



WELCOME A PILOT PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM BY BAA TRAINING

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Months after launching a Pilot Peer Support Program (PPSP) for its partner airlines - Avion Express and KlasJet - and being the first ATO to do so, BAA Training now implements the same program internally. Support of trained pilot peers from the airlines mentioned above is now also available to BAA Training's flight students and flight instructors. They are invited to raise their concerns coming from any source – training, family or personal issues. The peers are pilots themselves, so they understand the profession's peculiarities and can help deal with stress in a confidential and nonjudgmental way.

The ultimate goal of the PPSP is to enable a pilot, their colleague or a family member to speak up and receive professional support. The issues they encounter may range from work-related stress factors, such as inflexible schedules, inappropriate workload, conflicts with team members, etc., to personal suffering, such as grief, marital or family difficulties. The involvement of pilot peers guarantees confidentiality and a non-punitive environment where pilots can expect to be heard and not judged regardless of the situation they report.

BAA Training realizes that both students' training and instructors' work come along with many stressors, so it aims to take care of their emotional health. Students have to be able to confront any educational struggle, whereas instructors take on an exceptionally high degree of responsibility. Therefore, ensuring both can ask for professional yet confidential support and be guided towards proper decision-making is crucial. That is where the PPSP is especially useful. The students now get access to the PPSP from day one of their flight training and flight instructors - as soon as they start working.

Dragan Ivanovic, Deputy Chief Flight Instructor at BAA Training Spain, says: "Piloting an aircraft puts students in a dynamic environment which they are not used to, so it takes them out of their comfort zone. It might be challenging to remember which tasks need to happen and in which particular order while also managing and mitigating risks and keeping high situational awareness. Therefore, having a point of contact students can refer to if they feel anxious or simply not at their best is very important. This way, they can get back on their feet and keep up with their professional and personal demands."

To be matched with a peer - a trained Avion Express or KlasJet pilot shortlisted as the most suitable and trustworthy for the role - an interested student or instructor have to fill in a [request form](#) on a [pilotpeer.com](#) webpage indicating BAA Training as the organization they come from. The system will notify the Program Manager, who will assign a peer to this request. The dedicated pilot peer will then get in touch with the applicant to arrange a convenient time to talk over the phone.

The structure of the PPSP is simple – pilot peers and those they consult are central to the program. The peers are supervised by a Program Manager who is accountable for training, supporting and consulting them to ensure high-quality services and people-centred care is provided. In exceptional circumstances and within the established procedure, a supporting mental health expert can also be involved.

Agne Novikene, Competence Center Director at BAA Training and the PPSP Program Manager, says: "We encourage our flight students and flight instructors to take advantage of the PPSP program as it's a great way to get the necessary support when going through difficult times."

The new EASA regulation regarding the PPSP was pushed forward as a swift follow-up on the Germanwings Flight 9525 accident. In consultation with the broader aviation community, the regulator has introduced "the right tools to safeguard the mental fitness of aircrew. "On 24 March 2015, Germanwings Flight 9525 crashed in the French Alps, killing all the passengers and flight crew. The investigation later revealed that the crash was deliberately caused by the co-pilot, who had suffered from depression and had had suicidal thoughts without making his employer aware of his mental troubles.

To prevent similar accidents, the PPSP encourages pilots to self-refer any psychological issues and solve them at early stages without fear of being excluded from rosters.

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