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Sir Stephen Hillier
CAA Incoming Executive Chair
CAA Head Office - Aviation House
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Tuesday 13th October 2020

Dear Stephen

Congratulations on taking up your appointment to the CAA at this important time. While Covid-19 has been a massive blow to the aviation industry, and the challenges of moving to net zero are immense, the potential for technology and innovative business models to deliver new mobility solutions have never been greater. I wanted to write to you in a different role to my Cranfield job, this time in my role as Chair of the Drone Industry Action Group to outline our support for the CAA and the areas where we overlap.

By way of background to the group, I was invited in 2016 by the BEIS Secretary of State to convene a broad range of business voices (including R&D and academia) from across the unmanned aviation sector to inform, support and shape their business environment and support their growth. The Drone IAG aims to be primary collaborative forum between Government and the sector as the opportunities and challenges emerge in the move to autonomous flight.

The DIAG aims to understand sector opportunities and challenges and identify how to address them. The group and its members have over the past nearly four years built a relationship with your colleagues and are grateful for their time and the openness they have shown to engaging early and in detail on sector issues. Our principal discussions have been with the Innovation Hub and Regulatory Sandbox team, as autonomous flight beyond visual line of sight is a goal many drone innovators aspire to achieve and end-users anticipate. But they have also been responsive on topics including spectrum, insurance, conspicuity and air traffic management, standards and public perceptions.

Looking ahead, we welcome CAA's commitment to helping the sector achieve BVLOS, including through the commitment of your resources to support the Future Flight programme as it champions new technologies and business models within a safe and effective traffic management system.

In a letter earlier this year, the IAG wrote to the CAA with its belief that, while there is no regulatory barrier per se, the UK has suffered from the lack a 'drone knowledge system' where innovators can work within a supportive environment to develop, prove and share new technologies, procedures and approaches that work. Future Flight and Pathfinder programmes are important steps in the right direction, but will need continued work, especially in communication and conspicuity technologies and in demonstrations of manned and unmanned aviation inter-operability, expanding on historic experiences such as Operation Zenith and airspace management capabilities like NBEC.

The Drone IAG also sees the critical importance of supporting positive public perceptions, to proactively balance the low awareness and mixed public view of drones by emphasising "drones for good" stories. We also see the need for active engagement with the commercial sectors that could benefit from drone solutions to accelerate the adoption of drone technologies for commercial and public benefit.

I wanted to reaffirm my commitment and that of the DIAG to continue to offer the CAA a trusted forum and sounding board to exchange views with sector leaders with real expertise and experience and look forward to discussing key challenges with you at your convenience.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iain Gray', with a long, sweeping underline.

Professor Iain Gray
Director of Aerospace
Cranfield University

Background on the Drone Industry Action Group

The original objectives for the group, outlined at the time, were to:

- Foster innovation and collaboration that will support the growth of commercial drone applications and wider use of drone technologies and solutions in the UK.
- Facilitate the adoption of drones in a wide range of uses across the UK public and private sector, as well as monitoring, reviewing and inputting to appropriate standards.
- Develop opportunities for adoption of drones and facilitate coordination, collaboration and exploitation of technology and an air traffic management system in the UK that integrates drones and wider General Aviation.
- Enable an industry led voice into Government and establishment of a framework that mitigates the misuse of drones and addresses societal concerns

More detail including minutes and participants of our meetings is available at <https://www.arpas.uk/drone-iag/>