

COMMON TRAVEL AREA (CTA) – GENERAL AVIATION REPORT (GAR)

Thinking of a flight to Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Republic of Ireland or the Channel Islands then you will need to complete the General Aviation Report Form commonly abbreviated to GAR for both the Outbound and Inbound flight. Note this article does not cover the requirement to complete for a flight to or from Europe.

We are focussed on flights within the Common Travel Area (CTA) it is comprised of Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands with the requirement to complete the GAR defined in the Terrorism Act 2000. Simply put; this is the mechanism to control and have visibility of persons moving within the CTA for the purpose of “securing and preventing terrorism”.

If this is your first time then visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-aviation-operators-and-pilots-notification-of-flights> Here you will find the various documents explaining the precise requirements which should be considered essential reading, also the link to the current in use GAR Form. Note many airfields and other Internet sites have links to GAR forms most of which are outdated. The legislation is constantly changing as are the GAR forms, so please use the current GAR form.

As you read all 12 pages of the guidance notes it mixes Border Force with Police and designated custom airfields with those having a Certificate of Agreement all very confusing especially as the same form is used for customs purpose. Simply put the GAR is used to inform both the Police when you fly within the CTA and Border Force when you cross an International boundary, the National co-ordination unit (NCU) just forward it to one or the other (see below about submitting the form). Having spoken with our local Special Branch Ports Unit the simple solution if in doubt; is to submit the GAR Form and the NCU will do the rest. Additionally note the Channel Islands are treated slightly differently for customs purposes as they are considered outside the EU. You still submit a GAR Form but you must depart from a Certificate of Agreement or designated customs and excise airport. So no, you can't leave or return direct from your microlight field to go to the Channel Islands. Also, please note in the guidance notes there are separate bespoke GAR forms for each of the Islands within the Channel Islands which SkyDemon completes automatically and they all have differing PPR requirements.

So having got the correct form, complete it using the guidance notes – simple. By now you will have noted it is completed for both outbound and inbound flights, don't worry if you have no confirmed return date you can do separate forms for the return journey (Inbound) at a later date. So to submission; easy via email just follow the addressing instructions to the NCU ncu@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk who forward to all interested parties. You can email direct to the Police force responsible for the area of your departure & arrival airfields but why run the risk of getting it wrong when there is the NCU specifically to do this?

In extremis you can Fax it to NCU on 0870 240 3738 but this is actively discouraged.

Notification must be sent at least 12 hours in advance for both Outbound and Inbound flights.

By far the easiest way to complete and submit the GAR Form is via the electronic flight planning systems which have the integrated means of submitting a GAR – SkyDemon for example.

Or specific websites like:

Online GAR <https://www.onlinegar.com/splash.olg?FromDefault>

These electronic means are much more preferable as you receive a confirmation message and unique reference to hold as proof of submission and it is easier to amend and alter / cancel the GAR. Plus your details are retained so future GAR Forms are easier to complete just ensure you input all the required fields when you set up the devices. Personally I believe SkyDemon is the most convenient with Online GAR a close second as it has a Smartphone app which whilst you pay a small charge to submit, it is a very useful backup tool. **Top Tip; carry your login / password details.**

Probably the best thing you can do is make contact with your local Special Branch Ports unit; I have found them extremely flexible and informative. Submit your GAR as normal then give them a ring as a courtesy, this will confirm receipt and give them a chance to ask any questions. In the past due to weather I missed a departure time and a quick call had them amend my time, all very painless and well worth the effort. Importantly you must comply with what you state in the GAR, if it changes for example; land elsewhere due to weather you must contact the Police Unit responsible immediately for obvious reasons. **Top Tip; carry Annex D Police Force contact details of the Guidance Notes.**

You may have seen advertised a telephone number for use in emergency to submit or amend a GAR it is not shown in this article as you are not permitted to use it for flights under the Terrorism Act 2000 (within the CTA) which are handled by the Police as opposed to Customs handled by Border Force.

Don't forget photo ID is required to be carried and for the Republic of Ireland you will need your passport.

Finally, the plan is to move to electronic filing of the GAR, no time line yet but no fax or email option in the future is likely. Enjoy your flight!