



Civil Aviation Authority

Safety Notice

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Unstable Approaches Continued to Landing

This Safety Notice contains information that is for guidance and/or awareness.

Recipients are asked to ensure that this Information Notice is copied to all members of their staff who may have an interest in the information (including any 'in-house' or contracted maintenance organisations and relevant outside contractors).

Applicability:	
Aerodromes:	Not primarily affected
Air Traffic:	All – For Awareness
Airspace:	Not primarily affected
Airworthiness:	Not primarily affected
Flight Operations:	All Operators
Licensed/Unlicensed Personnel:	All Operators

1 Introduction

This Safety Notice draws the attention of operators and flight crew to the continuing safety risk associated with the practice of continuing an unstable approach to a landing, rather than executing a Go-Around.

It sets out the actions that operators are expected to take within their operational, safety management and training systems to reduce the incidence of unstable approaches continued to landing and to reinforce the Go-Around as a normal, expected and well practised response.

2 Background

A stabilised approach is a long established defence against approach and landing accidents, in particular runway excursions, hard landings, tail strikes and runway-contact events. The principle is simple: an aircraft that is on the correct flight path, at the correct speed, in the correct configuration, with appropriate thrust and rate of descent, and with all actions completed by a defined point in the approach, is in the best position from which to complete a safe landing.

Despite this principle being well understood and embedded in most operator Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the CAA has identified — through analysis of mandatory occurrence reports and operator safety data — an increase in the number of unstable approaches which are continued to a landing rather than discontinued. This trend is of concern.

It is acknowledged that an unstable approach does not always result in an adverse outcome. Many continued unstable approaches conclude with an uneventful landing. This is precisely why the practice is so insidious: the absence of a negative outcome on any individual occasion can be misread by crews and organisations as evidence that the margin was acceptable.

The safety case does not rest on the outcome of any single approach. Historic data from the Flight Safety Foundation concluded that unstable approaches were a factor in 66% of approach and landing accidents. CAA data from 2024-2025 indicates that an approach which is continued in an unstable condition is 80-100 times more likely to result in a subsequent adverse event. These adverse events are most frequently not runway excursions, but hard or deep landings and tail strikes. Runway excursions remain one of the most frequently occurring accident categories worldwide, and unstable approaches are repeatedly identified among their principal causal and contributory factors. Continuing an unstable approach removes an important safety barrier.

3 Operator Actions

The aircraft commander retains the final authority for the safe conduct of the flight and may, in specific circumstances, determine that continuing to a landing is the safer course of action than initiating a Go-Around. This authority is not diminished by this Safety Notice. However, operators must ensure that this authority is correctly understood by all flight crew.

When the defined stability criteria are not met, the Go-Around is the normal and expected outcome.

The decision to continue an unstable approach should be supported by a specific, identifiable hazard that makes a Go-Around the greater risk on that occasion (for example, an aircraft system condition, a defined performance limitation, relative position of other aircraft outside of normal flight paths or another clear safety factor). It should not arise from a low level of confidence in flying the Go-Around, from unease about the manoeuvre, from commercial or schedule pressure, or from a perception that a Go-Around is an abnormal or undesirable event.

Operations in busy airspace environments are often cited as a reason for continuing an unstable approach. Approach, Departure and ATC procedures are designed to ensure safe Go-Arounds can be achieved and that ATC will deal with the necessary co-ordination for a go around once advised. This, alone in itself, should not normally be considered as an acceptable scenario to continue an unstable approach.

Operators should review their SOPs, SMS and Training against the following aspects of best practice and take action as necessary:

3.1 Standard Operating Procedures

Operator SOPs should set out clear, unambiguous criteria for a stabilised approach, including the parameters to be met (e.g. flight path, speed, configuration, thrust, rate of descent, completion of checklists and briefings) and the gate(s) — typically defined heights above aerodrome level or radio altimeter heights— by which those criteria must be satisfied.

In some operators a single stability gate is used, other operators promulgate a gate for Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC) and a lower gate for Visual Meteorological Conditions (VMC). There are a number of factors involved in setting such gates. However, the meteorological conditions do not directly affect the energy state of the aircraft. Operators should therefore review the operational benefits to determine the overall safety benefit of multiple gates and the circumstances for use. For example, a circling approach may require a lower gate, or different criteria, but a lower gate for a visual approach may simply create a higher risk of an unstable, rushed, approach with more time pressure on the Go-Around.

Operators should also recognise, and make clear in their SOPs, that stability is not a one time check at the gate(s). An approach can satisfy the criteria at the gate and subsequently destabilise. The approach requires continuous monitoring for stability all the way to the landing. SOPs should include clarity on:

What constitutes an acceptable transient deviation during which the approach may continue?

What must be called as unstable and treated as a Go-Around trigger?

SOPs should define clear, standard calls for the monitoring pilot to make when a parameter is deviating, and for when the stability criteria are no longer met and a Go-Around is required. This should include the expected response, so that the call and the action are unambiguous for both crew members.

3.2 Safety Management Systems

Operators should understand why approaches are continued by actively reviewing the reasons why unstable approaches are being continued to a landing within their operation.

This review should draw together FDM event data, safety reports, training data line operations safety audit data and crew feedback to understand the underlying drivers — for example, late configuration, late approach changes, ATC pressure, automation management, fatigue, crew threat-and-error management, or cultural factors that make the Go-Around feel exceptional rather than routine.

The output of this review should be a clear understanding of the local causes, which then directly informs training and procedural action.

3.3 Training

Training and checking should reinforce that a Go-Around flown in response to an unstable approach is the correct and expected decision, and crews should be assured that such a decision will be supported and never penalised.

Training programmes should be reviewed in the light of the output from the SMS, so that training addresses the actual reasons approaches are being continued in that operation, rather than being generic.

A particular aim of this review should be to increase crew confidence in conducting an all-engines operating Go-Around, including from low energy or high energy situations, from low altitude close to the landing and earlier points on the approach, in varied configurations. Go-Arounds practised only from the missed approach point in a fully prepared state do not reflect the situations in which the decision is most difficult.

Training should also ensure understanding that Approach, Departure and Air Traffic Control procedures ensure a safe environment for a Go-Around.

Human Factors training should be reviewed within the operator to ensure the factors involved in continuation of unstable approaches to landing are understood and addressed.

4. Queries

- 4.1 Any queries or requests for further guidance as a result of this communication should be addressed to commsflightops@caa.co.uk.

5 Cancellation

- 5.1 This Safety Notice will remain in force until further notice.