

SERA – all you need to know

The Standardised European Rules of the Air (commonly referred to as SERA) took effect across Europe on 4 December 2014 and in the UK superseded most (but not all) of the UK Rules of the Air Regulations 2007. Full details of the rule and the associated changes are contained in the CAA's SERA web pages at www.caa.co.uk/sera.

SERA is based on the same International standards as the UK Rules of the Air so in most respects they are identical. However, there are a number of differences to what aviators in the UK are accustomed to and these are summarised below.

SERA is slightly different to other European Regulations because it applies to **all** aircraft in European airspace (not just 'EASA aircraft'). Also, SERA does not address all of the areas that UK Rules of the Air historically have (for example, certain aircraft lighting requirements) and in some cases it requires States to write their own 'enabling' measures to allow some activities to take place (for example, VFR at night). It also allows for the retention of provisions that were already in place before SERA took effect, as long as these comply with and supplement SERA. The result is that the UK has retained a small number of domestic Rules of the Air and issued a number of General Permissions and General Exemptions. These can be found through the CAA's SERA web pages at www.caa.co.uk/sera.

Key changes

Visual Meteorological conditions

SERA requires aircraft flying VFR in controlled airspace to remain 1500m horizontally and 1000ft vertically from cloud and in a flight visibility of at least 5km at all times. The CAA is temporarily allowing aircraft flying VFR within Class C, D and E below 3000ft AMSL by day at 140kts or less to continue to apply the 'clear of cloud and with the surface in sight' minima as they have always done. This temporary arrangement currently lasts until 4 August 2015, and a permanent arrangement has yet to be finalised. The CAA will keep industry informed of progress with this.

Cruising levels

The quadrantal cruising levels system historically used in the UK does not exist in SERA. Instead, the semi-circular cruising level system applied throughout the rest of the world is used. To aid transition to the new system, this will now take effect in the UK on 2 April 2015.

Minimum Heights By Day

Although SERA changes the minimum height to a blanket 500ft above the surface, the CAA has used the flexibility provided in SERA to allow aircraft in the UK to fly below 500ft provided they are 500ft away from persons, vessels, vehicles and structures – in other words no change from the UK's former '500ft Rule' that people flying in the UK are used to applying. The CAA has also granted generic permissions to allow for all the long-standing exceptions to the old rule 5 that were contained in rule 6 – i.e. gliders hill-soaring, aircraft picking-up and dropping articles at aerodromes, practising forced landings and flying displays/air races/contests, to continue unaffected. Otherwise 1000ft is the minimum height over cities, towns or settlements or over an open-air assembly of persons above the highest obstacle within a radius of 600 m from the aircraft.

VFR at night

Aircraft have been able to fly under VFR at night since June 2012. SERA introduced a small number of additional requirements for aircraft flying at night. These are:

- If the aircraft leaves the vicinity of an aerodrome a flight plan must be filed. This can either be a 'paper' plan, an AFPEX plan or an abbreviated plan ('booking out').
- The cloud ceiling must be at least 1,500ft AMSL;
- The flight visibility must be at least 5km, or 3km for helicopters;
- When flying at 3,000ft AMSL or below, the surface must be in sight at all times; and
- The night VFR minimum height requirements are more stringent than the day requirements. Aircraft are to be flown at least 1000ft above the highest fixed obstacle within 8km of the aircraft, or 2000 ft when flying over high or mountainous terrain.

Special VFR (SVFR)

SERA introduced a speed limit of 140kts to aircraft flying under an SVFR clearance. The weather minima is now:

- Remain clear of cloud and with the surface in sight
- Maintain a flight visibility of 1500m, or 800m for helicopters

Rights of way on the ground

Rules on overtaking and giving way are now less specific. Aircraft and vehicles overtaking other aircraft and vehicles can now pass on either the left or the right.

The Right Hand Rule

The UK rule which required aircraft to be flown along the right hand side of line features ceases to be a legal requirement. However, it is still considered to be good practice as a means avoiding collisions with aircraft coming the other way, and so is strongly recommended.

SERA does not make any changes to pilot licenses or their conditions and limitations. Some licences include limitations such as visibility minima which may be greater than the minimum specified in the Visual Flight Rules. Therefore pilots are recommended to remind themselves of the applicable minima for their licence (you can find this on the personnel licensing pages of the CAA website).

More detailed information regarding SERA can be found on the CAA's SERA web pages by visiting www.caa.co.uk/sera.

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