

**AIR OPERATOR
CERTIFICATE
(AOC)**

Take your
business further
with an AOC
from the BCAA



Obtaining an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) is a critical step for anyone wanting to use aircraft commercially, from private and business aircraft owners to emerging and established airlines. Before applying for an AOC, it's important to understand the various jurisdiction options as well as what's involved in the application process.



What is an AOC?



Benefits of obtaining an AOC



An AOC is an official authorisation issued by a national aviation authority to an airline or aircraft operator, permitting them to use aircraft for commercial purposes. This certification ensures that the operator possesses the necessary professional capabilities and requires them to adhere to the aviation authority's established safety and operational standards.

Key elements of an AOC include:

- **Authorisation:** The AOC specifies the types of operations the operator is authorised to conduct, such as passenger transport, cargo transport, charter services, and specialised operations like medical evacuation or aerial work.
- **Aircraft and equipment description:** The certificate details the types and registration marks of the authorised aircraft and ensures that they meet specific safety and maintenance standards.
- **Personnel:** The AOC requires the operator to employ sufficient personnel to plan, perform, supervise, inspect, and certify the operations listed in the applicant's operations manual, including postholders, management, pilots, cabin crew, and maintenance and ground operations staff. The training and qualifications of personnel must meet regulatory standards.
- **Operational control:** The operator must have systems and procedures in place to manage and control flight operations, including flight planning, dispatch, and monitoring of flight activities.
- **Safety management:** A robust Safety Management System (SMS) must be implemented, ensuring continuous monitoring, assessment, and improvement of safety practices.
- **Financial stability:** Operators must demonstrate financial health to confirm they can sustain operations safely and effectively.

Setting up an AOC provides operators with advantages in a number of areas, including:

- **Regulatory compliance:** An AOC ensures that the operator complies with national and international aviation regulations and provides legal authorisation for commercial air transport activities.
- **Tax incentives:** Depending on the jurisdiction where the company is registered, operators may benefit from a range of possible tax incentives such as aircraft and aircraft parts depreciation, deductions for aircraft expenses, no Value-Added Tax (VAT) on fuel in Europe, and expenses being reimbursed by a chartered company.
- **Safety assurance:** By demonstrating adherence to stringent safety standards, an AOC improves the safety of passengers, crew, and cargo.
- **Market access:** With an AOC, operators can access domestic and international markets, thereby facilitating commercial operations across borders.
- **Reputation and trust:** Holding an AOC enhances the operator's reputation as it signals both reliability and a commitment to safety to customers, partners, and regulatory authorities.
- **Insurance and financing:** With an AOC, operators can obtain insurance and financing more easily as insurers and financial institutions prefer to do business with certified operators who meet regulatory and safety standards.
- **Operational efficiency:** The process of obtaining and maintaining an AOC helps establish robust operational control systems, contributing to overall efficiency and reliability in operations.

Why obtain an AOC from an offshore registry?

An AOC from an offshore registry offers several potential benefits, depending on the specific needs and circumstances of an aircraft operator or airline. Operators might choose to register their aircraft and obtain an AOC through an offshore registry like the Bermuda Aircraft Registry to gain:

- **Regulatory flexibility:** Offshore registries often offer more streamlined and flexible regulatory frameworks compared to some national aviation authorities. This can result in reduced administrative burdens and regulatory complexities for operators, especially those who operate internationally.
- **Cost savings:** Offshore registries may have lower registration fees, maintenance costs, and operational costs compared to onshore jurisdictions, making them a cost-effective option, especially for smaller airlines.
- **Ease of registration:** For operators looking for expedited registration, offshore registries' typically simplified procedures allow for quicker processing times and less bureaucratic red tape compared to some national authorities.
- **Confidentiality and privacy:** Some offshore jurisdictions offer enhanced confidentiality and privacy protections, shielding sensitive information from public disclosure – a particularly appealing feature for operators who value discretion in their business dealings.
- **International recognition:** Many offshore registries, including the Bermuda Aircraft Registry, adhere to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Aircraft registered under these jurisdictions are recognised globally, facilitating international operations and leasing arrangements.
- **Operational flexibility:** Operators seeking to maximise the utilisation of their aircraft fleet will appreciate that offshore registries may allow for more flexible operational arrangements, such as leasing agreements and charter services.
- **Political stability:** Offshore registries in politically stable jurisdictions – such as Bermuda – provide continuity and reliability in regulatory oversight – critical for maintaining operational stability and confidence among stakeholders.

While offshore registries offer these possible advantages, operators should consider the regulatory requirements, safety standards, and reputation of the registry carefully before proceeding. It's important for operators to ensure that the jurisdiction they choose for registration aligns with their operational needs and complies with international aviation safety and regulatory standards to maintain a high level of safety and operational integrity.



The advantages of an AOC from Bermuda

The Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority (BCAA) is the regulatory body responsible for overseeing aviation safety and the registration of aircraft in Bermuda. The BCAA boasts a well-deserved reputation in a number of areas, making it an attractive option for obtaining an AOC:

- **Regulatory oversight:** The BCAA has continued to achieve high compliance levels with the international aviation standards and regulations set by the ICAO.
- **Responsive customer service:** The BCAA's ample guidance and superior service response standards truly set it apart. The Authority is known for responding to reviews and applications in a timely manner.
- **Aircraft registration:** The Authority manages the Bermuda Aircraft Registry, which is known for its stringent safety standards, regulatory excellence, and global recognition, making it a popular choice among private and commercial aircraft owners.
- **Safety and standards:** To maintain high safety standards, the BCAA conducts safety inspections, certification, and continuous monitoring of registered aircraft.
- **Services:** The BCAA provides various services, including aircraft certification, airworthiness assessments, maintenance organisation approvals, and flight operations oversight.
- **International cooperation:** A strong audit record with ICAO enhances the international reputation of the BCAA, making Bermuda an attractive jurisdiction for aircraft registration and AOC issuance. The BCAA collaborates with other aviation authorities and organisations globally to enhance aviation safety and regulatory practices.



Applying for an AOC in Bermuda

The timeline for setting up an AOC in Bermuda can vary depending on several factors, including the completeness and accuracy of the application, the complexity of the operation, and the readiness of the applicant. However, the process typically follows this timeline:



1 PRE-APPLICATION PHASE

5-14 days

Initial inquiry and consultation

Contact the BCAA to express interest in obtaining an AOC and to arrange an initial consultation with BCAA representatives to discuss requirements, processes, and timelines.

Note that, according to Article 94 of the Air Navigation Overseas Territories Order (AN(OT)O), to obtain an AOC in Bermuda the operator must be able to demonstrate a physical presence in Bermuda, including the ability to exercise flight operations, maintenance management, and control; appropriate infrastructure to house and access operational and safety-related records; the ability to host oversight activities at their Bermuda offices; and residence status for the accountable manager(s).

Pre-application meeting

Schedule and attend a pre-application meeting with the BCAA to discuss the specifics of the operation, requirements, management team/postholders, and application process.

Preparation of documents

Begin gathering documentation, including operational manuals, safety management systems, financial documents, and other required materials.

2 FORMAL APPLICATION PHASE

5-30 days

Submission of application

Attend the formal application meeting, submit the AOC application along with all required documents, and pay the necessary deposit.

Cursory review of required documentation

At this point, the BCAA:

- Conducts a cursory review of documentation (including maintenance control and other safety-related manuals) for completeness and compliance with regulatory requirements, as well as the procedures for the distribution, amendment and use of the documents: Are the manuals in electronic format? Are they easy to revise? Is the date of the last revision on each page?
- Reviews management personnel résumés providing qualifications and aviation experience, and conducts interviews.

Applicants should expect to address any requests for additional information or clarifications.

3 DOCUMENT EVALUATION PHASE

2-3 months

Document Review

The BCAA will thoroughly evaluate the required documents and manuals for completeness and compliance with regulatory requirements. While the complexity of the information to be provided is dependent on the complexity of the proposed operation, required documents and manuals typically include:

- Flight safety document system with operations manual covering:
 - general operating policies and procedures
 - aircraft operating manual – type related
 - minimum equipment list
 - configuration deviation list
 - aircraft performance manual
 - mass and balance control manual
 - aircraft loading and handling manual or ground handling manual
 - route and aerodrome instructions and guide
 - training manuals for flight crew, cabin crew, operations personnel and ground personnel
 - fatigue management scheme
 - operational control procedures, dispatch, flight following, etc.
 - flight data analysis programme (may also be part of the SMS Manual)
 - cabin safety procedures manual
 - safety and emergency procedures manual
 - international navigation manual

4 DEMONSTRATION AND INSPECTION PHASE

1-2 months

Compliance audits and inspections

To verify compliance with safety and operational standards, the BCAA conducts a series of audits and inspections, including reviewing base facilities, ground operations, aircraft conformity, training and training centres, flight examiners, management system infrastructure, maintenance procedures, and operational control centres.

Demonstrations

Applicants perform demonstration flights and operational trials under the observation of BCAA inspectors to evaluate the effectiveness of training, flight, cabin, dispatch, operational control, maintenance, ground systems, and procedures.

Address findings

Expect to address any deficiencies identified during the audits and inspections, and implement corrective actions as required.

Final review

The BCAA conducts a final review of the application and inspection reports to ensure all requirements have been met.

5 ISSUANCE OF AOC

1 week

Approval and issuance

Once all requirements are satisfied, the BCAA issues the AOC, and upon receipt the applicant can begin commercial operations as authorised.

**TOTAL ESTIMATED TIMELINE:
4-8 MONTHS**

Additional factors to consider

- **Preparation:** Operators who have well-prepared documentation, infrastructure, aircraft, and staff, and established operational systems may be able to expedite the process.
- **Complexity of operations:** More complex operations (e.g., large fleet, international routes) may require more extensive evaluation and longer timelines.
- **BCAA workload:** The workload and availability of BCAA resources can affect the timeline. Proactive communication and planning can help mitigate delays and ensure sufficient resources are in place for project assignment.
- **Regulatory changes:** Any changes in regulatory requirements during the application process may affect the timeline.

Engaging with experienced aviation consultants and maintaining close communication with the BCAA throughout the process can help ensure a smoother and more efficient certification process.

Frequently Asked Questions



What are the fees associated with setting up an AOC?

The deposit for an AOC is US\$96,000. These monies are used to ensure that the BCAA assigns the appropriate resources to the project and are applied to the various aspects of the application process, including the investigation, manual reviews, required travel, inspection costs, etc., in accordance with our fee schedule. At the end of the project, any remaining funds are refunded to the client or used as a credit towards future costs.

How long does it take to register a new aircraft to the AOC?

Once the AOC is completed, new aircraft can be registered within 24 to 48 hours as long as the aircraft type has already been approved.

What are the registration marks for Bermuda registered aircraft?

The applicable registration marks are VP-Bxx and VQ-Bxx.

Who do I contact for more information about setting up an AOC in Bermuda?

Please reach out to bdteam@bcaa.bm for further information on setting up an AOC in Bermuda. Our Business Development concierge service will assist throughout the entire process until the final completion of your AOC.



For more information, contact us:

bdteam@bcaa.bm | bcaa.bm

 **Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority**