



GUIDE TO GAINING A HELICOPTER LICENCE / CAREER

Introduction

People learn to fly helicopters for all sorts of reasons. Some have a yearning to fly for a living, many do it to increase mobility in their business and social lives, whilst others simply wish to satisfy a burning ambition. Whatever your reason for taking up the challenge you are sure to gain a real sense of achievement once you have mastered the art of flying a helicopter. Private flying is easy enough to organise. There are numerous training schools around the country which are either approved by or registered with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to train student pilots for the Private Pilot's Licence (Helicopters) (PPL(H)). The BHA has a list of training schools, who are members of the Association, on the website and the Fairoaks office staff are always happy to take inquiries on 01276 856100.

As a result of their complexity, helicopters are more expensive to operate than comparably sized aeroplanes. In recent years the industry has done much to reduce, in real terms, the cost of learning to fly a helicopter. As a result, we have seen a welcome rise in the number of private helicopter licences issued with increasing numbers of people, from all walks of life, satisfying their desire to fly a helicopter. Learning to fly helicopters is not necessarily as 'cost prohibitive' as it may first appear and those individuals who are prepared to put their mind to it can often realise their ambition to become a private helicopter pilot. However, the total expense in gaining a license should not be underestimated and many individuals choose to spread the cost of training over a year or longer; others prefer to save toward it or else raise a small loan and so train more intensively.

Flying for a living is a different matter. It can appear to the outsider to be glamorous, exciting and even a little risky - the stuff of adventure. The idea of Search and Rescue helicopters sweeping from a leaden sky to pluck survivors from a certain icy tomb has a fascination for a large number of young men and women. The glamour of flying rock stars or captains of industry, or perhaps aerial filming with TV crews or monitoring traffic for a local radio station might appeal even more. The reality is somewhat different, like so many walks of life. Most commercial flying is straight line, fetch and carry work. Offshore oil support operations (such as in the North Sea) often involve long transits, and onshore charter work usually means a lot of waiting around for passengers. It's about 95% routine and 5% excitement - again like most jobs! At whatever level you aspire to learn, this information sheet should answer some of the questions you are bound to have. The 'Brexit' vote might mean some changes in the future to the **guidance** given below.

Learning to Fly

Across much of Europe pilots are required to be licenced by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) before they can fly in command of any aircraft, apart from when on a recognised training course. In the UK these EASA licences are issued and enforced by the CAA. As with many parts of aviation, the reference material which lays down the requirements and regulations does not make easy reading. A good place to start is CAP 804, Flight Crew Licensing: Mandatory Requirement, Policy and Guidance, which can be found at the following link:

<http://publicapps.caa.co.uk/modalapplication.aspx?catid=1&pagetype=65&appid=11&mode=list&type=subcat&id=8&filter=2&reorder=refOrder>

Many good bookshops also offer books which detail the process, but these can quickly become dated as the regulations change regularly. Your training provider will also be a good source of information but a good tip is make sure you can meet the Class 1 Medical standards prior to starting out, should your desire be to fly commercially. There are broadly three forms of pilot's licence:

Private Pilot's Licence (PPL(H)). This is the entry-level qualification, which allows you to fly yourself and your friends or colleagues for purely private purposes. It is split into 2 divisions, which are fully explained in CAP 804:

The lesser Light Aircraft Pilots License (LAPL(H)) will only permit you to fly helicopters of under 2,000Kg with 3 passengers on board within Europe and takes a minimum of 40 hours. Flying "for hire or reward" (even in kind) is expressly forbidden, which means you cannot charge for your services.

The PPL(H) approved flying course stipulates a minimum of 45 flight hours, gained both under instruction and solo (a current fixed wing PPL entitles you to a 10% (maximum of 6 hours) dispensation on that). Helicopter pilots holding only a PPL(H) can be paid for various flying activities, most notably flying instruction. The syllabus for the PPL(H) licence includes a challenging cross-country navigation flight and simulated instrument flying. A night qualification course in addition to the standard PPL(H) is required before privileges for night flying are included on the PPL(H).

Ground exams in related subjects and an aviation medical must also be taken, and the entire package is available in your local area from any Registered Training Facility (RTF). Charges do vary, however, as a rough guide you might expect to pay between £250 and £500 for an hour's instruction but if you buy a PPL package it can cost upwards from £12,000. Also fees are levied by the CAA for such things as a medical certificate, flight skill test, examinations and of course to issue the actual licence once you have qualified! Unlike a driving licence, once the PPL is attained it is important to remain in practice as the regulations call for a minimum of 2 hours flying for each helicopter type or group of types per year plus an annual proficiency test with an examiner. Additionally, to enable you to carry passengers you must have completed at least one flight within the preceding 90 days. The PPL(H) is valid only for the type or group of helicopter types stipulated on the licence; if you want to fly a different type you must undertake a conversion course which normally involves 3 to 5 flying hours dependent upon the type of helicopter used.

The PPL(H) is generally regarded as the stepping stone to professional qualifications, however this is not always the case. If you decide to upgrade to a Commercial Pilots Licence don't be surprised if the training school wishes to review your abilities and requires further training to remove any bad habits you have picked up. Upgrading your PPL(H) to the CPL(H) is known as the 'Modular' route which is discussed in more detail in the section on the Commercial Pilots Licence. If you would like to take advantage of any sponsorship packages, which may from time to time exist, a PPL(H) will certainly demonstrate the required aptitude and commitment to the sponsoring company. Indeed, it may be a pre-requisite of the individual sponsorship scheme that the applicant possesses some sort of flying qualification to be selected (see later).

Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL(H)). This is the standard professional licence, and the one a pilot will hold at the end of a recognised training course under either the EASA modular or integrated systems.

Modular Training. This route was developed to enable holders of a PPL(H) to undertake professional training. The modular commercial pilots course may only be undertaken at an approved 'Modular' Flight Training Organisation (FTO). Following completion of the PPL(H) the

modular student will be required to gain sufficient experience as a PPL(H) to achieve 155 hours total helicopter flight time, of which at least 50 hours must have been as pilot in command of a helicopter. In addition, the student is required to undertake at least 500 hours of theoretical knowledge study covering the technical aspects of helicopter flying, aviation law, communications, meteorology, human performance, navigation, operational procedures, flight performance & planning together with instruments and electronics. Study for the commercial pilots examinations can be undertaken either in a classroom environment or else via a distance learning approach. At the end of the study programme the student pilot will be required to sit the commercial pilots examinations in:

- Air Law,
- Aircraft General Knowledge - Airframe/Systems/Powerplant,
- Aircraft General Knowledge – Instrumentation,
- Mass and Balance,
- Performance,
- Flight Planning and Monitoring,
- Human Performance,
- Meteorology,
- General Navigation,
- Radio Navigation,
- Operational Procedures,
- Principles of Flight,
- Visual Flight Rules (VFR) Communications.

Once the examinations have been successfully completed and the requisite flight experience gained, the student pilot may commence a 35-hour 'Commercial Flying' course. NB. This may be reduced to 30 hours where the PPL(H) includes night flying privileges. Upon completion of the course each student must undertake a commercial pilot 'skill test' with a CAA examiner their CPL(H) can be issued. Modular training is particularly popular thanks to its flexibility. The programme may be conducted entirely at the pace of the individual or to suit budgets and may be completed on either a full or part time basis. As a full time programme it would take at least 9 months to obtain the CPL(H).

Integrated Training. An alternative to the flexibility of the modular route, is a more formal environment offered by the 'Integrated' training colleges. The integrated commercial pilots course may only be undertaken at an approved 'Integrated' Flight Training Organisation (FTO). As its name suggests an 'Integrated' course combines all aspects of the requirements, both flying and theoretical knowledge, into one single course from which the student will graduate with an identical commercial pilot's licence to his or her modular course colleague. Integrated courses tend to be provided by the specialist aviation colleges, they are undertaken full time over 12 months and have fixed enrollment dates. Most integrated training colleges set pre-entry standards and, whilst these may vary, 5 GCSEs (including English and Maths or Physics), a professional pilot medical certificate and the satisfactory completion of aptitude tests may be considered as typical. The integrated student will gain 135 hours of helicopter flight time during the course including 50 hours as pilot in command of a helicopter. In the classroom he or she will undertake at least 500 hours of theoretical knowledge study covering the technical aspects of helicopter flying, aviation law, communications, meteorology, human performance, navigation, operational procedures, flight performance & planning together with instruments and electronics before sitting the nine CPL(H) examinations. Once their examinations have been completed each student must, like their modular colleague, undertake a commercial pilot 'skill test' with a CAA examiner before their CPL(H) can be issued.

Whether modular or integrated, current rates for the complete CPL(H) course are in the region of £50,000, depending on the school. Whilst this includes flying and theoretical knowledge instruction, it is wise to take into account the cost of board and lodging as this is usually additional. Undertaking a CPL(H) is an immense commitment with numerous considerations and as such it certainly deserves to be thoroughly thought out. The regulations are complex and confusing for the newcomer to the aviation industry. As a result it can seem like a minefield as few courses can be readily compared. The list of schools approved to conduct either modular or integrated commercial training is constantly changing, but contacting the BHA offices or one of the Training Organisations on the BHA website is a good starting point.

The Airline Transport Pilot's Licence (ATPL(H)) This is the senior licence to which many professional pilots will aspire, and requires 1000 hours total flight experience of which 250 hours must be as a pilot in command. Additionally, for an ATPL(H) to be issued the candidate must possess a valid Instrument Rating (IR) and have completed at least 70 hours of instrument flight time together with 350 hours of multi crew and multi-engined helicopter experience.

Integrated Training. A 'frozen' ATPL(H) can be directly attained as part of an integrated ATPL(H) course where the student will study at least 750 hours before undertaking the 14 ATPL(H) examinations. On the flight training side the integrated ATPL(H) student will complete twin engined and Instrument Rating training prior to completing the Commercial Pilot's and Instrument Rating skills tests before graduating from the course. The license issued upon graduation will be the CPL(H) including IR(H) with the ATPL(H) privileges 'frozen' until such time as the necessary experience requirements are satisfied.

Modular Training: A modular student can elect to study for the 14 ATPL(H) examinations rather than the CPL(H) alternatives. To achieve this he or she must undertake at least 650 hours of Theoretical Knowledge study either in the classroom or via distance learning prior to undertaking their ATPL(H) examinations. The licence issued upon graduation will be the CPL(H) with the ATPL(H) privileges frozen until such time as an Instrument Rating (IR(H)) is obtained and the necessary experience requirements satisfied. Bridging examinations A CPL(H) may choose to upgrade the licence to a ATPL(H) by undertaking a set of bridging examinations which comprises the theoretical knowledge element to the Instrument Rating together with a small number of more advanced areas of knowledge relating to their original CPL(H) studies. The status of the licence upon completion of the bridging examinations would depend upon completion of the Instrument Rating flight training course and IR(H) skill test together with being able to satisfy the necessary experience requirements

In theory, one of the principal advantages of an EASA license is that it is accepted by every European national authority as licensing the pilot to fly in operations of all the countries within the Common Aviation Area. However, do not be surprised when foreign companies appear to prefer their own nationals. As legislation is continually changing it is strongly recommend that those contemplating becoming a helicopter pilot seek appropriate advice before embarking upon a course of training. Training courses for EASA licences must be carried out in flying schools that are either registered with or approved by the civil aviation authority of the country concerned. For pilots holding EASA licences, only those holding a CPL(H) or ATPL(H) will be permitted to be remunerated for their flying.

However, the requirements for and privileges of EASA licences are different from the previous UK national professional pilot licences. The EASA ATPL(H) licence will be required for pilots flying two crew helicopters, and must include a valid instrument rating. The EASA CPL(H) may or may not

include an instrument rating, but the holder will only be entitled to fly as pilot in command in a 'single pilot' helicopter. Without a valid Instrument Rating the holder will be restricted to flights conducted in daylight visual conditions. There are provisions for those holding existing UK national licences and ratings to be able to continue to exercise the privileges of these licences in the EASA environment but all licence revalidations and renewals must follow the EASA requirements.

Training Schools.

Unless stated otherwise, Part-FCL requires that training specified to gain or maintain as valid an EASA licence, rating or certificate must be received from an Approved Training Organisation (ATO), that is approved in accordance with Part-ORA of their regulations. Organisations providing training for the issue of UK national licences or ratings, shall either: hold an organisation approval under Part-ORA; or shall be approved by or acceptable to the CAA for the purpose. What this means is that it is important to check what licence your training provider is aiming you at.

Registered Training Facility (RTF). This is the status assigned to any training provider that wishes to conduct ONLY training toward the issue of a EASA PPL(H). In order for a UK RTF to offer PPL(H) training they must register as such with the CAA. No formal approval process exists, but in the interests of flight safety, any RTF can expect to be scrutinised by the Authority from time to time. Under the regulations an RTF is restricted to teaching on single engined types with a maximum seating capacity of four. An RTF may not offer a qualified PPL(H) conversion training onto any additional type (including those upon which they conduct their own PPL(H) training).

Type Rating Training Organisation (TRTO). UK TRTOs are formally approved by the CAA to conduct 'post qualification' conversion training in respect of specified types and classes of helicopter. In the majority of cases such approvals are for single pilot operated, single-engined helicopter types of the sort an average private pilot might wish to add to their licence. Some organisations will also hold approvals for single pilot operated, multi-engined light helicopter types. The major helicopter operating companies hold TRTO approval for the more complex medium and large multi-pilot, multi-engined types used by professional pilots for scheduled public transport work such as that in support of the UK offshore oil industry.

Flight Training Organisations (FTO). A FTO is approved by the CAA to conduct the advanced pilot training associated with the initial issue of the Commercial Pilot's Licence, Instrument Rating or Instructor Rating. Whilst some FTO's may hold multiple approval to conduct each of the above advanced training courses others may, for example, be approved to teach only Commercial Pilots or Flying Instructors. General In the case of Commercial Pilot training FTO's may be approved to teach to either the Integrated or Modular syllabus or indeed to both syllabi.

From the 8 April 2012, Flight Training Organisations (FTOs) and Type Rating Training Organisations (TRTOs) that on that date held an approval under JAR-FCL, were deemed to be Approved Training Organisations (ATOs) for the scope of their approval at that time. These organisations must become fully compliant with Parts ORA and FCL by 8 April 2014, and any new courses for licences, ratings or other qualifications must be approved as compliant with Part-FCL. Registered Training Facilities (RTFs) that were recorded as registered with an EU National Aviation Authority on 8 April 2012 (17 September 2012 for RTFs located in the UK) can continue to provide PPL training until 7 April 2018. To continue after that date or to offer other courses, a Registered Facility must become an Approved Training Organisations (ATO) in accordance with Part ORA. From 8 April 2015, RTFs that were approved to conduct PPL training may also conduct LAPL courses under their existing approval for the same category of aircraft. Training providers may hold any or all of the above status/approvals across their various

training bases. In early 1016 EASA started looking at the subject of Training outside of an ATO but this issue still has a long way to go before it is settled. The BHA office will be able to give you a steer on Association Members who can provide the training you want.

Training Overseas.

Under EASA training for a EASA licence may only take place outside of a EASA state where, in addition to meeting the requirements for becoming an approved FTO, a school also satisfies a number of further conditions relating to the instructional staff engaged. Some other EASA member states may be unwilling to accept a EASA licence which has been issued in respect of a EASA course conducted outside of the EU. CAP 804 is a good place to start when looking at what the CAA will require you to do to convert a non-EASA licence. It may appear to be a lot cheaper to gain a FAA licence in in the States but check what hurdles you need to pass to convert it to an CAA/EASA licence. Plus consider whether a prospective employer would like your flight hours to have been gained in EU weather conditions, with all the airmanship points that entails, or through hours building in a benign climate like Arizona. Training overseas can work out to be much more expensive in the long run, especially if additional flying/ground training is required upon your return to seek work in the UK. How much does it cost?

Other Considerations.

Before committing any significant sums of money, it would be a good idea to take a trial flying lesson to make sure learning to fly is something you really want to do. All flying training schools will offer trial lessons, usually at a reduced rate.

As previously stated, before any licence can be issued, candidates must complete and pass an aviation medical carried out by an Authorised Medical Examiner (AME). To avoid wasting money, this should be done at the start of your training, just in case you have a condition that would prohibit you flying. Your local training school should be able to provide the names of AMEs where you can take the medical. There will be a fee for the medical. Alternatively, you can search for a doctor in your area via the Civil Aviation Authority's website, www.caa.co.uk under Safety Regulation Group, Medical, Find an AME.

Check your chosen school's financial requirements and seek advice before paying any money up front. Training schools have been known to cease trading, and those who committed funds were unable to recover their money. Rates vary depending on the flying school, so it is a good idea to shop around. As a rough guide, you might expect to pay between £200 and £350 per hour for an instructional sortie. To gain your Private Pilot's Licence (PPL(H)) can cost upwards of £12,000. To gain your Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL(H)) will cost in the region of £50,000.

How do I pay? Sponsorship is very occasionally available, though it is not easy to obtain, with intense competition for any vacancies. Sponsoring companies typically require a current flying qualification, a Class 1 medical, education up to 'A' level standard, and candidates of an age between 18 and 27. Unless you train with the armed forces, you will almost certainly have to pay for your own training, be it with your savings or a loan. Should you decide to take out a loan in order to pay for training to become a commercial pilot, it is imperative to realise that there are no guarantees that you will find employment as a pilot once you are qualified.

Prospect of Employment. The supply and demand for helicopter pilots can fluctuate from year to year and precedence will inevitably be given to experienced pilots. Newly-qualified pilots can sometimes find it difficult to get work, so it would be wise to have a back-up plan and not to re-mortgage your house on the strength of getting work as a commercial pilot. This may seem an overly pessimistic view, but some potential commercial

pilots have been told they will have absolutely no problem finding work, have taken out large loans in order to pay for training, and have then found themselves deep in debt and unable to find employment as a pilot. The supply of helicopter pilots, especially in the field of offshore support operations, may dwindle as senior pilots reach retirement age and others are attracted to move to fixed-wing airline operations. In addition, whilst ex-military pilots enjoy an advantage in certain specialist roles such as in the police aviation field and search and rescue, the number leaving the armed forces may also decrease. These conditions may open up employment opportunities in the future.

The Armed Forces. Another way to learn to fly helicopters is with HM forces. Your commitment is asked for in other ways of course. The age limits are similar to civil sponsorship as well, but after 8-years of service, you should be in a reasonable position, including flight time, to complete your CPL(H) or ATPL(H) studies. Assuming there are suitable jobs around, you may be well qualified for some of the more demanding roles out of reach to the newly qualified CPL(H).

Summary

Professional helicopter training involves an immense commitment with numerous considerations requiring careful thought. Planning your intentions is important; seeking advice is equally sensible and should be regarded as an essential component of any proposed career change. Be very careful about committing yourself to overseas training, and make sure that you fully understand what will be required if your eventual goal is an EASA licence. The BHA recommends reference to the CAA publication CAP 802 This useful booklet contains comprehensive details of licensing requirements and answers many frequently asked questions. A copy may be obtained from Civil Aviation Authority, Personnel Licensing Department, Aviation House, Gatwick Airport South, West Sussex, RH6 0YR or on line on their website. We hope we have given you an idea of the situation regarding helicopter pilot training. Specific questions on the subjects of eligibility or training should be addressed to the companies direct. Full details on all BHA member companies are available in our annual handbook. Feel free to contact us: The British Helicopter Association, Fair Oaks Airport, Chobham, Woking, Surrey, GU24 8HU T. +44 (0) 1276 856100 / F. +44 (0) 1276 856126 / info@britishhelicopterassociation.org