



MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE IN CIVIL AVIATION - THE ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY PUBLISHES PAPER

News / Airlines



The Royal Aeronautical Society has published a paper on the mental health challenge to civil aviation safety, covering both psychosocial risk management and mental health. The paper explores the impact that mental health in aviation currently has within civil aviation. The Royal Aeronautical Society's Human Factors Wellbeing Working Group paper highlights key areas of the civil aviation 'eco-system' that would be positively impacted by a coherent approach to managing and mitigating staff mental health and wellbeing.

Poor mental health is now an acknowledged safety risk factor in civil aviation, from Germanwings in 2015 through to Alaska Airlines in 2023, the issue in the mental wellbeing of safety-critical staff has become an issue for the industry. One key question relating to this challenge is to what extent can the risk be monitored and quantified by means of the psychological assessment of safety-critical staff to inform safety management strategies. The view of the HFW WG is that an approach based on the information outlined in this paper could provide a positive 'tailwind' for the industry addressing the challenges in the current environment.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the development of a response to the emerging recognition of the safety risk posed by the mental health and wellbeing of all civil aviation personnel. In addition, the paper provides recommendations and psychosocial risk management systems that can be implemented into current organisational structures to prevent the degradation of staff mental health and wellbeing.

Marc Atheron MRAeS Chair of Human Factors Wellbeing Working Group stated: "Events since 2015 have highlighted that the mental health and wellbeing of civil aviation staff is a growing issue in maintaining the impressive safety record and operational performance of the sector. The RAeS Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group have been addressing the area since 2016, and we have produced a report which looks at the topic from the perspective of a developing a strategic approach to monitoring, managing, and mitigating the risks posed to both operations and individuals. The report includes evidence of the prevalence of mental health issues in safety critical groups, and an approach based on adapting existing and evolving policy and regulation around psychosocial risks in the workplace to the sector as a way forward. My personal hope is that this report contributes to the development of a positive culture of change that recognises and enhances the role played by, and the value of, the multitude of individuals who make the global sector the success it is."

Gerard Forlin KC ARAeS commented: "It is a great honour to be involved in this very important paper with Marc and the other expert contributors. I have been involved globally in aviation and mental health as a lawyer for over ten years in over 80 countries, and have seen this concern becoming increasingly more urgent. It needs to be sorted immediately. This paper hopefully provides a more holistic approach to remedy this growing crisis rather than just attempting to put a plaster on an already concerning the situation. I thank the RAeS, Marc Atherton, the other contributors and everyone else I have met globally working on this topic."

RAeS Chief Executive David Edwards FRAeS said: "The civil aviation industry is shifting more focus onto the important topic of mental health, highlighted by the Germanwings and Alaska Airlines incidents. Whilst the industry is doing more to support staff who are already facing mental health issues, there remains a lack of psychosocial risk management systems to prevent the development of mental health issues in the first place. This Royal Aeronautical Society paper highlights several recommendations and systems that organisations can implement to help address this; we believe that this study will highlight the impact mental health has on the civil aviation industry and, with further support and willingness from organisations, allow it to become an important contributor in mental health psychosocial risk management."

The full paper can be found here: <https://www.aerosociety.com/media/23475/mental-health-and-wellbeing-raes-paper.pdf>

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