current value (September 2026) in British pounds sterling is approximately £155,291.

Article 28 requires carriers to make advance payments to those entitled to compensation to meet their immediate economic needs.

If a country has not ratified MC99, it may still apply the Warsaw Convention, setting its own limits of liability for passenger compensation. If neither the Montreal nor Warsaw Conventions apply, the carrier would establish its own limits of liability.

ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS)

Additionally, ICAO SARPS and policy set out clear guidance:

- [Annex 9](#) to the Convention on International Civil Aviation – Facilitation (Chapter 8, Section I)
- [Annex 13](#) to the Convention on International Civil Aviation - Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation
- [Annex 14](#) to the Convention on International Civil Aviation – Aerodromes (Chapter 9, Section I on Airport Emergency Planning and AAAP)
- [Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families](#) (Doc 9973)
- [Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families](#) (Doc 9998)

Assistance in Action

Response phases

In the event of an air accident, there would be multiple, overlapping response and assistance requirements at different times. These can be divided into the following indicative phases:

Immediate (0-4 hours):

In this phase, the response to the accident focuses on preservation of life. Emergency services and any necessary technical operations are activated, securing people and the accident site, followed by the transportation of survivors to hospitals as required. NHS emergency response coordinate and allocate medical capacity across nearest hospitals. It is crucial that the airport and airline activate systems to provide immediate assistance to those involved.

Actions:

- Emergency response initiated and Category 1 and 2 Responders begin operations
- Airport activates Emergency Response Plan (ERP) including initial Survivors Reception Centre (SRC), Friends and Family Reception Centre (FFRC) and Reunification Area on site as required
- The airline activates its assistance plan, mobilises resources and sets up a toll-free information number
- The communication plan is activated. All personnel involved are alerted and aware of their roles and responsibilities
- Transfer of arriving family members to FFRC is arranged
- Non-hospitalised survivors are transferred to the SRC and reunited with their family

- Airport operations may have been suspended and general passenger flow management within the terminal needs extra attention to safeguard the privacy of victims and their families as media attention increases

Short-term (4-12 hours):

Medical rescue operations completed or near completion. Site secured for aircraft accident investigation. AAVF needs increase as news spreads and more families travel to the airport. Effective information management in assistance rooms is crucial with regular briefings required.

Actions:

- Trained airline crisis/assistance teams and/or contracted crisis management company establish a Family Assistance Centre (FAC) near the site of the accident as well as supporting SRC/FFRC at airports as appropriate
- Trained personnel collect data and assist arrival of family members to FFRC and reunification where possible
- Regular briefings begin updating family members on the current situation

Extended (12-24 hours):

Assistance is provided to survivors who require replacement travel documentation and to families needing visas. The reunification process concludes and the identification and return of deceased persons begins. Non-hospitalised survivors are assisted to recover personal effects where possible and continue their journeys. During this period, most assistance activities move outside the airport, activated airport rooms are closed and restored to their original functions.

Actions:

- Transition from airport assistance to airline assistance if the accident occurred at or near an airport. The airline establishes a FAC outside the airport
- Normal operations at the airport resume unless the accident was at the airport and necessary investigation is ongoing

Medium to long-term:

Airport operations normalised and local staff resume regular duties. Media attention and ongoing activities at the accident site may still impact the airport but should be kept off airport where possible. Psychological support for all involved, including ground handling staff involved in the accident, emergency staff and first responders, should be provided. Practical support to survivors and family should be arranged and special attention should be given to the medical and recovery needs of survivors to ensure that no secondary impacts develop.

Actions:

- Coordination of psychological and practical support for the medium and long term
- Airlines should ensure that first payments are provided for initial needs as well as ongoing assistance

Post-recovery phase:

This phase focuses on the longer-term aftercare activities that may take weeks, months or even years. It is best practice to incorporate these post-recovery phase elements into family assistance plans and consider how resources to facilitate longer term support will be financed. Experience from previous accidents has shown that these activities might include:

- Clearance and release of the accident site
- Assessment of environmental impacts/ground remediation
- Salvage and restoration work
- Allowing and accompanying visitors to the site of the accident at later stages
- Holding memorial services
- Establishing a temporary or permanent memorial site
- Information meetings for victims/relatives, citizens and assistance personnel
- Support with symptoms that develop later in time following an accident and associated assistance
- Maintaining contact between the government, air operator and any victim and family associations
- Evaluations and their results
- Assistance with the settlement of damages and liability questions
- Handling and coordination of the long-term effects and consequences of the air accident
- Management of the aftermath and long-term communication with the media, provision of information and information management

Communication and Information Management Strategy

In the aftermath of an aircraft accident, timely and accurate communication is essential to avoid confusion and distress. There is a pressing need from families of passengers for

information, as well as demands from the media, but it is of paramount importance that all information released is verified, which can take time. In quicker time, social media can spread images, narratives and comments rapidly, which may not be accurate. Government communications play a crucial role and will include continuous monitoring of the evolving situation across channels, with rapid identification and rebuttal of misinformation. Frequent, transparent updates on the status - even when circumstances don't change - help manage public perception and maintain trust. Q&A documents, shared between government departments and operational stakeholders, will be regularly updated to provide stakeholders and media with a single source of truth, ensuring consistent language and messaging throughout.

The arrival and departure airport can become gathering points for families to seek information, even when an accident occurred elsewhere, necessitating clear, coordinated communication strategies across government, airlines and airports. Relevant information, such as emergency response or investigation updates, should be shared with families first in a secure area where possible.

Media engagement must be carefully managed as reporting can have a significant impact, not only on aircraft accident victims and their families, but also on public perception of the occurrence and the reputation of the accident investigation authority. The communication aspect and media relationship should be managed from the first minute of the accident, as incorrect or partial information can cause distress and worsen an already difficult situation. Media interest is typically highest in the first two days following an accident but can vary depending on factors such as location, number of victims and circumstances of the accident. High profile accidents can lead to intense media coverage which can increase public pressure on investigation authorities to provide updates.

In such instances, it is important to uphold communication authority and speak with one voice. Training and exercises should include media handling techniques, internal and external communication coordination and social media management, including preparation for the spread of misinformation via social media. A clear communication strategy is vital in the aftermath of an air accident to ensure victims and their families receive accurate and timely information. Communication plans should be drawn up by all stakeholders and coordinated across the response. DfT Communications would work in close partnership with other government departments, ALBs, emergency services and aviation industry partners throughout. Depending on responsibility, plans may include the following:

- Convene a media cell involving representation from the key parties
- Set up and management of information meetings at FAC
- Coordination with the airlines involved and their ground handling providers
- Coordination with first responders and rescue teams
- Coordination with medical facilities and medical transport
- Timings of dissemination of the confirmed passenger and crew list
- Notification of involvement and identification of victims

- Communication with traditional and online media, including social media platforms
- Coordination with the AAIB on timings of initial findings and report presentations
- Information to recipients of assistance regarding the services available, including psychological support

Responsibilities of Public & Private Assistance Providers

In the event of a major air accident, multiple state, industry and third-party organisations would be responsible for different elements of the response.

Responsibilities of the State

In the event of an accident in UK airspace, the UK Government (UKG) has a legal, moral and ethical duty to safeguard the welfare of victims/families and ensure that their needs are being met. UKG responsibilities following an accident include:

- Ensure sufficient medical and emergency staff are available as first responders
- Maintain oversight of the Family Assistance Plans (FAP) of national airports and airlines
- Coordinate with airports and airlines involved during an accident and across all phases
- Coordinate with other involved States on assistance to victims and their families
- Facilitate entrance of investigation teams and necessary staff into the UK and on site
- Expedite visa issuance for families of victims who want to enter the country
- Ensure communication and information is coordinated through agreed comms plans

The immediate emergency response would be handled locally via the network overseen by the relevant Local Resilience Forum (LRF) in England and Wales or its counterpart in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The LRF or equivalent is the central coordinating body for the initial response and ensures that relevant training and regular exercising is undertaken across a range of potential risk scenarios. Led by the police, this network constitutes a range of first and second responders, usually including airport representatives where appropriate, and is responsible for ensuring that all relevant agencies are notified and that the first phase response is effectively organised.

Depending on the severity of the accident, there are several levels of government response ranging from the local response for minor incidents supported by a Government Liaison Officer (GLO), through a Lead Government Department (LGD) response for more serious incidents, up to a full government response under the UK Government Central Response Framework (UKGCRF) which would activate Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) for a major catastrophic event. Cabinet Office also publish guidance on [Human Aspects in Emergency Management](#). Multiple government departments, agencies and ALBs would be involved, with input increasing in line with the severity of the accident.

The Department for Transport (DfT) would mobilise various teams including Transport Security Operations Centre (TSOC), Aviation Resilience and Aviation Safety who would focus on the response, resilience and safety elements respectively. If terrorism or foul play were suspected, Aviation Security would also be involved. In addition, the Aviation Facilitation team would be focusing on AAVF elements of the response. The AAIB would lead on the accident investigation, providing updates to families plus a final briefing in non-technical language to aid comprehension in advance of the final report being made public. The CAA would work closely with DfT's Safety team to gather information on the accident and assess whether it highlights any additional UK exposure which may require action.

Although airlines are not Category 2 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, as the main provider of assistance to victims and their families, it is imperative that they are dialled in to all of the relevant response networks and invited to attend the relevant Strategic/Tactical Command Groups by the police/LRF. On the UKG side, the initial contact to/from the airline would be via DfT's TSOC. Aviation Resilience would engage with the relevant airline to gather information.

FCDO would be involved in accidents involving British Nationals overseas or Foreign Nationals in the UK. Following a major incident involving British Nationals abroad, they would set up a rapid response team to assist victims and their families. International cooperation and joint assistance efforts are crucial for providing appropriate support to those impacted who do not speak English and FCDO have the relevant contacts overseas to ensure this. They may also assist in arranging visas for UK Nationals travelling to an accident overseas.

The Home Office (HO) would advise on the provision of visas for families entering the UK, as well as for relevant experts/investigators who require permits.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) would stand up the Independent Public Advocate (IPA) to support victims and their families in England and Wales in the event that a major incident was declared, to signpost families to existing practical support and advocate on their behalf if their needs were not being met.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) would offer support and guidance to local resilience partners in England and ensure that the local and national levels are joined up during the emergency response. They may also coordinate interim welfare assistance to support initial emergency response.

Responsibilities of other states involved in an accident

Depending on the nature of the accident, other states involved may be as follows:

- the state of registry of the aircraft
- the state of design of the aircraft
- the state of manufacture of the aircraft
- the state of the operator of the aircraft
- the state of departure, transfer or arrival of the aircraft
- any state whose citizens are fatally or seriously injured

Since aircraft accidents generally involve multiple nationalities, it is essential to establish cooperation with other impacted states. This includes family assistance arrangements at appropriate airports, the sharing of essential information, facilitating expedited travel and visa documentation and joint efforts to provide assistance, financial support and psychological support. FCDO would lead on international cooperation.

Responsibilities of airport operators

Airport operators play a key role in managing the immediate aftermath of an air accident, as the majority of incidents occur at or near an airport. Even if this is not the case, family and friends of victims often come to either the arrival, transfer or departure airport for further information about the accident. Airports must have an emergency response plan (ERP) which include assistance.

They are also responsible for coordinating immediate response activities within the airport's territory, which may include supporting or coordinating the emergency services, particularly in terms of onsite logistics.

As members of the LRF or equivalent in many cases, they should be linked into their local response network and regularly exercise their plans with members of the emergency services. As they also set up survivor as well as friends and family reception centres, they should ensure that their staff - especially the appointed focal points - are appropriately trained to handle crisis situations and are sensitive in providing necessary assistance to victims and families. Coordination with government and airline operators is essential when information is shared with the victims and their families.

Responsibilities of airline operators

UK airlines must have their own emergency plan which includes assistance and sets out their responsibilities and procedures in the event of an accident, whether involving their own flight or one operated under commercial agreements. Third country operators are also encouraged to have the same provision and should be subject to legislation in their country of origin to provide assistance to air accident victims as per ICAO Annex 9 Standard 8.43:

Contracting States shall establish legislation, regulations and/or policies in support of assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families.

Airlines must also follow any local legislation or guidance where the accident occurs, such as Spain's Royal Decree on AAVF.

To ensure the effective implementation of assistance, airlines must identify the personnel that will provide the assistance, either through dedicated teams in house, through a third-party crisis management company, or a mixture of the two. It is important they prepare and offer training for frontline staff and booking agents who may be approached very early on in the response by family members concerned for their loved ones, as they are more immediately accessible in the first instance. Airlines should consider relevant training for such staff so they are able to respond appropriately to these enquiries.

In the event of an accident, much of the assistance provided will be paid for by the airline's insurance, so it is imperative that the airline is pro-active in engaging with relevant authorities and family members to ensure that immediate support is available to provide for the needs of victims and their families.

Once the immediate emergency response has concluded and the next phase of support begins, assistance transitions to the airline's Family Assistance Centre (FAC) which is usually at a hotel with conference facilities located off airport but nearby, as the FAC may be operational for several weeks.

Additional assistance providers for accidents over UK waters or covered by UK Search and Rescue Region (SRR)

His Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG) assumes operational command for air accidents in UK waters or SRRs. The response varies by location and may involve international coordination. In the Channel, SRR efforts depend on the incident's location due to overlapping UK and French SRR zones. Major incidents, especially in the Dover Straits, would escalate to COBR due to the level of disruption to maritime traffic, requiring support from DfT, HMRC and Border Force. In the Irish Sea, the Irish Coastguard covers a small zone near the eastern coastline. Broader coordination with Devolved and Irish Governments would be necessary for incidents affecting port access. In international waters within UK SRRs, HMCG would coordinate the rescue including tasking passing vessels under SOLAS (International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea). Royal Navy assets may also be deployed.

Assistance by third parties

Commercial and third sector organisations, such as crisis management providers and support charities, may also be involved in delivering assistance. Their prompt and efficient actions can significantly impact the overall response time and the quality of assistance provided to victims and their families. These parties may also include ground handling services, subcontractors and other service providers who contribute to different aspects of the emergency response. Ground handling services are responsible for managing logistics at the airport, including baggage handling, aircraft servicing, and coordinating with emergency services.

Dedicated support charities such as The Red Cross or commercial organisations specialising in assistance following major incidents are often utilised as they can stand up resources quickly and have a network of well-trained professionals and/or volunteers to

offer additional support during an emergency. Subcontractors, such as catering and cleaning services, also need to be prepared to respond quickly to increased demand and to provide necessary support. It is recommended to include these third parties in the airport emergency plan.

Family Associations

Family associations are often formed in the aftermath of an air accident to provide advocacy and emotional support to survivors and victims' families. In what can often be very high-profile events, victims and families experiencing the impacts of an air accident and the loss of loved ones should be encouraged to come together and offer peer support and the understanding that only someone who has been through a similar tragedy can provide. In addition, they can also facilitate long-term support and engagement in later processes related to the air accident response and victim assistance. If appointed, the Independent Public Advocate may engage with and work alongside any established family associations to ensure their voices are heard and their needs understood.

Types of assistance to be provided

Confirmation of involvement

Following an air accident, the priority is to confirm who was onboard. While airlines and their agents play a central role in initial communications with families, only the police can formally notify families regarding the possible involvement of their loved ones.

Airlines:

All efforts should be made by airline operators to submit a complete, verified passenger and crew list (manifest) to authorities within 2 hours of the accident. In addition, they should immediately provide a list of the dangerous goods on board.

UKG:

All operators of scheduled international passenger flights arriving into, or departing from, the UK are required to provide the Home Office with passenger and crew information for their flights in advance of departure and to confirm those onboard within 30 minutes of departure. Using this data and any other relevant sources of information, the National Casualty Bureau coordinates with medical and forensic teams to ensure the timely identification of victims.

FCDO will support with confirmation of involvement regarding foreign nationals via their embassies and consular services. Notifying foreign governments, including that of the airline operator if not a UK carrier, should occur as soon as identities have been verified. The release of passenger details and other sensitive information publicly is discouraged as any release can drive media enquiries towards impacted victims and their families.

Provision of immediate information

Timely and accurate information should be provided to reduce distress and uncertainty for families in the aftermath of an air accident. Communication via relevant channels must be undertaken by trained, multilingual personnel who are capable of delivering sensitive, consistent and accurate information with compassion and clarity. All parties must ensure that any personal data processed or shared in the course of these communications

complies with applicable privacy legislation, specifically the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR should not discourage appropriate information sharing, as the law supports this use to safeguard individuals at risk. Stakeholders should cooperate in setting up and publicising a secure online platform for real-time, verified updates where possible. The online platform should be regularly updated with verified facts, timelines and relevant updates on the accident, investigation and assistance processes.

Airlines:

One of the first tasks for the airline is to set up a toll-free number that family members can contact to register concern for a missing family member. Information provided to affected family members must be accurate and timely, acknowledging that, in many cases, the operator may not hold contact details for the next of kin. It is usual for families to reach out to the airline first, which is why the immediate establishment of the toll-free number with trained staff available to respond in multiple languages and relay verified information, is so important. In practice, operators often contract with crisis management companies experienced in crisis communication to set up the call centre at speed.

There should be a recommended structure on updates, especially from the airline, with the CEO's initial live or recorded statement within 3 hours, expressing compassion and outlining key verified details and what the airline is doing to respond.

Airlines should also provide for ongoing engagement with the families to ensure they are aware of when updates on the investigation will take place or if opportunities to visit the site are offered, as well as information on support services available to them. Operators are advised to publish this information on an accessible digital platform in the languages of the nationalities on board. The coordination of messaging between government and operator is critical to avoid mixed or contradictory messages, which can severely impact families in the already emotional aftermath of an aircraft tragedy. Experiences from affected families show that inconsistent or uncoordinated communication from different actors can lead to confusion, emotional distress and a loss of trust in both public authorities and the airline operator.

Under ICAO Annex 13, the airline cannot comment on the cause of the incident. All communication regarding updates on the cause of the accident, the wider investigation and access to the accident site must be initiated, coordinated and approved by the AAIB, to avoid premature or incorrect disclosures and ensure safety and legal compliance. It is strongly advised to be cautious when discussing the possibility of visiting the accident site with families, as the condition of the site may be distressing and such visits are not always feasible due to the status of the investigation. The personnel delivering updates should be trained in crisis communication, including how to manage emotional reactions and cultural sensitivities

Airports:

Depending on the circumstances of the accident, the airport should be prepared to receive and assist survivors, family members, concerned individuals, and media representatives. In the short term, operators must be ready to set up a Survivor Reception Centre (SRC) airside to support victims, and a Friends and Family Reception Centre (FFRC) landside to

collect information from family members who turn up at the airport. Once emergency response, identification and border clearance functions are complete, a re-unification area may also be required to reunite survivors and their families. These centres should be set up away from public areas, media and the accident site, with staff trained in family support and trauma care and appropriate facilities to support families and ensure privacy and comfort. Sufficient security should be provided to maintain the privacy and security of family members. As the response develops, support will transition to the airline's Family Assistance Centre (FAC) which may be located at the same site as the airport's FFRC, usually at a hotel with conference facilities nearby as the FAC may be operational for several weeks.

Information on accessing the FFRC and FAC should be immediately accessible to victims and their families and preferably coordinated with the airline to ensure consistent communication from the first point of contact. The FAC may also serve as a distribution point for official updates and printed materials and should coordinate with government bodies and the airline to ensure accurate and timely dissemination of information.

UKG:

In reality, families often receive updates from multiple official sources: the police, forensic authorities, the AAIB and, if foreign nationals, through consular officials. All operators should include best practice protocols for communicating with families and UK legislation empowers the CAA to conduct oversight of airlines' family assistance plans while ICAO SARPS ensure that airports' emergency plans cover AAASF and are regularly tested. In addition, the appointment of FLOs by the police, plus the support of the IPA, if appointed, can serve as central points of contact for family members, providing a valuable channel to signpost to important information, support and advocacy during the post-accident period.

Assistance with Immigration and Customs Formalities

In the aftermath of an air accident, family members, investigators and experts may need to undertake urgent travel to the UK. Immigration and customs formalities can pose significant challenges during this emotionally charged time.

UKG:

The UK has protocols and legal provisions in place to expedite entry and customs clearance for those involved in the response, while ensuring that all facilitation measures remain within the framework of applicable immigration and security legislation. The Home Office (HO) can offer practical assistance such as timely help with acquiring visas (or exemptions) for victims' families and appointed experts to travel to the UK, as well as facilitating the repatriation of remains.

Although swift entry of those involved is a priority, the HO requires that all incoming individuals meet legal entry requirements and are fit to travel. Coordination with embassies, consulates and border security is essential to facilitate timely and lawful access. The HO, where appropriate working with FCDO, should ensure that guidance on visa requirements, travel documentation and customs formalities is communicated clearly to families and support organisations.

Airports:

Operators can facilitate the immigration and customs formalities by providing the necessary infrastructure and support for the victims and their family members via their SRC and FFRC as well as assistance with procedures from trained/experienced personnel. Airports should work in conjunction with the government and airline to streamline the process for requesting the necessary immigration and customs documents.

Airlines:

Airline operators should cascade UKG guidance on immigration and customs requirements via their FAC as their assistance in managing logistics and supporting the documentation process can greatly ease the burden on families.

Provision of information about financial services

Providing information about available financial assistance and procedures is a critical component of family assistance in the direct aftermath of an aviation accident and beyond.

Airlines:

The airline is responsible for ensuring sufficient local funds are available to support the needs of family members in the immediate aftermath and should have procedures in place to provide financial counselling and support to families, including translation support where required. Airlines should also liaise directly with their insurance brokers to ensure that all legislated payments are made to family members as quickly as possible, including advance payments as required.

UKG:

The UK Government can also publicise the financial support available and the IPA can signpost information to victims and their families so they can access any immediate financial assistance available to them. Accessible and comprehensible information about access to financial support and possible compensation should be shared with families in the direct aftermath of an aviation accident.

Airports:

Financial information should also be provided to family members who come to the FFRC in partnership with airline and government provision.

Provision of privacy and security

Maintaining the privacy and security of victims and families is an important component of AAASF. Personal information collected by government bodies, operators and authorised third parties must be protected from unauthorised access and abuse.

Airlines and airports should maintain contingency communication protocols in the event of a cyber or data-integrity breach affecting crisis response systems. Backup offline directories and non-networked channels must be available for use.

UKG:

UK legislation ensures strict protocols for handling sensitive data and limiting its access to authorised personnel only via the UK GDPR.

Airlines:

Operators should follow UK legislation in this respect as well as setting out the protocols in place to handle requests for information from the media. Official communications should also be shared where possible with families ahead of time, particularly if any of the information relates to the passengers specifically. It is important to note that UK GDPR does not prevent the sharing of victims' personal information, such as the manifest, under certain circumstances:

- Under section 8 of the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) (Lawfulness of processing: public interest), processing of personal data for the purposes of (part d) *"the exercise of a function of the Crown, a Minister of the Crown or a government department"* is permissible
- Section 2(1)(a) of the Act notes that *"The GDPR, the applied GDPR and this Act protect individuals with regard to the processing of personal data, in particular by...requiring personal data to be processed lawfully and fairly, on the basis of the data subject's consent or another specified basis"*
- Schedule 8 of the Act sets out a number of these specified conditions. The relevant sections are:
 - Section 3 (Protecting an individual's vital interests)
 - Section 4 (Safeguarding of children and individuals at risk) which notes that consent is not required when *"the processing is necessary for the purposes of...protecting an individual from neglect or physical, mental or emotional harm, or...protecting the physical, mental or emotional well-being of an individual"*
- This part of the Act was specifically drafted with major incidents and victims in mind. This means that airlines do not need the consent of victims in order to share their personal information, including the manifest, with authorised bodies if the above purpose and conditions are met
- The [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), read alongside Regulations 45-54 of the [Contingency Planning Regulations 2005](#), places a duty on Category 1 and Category 2 responders to share information with other responders, including government departments, under certain conditions (namely that a legitimising condition under the Data Protection Act is met, as above), unless an exemption applies.

Airports:

As Category 2 responders in England and Wales, the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), read alongside Regulations 45-54 of the [Contingency Planning Regulations 2005](#), places a duty on airports to share information with other responders, including government departments, under certain conditions unless an exemption applies.

Airports must be prepared to accommodate potentially large numbers of individuals seeking information regarding the accident, whilst also ensuring the privacy, dignity, and security of victims and their families via the designated FFRC. This area should be clearly separated from public spaces and must be capable of being secured quickly, with access strictly limited to authorised personnel. Police and/or airport security should be present to ensure that media representatives, curious onlookers and unauthorised individuals are not able to approach or enter the area.

The SRC and FFRC should also allow survivors and families to move through and exit the airport discreetly, shielding them from public or media attention. The airport should also make provisions for a reunification area, where survivors can privately reunite with their families. This area should be located near the FFRC and must meet the same standards of privacy and protection. To protect victims' privacy, airports should support efforts to discourage families and survivors from sharing accident-related content on social media. This request should be included in briefings or information materials provided to families.

Provision of Information about the Accident Investigation

In accordance with Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention, the AAIB is responsible for initiating and conducting an investigation into the circumstances of the accident. The sole purpose of the safety investigation is to prevent future accidents and incidents. It is not conducted in order to apportion blame or allocate legal liability.

UKG:

The AAIB will notify the states of design and manufacture of the aircraft and engines, the state of registry of the aircraft and the state of the operator, all of whom are entitled to participate in the investigation. States having a special interest by virtue of fatalities or serious injuries to their citizens also need to be notified.

Many of the inputs to the investigation must be treated as confidential and there are strict obligations on the protection of sensitive records; however, the results of the safety investigation are made public through the publication of a final report. For high-profile accidents, the AAIB would release relevant factual information early on in the investigation and additional updates throughout the investigation as appropriate, including on each anniversary of the accident.

In terms of assistance, the AAIB will provide information on the course and progress of the investigation to families, while ensuring that this provision does not compromise the integrity of the safety investigation. The information shared primarily covers details regarding the investigation process, associated timelines and the timings of issuance of reports.

AAIB contact with the families focuses on providing information on the accident investigation and usually takes place as follows:

- Early on in the investigation, the AAIB will meet with families to explain the purpose of the safety investigation and agree how and when updates will be provided to them
- As the investigation proceeds, the AAIB will provide any updated, validated information on the progress of the investigation to family members, before it is released to the public
- Prior to the public release of any investigation report, the AAIB will meet with families to inform them about the publication of the report and explain the contents of the report in understandable, non-technical language
- In some circumstances, the families of the victims are allowed to visit the accident site. This visit requires agreement from the AAIB, and other responsible authorities overseeing victim recovery and identification, to ensure appropriate processes are followed and the investigative process is not disrupted

The AAIB will nominate a focal point who will maintain communication with the families throughout the investigation. Where possible, the AAIB will offer an in-person meeting dedicated to informing accident victims and families of the findings of the investigation and addressing any questions. A plain language summary of the final report may also aid family members' understanding.

Identification, Protection and Return of Human Remains and Personal Effects

A sensitive and dignified approach must be ensured in the handling of human remains, particularly when coordinating return procedures on the arriving side. Special attention should be given to the cultural and/or religious background of the victims that may require specific practices and religious rites.

UKG:

The Home Office publishes [Guidance on dealing with fatalities in emergencies](#), setting out the key roles and processes to be followed for mass fatality incidents. The coroner, supported by the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) unit in some cases, holds the primary responsibility for victim identification and the confirmation of death or injury following an air accident. Families should be kept updated on the status of victim identification as per their wishes. Border Force would also be involved in the process of repatriating human remains and personal effects. Diplomatic representation from FCDO may also be required when coordinating return procedures for foreign nationals.

Airports:

Airports play a crucial role in facilitating the return of human remains by providing the necessary infrastructure and logistical support to help families navigate the legal, administrative and logistical aspects of repatriating their loved one's remains by

disseminating information on the required procedures via the FFRC. The airport should also provide secure and private facilities for the handling and temporary storage of remains if needed.

Airlines:

Operators should have procedures in place to support government efforts to facilitate the timely and respectful return of human remains, including offering logistical support with repatriations via the FAC. This support can extend to search and recovery efforts as well as temporary mortuary arrangements should local resources be stretched. The airline should work closely with the coroner and funeral service providers to ensure that the remains are handled appropriately during transportation and that cultural and religious preferences are respected. This provision may be handled via agreements with specialist crisis management companies as appropriate.

Airlines are responsible for the processing, cataloguing, storage and return of personal effects, including both associated and unassociated items. This must be done in conjunction with the police and investigators and in close liaison with insurers.

Memorials and memorial services

Families may wish to commemorate their loved ones through memorial services, monuments or other remembrance activities following an air accident. All relevant organisations should maintain procedures to ensure that families are appropriately supported to participate in such events. Families of air accident victims must be consulted and given the opportunity to contribute to the planning, design and dedication of any memorial structures or commemorative initiatives established in recognition of those who lost their lives or were injured in the accident.

Cultural, philosophical and religious considerations

Aviation disasters, by their nature, will affect people from many different cultural, philosophical and religious backgrounds. As such, the cultural and social competence of assistance providers plays a crucial role. Compassionate and culturally sensitive communication is essential during such traumatic events. Assistance providers, whether from government or industry, must recognise the diverse backgrounds, beliefs and emotional needs of those impacted. By understanding cultural nuances, providing language support and respecting grieving rituals, providers can offer more effective assistance and emotional support. Assistance should consider how the needs related to cultural practices, rituals and beliefs will be effectively addressed and supported. Faith related or philosophical organisations can also provide support.

Lessons learned

As the scope of this document covers a rarely tested area, it is essential to ensure that lessons are systematically captured and that best practices are updated as understanding and experience evolve. Continuous improvement should be underpinned by a no-blame culture, encouraging openness, transparency and collaboration between all agencies involved in the response. Much can be gained from working in partnership across

government, industry, local authorities, voluntary organisations, and international fora to review each incident objectively, identify areas for improvement and share both effective practices and examples of challenges or shortcomings. All partners share a collective responsibility to apply these lessons to strengthen future preparedness and response, recognising that doing so honours the victims and their families by ensuring continual improvement in the care and support provided.

Airline AAVF Guidance

Although various aspects of assistance, particularly in terms of oversight of the emergency response, accident investigation and appointment of the IPA, are instigated by the UK Government, the majority of the direct support to victims and their families is the responsibility of the airline operator. The following guidance lays out the requirements that the UK Government expects all airlines operating to the UK to provide as part of their family assistance plan. This provision can be resourced in-house or via a contract with a crisis management company.

Principles Applicable to all Requirements

- To the furthest extent possible, the wishes of the victims and family members should be respected and not driven by the exigencies of the airline
- Family members should have the choice of language for all communications
- To the furthest extent possible, family members should be afforded equal treatment in respect of information, communication and the support services provided by the airline. This is irrespective of the location of family members
- The airline should maintain detailed plans and procedures to meet the requirements
- The airline should maintain sufficient trained staff to meet the requirements
- The airline should maintain sufficient equipment resources to meet the requirements
- The requirements are equally applicable to any ground victims and their families as well as passengers/crew and their families

Requirement 1 – Communication from the Airline to Family Members

- Establish an emergency enquiry system (EES) and/or emergency call centre provision that families can contact to register their concern for a missing family member who they believe is connected with the accident. If this is a telephone

number for families to call, the number should be toll-free so that families are not charged for using the service

- Provide proactive airline communication to those family members that can be identified from passenger (customer) and crew (staff) records or third-party data (e.g. from the police) before any public notification of names
- Establish with each family member their wishes for future communication in respect of language, involvement of a third-party (e.g. family friend), frequency, timing and method(s) (i.e. personal visit, phone, email). Note that these wishes are not final; families may change their choice at any time
- Provide proactive airline communication with identified family members to process their questions and requirements
- Brief and give family members access to information, such as the investigation process and access to funds, that will help their decision-making. Such information is to be clearly, concisely and accurately presented
- Provide timely communication to all family members on the following (not an exclusive list):
 - Access to and travel options for centralised family assistance centres
 - Family visits to the accident site
 - In coordination with appropriate authorities, the process and progress of the air accident investigation
 - Availability of funds and logistical resources to support the family
 - In coordination with appropriate authorities, the process and progress of victim identification (opt-in by the family)
 - Process and progress of personal effects management (opt-in by the family)

Guidance:

- Contact details of the EES should be widely publicised via airline media channels, mainline media and social media
- EES will include options for telephone (person-to-person voice) and web-enquiry form
- EES will offer local telephone numbers in each country identified as the home country of the family member or, where more practical, provide toll-free options for families to call

Requirement 2 – Data Management of Passengers, Crew and Family Members

- Provide a preliminary passenger manifest and crew list and a dangerous goods list as soon as possible, at the request of authorised bodies including relevant responding emergency services, DfT, AAIB and the National Casualty Bureau, as well as any other relevant government body who may require such information
- Provide a verified passenger manifest and crew list within two hours (Ref: EU 996) of the accident to the same parties above
- Securely maintain data on family members and their connections to passengers and crew and provide such data to investigation authorities on request (to support the victim identification process). All data held must be approved by family members in accordance with normal GDPR rules

Guidance:

- A preliminary manifest is available immediately from electronic systems and will include names, any available boarding information including seat numbers, nationalities and any other relevant information
- A verified manifest is one that has been checked line-by-line by airline reservation professionals for inconsistencies, errors or omissions and subsequently corrected and enhanced with additional information available to the airline in the booking system and other internal data sources e.g. frequent flyer data, that provides nationality and other key identifiers that should be added to the verified manifest

Requirement 3 – Centralised family support locations and in-person care for families

- It is recognised that families often wish to travel to the accident location. To facilitate this process the airline should establish a Family Assistance Centre at a location close to the accident location (or wherever it is safe and practical to do so)
- Establish one or more centralised facilities for family members (FAC) close to the location of the accident and/or the location of the medico-legal process of victim identification
- Provide sufficient staff and equipment to operate the FAC(s)
- Provide funding for all FAC operations for families, airline staff and authorised supporting third parties
- Permit access to the FAC for passenger legal and national-consular representatives

- Ensure sufficient resources are available to support family members with their basic needs for goods and services, cultural and/or religious support, communication and access to information
- Ensure there is suitable psychological support available to family members at the FAC, provided by authorised and trained organisations (such as trained personnel from a local authority or charity, e.g. The Red Cross)
- Ensure timely briefings are provided to family members, both at the FAC and virtually, with updates on the latest information, what the different responding organisations are doing, and the processes being expedited
- Provide suitable liaison personnel to coordinate support services to the families from all authorised organisations e.g. emergency services, voluntary organisations, national representatives and charities

Guidance:

- Typically, a FAC is a full-service hotel with discrete and secure accommodation plus catering and briefing facilities for the family support operations
- The establishment of a FAC should, if practical and timely, be coordinated with the Local Authority e.g. LRF
- The FAC will be frequented by representatives of multiple official agencies (e.g. foreign consulates, UK emergency services). It is important that the airline, as the provider of the FAC, is cognisant of the attending agencies' roles to support families or support the process of victim identification and investigation. Where practical and appropriate, representatives may take part in family briefings either to provide specialist information or to demonstrate unity of the airline and the UK's response
- Ideally, family briefings will be led by a panel convening all relevant parties, similar to NTSB's [Joint Family Support Operations Centre \(JFSOC\)](#) model. Depending on what is being covered in each specific briefing, the panel would include representatives from the AAIB, police, ambulance, fire service, coroner, airline, airport and government. The chair could change depending on the timing of the briefing and what is being covered but should be someone with relevant experience, such as a representative of the appointed crisis management company, ensuring a comprehensive and effective response for victims and their families
- The airline must always be represented at family briefings
- All family members should be treated equally, irrespective of their connection to passengers, crew or ground victims

Requirement 4 – Victim Identification and Return of Human Remains

- Provide resources to assist the police and coroner with collecting ante-mortem data from family members to assist with the victim identification process
- In coordination with UK authorities, consult family members in respect of notification of confirmed identifications resulting from a victim's remains being scattered as they may not wish to be informed multiple times
- Consult family members for their wishes in respect of victim repatriation and national markings of transit containers, such as national flags

Guidance:

- Close liaison with faith groups/religious leaders is advised. Due to the nature of the incident and that families will likely be of different cultures and faiths, there will be different expectations on the disposition of human remains. This needs to be carefully managed

Requirement 5 – Personal Property of the Victim

- Consult family members in respect of their wishes to be part of the process for the return of personal property. This should be an opt-in choice for families after full and proper explanation of the process
- Provide appropriate and sufficient resources for the collection, transportation, processing, cataloguing, storage and return of personal property, paying particular care and attention to electronic devices containing personal information
- For survivors, ensure the timely return of associated property

Guidance:

- At all times, three principles should be adopted:
 - All personal effects will be treated with the highest level of dignity, care and respect
 - The airline and any other responding organisation must understand, respect and honour the wishes of the family i.e. possessions that may seem trivial to some can be priceless to others
 - The aim is to offer to the family the return of all personal effects
- Associated items are effects that can be matched to a passenger/customer or crew member e.g. a passport, a wallet and its contents, an intact suitcase clearly labelled to the passenger and its contents

- Unassociated items are effects that cannot be matched to an individual e.g. loose clothing, jewellery etc. If an electronic device containing personal data, such as a mobile phone, cannot be associated with an owner despite best efforts, the device should be handed to authorities for safe disposal
- A period of storage for up to 2 years is accepted as international best practice. Considering the wishes of the families, the status of the investigation and the agreement between the airline and its insurer, this period may be significantly extended

Requirement 6 – Access by Families to Investigations and Hearings

- Provide families with secure and appropriate access to medico-legal and investigation hearings. This provision should include the logistical support for families to attend in person or via electronic means if that is their choice
- Provide translation support to those families unable to communicate in the language of the hearing
- Ensure a written transcript of the hearing is available to all family members

Guidance:

- It is recommended that the airline provides a pre-built, secure and private family-only website with credentials provided to identified family members
- The website would serve as a central location to access resources and information, for families to remotely join any briefings or hearings and to act as a portal for the personal effects process. Such a website would address the requirement above for electronic access to meetings etc

Requirement 7 – Financial and Logistical Support to family members

- Ensure sufficient local funds are available to support the continued needs of family members at the FAC and at any other centralised family facilities that are supported by the airline
- Liaise directly with company insurance brokers and legal counsel to ensure that all legislated payments are made to family members as quickly as possible. This will include but is not limited to the Standard Drawing Rights under the Montreal Convention 1999

Guidance:

- Pre-loaded credit cards are suggested as part of deployment kits for those working in the FAC to support family members and to meet their immediate and ongoing needs

- Do not underestimate the significant cash and credit requirements to support a major FAC and recovery operation. Airlines should seek evidential advice from their insurance brokers in respect of the realistic reserves required
- To meet the requirements, a third-party service provider may be retained
- Third party emergency response providers must have pre-incident relationships with the relevant authorities and be considered an extension of the airline's response

Requirement 8 – Memorials and monuments

- Determine with families their wishes for an immediate memorial service. Faith leaders, local authorities and foreign consulates should also be consulted to determine the timing, location and programme for the memorial service
- Provide families with the logistical and financial support to attend any centrally organised memorial service or dedication of any lasting memorial. This would include memorials arranged by the airline and those arranged by local or national authorities
- Consult fully with families in respect of the design and location of any lasting memorial, permanent structure or similar
- Provide funding for the design, construction, inscriptions and dedication of the lasting memorial
- Consult fully with families in respect of the upkeep of any lasting memorials and the extent to which the airline will financially support annual memorial events

Guidance

- Memorial services may be in a variety of locations e.g. in the country of origin or close to the accident/incident location
- Memorial services are often organised quite quickly as a sign of respect by civil authorities. Be prepared for such services to be offered within 7 – 14 days and attended by multiple foreign dignitaries
- Family permission should be sought for the memorial service to be privately broadcast for those unable to attend in person

Requirement 9 – Compensation by the Airline to Third Parties

- Provide reasonable compensation to any charitable organisation that has provided services or assistance as part of the accident/incident response
- Provide reasonable compensation to those third-party organisations providing services required and requested by the airline

Guidance:

- Compensation may, for example, be reimbursement of expenses or a donation to the charitable fund

Requirement 10 – Accounting for air accident survivors

- Work closely with the local and national authorities and emergency services e.g. police, fire, ambulance, local authority, airport authority, UK Casualty Bureau, to collectively manage information regarding air accident survivors, their whereabouts and their status
- Without delay, provide notification to the families of their loved ones' location and status, aligned with Requirement 1

Guidance:

- Accounting for passengers, crew and other victims involved in an air accident is an important step in the reunification process. In the initial hours following an air accident, it is a vital and complex task to determine the status of each affected person
- Airlines can expect reasonable questions from concerned family members: Was my loved one onboard the aircraft? Where are they? Are they alive? Are they injured? Which hospital have they been taken to?
- To work towards answering these questions, the accounting for survivors of air accidents is a multi-agency responsibility and is dependent on multiple factors and which agency is gathering what data
- In a fast-moving response operation, it is unlikely that any single agency in the first hours after an accident will have the complete picture of survivor names, locations and the extent of any injuries
- The information management process requires close coordination between the emergency services, the airline and other involved agencies e.g. the airport, who may have established an SRC. The airline must be prepared to:
 - produce and verify passenger and crew information
 - share such information in a meaningful format
 - engage continuously in multi-agency information sharing

Training and Exercising

Review

Planning is key to ensure preparedness but, unless such plans are tested for operational effectiveness, the response may be impacted if issues go unidentified or improvements are not considered. This is particularly the case when preparing for rare but potentially catastrophic events such as air accidents.

It is important that assistance plans are reviewed and exercised as part of a continuous programme to ensure optimal preparedness. Exercises raise awareness, educate individuals on their roles and responsibilities and promote coordination and cooperation. The quality of an exercise does not depend upon size/scale – the crucial aspect is the selection of the exercise objectives and the extent to which these are tested and used to continually improve assistance plans and processes.

Training of personnel

Training is crucial to ensure that personnel involved in providing assistance are adequately prepared. Personnel tasked with assisting victims of air accidents and their families should receive comprehensive training that aligns with principles of continuous professional development. This includes both initial and recurrent training, with updates required at least every two years. Operators may wish to focus more frequently on training in crisis media and how to brief families, especially within senior management.

Training should use a range of methods, such as audio-visual materials, including testimonies from relatives, victims, rescuers, journalistic content and role plays. This approach helps personnel understand internationally recognised best practice which considers the social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of those being assisted.

Training is a key element in the development of preparedness across government and industry stakeholders to ensure an effective, coordinated victim and family assistance response to an aviation accident when required. There are many levels of training, ranging from general awareness of the family assistance arrangements to equipping people with knowledge and skills to perform key roles. Training sessions should use active and experiential methods including video footage or relevant simulations, participating in roleplay (both as actors and observers), completing problem-solving exercises and presenting emergency management cases in different contexts and scenarios. The

training methodology must emphasise experiential learning to ensure practical skill development beyond theoretical knowledge.

Providing assistance to victims and their relatives in the aftermath of an aircraft accident is a multifaceted and emotionally demanding task. As such, it requires a high level of organisation. This can be provided by the responsible entities or by specialised companies. Operators should ensure that appropriate training is provided to personnel responsible for AAVF. Training and exercising with third parties is vital to ensure personnel understand their roles and responsibilities. Regular drills and simulations involving all stakeholders, including third parties, help to establish clear communication channels and operational protocols, as well as reduce and manage risks.

Cross-cultural competence of assistance providers

Cross-cultural competence is important for providing effective support to families from diverse backgrounds during the aftermath of an air accident. It involves understanding and respecting different cultural norms, values and communication styles as well as particular religious or philosophical questions that may arise. To enhance cross-cultural competence, training programs for personnel involved in providing assistance to the victims and their families should include information on cultural awareness and sensitivity. Regular exercises that simulate real-life scenarios involving diverse groups should be conducted to reinforce the training. Additionally, involving representatives from different cultural communities in these exercises can provide valuable insights and enhance the realism of the scenarios.

Compliance and Assurance

All organisations involved in family and victim assistance should maintain a documented training and exercising programme that demonstrates compliance with national and international standards. Training activities should be developed and delivered jointly with relevant partners, including the DfT, CAA, AAIB, LRF and any voluntary or contracted specialist crisis management companies.

Each exercise should be evaluated formally, with lessons identified and incorporated into future revisions of the Family Assistance Plan (FAP). Records of training, participation and evaluation outcomes should be retained for assurance and audit purposes to evidence readiness and continual improvement. They may also be required as evidence for any litigation process or inquiry.

Resource preparedness

The training and testing of the FAP involves the strategic preparation and organisation of resources needed to effectively respond to and manage the aftermath of an aviation accident. In the direct aftermath of the tragedy, survivors require medical care, food and water, dry clothes, blankets and a safe and secure recovery space. Those with children may additionally need nappies and toys. Subsequently, victims and family members may need assistance with practical and logistical concerns, including recovering their belongings, obtaining temporary accommodation and accessing assistance to continue their journey.

Resource preparedness also involves maintaining an up-to-date inventory of essential supplies and equipment, both at a local and national level. Due to the variations in the size and circumstances of aircraft accidents, the extent of the resources required to provide family assistance will vary considerably. To allocate the resources necessary in the direct aftermath of the tragedy, it is advised to train crisis teams from relevant stakeholders on the rapid deployment of resources or contract specialist support services for this provision.

Conclusion

In the wake of tragedy, clarity and compassion must guide every action. Air accidents are rare but impacts can be catastrophic and, as stakeholders responsible for supporting victims and their families during their worst moments, we have a duty of care to get it right first time.

Effective levels of assistance, commitment to verified information and well-coordinated and exercised response plans and processes are not just a procedural necessity – they are a lifeline for families desperately searching for answers - and a safeguard against inadequate support.

By following best practice and preparing our teams to respond with empathy and precision, we honour those impacted and uphold the integrity of our response. Let this guidance serve as a reminder that, in moments of crisis, the strength of our systems lies in their humanity and our greatest responsibility is to ensure no-one gets lost in the noise.

Glossary

AAAVF	Assistance to Air Accident Victims and their Families
AAIB	Air Accidents Investigation Branch
ALB	Arms' Length Body
API	Advance Passenger Information
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
COBR	Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms
DfT	Department for Transport
DVI	Disaster Victim Identification
EES	Emergency Enquiry System
ERP	Emergency Response Plan
FAC	Family Assistance Centre
FAP	Family Assistance Plan
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
FCP	Foreign Carrier Permit
FFRC	Friends and Family Reception Centre
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GLO	Government Liaison Officer
HMCG	His Majesty's Coastguard

HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue and Customs
HO	Home Office
iAPI	Interactive Advance Passenger Information
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IPA	Independent Public Advocate
JFSOC	Joint Family Support Operations Centre
LGD	Lead Government Department
LRF	Local Resilience Forum
MC99	Montreal Convention 1999
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NAEP	National Aviation Emergency Plan
SARPS	ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SOLAS	International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea
SRC	Survivors Reception Centre
SRR	Search and Rescue Region
TCO	Third Country Operator
TSOC	Transport Security Operations Centre
UKG	UK Government
UKGCRF	UK Government Central Response Framework