

Ryanair random seat allocation is not so random says Oxford University expert

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Passengers have more chance of winning the National Lottery jackpot than being allocated middle seats at random on a Ryanair flight, according to new Oxford University analysis.

In recent weeks Ryanair have faced mounting customer criticism, with

some accusing the airline of splitting up groups and families, who do not pay an additional charge for reserved seating. These claims have been rejected by the airline which says that customers who do not wish to pay for their preferred seat are randomly allocated one, free of charge.

Last night, the BBC Consumer affairs programme, Watchdog, ran its own investigation to test how random the airline's seating algorithm is.

As part of their tests, groups of four people were sent on four separate Ryanair flights. In each instance every single person was allocated a middle seat. Dr Jennifer Rogers, Director of the new Oxford University Statistical Consultancy was then invited to analyse the data, to work-out the chances of every person getting a middle seat allocated randomly.

By looking at the amount of window, aisle and middle seating available on each [flight](#), at the time of check-in, Dr Rogers, calculated the chances of all four people being randomly given middle seats on each of the flights, to be around 1:540,000,000. The chances of winning the National Lottery jackpot are 1:45,000,000. (This means that you are 10 times more likely to win the lottery than be in a group who are all randomly allocated middle seats.)

To support her analysis, Dr Rogers was also given access to data from a further 26 individuals, from nine groups, who had been separated from their party when travelling with Ryanair. Of the 26 people canvassed, 21 had been allocated middle seats, and in 11 of the total 13 groups (including the four BBC flights) assessed, each person had been given a middle seat.

Dr Rogers also considered whether row allocation played a part in the seating arrangement, observing that passengers were often scattered throughout the plane. An individual from a group would, on average, be sat 10 rows away from someone else from their group. On two of the

flights the data revealed that a passenger had been sat 26 rows away from someone else who they were flying with.

Dr Jennifer Rogers, Director of Oxford University Statistical Consultancy, said: 'This is a highly controversial topic and my analysis cast doubt on whether Ryanair's seat allocation can be purely random. I am delighted that Oxford University Statistical Consultancy (OUSC) has been able to support Watchdog with their research in this way. It's great that in the run up to the official Unit launch we can highlight the kind of services that we will be able to offer.'

Provided by University of Oxford

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