ONLINE TEST LAUNCHED FOR INFRINGING PILOTS

To increase the options it has available to tackle airspace infringements, the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), it was announced on 1st September, may ask pilots who infringe controlled or restricted airspace to sit a short online test to assess their airmanship skills. The test will only be accessible with a secure password, sent by the CAA to the infringing pilot. Failure to successfully complete the test within one month could result in further licensing action being taken against the pilot. The test will be preceded by an open-access tutorial to be found at http://infringements.caa.co.uk reiterating the basics of good airmanship, which all current pilots are urged to view.

The CAA said the move was a further attempt to reduce the large number of airspace infringements still occurring in the UK every year. In 2013, air traffic control provider, NATS\(^1\), reported 670 incidents of pilots infringing controlled airspace – equating to one incident occurring every five hours of daylight, spread over the course of the year. Infringements of temporary restricted airspace and Danger Areas bring the average annual total to around 900. Despite the efforts of the CAA, air traffic control providers and the aviation industry, there has been little decrease in these numbers over recent years.

The CAA said it acknowledged that some of these incidents were not down to poor judgment on the part of the pilot, and could be the result of miscommunication or misunderstanding with an air traffic controller, for example. In such cases, it was unlikely the pilot would be required to sit the test. Only incidents in which the pilot had displayed poor judgment or insufficient knowledge would he/she be expected to undertake the assessment. In the most serious cases a criminal prosecution may still be resorted to.

Phil Roberts, Head of Airspace, Air Traffic Management and Aerodromes, at the CAA, commented, “Unfortunately, the number of infringements occurring in UK airspace remains stubbornly high. This represents an unacceptable safety risk for commercial, private and military aviation. This initiative, which has the full support of general aviation groups should increase much-needed awareness of the issue.

“Although we strongly recommend all pilots view the tutorial as a basic refresher on airmanship, our firm hope is that pilots who have infringed, and subsequently sit the test, will learn from their mistakes and become better pilots as a result and, as a consequence, be less likely to infringe again in the future.”

\(^1\)
The tutorial and test have been produced with the assistance of a number of General Aviation representative groups, such as AOPA\(^2\) and BMAA\(^3\), as well as NATS and the Ministry of Defence.

Pilots who are required to sit the test following an infringement will be contacted in writing by the CAA. The test is made up of 20 randomly selected multiple-choice questions probing the full range of pilot knowledge, and must be completed within ten minutes. Only one attempt may be made at the test, with the pass rate set at 80%.

1. National Air Traffic Services

2. Aircraft Owners’ and Pilots’ Association

3. The British Microlight Aircraft Association