A British-owned drone consultancy group is attempting to improve public perceptions with the forthcoming launch of a new academy at a Southampton Air Cadet squadron. Pioneered by UAVi ate, the Hedge End, Southampton, drone academy will teach cadets how to build, fly and race next generation drones, it is understood.

Drones have received a poor press over recent months, with government officials even toying with the idea of banning the airborne devices.

In July an incident at London’s Heathrow airport saw an unidentified UAV jeopardise the safety of an Airbus A320 carrying 180 passengers. An official report released by the Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that the drone posed a ‘serious risk of collision.’

Furthermore, investigations have been conducted into cases of invaded privacy while the Department for Transport and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have been forced to answer questions concerning the use of drones for commercial and national security purposes, it is understood.

Widefelt concern has led to an inquiry by the House of Lords EU Sub-Committee which will examine the use of civilian remotely piloted aircraft systems and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Responding to the incidents Chief Inspector Nick Aldworth of the Metropolitan Police was quoted as saying: “We have undoubtedly seen this technology flown in controlled airspace, we have undoubtedly seen it used to harass people, and we have seen it flown in contravention of the air navigation orders, so I think that concern arises by the fact that there is clearly a means of offending that we do not seem to be able necessarily to address quickly.”

It was announced on 16 January that drone operations and consultancy provider UAVi ate is on a mission to inform that drones can be useful. This company is committed to responsible operations and the maintenance of rigorous safety standards. At the core of its strategy is a commitment to educate society in a positive way and here the newly commissioned Hedge End drone academy will encourage the local community to become involved and gain a better understanding of drones and their many uses.

To this end an academy training programme has been developed with the support of Southampton International Airport and RadioC, a UK low cost supplier of multicopter, drone and quadcopter parts. This curriculum, it is
reported, will teach cadets a range of core skills including how to build and fly drones safely, how to accurately record and log flying hours, how to obey the rules of the air and how to be a responsible pilot. The ultimate aim is to enter a team into FPV (remotely controlled) racing events and eventually send cadets to represent the squadron at national drone racing competitions.

In launching the academy UAViate will be helping the local squadron to fulfil key objectives of the Air Training Corps (ATC). The dynamic programme will promote and encourage a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force.

Lee Barfoot, Commanding Officer of 2428 Squadron ATC said: “We are thrilled to be working with UAViate who will provide training for our cadets which will be useful in both the services and civilian life. It is great that an aviation company has such an interest in the community and is actively encouraging youngsters to take an interest in drone technology.”

Picture caption
At left Michael Glen, Airside Operations Policy and Planning Officer, Southampton Airport and Civilian Instructor at 2428 Squadron with three cadets from the squadron and, at right, Flt Lt Lee Barfoot, the squadron’s Commanding Officer.