

PRESS RELEASE

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New data reveals public attitudes to drone use in the UK

According to a new poll of British adults, drones can make an important contribution to the UK economy but the public is at present more cautious about the use of drones for some business purposes and in leisure activities.

The new research, conducted by ComRes for the Royal Aeronautical Society, found high-levels of support for drone use in some areas of society – emergency response (91%), environmental conservation (86%), police surveillance (83%) and infrastructure management (81%) to name a few.

The findings indicate the public would, however, benefit from greater awareness, education and reassurance about the usage of drones in others areas which have the potential to yield significant financial and national economic gain. British adults say they are currently less likely to support the use of drones for leisure activities (37% support the usage of drones in this area) and in logistics (32%). The likes of Amazon and Google are just some of the names looking to expand the use of drones for delivery operations.

Four in five British adults are concerned about safety (74% are concerned about the usage of drones because of this), privacy (75%) and the difficulty of tracing drone operators and/or owners in the event of incidents (79%).

The research also found that over three quarters of British adults (76%) back tighter enforcement of the regulations governing drones use, despite fewer than one in five (18%) agreeing that they have a good understanding of what those rules are.

In April the Royal Aeronautical Society held a workshop involving drone users, regulators, law enforcement and government to explore whether registration and identification of drone operations in the UK would result in their safer operation.

Commenting on the figures, Tony Henley MRAeS, Chair of the Royal Aeronautical Society Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Group, said:

“The market in civil drones is developing rapidly, driven largely by small, cheap and versatile systems with a variety of uses. The sales of small drones have skyrocketed – particularly the camera-carrying ones – and the UK is well placed to capture the economic gains from this fast-growing industry. An important means of achieving this will be the development and certification of

collision-avoidance technology for beyond-line-of sight operation, vital to delivery services, that will permit the integration of drone use into existing airspace.

“There is understandable caution at present about the more widespread use of drones. As the number of drones increases, and with more frequent reports of incidents involving the unsafe or anti-social use of drones by irresponsible or inexperienced operators, public perceptions of the sector could take a nose-dive. Government, regulators, law enforcement and industry must continue to work closely together to increase awareness of drone use and to address these fears so the sector might flourish in a safe and responsible way. A key component of this activity should be the provision of more accessible education for leisure users, which could significantly reduce careless misuse.”

ComRes Polling Findings Highlights

Contribution to society

- Almost half of British adults (46%) think that drones can make an important contribution to the UK economy and society.

Risk versus opportunity

- British adults are split as to whether drones post more risks than opportunities (40% agree, 33% disagree)

Commercial versus private use

- 62% of British adults are more concerned about the use of drones by private owners and operators than commercial ones

Support for greater enforcement of the rules governing the use of drones

- 76% of British adults support tighter enforcement of the rules governing the use of drones than is the case at the moment.

Understanding of the rules and regulations

- Fewer than one in five British adults (18%) agree that they have a good understanding of the rules and regulations governing the use of drones in the UK, whereas seven in ten (69%) disagree.

Specific Areas of Drone Use

- British adults support the use of drones in many areas. For instance, nine in ten Britons (91%) say that they support the use of drones in the UK for emergency response.
- A similar proportion (86%) say the same for environmental conservation.
- Around four in five Britons say they support the use of drones for police surveillance (83%), infrastructure management (81%) and agriculture management (78%).
- British adults are currently less likely to support use of drones in passenger transport (22% support the usage of drones in this area), logistics (32%) and leisure (37%)

Concerns about drone use

- Four in five British adults (79%) say they are concerned about the difficulty of tracing drone owners/operators; a similar proportion say the same about privacy (75%) and personal/public safety (74%).

Protecting the public interest

- A third of British adults say that the police and/or regulators (both 33%) are doing a good job at protecting the public interest with regard to drone technology
- By contrast, nearly half (47%) say that drone owners and/or operators are going a poor job; a similar proportion (45%) say the same of the Government.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) is the world's only professional body dedicated to the entire aerospace community. The Society promotes the highest professional standards in all aerospace disciplines; provides specialist information; acts as a central forum for the exchange of ideas; and plays a leading role in influencing opinion on aerospace matters. Visit www.aerosociety.com for more information.
2. The Royal Aeronautical Society Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Specialist Group focuses on all aspects of unmanned aviation across industry, academic and government. Visit <http://aerosociety.com/UAS> for more information.
3. A Royal Aeronautical Society spokesperson is available for further comment and interview.
4. ComRes interviewed 2,043 GB adults between 11 and 12 May 2016. Data were weighted to be representative of all British adults aged 18+ by age, gender, region and socio-economic grade. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Data tables are available on the ComRes website www.comres.co.uk.

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