

Red Tape Challenge

The government's welcome assault on the excessive red tape afflicting the general aviation industry has led to an avalanche of complaint from flying clubs and schools, engineers and pilots seeking relief from the crushing burden of bureaucracy.

The 'Red Tape Challenge' for GA, announced in mid-April, originally caused some puzzlement because it appeared that it wasn't within the UK government's gift to force the bureaucratic boot off the

industry's windpipe. The self-regulated sector – microlights, permit and vintage aircraft, gliders – would be largely immune, while the government has little or no control over EASA, the European Aviation Safety Agency, where the red

tape motherlode is housed and the rulemaking mill runs night and day.

But in an interview with *General Aviation*, the Minister responsible for Red Tape Challenges, Grant Shapps MP – himself a general aviation pilot – said there was much that could be done nonetheless. 'Europe' was no longer the magic shield that excused all sins when it came to explaining how new regulations would be implemented, and the intention was to 'future-proof' the Red Tape Challenge so that rules currently in the making in Cologne could be taken into account, and as far as possible ameliorated now. Just how that's going to work is unclear, but it's not a stone that AOPA is leaving unturned.

"A flourishing aviation sector is vital to Britain," Shapps says, "and that includes general aviation as well as large commercial operators. The General Aviation Red Tape Challenge is specifically aimed at smaller operators and businesses for whom regulatory issues can be frustrating and restrictive. We want to help generate jobs and prosperity, so I hope everyone in the sector from pilots to mechanics to training organisations to airfield owners take part in this challenge and let us know how we can help you to succeed."

The last government bought a pig in a poke when it signed up to EASA in the 1990s; it committed Britain to adopting whatever rules EASA came up with. The CAA exacerbated the problem during the early stages by effectively sitting on its hands when it should have been pushing Britain's case, and EASA has largely ignored the advice of industry bodies. Britain's under-representation at all levels in Europe, largely a result of the basic European qualification of having to speak at least two languages, has meant that the driving forces in GA rulemaking have been officials from countries with little or no

tradition of consultation with industry, and in some cases, no general aviation.

As a result, the regulations that have made British GA significantly safer than the rest of Europe – in France some 90 pilots die each year, in Germany about 75, in Britain around 25 – have been ignored in the drive for harmonisation, to be replaced by a frenzy of box-ticking. The triumph of bureaucracy over safety reached its nadir with EASA's decision to effectively kill off the IMC rating, one of the foundation stones of British GA safety. Under the leadership of Andrew Haines,



Grant Shapps: flies a Cherokee Six

the CAA's representatives in Cologne and Brussels are no longer the silent men of Europe, but has the horse bolted? Can we realistically expect to fix the Part M maintenance requirements, introduce sense to EASA-FCL, or stave off the bureaucratic avalanche that is EASA's Aviation Training Organisation (ATO) requirements?

Yes, says Grant Shapps. "We are welcoming GA's input on every aspect of red tape, including the closure of the IMC rating to new pilots and those draft regulations which have been promulgated by EASA and are under discussion, such as the ATO requirements. If general aviation believes the level of red tape to be unnecessary and to be hampering them in the conduct of their business, then we will look at what can be done to alleviate the problems."

But having committed years ago to implementing EASA regulations, how much wriggle room is there? "Look, this is our 27th Red Tape Challenge, and in many of them the cry has been the same – oh, Europe says we have to do this. But when

we've looked closely at it, it has turned out that the interpretation of European requirements has been unnecessarily bureaucratic," Shapps says.

"An example is Health and Safety, where we looked at the effects of red tape on small businesses. The Health and Safety Executive claimed to be implementing European directives, but it turned out that exemptions could be made for small businesses, and we managed to free them from a vast number of expensive and unnecessary rules. In all, we have managed to sweep away some 6,500 regulations so far. The CAA is answerable to the Department for Transport and the UK government, who require of it that it wash its face and who have a responsibility to ensure that this does not mean it introduces or increases fees when making efficiencies would be the better option.

"We have not done well by general aviation in the past. This is an industry that is worth at least £1.4 billion and probably more like £3.5 billion when you take all of its facets into account, and employs some 11,500 people directly, many more indirectly, in highly technical fields. We are aware that we are driving flight training overseas and damaging our own competitive ability, and we have to try to reverse the trend."

Fascinated by aviation since childhood – his father, a graphic designer, was an acknowledged expert at designing paper planes – Grant Shapps learned to fly as soon as his commercial printing business generated the means to do so. "In 1995 I was cycling past Elstree with a friend who said he was going in for a trial lesson," he says. "I went along with him, and was hooked from the start – my friend fell by the wayside. But I got my licence at Cabair on the AA5 and the PA-28, and over the years I've amassed about 500 hours, largely on these types."

Shapps also has an FAA Part 61 licence, on which he flies an N-registered Cherokee Six out of Panshanger, so he understands what EASA's assault on third-country registrations means for private pilots. He also has reservations about regulations on fire cover. "I'm impressed by the sensible American way of doing things," he said.

"But it's not for me to propose areas where red tape can be cut back – the impetus must come from GA, and we will do our best to facilitate change."

Shapps also has an IMC rating, and while he is pleased that holders will have grandfather rights, he recognises the safety case for the rating in a country with more capricious weather than anywhere else in Europe and does not accept that the UK has abdicated to EASA its responsibility for the safety that the IMC rating represents.

The GA Red Tape Challenge comes as

