Aviation Stakeholder Forum Meeting #6 – March 2026

An aviation stakeholder forum has been established in Ireland to foster and maintain a positive aviation safety culture within the Irish civil aviation system. The Forum is chaired by the IAA and operates in accordance with agreed Terms of Reference. Details of the forum and reports of meetings are published on the IAA website at https://www.iaa.ie/about-us/aviation-stakeholder-forum.

The sixth meeting of the Forum was held on 25th March 2026 in IAA headquarters, with attendees representing a cross section of organisations involved in civil aviation in Ireland. Minutes of the meeting and associated presentations were distributed to the nominated members of the Forum. The following provides a report of the meeting.

1. Opening remarks and Agenda

The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed attendees. He introduced the agenda to include:

- Regulation Updates.
- EASA rule simplification.
- Cybersecurity incident and recovery.
- Current and future skills shortages in aviation.
- Workshop on current and future skills shortage.

The Chair noted that in the normal manner, there would be ample time for open discussion of topics, minutes will be circulated, and report to be published on the IAA website.

State Plan for Aviation Safety (SPAS) 2026-2028

The Chair advised that the intended public consultation on the next version of SPAS advised in last Forum was delayed slightly due to ongoing discussion with EASA on the future direction of the European Plan for Aviation Safety (EPAS). The IAA SPAS is aligned with the Global Aviation Safety (GASP) and the EPAS and current discussions at EU level address the need for alignment with GASP goals and restructuring of the EPAS to provide focus on the top safety topics for Europe. The safety priorities for Ireland have already been determined and much of the related narrative has been drafted, however, to align with future plans for EPAS, the IAA is taking time to re-structure the SPAS. Consultation on the final document is consequently delayed until next month. The draft list of EASA proposed top safety topics was also shared with the group for information. EASA consultation on EPAS will follow later in the year.

2. Update on key regulatory Changes

The latest regulatory changes in Europe and Ireland were presented and the highlights included:

1. Update on forthcoming Commission adoption topics, including updated EASA Fees and charges (mainly affecting third country oversight), new airworthiness rules that will apply from August 2026, streamlining processes across the EU and updated ATCO regulations that will expand recognition of computer based and simulator training to help address staffing shortages.

2. Update on FSTD Regulations including amendments to Reg 1178/2011 and 965/2012. A major shift in FSTD regulation is underway, moving to capability-based classification with mandatory Equipment Specification Lists, acceptance of touchscreen interfaces, and provisions for legacy devices; full applicability begins in 2028.
3. Update to ATM/ANS oversight to provide alignment with SES2+, clarify contracted activity issues, address role of National Supervisory Authority vs National Competent Authority, and address the COMM provider certification.
4. Ongoing discussions to address planned update to ATM/ANS rules to tighten thresholds for obstacle data provision, that is subject to ongoing discussion with EU Member States.
5. Occurrence Reporting, including new security reporting framework and related interface with safety and UAS/U-Space reporting.
6. Air Operations Regulation Update, including duties and training for operations control personnel, transition from ETOPS to EDTO, clarify issues regarding RAMP inspections and alcohol testing.
7. Aircrew regulation updates concerning Flight Time Limitations (FTL) for emergency medical services (excl HEMS), air taxi operations and single pilot operations.
8. Following publication of the Irish Operations Order (S.I. No. 298 of 2024) in June 2024, national regulatory work is progressing on the Personnel Licensing Order following extensive public consultation, with completion expected soon. A major overhaul of national airworthiness regulations is next, and stakeholder input will be sought.
9. The IAA is also determining the best national regulatory approach to address misuse of psychoactive substances and working with EASA to help develop supporting guidance.
10. National Enforcement in respect of misuse of drones continues with more successful prosecutions of offenders through the courts.
11. An ICAO survey on women in aviation was highlighted, and Forum members were encouraged to disseminate it widely within their organisations and contacts, particularly to those acting as gender focal points or DEI officers.
    Visit *'ICAO's Landmark Study on Women in Global Aviation'* or use QR code below.

Q&A

It was asked if the consequences of drone offences are sufficient to encourage compliance with the rules.

The IAA can bring cases to the District Court, and serious matters may be escalated to the High Court. Recent incidents at Dublin Airport involved highly negligent behaviour, but prosecution by the DPP requires proof of specific intent, and one case did not proceed on that basis. Sentencing is determined by the District Court judge; first time offenders often receive a warning, may be asked to donate to charity, and are required to cover IAA costs. Some cases are appealed to the Circuit Court.

The IAA publicises court outcomes on social media to reinforce accountability. In one instance, refusal to attend an interview led directly to prosecution. Drone offences remain a developing area where education is key.

Under upcoming regulatory changes in the Air Navigation and Transport Act, new enforcement powers, including fixed charge penalties are being introduced, with legislation currently progressing through the Departments of Finance and Justice.

3. Update on EASA Rules Simplification Project

EASA has launched a multi-year Rules Simplification Programme to address the growing complexity of its regulatory framework. Although safety levels remain high, constant additions to the rule set have created administrative burden, inconsistencies in interpretation, and disproportionate requirements for smaller organisations. The aim is to simplify existing rules, make them easier to apply, reduce paperwork, and ensure future rulemaking follows these principles.

A major stakeholder survey, with around 2,000 responses, highlighted recurring issues: proportionality, documentation overload, limited digitalisation, inconsistencies in oversight, and the need for clearer soft law.

Hundreds of simplification proposals were submitted across all regulatory areas. EASA sees the programme as requiring a strategic reset of how regulations are developed, including better integration with other legislative frameworks such as NIS II and CER, and improved feedback loops. Data analysis is complete, momentum is strong, and more outputs are expected in Q2 2026.

Stakeholders were encouraged to engage and provide data to support justified simplification.

Q&A

It was asked how EASA can make the rule-simplification process more efficient?

EASA analysed all stakeholder comments in parallel, looking for common trends, and used AI tools to speed up the review and classification of responses. This combination of parallel processing and use of AI significantly accelerated the overall timeframe for analysis of the scope of the problem. For implementation, some of the issues identified are already being actioned via the European Plan for Aviation Safety and associated rulemaking tasks are being updated to consider simplification proposals.

4. Cyber Incident and Lessons from a Ransomware attack

One stakeholder maintenance organisation experienced a major ransomware attack in December 2025 that shut down all systems, including damaging backups, leaving the organisation unable to restore operations through normal recovery procedures.

The incident demonstrated how a cyber-attack on an MRO can immediately disrupt airlines, regulators, and the wider aviation ecosystem because maintenance records, airworthiness data, and operational systems become inaccessible.

The organisation chose not to pay the ransom, instead rebuilding its entire infrastructure from scratch, engaging external cyber-forensic experts, and maintaining transparent communication with customers and regulators.

The key lessons shared included, the importance of rehearsing major cyber-outage scenarios, ensuring cyber-insurance provides adequate cover and maintaining truly immutable, off-network backups.

It was recommended that organisations test their backups, conduct regular crisis-management exercises, pre-contract specialist support, understand third-party dependencies, and develop manual fallback procedures.

A central message: if backups are within reach of an attacker, they are not backups.

The Chair thanked the organisation for their excellent presentation and for openly sharing their experiences with the Forum.

Q&A

Many detailed questions were raised by attendees, and the following are the key points were highlighted by the organisation.

The attackers were part of a professional criminal group operating outside Ireland. Initial phishing emails targeted staff weeks before the incident, capturing usernames and passwords. The attackers then used these stolen credentials to access the company's remote-access VPN, used for hybrid working, which became the primary entry point into the network.

The organisations cyber-insurance provider activated their incident-response network immediately. They supplied specialist teams with direct experience in cyber-attacks and ransomware negotiations. These groups included technical cyber-forensics experts who carried out a detailed investigation of how the attackers entered the network, moved through it, and caused damage. They helped rebuild services and infrastructure, recover data, and reverse the impact of the attack wherever possible. The IAA also provided regulatory support to enable continued operations using alternative procedures, whilst the systems were being recovered.

The organisation rebuilt systems with a focus on those critical to aviation safety, prioritising Part-145-relevant functions over support services. While some damage could not be fully reversed, core safety-related systems were restored and hardened to ensure safe continuation of commercial operations.

Working through the Part-IS process helped the organisation to re-evaluate risk, strengthen containment measures, and reassess how systems interact with each other and external stakeholders. Customers also conducted their own mini-audits for reassurance, ensuring no cross-contamination or residual risk.

Forensic analysis confirmed that approximately 400GB of data had been taken. A deep review, conducted by a specialist external team, found no evidence that sensitive personal data was included. This was communicated transparently to stakeholders.

5. Current and future skills shortages

The Chair welcomed members of SOLAS and Higher Education Authority to the Forum. He reminded members that during the last two forum workshops relating to aviation safety strategy and safety planning, the issue of future skills shortages was a recurring concern voiced by members. He thanked the SOLAS and HEA representatives for presenting on this important topic and for guiding the Forum workshop session in this respect.

The presentation focused on the growing skills shortages across the aviation sector and the need for a coordinated national approach. It highlighted that the main pressure point for industry is talent, both technical and non-technical, across aviation engineering, maintenance, repair, overhaul, task planning, compliance, and safety management.

Building on the successful 2025 initiative to expand the maintenance talent pipeline, it was noted that enrolments have doubled again this year, reflecting strong collaboration between education providers and industry.

Data presented showed increasing employment in aviation engineering roles, with concentrations in Dublin and Shannon and approximately 70 aviation-engineering related companies nationally, most with fewer than 50 employees. Employment permit data illustrated ongoing challenges in securing international talent due to visa delays, particularly for families of skilled workers.

The higher and further education system currently delivers around 970 aviation-related learners annually across universities, technological universities, ETBs and industry-aligned programmes. Courses span Levels 6 to 9, including technical training, leadership, aviation finance, digital aviation, sustainability, aircraft maintenance, and specialist OEM courses.

Upskilling and reskilling pathways, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, Springboard+, Skills to Advance and micro-credentials, are increasingly important. Emerging skills needs align with trends in other advanced sectors, particularly cyber security, AI, digital technologies, and sustainable/green aviation technologies.

To support future planning, the presenters proposed a structured dialogue between industry and education providers, possibly including Regional Skills Fora. They encouraged discussion around indicators of demand, the balance between new graduates and workforce upskilling, the adequacy of current education provision, and the challenges of meeting sector-wide skills needs.

The overarching message was that skill needs must be monitored continuously, not as a once-off exercise, and addressed collaboratively to ensure a sustainable, future-ready aviation workforce.

The Chair introduced the Breakout Session with the following questions to be discussed:

1. What are the indicators of demand versus skills shortage within the industry?
2. Is there primarily a need for more upskilling of the existing workforce, or emerging graduates, or are more ‘mainstream’ graduates needed?
3. What other observations occur on the span and range of current further and higher education provision?

Groups were also asked to consider if a structured dialogue approach would be a useful and feasible next step.

6. Feedback from Breakout Groups:

The following is a summary of the feedback from the breakout groups and related discussions.

Group 1

- Skills shortages are different across sectors and organisations
- IAA holds current data on regulatory staffing requirements across organisations, and this data source could be used to identify sector-based shortage trends.
- Surveys may need to be conducted in some areas
- Overtime usage can provide a useful signal of understaffing.
- Skills shortages span regulatory, IT, management, and technical areas.
- Both mainstream education and upskilling are needed
- Apprenticeships are an effective route straight into aviation roles.
- There is a need to do more to attract people into aviation, including greater female participation, through clearer career pathways.
- Need for project management and digital skills, reflecting rapid technological change. This should be aviation focused.
- Need to address aviation safety awareness through early education on issues such as drone safety, perhaps promoting a Safe-Pass model as used in construction.
- Significant upskilling required once people enter industry, including on the job training and mentoring, and leadership development, as well as keeping up with emerging issues such as environmental, cybersecurity, AI.
- AI/Co-Pilot tools risk over-reliance; must maintain proper checking and review.
- Aviation specialist training is largely bespoke, but some issues (eg sustainability skills) are emerging. Specialist level training in this respect may only apply to a small proportion of the staff in the organisation, whereas many staff may need awareness training.

Group 2

Engineering skills development follows a 5-year pathway in line with Airworthiness regulations.

- Suggestion: a broad introductory level training course covering all aviation engineering areas before specialisation into different skills. This would provide a "way back" to another aviation discipline where first choice specialisation does not work out.
- Need training programmes for management staff (eg CAMO, nominated persons, Safety management, and technical services) not just training aimed at licenced personnel.
- Cost of training for students can be high, so Government incentives could help. For example, other jurisdictions offer tax benefits (e.g., Malta).
- Cost of living in Dublin/Shannon makes retention of skilled staff difficult.
- Graduates bring essential talent; need to broaden the scope of aviation education offerings.

Group 3:

- Agreed with comments from other groups
- Desire for a clearer pipeline of students into aviation careers.
- Strong support for the DCU aviation pathway, seen as highly productive.
- Grants and financial supports would encourage more entrants.
- Online delivery and flexible learning formats improve participation.
- Work-life balance considerations are increasingly important.

Group 4

- Significant shortage of engineers, especially due to retirements.
- Some organisations have re-opened apprenticeships, but strong industry competition challenges retention.
- Training takes 2–3 years, making workforce turnover a major risk.
- Very low number of female engineers; need earlier engagement (e.g., primary school outreach).
- Regional barriers: commuting long distances to work is not feasible in longer term.
- Suggestion: develop central-country MRO/hangar training facilities.
- Approval delays for engineers (e.g., B1 approvals).
- Pilot training costs extremely high (€100k); government grants should be explored.
- Accommodation challenges for students and apprentices.
- Career guidance in schools often unaware of aviation opportunities; teachers need more information.
- Collaboration with universities for apprentice training.
- Need for alternative training locations beyond Dublin (e.g. Limerick).
- Importance of structured knowledge transfer programmes from senior to junior engineers.

Q&A

Questions from members addressed issues such as attracting young people, career pathways and on-the-job training with the following highlights.

The representative from a flight training organisation in Cork explained that early engagement is essential. This organisation actively contacts schools, give presentations, and invite students to visit their facilities to "plant the seed" about aviation career options. However, schools often don't know who to contact, so providing clearer information and points of contact would make outreach easier. Similar early-stage engagement could also help promote engineering pathways.

The representative from a maintenance organisation noted that trainees who spend several years in training but do not pass all modules leave with no formal qualification, despite completing substantial coursework. It was recommended that trainees receive some form of recognised certificate or record of modules completed, so they have evidence of their learning and can still use this training to progress in the industry.

One airline representative highlighted the importance of structured knowledge sharing. Much learning currently happens informally on the job, with lessons learned from history dependant on the personal experience of managers/mentors etc. Formal mechanisms for passing on practical knowledge and safety history would strengthen organisational capability. Each organisation has a responsibility to manage knowledge transfer proactively so that critical operational experience is retained and embedded in the next generation of aviation professionals.

SOLAS representative noted that maths competency remains essential for engineering roles and that career "streaming" should begin earlier, emphasising that university is not the only route and that alternative pathways should be promoted from ages 10–12. It was commented that the SOLAS scheme has been very effective for upskilling existing staff in Limerick and remains a strong apprenticeship pathway.

In closing, the meeting reflected on the value of the session's feedback and the proposal to establish a structured dialogue approach was accepted by the Forum as a valuable way forward. The Chair requested SOLAS to provide an outline of this proposal, with Terms of Reference if appropriate, that he would circulate to the Members.

7. AOB/Closing Remarks

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Members for their attendance and active participation. He reminded members that they were welcome to propose agenda items for next meeting and to present on topics they feel might be relevant to the Forum.

He concluded by once again thanking all presenters and the representatives of SOLAS and HEA for their support for this meeting.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting of ASF will be planned for end September 2026.