

Speech given by Aviation Minister Baroness Sugg CBE 25 October 2018

Good evening ladies and gentlemen

I'm delighted to address such a distinguished audience.

It has been an honour to hear the award winners' stories

And to celebrate the Red Arrows....to pay tribute to their role in representing Britain at home and abroad for more than 50 years

Along with the Royal Air Force as a whole - which of course this year celebrated its centenary.

We owe the RAF and all members of the armed forces a great debt of gratitude for keeping Britain safe.

As Aviation Minister I know it's the skill, talents and dedication of all pilots, that help to make our aviation sector so special.

Today we can take it for granted that air travel is safe, speedy and generally comfortable.

But of course this wasn't always the case. The health and safety policy of airlines in the early days of commercial flights seemed to amount to one thing, handing the passenger a parachute.

Travellers would also regularly be made to sit on bags of mail....And share their space with the plane's cargo....This was 'no frills flying' at its finest.

We have come far in the 100 years since those first commercial flights, and of course throughout much of that time the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (and its predecessor, the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators) has done a superb job of championing British aviators. From helping pilots in their professional lives through training bursaries and scholarships, to running charities such as the Air Pilots Benevolent Fund. It's little wonder that four years ago you were awarded a Royal Charter – in recognition of all your distinguished work. As Aviation Minister I share your commitment to helping the industry we represent reach even greater levels of excellence.

Recruitment

Our industry has undergone dramatic growth. More passengers are flying than ever before, with numbers increasing by over 20% in the last five years, with 268 million passengers passing through UK airports. Our latest forecasts show that passenger numbers are likely to increase to 410 million by 2050.

But with that rapid expansion comes challenges that we must tackle together – we will need a lot of pilots to fly them!

So a key priority for the aviation sector, and for the Government, is ensuring there are sufficient pilots to meet rising demand.

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots does outstanding work in encouraging the next generation. And the aviation sector is also working hard to train and support new industry recruits.

But of course we must not be complacent about encouraging future talent and more needs to be done to encourage women – who currently make up just 4.5 % of commercial air pilots – into the aviation sector. I'm pleased to say that we are making some progress on this front - earlier this year I was delighted to launch the UK Women in Aviation and Aerospace Charter. With over 50 organisations so far pledging to build a more balanced and fair industry for women. But there is more we can all do to ensure that we attract the pilots of the future. I recognise the concerns around the cost of pilot training - we are working closely with industry and across Whitehall to explore the issues and barriers affecting recruitment to the industry.

Pilot Fatigue

Another challenge that I want to see tackled is that of pilot fatigue. It goes without saying that it is a real risk factor in aviation safety and we take its management very seriously.

It's important that pilots and other crew members feel able openly to report fatigue related issues ...

Allowing appropriate action to be taken through safety management systems.

So we will be reviewing the forthcoming EASA study into the issue carefully. As well as working with EASA and industry to ensure regulation is correctly implemented.

Medical declarations & new threats

I'm well aware of the professionalism with which you go about your jobs.

So I'm keen to see Government doing more to make pilots' lives a little easier by scrapping unnecessary red-tape. I'm delighted at the warm response from the industry to the introduction of Pilots' Medical Declarations - removing the requirement for a doctor's signature for national licences.

A safe and proportionate regulatory change that has succeeded in saving non-commercial pilots time and money.

And we're protecting pilots and the passengers you fly from emerging threats, such as drones and lasers with the introduction of new laws, making it an offence to fly a drone above 400 feet and within a kilometre of an airport, and now anyone who shines a laser at an aircraft faces unlimited fines and up to five years in prison.

Aviation Strategy

But I'm keen to hear **your** thoughts on how we can build an aviation industry ready for the future.

My department is working on our new Aviation Strategy which aims to maximise opportunities for the sector in the coming decades. We will be publishing a Green Paper in December outlining our policies.

And I encourage you to contribute to the consultation that follows it, ahead of the final strategy being

Brexit

So we are making every effort to make sure our policies work for the industry and the same applies towards our preparations for Britain's withdrawal from the European Union.

We want to secure an agreement that will allow our aviation sector to continue thriving after Brexit....

So that pilots can get on with their jobs without a hitch and Britain can continue to participate in the EASA system – with pilot and aircraft certification and licensing continuing on current terms.

We are seeking comprehensive air transport agreement which not only maintains connectivity but allows services to evolve and innovate.

But as a responsible Government, we have also taken practical steps to prepare for a no deal scenario, including issuing technical notices, laying out the steps pilots and the wider aviation sector will need to take. Recognising EU licences and aiming to minimise the burden on industry.

Steps we hope will be reciprocated by the EU.

And the UK is committed to maintaining and improving the current levels of safety to the benefit of passengers and pilots from Britain, the EU and beyond.

Concluding Remarks & Toast

It has been a great pleasure to speak to you all tonight.

As Aviation Minister, it is an honour to represent such a successful, dynamic, and vibrant industry.

And as British pilots, your reputation for professionalism and technical excellence is world renowned and well deserved.

Thank you all for listening, and I would like to congratulate all the winners of tonight's awards.

To the Honourable Company of Air Pilots - may it flourish root and branch forever.