

EASA Compliant Regulatory Course Acceptance Best Practices

Here we share an interview with Steve Bentley, FRAeS, CEO of Sofema Aviation Services, exploring the regulatory mechanics of course acceptance and how Sofema navigates EASA compliance.

The big picture. What is the primary role and purpose of Sofema Aviation Services within the industry?

Steve Bentley: Thank you for having me. Fundamentally, Sofema exists to build practical competence and support total operational compliance across the global aviation industry.

- Since 2008, our purpose has been to bridge the gap between complex regulatory frameworks, like EASA, and the practical realities of daily operations.
- We do this by providing highly structured, interactive e-learning and vocational training. With over 525 active training programs, we empower organizations to manage their regulatory training matrix efficiently, drastically reducing overhead while ensuring their personnel remain thoroughly compliant and capable.

Sofema offers an impressive portfolio of over 525 courses and diplomas. However, the organization holds no EASA approval. Can you explain why that is?

Steve Bentley: It's a very common question, and it comes down to a fundamental misunderstanding of how the European regulatory system works.

- Sofema Aviation does not hold an EASA approval simply because EASA does not issue generic organizational approvals for the type of regulatory and vocational training we provide.
- EASA's framework is highly specific; there is no "blanket" approval certificate that a training provider can apply for to cover subjects like Safety Management Systems (SMS), Human Factors, or Compliance Auditing.

Many in the industry immediately associate aviation training with an EASA Part-147 certification. Why doesn't your training fall under that umbrella?

Steve Bentley: The scope of EASA Part-147 is strictly limited. The only training approval EASA issues under this regulation is specifically for providing Basic and Type training for Part-66 Licensed aircraft engineers.

- It is not a generic catch-all for aviation training. The vast majority of our 525+ courses, covering topics from EWIS and Fuel Tank Safety to Root Cause Analysis, fall entirely outside the remit of Part-147.
- In fact, EASA explicitly dictates that courses outside the scope of Part-66 licensing cannot be included in a Part-147 organization's approval schedule.

If EASA isn't approving the training provider, how does an organization ensure the training they purchase from you is legally compliant?

Steve Bentley: This is the crux of the EASA philosophy.

- For regulatory compliance training, EASA places the legal burden of approval entirely on the receiving organization, the specific Part-145 maintenance organization, the Part-CAMO, or the Air Operator employing the trainee.
- The mechanism is decentralized. EASA says to the operator: *You* are responsible for the competence of your staff.
- Therefore, *your* organization must formally validate and accept that our training course meets your specific EASA compliance objectives before you roll it out to your workforce.

What exactly is the receiving organization obligated to do to formally accept a course?

Steve Bentley: The organization must demonstrate to their Competent Authority, that the external online training satisfies the requirements detailed in their approved manuals, whether that's the Maintenance Organisation Exposition (MOE) or the Continuing Airworthiness Management Exposition (CAME).

- They are legally obligated to review our syllabus, the learning objectives, and the content to ensure it accurately reflects current regulations and aligns with their internal procedures.

Within an airline or maintenance facility, who typically performs this assessment?

Steve Bentley: The primary responsibility almost always falls to the Compliance Manager or the Compliance Monitoring Manager. They are the gatekeepers. They review the course content, audit our quality processes, and formally "accept" the training on behalf of the organization.

- In larger organizations, they work in tandem with the Training Manager, who evaluates the pedagogical suitability, and
- The Nominated Persons or Postholders, who ensure the material addresses the practical, day-to-day safety risks of their specific technical departments.

Assessing a course usually requires seeing it first. How do organizations ensure the delivery and examination methods are robust before committing to them financially?

Steve Bentley: That is exactly the challenge EASA's decentralized system creates, and it's why the organization must physically evaluate the delivery method, like our e-learning platform and the final assessment mechanism to ensure it genuinely measures competence.

- To solve this, we cannot reasonably ask a Compliance Manager to buy a course just to see if it's compliant. That would be completely impractical.

Is that what led to Sofema's "Free of Charge Guest Enrollment" policy? How does that work?

Steve Bentley: Precisely. We provide "Free of Charge guest enrollment" as a direct, pragmatic solution to the EASA regulatory framework.

- Because the receiving organization's Compliance Manager must formally validate the training, we grant them free guest access to our online portals.

- This allows them to log in, review the modules, examine the learning objectives, and test the assessment methods without incurring a single euro of financial cost.

Does this guest access extend to the regulatory authorities as well?

Steve Bentley: Absolutely. We actively encourage it.

- We provide this same free guest access to Competent Authority Airworthiness Inspectors.
- If a National Aviation Authority is auditing one of our clients and wants to verify the standard of the external training being used, the inspector can log directly into our system to review the material. It guarantees total transparency.

How does this audit process help organizations tailor generic regulations to their specific environment?

Steve Bentley: While our courses are designed to be globally compliant with EASA regulations, every aviation organization is unique.

- They have different operational scopes, different aircraft types, and different inherent risks.
- Guest access enables the Compliance Manager to confirm that our generic regulatory training adequately addresses their organization's unique requirements. If they identify a gap between our generic training and their specific company procedures, they know exactly what supplementary internal briefings they need to provide to their staff.

Any final words of advice for organizations managing their training matrices today?

Steve Bentley: Understand where your responsibilities lie.

- Do not look for a generic "EASA Approval" stamp on a human factors or SMS certificate, it doesn't exist.
- Instead, empower your Compliance Department to robustly audit your external providers, utilize guest access to verify the content, and ensure everything ties back clearly to your MOE or CAME.
- Compliance is a proactive responsibility, not a passive one.

Next Steps

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