

JAR-FCL – it was all for nothing

The CAA has produced a report that concludes that JAR-FCL had done absolutely nothing to improve GA safety, despite the massive disruption and cost burden it has placed on pilots and the industry.

The findings of the report are a salutary lesson to all those regulators in Cologne, in Brussels, at Gatwick and elsewhere who are now sitting down to plan new regulations and restrictions which they claim will improve safety. They won't.

Will the lesson be heeded?

The report, produced by an undergraduate engineering student on a placement at the CAA's Safety Regulation Group, shows that all the new JAR requirements for currency, medical standards, and extra training have had zero effect on safety levels. In its findings the report states flatly: "JAR-FCL has had no significant effect on the number of serious incidents and accidents involving fixed-wing GA single-engined piston aircraft for both private pilots and instructors."

Conversely, the UK National Private Pilots Licence – conceived, written and pushed through by AOPA when its predictions of a reduction in licence uptake after JAR-FCL were borne out – has resulted in no decrease in safety, despite its curtailed regulatory burden.

AOPA's chief executive Martin Robinson says: "For years we have repeated the mantra – more regulation does not mean more safety. Here we have proof positive that it is true. The question is, will those whose livelihoods, empires and revenues depend on regulation get the message? The cure for many of our ills is for EASA to get its regulatory boot off the

industry's windpipe, but Cologne is creating more bureaucracy, not less."

The CAA report bears out all AOPA's warnings in 1999, when we said JAR-FCL would drive pilots away, put people out of business, kill the PPL twin rating and lead to an instructor shortage. The CAA dismissed AOPA's warnings of disaster, and concluded in its Regulatory Impact Assessment – which



Will the CAA now apologise to all the people who once made a living from a multi-engine industry that collapsed overnight?

AOPA had demanded – that the effect would be "nugatory". That means there would effectively be no change.

There certainly hasn't been, but only on the safety front. The cost of a PPL – and indeed

all licences – has gone up by about 20 percent. The number of people driven away from aviation by JAR-FCL is legion, although the NPPL has allowed some to get back into flying. Thanks to the five-year renewable licence, another pointless cost-burden on pilots, we know that 70 percent of those who get JAR licences don't renew.

Yet many of the same people who brought you JAR-FCL are now hard at work on EASA's new regulatory framework, and one only has to look at the madwoman's breakfast that constitutes the Implementing Rules on Maintenance to see that they don't hear the music.

The new CAA report, produced as it has been by a student on a placement, falls far short of the Post-Regulatory Impact Assessment that AOPA has been calling for, and which the CAA is legally obliged to undertake but resolutely refuses to carry out. Its excuse is that the coming of EASA would render the exercise pointless.

Martin Robinson says: "The CAA and its counterparts in other European countries who concocted JAR-FCL must be horribly embarrassed that they got the whole thing so completely wrong. It has been a dreadful burden on this industry, and is the cause of many of our ills, and they now admit it was all utterly pointless.

"Will the CAA now apologise to all the pilots →



Fuel tax fight continues

The price of avgas seems likely to rise by about 2p a litre following a successful campaign to restrict an EU-mandated tax rise to the lowest possible level. The threat of a rise of about 30p a litre has receded as UK tax authorities have agreed to reclassify avgas as a specialist fuel, which will allow them to levy a rate of tax different to that on car fuel.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have published their proposals for change, which must now go through the consultation process. Have a look at the AOPA website www.aopa.co.uk and respond favourably to the proposal – won't take a minute, and could save you a lot of money. If accepted, the new tax rate will represent a victory for AOPA, the BBGA and other bodies like the GAA who have fought together to limit the damage to general aviation from the European tax diktat.

The threat arose last year when the EU refused to extend a 'derogation' which had allowed Britain to tax avgas at half the rate of car fuel. The derogation was won by AOPA and GAMTA in the 1980s, when they convinced UK tax authorities that British general aviation would be rendered hopelessly uncompetitive if car fuel tax rates applied. As a result, over the years GA pilots have saved

millions of pounds.

After the EU demanded an end to the derogation, the Revenue readily agreed with industry bodies that a way must be found to limit the damage – a 30p tax hike would have been crippling. The suggestion that avgas could be reclassified as a specialist fuel with its own tax rates was even supported by the



CAA, who at AOPA's request produced an opinion in favour of reclassification. AOPA's chief executive Martin Robinson says: "Right from the start we have had positive co-operation from the UK government, HM Customs and Revenue and the CAA, and it looks like we're heading for a successful conclusion."

The real damage from the EU demand, which is nothing more than bureaucratic tidying-up, falls on private avtur users, and in particular throws a spanner in the business plans of diesel engine companies. Because only a tiny fraction of Jet A1 is used for "private pleasure purposes" it is seen as almost impossible to collect the tax, so an honesty box system is proposed, in which users would calculate their own tax and pay annually.

The EU intends to slap 55p a litre tax on Jet A1, lifting the price from less than 60p to £1.15. Diesel engine manufacturers have been promoting the idea of expensive re-engining because under the old system, you'd get your money back over time on the fuel. If you're a private user, that will no longer apply. The result will be that diesel engines, which are after all 'greener' than avgas engines, may be priced out of reach by the EU's tax grab. ■

The diesel-engined Twin Star — 'greener' than avgas engines, but will be disadvantaged by the EU's tax grab



who were forced out by nonsensical medical requirements, all the examiners who gave up because of farcical currency demands, all the students who had to pay for extra training, all the people who once made a living from a multi-engine industry that collapsed overnight, and all the rest of us who have paid out for the mish-mash of bureaucratic pedantry that JAR-FCL represents?

"In fact, I believe that all the LPCs and flight reviews that soak money out of a flying budget reduce safety because they cut the amount of proficiency flying a pilot can do, and practice is what improves safety. Our regulators just don't know where to stop.

"We now find Graham Forbes chairing the EASA sub-group that's setting out the

requirements for EASA's Light Aircraft Pilots Licence. Will it become another exercise in meddling, larded with pointless requirements and special-interest quirks?"

The sad truth is that for many regulators, JAR-FCL became an end in itself, and the industry was simply there to serve the perceived goal. The bureaucratic tidiness of a pan-European system was the driving force, and the effect on the industry was a side issue.

Similarly, EASA has now become the bureaucratic monolith to which homage must be paid, and regulations are being written because EASA must have regulations. The high hopes we once had of a simplified, cost-effective European regulatory regime serving the industry have been dashed. They have once again lost sight of the fundamental question – what is it all for? EASA exists

because the JAA so palpably failed, and yet we are making the same mistakes all over again – a reflection of the whole European situation perhaps? The goal of JAR-FCL was good, in that you could use your qualifications across Europe, but national legal and bureaucratic systems got in the way. Until you have legal harmonisation, how can you have regulatory harmonisation? EASA will overcome some of this to a degree, because European regulations are de facto laws in each member state, but it will still come down to national interpretation. The difference in the USA is that the FAA's writ runs across the country, whereas EASA is an agency and needs member states to enforce through national legal systems the new regulations.

Martin Robinson adds: "It must also be clear to the CAA that their two General Aviation reviews, although welcomed by GA, are probably on the rosy side." ■

'practice is what improves safety'

Chief executive's diary:

LARS, JARs and jolly tars

It's been a fruitful couple of months, dare I say it, what with progress on the fuel tax issue, LARS moving in the right direction, and the CAA finally admitting what AOPA has said all along – that the whole JAR-FCL exercise was a costly cock-up with no safety benefits. There are many dark clouds on our horizon – British Airways is once again complaining that it's subsidising general aviation, despite a level of CAA charges on us that continues to drive business away – but we occasionally win one.

I've forged an unofficial alliance with our sailing brethren in the Royal Yachting Association, so we can campaign together on issues of common interest. It's fascinating to note how few constraints there are on yachtsmen who want to go abroad, and how cursory the checks are on what they want to bring in and out of the country. There are hundreds of thousands of them out there on the high seas, and their levels of skill and instruction are largely dictated by their own common sense. Wouldn't that cause consternation at the CAA! Of course, people say, the terrorists didn't sail boats into the World Trade Center – but they didn't fly their training aircraft into them either, because they would have bounced off.

And of course, this being the season, I had a couple of weeks' holiday in North Wales with the family. Fine, thanks. I went to the museum at Caernarvon Airport, and that's well worth a look – as is the whole airport. I was very impressed by the way it's run, and how friendly it is to general aviation. Well done, Caernarvon.

To go back to before the holidays, on July 24th I was at the CAA's Finance Advisory Committee, where the issue of cross subsidies has once again raised its ugly head. British Airways is still going on about

£300,000 it allegedly pays in cross-subsidies to GA. Perhaps it needs all the money it can get to pay its recent £300

million "dirty tricks" fine for fixing surcharges on its tax-subsidised fuel. The fact is that BA has a responsibility to its shareholders to grab every handout it can get, and it will continue to hound GA for cash until somebody calls a halt.

On the 25th I was at Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue for a fuel duty discussions, and the following day I went to the CAA, where the topic was possible updates to pilot licensing pending proposals from EASA. On the 31st I attended the first Mode-S Working Group – see separate story on Mode-S.

On August 15th I was at the first meeting of ACEP, a committee formed by CAA and

it will continue to hound GA for cash until somebody calls a halt

NATS as part of the Airspace Safety Initiative to educate pilots regarding infringements. This is a laudable objective – see story elsewhere in this section.

They're putting up £200,000 to fund a communication campaign with pilots, including CD-ROM and website material, and of course they're trying to get the message out through organisations like AOPA and magazines like *General Aviation*.

On August 9th I went to an e-Borders discussion ahead of a formal consultation that the Home Office are coming out with later this year. Parliament is looking to legislate on this some time in 2008, but there are a few hurdles to cross first. The ultimate aim is to have an online resource where you can lodge all your details, so customs and immigration wouldn't have to come out to see you when you fly abroad, but it's all tied up with things like retina



scans at Heathrow and other details. But it could be good.

After the holidays my welcome-back job was a meeting of the ASISG, the high-level CAA group that's developing plans to increase safety in UK airspace, and on September 1st I was at Duxford for a meeting of the AOPA Members Working Group. This group has been a real bright spot in the last year, full of enthusiasm and new projects. There were 13 members at Duxford for the meeting, and discussions ranged over many useful projects that could be taken forward.

I was back at ACEP on September 4th, to report on the meetings of my Working Group discussing the role of GPS in infringements, and the following day I had the pleasurable duty of travelling to Farnborough to see the first Cessna Mustang to come to Europe – a beautiful aircraft indeed. Well, a man can dream.

On the 6th I was at NATS at Swanwick to continue discussions on 8.33 MHz radios, which AOPA believes to be a 400 million euro mistake. But who cares, as long as GA pays? Next day I went to the Department for Transport for an EASA briefing, looking particularly at the mess IR-M is getting itself into. On the same day I sat through a CAA interview with an AOPA member who's been reported for flying without a type rating; I may be able to tell the full story one day.

On September 10th I had a meeting with web experts about trading on the AOPA website, and on the 13th I was back at the CAA for an interview with a member who's accused of infringing the London TMA. Again, I hope to be able to give an outline of the case for the education of members once it's over.

On the 14th we had the AOPA AGM – see stories in this section – and looking ahead (at time of writing) I've got the IAOPA (Europe) Regional Meeting in Cyprus starting on September 19th, and my holiday seems like a hundred years ago.

Martin Robinson

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AOPA Annual General Meeting 2007

Investing £70 to make £700

AOPA has had a successful year of staving off cost increases for members, and more pilots need to invest in the Association. Pat Malone reports

The general aviation industry in the UK has saved hundreds of thousands of pounds this year as a result of the work of AOPA, with the average member having saved ten times his or her subscription during 2007, chief executive Martin Robinson told the Association's Annual General Meeting.

One of the biggest 'wins' of the year was the killing of proposals to impose VFR charges on all flights, which was achieved by IAOPA (Europe) and has saved the average member about £10 a flight, or £300 a year. AOPA has also played a salient role in fighting European demands for tax increases on avgas, which seems to have been successful in restricting the tax increase to less than 2p a litre and will save the average pilot £400 a year.

"Thus the average AOPA member is £700 better off this year because of the work of AOPA, about ten times the annual subscription," Martin Robinson said. "Of course, these benefits, hard-won with members' money, also accrue to those who are not members, and we all need to convince them to join AOPA. Without money, the work cannot be done."

At the corporate level there have also been financial successes, with the Flight Training Policy Group – operated in association with the BBGA – having created cost efficiencies on simulator requirements which had saved corporate members hundreds of thousands of pounds, according to Cabair chairman Charles Henry.

The Association has had a successful year on all fronts, with membership income increasing, expenses down, and committees, working groups and the executive all reporting

increased activity. Company Secretary Graham Rowe said that AOPA's finances were sound, with membership income going up despite a reduction in advertising expenditure. Income from Flight Instructor seminars has increased, and they are operating at a marginal profit.

All Board members were re-elected, and two new directors were co-opted – Chris Royle, chairman of AOPA's Members Working Group, and Charles Henry, Chairman of Cabair Holdings Ltd.

Martin Robinson covered some of the many activities of the Association through the year. Airspace issues in the UK and Europe had taken up a lot of time and effort, but AOPA's success in fighting off Eurocontrol's proposals for VFR charging had been the biggest single win in that area. As with many of AOPA's successes, it meant there was no change to the status quo, so it's difficult to sell to members as a 'win'. Safety issues are as always at the top of the agenda, now dictated by European policy. On the regulation front, IAOPA significantly influenced the European Commission's decision to reject Eurocontrol's proposals to abandon ICAO airspace classifications and move to having only two categories of airspace, a poorly conceived plan that would have adversely affected general aviation. At home, AOPA seems to have convinced the CAA that a transition period is required for Mode-S, resulting in more savings for members.

Martin warned that 8.33 kHz radio frequency separation is being strongly pushed by Eurocontrol, which admits that it will cost GA some 400 million euros to implement. He has written to EASA's Industry Consultation

Body, on which IAOPA (Europe) has a seat, seeking an independent study into the issue of frequency assignments. AOPA Germany's studies show that the problem is not lack of frequencies, but inefficient frequency assignment, with every EU country doing its own thing.

Background security checks on all flight students will become a major issue in the coming year, Martin said. States have opposed EU requirements because of the complexity of administration at the GA end, and the legislation is currently stuck between the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. Luckily, IAOPA (Europe) has an ally in Arunas Degutis MEP, transport *rapporteur* and chairman of AOPA Lithuania and MEP, is working on this.

The concept of e-Borders is creeping into the language. This is a proposed system whereby pilots crossing borders will be able to lodge their details on a website, and spot checks will then replace the current entry and exit arrangements. AOPA was seeking a revision of the Prevention of Terrorism Act as it applied to general aviation, given that the situation in Ireland had been normalised.

AOPA has established an information relationship with the Royal Yacht Association, which has 100,000 members but represents only five percent of the sailing community. The two organisations will seek to present a common front on cross-border issues.

Martin gave a brief resume of the debate on air traffic services outside controlled airspace – see the London LARS article elsewhere in these pages – and set out IAOPA's objections to EASA's Implementing Rules on Maintenance, which are still badly drawn. Following AOPA consultations with the Department for Transport, the UK has agreed to write to EASA expressing its concerns about IR-M, which would turn out to be a nightmare for GA if forced through in their present form.

During the year, he added, largely thanks to the AOPA Members Working Group, the AOPA website had been revamped, and while there had been a few teething problems it was a major improvement and increased the Association's ability to communicate with members. "We now have about 80 percent of members' emails," Martin said, "and we are sending bulletins out as required." Members continued to comment favourably on the high quality of *General Aviation* magazine, which was avidly read in Parliament, at the CAA and in Whitehall. ■



Left: AOPA members at the AGM

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Any other business?

After the formal business of the AGM, several reports were given on the state of play in various areas of AOPA's activities. David Ogilvy gave the AGM a run-down of the depressingly familiar story on aerodromes – in particular, the encroachment of wind farms, and regional airfields kicking out GA – while John Walker updated the meeting on the situation at Lee on Solent, the longest-running problem AOPA has been dealing with. Owned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the South East England Development Agency, the airfield operates under restrictions which heartily discourage GA. It was effectively owned by the Department of Transport, which was on the one hand professing to promote general aviation, yet was killing it stone dead at its own airfield.

Chris Royle, chairman of the AOPA

Members Working Group, gave a positive account of the group's activities during the year, which had led to a number of improvements. The MWG was a group of vocal, opinionated, active and knowledgeable group with a vast range of flying experience and included a student with 20 hours and a number of instrument rated pilots who regularly flew across Europe on airways. It had met four times, and at its most recent meeting there had been 14 members. Several had taken on specific tasks, including promoting the Wings scheme and revamping the AOPA website, which was greatly improved. They were addressing issues such as the web forum and were working on a mentoring scheme, and a system of regional representatives for AOPA. "Everyone brings enthusiasm, and a commitment to improve standards and to defend and develop private flying in the UK

and Europe," Chris said. "It would be useful, however, to have more people from the north, and more women."

Howell Williams outlined the continuing work of the instructor committee, which this year had revamped the AOPA Aerobatics Course to introduce a standard-level qualification. The Wings Scheme had been broadened to include helicopter and seaplane pilots, and the AOPA ground instructor certificate had been brought into full conformity with the JAR syllabus. The Radio Navigation certificate has been approved, including a GPS component for VFR work. NPL flight instructor issues were still taking up a lot of time, and other ways were being sought to alleviate the instructor shortage.

AOPA has now run some two dozen Flight Instructor Refresher Seminars, and they were now open to PPLs if there were spare places available. "A lot of hard professional vocational work done has within this committee," said Howell, "and it has always acted with great persistence, because it's taken years to drive some of these things through." ■

Runway robbery

The curse of 'compulsory handling' is becoming so rapacious that lives are now being put at risk.

Charles Strasser operates the 'Strasser Scheme' under which airfields agree to waive landing fees in cases of genuine emergency or unforeseen weather diversion. This was suggested, and is strongly supported, by the CAA because the last thing on a pilot's mind when he's trying to make decisions in difficult circumstances should be whether he can afford to land. Over the last six years, 195 UK airfields have signed up to the scheme.

Unfortunately it is now being undermined by the cancer of 'compulsory handling,' the licensed banditry that allows third parties to fleece general aviation pilots for outrageous charges for 'services' they neither want or need.

Charles Strasser told the Annual General Meeting of an AOPA member who recently ran into unexpected bad weather on his way from Dunkswell to Woodvale. With welcome help from London Information and ATC at Liverpool he diverted to Liverpool John Lennon airport, landing safely a couple of minutes after 8pm.

Liverpool is one of the signatories to the Strasser Scheme, but has appointed a handling agent, Liverpool Aviation Services,

and decreed that handling is compulsory. On this occasion, Liverpool Aviation Services handed our member a bill for £191.68 – a landing fee of £26, a 'handling fee' of £24.68 and an 'out of hours' fee of £141.

When Charles Strasser complained that Liverpool had signed up to the Strasser Scheme, he was offered a refund of half the landing fee – £13. Liverpool Airport says it's nothing to do with them.

Compulsory handling and the rip-off banditry that goes with it undermines the

whole concept of the Strasser Scheme. A pilot in trouble should be able to get his aircraft on the ground as soon as possible, without fearing the greed of some runway robber with a licence to plunder his wallet. A difficult situation can be made life-threatening when a pilot's decision-making is compromised by the fear of 'compulsory handling'.

Charles Strasser says: "The purpose of this scheme is to avoid fatalities, and if this curse grows and spreads, people will die as a result." ■

AOPA – helping to make NOTAM better

AOPA UK, through Mike Cross, influences developments on behalf of the entire UK GA community. Mike attends regular customer liaison meetings where AIS and the CAA sit down with representative from the airlines, commercial briefing services and the GA community to discuss issues and find answers. AOPA UK also facilitates more specialised meetings. On August 2nd a meeting organised by AOPA UK took place at AIS Heathrow to forge links between the CAA, NATS/AIS and software developers. The CAA were represented by Steven Hill, Head of Aeronautical Information and Management Regulation, and Wing Cdr Nicki Lockhart, Head of the CAA's Airspace Utilisation Section. Also present were a number of software developers, as well as representation from NATS/AIS.

The benefits are already feeding through with a further meeting taking place on September 13th at which David Adams (fly.dsc.net) and Andrew Hall (www.notam-map.co.uk) are due to again meet Nicki Lockhart and Steven Hill to discuss proposals for software tools to aid NOTAM production in a way that will enable more accurate geographic plotting of the areas they cover.

*How to use the AIS website – see page 16

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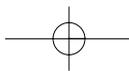
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Southampton – partial redress

BAA has agreed to refund a £57 handling fee to a member who was charged £181.37 after making a precautionary diversion to Southampton Airport because of bad weather.

The case of pilot Richard Battersby was taken up by Charles Strasser after the money was demanded when he was forced to divert on an IFR flight from Leeds to Guernsey. As reported in the last issue of *General Aviation*, officials at the airport told the pilot they would not waive their charges because he had not declared a Mayday. Charles Strasser checked all the circumstances of the flight to satisfy himself that it was a suitable case for refund under the 'Strasser Scheme', to which 195 airports have signed up, including Southampton. The scheme, which has strong CAA backing, aims to ensure that pilots who are making potentially life-saving diversion decisions are not deterred from landing ASAP because of cost. When Mr Battersby left Leeds at 1330 GMT the Guernsey TAF showed acceptable conditions for a landing up to 1800, at which time a deterioration was forecast down to close to minima. His scheduled arrival time was

15.40. Overhead the Isle of Wight he got the Guernsey ATIS which showed conditions to be below minima. The same applied to Jersey, his designated alternate. He therefore decided to divert to Southampton.

At Southampton, he was told that since he did not declare a full emergency, the full landing and 'handling' charges for his PA31 were payable. These included £57 for the landing, £45 for the handling fee for arrival, £45 for the handling fee for departure, and £25 plus VAT for 'transport'. Mr Battersby had no alternative but to hand over his money. Two hours later there was an unforecast clearance at Guernsey, and he was able to depart.

In a letter to Mr Christopher Butler, managing director of Southampton, Charles Strasser pointed out that not only does the Strasser Scheme not require a Mayday call, but in this instance such a call would have been an abuse of procedure.

In a reply to Charles Strasser, Mr Butler agrees to refund the £57 landing fee. But he goes on: "Given that Mr Battersby made full use of the handling facilities and did not query this at the time, the handlers, Signature, are reluctant to give a refund. In the circumstances I will now leave it to Mr Battersby to pursue."

Charles Strasser says: "We are grateful to Mr

Butler for refunding the landing fee. This case, however, once again highlights the baleful effect handing companies have on this life-saving scheme. I would like to know exactly how to interpret Mr Butler's letter. Would Signature refund the charges had Mr Battersby complained at the time?

"The whole scheme is compromised if compulsory handling companies demand a pound of flesh from unfortunate pilots who have been forced down by emergencies or unforeseen circumstances."

The Strasser Scheme is fully supported by the CAA, which says in CAP 667 9.2(c):

"There were a number of fatal accidents where a timely diversion or precautionary landing could have avoided an accident. In the UK there is a 'culture' of pressing on and hoping for the best rather accepting the inconvenience and cost of a diversion. This 'culture' needs to be changed, firstly by educating pilots and secondly by persuading aerodrome owners that there should be no charge for emergency landings or diversions. *It is recommended that all aerodrome owners be persuaded to adopt a policy that there should be no charges for emergency landings or diversions by general aviation aircraft.*" ■



The shame of Blackpool

While 195 airports have signed up to the Strasser Scheme, for some reason Blackpool continues to hold out. Its recent treatment of a member who had a problem there has infuriated Charles Strasser and should give us all food for thought.

The member wrote:

"I was forced to call a mayday in the early stages of take off from 25 at Blackpool due to a partial loss of power. This allowed me to make a left turn (circuit was right handed) and avoid the busy part of the beach and a possible circuit over the town. This enabled the engine to recover, and enough height to be gained to safely return to runway 31. ATC were first class. Total flight time two minutes. I then taxied the aircraft to an area where I could carry out engine runs and change plugs. One of the ATC officers came to see me to ensure I filled in the correct report. I then departed from Blackpool via 28 with a clearance to turn left and climb over the beach to overhead Warton before setting out (nervously!) home to Mona. The engine power loss is considered to have been caused by plug fouling due to the 20 min taxi/delay before take off.

"At no time did anyone from Blackpool remind me about, or request, a second landing fee, and at no time was I anywhere that I could have paid such a fee.

"I was horrified to receive on Friday a bill from Blackpool for the landing fee (£7.50-ish as the ARV is 499kg) plus a minimum charge to bring the total to £35 inc VAT."

The member is appealing for reason, but has not yet received a reply from Blackpool. Because the airport has resolutely refused to join the Strasser Scheme, there is very little AOPA can do other than to make the situation known to members.

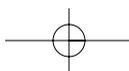
If we received updated information it will be published here. ■

CAA Safety Evenings

Christmas is coming – can David Cockburn be far behind, with his winter programme of CAA Safety Evenings? Indeed not. Coming to an airfield near you is one of the best investments you can make in the cause of your own safety, and like everything of real value the CAA produces, it's absolutely free.

Here are the dates and locations of the Safety Evenings, attendance at which – as you know – qualifies as an achievement in the AOPA Wings scheme, and can help reduce your insurance. Additions and updates will be published on the CAA website www.caa.co.uk – click through 'safety regulation', 'general aviation' to 'safety evenings'.

Date	Area/airfield	Location	Organiser, phone
October			
08	Coventry	Coventry Aeroplane Club	02476 301428
23	Cumbernauld	Airfield café	01236 452525
24	Blackpool	Terminal	01253 404925
25	RAF Cranwell	Whittle Hall theatre	01526 832217
November			
06	Popham	Clubhouse	01256 397733
08/	Norwich	Restaurant	01603 412888
26	Compton Abbas	Restaurant	01747 811767
27	Plymouth	College of St Mark & St John	01752 773335
December			
03	Derby	Aerodrome	01283 733803
04	Lydd	Airport Restaurant	01797 320734
06	Netherthorpe	Sheffield Aero Club	01909 475233
January			
24	Belfast	Civil Service Club, Stormont	02891 813327
February			
06	Stapleford	Restaurant	01708 688380
07	Fenland	Fenland Aero Club	01406 540461
March			
04	Sleap	tba	01939 232882
05	Caernarvon	aerodrome	01286 830800
06	Swansea	tba	0791-9661200
12	Perth	tba	07785 244146



Kingston University students win AOPA prize

AOPA supports an educational initiative that aims to encourage budding aircraft designers every year by providing one of the major prizes in the Annual Merlin Flight Simulation Group's Aircraft Design and Handling Competition, co-sponsored by the Flight Simulation Group of the Royal Aeronautical Society. This is open to student teams from UK universities and colleges; each team submits their own design of an aircraft to a specification set by their tutors which is then 'flown' on the Merlin simulator by John Farley, the now-retired Harrier test pilot, and Dave Southwood from the ETPS. In previous years, the competition has been held at the Royal Aeronautical Society, but this year it took place at the ETPS, Boscombe Down. The team from Kingston University was selected by John and Dave to receive the AOPA prize, which consists of up to an hour's flying with an AOPA Corporate Member for each student. The members of the team were Francesca Domella, Greg Bayley, David Peebles and Ben Sudall. David's story of the team's flying experience with AOPA Corporate Member, the West London Aero Club, follows:

"The day began with an early start at 8am when we set off from Kingston to make our way to the West London Aero Club, situated just off junction 9 of the M4 near

The Kingston University team, from left, Greg Bayley, Francesca Domella, David Peebles and Ben Sudall



Maidenhead. We were due to begin our flying experience at 10am though at this stage we were unsure of what this would consist of due to the poor weather in the morning.

"Upon arrival at the club we were a little earlier than expected so a cup of tea was in order whilst we chatted about what we were hoping for in the days flying. Our instructors, Dan Francis and Dave Coe, appeared and introduced themselves and were delighted to inform us that we would be flying to the Isle of Wight. The plan was to set off in two aircraft allowing us four to fly one leg each, and there would be enough time at Sandown airfield for a drink and chat about the flight before returning to WLAC.

"Ben and Francesca flew with Dan in a Piper Warrior whilst Greg and I flew in a Cessna 172 with Dave. We were told these aircraft are relatively similar in performance though one has a low wing the other has a high wing. Once we were strapped in Dave explained to me and Greg what each of the instruments and controls did, giving us practical insight to some of the theory we were taught at University; it was much more obvious seeing everything working first hand. For the Merlin Competition we had designed a Jet Trainer so it was interesting to compare our design with a more basic training aircraft.

"Before boarding the aircraft Greg and I agreed I would be in the co-pilot seat for the outbound journey. After doing some checks along and switching on the magnetos and fuel pump, Dave started the engine. The aircraft shuddered and the engine purred, and when we were ready to go I was asked to steer the aircraft to the runway using the rudder pedals. This required more input than I had expected, as pushing the pedal slightly the first time had no impact on altering our course. After more checks we lined up on the runway, with Ben and Francesca in the

Warrior not too far behind. We powered up and in no time the aircraft was airborne. Our Jet Trainer was designed for a minimum of 750m take off run whereas the Cessna seemed to do it in about 100m so this put things into perspective for us.

"Francesca and I were able to fly the whole way to Sandown. It was amazing to be in control and feel how the plane reacts to the surrounding environment, and we had a lot of crosswind that pushed us off course, and also turbulence giving a bumpy ride! Dave gave a heading and an altitude at different stages of the flight and we would position the aircraft with coordination of the control yoke and rudder pedals. The route consisted of flying over Farnborough then onto Goodwood race track followed by a SW heading to the Isle of Wight where we were welcomed with sunshine and clear skies.

"We stopped for an hour for drinks and a chat with our two instructors, and then returned with Ben and Greg flying. The route was slightly different as we headed for Portsmouth before flying over Farnborough. It was great to see Portsmouth from the air especially the military war ships and the Spinnaker Tower. Greg flew back directly into wind and as the passenger I could see how difficult it was to control and keep the aircraft steady though Greg enjoyed the challenge. We all arrived back with a soft touch down and reconvened at the club-house for some drinks and debrief.

"We would like to thank AOPA for arranging the flying experience, and Merlin Flight Simulation Group for the chance to participate in the Aircraft Design and Handling Competition and win the AOPA award. We feel that both these experiences considerably benefited our aeronautical studies.

"Whilst theory is an important part of any course in Aerospace Engineering, hands on experience brings everything into perspective.

"We hope that in the future many more students on aeronautical engineering or aeronautics related courses will be encouraged to take part in the annual Merlin Competition with the aim of winning one of the several prizes – but of course the best one to win is the AOPA award!" – David Peebles ■

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Don't know your RAS from your elbow?

Infringements of controlled airspace are one of AOPA's biggest bugbears, as chief executive Martin Robinson reports

For the last ten years I've been dealing with members who for one reason or another come to grief as a result of infringements of controlled airspace. The infringements that reach AOPA's ears are only a small proportion of the total, and for every one that ends up in court, there are hundreds more that do not.

In more than 95 percent of infringements, the cause can be traced back to the pilot's failure to plan the flight properly. It may be because he is too confident in his ability to use the GPS – the old maxim 'the GPS can't be wrong' comes to mind here – and I believe that this breeds a unjustified degree of self confidence on the part of poor navigators. Most GPS systems won't alert you to the fact that you've ventured into controlled airspace,

even if their positioning data is correct in the first place. It may surprise you to know how often we find GPS databases to be inaccurate – less so in the UK, but in some countries the provision to data leaves much to be desired. There is no overall global standard for database accuracy, and the quality of the data supplied to companies like Jeppesen from

individual states is often suspect. In addition, people often blindly follow databases that have not been properly upgraded and are sometimes years out of date. Airspace is changing all the time. There is an urgent need for attention to the accuracy of GPS databases used in aviation.

I'm currently chairing a GPS Working Group involving the CAA and other industry representatives where we're looking at the issue of airspace infringements with particular regard to GPS. There is a pressing need for GA pilots to be given enough educational material to make informed decisions about how far they should rely on GPS. But while there may be issues with the kit, the real problem lies with the pilots.

One of the recommendations that my group has come up with is that the CAA needs to work harder to implement an industry-wide standard for navigation instruction. There is too much variation in the way navigation is a taught. For decades we've been teaching the one-in-sixty rule, but how much use is it in the real world? When did you last adopt that method of checking your progress? If you've done it at all, you'd be a curio in any flying club bar. Should we not really be teaching VFR

pilots the despised track-crawl method, where you spend more time relating your position to features on the ground? When representing infringing AOPA members at the CAA, I have often found that interpretation of charts is poor, and that little time was spent studying the chart properly before pilots take to the air, particularly with regard to vertical navigation.

Even where all possible information was obtained prior to flight, mistakes are made because that information is not acted upon. I have a case at the moment where a pilot allegedly infringed a Red Arrows TRA which he knew was there. He'd got the Notam, but there was some disconnection between that and doing something about it. And before you scoff, he's an experienced high-time CPL/IR pilot who can't believe he's got himself into this situation. Brain fade happens. There but for the grace of God...

To some people, getting the Notams seems to be an end in itself. But the time to apply the information to your chart is not in my office afterwards, when the CAA investigator is sitting across the table.

People also forget that when they get the winds from the Met Office, they are forecast rather than actual, and the forecasters try to represent a large area with a single value. A real-time assessment of drift must be made when in the air.



Minister invoked in Lee-on-Solent saga

One of the first items of business falling on the desk of new aviation minister Jim Fitzpatrick MP is a letter from AOPA past president David Ogilvy seeking assurances that the matter of Lee on Solent will not fall between ministerial cracks. While his predecessor Gillian Merron MP professed support for general aviation, she made no move to back the talk with action on a government-owned aerodrome.

In the letter, David Ogilvy writes:

Dear Minister

As a result of a recent AAIB report into an aircraft accident at Lee-on-Solent Aerodrome and a number of issues raised by AOPA members based there, the Association has become extremely concerned about the future of general aviation at this site.

Lee was the Royal Naval Air Station, HMS Daedalus, which was sold by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) last year to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). As the MCA is an executive agency of the DfT, Lee is a 'government aerodrome' as defined in the Air Navigation Order (ANO) and as such, under Article 126 of the Order, the aerodrome could be used for instruction in flying. However, such instruction is not permitted by the current aerodrome management. In addition, due to the division of the land on the Daedalus sale, all bar one of the existing hangars at Lee are owned by SEEDA with the remaining hangar, old watch tower and runways being owned by the MCA. The boundary demarcating the respective land ownership consists of a permanent fence that crosses existing taxiways at various angles and part of this fence was the cause of the accident reported on by the AAIB.

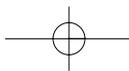
Apart from these physical constraints on access there are further rules on the use of the aerodrome which have recently been made more onerous through restrictions placed on fixed wing operations when gliding is in progress. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that at least two previous tenants, a gliding club and a flying school, have left the site and the remaining general aviation concerns there are suffering considerable financial difficulties. These concerns also fear that yet more restrictions on their activities are planned.

All of this is at odds with the published intent of SEEDA that 'the development of the site will focus on new aviation and marine related businesses, exploiting access to the existing runways and the Solent'. It is

difficult to understand how this objective is to be achieved given the physical and operational restraints currently put on the existing aviation businesses. The SEEDA objective is a reflection of the agreed aims of Hampshire County Council, Fareham Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council and MoD Defence Estates on the future of the site, as discussed at meetings of the Daedalus Strategy Group. As a result of the Group's work and in liaison with both the MCA and SEEDA, the two Borough Councils have prepared and published a Joint Planning Statement for Lee endorsing general and private aviation use of the site. In spite of this, there appears to be no agreement between the MCA and SEEDA on access to the runways by the hangar tenants of SEEDA.

The local support for Lee to be retained for aviation purposes is unprecedented and reflects the fact that the aerodrome is ideally situated with landing and take-off paths over the sea and an open area of land. It is also sited away from controlled airspace and close to the preferred cross-channel route for general aviation traffic. The Fareham and Gosport areas are particularly prosperous with much development activity taking place, particularly on land previously held by the MoD. With these advantages, and the fact that Southampton Airport has recently excluded virtually all general aviation activities to permit the expansion of its commercial air traffic, Lee is indisputably an ideal site for a model general aviation aerodrome. Since the construction of the former HMS Daedalus was funded by the taxpayer who has again provided £20 million for the MCA and SEEDA to acquire the site, followed by a further £4 million to fund the construction of a new MCA hangar and office complex, it is surprising that no attempt has been made to defray these substantial sums by operating the aerodrome on a full commercial basis for general aviation.

As the DfT is responsible for the development of civil aviation in this country and effectively owns the operational area of Lee-on-Solent Aerodrome, the continuing use and development of the site for general aviation should present an opportunity for the Department to clearly demonstrate in a practical way its support for general aviation. AOPA offers its full support in this endeavour and seeks an early meeting with officers of the DfT in pursuit of this aim. Since the matters raised in this letter are of local importance, copies have been sent to the Members of Parliament for the Fareham and Gosport constituencies. *David Ogilvy* ■



But the worst sinners are those who go out with their GPS moving map display without even having studied the chart prior to flight, having not drawn track lines on the chart, and sometimes without even having the chart in the aircraft at all! When the CAA accuses such a pilot of negligence, it's hard to defend against. I have to try to pick up the pieces, and it's rarely easy.

Ultimately, in many cases these infringements can be traced back to poor instruction in navigation. Often the people who come for help simply don't know the basics and are amazed when the true situation is pointed out to them. How sure are you about what level of ATC service you're getting? Another of my cases at the moment, in which a Heathrow 747 had to be turned off finals, involves a chap who thought he was getting a radar advisory service from White Waltham, an air-ground radio. If you couldn't tell me right now exactly what levels of air traffic service provide what levels of service, go straight to an instructor and ask.

As an aside, may I say that arrogance and pomposity have no place in aviation. Some people won't accept they're in the wrong, even when they don't have a leg to stand on. If you think you're at Denham when you're over Northolt, a little humility is in order. It's not the fault of your GPS, your ATC service, the instructor who taught you to navigate or the phases of the moon – it's you! Arrogance sometimes seems to go hand in hand with bad airmanship, and refusing to accept responsibility for your actions. The CAA

investigators are not pilots, they're ex-policemen, and if they know more about aviation than you, it doesn't do to come across all pompous.

If you want a simple rule to reduce your chances of infringing, try leaving a half-mile buffer zone around controlled airspace. It's easy to follow a demarcation line on a GPS display, but if you've got one wing running along it, a moment's inattention can put you in the soup. Give it a wider berth.

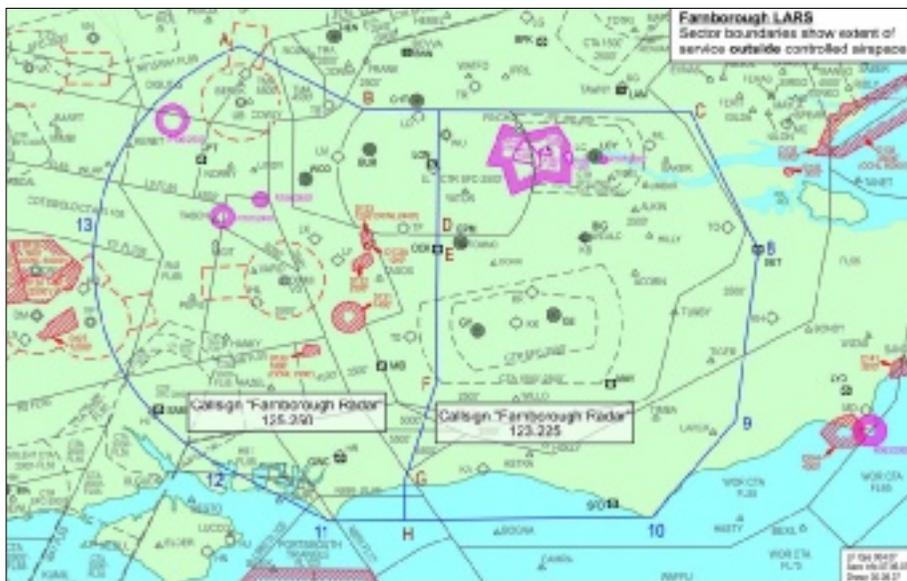
A lot of things are happening to improve the infringements picture. LARS is having an overhaul, and the ATSOCAS review – Air Traffic Services Outside Controlled Airspace – seeks to harmonise military and civil LARS units with view to increasing the availability of RIS and RAS or whatever replaces them. If you don't know why, it's re-education time. Go and buy an instructor a cup of coffee. And please, respond to the CAA's consultation on ATSOCAS – a lot of work has gone into the proposals that are being made. The idea is to change to four levels of service, Basic, Traffic, Deconfliction and Procedural. These would replace the FIS, RIS, RAS, Mandatory Control, Air Traffic Advisory and Approach Control services. The CAA accepts that the current system is complicated and poorly understood, and is doing something to improve the situation – now it's your turn.*

Almost all the mistakes that lead to infringements are made on the ground before the pilot ever takes off. There are siren voices in the CAA saying that hanging a pilot from the public gibbet as an example would encourage the others, but so far they have been outshouted by those who seek our co-operation.

To end on a positive note, I have to say this – you ought to see some of the cases I turn away. AOPA members infringe less often than the general pilot population, and are generally better-informed and educated about GA. Those who have enough sense to join the Association have enough sense to take more care over their flying. Often I'm approached by people who offer to join AOPA if I take up their case, or members of foreign AOPAs who live and fly in this country. Rarely, and only if it's in the general interest, will I take up these cases. We need to get the word out to those pilots who are not members – but first, we need to raise our own game. Don't just go through the motions. Have infringements at the forefront of your mind. In you have a transponder with an 'Alt' function, use it and give TCAS/radar systems a chance. If you become uncertain of position, give 121.5 a call. It could save red faces, and much more.

*For details of the consultations, see www.airspacesafety.com and www.caa.co.uk/consultations ■

AOPA members infringe less often than the general pilot population, and are generally better-informed and educated about GA



Left: the first stage of the new LARS covers airspace around Heathrow, Gatwick and London City up to the base of the TMA

London LARS project opens

The first stage of the new Lower Airspace Radar Service for the London area, discussed in the last issue of *General Aviation*, was introduced on September 11th and is to be extended to cover Stansted and Luton early in the New Year.

The LARS service is effectively an extension of the Farnborough LARS service that has always been available on 125.25. NATS has recruited eight new controllers to provide the service, which will operate from 8am to 8pm and for the moment is free.

It has grown out of the ATSOCAS review –

Air Traffic Services Outside Controlled Airspace – and is aimed at reducing the risk of infringements in some of the world's busiest and most complex airspace.

The first stage, which was implemented between September 11th and September 24th, covered airspace around Heathrow, Gatwick and London City up to the base of the TMA. The second phase, extending the service to airspace around Luton and Stansted, is expected to be introduced in early 2008.

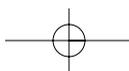
The frequency for the western sector – the area hitherto covered by Farnborough LARS –

remains 125.25. The eastern sector, stretching from north-east of the London City zone to Beachy Head by way of the Detling VOR, will operate on 123.225 with the same call sign, Farnborough Radar. The service will provide RAS, RIS or FIS, depending on workload and whether you have a transponder. The frequency for the northern sector will be published nearer the time.

Having introduced the service, NATS is very keen to see it used, and comments in all its literature that it is vital that GA take advantage of it. AOPA urges all pilots to use the service when they're in the area because it will improve safety. It will surely prevent a number of infringements in the most sensitive airspace in the UK, but AOPA would not like to see NATS follow up with a claim that because of its popularity, it will have to start charging GA for the service. It is not an en-route service across the London area – while it has effectively created a new "controlled area" around London, don't let that put you off flying VFR in this airspace. It's up to the PIC to determine when a LARS service is advisable.

The vexed question of who pays for LARS has been kicked around for years, and AOPA has played a part in staving off demands for money from GA. But now NATS is owned by the airlines, and they don't give money to GA, they take money from GA. At the risk of sounding churlish, AOPA will be keeping a close eye on developments.

A full description of the service, including the radio frequencies, can be found in the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP), page ENR 1-6-3-2, at www.ais.org.uk ■



Oban galactic spaceport mess

The sorry saga of Oban airfield continues, with more money being poured down the drain in pursuit of grandiose ambitions which will never be realised.

So far, £8.5 million of taxpayers' money had been squandered in an ambitious plan to bring scheduled services to Oban, an airfield particularly unsuited to them. GA movements at the once-thriving airfield are down dramatically, and the prospects for getting a CAA licence for the field seem as far away as ever.



The fiasco began when Argyll and Bute Council, presided over by chairman Allan Macaskill, conceived a notion to spend £3.25 million upgrading Oban and two grass strips on the small islands of Coll and Colonsay to introduce scheduled

flights. Macaskill intimated at the time that flights direct from Oban to Glasgow and the near Continent were in prospect, and the European Union pitched in with a £3 million handout for resurfacing and upgrading.

Paul Keegan, who was operating the airport successfully as a general aviation airfield, made known his opinion that the proposed development would turn out to be a white elephant and his operating contract was not renewed by the council, who hired an English consultancy, then an airport development manager (who projects that GA traffic will remain 90 percent of their business) and a total of 12 staff to do the job. Keegan took over Oban 15 years ago when it was virtually moribund – about 100 movements a year – and built it up to 5,000 movements a year before he was pushed out. The incomers managed to alienate GA pilots and spend a lot of money, but Keegan held onto his contractual rights to the fuel concession and was asked to return in June, 2006 at short notice to run the A/G radio service when the contractor appointed by the council was sacked, having allegedly been unable to provide the required level of service.

Macaskill, instigator of the whole mess, quit

the council ahead of elections in May, still claiming the airlines were coming.

A new tower and terminal was built at Oban and the main runway was resurfaced. Late in the day the council asked the CAA to give them licenses for Oban, Coll and Colonsay, but the CAA responded with a wiggling for not involving them sooner. Many obstacles lie in the way of a licence for Oban. The topography, weather, lack of IFR approach options and lack of acceptable fire cover are among the problems – Argyll and Bute Council is in dispute with a company that provided two fire engines for the airport and has now tried to cancel the order.

Coll and Colonsay have been expensively upgraded but their strips have not been lengthened, and at 500m they are useable only by BN2s. The twice-weekly service will be subsidised to the tune of £500,000 a year by the Scottish Government, but it could have been operated without a single penny having been spent. A complaint about the expenditure



Above: Oban's GA apron

and tendering procedure has been lodged with the Scottish public sector auditing organisation.

Oban's operators have now closed the 600m cross runway, which although it lies only 20 degrees off the main runway was extremely useful in strong winds and in fact lies closer to the prevailing wind at Oban.

The CAA will be under heavy political pressure to grant the licences, but the best-case scenario now seems to be that for the expenditure of £8.5 million, Oban ends up with a scheduled Islander service to Coll and Colonsay (pop: 400) at a further cost to the taxpayer of half a million pounds a year, a service which could have been provided at little cost to the taxpayer by an existing BN2 operator. Councillors' visions of Ryanair and easyJet cheapies to Amsterdam will remain fantasy. A regular scheduled floatplane service has just commenced flights between Oban harbour and Glasgow City centre, again bringing into question the viability of scheduled flights to the airfield.

Oban is one of the few airfields with avgas in western Scotland and is the perfect jumping-off point for tours of the Highlands and Islands. Despite the political farce, the airfield remains open and is well worth visiting, and fuel can be had from Paul Keegan. It's open seven days a week, dawn to dusk. The number of movements fell away badly when the saga began but is showing signs of recovery, and if ever a GA cause was worth supporting, it's Oban airfield. If you haven't visited, you're missing a treat.

It has been suggested that the whole disaster was pre-planned in order to create a loss and flog Oban airfield off for housing development, but there is no evidence of any 'mastermind' behind this sorry pantomime. Nonetheless, when it is shown that Oban cannot get back any of the money that's been fire-hosed into it, the cry will go up that some of the cash must 'somehow' be recouped. I'd love to see Persimmon's landbank file on Oban. – *Pat Malone* ■

**Above left: Oban's lost cross-runway
Left: Paul Keegan, still in business**

Alice in Wonderland strikes again

The plight of one AOPA member provides a stark illustration of how nonsensical many of our rules and regulations have become, and how they hamstring individuals and companies in the market.

The pilot works as an instructor and commercial charter pilot in the helicopter industry, and has some 5,000 hours total time. He has been giving some thought to progressing to North Sea work, for which he will need an Instrument Rating.

Unfortunately a helicopter Instrument Rating is very expensive, largely because the powers-that-be insist that in the UK it must be done in a twin-engined machine, and the least expensive twin helicopter can cost something

on the order of £1,000 an hour. Getting an IR(H) will cost a student about £30,000.

But because more than three years have elapsed since this pilot completed his commercial exams, he must take most of them again before he's allowed to take the IR. So now he's faced with re-sitting seven exams he's already passed (of which 90 percent was pointless rote-learning anyway) before he can enjoy the privilege of laying out £30,000 of his hard-earned wages to put himself in a position to apply for a better job.

The question arises – what idiot thought that one up? Is it any wonder that our regulatory regime has brought such disrepute upon itself when every day, there are examples of pilots

being forced to jump through Alice-in-Wonderland hoops to satisfy the whims of paper-shuffling bureaucrats from a different planet.

What are they trying to achieve? At the other end of the spectrum, you have a young helicopter pilot who passes his commercial exams with 150 hours total time. Within the regulation three years he pays £30,000 for his IR, and probably has less than 500 hours, and he finds nobody will employ him because he hasn't got the experience. Is he a better pilot than our member, who is being penalised despite his experience?

There seems to be one solution – do all 12 exams again, do the much cheaper fixed-wing IR and get a job flying for the airlines. And this at a time when the number of students presenting themselves for commercial helicopter courses is falling to worrying levels. ■

A death foretold

The death of a 16-year-old student in a flying accident at Southend had brought together two matters on which AOPA has long campaigned without success – orbits for students in the circuit, and the inability of controllers to identify low-hour pilots. His death has finally convinced the CAA to create a 'student' prefix for radio calls, something AOPA has pressed strongly for. The Association was rebuffed then, but the CAA has done a sudden about-face. Why did it take a death to force their hand? The new policy was announced after AOPA past president David Ogilvy wrote to CAA chairman Sir Roy McNulty as follows:

Sir:

Within the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association we are very concerned about several elements relating to the fatal accident at Southend Airport on 19th July 2006, in which a 16 year old student pilot was killed. Following detailed discussion with the Chairman, Chief Executive and Chairman of the Instructor Committee, it has been agreed that I should write to you in a determined attempt to prevent a recurrence of such an unacceptable situation. The full report appears from pages 70 to 96 in AAIB Bulletin No.7 of 2007, the length of which alone confirms the seriousness of the case.

Firstly, the AAIB puts forward two recommendations that previously have been suggested by AOPA but which were not accepted. One concern is the use of the word 'tyro' (as practised in the RAF) or 'student' in radio transmissions, to stress that a pilot is very inexperienced. The second relates to the unacceptable habit by air traffic controllers to instruct student pilots to orbit at times when they have no spare capacity to divert from standard operating practices. These points were raised by AOPA following an incident at Teesside in which a 17 year old air cadet on a flying scholarship course was ordered to orbit on his first solo flight. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, but possibly because neither of our recommendations was implemented then,

now we are faced with a youngster being killed quite unnecessarily.

In this latest accident, it appears that due to an internal communication failure at duty handover, the aerodrome controller was not aware of the inexperience of the pilot concerned. However, as the Rules of the Air Regulations state clearly that if there are two aircraft on the approach to land, the lower machine has the right of way, the action by the controller was not acceptable.

Whilst there may be occasions on which the pilot of a lower aircraft may be required to carry out an orbit in the circuit, this is contrary to long-term practice and should be required only (a) at a safe height and position and (b) if the pilot is sufficiently experienced. In this subject case, following a change of instruction by the controller, the student was ordered to turn away from the final approach track at a low level (with 24° of flap lowered) and then carry out a non-standard procedure that he was unable to handle. He crashed and died. It is fortunate that, in a built-up area, he hit the ground clear of people or buildings, but the potential for further harm was vast. The student's instructor had been listening to the radio communication throughout and understandably was concerned that an unfamiliar order had been given and that his student 'might find it bewildering'. He did.

I am writing this on behalf of all concerned at AOPA because I instigated both the earlier suggestions that I have mentioned. Now, these are being submitted as suggestions by the Air Accident Investigation Branch. I qualified as a flying instructor in 1949 and in 1952 I was appointed as CFI at Elstree. Since then I have

been involved in a broad range of activities in general aviation on a full-time basis throughout my working life, so I hope you will accept that I am qualified to press this case.

I need say no more, except to add that AOPA is pursuing a 'zero accident' policy as a target for UK GA. It may not be possible to achieve, but as an aim it sets our safety sights as high as possible.

I will be pleased to hear what action the CAA proposes to take.

David Ogilvy OBE FRaeS ■

Wrong number

NATS is having problems getting the word out about its new phone numbers. AOPA has this note from FBU manager Neil Partridge.

"Following the move of the Heathrow Flight Briefing Unit from the old control tower to the new control tower in April, we are still having problems with pilots using the old contact numbers to file flight plans etc. We have notified the changes through the normal channels available to us but are still having problems.

"Therefore, would you please detail changes to the contact telephone and fax numbers for the Flight Briefing Unit located at Heathrow. The new contact numbers are: Heathrow Flight Briefing Unit tel: 020 8750 2615/2616, fax: 020 8750 2617/2618."

Channel Islands 'VAT' move

The Channel Islands is to introduce a form of VAT, initially at three percent but in all probability rising as the opportunity allows.

The tax is to be called General Service Tax, and was originally planned to cover almost everything. But following representations from AOPA's Channel Islands chairman Charles Strasser, it has been agreed to exempt fuel for visiting aircraft from the tax.

It is also well worth remembering that presentation of an AOPA membership card entitles you to a five percent discount on fuel in Guernsey and Jersey.

VAT loophole to close

The Danish government is moving against the VAT anomaly which allows aircraft to be imported into the EU through Denmark at a zero rate of VAT, and intends to have the loophole closed by January 1st 2008.

The European Union has been pressuring the Danish to amend their tax laws to cover aircraft, and it now looks likely that a VAT rate of 25 percent will eventually be imposed, with devastating effects for the market in Denmark.

Buyers in other countries will be affected – hundreds of owners have taken advantage of the situation to import aircraft through Denmark, then move the aircraft to their home countries as VAT-paid assets. The situation was perfectly legal, and Customs and Excise could take no action against UK owners who went the Danish route. These aircraft will be unaffected by the new situation – any change in the law cannot be made retrospective.

Opmas, the Danish company who facilitated the VAT scheme for most UK owners, say it seems unlikely the Danish Government will be able to change the situation by its stated deadline of January 1st. In the meantime, imports may continue under the present scheme, and deliveries to Denmark may take place after the deadline if invoices are raised before it takes effect.

Lawyer Lasse Rungholm, chief executive of Opmas, says: "For now the best advice is to make decisions about aircraft purchases or sales before New Years – at least on paper. We have a back-up plan in the works, one that might even be a better solution in the long run, but we're not ready to release any details yet."

The anomaly arose when the Danish airline Cimber Air claimed back VAT for supplies for domestic flights, a claim which was challenged by the Danish Customs. The case went against Customs, and over the past three years the European Commission has been preparing a request for the Danish authorities

to alter domestic law to reflect the EU rules that had been adopted elsewhere in Europe.

Last month the Danish government released a draft VAT Act amendment which proposes that the text in the EU directive be adopted more or less directly. The January 1st deadline for implementation may be impossible to achieve because the draft must first go out for consultation before it goes through the political process.

Rungholm is particularly concerned about the general aviation market in Denmark, which has benefited greatly from the zero-rating. "It will have dramatic results for the entire Danish GA industry," he says. "An effective price increase of 25 percent will leave GA bleeding – paint shops, maintenance shops, avionics shops, flight schools, private aviators, airports, fuel suppliers and all others involved in general aviation."

For further clarification you can contact Rungholm through lr@opmas.dk, or see their website www.opmas.dk ■

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