

## SPARA – Activity 7.3

Airport strategy document for engagement with the public and stakeholders (incorporating Kirkwall Airport case study)



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## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to build on the deliverables produced in work package activity 7.2, which produced two strategic templates, two best practice guides and an information sheet. Those documents were produced to provide a commentary on the context within which remote airports are working, and the options which are open in terms of social engagement, media activity and alternative uses for airport spaces (both internal and external).

Therefore, and to develop this strategy, the authors worked with Kirkwall Airport in Orkney to critically discuss the options which had been identified with regards to various strands:

- Public engagement
- Stakeholder engagement
- Social media
- Off-peak airport space
- Social and cultural capital

SPARA has demonstrated through the work of Baxter and Bloice how remote and rural airports carry the capacity to act as cultural and social 'gateways' to parts of their respective countries and regions, and the importance of such airports in terms of their embodying cultural heritage is clear. Therefore, within this document we develop some of the ideas and themes contained within those previous publications, to explore how the contents can and have been utilised by the case study airport.

## Kirkwall case study



Kirkwall Airport was selected for study using a range of criteria:

- Known engagement with external parties
- Existing presence on social media
- Prominent position in the local community, and relative accessibility for residents of Orkney (mainland)
- Some existing known uses outside of passenger transit
- Cultural and social importance of the airport, both locally and to tourists

Within the case study, we have explored how the SPARA2020 worksheets hold resonance, and discuss how any areas not currently explored or exploited could be developed in the future. Through this method, we present the strategy in the form of a contextualised case study, which taken together with the worksheets could be adapted and applied in other locations and other contexts.

One observation we would make is that the importance of engagement with the local 'team' is vital to that process, as is understanding how they might offer a conduit to foster engagement with a wider community.

## Areas and themes of analysis

We propose that the SPARA 2020 worksheets can be applied as a series of focussed discussions, to explore how the airports might already use methods to support activity, and also to help instigate debate around whether any other (additional or alternative) models could be followed in the future. In order to do this, we follow those headings established throughout the project, and the observations are drawn from discussions with the Kirkwall airport manager, retail manager, air traffic management controller, station manager (airline and operator) and the terminal building manager.

- Public engagement

The Terminal management is undertaken by an associated company, dealing with landside activities. During our consultation with the interviewees, there was a great emphasis on the benefits which can arise from the scale of the airport leading to the possibility of all aspects of customer service having a personal and locally-informed flavour. The importance of a 'social rapport' between customers (passengers) and the fact that this can be possible in a small community came across strongly in the interviews, in the sense that this is not likely to be possible in larger airports.

The airport has a consultative committee, which includes representation from the local NHS, local councillors, community groups, airlines and local business groups. Much of the discussion is associated with transport to/from the airport, as well as any implications which might arise from changes to airline schedules (including onward connections). Feedback from meetings is used to inform planning at the airport, and major communications are put out through either social media or through press releases.

The airport makes extensive use of customer feedback (push button 'faces'), which can be moved between sections (such as check in, security, café, and so on), and the data is then fed back to the relevant departments and staff.

- Stakeholder engagement

With regards to community consultation, this initially took place through the 'Gateway' project, leading up to opening in 2001. Much of the planning to ensure that external engagement takes place has been instigated and designed by the airport staff, and can in many ways be regarded as best practice (in terms of both content and the collective approach adopted). The highest percentage of advertisers in the airport are local businesses, including local jewellers.

The point was made that any changes which might be proposed for the internal layout of the airport (e.g. seating) that stakeholders will be consulted to hear their opinion. The marketing team from local operators interact with the local tourist authorities, to ensure that there are obvious connections with the airport and airlines (including advertising).

- Social media

Social media is run locally by the terminal manager, with the aim to ensure that the customer is aware of airport activities. Use of social media within the airport was originally driven by staff themselves, through a blog, and has in more recent years has a Facebook page (<https://en-gb.facebook.com/KirkwallAirport/>). Where major events or visits take place, the airport social media team will make an effort to post an update on Facebook, with a wider collection of photographs via the airport blog. There was a feeling that there was little local interest in twitter, so the airport has concentrated on one social media platform. This matching of platform to likely use and interest is important, and the airport uses Facebook insight to understand and track engagement (e.g. number of views).

“One size does not fit all”

One important point was to ensure that service updates are clear and available (including through the use of email), and that such formal information flows are not confused with social/cultural information. HIAL has organised training for the ‘social media ambassadors’ in each of the Highlands and Islands airports, and have used their experience to explore which platforms are most appropriate. For example, Instagram is quite heavily used within Orkney, but was felt to be more useful on a ‘personal’ level. Most postings on social media tend to begin with items which are of local interest (e.g. service updates) but usually followed by items of wider interest (e.g. attractions, airport webcam, etc).



The airport’s Facebook page and blog are useful in that they allow the social media ambassador to gain an understanding (to some extent) of where users are from (geographically), and the extent to which people are interacting with information which has been posted. The airport has also been

careful to ensure that clear guidance and rules are posted, to ensure that online discussions are polite and do not contain inappropriate language.

The interviewees were well aware of data protection issues, which may affect the manner in which information is posted (e.g. images) and how individual data is collected, stored and communicated.

- Off-peak airport space

Whilst the airport does not have spare physical capacity to have (for example) rooms available for booking, the airport has become an important location for local gatherings. This includes the airport café/restaurant being known as a local spot for informal meals, and is used by local children and young adults with special learning needs. The airport manager noted that this was welcomed by the staff, and that the children were missed when not there.

The café was noted by all interviewees as a key part of the terminal, and appeared to be regarded as a local facility, regardless of whether the users were arriving at the airport in order to fly.

The airport has developed the opportunity for training facilities on the site (fire safety training), which can be open to anybody in the community. Therefore, the fire service in Kirkwall is trained locally, as well as training facilities being available to other Islands in Orkney. There has also been some offering of first aid courses at the airport. Small meeting facilities are available within the fire training facility, but this is not appropriate for use elsewhere or by other groups.

- Social and cultural capital

The interviewees spoke about the aim to include arts and crafts within the terminal building. This was undertaken as part of an earlier 'gateway' project, with an aim to promote Orkney businesses and artists. The work was planned through engagement with the wider community, as opposed to just with airport clients and customers. There was also a stated aim to incorporate aspects of Orcadian history in displays, so that there was a mixture of goods which might be regarded as being 'for sale' and objects and artefacts which signal information about the Islands' history and culture. Reflecting this in the airport itself was regarded as being a conscious and intentional activity.

"The airport is a lifeline service"

All interviewees commented on the extent to which the airport is a vital part of people's lives, not least in terms of inter-island travel.

"It is like nowhere else I have worked"

"The airport is not huge, but it is still busy"

The size of the airport was described as being a positive feature, in the sense that this allowed staff from the various departments were able to work together, and to collaborate. Another example was the recent development of a 'local flyers' scheme, where amateur pilots were able to use the airport on a Sunday morning without incurring landing fees, which has positive safety implications, as well as the terminal benefitting (through use of the café, and so on). All goods for sale in the café and shop are sourced locally, and gifts for sale are likely to appeal to people departing, and suitable for hand luggage.

"People want peedier things to take on board"

The airport has hosted events (including celebrations to commemorate the Battle of Jutland, the place of the airport within the history of the RAF), which tend to include dignitaries from overseas (Germany, Italy), and leads to recognition and praise regarding how the airport connects with both ancient and modern history. The airport makes a positive effort to promote such events and facts, and the airport makes an effort to employ and train staff who are able to act as ambassadors for the Islands.

“It does not cost you anything to have good manners...”

The airport receives numerous school visits, to understand about security, fire safety, airport operations and (for older children) career prospects. The airport has plans to attend career events in Orkney, for example.

It was felt that Orkney has received a large amount of publicity on television, and that this has led to an increase in tourist numbers. There was also some discussion about the balance of tourism numbers (e.g. with an influx of cruise ships). Whilst this aspect may well be specifically relevant to Orkney, the message to be translated to other sites and airports is that the operations and cultural/social impact of the airport will be part of a wider and locally-specific context and system.

## Airport as a gateway

The interviewees expressed pride in the airport and the terminal, along with a recognition that this can and should extend across the local community and visitors to the area. In terms of what makes the airport different and distinct, there was a strong recognition that the airport, as a rural airport, is unique.

“We have tried to keep a homely atmosphere”

“The most important thing...when you walk through arrivals, you know you are in Orkney”

“We aim to keep it as rustically Orkney as possible”

The expressed aim was to give the “Orkney welcome” or “sad to see you go”.

The airport terminal is 17 years old, but there was a feeling that the terminal is looked after by the staff, and that the staff work as a team with pride for the airport.

Interestingly, the airport includes small exhibits of jewellery and craft which are available for sale locally, but not in the terminal itself. Although the interviewees spoke about this having both positive and negative implications, one could argue that this again lends weight to the notion of the airport and the terminal being a starting point, from which airport users can embark on a wider exploration. Indeed, it was noted that there is an effort made to ensure that the goods featured in the terminal cabinets are deliberately not for sale at the airport, to encourage people to explore the island and to buy locally. There is also an effort made to rotate or change the artwork on display.

“Folk will ask about how to get to Maeshowe ... the bus service takes people straight to tourist information”



The airport has a dedicated information desk, which is able to deal with tourist enquiries. The local tourist board also carry out regular surveys at the airport, to capture visitor perceptions of the islands. Any tourist leaflets for Orkney are held at the airport, and well-known tourist attractions are regularly asked about by arriving passengers. The airport also has a stock of both 'formal' and 'caricatured' maps of Orkney (in collaboration with the Oban times), for visitors. Staff working on the desk as required (as part of the job description) to have a strong knowledge of the islands (attractions, accommodation, transport, food and drink).

## Summary of approach and guidance for application

The approach taken was to explore how the case study had applied aspects of the working documents, but over a reasonably long time period.

Guidance which can be taken from this document, along with the templates and best practice guides, is that the context of rural and regional airports, which will usually be on a smaller physical scale than national transport 'hubs', is that the areas of guidance very much hold, but should be taken and applied within the context of the regional setting. This will help to ensure that the guidance is used in service to the existing cultural, social and practical values of the airports, and help to ensure that they can be used to enhance and realise the potential of such airports to act as important cultural gateways (for the visitor) and as important parts of the community (for residents).

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