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Chairman's message

Fit for purpose?

It is little over a year ago since Dame Deirdre Hutton and Andrew Haines took up their positions of Chairman and Chief Executive respectively of the CAA. Shortly after, Gretchen Burrett was appointed as Group Director Safety Regulation. Neither of the first two had prior experience in aviation matters, and as I observed in this column in *General Aviation* for February 2010 that this was "...not necessarily a disadvantage when operating at the highest level within the organisation, as experience from elsewhere can be brought to bear on management and strategy, and a fresh pair of eyes can open up new visions and opportunities, whilst relying on the great wealth of technical competence embodied within the CAA staff". The interview with the CAA Chief Executive within this issue of *General Aviation* amply supports this view, I believe. With the unexpected diversion earlier in the year of the volcanic ash situation to confront and the rapid need to devise a practical operational solution out of the way, the senior team has hardly taken breath before embarking on the CAA Development and Strategic Safety Review that has recently been announced and aired at important consultative committees, including the GACC (General Aviation Consultative Committee).



If you were to be unkind, you could say that this is to be no more than a bit of introspective navel gazing. But as presented to the GA community, and no doubt to that of CAT, it is actually very outward looking and will benefit to a great extent from inputs from stakeholders, i.e. all those who are affected in some way by how the CAA does its job. It is a way of assessing 'fitness for purpose', a previously little known phrase that sprang into public prominence when the workings of the Home Office were slated by a past Home Secretary of the last government. At the same time, an opportunity is also presented for the purpose and fundamental objectives to be re-defined. One of the external drivers for the review is the intensifying European agenda, and you do not have to look very far in the aviation press, including our own magazine, to recognise the impact that EASA has already begun to make on the viability of general aviation.

The new EASA maintenance regime, Part M, is now established, and the CAA and owners alike have had to adjust and acclimatise to the new system. A straw poll of owners indicates increased costs of the order of £1000 per annum per fixed wing aircraft, and possibly double that for helicopters. In the UK at least, there has been no perceptible improvement in safety as a result of this extra spending and administrative book keeping by our maintainers, not that poor maintenance was previously a factor in aircraft dropping out of the sky pre-EASA. On the same theme, members who subscribe to IAOPA eNews (www.iaopa.eu) will be alarmed to read the news from AOPA Sweden, whose CAA has almost monotonically taken EASA at face value and turned manufacturers' recommended practices into mandatory requirements. We in the UK have experienced a bit of this with regard to, for example, Cessna seat belts, for which Cessna recommended replacement after 10 years of life, regardless of actual condition and safety, and there are other examples. Now, in Sweden, amongst other tasks, owners of Piper aircraft must check battery fluid density once a month (how do you do this with a sealed gel battery?), and similarly clean out the fuel filter. Every time the filter bowl is removed and re-assembled, there is a resultant added risk to safety as the bowl and/or gasket may not be re-fitted properly, the wire locking not done adequately, etc. You might well also ask, what is the problem with Piper aircraft that is not present in Cessnas?

This sort of stupidity will lead to short cuts and untruthful logbook entries, in my view leading to a degradation of safety. The question inevitably arises - is EASA itself fit for purpose? If there is a clear challenge for our own CAA in its current strategic review, it is to argue and win the case for sensible, practical, risk-based regulation from EASA, not only in maintenance but across the board. We do not want safety regulation to become a safety factor!

George Done