

FC5290/FC5294

Posted on 29.01.2024 by Steve Forward

Category: [Flight Crew \(Commercial\)](#)

Report Title Inability to contact Ops/Crewing

Initial Report

FC5290 Report text: Crew, widely, are unable to get hold of our centralised support functions when it matters most. We're left to fend for ourselves over and over again at the moment. No support, seems a safety issue.

FC5294 Report text: Company operations centre phone system is crumbling. The ops centre is severely understaffed and technically under-resourced. Routinely it takes several phone calls (my record this month is 17 attempted calls in a single 4hr period on-duty), the calls often usually go through with clear background noise and voices then immediately hang up (dropped calls by the system according to the Centre manager... the alternative is that staff are deliberately answering and immediately hanging up).

Due to the under-crewed operation, we're regularly close to Max FDP, always on minimum rest, and delays (sometimes before report, sometimes after) mean we're often beyond Max FDP, sometimes with Commander's Discretion not available (delays known about before report, i.e. late inbound aircraft), sometimes with Commander's Discretion not available due crew fitness or other reasons.

It can take hours to get hold of the company to either replace or compromise with crew on a favour-for-a-favour basis (although the company usually seem reluctant to do that). Crewing will usually want to get the flight out, even if it means not coming back. Ops usually want the first-wave protected and aircraft in-base the following day, not stuck down route because of FDP limits. It is becoming impossible to get hold of the company to get a decision whether to operate or cancel the flight. As a Captain, it is not our decision whether to operate a single flight or cancel, or attempt to operate return flights with a high risk of being stuck down route. There is also the added stress that if we attempt to make a decision such as to go, we then expose ourselves to a challenge of "you should have checked first", or if we don't go and spend hours trying to contact the company, the flights get cancelled and we're told "you should have just gone".

The company have had this reported numerous times, and nothing seems to change. They cannot handle minor disruption without things falling apart and crew are unable to delay off-duty times or get changed to legal duties when they check-out with an illegal rest period. If there was a major incident or something requiring informing the Duty Pilot, or even something that you wish to

discuss operationally with them, it seems that is just impossible. The CAA need to investigate and apply pressure on the company to rectify this. One part of the solution is to employ more staff, you cannot have a single person dealing with [large numbers] of crew, and one person dealing with [numerous] aircraft when there are the levels of Eurocontrol sector disruption there were in 2023.

Comment

It should go without saying that companies must have robust back-office resources and communication protocols for crews to be able to contact operations or crewing in a timely manner so that guidance or direction can be received on critical time-sensitive operational matters. Unfortunately, neither reporter responded to our requests to contact the company concerned and so we were unable to do so in accordance with our mandate to protect reporters identities. Given that the reporter states that this issue has been reported to the company numerous times without resolution, a cynic might say that there would likely be little to be gained even if we did engage with them. But we did pass on the reporters' concerns to the CAA and ask that they investigate the company's crew-to-operations communication protocols and resourcing. The CAA reported that they investigated this concern with the operator but, due to confidentiality requirements, they rarely give CHIRP detailed specifics about the outcomes of their engagement with companies other than a generic overview commenting that they have engaged on the matter. The CAA did inform CHIRP that the operator in question was aware of the limitations the current system had, and were investing in changes to address them. In this regard the CAA expects improvements and will look for evidence of effectiveness so hopefully something will have come from CAA's engagement and our highlighting the issue.



