

**Finance and Corporate Services**  
Information Management

11 March 2011  
FOIA reference: F0001134

Dear XXXX

I am writing in respect of your recent application of 4 March 2011, for the release of information held by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Your request:

*“ I have Increasingly noticed over the last year that there are regular passages of planes during the day and night over the Salford area above where I live and work.*

*Under the Freedom of Information Act, could you please advise me what the purpose is of these plane and their movements and whether the deposits left in the sky are there for a justified reason and aren't detrimental to the general health of the local population”.*

Our response:

In assessing your request in line with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we are pleased to be able to provide the information below.

In response to your request, it may be useful to outline the respective roles of those in the UK aviation industry, before explaining the airspace structure above Salford.

The CAA is the UK's independent regulator of the civil aviation industry and has responsibility in four main areas; Safety, Airspace Policy, Economic Regulation and Consumer Protection. Whilst the CAA does ensure that certain standards are met in the provision of air traffic control (ATC) services, it is not itself an ATC service provider nor does it have oversight of individual aircraft movements. Consequently, the CAA is unable to confirm the identity of these aircraft or explain the reason for their flight.

There are a variety of organisations that provide ATC services at both airports and control centres throughout the UK. However, the main provider is NATS, formerly known as National Air Traffic Services Ltd, and any aircraft operating within controlled airspace (CAS) and at most major airports will be under their control.

CAS, namely the Manchester Control Area (CTA), is established over Salford and is active between 2,000 and 3,500 feet above mean sea level (amsl). Further CAS, the Manchester Terminal Control Area (TMA), is located on top of the Manchester CTA and is active from 3,500 feet amsl upwards. The Manchester TMA forms a confluence of airways and departure and arrival routes in and out of the region's airports.

**Civil Aviation Authority**

Aviation House GW Gatwick Airport South Crawley West Sussex England RH6 0YR [www.caa.co.uk](http://www.caa.co.uk)  
Telephone 01293 768512 [rick.chatfield@caa.co.uk](mailto:rick.chatfield@caa.co.uk)

There are numerous high level air traffic routes that are established over the northwest of England; for your reference, I have enclosed an extract from the UK Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) showing the airspace structure above 24,500 feet; it is highly likely that the aircraft to which you refer are commercial aircraft transiting along the air routes displayed on this chart.

Aircraft transiting at such altitudes will, when the surrounding atmospheric conditions are conducive, form condensation trails (contrails). Contrails are formed when water vapour, which is emitted from aircraft engines as part of the combustion process, comes into contact with the cold surrounding air. Depending on the ambient atmospheric conditions, such as temperature, pressure and humidity, the water vapour may form or initiate a layer of cirrus clouds; therefore, I presume that by using the term "heavy grey/black cloud in the sky" you are actually referring to persistent contrails.

Contrails are mostly formed of ice; the primary exhaust emission of a jet aircraft is water vapour, which freezes within a couple of seconds, forming the visible part of the contrail. Jet engines also emit carbon dioxide, small amounts of unburnt hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen and carbon monoxide. Such emissions are regulated and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) specifies standards limiting the emissions from turbojet and turboprop aircraft in Annex 16 Volume II to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is responsible for certification of engines in the EU and will certify an engine providing that it meets the standards set out in the above Annex. European Commission Regulation (EC) No 1702/2003 sets out the applicable environmental protection requirements and certification specifications in Part 21A.18(b). It should be noted that EASA only certifies engines for aircraft registered in the EU. Aircraft registered outside of the EU are certified by their own regulatory authorities. A databank containing information on exhaust emissions on aircraft engines that have entered service can be accessed through the following link:

<http://www.caa.co.uk/default.aspx?catid=702&pagetype=90>

The information contained on the databank has been provided by the engine manufacturers and it should be noted that they are solely responsible for its accuracy.

Whilst it does acknowledge that aircraft emissions can have a detrimental effect on human health and the environment, the CAA does not hold any documentation that specifies the length of time that it would take for the substances contained within aircraft engine emissions to reach the ground. However, given that the aircraft are transiting at altitudes above 25,000 feet, and taking into account the upper winds that would be active at such altitudes, it is highly likely that such substances would travel a considerable distance prior to reaching the ground, if indeed they didn't dissipate completely.

If you are not satisfied with how we have dealt with your request in the first instance you should approach the CAA in writing at:-

Mark Stevens  
External Response Manager  
Civil Aviation Authority  
Aviation House  
Gatwick Airport South  
West Sussex  
RH6 0YR

[mark.stevens@caa.co.uk](mailto:mark.stevens@caa.co.uk)

The CAA has a formal internal review process for dealing with appeals or complaints in connection with Freedom of Information requests. The key steps in this process are set in the attachment.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome you have a right under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act to appeal against the decision by contacting the Information Commissioner at:-

Information Commissioner's Office  
FOI/EIR Complaints Resolution  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF  
[www.ico.gov.uk/complaints.aspx](http://www.ico.gov.uk/complaints.aspx)

Should you wish to make further Freedom of Information requests, please use the e-form at <http://www.caa.co.uk/foi>.

Yours sincerely

Rick Chatfield  
FoIA & EIR Case Manager

## **CAA INTERNAL REVIEW & COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

- The original case to which the appeal or complaint relates is identified and the case file is made available;
- The appeal or complaint is allocated to an Appeal Manager, the appeal is acknowledged and the details of the Appeal Manager are provided to the applicant;
- The Appeal Manager reviews the case to understand the nature of the appeal or complaint, reviews the actions and decisions taken in connection with the original case and takes account of any new information that may have been received. This will typically require contact with those persons involved in the original case and consultation with the CAA Legal Department;
- The Appeal Manager concludes the review and, after consultation with those involved with the case, and with the CAA Legal Department, agrees on the course of action to be taken;
- The Appeal Manager prepares the necessary response and collates any information to be provided to the applicant;
- The response and any necessary information is sent to the applicant, together with information about further rights of appeal to the Information Commissioners Office, including full contact details.