

GA1353

Posted on 15.05.2024 by Steve Forward

Category: [General Aviation](#)

Report Title Unsuitable conditions for students

Initial Report

I was listening to [Radar Unit] as 2 students we're transiting from [Airfield 1] to [Airfield 2] using student callsigns. Both were making regular calls that conditions were deteriorating and that they were descending. Other pilots on frequency went quiet, aware what was unfolding. [Airfield 2] had been IFR all morning and [Region] was low cloud and mist in places. After about 15mins of calls from these two students about conditions deteriorating, it became clear the situation was not improving. The calls they were making were quite consistent *"Conditions are getting worse, descending but continuing."*

The controller was being extremely helpful but it was obvious it was getting worse when they were descending near [Town], I believe 1000ft at one point. I made a call to *"Student- [Aircraft Reg 1] this is Instructor in [Aircraft Reg 2], request you divert or turn around please"*. [Radar Unit] asked if they had received it and they said affirm but were continuing. A few minutes later the other callsign said they were descending and another pilot made a call on frequency *"Will someone do something to help these two?"*. [Radar Unit] were excellent and offered heading and any assistance they required but they seemed determined to make [Airfield 2] despite the conditions. Then the call came *"Student [Aircraft Reg 1] I'm in cloud."*

With some headings from [Radar Unit], both aircraft did ultimately return to [Airfield 1] safely. As an instructor I would never have sent a student out with those forecasts and I ensure my students understand that turning back is not failure but the right decision.

Comment

The instructor's comments paint a very different picture to that of the reporter, and, notwithstanding their pre-flight telephone call to the destination, may reflect the difference between the departure airfield local weather conditions experienced during the instructor's short flight and the reality along the route; it appears from the reporter's comments that the conditions that actually pertained along the route by the time the students were in that area were very different. We all know that TAFs contain a degree of uncertainty, especially if you're relying on one from a different airfield in the region [Airfield 3] where local weather effects can cause important differences. It's easy to get caught out if relying on a destination METAR and another airfield's TAF in

the region, and this needs to be fully considered when sending pre-PPL students on cross-country flights; obtaining as good an understanding as possible of the region's synoptic situation is vital, including reviewing TAFs from a number of airfields, so that students have weather information that is as comprehensive as possible. The Met Office F214 and F215 charts (spot wind and low-level weather forecasts respectively) and their [Aviation Briefing Service](#) (ABS) should be one of the first ports of call for such information – the free version of the ABS provides the essentials.

All that needs to be balanced by the instructor's comments that the students were briefed on the actions to take if poor weather was encountered. The first student at least was participating in an integrated course; this meant that they had very low hours and experience, no PPL, and were potentially under financial and organisational pressure to complete the course expeditiously. We can only speculate about what was going on in the students' minds at the time and so mustn't jump to conclusions, but it does seem odd that both seemed happy to continue towards bad weather despite all warnings, with one reportedly even stating they were entering cloud before turning around. We've seen such occurrences before, and the AAIB investigation into the [G-BHFI incident](#) of 8th September 2020 has similarities in many respects.

There are likely many generic lessons in this report relating to flights in deteriorating VFR, many of which are covered in the recently published CAA [Safety Sense Leaflet 33](#) titled 'VFR into IMC Flight'. Although we make no specific statements as to what actually happened, potential takeaways for training organisations to consider are: assumptions of understanding; press-on-it-is in a training environment; pressures to fly (perceived, financial and self-imposed); supervision of students; comprehensive briefing to students about weather limits; fulsome and unambiguous out-briefs (especially to students, and including 'what if' scenarios); decision making; and a host of other factors related to training inexperienced students. Indeed, the complete gamut of the Dirty Dozen Human Factors descriptors probably applies in one form or another (although there was no evidence of Fatigue that we know of), namely: Deviation, Complacency, Assertiveness, Teamwork, Communication, Knowledge, Awareness, Distraction, Resources, Pressure, and Stress. Ultimately, this incident emphasises the duty on instructors to look after and think ahead for their students (who were, after all, unqualified at that point and flying under the authorisation of their instructors).

Key Issues

The following 'Dirty Dozen' Human Factors elements were a key part of the CHIRP discussions about this report and are intended to provide food for thought when considering aspects that might be pertinent in similar circumstances.

- **Stress** – Conducting a solo pre-PPL navex in relatively poor and worsening weather conditions.
- **Pressure** – Potential desire to complete their course for financial and career reasons.

- **Resources** – Destination TAF not available.
- **Awareness** – Incomplete weather information.
- **Teamwork** – Duty of care from instructors to students.
- **Complacency** – Assumption that the en-route weather was suitable based on a local flight and a TAF from an airport in the region.
- **Deviation** – Student flew below weather limits and entered cloud before turning back.

stressStress

pressurePressure

lack_of_resourcesResources

loss_of_awarenessAwareness

teamworkTeamwork

complacencyComplacency

normalisation_of_deviationDeviation



