

CEO Report – September 2024

I'll start with a few general points:

Personal matters

It has not been a great 2024 for me so far, with the loss of my mother, a close friend and then more recently by brother-in-law. I have also had some minor health issues of my own, all of which is leading me to conclude that life is too short to spend all day every day in front of a laptop and a drive to try and reduce some of my various commitments to try and reach a better balance.

I have only managed to fly model aircraft half a dozen times in 2024 (my Club's away day to Buckminster was cancelled twice due to rubbish weather) but plan to return to my youth and resume racing model cars over the winter months.

Scottish Aeromodellers

Relations with the SAA remain cordial and the BMFA Scotland Area seems to be progressing well.

Large Model Association

The LMA remain interested in exploring options for coming on board with us for 2025 after deciding against it for 2024.

Membership Insurance

I am awaiting renewal quotes from Tysers for 2025 but will not be meeting with Colette Eustace until W/C 7th October. We will also be meeting the Underwriter from AXA XL at the same time.

However, we held meetings with two other potential options (AON and Specialist Risk Group) on the 11th September. The SRG team are comprised of the key people we used to deal with at Tysers and the Underwriter they were pinning their hopes on was our Underwriter at Mitsui/MS Amlin for a number of years with whom we had an excellent relationship. Unfortunately, the Underwriter has moved to another area of the business, so SRG are unable to offer terms for 2025. Their advice was to remain with AXA XL.

We also met with AON, and they will be providing a quote for terms but they too consider AXA XL the best option currently for our primary liability cover.

So, whatever we do, at present all routes lead back to AXA XL for our main insurance policy.

Merus Court

The arrangement with the BGA and BHPA at Merus Court has continued to work well.

BMFA Members Handbook

Apart from a few minor tweaks, I haven't made any major updates to the Members Handbook for 2024 but plan to do a thorough review and update for 2025 in the next few weeks which will be published once the terms of our 2025 Article 16 Authorisation are confirmed.

Junior/New member initiative & rolling memberships

I have not progressed the proposed new member initiatives as they were dependent on a wider availability of rolling memberships which we've been unable to agree.

The BDF memberships have continued to grow slowly but there are several alternatives available. FPVUK membership is now available as an add on (free for three months) when purchasing a drone from the DJI store. It also includes an element of cover for commercial operation.

We have had some preliminary discussions with one of the top three drone retailers in the UK about offering BDF membership on a similar basis with three months free when purchasing a drone. The hope would be that we would then convert customers to full members after the trial period but whether this initiative is worth pursuing depends upon the view of the Board (and insurers).

2024 Shows

I have supported the BMFA presence at two Duxford Airshows this year as well as Weston Park. A recurring theme from potential members we have spoken too (particularly at Duxford) has been the difficulty they have encountered in dealing with their local clubs.

In terms of specific Board Agenda items:

a. National Centre Update

The Café has provided to be a popular addition to the National Centre since it opened for business in March. So far, on sales of £29,783, it has generated a useful profit of £8,797.

The centre has received strong bookings for 2024, some of which have been adversely impacted by the less than perfect summer.

Another auction has been scheduled for Sunday November 3rd and any of those physically attending the AGM on Saturday 2nd will be able to view the lots. There is strong demand for the auctions, but they do require significant staff resource to make them successful.

b. CAA Team report

Things have been fairly quiet on the CAA front since our last meeting.

The CAA continue to have a string of personnel changes, and our principal contact is now Alan Perrin (who is a long term BMFA member) rather than Tom Guest. A new Article 16 Authorisation was issued 13th June, but it did not contain any substantive changes requiring us to update any of our guidance.

I have just commenced work on preparing the application for our renewal for 2025 which I hope the CAA will process slightly more expeditiously than in the last couple of years, as it has been landing with me after I have tried to finish for a break over the festivities which I've then had to partially cancel.

The CAA seems to have become less communicative in general terms over recent months, with several of the wider stakeholder meetings having gone by the wayside.

c. Computer Sub-Committee report.

Our project to issue CAA Flyer I.D.s has progressed and is currently subject to some testing. It is now almost ready to roll out and should be in place ahead of membership renewals and hopefully by the 1st October.

d. Club Support Officer's report.

To follow.

General Aviation Alliance (GAA).

The GAA work has continued in dealing with airspace change proposals which are swamping us all.

Following Mike Pearson (BMFA Member, Airfield Manager at Popham and former GA Advocate to the DfT) taking over from Roger Hopkinson as facilitator (the principal point of contact with the government and CAA management), there have been further changes with Tom Hardie stepping down as Programme Manager (as sad loss to the GAA) and Simon Tilling (LAA CEO) taking over from Pete Stratten (BGA CEO) as Secretary. I will be attending their AGM (most likely virtually) on 25 November.

f. European Model Flying Union (EMFU).

I have been working with EASA on several matters and remain the principal point of liaison between the EMFU and EASA at the present time.

The EASA drone regulations (which we adopted in the UK at the point of BREXIT) are subject to some review and we have made some suggestions which have been positively received, which include trying to provide clearer derogation for model flying as a distinct activity which is neither Open Category nor Specific Category. The rationale for this is because we all spend so much time arguing that the Specific Category requirements don't apply to us and that whatever we had prior to the drone regulation should be our default starting point rather than the Open Category. It is hoped that any changes we can get through could be helpful to our own cause in the UK.

There have also been some issues arising from the interpretation of the existing regulations by some EU member states. There is a particular problem for our colleagues in Austria, where every single club must apply for its own Article 16 Authorisation which is an overly bureaucratic interpretation of the regulation, partly stemming from an issue with the German translation of the regulatory text. I am in correspondence with the EASA team on how this situation can be clarified and improved.

The EMFU General Assembly will be taking place in Dubendorf, Switzerland, on the 9th and 10th November and I hope to have a representative from EASA to address the meeting (albeit virtually).

g. Airprox

To July, there had been two reported AirProxes involving model aircraft so far in 2024 (both involving conflict with full sized helicopters). For information, there was a total of three reports in 2023, none in 2022, one in 2021, two in 2020 and none in 2019. This is in accordance with the pattern established historically of zero, one, two or three per year.

h. Sport & Recreation Alliance

There is nothing of note to report at this stage. I did not attend the last Outdoor Pursuits Division meeting as there was nothing of note or relevance to us on the agenda but I may attend their AGM in October.

i. General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC).

The GAAC has been subject to some changes, with a successor for Charles Henry being appointed at long last. There was a contest between John Gilder (long term Vice Chair) and Matt Wilkins (new Board member and Airfield Manager at Old Buckenham Airfield) with Matt being voted in as Chairman.

Matt's appointment seems to have re-invigorated the GAAC and I will be attending their next meeting on 24 September.

Dave Phipps. 17 September 2024