

# Submitting Flight Plans Online

In May NATS started to introduce its online flight plan filing tool to the GA community. AFPEX is a powerful tool, but there are some new skills to learn. Here's our step-by-step guide to filing your VFR flight plans online

There's something about being in charge of your own destiny that appeals to many pilots. We've never really liked the idea of handing over a flight plan for someone else to file, and although faxing one from the office or home to the FBUs (Flight Briefing Units) at Heathrow or Manchester brings you one stage closer to the process, it still isn't as direct as it could be.

Now that NATS is gradually rolling out AFPEX, which stands for Assisted Flight Plan Exchange, licensed pilots living in the UK can, once they are registered, file their own flight plans online. AFPEX is a powerful 'one size fits most' tool that was designed for use by airfields, ops departments, airlines and pilots. Pilot users will find that there are parts of the flight plan,

addressing in particular that now need to be filed rather than having someone else do it on your behalf.

## Applying for an account

If you have not yet registered, you will need to go to [www.flightplanningonline.co.uk](http://www.flightplanningonline.co.uk). Click on 'Applying for an AFPEX account' and then on 'Individual Application Form'. This should download two documents, a help document and a webpage. The webpage is a form that needs to be filled in and submitted by clicking the submit button.

If your computer is configured to run Java and if it has a compatible mail client, you should see a populated email ready to send.

If not, you can print the form out and fax it on 0208 745 3229.

The system provides users with a powerful gateway to the AFTN (Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunication Network) so each application is fully checked. This can mean that it may take a while before you are put on the system.

To guide you through filing a VFR flight plan, we'll take a look at a simple route from Blackbushe to Kortrijk in Belgium, and discuss a couple of alternatives along the way.

If you need further help then there is a 24-hour helpdesk available on 0845 601 0483, although if you have general registration enquiries you should call 0845 601 0484 or email [flightplanningonline@nats.co.uk](mailto:flightplanningonline@nats.co.uk). ■

## LOGGING ON TO AFPEX



Go to [www.flightplanningonline.co.uk](http://www.flightplanningonline.co.uk) and click on 'Login'. This will start a download process that should result in the screen above appearing. You have three attempts at signing in. If all three fail you will be locked out of the system and will have to call the helpdesk.



Successful completion of the user name and password page will take you to the next security step where you will be asked to fill in letters selected at random from your pass phrase (these are case sensitive). You have 20 seconds per letter. Again, the three strikes and you're out rule applies.

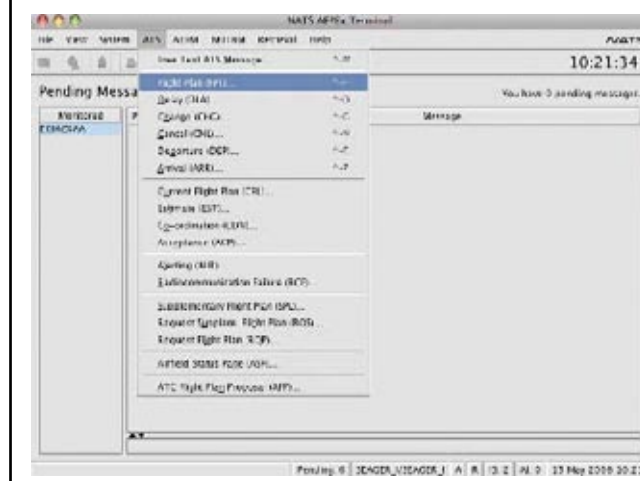
Nearly there! Assuming that you remembered your pass phrase, you will now get a screen asking you to accept the terms and conditions. Click 'Accept' (assuming that you do, of course) and you will be taken to the Pending Messages screen.



**Congratulations, you're in. This is your Pending Message screen and will contain, not unsurprisingly, a list of messages. These could include messages regarding IFR flight plans (there's no VFR flight plan confirmation) or system messages such as updates to the software etc.**



## TIME TO CREATE A VFR FLIGHT PLAN



**All you have to do now is to select Flight Plan under the ATS menu and the system will bring up a blank flight plan form ready for you to fill in.**

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A field-by-field guide to filling in your VFR flight plan on AFPEX

Send - FPL - ICAO Flight Plan

File View Edit Help NATS

Any Error messages will appear here

Invalid route points: Field; Unknown item

Prio.  Addressees

Filing Time  Originator  Bell   Address To IFPS  Full Addressees List  
 Extended Header

7/Aircraft ID  SSR

8/Flight Rules  Type of Flight

9/Number  Type of Aircraft  Wake Turbulence

10/Equipment  /

13/Departure  Time

15/Speed  Altitude/Level

Route

16/Destination  Total EET  Alternate  2nd

18/Other

Activate supplementary information Item 19 information is not part of message body

19/Endurance  Person on Board  Emergency Radio  UHF  VHF  ELT

Survival Equipment  POLAR  DESERT  MARITIME  JUNGLE  Jackets    LIGHT  FLUORES  UHF  VHF

Dinghies  Number  Capacity  Cover  Colour

Colour and Markings

Remark

Pilot

Filed By  Group  User

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The first user-editable field that you will come to is labelled **Prio.** for priority. This default setting is **FF** which is correct. Of the other settings available, you should be aware that **SS** is the highest safety of life setting. If you send that it will cause all sorts of trouble in all sorts of places. Best leave it set to **FF**.

If you find that you run out of address boxes, clicking on Full Addressees List will give you an additional 14 boxes. There's a section all about addressing on the opposite page.

**Item 7** Aircraft ID is your registration. Leave the SSR field blank.

**Item 8** The default setting here is for an IFR flight plan. This needs to be changed. If you forget to change it the flight plan will be rejected as it will not be IFR compliant. Type of flight should be set to **G** for General.

**Item 9** Number should be left blank (it is there for formations).

**Type of Aircraft.** This should be the ICAO code for your aircraft. If you get this wrong or your aircraft does not have an ICAO code, you will see a yellow triangle. This will not stop the flight plan being sent and processed. You can enter **ZZZZ** in this box and type **TYP/** followed by the type of your aircraft in field 18. If you do have a recognised type, the wake turbulence field will auto fill. If not, piston **GA** is covered by **L** for light.

**Item 10** This asks for details of equipment, CAP694 contains the full list. This flight plan shows **S** for standard and then after the **/S** for Mode S transponder (there are options for that too).

**Item 13** This asks for the ICAO code of your departure aerodrome. If you don't know it, right click and search in the window below. If your departure field does not have an ICAO code then enter **ZZZZ** and put **DEP/** followed by a plain text description (such as 'strip 10nm south of Colchester') in item 18. The time is your time of departure in UTC.

**Item 15** This asks for speed and will accept either **N** (knots), **K** (KPH) or **M** (Mach number, probably not applicable for most of us). The altitude field can be entered as **VFR**, a flight level, an altitude or in metres.

**The route box** The syntax here has to be checked by pressing **CTRL E**. The 'space' after **DCT** in the example here has generated an error.

**Item 16** Destination, **EET** and Alternate. Again, right click can be used to search for ICAO codes and **EET** (Estimated Elapsed Time) should be entered in hours and minutes.

**Item 18** This is the field used for other information. There's a full list of acceptable abbreviations in CAP 694. The convention is to follow the abbreviation with a forward slash before adding the free text.

**DEP/** – Departure airfield

**DEST/** – Destination Airfield

**TYP/** – Type

**EET/** – Estimated Elapsed Time (the French are very keen to get an EET to the FIR boundary when leaving France). If you have several EETs, the times shown should be the elapsed time since departure, not since the last EET.

**REG/** Registration markings if different to the aircraft ID in section 7. This could be used for a **GA** aircraft that carries military markings.

**RMK/** This is used for any additional, free text remarks

**DOF/** Date of Flight. This is auto-filled by AFPEX, but obviously if you are filing early then you would need to change that. Note the format, **YYMODA**. Once you have completed item 18 you will need to press **CTRL E** to check for any errors. When you do this, AFPEX will also sort the additional information into the correct order.

The additional information, from item 19 onwards, is not transmitted with the flight plan, but it is stored, so that in case of search and rescue information it can be retrieved.

**Item 19** Endurance. If the endurance is less than the **EET** in field 16, a red triangle and an error message will appear at the top of your flight plan form. Persons on board is straightforward, while any of the equipment that you don't have should be crossed out by clicking in the box. Clicking on **S** for survival or **J** for jackets will cross out all supplementary boxes. Colour markings should obviously reflect the aeroplane

If you don't want to put anything in the Remarks field, you'll need to click on the letter **N**. It is a good idea to put your contact details here, although putting them in item 18 after **RMK/** would ensure that your destination airfield could contact you.

Finally, the name of the pilot is straightforward and the 'filed by field' is self-explanatory. ■

## HOW TO ADDRESS A VFR FLIGHT PLAN



Even if you are used to filing flight plans, you almost certainly will not have had to address them. Correctly addressing a flight plan ensures that it is seen by everyone who needs to see it. An address consists of eight letters with the first two representing the country. There are two types of address used in AFPEX: single addresses that go to a single location (the tower in Le Touquet for example) or collective addresses that are used when a flight plan needs to go to several individual addresses.

### Departure, Destination and Alternates

When you fill in items 13 and 16 AFPEX auto-fills the correct addresses for the above

### Departure FIR and countries enroute\*

You will need to address your flight plan to the UK FIR that it started in, as well as any (UK FIRs) that it crosses. In the case of this flight, that will only be London for the UK. You also have to address the flight plan to any country over which you will fly, so for this flight, France and Belgium

### Other requirements\*

As you can see, some countries have other requirements. If you are landing in France, for example, you need to add **ZPXZ** to the ICAO address of the destination and alternate, and add those two addresses. You will also find that some UK airfields have other addressing requirements. You can find these by scrolling through the VFR Address List



**\* To find the VFR Address, right click in an empty address box. Select Add VFR Addressees. You will need to do this once for every additional addressee**