

Pilot policy lags behind research, says safety expert

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Research by Dr Simon Bennett (pictured) of the Civil Safety and Security Unit in our Institute of Lifelong Learning has expressed his concern that aviation regulators are not taking account of research into the 'lived reality' of pilot lifestyles.

This year the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) will agree new flight-time limitations (FTLs) for pilots. Many consider EASA's proposal to relax FTLs a threat to safety.

Britain's FTLs are amongst the most stringent. Nevertheless, research

published by Dr Simon Bennett of the University of Leicester's Civil Safety and Security Unit in the Institute of Lifelong Learning shows that pilots can find themselves flying an aircraft many hours after waking. Over 20% of Dr Bennett's respondents said that by the time they completed their shift they had been awake for 28 hours or more.

Dr Bennett said, "Research proves that judgment is seriously impaired after eighteen hours of wakefulness. How well do you think you could drive after being awake for eighteen hours?"

"FTLs take no account of the pilot lifestyle. No account is taken of prior [wakefulness](#), the duration and quality of sleep or commuting. FTLs are dissociated from the realities of life – despite the fact that those realities affect performance. Nearly 50% of respondents took over 60 minutes to commute to work."

FTLs stand apart from what Dr Bennett calls 'lived reality'. He adds, "Regulators (and lawmakers) take no interest in the world beyond the crew room and flight-deck. When pressed they retort, 'We have no knowledge of any rule violations'. Violations are not the issue. The issue is the fidelity of FTLs. Those who represent the industry remain aloof. 'Flying time is a matter for the UK Authorities and it is up to them to specify the measures which are appropriate' says the British Air Transport Association.

"The [aviation industry](#) is volatile. In debt due to training fees, novice pilots struggle to make ends meet. Properties in airport catchments are expensive. Hard-up pilots find themselves commuting long distances. Long commutes add to the fatigue generated by flying multiple trips through congested airspace. The new regulations must take account of the fatigue-inducing aspects of life beyond the airport perimeter.

"Regulations made without reference to scientific knowledge or social

context are dangerous. EASA's proposed FTLs take little account of the latest sleep research and no account of the [pilot](#) lifestyle as described in my own research. Passenger safety is threatened. Those who work at the coal-face of aviation deserve better."

Provided by University of Leicester

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