



PTD 1010

PILOT FEEDBACK SYSTEM

WARNING

Information contained in this document is intended for flight simulation purposes only.

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Control Pages

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Introduction

General

The Pilot Feedback System (PFS) is a voluntary system designed to help further the aim of VATSIM to be an educational environment and to enhance the enjoyment of all network users by enhancing the understanding, knowledge and skills of members across the board. It will achieve this:

- By providing a means for individual pilots on the network to receive feedback about their performance, understand what they did well and be provided with information and resources to help them develop their understanding and perform better in areas which were not as strong
- By promoting a culture in which individuals are encouraged to admit to and learn from their own errors
- By providing data to the Pilot Training Department about common faults and issues, enabling the creation of educational resources, campaigns and policies to tackle these on a regional or network-wide scale

The system will be non-punitive, so long as it is determined the pilot had no intent of doing something unsafe, illegal, or in poor practice. So long as intent is not present the data collected from pilots will be stored and sorted.

PFS operates on the basis of 'Just Culture'. This means that:

- Innocent mistakes are not punished and are treated as opportunities for learning and improvement
- Reckless or malicious non-compliance may be escalated to network authorities for further investigation and sanction

Just Culture is a cornerstone of modern aviation safety culture, and fair and consistent application of these principles is essential to the development of an environment which is enjoyable for all and in which all individuals, no matter what level they are at, may feel supported to develop the skills and knowledge required to participate effectively without spoiling the enjoyment of others.

This document is provided to the members of the Pilot Training Department Staff who are assigned to handle Pilot Feedback Reports. This handbook should be followed as effectively as possible and any deviation should be approved by VATSIM Vice President - Pilot Training or their designee.

Reporting Process

Submission

At present, the ability to submit reports to PFS is limited to Network Supervisors only. As the scheme develops this will be expanded to all network users.

Feedback reports must include:

- The CID of the member for whom feedback is being submitted
- The callsign(s) of the flight(s) involved
- A description of events
- Name/CID of reporting person

The reporter should try to include as much information as possible, in order to enable the reviewing team to accurately categorise and make use of the report. Supporting information (e.g. video/audio recordings etc) is also encouraged to be included in the submission where possible.

Once the system has been opened to all members of the network, individuals are also encouraged to voluntarily submit reports regarding their **own** errors and mishaps. The culture of 'self-reporting' is a cornerstone of real-world aviation safety and provides multiple benefits; not only does it remove the need for investigation and any further intervention if an individual has demonstrated that they are aware of their own errors and shortcomings and how to avoid them in future, it also provides the wider community with the opportunity to learn from such occurrences, both directly and indirectly through the creation and enhancement of new and existing learning resources.

Report Handling

Report Reception

Reports will initially be received via email or designated website. These reports are confidential and should be treated as such.

To prevent multiple staff members from working on the same case accidentally: Upon receipt of the initial report, the responding PTD staff member should “reply all” (in the case of an email submission), or assign themselves to the report via the designated website.

A response to the reporter should detail who the staff member is, how they should contact them, and a brief description on what the next step in the process will be.

Initial Review

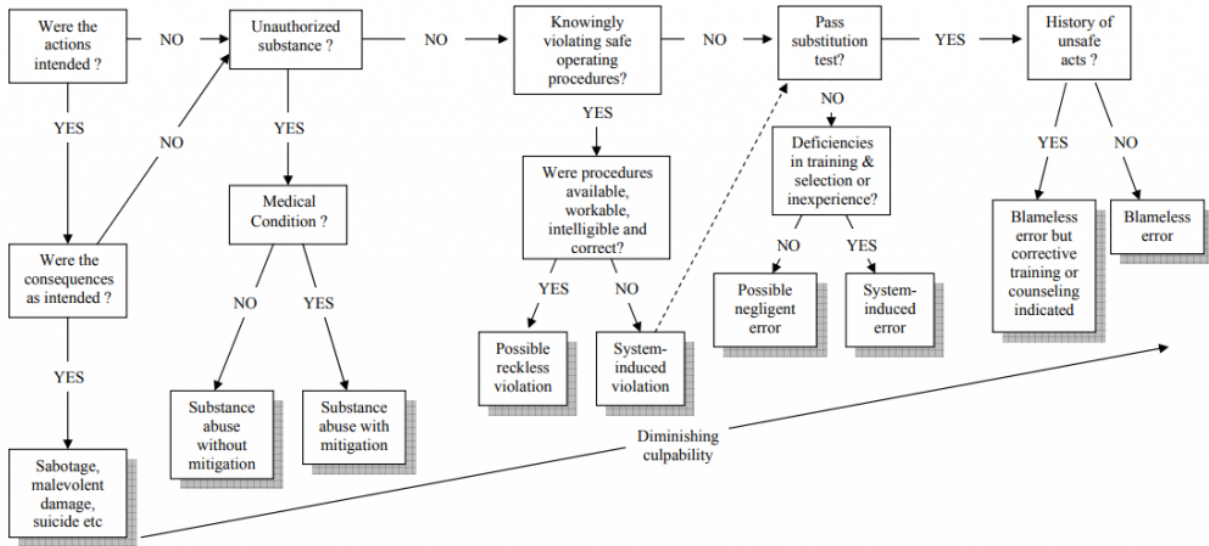
Reports will normally initially be handled by a Feedback Analyst, who will determine whether any further action is required and enter the details of the report into the Pilot Feedback database for future review and data analysis purposes.

In determining whether further action is required, the Feedback Analyst should make use of the ‘culpability tree’ and consider:

- Were the actions intended?
- Were the consequences as intended?
- Would three other individuals of similar experience and in a similar situation and environment act in the same manner as the pilot being evaluated?
- Has the pilot in question been involved in previous incidents?

Just Culture

In determining whether further action is required, Feedback Analysts and Pilot Training Managers may find it useful to refer to the following decision tree, devised by the psychologist James Reason, known for his work on human factors in aviation incidents and, notably, the “Swiss Cheese model” of threat and error management.



Applying the Just Culture Model

Were the actions intended?

The first step in applying the Just Culture model is to ask: **Were the actions intended?** In other words – did the pilot **intend** to do what they did?

In considering this, it is important to note that we are considering the pilot’s actions, **not** the outcome. Take the example of a pilot climbing through a SID altitude restriction: did the pilot **intend** to level off but failed to do so, or were they intending to climb to a different level altogether?

Were the consequences as intended?

If the answer to the question of intent is yes, the next question is: were the **consequences** of this action as intended?

In the case of the pilot climbing through the SID level, if they had set the appropriate altitude and intended to level off, but for whatever reason (distraction, technical malfunction etc) did not level off, clearly the consequences here are **not** as intended, and we move up the “no” branch.

If, however, the pilot had **not** set or intended to level off at the correct level, we have to then establish: did the pilot **know** that they were meant to level off and did not (in which case this is a deliberate malevolent act, we move down the “yes” branch and would typically put a case together for disciplinary action), or did they **not realise** they were meant to level off? If so, the consequences (busting the SID altitude) were not intended: we move up the “no” branch.

Unauthorised substance?

The next step, “unauthorised substance”, is not typically directly applicable to VATSIM in the same sense as real life, although this is a good moment to consider whether there are factors involved (was the user under the influence of alcohol/drugs etc?).

Were normal safe operating procedures knowingly violated?

Assuming the answer to the above is “no”, then we move on to the question of whether the user was **knowingly** violating normal safe operating procedures. In the example of a pilot exceeding a SID altitude restriction, two common procedures to prevent a level bust are 1) to have the relevant SID chart available and to refer to it when briefing and executing the procedure, and 2) to have the altitude restriction set in the aircraft MCP. Did the pilot **know** about charts in general? If not, then they have not **knowingly** violated the procedure, and we move down the “no” branch.

If the pilot **did** know charts exist, then it is reasonable to expect that they should have made some effort to obtain one and/or made sure they had it available: **IF** the appropriate charts were readily and easily available. If this were the case then we might conclude that this was a reckless violation; the pilot knew what they were meant to do, the information was readily available, but they **chose** to disregard the information.

On the other hand, it is possible that the pilot is operating in a part of the world in which charts are not easily and freely available, or perhaps the charts which are freely available are not clear, missing information or are outdated. If so we might consider that the procedures were not available, workable and/or intelligible and therefore the fault may lie more with the system than the pilot.

Substitution Test

If it has been determined that the pilot did **not** knowingly violate safe operating procedures, or did but the procedures/information necessary were **not** clear or readily available, the next stage is the **substitution test**: the question asked here is, essentially:

Would three other individuals of similar experience have acted in the same way if they were placed in the same situation as the incident pilot?

For instance, say the pilot was unaware of the availability of charts. However, they have been a VATSIM member for three years and flown some 300 hours on the network. Would three other individuals of similar experience also have been unaware of the availability or existence of charts? Probably not!

On the other hand, a pilot who is new to the network, or operating in unfamiliar territory, may be less aware of the resources which may be available and therefore less culpable.

It is also important to consider how reasonable it is for a (flight simulator) pilot to ‘uncover’ certain information. For instance, information which is clearly stated on freely-available instrument procedure charts, or which is contained within easy-to-find briefing documents on a control facility’s website, might be reasonable to be encompassed within a VATSIM pilot’s pre-flight preparation. However, it may be unreasonable to expect pilots to dig for information which is only available buried in textual form in an AIP, or in documents aimed at controllers, for instance, even though a real-world pilot might be required to do this.

Were there any deficiencies in prior training/support?

If the substitution test is not passed – that is to say that it is considered that similarly experienced individuals would have acted differently – the next question is to determine why this might be. Have there been any deficiencies in any training or support the individual might have

received up to this point? How and where has the member obtained their knowledge from? Does the member hold a pilot rating? If so, which ATO issued it? Is there training material covering the topic readily available and provided via VATSIM sources, or was the topic covered in the New Member Orientation Course? Has the individual had any previous interactions with the PTD and what was the outcome?

It may not be possible, practical or desirable to quiz the member in depth about all of these factors; a “twenty questions” type interrogation is absolutely not desirable. But any information which can, sensitively, be obtained here can be extremely valuable in helping to identify any systemic issues, such as sources of negative, incomplete or incorrect training material, which may be tackled separately to reduce the likelihood of further similar incidents occurring.

If the individual was otherwise as well-informed as they could have been – perhaps they had previously been counselled through the PFS system regarding a similar incident – then a recurrence may suggest an element of negligence, and thus greater culpability.

Does the user have a history of committing other unsafe acts/violations?

On the other hand, if the substitution test is passed – that is to say, that it is considered that three other individuals of similar experience would have acted in the same way – then the final step in the decision tree is reached: does this individual have a history of other unsafe acts, whether related or otherwise?

If so, then whilst they may not be at fault for committing this particular error, evidence of multiple violations (whether minor or otherwise) suggests a deficiency in competence which may need to be addressed.

If not, then no further action is normally necessary, although it may still be valuable for the member to be made aware of the feedback.

Post Decision

After the initial review is completed, the Feedback Analyst should have made a decision on whether or not the case requires further action. Further action is determined above and should be referred to a Pilot Training Manager for further actions to be taken.

If no further action is required:

- The Feedback Analyst shall enter the report into the database.
- The Feedback Analyst shall take note on the commonality of the report and report findings to Training Standards Team Lead

If further action is required:

- The Feedback Analyst shall refer the report to the Pilot Training Managers Team:
 - The Pilot Training Manager shall use the Just Culture section of this document to determine the culpability of the individual and to determine what type of action may be required.
 - If malicious intent is found in the report, the report should be referred to the Supervisor Department for Post Factum report. (unless referred from the SUP Department).

- If no malicious intent is found, the Pilot Training Manager should reach out to the member stated on the report and provide correction where needed.

The ultimate aim of the process is to enhance the overall enjoyment of all network users, both pilots and controllers, by supporting members to learn more about aviation and the art of aviating. However, it is important to recognise that each individual has a responsibility to operate within their competency, to take on board feedback and to seek information and training where necessary to close any gaps in competency which have the potential to affect other network users.

To this end, it is the PTD's aim to support individuals to achieve their goals regarding flying on the network to the greatest extent possible by support, guidance and resources through the 'Just Culture' process.

However, it is important to note that a 'Just Culture' is **not** a 'no blame' or 'non-punitive' culture where errors or unsafe/disruptive acts are **never** punished. The VATSIM network is a learning environment, but each member has an individual responsibility to engage in this learning environment in good faith, with due regard for the enjoyment of others and to ensure that they do not recklessly or negligently place themselves in a position beyond their competency which causes disruption to other users.

The VATSIM Code of Conduct and other rules are established to ensure that all network users have an enjoyable and safe experience on the network. It is in the interest of all VATSIM users who comply with the rules of the network to have confidence that these rules are enforced. Where a member acts in a manner contrary to the Code of Conduct which is malicious, reckless or negligent, taking in to consideration their accumulated experience and the resources, coaching and information available both as a whole to the average member and as provided to the individual specifically, the PTD may consider it appropriate to bring a case for enforcement action such as a network suspension if it considers that this is the most appropriate way to safeguard the enjoyment of others, prevent undue disruption to the network and to deter non-compliance with the rules.

The PTD does not have the power to determine whether any penalty should be levied upon a network user; it merely presents a case to the Supervisor Department who will evaluate and pursue cases according to network guidelines.

If a PTM reviewing a case believes that enforcement action may be appropriate they should discuss this with their team lead at the earliest opportunity and ensure that the relevant evidence for any such case is compiled effectively.

Pilot Correction

Should the Pilot Training Manager need to provide the member correction, the following options are amongst those which may be considered:

- Use a VATSIM resource to provide the member a centralized area to learn from their mistake
- If a VATSIM resource is not available, provide the member a reputable source for information such as FAA for the US or EASA for Europe and beyond.
 - Take note of what resources are given out to allow for the Pilot Training Department Development Team to create a VATSIM resource to be used at a later date
- Advise the member (tactfully!) as to areas of operation which may be more within their current level of competence, and areas of learning and checkpoints of competency they should aim to achieve before attempting more complex operations in future
- Consider referring the member toward enrolment in a VATSIM Pilot Training program

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in nature, and PTMs are encouraged to use judgement, tact and creativity in their actions and recommendations. The greatest benefit is to be found when recommendations are tailored specifically to the individual concerned and the individual case, rather than providing simple 'boilerplate' responses. As such, wherever possible PTMs are expected to use their communication skills to maximum effect in order to ascertain and enact an appropriate course of action for each individual circumstance.

PTMs must bear in mind that for many pilots, merely receiving an e-mail from a VATSIM staff member in relation to their performance on the network may feel like a (potentially unwarranted) admonition or accusation of guilt, and a negative or defensive reaction may be instinctive. It is essential that PTMs are polite and tactful in all their interactions, and great emphasis should be placed on the non-punitive nature of the system. PTMs should also be mindful that there is often more than one side to a story and keep a neutral attitude and open mind, particularly in the initial stages of any interaction where it is important to gather the pilot's understanding of what happened.

Feedback provided to the member must be concise, factual and make clear what **specifically** was below the required standard, what the required standard is, and provide a means (e.g. through pointers, resources etc) for how the member can bridge the gap between the two. Avoid talking in generalities, slipping into opinion or 'overloading' with too much information.

Feedback should be "ABC" (Accurate, Brief, Clear). A good structure to use is "CAP" (Commentary, Appraisal, Pointers). For example:

I wanted to drop you an e-mail because I wanted to have a quick chat about your flight out of San Francisco on Thursday evening. Before I go any further, I want to be really clear - you're not in trouble, you're not going to get banned or anything - I just wanted to pass on some feedback and assistance.

I can see from the logs that you were flying as ABC123 from KSFO to KLAX. I understand that you had a bit of difficulty with filing a valid route for your flight and getting in touch with ATC, which led to you taxiing without a clearance and crossing an active runway.

I can see you're new to VATSIM, and we'd really like to help you so that your future experiences on the network are more successful. With that in mind, I've enclosed a couple of links to topics in the VATSIM Pilot Learning Centre which I think you might find useful.

Beginner's Guide to ATC Communications

<https://my.vatsim.net/learn/vatsim-master-classes/section/127/page/71>

Guide to US IFR Route Planning

<https://my.vatsim.net/learn/vatsim-master-classes/section/128/page/73>

VATSIM Pilot Learning Centre

<https://my.vatsim.net/learn>

I'd recommend having a watch of the above videos, and then try to apply that knowledge to your next flight! If you have any questions, we're a really supportive bunch - you can drop in to the VATSIM Community Discord at <https://community.vatsim.net/>, or feel free to e-mail me any time.

A couple of really important points to remember:

- *It's really important to ensure that we have an explicit clearance from ATC to taxi, or to cross any runways*
- *A good pilot is always prepared! Having all the relevant charts for your flight to hand, getting them organised in advance to make sure that you always have the right one ready, and checking over them in advance so that you have a good idea of what you will be flying is essential. Here's a link to where you can find charts for KSFO and any other airport in the USA: <https://www.aviationapi.com/charts?apt=KSFO>*

I hope that helps and once again, if there's anything you're unsure about or you've got any questions please don't hesitate to reach out.

I look forward to seeing you on the network again soon!

PTMs shall provide as much information in the correction as possible to allow for the member to fully understand the situation they have encountered and how to avoid it in the future, therefore learning from their mistakes.