



Public Consultation Notice

Irish Aviation Authority Consultation Paper

Consultation on a Proposed Employer-Led Drug and Alcohol Testing Framework with Regulatory Oversight

Introduction

The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is commencing a public consultation on the future regulatory approach to drug and alcohol testing in the Irish aviation sector. This consultation seeks the views of aviation stakeholders, employees, industry representative bodies, public authorities and members of the public on the most appropriate means of introducing a comprehensive framework to manage the safety risks associated with impairment arising from alcohol and other psychoactive substances.

The IAA is particularly seeking views on a proposed Employer-Led Testing Framework with IAA Oversight, which has been identified as a potentially proportionate, practical and risk-based approach to addressing these concerns within the Irish aviation sector.

No decision has been taken. The purpose of this consultation is to gather evidence, perspectives and views to inform future policy development.

The IAA welcomes all submissions and observations on the matters raised in this consultation paper, which can be submitted via [this Form](#).

The deadline for submissions is 31 October 2026.

1. Background

The Changing Societal Context

In recent years, many countries have experienced significant changes in patterns of alcohol and drug use. Public health agencies across Europe have reported increasing availability of psychoactive substances, including established illicit drugs, prescription medications capable of causing impairment, and emerging synthetic substances.

The aviation sector does not operate separately from wider society. Aviation personnel are members of the communities in which they live and work and are therefore exposed to the same societal trends affecting the wider population. While the overwhelming majority of aviation professionals perform their duties responsibly and safely, it is increasingly recognised internationally that the risk of impairment caused by alcohol or psychoactive substances requires ongoing attention and proactive management.

Modern aviation relies upon a wide range of personnel performing safety-sensitive functions, including flight operations, air traffic management, aircraft maintenance, aerodrome operations, security activities and other operational roles. Any impairment affecting decision-making, judgement, situational awareness, reaction times or cognitive performance may have safety implications.

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International aviation standards, European aviation regulations and safety management principles all recognise the importance of ensuring that personnel performing safety-sensitive duties are fit to do so and are not impaired by alcohol or psychoactive substances.

The issue is therefore not whether aviation personnel should be free from impairment while undertaking safety-sensitive duties. Rather, the question is what regulatory framework provides the most effective, proportionate and practical means of achieving that objective.

2. Why is the IAA Consulting?

The IAA has reviewed the existing national and international regulatory framework applicable to psychoactive substances in aviation.

The review identified several significant considerations:

- Existing Irish aviation legislation provides a framework for alcohol testing in certain circumstances.
- There is no comprehensive statutory framework specifically addressing psychoactive substance testing across all safety-sensitive aviation roles.
- Different aviation organisations currently utilise different approaches and policies.
- International developments are placing increased emphasis on the management of substance-related safety risks.
- Aviation organisations have indicated a desire for greater regulatory certainty.
- Safety management principles increasingly support proactive identification and mitigation of risks before accidents or incidents occur.

Against this background, the IAA considers that it is appropriate to examine whether further legislative or regulatory measures should be introduced.

3. The Policy Objective

The objective of any future framework would be to:

- Promote aviation safety.
- Ensure personnel performing safety-sensitive functions are fit for duty.
- Support prevention and deterrence of impairment arising from alcohol and psychoactive substances.
- Provide clarity for regulated organisations and employees.
- Ensure appropriate safeguards relating to privacy, employment rights and data protection.
- Support rehabilitation and return-to-duty pathways where appropriate.
- Align with evolving international best practice.

Any future framework must strike an appropriate balance between public safety, proportionality, fairness and practicality.

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4. Employer-Led Testing Framework with IAA Oversight

Overview

Under an employer-led testing framework with IAA Oversight, responsibility for operating testing programmes would rest primarily with regulated aviation organisations, while the IAA would establish regulatory requirements and provide oversight through its existing regulatory functions. This aligns with the existing regulatory framework from both ICAO and EASA.

Rather than a centrally administered State testing programme, regulated organisations would be required to establish, maintain and operate approved substance management programmes appropriate to their operations and risk profile.

The IAA would oversee compliance through regulatory approval, audits, inspections and safety oversight activities.

Key Features

Under this model, regulated organisations could be required to:

- Maintain a documented drugs and alcohol policy.
- Identify safety-sensitive positions within their organisation.
- Provide employee awareness and education programmes.
- Establish procedures for testing and reporting.
- Ensure testing is conducted by competent and appropriately qualified providers.
- Maintain appropriate records and reporting arrangements.
- Implement rehabilitation and return-to-duty procedures where required.

Circumstances in Which Testing Could Occur

Views are sought on whether testing should be permitted in the following circumstances:

1. Pre-employment or Pre-assignment Testing

Testing conducted before an individual commences employment or assumes a safety-sensitive role.

2. Reasonable Cause Testing

Testing where there are objective and documented grounds to believe impairment may be present.

3. Post-Occurrence Testing

Testing following a reportable safety occurrence.

4. Post-Accident Testing

Testing following an accident or serious incident.

5. Return-to-Duty Testing

Testing following a period of absence arising from substance-related concerns.

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6. Random Testing

Testing undertaken on a deterrent basis using objective and non-discriminatory selection methods.

The IAA welcomes views on the appropriateness, necessity and proportionality of each of these testing triggers.

5. Potential Advantages of Employer-Led Testing Framework with IAA Oversight

The potential benefits of this approach may include:

- Building upon existing safety management systems already used throughout aviation.
- Allowing organisations flexibility to design programmes suited to their operational environment.
- Ensuring risks are managed directly by those responsible for operational safety.
- Reducing the need for a large centrally operated State testing programme.
- Promoting consistency across the aviation sector through common regulatory standards.
- Supporting education, prevention and safety culture initiatives.
- Enabling oversight through established IAA inspection and audit mechanisms.

6. Potential Challenges

The IAA also recognises that this approach raises important issues requiring consideration, including:

- Privacy and data protection safeguards.
- Employment law considerations.
- Consistency between organisations.
- Costs of implementation.
- Appropriate testing methodologies.
- Reporting requirements.
- Protection of confidential medical information.
- Rehabilitation and support arrangements.

Stakeholder views on these issues are particularly welcome.

7. Consultation Questions

The IAA invites responses to the following questions:

Question 1

Do you agree that impairment arising from alcohol and psychoactive substances presents a potential aviation safety risk requiring ongoing management?

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Question 2

Do you consider the existing legislative framework sufficient to address these risks?

Question 3

Do you support the introduction of an employer-led testing framework subject to IAA oversight?

Question 4

Which categories of aviation personnel should be considered safety-sensitive for the purposes of any future framework?

Question 5

Which testing circumstances should be permitted?

- Pre-employment
- Reasonable cause
- Post-occurrence
- Post-accident
- Return-to-duty
- Random testing

Please provide reasons for your views.

Question 6

What safeguards should be included to protect privacy, confidentiality and employee rights?

Question 7

Should any future framework include requirements relating to rehabilitation and return-to-duty programmes?

Question 8

Are there alternative approaches that the IAA should consider?

8. Conclusion

The aviation sector continues to maintain a strong safety record built upon professionalism, safety culture and effective risk management. However, wider societal trends, evolving international expectations and the increasing recognition of psychoactive substance-related risks require consideration of whether additional measures are necessary.

The IAA has not reached any final conclusions and remains open to a range of possible approaches. Through this consultation, the Authority seeks informed and balanced views from industry participants, employees, representative bodies and members of the public.

The purpose of the consultation is to identify the most effective, proportionate and practical means of protecting aviation safety while ensuring fairness, transparency and appropriate safeguards for all affected persons.

The IAA welcomes all submissions and observations on the matters raised in this consultation paper, which can be submitted via [this Form](#).

The deadline for submissions is 31 October 2026.

IAA Consultation on the regulatory
approach to psychoactive substance testing



Important Note

This consultation paper deliberately avoids discussion of individual cases, individual organisations, or specific licensing actions. The consultation is focused on the broader policy question of how risks arising from alcohol and psychoactive substance impairment should be managed within the aviation system and whether an employer-led framework with regulatory oversight represents the most appropriate way forward.

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