

UK VFR RULES AND REQUIREMENTS

HELICOPTERS

At or below 3000 feet QNH, helicopters may operate VFR in classes C, D, E, F or G airspace without any specified minimum visibility, provided they remain clear of cloud and in sight of the surface and fly at a 'Reasonable Speed' for the actual visibility.

SPECIAL VFR

For a number of reasons, VFR operations within a control zone are not always possible. If the weather conditions are below the VFR minima for that type of airspace or it's night time, or it's Class A airspace for example, then it may be possible to obtain a Special VFR Clearance (SVFR). This is essentially an ATC dispensation to operate in the zone without having to comply with IFR when otherwise, you would have to. Entry and exit lanes are sometimes set up within a control zone inside which, the rules for Special VFR operation may be different again.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS

The basic or standard requirements for operation under SVFR are contained in the UK AIP En-route Section (ENR 1-2-2). Any more restrictive requirements for operation under SVFR for any particular Control Zone, should be published in the UK AIP Aerodromes (AD-2) Section under the respective aerodrome's Flight Procedures.

In any event, you will not get a Special VFR clearance to land or take-off within a Control Zone, if the visibility is 1800 metres or less (i.e. visibility must be 1900m or more) or the cloud ceiling is less than 600 feet.

If you hold a PPL, BCPL or a JAR-CPL, then you may not fly Special VFR unless the flight visibility is 10km or more. If you hold an IMC rating then this restriction is reduced to 3000 metres visibility. Whatever qualifications you hold, you should know your licence limitations (see ANO Schedule 8) and lookup the limitations applicable to the airspace you are flying into. (AIP Aerodromes Section "AD 2 (aerodrome) paragraph 2.22" (Flight Procedures).

IS THE AIRSPACE "NOTIFIED"?

Some Routes (such as Entry and Exit Lanes) and some Aerodrome Traffic Zones (Note that's not necessarily the entire Control Zone) are "notified for the purposes of schedule 8 to the Air Navigation Order". This means, for example, that if you are limited to 10km by your licence you may still fly Special VFR on these "Notified" routes and in these zones even though the visibility is less than 10km. Instead, you are limited to the minima quota in the notification.

GET A CLEARANCE

You must get a clearance from the ATC unit controlling the zone at least 5 – 10 minutes before you expect to reach your entry point. You must maintain radio contact with the ATCU so that you are able to comply with their instructions operating under the clearance given.

The granting of a SVFR clearance is subject to other traffic conditions and various ATC regulations, which are the responsibility of the controller. This means that whilst conditions for your flight may appear to be acceptable to you, you may not get the clearance you want and you should be prepared to avoid the need for it. This may mean, for example, diverting your route to avoid the relevant control zone.

WATCH YOUR HEIGHT.

If ATC direct you to fly below 1000 ft over a congested area, town or city under a SVFR clearance, you are then absolved from this particular element of rule 5. You are nevertheless NOT absolved from the other elements of the low flying rules (including the 500 ft rule) which means if you are still flying a single you must still make sure you can land clear of any congested area should the engine fail.

STAY CLEAR OF CLOUD AND IN SIGHT OF THE SURFACE.

Special VFR also means that you must be able to see any obstacles and determine your flight path by visual reference to the surface. Therefore you must keep clear of cloud and in sight of the surface, all the time you are under the SVFR clearance, whatever your qualifications may be.