



Becoming a Helicopter Pilot

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.

Rising to the challenge

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 Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) Private Pilot's Licence.

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. 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 choppers 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 hither and yon, 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.



Learning to fly – Now

Across much of Europe pilots are required to be licensed by the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) before they can fly in command of any aircraft away from a recognised training course. In the UK these JAA licences are issued and enforced by the CAA.

This section offers some background to the recently adopted JAA regulations for pilot training. Ultimately, it is anticipated that these standards (known as Joint Aviation Requirements - or JAR's for short) will be implemented across the whole of greater Europe (and perhaps even beyond).

'Flight Crew Licensing' standards are part of 'JAR-FCL' with helicopter regulations contained within the second part of these manuals. Helicopter training is therefore commonly referred to as being 'conducted to JAR-FCL 2'

Within JAR-FCL 2 there are three forms of pilot's licence.

1. The 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. Flying "for hire or reward" (even in kind) is expressly forbidden, which means you cannot charge for your services.

The JAA 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). 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 £175 and £280 per flying hour, so a PPL(H) can cost upwards of £10,000. In addition, 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 dependant 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 JAA 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).

2. The 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 JAA 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 a JAA 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 JAA 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 nine commercial pilots examinations.



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 before his or her 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

As an alternative to the flexibility of the modular route some individuals will prefer the more formal environment offered by the 'Integrated' training colleges. The integrated commercial pilots course may only be undertaken at a JAA 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 JAA 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.



General

Whether modular or integrated, current rates for the complete CPL(H) course are in the region of £45,000, 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, however the list contained in Annex A was correct at the time this page was created.

3. 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 JAA 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 licence 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 JAA ATPL(H) examinations rather than the 9 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 JAA CPL(H) may choose to upgrade the licence to a JAA 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.

The Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA)

The UK Civil Aviation Authority implemented the Joint Aviation Requirement (JAR) relating to helicopter pilot training and licensing - JAR-FCL 2 of the Joint Aviation Authorities on 1 January 2000. This significantly changed the training and licensing of those wishing to become helicopter pilots from that date.

The JAA is a group representing the civil aviation authorities of some 34 member states from across the Greater European area. Full details of the member countries and their membership status can be found on the JAA website at <http://www.jaa.nl/>. To quote from their site:

"The Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) is an associated body of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) representing the civil aviation regulatory authorities of a number of European States who have agreed to co-operate in developing and implementing common safety regulatory standards and procedures. This co-operation is intended to provide high and consistent standards of safety and a "level playing-field" for competition in Europe. Much emphasis is also placed on harmonising the JAA regulations with those of the USA."

A principal objective of the JAA is to develop and adopt Joint Aviation Requirements (JAR's) in the fields of aircraft design and manufacture, aircraft operations and maintenance, and the licensing of aviation personnel. JAR-FCL 2 is the JAR that covers the training and licensing of helicopter pilots.

In theory, one of the principal advantages of JAR-FCL 2 is that a pilot holding such a licence will have that licence accepted by every JAA authority as licensing the pilot to fly in operations of all the countries within the JAA. It remains to be seen whether this



will be the case in practice, and whether this will widen job opportunities for pilots or not.

Although JAR-FCL 2 was introduced into the UK in January 2000, major changes to JARFCL 2 are still being considered by the JAA. As it is impossible to incorporate all of these changes as they take effect we strongly recommend that those contemplating becoming a helicopter pilot seek appropriate advice before embarking upon a course of training.

Training courses for JAR 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 JAR licences, only those holding a CPL(H) or ATPL(H) will be permitted to be remunerated for their flying. NB, under pre- JAR-FCL 2 arrangements, helicopter pilots holding only a UK PPL(H) could be paid for various flying activities, most notably flying instruction.

The syllabus for the PPL(H) licence under JAR-FCL 2 includes a challenging cross-country navigation flight and simulated instrument flying. The minimum number of helicopter flying hours required under JAR-FCL 2 is 45. A night qualification course in addition to the standard PPL(H) is required before privileges for night flying are included on the PPL(H).

The professional licences are still known as the CPL(H) and ATPL(H). However, the requirements for and privileges of the licences are different from the previous UK national professional pilot licences. The JAR-FCL 2 ATPL(H) licence will be required for pilots flying two crew helicopters, and must include a valid instrument rating. The JAR 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 JAA environment. To achieve this, all licence revalidation and renewal must follow the JAR requirements.

JAA Training Schools

Following the implementation of JAA regulations flight training providers must now fall into one of several defined categories, these are explained below:



Registered Training Facility (RTF)

This is the status assigned to any training provider that wishes to conduct ONLY training toward the issue of a JAR FCL 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 Type Rating Training Organisations 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 Flight Training Organisation (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.



Training providers may hold any or all of the above status/approvals across their various training bases. Full details of the various categories and approvals held by the BHA member companies are contained at the end of this document.

Training overseas

Under JAR-FCL, training for a JAA licence may only take place outside of a JAA 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.

These further requirements have not yet been fully determined by the JAA and, despite the limited approvals conducted by the UK CAA, they may yet change and risk becoming impractical for overseas schools.

Some other JAA member states may be unwilling to accept a JAA licence which has been issued in respect of a JAA course conducted outside of the JAA.

As far as the Private Pilot's Licence is concerned, the CAA has now implemented an amendment to JAR FCL 2 which requires the holder of a valid PPL(H) issued by another ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) state to meet the following conditions:

1. Hold a licence issued in accordance with ICAO Annex 1 which is current and valid in all respects (additional procedures exist for expired or lapsed foreign PPL(H)'s)
2. Hold at least a JAR-FCL Class 2 Medical Certificate
3. Pass the JAR Air Law examination
4. Pass the JAR Human Performance and Limitations examination
5. Have completed a minimum of 100 hours flight time as pilot of helicopters
6. Pass the JAR PPL(H) Skill Test
7. Pass the JAR-FCL Radiotelephony (RT) theoretical knowledge examination and the RT practical test with an authorised RTF examiner in order to obtain a UK Flight Radiotelephony Operator's Licence (FRTOL).

For those who elect to undertake a foreign professional licence and then subsequently return to the UK intending to convert it to a JAR-FCL equivalent, the individual will, in many respects, have to start all over.

In addition to the requirements stated above, the holder of a CPL(H) issued outside of the JAA can, on his or her return, also expect to complete:

1. A JAR-FCL Class 1 Medical Examination
2. A course of commercial flight training
3. A course of theoretical knowledge training



4. Obtain a full pass for all JAR FCL examination subjects (NB there are no exemptions)
5. Obtain a pass in the JAR FCL CPL(H) skills tests.

The negotiations on the conversion of overseas licences are not fully concluded and further changes additional to the above could be forthcoming.

Prospective professional helicopter pilots should be warned that it is a JAA requirement for any JAA licence issued on the basis of a conversion from a non JAA standard must be so endorsed and as such it may not then be accepted by other JAA states.

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?

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.

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 £175 and £280 per hour.

To gain your Private Pilot's Licence (PPL(H)) can cost upwards of £10,000.

To gain your Commercial Pilot's Licence (CPL(H)) will cost in the region of £45,000.



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 JAA 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 service, you should be in a reasonable position, including flight time, to complete your JAA 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 a JAR-FCL licence.

The BHA recommends reference to the CAA publication LASORS (Licensing Administration and Standardisation Operating Requirements and Safety). 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.

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.

Pilot Training Schools (Annex A)



SCHOOLS	CONTACT	LOCATION
BIH (Onshore) Ltd	T. 01392 366580 www.bih.uk.com	Coventry
Babcock Mission Critical Services Onshore Ltd	T. 01452 856007 www.babcockinternational.com	Staverton
Bristow Helicopters Ltd	T. 01224 723151 www.bristowgroup.com	Aberdeen
East Midlands Helicopters	T. 01509 856464 www.helicopter-services.co.uk	Costock
Heli Air Ltd	T. 01789 470476 www.heliair.com	Wellesbourne
HQ Aviation Ltd	T. 01895 833373 operations@hgaviationltd.com	Denham
Multiflight	T. 0113 238 7100 www.multiflight.com	Leeds
PDG Helicopters	T. 01667 462740 www.pdghelicopters.com	Inverness
Sloane Helicopters Ltd	T.01604 790595 www.sloanehelicopters.com	Sywell
Specialist Aviation Services	T. 01452 857999 www.specialist-aviation.com	Staverton
Starspeed Ltd	T. 01276 859100 www.starspeed.co.uk	Fairoaks Airport