

» “I’m prepared for the industry to be slow for a while and finding that first job might be very tough, but COVID-19 hasn’t affected my love for aviation. I’ll just keep going with my training.”

Seventeen-year old Gemma Douglas is a former Macpherson scholar, from North Shore Aero Club.

She does feel like COVID-19 has left her a bit unsure about her future in aviation.

“I was initially going to join the air force, and I got into the Schools for Skies programme, but it was postponed because of the pandemic.

“If my air force plans don’t work out, I’m considering an aviation degree, while the industry gets on its feet.

“One thing I am sure about, is that aviation in some form is still my future.”

Adam Hancock, from Mid Canterbury Aero Club, took second place in the Airways competition for flight manoeuvres, at Tauranga.

He wants a career in aircraft engineering.

“I still feel really positive because aircraft will still need to be flown and they will need to be maintained.”

Young North Shore pilot Jannik Wittgen won the 2020 Waypoints scholarship and was third equal in the CAA trophy for preflight checking.

His planned career as an aeronautical engineer is still on course.

“I met an aeronautical engineer last year and he told me about how he test flies planes that he’s designed and engineered – and I just thought, ‘that’s what I want to do.’”

“I’m hoping that during the four years I’m studying engineering at university, aviation will have made some sort of recovery.”

Scott Wright was a Ross Macpherson scholar in 2018, and while no longer a Young Eagle, spent time with the 2020 group at Tauranga.

He came third-equal in the CAA competition for preflight checking.

His plans for aviation have been put on hold while he watches what happens.

“I’m going to do science at the University of Canterbury next year, but I’ll still carry on to get my PPL and CPL to have ready for when the aviation industry needs new pilots again.”

BACK TO THE FUTURE WITH SMS

// By Neil Richardson, Verda Consulting, UK

With the damage done by COVID-19 to aviation businesses, it would be understandably tempting to ‘release the safety brakes’ as restrictions ease. But deterioration of safety standards might only lead to more business losses.

Changing hazards

COVID-19 has shaped a new era. In light of those changes, your safety management system should be responding appropriately.

New hazards may have been introduced due to the COVID-19 situation and they will need new and appropriate control measures.

For instance, physical distancing, and how that applies to *your* operation, will need to be carefully thought through. The properties of existing hazards and how they interact with other elements of your system may have changed so their control will need reviewing and possibly adjusting. For example, physical distancing measures may cause some human factors issues with preflight planning and shift handovers.

Some new hazards may take time to become evident while some may no longer be present. Whatever the case with your organisation, the ‘new normal’ will almost assuredly mean looking at the nature of the hazards in your operation and making sure their associated risk is effectively managed.

Think about your service providers

Many commercial operators are dependent on other providers such as aerodromes or ground handling contracting companies to deliver their services. Some of those service providers may need a bit of time to get back to their previous levels of performance. »



Photo courtesy of Eastland Heli Services.

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That means, while you, as the operator, are ‘open for business’, your service provider(s) may have limitations you need to consider carefully.

For example, an airfield that had to close during the worst of the pandemic, may have experienced reduced wildlife control activities.

Wildlife, particularly birds, may be more prevalent which is likely to have attracted new predators. Those predators may have damaged fences or other barriers. This may take time for your aerodrome to get under control, and also work through possible emerging issues, such as how to deal with a protected species, that’s made a new home there.

Consider your people

It’s likely there’ll be emerging issues post-COVID-19, from the introduction of new tasks, such as maintaining physical distancing, which could be a distraction to staff. You’ll have to build the awareness of those issues among participants and employees, and build their skills to cope.

Upholding physical distancing measures requires active participation by all employees; this is a skill in its own right and may involve conflict resolution skills which not everybody is comfortable with.

It’s often assumed that staff can easily cope during change, but human error is very typical of under-resourced operations and those undergoing or that have undergone change.

Your staff could be worried about the impacts of COVID-19 – such as financial hardship – concerns about relatives or colleagues, stress, and fatigue brought about by unfamiliar and changing tasks, extended working hours, and competing priorities. These can all increase the risk of errors.

The staff levels you need now may be different from those needed before the outbreak of COVID-19. It’s key to match the resources you have to any new risk control measures.

The right balance

In a time when the need to recover financial losses is pressing, it would be very easy to prioritise production. Your leadership, and its messaging regarding safety, must ensure you have the right balance between production and protection.

We all need to be vigilant during and after change. Each organisation will face unique challenges to returning to operations, and at times, change will be fast-paced with maybe many temporary situations arising before things settle down. Prepare for change now, engage with your suppliers, don’t underestimate how small changes can affect your operation, and ensure safety is on the agenda.

Focusing on your safety management system and remaining constantly curious about what this new era means for your safety standards will serve you well in the coming months.

More information

To read more about human factors, visit aviation.govt.nz > Safety > Human Factors.

This article was written before New Zealand moved to Alert Level 1. For the latest information on COVID-19, visit aviation.govt.nz > COVID-19. [↗](#)

Neil Richardson has been a consultant in safety management for 15 years, particularly in complex safety-critical environments, including in civil and military aviation.