# Law Commission seeks views on managing pilotless aircraft in UK airspace



The Law Commission has issued a new consultation paper addressing the complex legal challenges associated with managing large numbers of pilotless aircraft, including those designed to carry passengers, within Britain's already congested airspace. This initiative reflects growing commercial interest in aviation autonomy and aims to reform air traffic management systems to safely accommodate automated and remotely piloted vehicles.

The consultation, which forms part of the commission's ongoing project on 'aviation autonomy', builds upon a previous paper published last year that explored the laws surrounding drones and vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) craft. The current paper focuses specifically on the capacity of existing air traffic control rules, which are considered inadequate for the anticipated influx of uncrewed aircraft.

Highlighting the need for regulatory evolution, the commission seeks input on how air traffic management (ATM) and air navigation services (ANS) must adapt to support uncrewed aircraft systems traffic management (UTM). This includes reconsidering protocols such as mandatory voice communication between pilots and air traffic controllers—a standard that cannot apply in the context of pilotless aircraft. Furthermore, the paper underscores the necessity for more detailed and localized meteorological data to ensure safe operations, especially for vehicles flying at low altitudes.

This project was commissioned by the UK government as part of its 'Future Flight Challenge', launched against a backdrop of rapid technological developments and increasing commercial usage of autonomous flight. Notably, Amazon has revealed plans to begin drone deliveries from its fulfilment centre in Darlington, signalling the commercial viability of such services. Elsewhere, China has authorised taxi services using an automated two-seater VTOL aircraft developed by the Chinese company EHang, illustrating global advancements in this sector.

Commenting on the government's stance, Aviation Minister Mike Kane said this week, "We are determined to get these new types of aircraft off the ground," emphasising the commitment to integrating these vehicles into UK airspace safely and effectively.

The consultation paper also addresses potential regulatory frameworks for UTM and explores mechanisms to establish liability in the event of accidents involving uncrewed aircraft. Professor Alison Young, Public Law Commissioner, highlighted the importance of getting the regulation right. Speaking to Law Gazette, she said: "It is paramount that we get the regulation of these services to uncrewed aircraft right, and that there are appropriate mechanisms in place if things do go wrong. We want to hear from those involved in developing autonomous aircraft or ATM/ANS to unpiloted aircraft, as well as anyone who may be affected by the regulation of autonomous aviation more generally."

The Law Commission is inviting responses to the consultation paper, with the deadline set for 18 July. The feedback will help shape the regulatory framework essential for the future integration of pilotless aircraft into the UK's airspace system.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/aviation-autonomy/> - This URL corroborates the Law Commission's ongoing project on aviation autonomy addressing the legal challenges of managing pilotless aircraft in UK airspace, including the consultation period open until 18 July 2025.
* <https://lawcom.gov.uk/news/law-commission-seeks-views-on-air-traffic-management-and-air-navigation-services-for-uncrewed-aircraft/> - This source supports the information about the Law Commission's second consultation paper focusing on air traffic management and air navigation services (ATM/ANS) for uncrewed aircraft, the need for regulatory evolution, and the call for stakeholder input.
* <https://www.arpas.uk/law-commissions-2nd-consultation-paper-on-aviation-autonomy/> - This page validates details about the second consultation paper concentrating on regulation of uncrewed aircraft systems traffic management (UTM), along with provisional proposals for UTM regulation and liability mechanisms.
* <https://lawcom.gov.uk/publication/aviation-autonomy-consultation-paper-2-summary/> - This document provides a summary of key issues discussed in the second consultation paper, including the limitations of current air traffic control rules and the need for enhanced meteorological data and communication protocols for pilotless aircraft.
* <https://www.unmannedairspace.info/emerging-regulations/uk-law-commission-seeks-views-on-utm-regulation-and-liability/> - This article confirms that the UK Law Commission is holding a consultation on UTM regulation and liability, details the involvement of the UK government's Future Flight Challenge, and quotes officials highlighting the importance of regulatory adaptations for autonomous and pilotless aircraft.