

# Chief Pilot



# What is a Chief Pilot?

The term ‘Chief Pilot’ is not used in the Civil Aviation Rules.

In Part 119 *Air Operator – Certification* general aviation certificate holders are required to employ a “senior person” who is responsible for “air operations and the supporting ground operations”.

This person is responsible to the company’s Chief Executive, and can be given any title the company chooses. Common examples are ‘Chief Pilot’ or ‘Operations Manager’. Larger companies may elect to split the responsibilities of this role, and perhaps employ both an Operations Manager and a Chief Pilot.

For simplicity, this booklet uses the term ‘Chief Pilot’ to describe the role.

## Chief Pilots

Chief Pilots need operational expertise, technical know-how, management ability, effective leadership skills and business sense.

Keeping a finger in every pie, they are the conduit between pilots, management and the Civil Aviation Rules.

If the business is not performing commercially – they are held responsible. If safety is compromised – they are held responsible. If their pilots are disgruntled – they are held responsible.

It is a demanding job, and one that few new Chief Pilots expect or are prepared for.

This booklet has been developed with the help of experienced and successful Chief Pilots, and their bosses, to help others better



*Richard Rayward*

understand the responsibilities of the role, and to offer some practical advice.

*“Above all else, Chief Pilots need to set the sort of example in all facets of their job, that they wish their team to follow.”*

*– Richard Rayward, Managing Director – Operations, Air Safaris.*

### About the job

The Civil Aviation Rules require Part 119/135 air operations companies (small aeroplanes and helicopters) to employ a senior person responsible for air operations including flight and ground operations – the Chief Pilot.

Chief Pilots accept responsibility for the company’s flight operations, both in the air and on the ground. If appropriately qualified, they may also be approved to handle crew training and competency assessments.

In smaller businesses, the Chief Pilot may also be approved to do other jobs such as controlling maintenance or investigating company accidents and incidents. Again, this will depend on qualifications and experience. In a one-person ‘owner-operator’ business, the Chief Pilot has the added pressure of also being the line pilot, the booking clerk, the cleaner and the boss.

The Chief Pilot is named in the company’s operating manual. They must meet minimum experience requirements (see page 15) and be approved by the CAA. Prospective Chief Pilots sit both written and oral tests of their knowledge, are personally interviewed by the CAA, and must meet ‘fit and proper person’ criteria.

There is absolutely no option for a Chief Pilot to be employed by a company in ‘name only’, leaving the real running of the business to a less experienced pilot. CAA safety auditors take a very close look at the whereabouts and performance of Chief Pilots during routine audits, and spot checks and other random surveillance.

Successful Chief Pilots maintain a tight grip on every detail of their organisation. They do this by setting high standards and ensuring these are met. They check that their systems are being followed, and take nothing for granted. They scrutinise these systems regularly to make sure they are still relevant, and that they are providing a lean, successful business without compromising safety.

For CAA safety auditors, the Chief Pilot is the barometer of an aviation company’s compliance health.

*“You want to see the Chief Pilot running the flying, not the other way around. They should be thinking ahead of potential problems, not just knee-jerking.”*

*“Chief Pilots should have an intimate knowledge of their company manual, and the Rules. When you see a Chief Pilot flicking haphazardly through their manual to find answers, you know you won’t have to look far to find safety problems.”*

*– Graham Guy, CAA safety auditor and former Chief Pilot*

## Company manuals

### ‘By the book’

Many Chief Pilots come direct to the role from operational line flying or instructing. They may not have taken much notice of company manuals before.

*“It’s a real mental shift to go from asking your Chief Pilot questions, to being the one who’s supposed to know the answers. That’s where the manual comes in.”*

*– Jeff Graham, CAA flight operations inspector and former aero club Chief Pilot*

Company manuals (also called expositions) detail how the operation intends to meet the requirements of the Rules. In preparing a manual, aviation companies predict potential problems and decide how they will respond in typical situations. Manuals include details such as actions to be taken after accidents and incidents, flight and duty times for crews, and procedures that list the way the company carries out its day-to-day activities.

The CAA assesses manuals in detail during the company certification process. The company, and in particular the Chief Pilot, are then responsible for ensuring that the operation is run exactly as the manual says. Manuals must reflect what works for the operation. If the company decides to change the way it does things, these changes must be written into the manual.

You can think of your manual as a written reminder of how your company does things, and of how it ensures safety for your customers and pilots, and efficiency for your employer.

You need this written reminder for several reasons.

The first is so that you don't forget to do things. Every task in a company's manual has been put there so the actions that have to be done to ensure safety are actually done. In many instances these procedures have been placed in the manual as solutions to risks identified by Chief Pilots before you.

*“You’ve got to have systems in place to remind you to do all the things a Chief Pilot has to do. You can’t remember it all yourself, and in the case of HNZ, you can’t do it all yourself. We have senior people who report to me at all our bases.*

*“You’ve got to make sure everyone is doing things the way the company procedures have set out. Some 85 percent of accidents are caused by human factors and people not following standard operating procedures.”*

*– Jim Wilson, Chief Pilot at Helicopters (NZ)*

Another reason for written manuals is so that the CAA can audit the company against what it said it would do to provide safety for the public. A copy of every company's manual is kept at the CAA, and during safety audits, spot checks and other unscheduled surveillance, the company's operations



*Jim Wilson*



are checked directly against its manual.

For example: If your manual says you have a system for ensuring that your pilots do not exceed their flight and duty times, the CAA auditor will want to see that blackboard, white board, computer file, clipboard, or other system. He or she will want to see that it is up to date, and that it works.

*“The Chief Pilot has got to have their act together. A CAA audit doesn’t guarantee the flight safety of your operation – you do.”*

*– Jim Wilson*

A written manual replaces you when you are not there. It means everyone can always access guidance and company rules. It is your job to ensure it remains specific, relevant and up-to-date. If you leave it on a shelf gathering dust between audits – it'll show.

Among some levels of the industry, the turnover among Chief Pilots is high. Many stay in the position less than 18 months.



It is likely then, that you have taken over a fully developed and approved company manual from your predecessor. If not, you may have got the job of writing or updating the manual yourself, and you will be facing extra pressures as you struggle to avoid getting bogged down in the paper work.

*“If you’re writing or updating your manual, try not to get fixated on it at the expense of being at the coal face. You’ve got to keep getting out among your pilots, or you’ll suddenly look up to find company has slid well behind the eight ball.”*

*– Geoff Ensor, Chief Pilot at Air Safaris.*



Geoff Ensor

### **‘Beyond the book’**

To be considered acceptable, your manual must comply with the Rules, but don’t forget, the Rules are the minimum standard.

So, if you decide to set standards beyond these minimums, or to establish special

procedures for night operations, taxi routes, restricted weather minima for less experienced pilots and so on – these should all go in the manual.

For example, you may decide that because your operation uses twin-engine aircraft, all of your pilots are going to practice a single-engine approach once every two months. Now that you have set the standard, how are you going to make sure it happens?

What control system are you going to put in place? One idea could be to pin a list of your pilot’s names on the wall in your office and tick them off as they do their approach. You could either replace the list every two months, or have six columns and replace it every year. The systems don’t have to be complex and time consuming, but a well-run company needs them.

*“Having a system isn’t rocket science. It just has to work. And you have to know whether it’s working.”*

*– Rick Bulger, CAA Manager Safety Audit.*

## **Coping with commercial pressures**

Chief Pilots can expect to experience commercial pressures to cut corners and to try and do things more cheaply. This is a false economy. Your company will be more successful in the long run if you set high standards and stick to them. The losses you face if you don’t take this approach will not just be financial ones.

*“Chief Pilots who are feeling the effects of commercial pressure have to remember that they are responsible for people’s lives. You’ve got to look after the company financially, but don’t let anything pressure you into making a decision you know isn’t right.”*

*– Russell Jenkins, Chief Executive of Associated Aviation Flying School and Operations Manager at Origin Pacific Airlines.*



Russell Jenkins

*“If you think the requirements are too demanding, try thinking about it from the perspective of something having just gone wrong. When the CIB are investigating you for the cause of death following a fatal accident, what will you say when they ask you when the pilot last did a check ride? ‘Oh, I don’t know’? You’d be shot down in flames. Tragedies can be avoided. The requirements are not too demanding at all.”*

*– Jim Wilson*

Extra standards you should consider developing include:

- Actions to be taken after an accident or incident. You need a disaster plan, either in your manual, or as a separate document, that contains all the answers that you don’t want to be spending time looking for when things go wrong. These could include:
  - Telephone numbers for next-of-kin for all your pilots and other staff, as well as management.
  - A section on handling the media – who will have the authority to do this? What should they say?
  - A section on your company’s involvement in search and rescue operations. Who should do the flying? Are they up-to-date on rescue flying techniques? What if one of your own is missing? Do you have an action checklist pinned next to the telephone with telephone numbers for the Police, CAA, Airways Corporation, etc?
  - A section on any other matters peculiar to your operating environment, such as specialist communications.
- A check list so you automatically know whether an incident should be reported to the CAA, how it should be recorded in the company’s records, who will investigate the problem, and how. As well, you should have a system for recording what preventative action will be taken as a result of any investigation.

Your manual should also tell you how often it should be reviewed to ensure it is still making sense for your operation.

Perhaps your company has never had an engine failure. You might decide your pilots don't need to practice single-engine approaches more than twice a year. If so – update your manual. A book full of information that does not accurately reflect your business is cumbersome, expensive and wastes time.

Knowing all this is one thing; applying what you know in day-to-day terms is another. The following practical routine should assist you in fulfilling your role.

## Monthly

### Team meetings

The Chief Pilot of a general aviation business needs to formally meet with his or her pilots every month. If your operation has several bases, that means getting around to each one. Being there in person is the only way to be sure company procedures are being followed, and that grizzles are being heard.

Use this monthly meeting to:

- Review and discuss past, current and future operations.
- Present any information that must be passed on from the company's management.
- Present updates on any maintenance done on your aircraft.
- Highlight any changes relating to your operation in the IFG, VFG, Planning Manuals and other AIP documents.

- Discuss incidents, accidents and other occurrences; explain your investigations into these and the results of your findings.
- Discuss your observations of your pilots' flying over the past month.
- Reinforce company operating procedures.
- Present a tutorial on some aspect of your aircraft type(s) or operations.

*“With safety education, there's no point in doing it once. The best personal quality a Chief Pilot can have is persistence.”*

*– Jim Wilson*

### Review logbooks

Each month, review all pilot logbooks for:

- Correctness of flight hours against aircraft flight records. Check your pilots' flight and duty times.
- Ensure each pilot is current. Consider whether they are due for check rides, instrument rating renewals or Biennial Flight Reviews.

*“Check rides are an excellent opportunity to find out what's going on in your company. Ask your people if there's anything additional they want to practice, or any emergency procedures they want to go over again. Ask whether there's anything on their mind? Listening to your people is really the key to staying on top of things.”*

*– Jim Wilson*



- Check whether your pilots need more general recurrency training. When was the last time they practiced a single-engine or glide approach? Is your system for making sure it happens still working?
- Are the logbooks neat? These are legal documents, not scrap books.

Some companies opt to review logbooks less frequently. As Chief Pilot, you may prefer to do this every three or six months, or even annually, and to augment this with random sampling. It is up to you to decide what works best for your operation.

### *Review occurrences*

Ensure that company accidents and incidents over the previous month have been properly reported to the CAA, logged in the company's system, and that any investigation is proceeding or completed. Where appropriate, an internal accident or incident report should be posted somewhere that your pilots can read it – it is your job to check that they do – so maybe you need a check sheet that all the pilots sign off.

### *Rosters*

Many Chief Pilots elect to prepare monthly rosters. Set up your roster so that weaker pilots fly with more experienced pilots or instructors. Ensure flight and duty times are not exceeded. Ensure that there is time left for pilots to do secondary duties as appropriate.

### *Check standard weights*

Each month, you should check that the standard figures your operation uses still reflect reality. Check fuel burn figures on a

random selection of representative flights. Ensure fuel used, against fuel loaded and fuel remaining, balance against your predictions. People have run out of fuel using 'standard' fuels, and you may actually save your company money if you can track where all the fuel is going.

Check there have been no alterations to aircraft loadings. Do a check on a couple of flights by weighing passengers and their baggage and doing a manual weight and balance. If the results are in line with your 'standard' weights, then fine. But if not, figure out why. You may then have to undertake a good statistical sampling exercise to establish a new figure and get the manual changed – and that may include getting the amendment accepted by the CAA.

Check that your standard C of G figures are not being compromised by your loading procedures. Are you doing anything differently that could affect the C of G?

Do a reality check in every area of your operation in which you use a 'standard' anything.

### **Weekly**

Which checks you carry out each week will depend on the size and type of your operation. You may like to do all of these checks, or just some of them. Your job is to develop and stick to a checklist that is right for your business.

### *Review flight operations*

Check flight and duty records, and make sure all pilots are complying.

## Review rosters

Check a random sample of flight documentation for correctness (do this on at least 30 percent of the documentation).

Review flight operations generally, based on what your pilots have been telling you that week, and your own observations. What could you be doing better, or more safely?

If you decide to make any changes, carry out a full risk assessment before you implement anything. Consult with your senior pilots to ensure everything has been thought of.

Check that your roster is still working.

If you have pilots off sick, has this thrown your balance of experienced to weaker pilots out the window, or is the roster valid?

## Check performance

Fly with your pilots on a very regular, but random basis. Captain for your copilots and copilot for your captains. Look for things like:

- consistency and safety in everyone's operations
- company procedures are observed
- recommended and mandatory speeds and altitudes are met in all respects.
- Ask test questions like "What if an engine failure happened now?" and "Remind me what the proper speed or rpm is for this action."
- Safe taxi speeds

- Think about your pilots individually. Is anything happening in their personal lives that could effect their performance, and so safety? How is morale generally?

## Daily

Check your roster, is it still working?

Make a note daily of any items that crop up for discussion at your next monthly meeting.

## One-person companies

If you're doing it all yourself, you will face a special set of problems. To get it right you will need to step outside yourself and be your own line pilot. The procedures will be the same. You will need to monitor your own flight and duty times, and take time out to sit down and figure out how your systems are holding up. You will have to be just as hard on yourself as you would a line pilot. If you've made a mistake, figure out why and give yourself some training. Good organisation will save you just as much time day-to-day, and in an emergency, as it will a large-scale operation. If you occasionally hire back-up pilots for the busy times, don't forget that you are their Chief Pilot. You are responsible for ensuring their medicals are up to date, that they have completed their competency and currency requirements, and that they are reminded about the particularities of the way your operation runs. You are responsible for their actions, and for ensuring that they trust you enough to speak up about safety concerns.

*“Don’t let pride get in the way of asking for advice. Try other Chief Pilots that you respect, or the CAA. You are not, nor do you need to be, a one-man band. While the final decision may rest with you, you should access all the advice you can.”*

– Geoff Ensor

## About you

It is widely acknowledged that being a Chief Pilot can feel like being wedged between a rock and a hard place. The Chief Pilot’s own neck rests on the chopping block where safety is concerned – 24 hours a day. And yet this responsibility must be balanced with the responsibility of running a lean and profitable business. The two are not incompatible, but certainly a careful balance is needed, and in that respect, experience and maturity will be your biggest assets.



Neil Scott

Experience will tell you when you are facing a situation you have never come across before, and maturity will enable you to seek advice on the best way to handle it.

Professionally you need to be the best aviator in the company. Know yourself, know your aircraft and know your environment. You should be constantly critical of your own flying and always striving to improve. If, for example, you accept whatever speed over the fence you can get or whatever altitude downwind the aircraft (rather than you) deems appropriate, you will be sending the message to your pilots that this is all you expect.

*“It’s no picnic reaching these standards. It’s the ideal, but everybody should reach for it. Chief Pilots shouldn’t shy away from asking for advice and assistance.”*

– Neil Scott, Chief Pilot at Garden City Helicopters.

Know your aircraft inside and out, every limitation, every system, every circuit breaker, and every little handling characteristic. You should be the authority on it. Only your engineer should have a better technical knowledge of your company aircraft than you. You should fly all your company routes on a regular basis and know all there is to know about them, day and night and in any weather.

You should also have an intimate knowledge of the Rules that apply to your company's operations. All Rules and Advisory Circulars are available free on the CAA's web site or at low cost on 0800 GET RULES (0800 438 785). If you have any problems understanding parts of a rule, you can contact the CAA's Operator Certification Unit for informal advice at any time.

As Chief Pilot, you also need to know yourself well. It is essential that you have time off, and that you know when you need it. Part of your job is training others up so well that you can take time off without everything falling apart. If the operation can't run without you, take it as a sign that you're not doing your job properly.

Generally, your personal standards are vital in everything you do. If you are routinely late on scheduled takeoffs, so will others be. If you dress and look as though you have been partying all night, so will others in your team. If you are changeable and

inconsistent, so will their performance be. If you do not support the company management both in deed and vocally, then nor will others.

*“You have to have the responsibility to stand up for what you know is right. There have been several accidents in the past few years where, after the event, pilots — both line and Chief — have come out and said ‘we knew the operator wasn't logging hours, or was skimping on maintenance’. Obviously it's too late then. If a Chief Pilot feels that something is not right they should discuss it with the owner or management of the business. If the owner is not prepared to change, the Chief Pilot should have the conviction to walk away from the job.”*

*– Robyn Reid, Chief Executive of Nelson Helicopters*



Robyn Reid

In all areas, you set the standards. The way your team operates will be a direct reflection of these standards. When you look at the pilots in your company, what do you want to see looking back?



## Industry advisers



Helicopters (NZ) Ltd has aircraft working in New Zealand, Australia, South-East Asia, off-shore oil platforms and Antarctica. They have 65 pilots flying 37 helicopters. Jim Wilson

has been flying helicopters commercially since 1967, and has been Chief Pilot at Helicopters (NZ) since 1978. He is an A-category flight instructor (helicopter) and a flight examiner. Jim is also a Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer and has completed several Flight Safety International training courses in the United States.

Nelson Helicopters Ltd operates three helicopters throughout New Zealand and employs four pilots. Robyn Reid has been Nelson Helicopters' Chief Executive since its inception in 1983.



Russell Jenkins has been Operations Manager at the regional airline Origin Pacific Airways Ltd, since 1998. Russell has also owned and operated the Paraparaumu flight training school,

Associated Aviation Ltd, since 1983. An A-category instructor, Russell has been flying professionally in the fields of flight training, scenic and charter flying, and third level and regional airlines since 1978.



Air Safaris and Services (NZ) Ltd is a scenic and charter-flight company based at Lake Tekapo and Franz Josef. Richard Rayward has been Managing Director – Operations of the company since its

inception in 1970. He has been flying professionally since 1967. Geoff Ensor has been Air Safaris' Chief Pilot since 1994 and has been flying professionally since 1985 in scenic, charter and airline commuter operations.

Neil Scott is Chief Pilot and Operations Manager at Garden City Helicopters based at Christchurch. Neil has been flying professionally since 1966 and holds his A-category instructor ratings on both helicopters and aeroplanes. Garden City operates six helicopters and one fixed-wing aircraft. The company carries out air ambulance flights, general operations and helicopter flight training, and it employs eight pilots full time and three part time.





## Checklists

### Monthly

#### *Team Meetings*

Past and current operations  
 Incident and accident investigation results  
 Aircraft maintenance updates  
 Relevant AIP changes  
 Pilots' flying performance  
 Company operating procedures  
 Information from management  
 Safety education topics

#### *Review Logbooks*

Correctness of flight hours against aircraft records  
 Flight and duty times  
 Pilot currency (required by both the CAA and the company)  
 Neatness

#### *Rosters*

Experienced / inexperienced mix  
 Flight and duty times not exceeded  
 Time remaining for secondary duties

#### *Standard Weights*

Manual reality checks on all standard weights (passengers and baggage, fuels, C of G etc)

### Weekly

#### *Records*

Flight and duty records – all pilots complying  
 Random sample 30 percent of flight documentation

#### *Rosters*

Still working (experienced to inexperienced, illness)?

#### *Competency*

Random flight with pilots (consistency, procedures observed, speeds correct, test questions)

#### *Personnel*

Morale, personal issues at home and at work

### Daily

#### *Roster*

Still working (experienced to inexperienced, illness)?

#### *Take Notes*

Note down items to bring up at next monthly meeting

## Qualifications and experience of senior persons – general aviation air operator certificate holder

This Appendix prescribes the qualifications and experience for the senior persons responsible under Civil Aviation Rules Part 119 *Air Operator – Certification*, rule 101 (b)(1)(i), (ii), (iii), and (iv).

### B.1 Senior person responsible for air operations

Part 135 Operation		
	Greater than three aircraft and/or greater than two bases	Less than four aircraft and/or less than three bases
Document required	Commercial Pilot Licence, with Instrument Rating if operations include IFR	Commercial Pilot Licence, with Instrument Rating if operations include IFR
Pilot-in-command experience	3 years as pilot-in-command under Part 135 operations; or	750 hours flight time on the category of aircraft to be operated or
Managerial experience	3 years in an operational control position	equivalent experience in air operations conducted under the authority of an Air Service Certificate issued under regulation 136 of Civil Aviation Regulations 1953 or an equivalent type of operation acceptable to the Director

### B.2 Senior person responsible for crew training and competency assessment

Part 135 Operation		
	Greater than three aircraft and/or greater than two bases	Less than four aircraft and/or less than three bases
Document required	Commercial Pilot Licence, with Instrument Rating if operations include IFR	Commercial Pilot Licence, with Instrument Rating if operations include IFR
Currency	Current to act as pilot-in-command of one type of operator's aircraft	Current to act as pilot-in-command of one type of operator's aircraft
Experience	3 years as pilot-in-command under Part 135 operations and 2 years experience in the check and training role	