

# Management and baggage handling operation

[Business](#), [Management](#)



## Case

## Study

## Birmingham International Airport

In the space of just 30 minutes every weekday, around 5. 00 in the evening, around 20 flights arrive and depart from the Eurohub Terminal. At the same time, aircraft are arriving and leaving from the Main Terminal next to the Eurohub. Across the runway and acres of tarmac, at the site of the original airport, the overnight freight operation is just beginning to wake up with the arrival of staff and the preparations for the first aircraft from Europe or the United States. Some of the 7, 000 staff from the 150 organisations based at Birmingham International Airport (BIA) see to the needs of their customers. The baggage handling operation is sorting, checking and dispatching bags to the many departing aircraft. The ground crews are loading and unloading aircraft, putting meals on board, filling the fuel tanks and cleaning aircraft during their brief spell at the airbridge.

The airlines' ticketing staff are dealing with lines of passengers, each of whom may have a different final destination. The information desk is fully staffed, dealing with the many queries, such as people wanting to know if their plane is on time, the location of a bank or hotel, or trying to work out how to get by road or rail to their final destination. Passengers flow through the lounges, passport control and security checks, and use toilets, duty free shops and restaurants, all of which have to be kept clean and stocked for their convenience. All of these activities, and more, are coordinated by BIA's Operations Director, Richard Heard. Richard explains his role: ' Out of all the people that work at the airport, BIA employs about 700 and I oversee about 600 of them. These operations people are basically concerned with the day-

to-day running of the airport and the short and medium-term operational planning. This includes a whole raft of things on the airfield and in and around the terminals.

The air-field side of things essentially involves maintaining the runways, agreeing slot allocations with the airlines, developing and implementing the safety management systems and keeping the fire crews fully trained. For example, this is a heavily regulated area so we work very closely with the Civil Aviation Authority. The other side of the operation is about managing the terminal buildings and other facilities. This is almost like running a shopping centre with its focus on customer service but with special security arrangements. Airport security is a key task which we run in-house, employing about 300 people. I also have a facilities management team and an engineering services team that look after the maintenance of the whole site.

‘ In terms of long-term design and development, we set up teams to oversee the planning of new building projects, such as new catering outlets, car parks and people mover systems. This plan uses the forecasts of passenger numbers and guides our decisions about what to build and when, and how to pay for it. We have been growing at a rate of about 10 per cent a year over the last 10 years. In 2000 the airport handled 7.6 million passengers and our growth is set to continue, with an anticipated 10 million passengers expected to travel through Birmingham by 2005. This plan involves serious money; we are talking about a capital plan of about £50 million a year over the next 15 years. This is all very much driven by operational needs. Managing and developing the airport’s operations are huge challenges.

' One of the major tasks for operations is not just to provide the infrastructure for all the other organisations on site - such as airlines, handling agents, retailers, cargo handlers - but also to provide the leadership and coordination for them. There are also groups off site, such as community groups, which we liaise with as we work to monitor and improve the environment. My personal job is about coordination and setting the safety and customer service standards for everyone to adhere to.

' All of us from the different organisations try to work together as a team and there is a great community spirit here that has built up over the years. Everyone wants their own bit to work well and the whole thing to work well together. We all have a great understanding of everyone's problems and there is an excellent spirit of cooperation.

' The real secret of managing operations, if you are ever going to sleep at night, is to make sure you have really good processes and procedures in place. We can't have people making it up on the spot. Everything has to be thought through and tried and tested. We spend a great deal of time reviewing and developing processes. We have to have procedures for fires, evacuations, bomb threats, ill passengers and even deaths in the terminal. Unfortunately, we do have medical emergencies, not surprising since we have about 30, 000 people passing through the airport every day in the summer.

' Another key task is operational planning. We do this on an annual basis. Operational planning is about making the operation as efficient as possible by working out how we can best allocate our infrastructure to the airlines. For example, we need to decide who is going to get the airbridges, who is

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going to get certain stands, who is going to have their passengers bussed to the terminal at peak times and so on. However, you have to remember that the operational plans are just that and as ever, things go wrong - schedules fall apart because of plane delays or mechanical problems, for example. So we also have terminal duty managers whose job it is to sort out the day-to-day operational problems. Our team of terminal managers covers the airport 24 hours a day, every day of the week, with one senior manager overseeing each shift.

' Many of the things that happen are recurring problems, such as delays or diversions and you know you will end up with a lot of passengers waiting around a lot longer than they want to. The job of the duty manager is to coordinate all our efforts, ensuring that the catering people know what's happening and making sure our information services people know so they can tell the passengers, for example. The terminal managers need to keep their own ears and eyes open. Passengers may report that they have seen someone acting suspiciously and the managers need to know what to do. When passengers get off the plane and their bags are not there, although it's the responsibility of the airlines or their handling agents, our people may have to pick up the pieces. When people try taking prohibited items through security, such as a family heirloom with a large curved blade, we have to explain patiently to them that they have to leave it with us.

' The terminal managers also have to deal with major incidents - things like bomb threats or, like last year, when Spanish coach drivers went on strike leaving many passengers stranded at the airport. The job of the terminal manager is to sort it all out and make sure everyone knows what is

happening. It involves a great deal of common sense but it is not easy. If you do an evacuation, for example, everyone will be at different stages in the passenger processing and security clearance procedures, so when the incident is over, we have to try and put them all back where they came from without mixing them up or making them start the process again!

‘ We have the equivalent of the terminal duty managers looking after the airfield side: operations duty managers. Their job is about dealing with the day-to-day problems, such as changing stand allocations when delays occur or arranging snow clearance if we have a sudden fall. Again plans are in place and everything has to be thought through. We also have weekly communication meetings when we get the operations and duty managers to work with the operational planning department.

‘ Our mission is to be the best regional airport in Europe. To do this we need continually to try and improve everything we do. It sounds simple, but it is not easy. For example, we have almost no capacity at peak times, that is between 7.00 a. m. and 8.00 a. m. and between 5.00 p. m. and 6.00 p. m. when we are busy with short-haul European traffic, so we are trying to encourage other airlines to fill in the off-peak times. This is ideal for long-haul operators and we now have flights to South East Asia and America, and just last year we added an Emirates flight to Dubai. This allows us to use the middle of the day when we have runway and terminal capacity and it suits everybody as we can all make better use of our facilities.

‘ Running an airport is a fascinating and exciting challenge. No two days are the same. We know that we can make a real difference to our customers, both passengers and airlines, by what we do. We also make a major

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contribution to the impact on the local economy by encouraging inward investment and exports. As an operations manager, my job is to make it all happen. It's a fantastic opportunity and it really does make a difference - its great!

## Questions

Identify the micro-operations to be found at the airport. For each one:

Identify the transforming and transformed resources

State what is the predominate transformed resource

Describe the output of each micro-operation and say who you think its customers are? Summarise the job of the operations director. What are the main issues/problems he faces in managing the airport??

What do you think Richard Heard actually does each day (how does he spend his time)??

Discuss the relationship between the day-to day tasks and the long-term issues and explain how Richard manages to oversee both at the same time