

AERONAUTICAL INFORMATION CIRCULAR Y 043/2020

UNITED KINGDOM



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UK FLIGHT INFORMATION SERVICES

1 Background

- 1.1 The ICAO requirements for a Flight Information Service within Class E and G Airspace in the UK are met through a suite of air traffic services (ATS) that are collectively known as the UK Flight Information Services (FIS). These services are provided in accordance with CAP 774 'UK Flight Information Services' and are detailed within UK AIP ENR 1.1-13.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Circular is to highlight the most important aspects of the services and in particular those aspects where incident investigation has identified that increased pilot awareness is required. The scope of the Circular does not include Deconfliction Service.

2 Key Principles

- 2.1 The following key principles are highlighted:
 - a) Within Class G Airspace, regardless of the ATS being provided, pilots are ultimately responsible for collision avoidance and terrain clearance and should **always** consider ATS provision to be constrained by the unpredictable nature of the uncontrolled Class G environment. Such unpredictability and constraints include but are not limited to:
 - Conflicting aircraft not being displayed on ATS surveillance systems due to their slow speed, low radar cross-section (e.g. gliders and hot air balloons), not operating an electronic conspicuity device, or operating one that is not compatible with the ATS surveillance system in use (e.g. FLARM);
 - High performance aircraft manoeuvring in the lateral or vertical planes, and which may not be immediately evident to the controller due to radar update rates;
 - The inability of the controller to detect aircraft due to the vertical or lateral limits of radar cover, or radar clutter caused by effects such as weather and interference.
 - b) It is essential that the type of ATS requested is appropriate both for the nature of the flight that is being undertaken, the flight rules under which it is being conducted and the meteorological conditions that prevail.
 - c) Controllers will make all reasonable endeavours to provide the ATS that a pilot requests; however, a reduction in traffic information may have to be applied or, in some cases, an alternative service may have to be provided. Pilots must recognise, fully understand and appropriately manage, any reductions in ATS capability.
 - d) Under a Basic Service, air traffic controllers and Flight Information Service Officers (FISOs) will normally only provide generic traffic information on airspace activity that they are aware of, when it is practicable for them to do so. This is subject to their workload and they are **not** required to monitor the progress of flights in receipt of a Basic Service.

3 Basic Service - Traffic Information

- 3.1 A Basic Service is intended to offer pilots the maximum autonomy and is available to Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) flights in Class G Airspace and to visual flight rules (VFR) flights in Class E and Class G Airspace. The purpose of a Basic Service is to provide pilots with information useful for the safe operation of their flight. Basic Service can be provided by either an air traffic controller or a FISO operating at both aerodromes and area control centres.
- 3.2 It is essential to remember that the controller or FISO will, under a Basic Service, provide only generic traffic information on airspace activity that they are aware of, when it is practicable for them to do so. This is subject to their workload and they are **not** required to monitor the progress of flights in receipt of Basic Service. Moreover, such information will not normally be updated unless the situation has changed markedly, or the pilot requests an update. Consequently, it is important for pilots to maintain a good lookout and to listen to radio transmissions from other aircraft to develop a mental picture of where aircraft are and to ensure that they continue to operate their flight safely.
- 3.3 An aerodrome FISO may provide a Basic Service to aircraft in the local area. In such circumstances FISOs will only be able to pass generic information based on reports from other aircraft on the RT and other notified or reported activity. Therefore, such information may not be accurate and is unlikely to be complete. In the vicinity of an aerodrome ⁽¹⁾ and within the aerodrome traffic pattern, the information will be more specific and detailed.
- Note:** ⁽¹⁾ *Reg (EU) No 923/2012 Article 2(9) defines 'aerodrome traffic' as all traffic on the manoeuvring area of an aerodrome and all aircraft flying in the vicinity of an aerodrome. An aircraft operating in the vicinity of an aerodrome includes but is not limited to aircraft entering or leaving an aerodrome traffic circuit.*
- 3.4 FISOs also provide a Basic Service from the Swanwick and Prestwick Control Centres; 'London Information' and 'Scottish Information' respectively. Their areas of coverage are large (London FIS sectors are depicted in UK AIP ENR 6-32, Scottish FIS sectors are depicted in UK AIP ENR 6-33) and as a result the information that they are able to provide on other airspace activity is likely to be limited and very generic. Although the FISO will normally ask a pilot to 'squawk' an SSR code (1177 for London Information and 7401 for Scottish Information), it should not be inferred that a surveillance based ATS is being provided, nor that the flight is being monitored or that 'radar derived' traffic information will be provided. The allocation of an SSR code is for the benefit of other units equipped with an ATS surveillance system to indicate that a particular aircraft is in RT contact with 'London Information' or 'Scottish Information'. Pilots intending to fly in the vicinity of an aerodrome should consider requesting an ATS from that aerodrome, and are strongly recommended to contact the aerodrome ATS unit if flying within 10 NM of any part of the instrument approach procedure (IAP) symbol marked on the Topographical Air Charts of the UK 1:250,000 and Aeronautical Chart ICAO 1:500,000.
- 3.5 The degree and accuracy of the traffic information provided by a controller under a Basic Service will vary depending upon the control position that they are fulfilling, their workload and whether they have access to a surveillance system to support the provision of the service. Controllers using a surveillance system **may** have a greater awareness of traffic in the local area and may provide more specific traffic information; particularly where they consider that a definite risk of collision exists. However, pilots in receipt of a Basic Service should not expect a routine and regular flow of specific traffic information and should request a Traffic Service if they consider that they require such detailed information, or need such information to be updated.
- 3.6 Whilst controllers may ask pilots to 'squawk' an SSR code, this does not indicate that they are identified or imply that they are receiving an increased level of air traffic service or additional protection; controllers are **not** required to monitor the progress of flights in receipt of Basic Service. Even if a controller advises a pilot that they are identified, it does not imply that they are receiving a surveillance based service; the terms of the Basic Service still apply (CAP 774 'UK Flight Information Services' refers).

4 Traffic Service - Traffic Information

- 4.1 A Traffic Service is available to IFR and VFR flights in Class G Airspace, and VFR flights in Class E Airspace. A Traffic Service is provided by air traffic controllers alone, using an ATS surveillance system to provide traffic information on relevant traffic. That information will be updated if the conflicting aircraft continues to pose a definite hazard or if requested by the pilot. Traffic is normally considered relevant when, in the judgement of the controller, it will pass within 3 NM and, where level information is available, 3 000 FT of the aircraft in receipt of the Traffic Service. Controllers will aim to pass information on relevant traffic before the conflicting aircraft is within 5 NM, in order to give the pilot sufficient time to meet their collision avoidance responsibilities and to allow for an update in traffic information if considered necessary.
- 4.2 Pilots must remember that, in all cases, the provision of traffic information will be dependent upon the limitations of the ATS surveillance system in use, the unpredictable manoeuvring of unknown traffic, controller workload and other higher priority tasks. Controllers will not provide deconfliction advice to pilots in receipt of a Traffic Service; it remains the responsibility of the pilot to visually acquire other air traffic and to alter their aircraft's heading or level in order to avoid collisions. Therefore, when receiving a Traffic Service, pilots should keep a good look out and develop a mental picture of where traffic might be in order to ensure that they continue to operate their flight safely. Pilots can do this by listening carefully to the traffic information given and manoeuvring their aircraft accordingly; the rules of the air ⁽²⁾ apply.

Note: ⁽²⁾ *The 'rules of the air' consist of Regulation (EU) No 923/2012 ('Standardised European Rules of the Air'), The Rules of the Air Regulations 2015, and Permissions and Exemptions made under either (or both) published in Official Record Series 4 - Miscellaneous. See consolidation at www.caa.co.uk/sera.*

5 Traffic Service - Headings and Levels

- 5.1 When providing a Traffic Service, a controller may provide headings and levels for the purpose of positioning, sequencing or as navigational assistance. Whilst the controller should take into account traffic in the immediate vicinity so that a risk of collision is not knowingly introduced by the instructions passed, the controller is not required to achieve deconfliction minima; the avoidance of other traffic is the pilot's responsibility. In such circumstances, a pilot is expected to discharge their collision avoidance responsibility without assistance from the controller. The pilot of a VFR flight receiving heading or level advice remains responsible for ensuring that they remain in VMC and at a terrain safe level. If, when in receipt of a Traffic Service, it becomes necessary for a pilot to deviate from an allocated heading or level in order to comply with Rules of the Air with regard to collision avoidance, the pilot should immediately advise the controller of the action they are taking.

6 Procedural Service

- 6.1 The provision of a Procedural Service does not require information derived from an ATS surveillance system and may be provided to IFR flights in Class G Airspace by air traffic control (ATC) units, either when their surveillance system is unavailable or when units are not equipped with such a system. A Procedural Service is an ATS where, in addition to the provisions of a Basic Service, the controller will provide restrictions, instructions, and approach clearances which, if complied with, will achieve deconfliction minima only against other known aircraft that are participating in the Procedural Service. Pilots must still comply with the rules of the air with regard to the avoidance of aerial collisions and advise ATC of any deviation from their clearance in order to do so.
- 6.2 When flying in Class G Airspace, pilots in receipt of a Procedural Service should be aware of the high likelihood of encountering conflicting traffic that is unknown to ATC. Controllers providing a Procedural Service may be able to provide some limited and generic traffic information on those aircraft in the area that they are aware of in order to improve the pilot's situational awareness. Moreover, the controller will only provide traffic information if they consider that a confliction may exist with other traffic that is **known** to them. However, due to the absence of radar data, the traffic information is unlikely to be specific. Therefore, in response to traffic information provided by ATC, pilots may in fact gain visual contact with, or receive an Airborne Collision Avoidance System (ACAS) Traffic Advisory (TA) or Resolution Advisory (RA) on, other traffic that is unknown to the controller. This highlights the importance of always following an ACAS RA when enunciated and of maintaining a good look out.
- 6.3 Recent AIRPROX events have indicated that some pilots operating under IFR in receipt of a Procedural Service may incorrectly believe that they have right of way over other aircraft routing through the same airspace. Whilst flights in receipt of a Procedural Service will have deconfliction minima applied against other IFR flights participating in the Procedural Service, in the absence of a priority being communicated by ATC, operating under IFR does not confer any precedence over other aircraft that may be encountered. Therefore, pilots in receipt of a Procedural Service must still comply with the Standardised European Rules of the Air (SERA) Section 3 Chapter 2 'Avoidance of Collisions' and Rules of the Air 2015 Section 3 (General Rules, Collision Avoidance and Protection of Persons and Property). Pilots should always advise ATC whenever it is necessary to deviate from their clearance in order to avoid a collision.

7 Reduced Traffic Information

- 7.1 There may be circumstances that prevent controllers/FISOs from passing timely traffic information e.g. high workload, areas of high traffic density, unknown aircraft conducting high energy manoeuvres, or when traffic is not displayed to the controller on their situation display or is obscured by radar clutter. Under these circumstances, controllers/FISOs will inform the pilot of reductions in traffic information along with the reason and the probable duration; however, it may not always be possible to provide these warnings in a timely fashion.
- 7.2 When circumstances require the controller/FISO to advise a pilot of a reduction in traffic information, they will use the following radiotelephony (RTF) phraseology:
'(Aircraft callsign), REDUCED TRAFFIC INFORMATION (direction and extent) DUE TO (reason)'.
- 7.3 A Traffic Service and a Deconfliction Service can only be provided by a controller using an ATS surveillance system; generally through a combination of primary and secondary surveillance radars (PSR and SSR). PSR gives horizontal position information on non-transponding aircraft, subject to those aircraft being good reflectors of radio energy and to various atmospheric conditions. SSR interrogates and detects replies from transponders operating onboard aircraft. Mode S transponders and those transponders with Mode C equipment provide controllers with level information which can enhance their situational awareness and thus improve the traffic information that they may provide; pilots should refer to the SSR Operating Procedures detailed in UK AIP ENR 1.6-3.
- 7.4 Where PSR is unavailable and SSR information alone is used to provide the ATS, controllers will advise pilots in receipt of a Traffic Service or Deconfliction Service through the use of the following RTF phraseology:
'(Aircraft callsign), REDUCED TRAFFIC INFORMATION, TRAFFIC INFORMATION PROVIDED ON TRANSPONDING AIRCRAFT ONLY'.
- 7.5 When SSR information alone is used to provide the ATS in Class G Airspace, ATC will only be aware of the relative positions of aircraft that are transponding. **Aircraft that are not equipped with a transponder, or the transponder has not been selected to transmit, will not be detected, and therefore ATC are unable to warn pilots of their proximity. Such aircraft would also not be detected by an ACAS.**

8 UK FIS and Class E Airways

- 8.1 Class E airways have been established to provide an air traffic control service to IFR flights and in which a Traffic Service or a Basic Service are available to VFR flights; Deconfliction Service is **not** available within Class E Airspace.
- 8.2 IFR flights in Class E airways will be separated from other IFR flights and, as far as practical, will be provided with traffic information on relevant VFR traffic. Controllers do not routinely separate IFR flights from VFR flights, although traffic avoidance advice will be provided if requested. VFR flights in Class E airways will be provided with traffic information as far as practical; it remains the responsibility of the VFR pilot to see and avoid other traffic.
- 8.3 Pilots of VFR flights are not required to be in receipt of an ATS; however, VFR flights not complying with notified SSR carriage and operation requirements require approval to enter the airspace. Such aircraft are required to be either in radio contact with the controlling authority or to operate in accordance with agreed procedures.

9 Choosing the Most Appropriate ATS

- 9.1 A pilot shall determine the need for an ATS in Class G Airspace and should request the service considered most appropriate for the various phases and conditions of flight.
- When operating VFR and only in need of information on general airspace activity, local altimeter settings, etc, then a Basic Service may be appropriate. Pilots should be aware that Basic Service might not be appropriate for flight in IMC or where lookout is constrained by other factors, when other ATS are available.
 - Traffic Service may be requested under VFR or IFR where surveillance based information on other traffic is sufficient to help to avoid other traffic visually. Pilots should be aware that a Traffic Service might not be appropriate for flight in IMC or where lookout is significantly constrained by other factors, when other ATSs are available.
 - If operating IFR in IMC, or when 'see and avoid' principles may be difficult or impossible to apply and assistance from ATC is required to provide deconfliction advice from other aircraft, then a Deconfliction Service may be more appropriate. This is the only surveillance-based UK FIS where a controller will provide this type of advice.
 - Pilots operating IFR and in contact with an ATC unit that is not equipped with an ATS surveillance system may request a Procedural Service. The controller will only provide advice to achieve the deconfliction minima against other known aircraft that are participating in the Procedural Service and generic traffic information on other aircraft known to be in the vicinity and which are being provided with a Basic Service. There may be other aircraft that the controller is unaware of and is therefore unable to provide information on.

10 Action to be Taken

- 10.1 All pilots should ensure that they understand the UK FIS, their responsibilities within those ATS and the inherent limitations of those services; particularly with regards to a Procedural Service and those circumstances where traffic information has been reduced.
- 10.2 Aircraft operators, particularly Air Operator Certificate (AOC)/Police Air Operator Certificate (PAOC) Holders and Approved Training Organisations, are reminded that Reg (EU) No 965/2012 'Air Operations' Annex III ORO.GEN.200(a)(3) requires "the identification of aviation safety hazards entailed by the activities of the operator, their evaluation and the management of associated risks, including taking actions to mitigate the risk and verify their effectiveness." In developing their safety risk assessments for flights outside controlled airspace, operators should ensure that they specifically consider the nature of the UK FIS and the effects of any reduction in the availability of ATS surveillance systems or the provision of traffic information.
- 10.3 Aircraft operators and pilots should proactively engage with ATS units to establish information on routine levels of ATS provision, the availability of ATS surveillance systems and contingency plans in the event of circumstances that may affect the availability or provision of ATS.

11 Further Information

- 11.1 Further information on the UK FIS can be found within CAP 774 'UK Flight Information Services' and in guidance leaflet CAP 1434 'UK Flight Information Services: Guidance from the Civil Aviation Authority'.
- 11.2 Any queries or requests for further guidance should be addressed to:
- The assigned Flight Operations Inspector for pilots and AOC/PAOC holders.
 - For ATS providers and Approved Training Organisations:
Intelligence, Strategy and Policy
Safety and Airspace Regulation Group
Civil Aviation Authority
2W, Aviation House
Gatwick Airport South
West Sussex
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