

SI0221

# Unmanned Aircraft Systems

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This Service Instruction provides information on the Governance, Use and Accountability of Unmanned Aircraft Systems within the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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## 1. Introduction

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has been using Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) since 2013, with Operational Authorisation (OA) granted to the PSNI Air Support Unit by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Other PSNI users currently fly with an Operational Authorisation, such as Scientific Support Branch – Imaging Branch, Tactical Support Group and specifically UAS trained Evidence Gathering Officers.

The aim of this Service Instruction is to provide PSNI officers and staff guidance in the procurement and use of UAS, and to introduce a safe, legal and auditable method of providing unmanned aerial coverage throughout Northern Ireland for policing purposes.

## 2. Inclusions

This Service Instruction applies to trained Police Officers and Police Staff. Only authorised and trained persons may use UAS. They must be aware of and are required to comply with the procedures contained therein.

These procedures are of particular relevance to Police officers and Police staff within the following roles:

- Air Support Unit – Air Observers;
- Tactical Firearms Commanders / Officers (TFC / TFO);
- Tactical Advisors;
- Gold, Silver and Bronze Commanders;
- Scientific Support Branch – Imaging and Mapping;
- Operational Support Department – Tactical Support Group / Police Search Advisors (PolSA) / Dog Section; and
- Emergency & Event Planning.

## 3. Purpose of UAS

The aim of the PSNI when deploying UAS is to:

- Provide situational awareness to Police Officers, Police Staff and Commanders in a variety of policing operations;
- Assist in searches for persons, both missing and believed at risk, or suspected of having committed offences;

- Assist with investigation at scenes of serious and fatal Road Traffic Collisions;
- Assist with investigation at major crime scenes;
- Assist with event planning, before and during events which require policing support; and

Work in partnership with other emergency services and investigative agencies (e.g. Health & Safety Executive (NI), Revenue & Customs) to provide aerial imagery and appropriate incident response, increasing public safety and confidence.

## 4. National Decision Model

The [National Decision Model](#) (NDM) is the primary decision-making model within the PSNI. Where applied it ensures that ethical (PSNI Code of Ethics), proportionate and defensible decisions can be made in relation to operational and non-operational policing.

## 5. UAS Management – Authorised Users

The PSNI UAS Working Group will retain overall governance for the purchase,

training and deployment of UAS. This will include providing returns to the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). However, this will not detract from those Departments or Districts who have been approved to deploy UAS from maintaining their own Operational Authorisation.

Approved users must comply with the CAA directions and provide a representative to participate on the PSNI UAS Working Group. Any Department or District that wish to purchase and fly UAS will forward an application with rationale to the Chair of the UAS Working Group. This should also include a preliminary outline activity based risk assessment demonstrating compliance with the [Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) \(PUWERNI 99\)](#) to:

- Justify the need;
- Identify how the use of this equipment could help control other existing risks; and
- Demonstrate that any new or additional risks arising from the introduction of the equipment have been considered and controlled.

The Working Group will consider the report and provide a response.

Under no circumstances must any Department or District purchase UAS without permission of this Working Group.

Any procurement of a UAS must be compliant with the [IR2030 Ofcom Regulations](#).

Departments and Districts must adhere to the prescriptive job roles and responsibilities ([Appendix B](#)). Failure to do so may lead to negative findings by the CAA.

## 6. Considerations

The operation of UAS is strictly limited to Remote Pilots who have received CAA approved training and who are authorised under a current OA.

Approved training will consist of an initial ground school, followed by practical flight training, conducted by or on behalf of, a National Qualified Entity (NQE). The authorisation to deploy will only be granted after the remote pilot successfully completes all CAA mandatory exams and practical flight testing. Remote Pilots

should then be afforded further in-house training that is commensurate with their role identified through a training needs analysis specific to the activity and related risk assessment for the intended use of the equipment.

Specific hours and type of training will be determined by the designated UAS Training Officers after consultation with the Department or District Accountable Manager.

A Remote Pilot's permission to fly on behalf of the PSNI will be at the discretion of the [Accountable Manager](#). This permission may be withdrawn at any time by the UAS Operator / UAS Senior Pilot / UAS Training Officer, with reasons documented and supplied to the Accountable Manager at the earliest opportunity for review.

Ongoing continuous professional development (CPD), with a minimum of 8 hours per year must be facilitated by the Accountable Manager to maintain competency.

Minimum flying / training must be undertaken by the Remote Pilot to maintain competency as outlined in ([Appendix C](#)).

The PSNI have [two levels](#) of trained Pilots. Every Remote Pilot must comply with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) minimum currency standards in order to remain 'current' and deployable as a UAS Remote Pilot. To achieve advanced status the Remote Pilot must participate in further training as documented in ([Appendix D](#)).

Remote Pilots who fail to meet the current required NPCC standards will be subject to a review by the Accountable Manager / UAS Operator / UAS Senior Pilot. In all cases they will be required to attend refresher training with an UAS Training Officer in order to be reaccredited.

## 7. UAS Equipment

The PSNI is required to protect data that is collected by a UAS. The risk in relation to stored data on the UAS is constantly under review especially as technology advances. Therefore, any purchase of UAS equipment must first be assessed for security specification and all details passed to the chairperson of the UAS working group for review.

PSNI Air Support UAS role holders can provide guidance on UAS equipment and

are an important contact that should be considered at the early stages of research. Consideration must also be given to the security of data when using mutual support or voluntary organisations. Each Department or District must appoint an UAS Operator who is responsible to oversee all records that pertain to UAS equipment; deployments and compliance.

All UAS administration and management must be recorded on the PSNI electronic management system at the earliest opportunity. It is the responsibility of the Remote Pilot to ensure that the Designated Person is aware of all defects.

Any Department or District that has ownership of an UAS will be responsible for the costs of any repairs or damage to the equipment and for arranging insurance. The UAS Accountable Manager must be kept apprised of any issue and electronic management system must be updated at the earliest opportunity.

In addition to pre-flight checks, comprehensive monthly safety checks must be completed by the UAS Operator for each Department or District on each

UAS and details recorded on the electronic management system.

## 8. Recording Data and Privacy

Any operational imagery captured by UAS onto an SD Card or other media storage must be transferred as soon as practical, using approved equipment, onto the PSNI internal storage server and once this transfer is completed, the recording media should be formatted for re-use. Please refer to PSNI Service Instruction, [SI0518 Data Protection](#) and [SI0419 Records Management](#) for regulations and guidance on handling and retention of data.

A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed and will be made available by the UAS Accountable Managers to Remote Pilots.

The following are instructions on the use of UAS when recording incidents.

### Principles:

- Remote Pilots will deploy to specific tasking and will not indiscriminately record data.

- When attending incidents involving a search for missing persons, the Pilot must agree the requirement to record searches with the assigned Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) / PoISA.
- The Remote Pilot should be mindful that failing to record incidents that are of evidential value may require an explanation in court.
- The decision to safely deploy the UAS or not will rest with the Remote Pilot. Their decision is final.
- The deployment will be logged on the PSNI Command and Control system - Control Works.
- Any decision regarding whether or not to deploy an UAS will be recorded on Control Works.

UAS are an aerial observational medium and can be used across a wide range of policing operations. There are a number of situations where the use of UAS are not appropriate. In all cases Remote Pilots and Supervisors must use their professional judgement with regard to recording.

The following examples of where the use of UAS is not appropriate (this list is not exhaustive):

- Intimate searches - UAS must not be used under any circumstances for video or photographic recording to be made of intimate searches.
- Private dwellings - Operators must consider the right to private and family life, in accordance with Article 8 of the Human Rights Act, and must not record beyond what is proportionate, legal and necessary to fulfil the tasking.

Provisions under the [Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act \(RIPA\) \(2000\)](#) must be taken into consideration during the operational deployment of UAS and any necessary RIPA aerial authority obtained. Property Interference under Part III [Police Act 1997](#) is required if the UAS is to be deployed from private property without consent. Advice should be sought from the PSNI Central Authorisation Bureau (CAB).

## 9. Accountability

UAS Accountable Managers are responsible for collating all records pertaining to UAS. Northern Ireland

Policing Board (NIPB) regularly audits the use of UAS. Therefore, all records will be inputted onto the electronic management system and forwarded to the Chairperson of the UAS Working Group biannually on 1<sup>st</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> October.

Each Department or District that operates a UAS is required to apply annually to CAA for an Operational Authorisation. The process of application requires PSNI to provide details of all Remote Pilots, training and hours flown over the previous year. It is a legal requirement for any PSNI Remote Pilot to be included on an Operational Authorisation and registered with CAA with a Flyer ID.

Any failure to update records for auditing by CAA will be reported to the Accountable Manager and Head of Branch or District Commander.

Heads of Branch or District Commanders will be responsible for the development and maintenance of risk assessments for the use of the UAS within their business area and compliance with all routine and reactive maintenance arrangements.

## 10. Misuse of UAS

For PSNI guidance on misuse of UAS  
please refer to:

- Guidance for Public:  
<https://www.psni.police.uk/safety-and-support/advice-and-information/unmanned-aircraft-systems-drones>.

## Appendix A Glossary

Abbreviation	Term Meaning
<b>AAIB</b>	Air Accident Investigation Branch
<b>AANI</b>	Air Ambulance Northern Ireland
<b>AIP</b>	Aeronautical Information Publication
<b>ANO</b>	Air Navigation Order 2016
<b>AOO</b>	Area of Operation
<b>ASU</b>	PSNI Air Support Unit
<b>ATC</b>	Air Traffic Control
<b>CAA</b>	Civil Aviation Authority
<b>CRM</b>	Crew Resource Management
<b>DPA</b>	Data Protection Act 2018
<b>EP</b>	Emergency Procedure
<b>EVLOS</b>	Extended Visual Line of Sight
<b>GCS</b>	Ground Control Station
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulations
<b>LOL</b>	Loss of Link
<b>MCS</b>	Mission Command Software
<b>MOR</b>	Mandatory Occurrence Report

<b>MTOM</b>	Maximum Take-off Mass
<b>NDM</b>	Nation Decision Model
<b>NOTAM</b>	Notice to Airmen
<b>OA</b>	Operational Authorisation
<b>OSC</b>	Operating Safety Case
<b>PCM</b>	Post-Crash Management
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment
<b>PSNI</b>	Police Service of Northern Ireland
<b>RP</b>	Remote Pilot
<b>RTB</b>	Return to Base
<b>UASSP</b>	UAS Senior Pilot
<b>UASTO</b>	UAS Training Officer
<b>UAS</b>	Unmanned Aircraft System

## Appendix B Roles and Responsibilities

Job Title	Responsibilities
UAS Accountable Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain oversight and responsibility for all UAS operations within their Department District or Teams.</li> <li>• Senior officer responsible to the CAA for maintaining safety standards in accordance with the relevant sections of the Air Navigation Order (ANO 2016), CAA Civilian Aviation Publication (CAP) 722, Air Navigation (Amendment) Order 2020 incorporating UAS Implementing Regulations (Regulation (EU) 2019/947), as well as any other relevant legislation and guidance. Must also adhere to the aircraft manufacturer’s technical specifications.</li> <li>• Ensure all returns are provided to the UAS Working Group biannually to ensure ACC Crime Operations Department and Northern Ireland Policing Board are afforded with specific returns.</li> <li>• Must facilitate CAA and oversight audits and feedback organisational learning.</li> </ul>
UAS Operator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for management of the UAS systems.</li> <li>• Overseeing that the systems are being used according to CAA permissions and are being maintained to a high standard.</li> <li>• Responsible for the Flight Operations Manual and any other documents as required by the CAA, including relevant Risk Assessments.</li> <li>• Ensure UAS records to be held in accordance with PSNI retention and disposal scheme.</li> <li>• Ensure compliance and to review records before any are deleted.</li> </ul>
UAS Training Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for delivering ‘in house’ training to the UAS Remote Pilots following their successful completion of initial training.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining accurate training records and qualification / requalification records and providing operational cover.</li> </ul>
UAS Safety Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement, maintain and review the UAS Safety Policy</li> <li>• Ensure all Remote Pilots are compliant with all the requirements of the OA.</li> <li>• Ensure all aircraft and equipment in respect of UAS operations are safe and compliant with OA.</li> <li>• Ensure all procedures are compliant with the OA</li> <li>• Organise relevant training, oversee Remote Pilot logs and assist the UAS Operator in the management of the UAS.</li> </ul>
UAS Senior Pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all Remote Pilots are compliant with all the requirements of the OA.</li> <li>• Organise relevant training, oversee Remote Pilot logs and assist the UAS Operator in the management of the UAS.</li> </ul>
Common Roles of: UAS Operator UAS Training Officer UAS Safety Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversight of UAS deployment requests.</li> <li>• Training and safety, ensures all Remote Pilots are trained effectively and are current and competent.</li> <li>• Subject matter expert on UAS regulations and all aspects of UAS operations.</li> <li>• Maintaining the Safety Management System (SMS) and UAS safety culture.</li> <li>• PSNI ASU are practitioners of Crew Resource Management (CRM) and will ensure all Remote Pilots receive annual training in CRM.</li> <li>• Monitor interaction with other PSNI aerial activity,</li> <li>• Reports back to the Accountable Manager as and when requested.</li> <li>• Point of contact for new operating procedures.</li> <li>• Point of contact for all UAS safety matters.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor operating standards and ensure operational learning points are captured and disseminated.</li> <li>• Monitor all Mandatory occurrences reporting (MORS), identifying trends and ensures correct use of Aviation Safety Reporting Portal (<a href="http://www.aviationreporting.eu">www.aviationreporting.eu</a>) by all Remote Pilots.</li> <li>• Incident reduction by providing safety advice and guidance.</li> <li>• Manage records of incidents or accidents.</li> </ul>
Remote Pilots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remote Pilots are persons who have completed and passed CAA approved training and are authorised to fly for PSNI.</li> <li>• To be aware and fully understands Civil Aviation Publication: 393 and Publication: 722, CAP 1789A – Regulation (EU) 2019/947 &amp; Aviation Safety (Amendment) Regulations 2022, ANO Amendment 2021, CAP 722F, CAP 2013 – ANO Amendment 2020 and the UAS Operations Manual.</li> <li>• Maintain accurate training and qualification records.</li> <li>• Monitor and update their own Remote Pilot log records.</li> <li>• Conduct flight planning, complete site survey form / pre-deployment check list / UAS deployment form.</li> <li>• Brief any on site assistants with roles and emergency procedures.</li> <li>• Complete all relevant maintenance documentation as trained.</li> <li>• Report any faults or incidents to UAS Operator / Department Designated Person</li> <li>• The category Advanced Pilot, is awarded by the Accountable Manager, upon completion of all necessary training.</li> </ul>

### Appendix C Pilot Training / Minimum Competency

Period	Minimum Hours Flown	Minimum Requirement	Assessment By
Quarterly	2 Hours	Operational flying including use of safety case. Minimum of 3 Emergency Procedures and 2 hours of assessed flight	Senior Pilot or Training Officer.
Six Monthly	4 Hours	Log Book Inspection	Safety officer UAS Senior Pilot / UAS Operator.
Six Monthly	4 Hours	1 x Night Flight (Advanced Pilot)	Assessed flight by UAS Senior Pilot or Training Officer
Annually	8 Hours	Flight assessment by UAS Senior Pilot / UAS Operator	CPD training day includes Flight assessment and written assessment. Accountable Manager to oversee assessment. UAS Operator to retain all relevant documents for CAA.

## Appendix D Standard / Advanced Pilot

Remote Pilot Level	Permitted Operational Flying
UAS Pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can only fly within the confines of the standard OA;                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 150 metres from groups of people, parks, industrial, residential and built up areas;</li> <li>○ 50 metres from uncontrolled people/buildings (30 metres at take-off).</li> <li>○ A Standard Pilot cannot fly in darkness as this poses significant additional risks or deploy on mutual aid.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
UAS Advanced Pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are persons who have completed and passed the necessary CPD training sessions and are able to demonstrate a sufficient history of safe operational deployments in their log books;</li> <li>• Pilot classification will be at the discretion of the Accountable Manager.</li> <li>• Can deploy during the hours of darkness;</li> <li>• Can deploy on mutual aid.</li> </ul>

## Appendix E Legal Basis

Relevant legislation / Guidance (not exhaustive);
Air Navigation Order 2016
Air Navigation Order (Amendment) Act 2020
The Data Protection Act (2018)
The Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) Order (2000)
The Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) Order (2000)
The Computer Misuse Act (1990)
The Health and Safety at Work Order (NI) (1978)
Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999
Human Rights Act (1998) Article 8 (right to Privacy)
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) (2000)
Freedom of Information Act (2000)
Health & Social Care Act (Reform) Act (NI) 2009
CCTV National Code of Practice – Information Commissioner’s Office
Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000
The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Order (NI) (1997)
The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (Relevant Official Records) Order (NI) 2018

## Appendix F Contact Us

**Service Instruction Author**

**Branch Email**

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