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Chairman's message

Fixing maintenance

The August and October issues of *General Aviation* contained short articles on Part M, the EASA maintenance requirements, or Continuing Airworthiness Requirements as it now says at the front of the relevant 329 page document. These were 'What's wrong with Part M?' and 'Part M – all cost, no benefit' respectively. The latter provided some brief details of the results of the questionnaire for aircraft owners and maintainers posted on the AOPA website as well some reference to other country AOPA's responses. The EASA Workshop on Part M for general aviation referred to took place in Cologne on 27th October and a report appears elsewhere in these pages. As mentioned, the workshop was more of a conference than a true workshop, and like many such gatherings, it presented a wonderful opportunity to get together with colleagues from other country AOPAs and similar like-minded folk. 'Networking' seems to be the popular word for it! It is a valuable way of picking up snippets of information, some immediately useful and some for future reference.

One of the more remarkable observations from this event is how different Part M turns out to be when regurgitated by the different national aviation authorities for consumption by owners and maintainers. Article 1 of the Part M document entitled 'Objective and scope' states: "This regulation establishes common technical requirements and administrative procedures for ensuring the continuous airworthiness of aircraft, including any component for installation thereto..." This is the one and only objective and it is far from being achieved. EASA send standardisation teams around the NAAs to audit their processes in the relevant activities and whilst, no doubt, in maintenance they concentrate mainly on the commercial air transport side, it seems that with general aviation only failures of compliance from what is written in Part M get picked up for further action; there seems to be no attempt to coordinate the processes across the various country NAAs. Having a model of best of practice would be a useful tool. The teams consist typically of two people from EASA and two from other NAAs, so there is a sort of mechanism there for standardisation across the countries to gradually emerge, but this osmotic process is not fast enough to achieve a sensible and timely improvement to Part M for GA.

Thus, the interface between owner plus maintainer and EASA, namely the NAA, can crucially influence the scope and detail of maintenance activity in a particular country. In a sense, the NAA acts as manager of the maintenance regime under its control. Many professional managers, particularly those who have been on management courses, are aware of what is referred to as 'management style'. In chatting to colleagues from other AOPAs it was easy to discover that some NAAs adopt an extremely autocratic attitude towards those whom they regulate, those of Iceland, Italy and Sweden apparently falling into this category. This has an effect across the board, and has led to problems caused by insisting on manufacturers' recommendations being mandatory, the star example being the monthly lubrication of Piper door seals in Sweden – never mind the subsequent rapid deterioration! Attitudes to the ACAM, or Aircraft Continuing Airworthiness Monitoring (random checks by surveyors of aircraft and paperwork, for GA aircraft usually when in a maintainer's hangar) are further sources of complaint – grounding aircraft without reasonable justification being typical. By comparison, we in the UK are indeed fortunate that our own CAA adopts a consultative style and, as a result, we suffer less from these irksome strictures than our European colleagues. Maybe EASA needs to address the management style of its NAAs?

The extra paperwork and administration from Part M is welcome by neither aircraft owner nor maintainer. It all has to be paid for one way or another. Maintainers do not like paperwork at the best of times, but accept the need for a certain level in a regulatory system, and they do not like having to charge for excessive and unnecessary paperwork. In AOPA UK we value the strength of the international partnership that is IAOPA Europe, and together with our colleagues we will endeavour to ensure that the eventual outcome of the programme of work promised by EASA at the workshop leads to a significant reduction in the cost of maintaining our aircraft, although expecting pre-Part M levels is perhaps a trifle too optimistic. Assuming a reduction of just half the extra cost, which, in the UK is £800 per annum (average from the AOPA web questionnaire) would, for a sole owner, be worth about 5 years' subscription every year. Owners in a group of five or less would see their annual subscription more than completely paid for. Non-owner pilots would also benefit since any reduction of maintenance costs should translate into lower hire charges. This is why AOPA is devoting much time, energy and resource to the topic. Of course, any future benefit will accrue to members of AOPA and non-members alike, so please, when you meet one of the latter, make the point and persuade him or her to join up!



George Done