

Drones in the UK: summary of government consultation

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Ongoing development of UK drone policy has taken a significant step forward with the publication of the "Consultation on the Safe Use of Drones in the UK" issued by UK Department of Transport ("DfT") on 21 December 2016.

The purpose of the consultation is to seek views from industry and the public on a range of policy initiatives being considered by the UK Government to build on existing regulation, which ranges from the aviation specific to the generally applicable such as privacy, in the context of the UK's declared aim to create an environment which is at the forefront of drone innovation.

As with all areas of UK regulation, the impending process of leaving the European Union, creates additional potential uncertainty and in the context of Brexit it is notable that in some areas DfT suggests that a pan-European rather than UK only approach might be desirable.

Highlights

Key changes being considered include:

- mandatory registration for drones
- new competency standards for drone users
- increased deterrents for breaches of existing drone regulation.

The consultation closes on 15 March 2017.

Overall approach

DfT stresses that the UK should develop a thriving drone economy whilst ensuring safe and appropriate use of drones. In this context, the areas considered fall into three main categories:

- Stimulating drone innovation and enterprise;
- Ensuring safety and operation within the law; and
- Laying the foundations for a developed drone market.

The nine topics consulted on (with a total of 66 questions on which comments are invited) are summarised below.

Stimulating drone innovation and enterprise

- **Drone Testing Facilities**

The UK has a testing centre in West Wales and drones will form an element of a new facility in Buckinghamshire currently under development.

The consultation seeks view on the options for expansion of testing facilities including case by case approvals, regional centres or incorporation into testing facilities for AI and robotics.

- **Pilot competency & licensing**

No formal drone pilot qualification currently exists in the UK. Commercially operated drones and those weighing more than 20kg are subject to varying pilot competency requirements but no such requirements exist in respect of drones operated for non-commercial purposes weighing less than 20kg, which includes most leisure users.

DfT's belief that some system of common standards is needed is clear, with an emphasis on the need for industry and government to work together to establish common standards.

- **Insurance**

Existing insurance requirements applying largely to commercial drones and those weighing more than 20kg means that most leisure users are not covered by specific insurance, with broader coverage (e.g. via household insurance) being limited.

DfT is looking to ensure that the insurance market keeps pace with the development and use of drones. It is consulting on whether this can be achieved solely through dialogue with the insurance industry or whether statutory powers are necessary.

Ensuring safety and operating within the law

- **Improving leisure drone user awareness of the law**

The UK Civil Aviation Authority has been increasing efforts to raise consumer awareness of drone use laws (e.g. www.dronesafe.uk and the [revamped Dronecode](#)) but concern remains that awareness is low.

Options under consideration include requirements on drone vendors and manufacturers to make official guidance on drone use available to consumers at the point of purchase.

- **Improving deterrents**

Recent near-misses between drones and passenger aircraft have led to calls to increase penalties and ensure that drone laws are comprehensive.

Options under consideration for increasing deterrents include amending the Air Navigation Order 2016 and creating a new offence for drone misuse.

- **"No Drone Flying Zones"**

A specific aspect of concern is to ensure that drone users comply with restrictions which prohibit the flying of aircraft, including drones, over certain structures and people.

Options under consideration include physical signs flagging the existence of "No Drone Flying Zones" and electronic notification to users of flight restrictions (e.g. via apps).

Laying the foundations for a developed drone market

- **Registration of drones**

Leisure users of drones under 20kg are under no obligation to register their aircraft. DfT believes a national registration scheme for all drones would increase accountability of drone users and help government to ensure drone users are aware of their responsibilities.

DfT envisages an online registration scheme for all drones weighing over 250g and is consulting on how and when such a scheme should be implemented.

- **Drone Traffic Management**

DfT outlines five proposed principles for future management of drone air traffic:

- Access to the airspace should remain open to all aircraft (including drones) capable of meeting the relevant conditions, regulations and processes.
- Any aircraft (including drones) must have the capability and equipment necessary to comply with applicable procedures. Its operator must also be appropriately qualified.
- New conditions, regulations and processes should be the minimum necessary to achieve safe operation.
- New types of operation must not have a negative impact on safety for other airspace users or the general public, and must not unduly impact other airspace users or service providers.

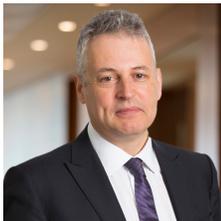
Views on these principles are invited.

- **Electronic identification of drones**

DfT believes embedded digital identification, allowing all drones to be identified in the air, would also improve accountability whilst helping both law enforcement and air traffic management.

Whilst DfT notes that the required technology is still some way from being sufficiently developed, it is consulting on implementation at this early stage.

Contacts



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