Becoming a Microlight Flying Instructor

This guide to the process of becoming a Microlight Flying Instructor is intended to explain the processes involved and offer a little advice.

Teaching people to fly microlights can be an extremely rewarding experience. Not only are you passing on the knowledge and skills to become a pilot but you will also be doing something that you have chosen as your hobby, and the combination of the two aspects can make the experience great fun.

The responsibility of the role of the flying instructor however must not be underestimated. The instructor bears a huge responsibility for the safety of the student pilot and later, when that student becomes a pilot, for all those passengers that they will fly with as well as other pilots in the air and people on the ground. As well as being able to fly and to teach others the instructor must have a highly professional approach and unquestionable integrity.

If you are not put off so far, please read on.

Instructor training

To progress from a licensed pilot to a flying instructor you must learn how to accurately pass on information to the student both in a classroom and in an aircraft. Once you have the fundamental understanding of the role of the instructor you will need to practice and develop your skills until you have the experience that is essential to deliver a complete and correct lesson in absolute safety.

Instructor training is designed to achieve safe progression from raw pilot to experienced instructor, and you will have to follow this training path.

The Restricted Flying Instructor (FI (R))

The first stage on the instructor ladder is to become a Restricted Flying Instructor (FI (R)). This qualification was once called an Assistant Flying Instructor (AFI) and you will see that term used in some places where it hasn't yet been updated. The FI (R) qualification is granted to a pilot by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) following a course of training. The FI (R) is a flying instructor, but it is recognised at this stage that he has a lot to learn and skills to develop through experience. The experience is gained under the watchful eye of an instructor with much more experience who will help the FI (R) to develop by their direct supervision. The FI (R) stage can be thought of as an apprenticeship.

The FI (R) Course - Structure

To qualify as a FI (R) a pilot must attend and pass a course of training conducted by the holder of a CAA qualification entitling them to conduct the course. That qualification is the Flying Instructor Course Instructor (FICI). A list of Microlight FICIs is published on the BMAA web site in the Information Library.

Part of the course consists of ground based instruction which covers the principles of instruction and instructional techniques and then practices those techniques developing the Student FI (R)'s (SFI (R)) knowledge of the ground and flight syllabus that they will teach to student microlight pilots.

The classroom-based lessons will include practicing the flight briefings that will be used to teach the lessons in the air.

The flight based parts of the course will start by converting you to flying the aircraft from the passenger seat, the one that instructors sit in when teaching, and then you will fly all the flight exercises that you will teach to student pilots. There is a syllabus for the FI (R) course which can be purchased through the BMAA on-line shop.

At the end of the course you will be tested by a Flying Instructor Examiner (FIE) and if you pass he will recommend to the CAA that you are issued with the FI (R) certificate. There is a list of Microlight FIEs published on the BMAA web site in the Information Library.

The FI (R) certificate issued by the CAA will be restricted to the control type of aircraft that you used for your course and test. It will be Weightshift, Fixed wing or Powered Parachute. You may add additional types by completing further assessment tests with an FIE and applying to the CAA for them to be added at a later date.

The FI (R) Course – Preparation

When you are considering taking a FI (R) course it is extremely beneficial if you can get the backing of your local school and the support of a good flying instructor who can act as a mentor in your course preparations. Ideally your mentor will eventually become your supervising instructor and he will have a vested interest in preparing you for your course so that you get the most out of it.

This preparation will include helping you get up to date with the theory side of microlight flying as well as flying with you. Although "Instructor Familiarisation" with you flying from the instructor's seat in the aircraft is part of the FI (R) course, it can be helpful to take some specific training with a qualified instructor in this prior to starting the course so that you minimise your workload when on the course. We strongly advise against trying to learn how to fly from the instructor's seat with a non-instructor pilot in the other seat. Instructors have the skills to ensure that the conversion training is safe, Joe Pilot doesn't.

The FI (R) Course – Pre-entry

Before you start the course you must hold a current pilot's licence and the licence must include a Microlight Class Rating or SEP rating with Microlight differences training completed. If your licence is a NPPL it must be Without Operational Limitations. You must have flown for at least 100 hours as pilot in command of aircraft, at least 5 of which must have been in microlights. You must have flown for at least 5 hours as pilot in command of the type of aircraft to be used for the course (that is Weightshift, Fixed wing or Powered Parachute not particular aircraft model.)

To make sure that an applicant for a FI (R) Course has the necessary skills and knowledge to potentially complete the course you must pass a pre-entry ground examination and a flight test. The level of knowledge required to pass the ground exam is at least that required for the NPPL so you should have kept up to date since passing your pilot's exams. In the flight test you should be able to demonstrate that you have gained experience, but no bad habits, since gaining your licence. The pre-course tests do not form part of the course and you are strongly advised to take and pass them before booking your course. Most schools will insist on this anyway, but our advice still stands even if the school doesn't insist.

The FI (R) Course – Length and Fees

The **minimum** course times set by the CAA are 40 hours of ground training and 15 hours of flight training. The actual course length will depend upon the SFI (R)'s ability and aptitude. Experience has shown that these times are only achieved by very few students and that 55 hours classroom and 20 hours flight time is nearer to the average. When booking your course make sure that you take this into account when calculating the time that you will need to complete the course and the cost of the course. Course fees are individual to the course provider and you should be absolutely clear on what is or is not included before you book your course.

The FI (R) course can be great fun, but it is hard work. Many students completely underestimate, or are unaware of, the effort required and some do not finish the course. You should not be put off by this, but be prepared. Most courses will be run over between 18 and 25 course days. 10 day fast-track courses are generally unrealistic unless you have held an instructor rating in the past. You may have breaks between blocks of days to give you time to catch up with course work and absorb what you have learned. Course days are very rarely 9 to 5 and you will be expected to study in the evenings in preparation for the next day. You will need to consider the time commitment and all potential fees when deciding where and when you book your course.

The test to complete the course is not included in the required minimum times and so you will need to allow further time for the test, up to a full day, and further funds for the test fee.

When you have completed the course you will make an application to the CAA for the grant of the FI (R) rating. There is a fee for this. When the certificate is back in your hands you are an instructor.

CAA, BMAA and examiner fees are published on the BMAA web site in the Information Library.

Being a FI (R)

The period that you are a FI (R) is one during which you will develop your skills by using them and develop your understanding and approach to instructing by the supervision that you will get from a more experienced instructor.

A FI (R) has certain restrictions put upon them to reflect their learning state. These are:

- The FI (R) must only give flight instruction when directly supervised by the holder of a Flying Instructor rating (FI). Direct supervision means that the FI must be at the airfield during the period that the FI (R) is giving flight instruction. This means that FI (R)s will have to find employment within a school to obtain the supervision.
- The FI (R) is not allowed to authorise a first solo flight by any student pilot or a first solo cross country flight.

The restrictions are in place recognising that building experience and skills takes time and that for the safety of the student, as well as making sure that any instruction given is correct, the oversight of a more experienced instructor is required.

Our advice to the potential FI (R) reading this guide is that you should treat this supervision period as vital for your development, and make sure that you get proper useful oversight and input to help you. There have been instances of FI (R)s who have had very little development input from their supervising instructor and the result is that when they have the experience in terms of flight time and are eligible to test for upgrade to FI they fail the upgrade, and in some cases are at a poorer standard than when they first came off the FI (R) course.

Good supervision will include the supervising instructor sitting in on some of your ground school lectures as you give them and when you present pre-flight briefings. He will help you develop your knowledge and presentation skills. He will also fly with you to check that your teaching of the flight exercises is correct and again help you develop your teaching technique. Although it is likely that your first few lessons will be introductory flights, these help you develop your instructor responsibilities without being too technical, unless you are able to teach the full range of syllabus exercises during your supervised period you will not progress up the instructional ladder.

The FI (R) certificate is valid for 36 months. To continue as a FI (R) you must revalidate the certificate by test with an FIE.

The Flying Instructor (FI)

Following a period as a FI (R), the minimum being 10 months after the FI (R) certificate was issued, and having had at least 100 hours teaching in microlights you will have become eligible to take a test to be upgraded from FI (R) to FI. The test is taken with an FIE and will comprise of you giving a pre-flight briefing and then conducting a flight with the examiner as your student, you will also have an oral test which will gauge whether you have sufficient knowledge of the ground subjects for the NPPL and understanding of the skills required by a flying instructor.

On successful completion of the test the CAA will issue a Microlight Flying Instructor rating, valid for 36 months, which no longer has the restrictions imposed on the FI (R) rating.

The FI certificate will only be valid for control types that you have been tested as competent to teach in. To add other control types you will have to pass a test with an FIE.