

Prospect ATCOs' Branch Position Paper On Fatigue & Fatigue Risk Management Systems (FRMS)



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Executive Summary

Prospect ATCOs' Branch is responsible for Air Traffic Control Officers working in the United Kingdom representing them on Professional and Industrial issues. Additionally the ATCOs' Branch represents other Air Traffic specialist grades such as Watch Managers, Supervisors, Flight Information Officers, Capacity Managers, Training Staff and many other key roles within UK Air Traffic Management.

Introduction

The ATCOs' Branch has been monitoring the increasing number of fatigue studies and the introduction of Fatigue Risk Management Systems (FRMS) in aviation and wider transport sectors.

This document sets out the Branch position on fatigue management responsibility for employers and individuals and the implementation and use of FRMS in ATC and ATM.

Definition of Fatigue

Any search on the internet for a definition of fatigue will come up with many alternatives which supports the view that its effect can be different for every individual with varying underlying causes. It is important to state that fatigue affects us in a more complex way than tiredness through a lack of sleep. As examples of that, symptoms both mental and physical may include a combination of the following;

- Lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating during busy and quiet periods
- Problems starting and finishing tasks
- Little or no motivation
- Weakness
- Constant feeling of tiredness
- Irritability and mood swings

With the high level of shift working within ATC & ATM, it is important that members recognise the onset of fatigue, understand the risks associated working under its effects and that an individual's performance and the ability to work safely can be compromised.

ATCOs' Branch position on Employer Responsibility towards Fatigue for Employees

The ATCOs' Branch considers the following as a basis for employers in ATM to continuously support, enhance and develop the workplace as an environment which helps to identify and prevent fatigue and its effects on staff;

- Where practicable, use rotational roster patterns that provide an appropriate and varied workload
- Seek to use rosters and shifts that do not have SRATCOH as the only benchmark or reference point for attendance patterns and duty lengths which are further enhanced by negotiation

- Provide training and information for employees regarding the effects of shift working and education around the recognition of fatigue in the workplace
- Consider alternative arrangements for individuals with a change of circumstances i.e. recovery from illness
- Facilitate the ability to alter temperature and lighting
- Offer free health assessments for shift workers
- Train managers to identify and understand the symptoms and effect of fatigue in an individual
- Regularly consult with Health and Safety representatives
- Supply and maintain suitable rest facilities which enable and support responsibility free breaks that help stop and reverse the symptoms of fatigue

ATCOs' Branch Position on Employee responsibility towards Fatigue

The ATCOs' Branch views an individuals approach and responsibility towards their own fatigue management as a key part of professional standards and behaviour.

Whilst we are fully aware through our own experiences that it is difficult to be prescriptive about life outside of work, we consider that, where possible and practical, members consider the following as advice and suggestions to help mitigate against fatigue in the workplace;

- Establish a routine outside of your work pattern and try to maintain it
- Understand what is "right" for you regarding eating, sleeping around your shifts
- Keep hydrated
- Be sensible with your time prior to shifts you know you may struggle with
- Try not to over commit yourself to activities before and after working time that will affect your levels of energy and concentration.
- Take leave on a regular basis so that you do not go for long periods without time away from work
- Be wary of changes in circumstances in and out of work that you may not think have an effect on your levels of fatigue
- Keep an eye out on your colleagues for signs that they are suffering from fatigue

Once again, we would like to reiterate that we know that all of the above are not possible at all times, however, we have noted and seen members - unwittingly or not - put themselves into situations which make it difficult to combat fatigue at work.

Fatigue is a key factor in an individual's ability to be fit for duty and **must** be seen as such.

Fatigue Risk Management Systems (FRMS)

The introduction of FRMS have increased in many industries, particularly transport, in recent years.

The ICAO definition of an FRMS is,

"a data-driven means of continuously monitoring and maintaining fatigue related safety risks, based upon scientific principles and knowledge as well as operational experience that aims to ensure relevant personnel are performing at adequate levels of alertness".

To be clear, an FRMS allows an employer to move away from a fully regulated and rule driven approach to fatigue prevention through evidence based research, testing and evaluation of its processes, approved by its regulator or through the employer's safety management system, again approved by its regulator.

The Branch has studied and consulted with those who have researched, assessed and implemented FRMS and has the following comments and statements on their use in ATC and ATM in the UK.

- Creation of an FRMS by an employer must be done in consultation with its employees
- An FRMS must have at its core a theme which promotes and improves safety within an individual's task and role
- The use of FRMS can have positive effects for both employer and employees by facilitating change that is relevant and beneficial to both parties
- Any data or evidence used to formulate an FRMS must be credible, well supported and be recognised as such by all it relates to
- Review of an FRMS should be constant and ongoing, involving both the employer and employees, essential to this is a fatigue reporting process.
- Any FRMS used in the UK must be assessed and approved by the CAA
- Prospect ATCOs' Branch expectation is for full involvement and consultation with the development of any FRMS at a unit/employer which recognises the Union.

The Branch position on the use of FRMS is as follows;

Prospect ATCOs' Branch cautiously welcomes the introduction and use of Fatigue Risk Management Systems in ATC/ATM.

Any such scheme must be supported by credible documented data, research and evidence which shall involve the contribution, acceptance and ongoing input of those affected by the scheme. Key to the success of an FRMS is the creation of a robust and open reporting system and culture embedded within the scheme.

The Branch will support and advise any members involved in these processes and will continue its consultation with industry groups, employers and the CAA on the use of FRMS.

Prospect ATCOs' Branch

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The logo is a circular emblem. The outer ring is dark blue with the text 'UK AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the top and 'YOUR SAFETY - OUR PROFESSION' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters at the bottom. The center of the logo features a stylized map of the United Kingdom in red and white. Overlaid on the map is a dark blue lighthouse with a white light beam. Several black curved lines represent flight paths or radar waves emanating from the lighthouse. Small black airplane icons are positioned along these paths. The background of the entire image is a repeating pattern of the names of various UK airports and air traffic control centers in a light grey font.