

Coaching Corner...

The need to be prepared

COVID-19 concerns are all encompassing for everyone. **David Cockburn**, PCS Head of Training, looks at continuing to fly safely...



However much I'd like to avoid the subject, it seems that COVID-19, with its consequent Government restrictions, is going to be with us for some time yet. Not only have many projected relaxations been discarded, we are seeing a growing number of localities being given additional restrictions, and have been warned that similar, or more stringent, restrictions may be implemented nationally.

I fear that, even though we can hope to avoid the return to the lockdown which prevented all but absolute essential flying in the spring, we ought to be prepared for the possibility, and I hope most of you were able to take advantage of the good weather in the past few months to reach an adequate level of currency.

The CAA has produced exemptions to allow pilots to maintain their licence rating privileges during the restrictions, and I hope these have allowed you to keep flying.

Above David Cockburn says pilots must be ready for the possibility of stricter COVID-19 rules being introduced.

However, I know of several pilots who were approaching the end of their rating validities and were planning on obtaining the necessary hours and flights with instructors at just the time that became impossible. While being a few hours short has been assisted by ORS4 Nos 16 and 18, that has not helped everyone.

Not that that ought to be a massive hindrance to maintaining licence privileges; a proficiency check with an examiner is not something to be feared, and if a pilot feels he isn't ready for such a check, our Coaches are able and willing to brush up one's skills beforehand.

I should also point out that, even though one can fly legally, that does not mean one can necessarily fly safely! For example, it is quite possible for a PPL holder to fly legally when he or she has not handled the controls for the previous 35 months. And after three successful (?) take-offs and landings on their own, they can carry passengers!



Sadly, the late summer has seen several minor accidents, and not a few airspace infringements. Were these the result of pilots being less able to cope with demanding situations than they thought they were?

Although I do not have definitive investigation reports to hand, I certainly believe that to have been the cause of several of these incidents and accidents. When we are less current than usual, not only do our handling skills fade, but our reactions slow and our inflight decision-making process becomes less efficient. If pilots are getting less flying than usual, and this applies to instructors as well, safety margins reduce.

Can we increase these safety margins, even though we are less current than usual? Well, probably not. However, if we avoid flying in challenging situations when we are less current than usual, we stand a chance of maintaining an adequate level of safety. Be more ready to avoid potential trouble, whether it be a forecast of a marginal cloudbase, a crosswind close to our own perceived limits, a fuel load close to minimum required, or any of the thousand and one possible 'gotchas' which we routinely cope with as pilots. It is better to be 'down here' wishing one were 'up there', than the other way around!

And why not use the services of a Coach to brush up your skills and knowledge before you challenge yourself? We should not think of a 'flight with an instructor' as an unfortunate necessity, but as an opportunity to hone our skills and either learn something new or refresh what we may have forgotten. Look on the LAA website under 'Find a Coach' and take advantage of the experience available. However, in these troubled times some Coaches may be unwilling or unable to travel or fly, so keep trying.

Flight with an instructor

Unfortunately, not everyone believes that a flight with an instructor can be of benefit. I quote from an email I received concerning the required flight with an instructor for rating revalidation. *"I will never understand why this nonsense was ever brought in as it isn't in any way instructional, but life is full of having to live with pointless regulations."*

That pilot is probably speaking from experience, and that really concerns me. If pilots want to use the services of an instructor, whether a LAA Coach or otherwise, they are entitled to value for money. While items are recommended for inclusion in revalidation flights, the instruction should be tailored to the pilot's needs, and Instructors should try to identify what these are, brief accordingly, and provide guidance during the flight and post-flight debrief.

Mind you, it may not always be the instructor's fault if

Above This is the time you realise that perhaps you should have had a refresher on your crosswind landing technique...

a flight offers little value. The pilot is paying for the service (even if only the fuel for the flight) so should offer some guidance to the instructor. You may be confident you can carry out the exercises listed in the CAA's TrainingCom (see <https://skywise.caa.co.uk/>), but what skill, manoeuvre or radio procedure do you not usually practice on your own? What problem do you hope you never encounter, and what skill do you hope you will never need to exercise for real? The instructor is not there to assess your capabilities but to help you improve, so talk beforehand and give him or her the chance to prepare a suitable flight and brief you on the items you want to include.

R examiners

Members are frequently confused by the various different regulations to which our variety of pilot licences are subject. Despite the expertise which I am rumoured to possess, I must admit to misunderstanding them myself on several occasions. I discovered one such case recently, so to avoid others being under the same misapprehension, I thought I should clarify that particular situation.

The LAA arranges with the CAA to give all Coaches 'R examiner' privileges in order to sign rating revalidation pages on licences. However, those privileges are confined to ratings on UK licences such as the UK PPL and NPPL. The privileges arranged by the LAA do not apply to EASA licences, so our R examiners are not able to use that qualification to sign rating revalidation pages on EU licences.

Nevertheless, many Coaches have their own privileges as listed monthly in the relevant sections of CAP 1585. In addition, all Coaches should also have 'FCL.945 privileges', which allows them to sign rating revalidations on EU licences if they have just completed the mandatory instructional flying for revalidation by experience as the final requirement for that revalidation.

Of course, if all UK issued EU licences become UK licences on 31 December, the situation should become a lot simpler!

Medical Declarations to fly EASA aircraft

Not everyone may be aware that the CAA recently issued and updated ORS4 No 1421 to replace No 1370.

This effectively allows pilots with a UK issued PART-FCL PPL or LAPL to continue to exercise LAPL privileges (only) in G registered EASA aircraft in UK airspace without the appropriate Medical Certificate, provided they have made a valid Medical Declaration to the CAA and not withdrawn it.

Details are on the CAA website, and the exemption expires on 31 March 2021. ■