

This guidance has been prepared to support clubs and in particular club CFIs as gliding emerges from the COVID19 lockdown.

Returning to a normal flying routine after this enforced break will be fantastic! It may also present a challenge because there are safety considerations associated with the break. There is likely to be pressure from all club pilots to get on with flying with the minimum of fuss. Of course, that's what we all want to achieve – we don't want to put barriers in the way when there is no need.

However, many of our club members will not have flown for many weeks and some will not have flown for many months. How does that break affect their abilities and how can we help them return to flight? It's important to be rational and objective when making decisions about the steps that need to be taken to ensure those initial flights are safe. We hope that the following information will help you to make those decisions.

Layoffs and workload

Even moderately experienced pilots rarely lose substantial flying ability – provided their workload is low. Many of us have flown with pilots who have had large breaks who can still handle the glider perfectly well. Driving a car and the ability to coordinate clutch and gears uses some similar skills. But to continue with the analogy, if you were asked to drive a car after a significant layoff while negotiating rush hour traffic, your skills may break down. In flying, as soon as there is any pressure, distraction or reduced situational awareness, an out of practice pilot quickly becomes overloaded. The amount a pilot's skills degrade during high workload will depend on four main factors:

- 1 - Their historic handling ability
- 2 - How long they have been away from flying
- 3 - How much workload they experience during flight
- 4 - Their overall experience level (total hours and launches)

If a pilot struggled to handle the glider before the layoff, and they didn't fly much if at all for four to six months, and aren't very experienced, they are likely to be unsafe because of insufficient skill to handle an in-flight challenge of some sort.

Layoffs and procedural skill fade

Skills fade during a layoff. But which skills? In our experience, it's the procedural skills that fade. How does that affect a pilot after a layoff? A pilot may well forget how to handle a failure or challenge that requires a procedure to resolve. Perhaps following a launch failure, they will recover using the wrong procedure or a procedure conducted in the wrong order. Maybe they will do nothing and, for example, freeze. Perhaps they will fail to effectively monitor the speed on a challenging approach.

How should we handle pilots who have had a layoff?

As noted above, the pilots with the greatest overall experience and historic skill will be impacted less from lack of recency. But they are not immune. They should be encouraged to consider where the biggest holes are in their currency and ensure that their first flights avoid challenges that might cause problems. For example, an awkward height winch launch failure with no wind and a short runway may be very challenging to handle even for an experienced pilot after a layoff. Other examples can be found in [BGA Managing Flying Risk](#) page 9 'Threat and Error management'.

The same applies to less experienced pilots, but they will require more active supervision. If there is any doubt, practicing with an instructor prior to flying solo is the best approach.

Pilots can prepare by refreshing themselves on important safety critical detail ahead of returning to flight. An e-mail or other communication to from you to all your pilots and instructors ahead of restarting gliding in which you note that you expect everyone to have read through the BGA publication Managing Flying Risk (MFR) and the relevant safe launching information published by the BGA will help to set the scene and get people thinking.

Here are some relevant links:

- BGA Managing Flying Risk (MFR) – essential reading for all glider pilots – updated regularly with the latest advice based on accident trends and good practice.
<https://members.gliding.co.uk/2019/11/15/managing-flying-risk-updated-november-2019/>
- BGA safe winch launching website. <https://members.gliding.co.uk/bga-safety-management/safe-winch/>
- BGA safe aerotowing website. <https://members.gliding.co.uk/bga-safety-management/safe-aerotowing/>
- BGA currency barometer. <https://members.gliding.co.uk/library/safety-briefings/currency-barometer-pdf/>

We also encourage the use of simulators but remind you that the simulators available at gliding clubs have limited value in respect of pilot recency.

Examples

We anticipate these examples (they are not requirements) will help when supporting your club pilots return to flight. 'Previously current' means was the person was flying regularly prior to the lock down.

Gold C level pilot or experienced instructor with several hundred hours and previously current:

Insist they read 'Managing Flying Risk'.

Encourage them to take the lowest risk possible on their initial flights.

Offer an instructional refresher flight.

Cross-Country Endorsed/Silver C level pilot with around 100 hours and previously current:

Insist they read 'Managing Flying Risk'.

Offer / perhaps ask that they take an instructional refresher flight depending on skill / timings of layoff.

Suggest that they remain local for their initial solo flights.

Pre-Cross Country endorsed (in some cases this includes quite experienced pilots):

Insist they read 'Managing Flying Risk'.

Require instructional refresher training based on individual need, including launch failure, out of position in the circuit, and stalling.

Proactively supervise.

Any two-seater flying (club glider, private flying, TMG etc):

In addition to the detail above, the pilot should have flown 3 take-offs and landings in the past 90 days.

Instructors:

Insist they read 'Managing Flying Risk'.

See BGA instructor requirements, which [includes a significant exemption regarding revalidation/renewal](#).

Encourage instructors to fly solo initially to refresh handling skills.

Be confident of an instructor's currency before allowing them to fly with a student or passenger.

Remind instructors of the late take over control directions, ie *take over IMMEDIATELY, even if you are a very experienced instructor, if P2 makes a potentially dangerous error* - more details including examples of accidents [are available here](#).

TMG flying and any other powered flight including glider towing:

Be satisfied that the pilot is experienced and current enough to operate safely.

See CAA COVID19 exemptions and the BGA guidance related to those exemptions at

<https://members.gliding.co.uk/covid19-restrictions-support-exemptions-and-restarting-gliding-information/>

We hope the guidance is helpful.

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