



vatsim uk

Virtual Royal Air Force  
& VATSIM UK  
Letter of Agreement (LOA)  
V3.2



## **1.0 Outline**

### **1.1 Purpose**

This Letter of Agreement (LOA) outlines standard operating procedures and policies to be utilised by the Virtual Royal Air Force (vRAF) and VATSIM - United Kingdom Division (VATSIM UK). It is also applicable to other VATSIM Special Operations (VSO) pilots as per section 3.5 of the Policy and Procedure Manual for VATSIM Virtual Airlines and VATSIM Special Operations (PPM).

### **1.2 Introduction**

Organisations that are members of the VATSIM Special Operations Administration (VSOA) hold approval to conduct operations listed in the VATSIM Code of Conduct (CoC) Section A13. This agreement outlines policies and procedures to allow VSOs to conduct these activities within the UK FIRs.

### **1.3 Establishes**

- Method for identification of VSO pilots on the network.
- Provision for operations of VSO aircraft within the UK FIRs.
- Provision for operations within Special Use Airspace.
- Procedures for the operation of landable ships (aircraft carriers) within 100nm of the UK coastline.
- Provision for the use of radar corridors.
- Provision for major exercises with multiple VSOs.
- Procedures for specialist operational support functions, including AWACS, Fighter Control and Forward Air Control.
- Provision of dedicated frequencies for VSO operational use.
- Appropriate lines of communication between vRAF and VATSIM UK.

### **1.4 Activation**

This LOA will be considered current and active as of the date of signing below.

### **1.5 Revision**

vRAF and VATSIM UK will endeavour to review this document bi-annually to ensure its continued relevance.

### **1.6 Cancellation**

This LOA will remain in effect until replaced by a revision that has been mutually agreed upon by both parties, or until it is cancelled by either party, with a minimum of twenty eight (28) days notice provided.

### **1.7 Distribution**

- Virtual Royal Air Force(vRAF)
- VATSIM United Kingdom Division (VATSIM UK)
- Vice-President of Virtual Airlines and Special Operations (VATGOV9)
- VATSIM Director of Special Operations
- VATSIM VSO ATC Coordinator (*will distribute to other VSOs as required*)

### **1.8 Policies**

Neither party can dictate or strike to change either parties' policies and guidelines set forth within their charters. Additions, modifications and deletions to this LOA must be done per mutual agreement by both vRAF and VATSIM UK.

## 2.0 General Operations

During operations within the UK FIRs, VSO aircraft are to file appropriate flight plans and squawk appropriately for the activity being conducted.

### 2.1 Identification

VSO pilots do not have a monopoly on the use of UK military callsigns or airfields, and whilst non-VSO pilots do use these callsigns and airfields, they are obviously not included in this agreement. It is critical therefore that VSO pilots are easily identifiable on the network to supervisors and controllers. VSO pilots are identified on the network by their flight plan remarks, which are restricted to VSO usage in accordance with the CoC A13 and the PPM.

VRAF will use a minimum of the following within their flight plan remarks;

OPR/VRAF.NET VSOA

### 2.2 Special Use Airspace (SUA)

The term Special Use Airspace refers to all airspace which is reserved for military activity within the UK FIRs. This includes certain Danger Areas, Air to Air Refueling Areas (AARAs), Orbit Areas, Low Flying Areas (LFAs) and any other appropriate airspace.

VSO pilots may utilise any relevant SUA within the UK FIRs. Sufficient notice should be given by NOTAM on the VATSIM UK forum. Whilst no time limit has been established, it is suggested that a minimum of 30 minutes notice ahead of the airspace becoming activated is provided.

### 2.3 Carrier Operations (Landable Ship)


VSOs may conduct operations from land-able ships located within 100nm of the UK coastline. Landable ships will be located:

- at the discretion of the VSO conducting the operation.
- in such a way as to minimise any interference with routine operations on the network.
- inside class G airspace.

### 2.4 Radar Corridors

A series of Radar Corridors has been established within the UK FIRs to facilitate crossing of controlled airspace with minimal disruption. Radar corridors are defined in the UK Military AIP and reproduced in the vRAF Pilot Handbook.

VSO aircraft may utilise radar corridors to transit controlled airspace. Transit of a radar corridor requires a clearance from the controlling sector (if online). If Swanwick Mil is online, they will provide coordination and clearance for aircraft transiting a radar corridor. The



appropriate controlling agency should, where possible, be contacted 5 minutes prior to entering controlled airspace for clearance and appropriate service.

## **2.5 Major Exercises**

All Major Exercises within the UK FIRs that are planned by any VSO are to be notified to VATSIM UK with a minimum of twenty eight (28) days notice. Notification will take place in the form of an Airspace Coordination Notice (ACN) and will include full operational details, including dates and times of projected sorties. This notification will also include a list of any other VSOs taking part in the exercise.

During notified exercises the VSO responsible will ensure distribution of this agreement to all participating VSOs, who will be responsible for their own adherence and compliance.

## 3.0 Specialist Support Functions

VSOs may operate Airborne Early Warning And Control System (AWACS) aircraft, Forward Air Controllers (FAC), Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTAC) and Fighter Controllers. vRAF provides these functions with the use of internally developed radar clients or existing ATC programs. To facilitate realistic operations, appropriate and defined protocols for controller-controller, controller-pilot and pilot-pilot coordination are required.

### 3.1 AWACS

AWACS is an **airborne** function provided by a **pilot** of an AWACS aircraft. They will only provide tactical information to other VSO pilots that are operating within a pre notified area of airspace.

#### 3.1.1 Overview

- AWACS functions will be provided by trained and approved VSO members logged into the network as a **pilot**, from an **aircraft**.
- VSO aircraft may be released to AWACS aircraft by controllers. No ATC services are provided by the pilot of the AWACS aircraft.
- Should an ATC service be required upon leaving the area of operations, AWACS aircraft will advise VSO aircraft to contact the appropriate agency. However, it remains the responsibility of individual pilots to ensure they are in contact with the appropriate agency before penetrating controlled airspace.

#### 3.1.2 Process

- It is the responsibility of AWACS pilots to make VATSIM UK controllers aware of their presence, providing the area in use, block of airspace activated (normally via NOTAM), expected assets, aircraft callsign and frequency in use.
- Upon approaching/entering the area of planned operations the VATSIM UK controller will approve a frequency change to the pre-notified AWACS aircraft.
- The overall control of aircraft & airspace remains the responsibility of VATSIM UK.
- Adjacent controllers will endeavour to direct non-participating traffic around the activated area to minimise disruption to VSO activities. However, should this be unavoidable, they will endeavour to inform the AWACS pilot of the conflicting aircraft.

### 3.2 Fighter Control

Fighter Control is a **ground based** function provided by a **controller**. They will provide enroute ATC services and tactical information to VSO aircraft operating within a pre-notified area of airspace.

#### 3.2.1 Minimum Requirements for Fighter Controllers

- S3 controller rating.
- Member of a VSO.
- Successful completion of a VSO fighter controller course. VSOs are required to notify VATSIM UK of qualified Fighter Controllers. For vRAF this notification will take the form of a notation on its publicly available [pilot roster](#).
- VATSIM UK home or visiting controller.
- VATSIM UK military controller endorsement appropriate to their rating.

#### 3.2.2 Overview

- Fighter Controllers operate as autonomous radar units, able to provide ATC services to VSO aircraft within Class C, E, and G airspace.
- Fighter Controllers are able to provide a service within Class A airspace for crossing purposes only. This should be done with either;
  - Cleared Flight Path coordination (CFP)
  - Tactical crossing that maintains the required separation against other unknown traffic within controlled airspace.
- Fighter Controllers are not authorised to provide a crossing via a radar corridor.
- Fighter Controllers are not authorised to provide ATC services in Class D airspace.
- Fighter Controllers are not to provide any top down service of any airfields.
- Fighter Controllers will provide the appropriate UK Flight Information Service depending on the airspace the VSO aircraft are within, abiding by standard separation rules.

#### 3.2.3 Process

- It is the responsibility of the Fighter Controller to make adjacent controllers aware of their presence, providing the area in use, block of airspace activated (normally via NOTAM), expected assets, callsign and frequency in use.
- The overall control of aircraft & airspace remains the responsibility of VATSIM UK (of which the Fighter Controller is a member).
- Adjacent controllers will endeavour to direct non-participating traffic around the activated area to minimise disruption to VSO activities. However, should this be unavoidable, they will coordinate with the Fighter Controller.

#### 3.2.4 Callsigns

The following callsigns will be used by Fighter Controllers to log into the network

HTSPR\_1\_APP/CTR (RTF - Hotspur)

HTSPR\_2\_APP/CTR (RTF - Hotspur)

### 3.3 Forward Air Control

Forward Air Control(FAC) and Joint Terminal Attack Control (JTAC) are **ground based** functions provided by an **observer**. They will provide ground based target information to VSO aircraft operating in a pre notified area of airspace. This function may be provided using any communication method that is **not a VATSIM network frequency**. For the avoidance of doubt - VSO members providing FAC/JTAC are **not** “controllers” in the VATSIM sense.

#### 3.3.1 Overview

- FAC/JTACs provide ground target information to VSO aircraft conducting Air to Surface operations.

### 3.4 Frequency allocations

AWACS, Fighter Control and Air-to-air frequencies delegated to VSOs within the UK FIRs shall be;

- Used for operational purposes only.
- Used by VSO members only.

The frequencies allocated to VSOs are selected from the unused portion of the Swanwick Mil allocation;

Frequency	Purpose
131.400	HTSPR_1_XXX
134.500	HTSPR_2_XXX
132.500	Air-to-Air Refuelling
125.725	Air-to-Air 1
129.700	Air-to-Air 2
126.600	Carrier Operations Safety Comm

Should re-allocation of the notified frequencies be required, then VATSIM UK will provide a minimum of twenty eight (28) days notice to vRAF and the VSOA. This notification will include appropriate replacement VHF frequency(s) and date of applicability.



### 3.5 vRAF Air Command

vRAF Air Command is the governing body of vRAF. Its members may log into the VATSIM network as an observer to monitor vRAF activity. They are to be the point of contact should conflicts arise between vRAF pilots and controllers. Other VSO pilots are responsible to their individual organisations and are not governed by vRAF.

Callsigns that may be used by vRAF Air Command;

- VRAF\_OPS

### Contacts

The primary contacts relating to this agreement are:

vRAF Air Command - [aircommand@vraf.net](mailto:aircommand@vraf.net)

VATSIM UK Operations Department - [operations@vatsim.uk](mailto:operations@vatsim.uk)

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Date: 1st April 2025

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**DOCUMENT ENDS**