
UNITED KINGDOM FLIGHT PLANNING REQUIREMENTS.

1 Introduction

1.1 The aim of this Circular is to clarify certain elements of the UK flight planning process ahead of amendments to both the AIP and CAP 694 (The UK Flight Planning Guide). The areas it seeks to highlight are responsibilities for the provision of flight planning facilities, flight plan addressing, the sending of departure messages and the availability of supplementary information.

2 Provision of Flight Planning Facilities

2.1 ICAO guidance material states that a flight plan filed prior to departure should be submitted to the Air Traffic Services Reporting Office (ARO) at the departure aerodrome. An ARO is defined as a unit established for the purpose of receiving reports concerning air traffic services and flight plans submitted before departure. In practice this usually means an office at an aerodrome used as a flight briefing unit to assist pilots to submit flight plans, retain their supplementary flight plan information (and transmit it if required) and provide other briefing information (MET, NOTAM etc.).

2.2 Whilst the ultimate responsibility for the correct filing of a flight plan remains with the aircraft operator or pilot, in the UK aerodrome operators have a responsibility to provide flight planning facilities wherever possible regardless of the size of the aerodrome or whether it is licensed or not. An ARO may be established as a separate unit or combined with an existing one such as an Air Traffic Services Unit (ATSU). To assist aerodrome operators NATS provides a gateway to the AFTN and flight plans may be filed via their on-line service AFPEX. Pilots and/or aircraft operators should be aware that NATS supports the filing of flight plans in this way but they are not able to assist with the completion of the flight plan itself. Alternative arrangements can be made for operators to file IFR plans direct to the Eurocontrol IFPS via computer flight planning systems.

2.3 If an aerodrome does have an ARO or ATSU and a flight plan is to be filed outside of their hours of operation, then the AFPEX service should be utilised. Details regarding applications for access to AFPEX are contained in the AIP (ENR 1-10).

3 Second Stage Flight Plans

3.1 ICAO guidance material outlines a process for submission of flight plans for a flight that will operate through intermediate stops. Flight plans for each stage of the flight are filed at the first departure aerodrome and the ARO at that aerodrome will transmit a fully addressed FPL message for the first stage of the flight. Separate FPL messages for each subsequent stage of the flight are also transmitted to the ARO at the appropriate subsequent departure aerodrome. The ARO at each subsequent departure aerodrome is expected to take action on receipt of the FPL message as if the flight plan had been filed locally, ie. transmit it to all required addresses. Most European states have adopted this guidance and consequently use this process for multiple stage FPL, including when filing the return leg FPL for trips to the UK. However, few aerodromes in the UK have an ARO and those that do cannot provide a full time service. Equally, aerodromes that do not have an ARO but do have an ATSU will very often be unmanned so that flight planning support will not be available outside the published hours of operation. Even if the ATSU is manned they may not have access to the necessary information to fully address a flight plan. There is a possibility, therefore, that a return leg flight plan filed at the point of departure for a flight to the UK will not be filed at the UK departure aerodrome. The UK, therefore, does not support the process for second stage flight plans. If the ARO at the first aerodrome of departure (or the Central ARO if one exists) cannot fully address all flight plans for a flight through an intermediate stop or stops in the UK, then the responsibility for ensuring that the second stage plans are correctly filed and addressed lies with the pilot.

3.2 For flights departing from the UK to states that have adopted the process for second stage flight plans the FPL for the return leg may be filed at the point of departure if that aerodrome has the capability to send it on to the subsequent departure aerodrome. However, it is still the responsibility of the pilot to ensure that the return plan has been correctly filed and that supplementary information is kept up to date.

4 Departure/Arrival Messages

4.1 It is the responsibility of the ATSU serving the departure aerodrome to send a departure message via AFTN. This serves to activate the flight plan and enable the destination aerodrome to calculate an ETA. If the aircraft fails to arrive at its destination overdue action will be taken at ETA +30mins. As a minimum the departure message is to be sent to the destination aerodrome and the FIR in which it lies. If there is no ATSU at the departure aerodrome the pilot or another nominated responsible person must ensure that the departure time is passed to the AFPEX Helpdesk and/or initial FIR controller for onward transmission.

4.2 Similarly it is the responsibility of the ATSU serving the destination aerodrome to send an arrival message to the appropriate agencies when required. If the destination aerodrome does not have an active ATSU or is not connected to the AFTN, the pilot is required to pass an ETA to a responsible person who must be contacted by the pilot upon arrival at the destination. If no call is received by ETA +30mins the responsible person must immediately alert the appropriate ATS unit so that overdue action may be taken.

5 Supplementary Information

5.1 For those flight plans filed with IFPS or through AFPEX the supplementary information will be held (although not transmitted) by those agencies. There will be occasions when flight plans are filed through an ARO, if one exists, or an aerodrome ATSU for a flight that terminates outside of their hours of operation. If this is the case a responsible person nominated by the aircraft operator or pilot must have access to the supplementary information in case it is needed to support search and rescue activities. In this event the contact details for the responsible person are to be included in Item 18 of the filed flight plan.

6 Training

6.1 Current training syllabi, particularly for GA pilots, do not comprehensively cover the ATC flight plan filing process. Training organisations are encouraged to ensure that their students, particularly those who are likely to file flight plans in the future, receive adequate instruction in the process and guidance as to where to find necessary information in aeronautical documents. All pilots are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the contents of the UK AIP (ENR Section 1-10), CAP 694 (UK Flight Planning Guide) and, if necessary for IFR flights, the Eurocontrol IFPS Users Manual.