

**Drone Industry Action Group**  
**28 April 2020 – Minutes**  
**By videoconference**

**Attendees:**

**Chair: Iain Gray, Cranfield**

Gavin Moir, NATS  
Graham Brown, ARPAS  
James Dunthorne, ARPAS  
Stuart McGlynn, Cyberhawk  
Craig Roberts, PwC  
Elaine Whyte PWC  
Phil Binks, Altitude Angel  
Craig Roberts, PWC  
Aleks Kowalski, ARPAS  
Stuart Young, Thales  
Paul Rigby, Consortiq  
Nick Rogers, Sky Futures  
Chris Blackford, Sky Futures  
Officials from BEIS and DfT

Simon Masters, UKRI Future Flight  
John Morlidge, UKRI Future Flight  
Nikos Pronios, Innovate UK  
Andrew Tyrer, InnovateUK  
Mark Westwood, CPC  
Andrew Chadwick, CPC  
Rikke Carmichael, Network Rail  
Hector Figueiredo, Qinetiq  
Owen McAree, Aerofirm  
Ian Williams-Wynn, Blue Bear  
Holly Jamieson, Nesta  
James Bell, CAA  
James de Beauvoir-Tupper, CAA  
Sophie O'Sullivan, CAA  
David Tait, CAA

**1. Welcome**

Iain Gray welcomed a significant turnout to the DIAG's first virtual meeting, which would focus on the Covid-19 response.

**2. Sector updates**

**Future Flight** update: Simon Masters updated how UKRI, and Future Flight in particular, is responding to the Covid-19 crisis. The team was very busy assessing the massive response to the [open UKRI Covid call](#), to which a lot of internal resource has been moved.

Phase 2 of Future Flight, initially due in April, is expected to open in May. The precise date is still TBC. The team expects the process beyond that to be as was initially forecast.

They have opened a portion of their budget to support drone-based projects that respond to the Covid-19 crisis. This opened on 24 April 2020 with application via the UKRI call (above). Key criteria include: strength of business case; speed and impact of response to Covid-19; value to and engagement of end users; and likelihood of achieving CAA clearance.

They are looking at project proposals with a realistic chance of being live in the coming 2-6 months. The usual limits of grant funded percentages apply, as these are limited by state aid clearance.

The UKRI Covid-19 competition is operating on an "always open" basis so applicants can apply at any point. However, as agreed in consultation with the drone community we are encouraging submissions at key points; 29 April, 13 May and 27 May in order to pool assessments and to give applicants the swiftest replies. Any project with a chance of contributing to immediate Covid-19 needs should submit within these timescales. There is no maximum funding limit for projects and funding will be available under standard Innovate UK funding rules.

UKSA had initiated a call, also open to drone-based projects. This represents a separate source of funding and assessments will be based on different criteria. Future Flight is in contact with UKSA and if they receive applications that may be better suited to the UKSA competition these would be discussed with UKSA to facilitate discussion with the applicant (and vice versa).

**Civil Aviation Authority** updated that they will be assessing the regulatory feasibility of proposals, and their likelihood of clearing regulatory hurdles within 2-4 months. Once approved, the CAA Innovation Hub would support applicants to improve the chances of achieving the necessary Operating Safety Case approvals they need. CAA has already publicly stated that front line NHS or public programmes will be prioritised. These applications will join those priority projects and staff were being mobilised internally to help accelerate response times.

Safety cases would need to reflect the operating environment as Covid-19 restrictions change and there is increased GA or Thames traffic. To help speed approval times, CAA will shortly put out a CAP describing the technical and operational parameters for the recent [Southampton/ Isle of Wight](#) BVLOS operation.

### **Further government updates**

- DfT welcomed the Southampton trials of NHS deliveries across the Solent, which had been supported by government funding.
- Pathfinder and UTM programmes continue, with funding for 2020/21 approved. While the Pathfinder programme is not formally doing anything Covid-19 related, they would support wider dissemination across the drone community.
- BEIS is supporting the Robotics Growth Partnership, which aims to outline a vision and ambition for robotics, with applications across sectors, including drones.
- CAA [published ORS4](#) deferring the need for payment and renewal for any PFCOs due before June back by 3 months.
- The Connected Places Catapult would continue its sector support and outreach, including for companies targeting UKRI support for Covid-19 solutions. A webinar on their [UTM white paper](#) was forthcoming and would include an ITT for the next demonstration phase, and two new projects had joined the programme:
  - o Maritime & Coastguard Agency: search & rescue and pollution
  - o EDF / Cranfield: marine ingress (seaweed, jellyfish)

**ARPAS** welcomed UKRI support for Covid-19 response. ARPAS had contact from over 400 SMEs interested in the scheme and how to access work or support Covid activities. One unresolved issue is that a large number of self-employed cannot access the furlough scheme and are struggling financially as much or all of their work has dried up.

There is a lack of clarity on the specific restrictions relevant to commercial drone operators and the definition of what is 'essential work' and how this is applied by different police forces and Flight Restriction Zones.

- 3. Minutes from January 15:** The minutes of the January meeting were accepted as a true record. The Action relating to Future Regulation would be discussed at the next meeting.
- 4. AOB:** ARPAS is working with the organisers for a Commercial UAV Show to be run in May 2021: more details are expected shortly. They are also working with BSI to identify gaps and priorities for standards across Aviation, Enabling and Industry standards required for drone operation.