

# Policy for the Establishment and Operation of Special Use Airspace: Engagement Summary Report

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## Introduction

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The CAA drafted a policy statement on how the UK employs Special Use Airspace, which aims to ensure Special Use Airspace is utilised consistently by describing a clear framework for its use, providing clarity and increasing awareness of all airspace users.

We sought your views on the content of the Special Use Airspace policy statement to ensure that all stakeholders had the opportunity to voice their opinion. Your feedback helped us understand any unintended impacts, implication or consequences and resulted in some changes to the content of the policy.

## Overview

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On 25 October 2023 the CAA launched a six week engagement period to request feedback regarding a proposed CAA policy statement for the establishment and operation of Special Use Airspace. The engagement period closed on the 6 December 2023.

This report summarises the results of the engagement period and outlines our conclusions and next steps.

## How we engaged

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The draft Special Use Airspace policy statement was uploaded to the [CAA's Citizen Space website](#) which provided respondents with the opportunity to complete an online response form to tell us their views. We asked questions regarding the content of the document and provided the opportunity for more generic feedback to be given. Stakeholders were asked to respond during an engagement period that ran for six weeks.

A notification email was sent to stakeholders using our online platform named mail chimp and a Skywise alert was posted to notify relevant stakeholders that are signed up to the service. Separate notification emails were also sent to members of the Airspace Management Steering Group, a CAA chaired group of internal and external stakeholders.

## Who responded to the engagement

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There were six responses via our Citizen Space platform during the engagement period representing ANSPs, ATC staff, airport operators, FISO license holders, general aviation and the MOD. Two respondents submitted additional feedback via email.

## Engagement summary

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### Policy content

The majority of respondents (67%) thought the policy contained sufficient information about how the UK employs Special Use Airspace. Of the remaining 33%, one respondent

was not sure and one did not think it provided enough information. Specific feedback was received regarding some areas of the policy and is summarised below.

It was noted that Restricted Area (Temporary) was not included as a type of Special Use Airspace. However, temporary Special Use Airspace structures are described within the policy and, despite there not being specific mention, a Restricted Area (Temporary) sits within the scope of temporary Special Use Airspace.

There was a request for improved clarity on where buffers should be applied (internal or external) and how they are applied in Class G airspace. The wording of the buffer policy Annex states a preference for buffers to be applied externally however we felt it important enable buffers to be applied in other ways should circumstances dictate this is needed. The buffer policy only applies pre-tactically, to ensure aircraft are adequately segregated from Special Use Airspace structures at the flight planning stage. This is not possible in Class G airspace due to its uncontrolled nature and as such we do not prescribe the application of buffers within this classification of airspace.

Feedback was received regarding how the flow diagram at Annex A could lead readers to a solution that was not achievable due to other policy limitations. We acknowledge this and will make this clearer within the policy.

### **Proposed definitions for Temporary Segregated Areas and Temporary Reserved Areas**

A majority of respondents (50%) agreed with the proposed definition changes, with 33% having no opinion, with 17% disagreeing with the proposals.

Concern was raised regarding the divergence from ICAO and EUROCONTROL definitions and the potential confusion this could cause to aircraft from other States. However, we believe the amended definitions still meet the intent of the ICAO and EUROCONTROL definitions while expanding the scope of their utilisation to enable the objectives of the Airspace Modernisation Strategy.

The similarity between the acronym for Restricted Area (RA) and Temporary Reserved Area (TRA) was identified as have the potential to cause confusion. However, these acronyms are already established and referred to in ICAO and ERNIP documents.

### **Infringement reporting**

Restrictive requirements to report airspace infringements were highlighted due to the combination of requirements in the draft policy and CAP 1404, Airspace Infringements: review and actions. The duplication of information resulting in overly restrictive requirements was not intentional. The requirements for the reporting of airspace infringements will be removed from the policy for Special Use Airspace which will instead refer readers to CAP 1404.

### **Special Use Airspace Authority**

Feedback was received regarding what constitutes a Special Use Airspace Authority and how an organisation would be approved as a Special Use Airspace Authority. We agree that this could be clearer, and the policy document will be amended to reflect this,

including reference to CAP 740 where the responsibilities of the Special Use Airspace Authority are contained.

### **Space launches**

There was feedback regarding the lack of activity descriptor for sub-orbital or orbital rocket launches. The Virgin Orbit space launch was not given a dedicated activity descriptor as it was a standalone launch that was enabled by a temporary Danger Area. There may be a need for new activity descriptors to be added, not just for space related activities, and this will be considered during the CAP 1616 Airspace Change Process.

It was noted that there are no protocols or priorities to integrate space rocket launches into the decision making process to apply Flexible Use of Airspace principles, and no mechanism in place for the Airspace Management Cell to manage the airspace. The CAA are aware of these aspects and any airspace management requirements would be considered as part of the CAP 1616 Airspace Change Process to establish Special Use Airspace to support space launches. When standard procedures and protocols are established they will be detailed in an update to CAP 740, UK Airspace Management Policy.

### **Policy implementation**

Assurances were sought regarding the implementation of the policy. While we are unable to provide assurances that the policy will not impact any stakeholders, we do acknowledge that the publishing of the policy will make a number of airspace structures non-compliant with some aspects of the policy. Operations in existing Special Use Airspace remain extant and the full implementation of the policy will be achieved over time and managed through existing governance structures and steering groups.

### **Email feedback**

Additional email feedback was received from two respondents because there was an insufficient number of characters available in the questionnaire. After reviewing this feedback, a meeting was set up with the respondents to discuss how to resolve certain elements, which is summarised below.

The main topic of discussion regarded the applicability of the activity descriptors to all Special Use Airspace, particularly Temporary Reserved Areas, and the resultant application of a buffer. Concerns were raised over the impact it may have in the Scottish FIR where large Temporary Reserved Areas exist. We clarified that activity descriptors and associated buffers will need to be applied to all Special Use Airspace. However, we acknowledge that the publication of the policy does not imply that existing structures are unsafe, and that procedures for established Special Use Airspace remain extant until reviewed as the policy is implemented over time. We also clarified that while the list activity descriptors apply to all Special Use Airspace, it does not mean that all activity descriptors are appropriate for all types of Special Use Airspace.

The wording of the safety buffer policy at Annex I was reviewed with minor amendments made to improve clarity on the application of the buffer and the geographical area within which it applies.

## **Next steps**

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The policy for the establishment and operation of Special Use Airspace will be updated to reflect some of the feedback received during the engagement period and will be published in Q1 2024.