



# Winter 2024 – Night Flights Review



Heathrow

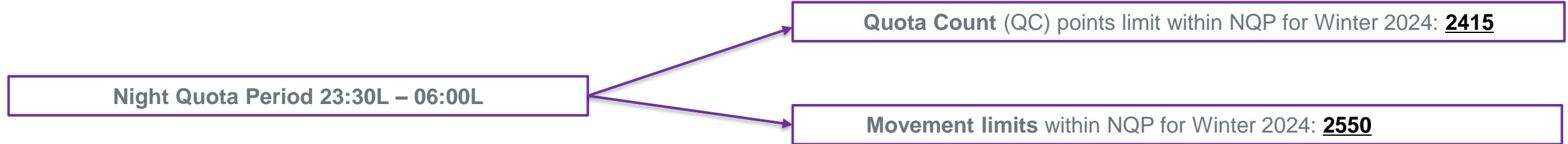
# OBJECTIVE

- DfT quota and movement limit for Winter 2024
- Dispensation, including categories and letter to DfT
- The process for dispensation
- Role of the Operations Duty Manager
- Summary of Winter 2024

# Background

By virtue of the Civil Aviation (Designation of Aerodromes) Order 1981(a) Heathrow Airport London, Gatwick Airport London and Stansted Airport London ('the London Airports') are designated aerodromes for the purposes of Section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982

Pursuant to the powers set out in section 78 of the Act, the Secretary of State considers it appropriate, for the purpose of avoiding, limiting or mitigating the effect of noise and vibration connected with the taking-off or landing of aircraft at the London Airports, to prohibit aircraft of specified descriptions from taking off or landing and to limit the number of occasions on which other aircraft may take off or land at those aerodromes



- The quota and movement limits are managed on a seasonal basis as detailed in the AIP supplement.
- Airlines with historic rights to operate during the night quota period receive their own quota and movement limit allocation taken from the overall limits above. Limits vary from Summer to Winter season.
- The quota and movement limits assigned to an airline with historic rights reflect predicted use for the season for its scheduled early morning arrival (0430-0600)
- Airlines with assigned quota and movement limits (detailed above) are responsible for ensuring that any late running movement (post 23:30) is recovered by delaying or cancelling a pre 06:00 arrival. This ensures an airline does not exceed its assigned quota and movement limit for the season.
- **Any** movement that operates after 23:30 is subject to approval from the Operational Duty Manager.
- Any quota and movements left over create the Heathrow Pool that is managed by the Airspace, Noise & ATM Performance Team.

# Dispensation

For the purposes of Section 78(4)(a) of the Act, the circumstances under which a particular occasion or series of occasions on which aircraft take off or land at the London Airports will be **disregarded** for the purposes of this Notice are as follows;

- a) Emergencies, where there is an immediate danger to life or health, whether human or animal;
- b) Widespread and Prolonged Air Traffic Disruption;
- c) Delays as a Result of Disruption leading to Serious Hardship and Congestion at the Airfield or Terminal;
- d) DfT Dispensation.

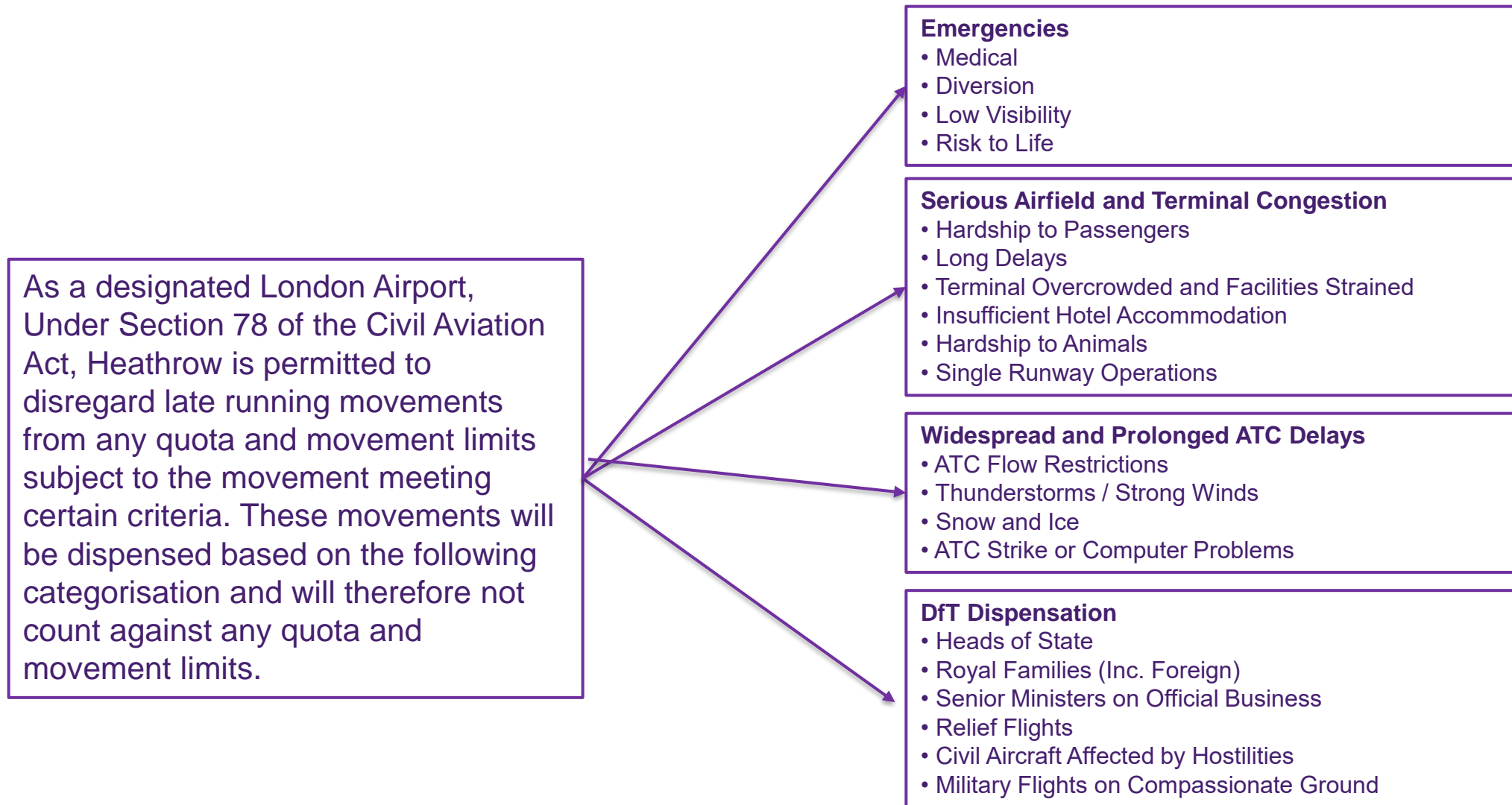
The DfT published guidance on dispensations on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/night-flight-dispensations/night-flight-dispensations>

The guidance outlined the requirement for a dispensation letter at the end of each season;

<https://www.heathrow.com/company/local-community/noise/data/reports>

# Dispensation Categories



# Dispensation Letter

**Heathrow**

Heathrow Airport Limited  
The Compass Centre, Nelson Road,  
Hounslow, Middlesex TW6 2GW  
W: heathrow.com

**Heidi Alexander MP**  
Secretary of State  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

16 April 2025

In summary there were 29 dispensations for Winter 2024 (27<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 30 March 2025);

20 dispensations granted due to widespread and prolonged ATC disruption. This was due to weather locally and across Europe.

8 dispensations granted due to medical emergency.

1 dispensation granted as a divert under the category of emergency, due to the closure of another international airport.

## Winter 2024 Dispensations

Dear Secretary of State,

I write to update you on Heathrow's dispensations for winter 2024, in accordance with the Department for Transport's (DfT) guidance on night flight dispensations.

Heathrow is committed to reducing the impacts of noise on our local community. Our Sustainability Strategy, Connecting People and Planet, commits to delivering quieter nights and flights and sets a target to reduce sleep disturbance by 10% by 2030 from 2019 levels. Our recently published Noise Action Plan (2024 – 2028) sets out our plan for reducing noise from our operations including night flights.

The winter season at Heathrow ran from 27 October 2024 to 30 March 2025 and saw over 192,000 air traffic movements. Over winter 2024, there have been challenges outside the control of Heathrow and our partners. These include emergencies and significant weather events.

Whilst we endeavour to limit the number of night flight dispensations by delivering an efficient and reliable operation, there are some circumstances which unavoidably require alleviation. These alleviations ensure passengers can reach their destination on time and prevent significant disruption to the consumer. These dispensations also avoid disruption spilling into the following day, which would be compounded by planes and crew out of position and are permitted under Section 78 (4) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

Over winter 2024, Heathrow dispensed 29 flights. The details are as follows:

- 20 dispensations were granted due to widespread and prolonged air traffic control (ATC) disruption. This was due to weather locally and across Europe.
- 8 dispensations were granted due to medical emergency.
- 1 dispensation was granted as a divert under the category of emergency, due to the closure of another international airport.

Given all 29 dispensations were outside of Heathrow and our partners' direct control and due to unplanned and unpredictable circumstances listed above, we do not foresee the repetition of the exact circumstances again. We are unable to advise on whether similar weather dispensations will be required for next winter in advance.

We will continue to work proactively with our partners each day to ensure that dispensations are kept to a minimum.

Yours sincerely,

**Javier Echave**  
Chief Operating Officer

# Dispensation due to Weather

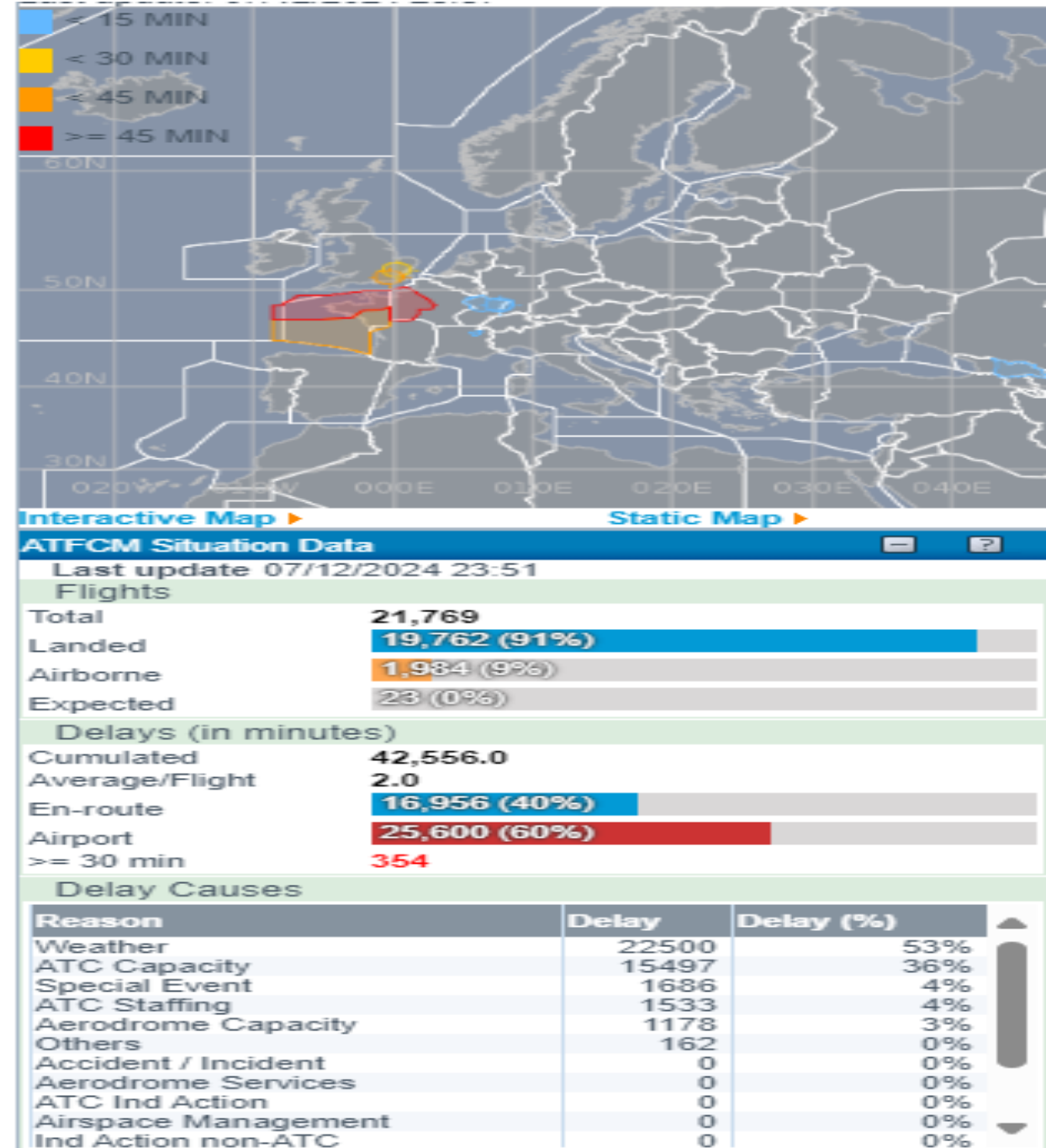
The Operational Duty Manager on shift, will provide operational reports throughout each day.

The report includes any weather disruption across the network and any flights at risk of running after 23:30. Regulation codes and NOTAMs are also provided.

We also require the relevant airline to complete a night jet movement form with full details on the reason for their late running flight after 23:30.

This information is required as evidence to determine if a flight can be dispensed or not.

Dispensation details including evidence are provided to the DfT within seven days of the flight operating.



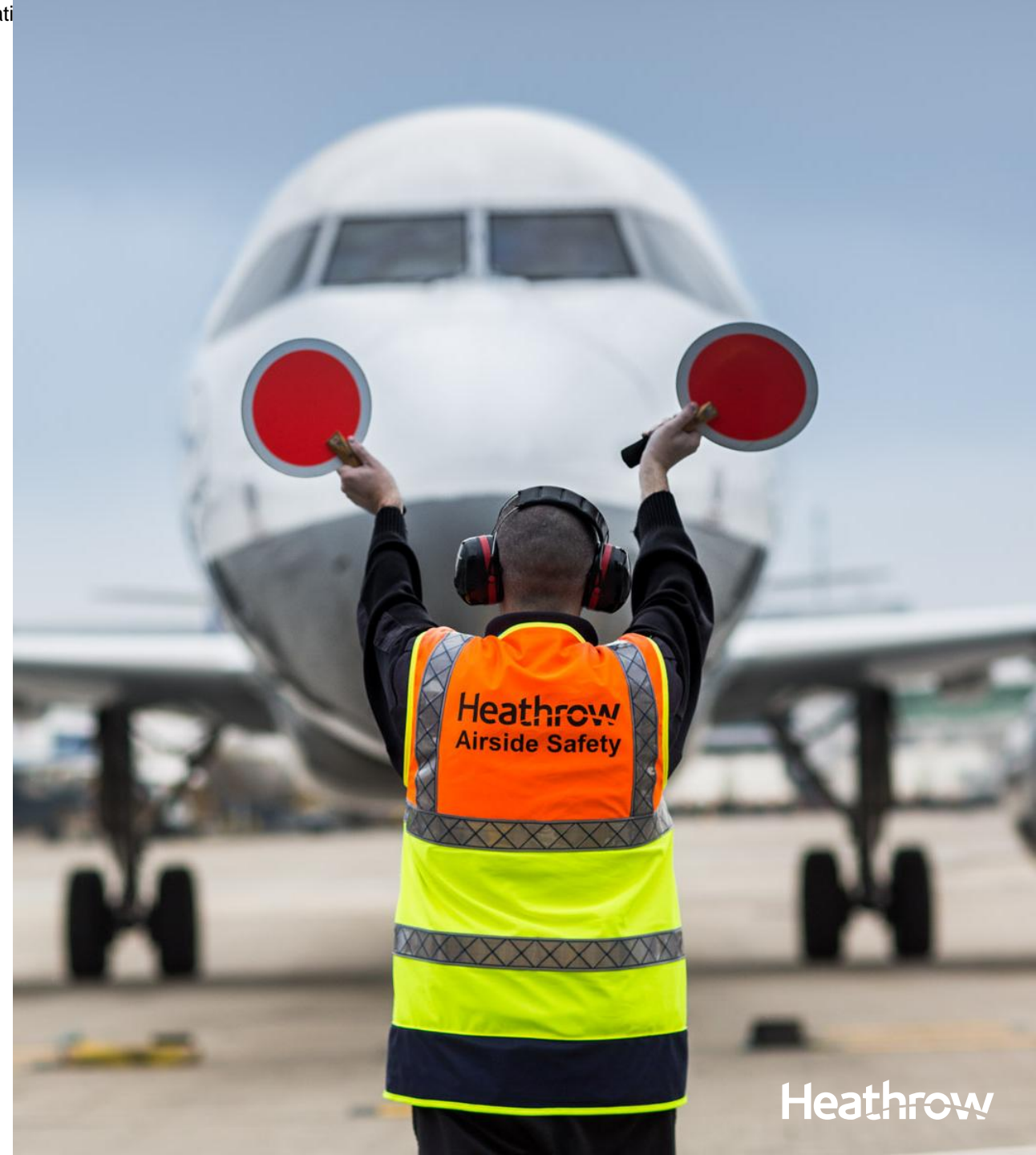
# Dispensation due to Emergency

The Operational Duty Manager on shift, will provide operational reports throughout each day.

The report includes any flight that declared a PAN PAN/MAYDAY.

The report will also detail if an ambulance attended the flight that declared a PAN PAN/MAYDAY. This information is required as evidence to determine if a flight can be dispensed.

If an ambulance **did not** attend, the flight **cannot** be dispensed and will be taken from the relevant airlines quota and movement allocation. This is categorised as “non dispensed”



# Day to Day Management

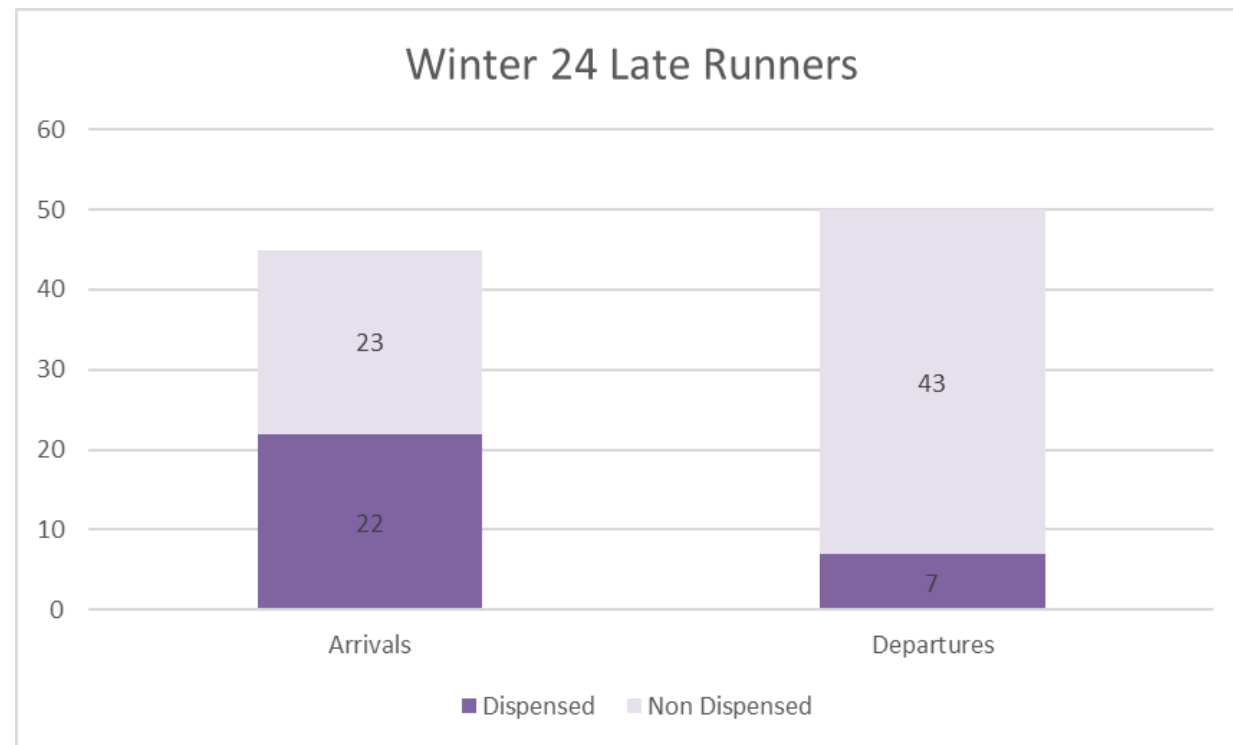
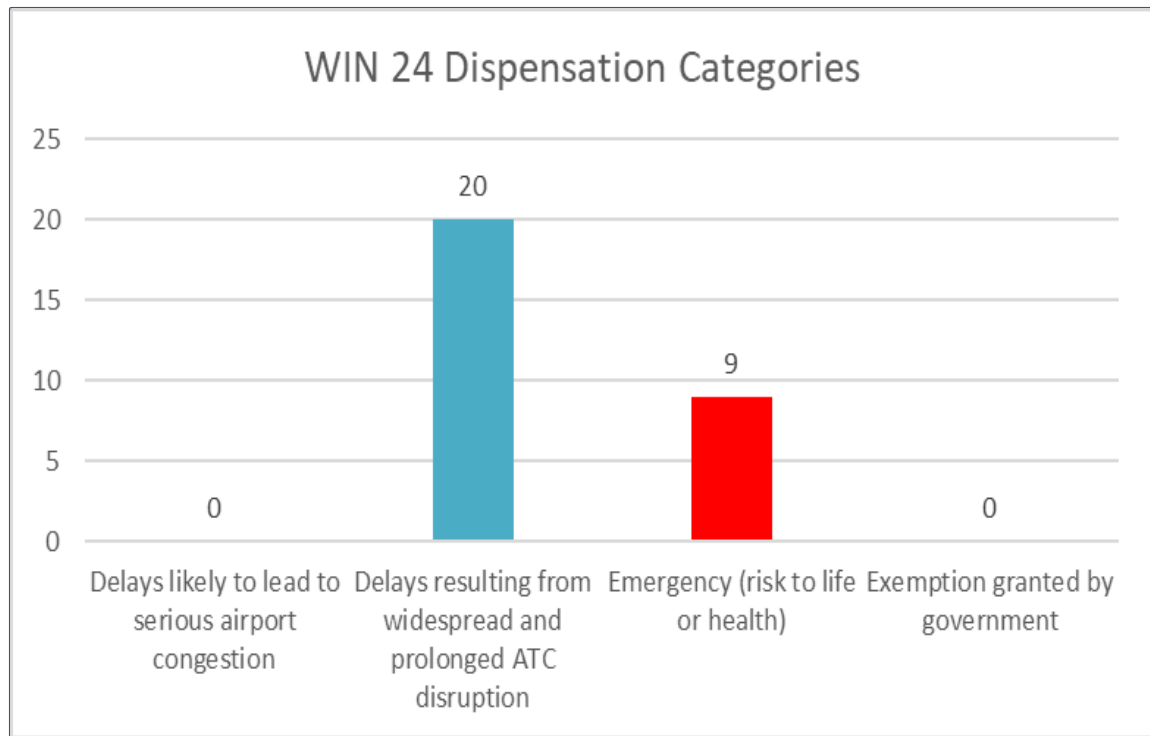
- All requests to operate after 23:30 are to be made through the Operational Duty Manager.
- Requests should be made with as much notice as possible for consideration
- The Operational Duty Manager will monitor a number of tools to ensure aircraft schedules are working to plan
- For the purpose of arrivals after 23:30, approval to arrive must be secured before the aircraft departs the outstation.
- If a late arrival will push the departure after 23:30 the airlines are required to contact the Operational Duty Manager to discuss prior to the aircraft departing the outstation.
- Onus is placed on an airline to be realistic with their requests and to provide their own mitigations before relying on a late movement.
- The Operational Duty Manager has a challenging role. They are required to balance the needs of the local communities, airlines and passengers.



**The Operations Duty Manager team are on shift 24/7 and their role is to ensure a smooth traffic flow throughout the operational day**



# Winter 2024 Final Figures – Late Runners



# SUMMARY

- Management of any night flight season requires collaboration with the Operational Duty Manager, Operational Planning Team and the Airlines.
- The Airspace, Noise & ATM Performance Team issue weekly reports to the DfT on how the season is progressing. This includes evidence for each dispensation too.
- Heathrow remained within the DfT quota and movement limit for Winter 2024.
- The number of dispensations for Winter 2024 was the lowest since the pandemic.
- The number of nights without late running flights (between 2330-0430) is increasing (this is reported annually and not per season)