

Currency / Recency and the Return to Flying Operations

‘So, here we go again’ I hear you say, ‘plug in what we did last time and let’s get airborne.’

WRONG

Things are even more tricky this time around – we have done half the normal flying over the year, there have been very few annual checks, and no motor-glider training. This has impacted particularly heavily on our ‘non-normal’ flying, such as launch failures and field landing practice. Very few club pilots will be within normal club currency parameters by the time lockdown eases again, and the flying weather will almost inevitably be much less benign than when we came out last time. On the positive side, hopefully we will be able to fly dual this time almost immediately.

As before, there are a number of threats to the safe resumption of flying operations, including: -

- Individual rustiness
- Collective rustiness
- Unusual procedures / considerations associated with Covid-19.

These all combine to reduce margins and introduce distractions. We must counter them by taking a measured, methodical approach, both in the air and on the ground.

Many people were pleasantly surprised that their handling skills had held up well last time, but did this hide a reduction in awareness? A reduced capacity? Not being ahead of the aircraft? Be honest with yourself – I know that I was affected.

The BGA

The BGA has continued to beaver away on our behalf. As well as interacting with the CAA and aviation organisations, they have been working hard on extending licences, medicals and instructor requirements and in attempting to formulate mitigating procedures and advice. You may also have seen some of the excellent webinars which the BGA has organised. The BGA has put all of the relevant information in one place, I strongly recommend that you have a look. <https://members.glidering.co.uk/covid19-restrictions-support-exemptions-and-restarting-glidering-information/>

Club instructors all have valid ratings / licences and medicals. Many instructors did no instructing at all last year, so will be doing some refresher flying prior to flying with other club members.

Instructors must also have done 3 T/O and 3 Landings in the previous 90 days prior to instructing.

I plan to run an instructors / tug pilots meeting on zoom within the next few weeks, hopefully prior to the resumption of flying.

Instructors will not be planning anything too ambitious until they feel fully back up to speed, and will plan to stay well within their personal ‘envelope.’ This will include taking over early if they are at all unhappy about the way things are developing. This is standard advice to instructors, and trainees can learn a lot from it and from the subsequent debrief – please don’t take it personally, it will always be the best course of action.

Individual Pilots

Please take a few minutes to think through the risks to you and your household associated with attending the club. It may help to do a mini personal 'risk assessment' to help you to come to a conclusion. Boredom, frustration or the feeling of 'letting the side down' are not valid reasons for putting yourself / them at risk. However, the final decision is yours.

Everyone must be legal – check that medicals / licences are in date, using appropriate extensions if necessary (see BGA link).

The CAA has issued new criteria for self-declared medicals – see <https://members.gliding.co.uk/2021/01/29/pilot-medicals/>

It is much easier (and safer) to return to flying if you have stayed in touch with it during a layoff. There is plenty of very useful material online – why not -

- Attend some Bronze Lectures?
<http://bwnd.co.uk/news/images/Bronze%20Schedule%201022021.pdf>
- Attend some BGA Webinars (or view some previous ones)?
<https://members.gliding.co.uk/webinars/>
- Look at the GASCo Return to Flying Interactive Briefing ?
<https://www.gasco.org.uk/returntoflighting.html>
- Read the Instructors Manual – you'll be surprised by how much you have forgotten!
<https://members.gliding.co.uk/library/pilot-training/bga-instructor-manual-2/>
- Have a look through the latest S&G, especially the BGA Safety Teams Covid Currency article, p66.
- Have a look at Alastair's field landing article – I've landed out within 3 miles of the airfield, and I'm not the only one...
- 'Fly' a computer (try to incorporate a lookout scan for realism).
- Give yourself an adrenaline boost by looking at some of Dan Weston's links (elsewhere in GA). Think about safety implications while you do so!

As a bare minimum, **you must**, before flying, prepare yourself by refreshing

- Managing Flying Risks, <https://members.gliding.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/04/Managing-Flying-Risk-v12.pdf>
- BGA Safe Winch Launching <https://members.gliding.co.uk/bga-safety-management/safe-winch/>
- Safe Aerotowing <https://members.gliding.co.uk/bga-safety-management/safe-aerotowing/>

Think through a flight and refresh yourself on checklists and procedures, especially eventualities. As you can see, there is quite a lot to brush up upon, but there's plenty of time.... Were you caught out by how quickly we returned to flying last time?

You should have your logbook available for inspection by the duty instructor (DI) in order that he can assess your needs on the day. If you are outside club currency rules, please tell the DI.

Returning pilots can be placed into 4 categories: -

1. Pilots who may fly solo with caution following self-briefing.

2. Pilots who may fly solo with caution following briefing with an instructor followed by monitoring from the ground.
3. Pilots who will need dual flights prior to solo.
4. Training flights.

Pilots may move between categories depending on the forecast or existing conditions. Each pilot will be looked at on an individual basis. The Duty Instructor has the final decision. As previously, I am intending to make some alleviations to the club currency rules. I will be using the club rules, managing flying risks and the pilot currency barometer to inform my decision. <https://members.gliding.co.uk/library/safety-briefings/currency-barometer-pdf/>

Mike Fox suggests that the 1. level is set at Gold C / instructors see his advice for the return to flying <https://members.gliding.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/04/Return-to-flight-guidance.pdf>

There will be some pilots who are 'on the cusp' between 2. and 3. If, after I have sent out the alleviation, you are unsure where you stand, please email / phone me – I'll need to know when your last flight was and your hours and launches for the last year. Remember, conditions on the day may push you from one category to another.

'First' Flights

No matter what your experience, please treat your 'first' flights much like a first solo: -

Make a plan! Plan an undemanding flight and don't allow yourself to get carried away once airborne.

Don't rush, take your time to do a good ABCD(E) check, with a really good think through of the Eventualities.

Get yourself nicely settled in the cockpit. Adjust your rudder pedals / seating and straps, then take a few moments just to re-familiarise yourself with the controls. Run through an abandon aircraft drill.

Be thorough with your cockpit checks – instruments / ventilation set for minimum distraction.

Assume that you WILL have a launch failure. Be prepared to release immediately if the wing drops – remember, you may be a bit slow in noticing, so be alert.

Once in the air, work on Lookout, handling and awareness / thinking ahead. If you find lift, by all means soar, but make sure that you can get back to high key for a standard circuit.

Do your WULF checks in good time. Assess possible conflicts and your landing area. LOOKOUT!

Fly a standard circuit from high key. Keep a very good eye on positioning and try to make everything as standard as possible to set yourself up for that perfect landing.

Now do it again!

Private Gliders.

Is your glider fully ready for flight? Is it legal? Have you updated your airspace files? Flarm firmware? Has your parachute been re-packed recently? Have you ironed out those niggles which could cause a distraction?

The top competition pilots make themselves a checklist and use it. I suggest that you do the same.

Happy Soaring!

