Air Traffic Services Assistant

Introduction

Air traffic services assistants (ATSAs) give help to air traffic controllers in their everyday working tasks. Their work is varied as the job title covers many different positions.

Assistants working for the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) are known as ATSAs. Those employed by non-NATS controlled airports are often called air traffic control assistants (ATCAs).

Also known as

- Air Traffic Control Assistant
- Assistant - Air Traffic Control

Work Activities

As an Air Traffic Services Assistant, you will be usually helping Tower Assistants or Approach/Radar Room Assistants. If you are working in the tower, you will carry out some of the following tasks:

- entering data into flight information and display systems
- passing departure warnings to other airports
- compiling daily flight schedules
- handling incoming/outgoing messages and passing on relevant information
- filing flight plans and booking out aircraft
- handling all telephone calls

You might also have to work with other agencies regarding aircraft slots and weather information.

Assistants working in the approach/radar room will have to do some of the following tasks:

- dealing with any telephone calls
- preparing weather boards
- updating recorded information for Pilots

You might also have to prepare flight strips. These contain all the information needed to track an aircraft during its flight. This information is constantly updated.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you’re looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become an Air Traffic Services Assistant, you'll need:

- to be able to pay attention to detail and produce accurate work
- teamworking skills
- a clear voice and good hearing as you will be dealing with people on the phone a lot
- computer skills
- an interest in aviation and some knowledge of the subject
- strong concentration skills
- to be able to work well under pressure

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Your colour vision will be tested. People who wear contact lenses or glasses can work as Air Traffic Services Assistant, if their unaided vision meets certain standards.

A driving licence is often required for people wishing to get into this job. Some employers will expect you to live near the airport. This usually means being within one-hour’s travel from the airport.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £80,500
- With experience: £81,500 - £90,500

Hours of work

Depending on where you are based, you will usually work 35 hours a week, which include shifts, evenings and weekends, and may be altered at short notice.

Where could I work?

NATS Air Traffic Services Assistants work at major control centres. NATS also provides air traffic control services at many other major UK airports, for example, Heathrow, Gatwick and Edinburgh.

Opportunities to work as an Air Traffic Services Assistant also occur in the RAF (where you are known as Flight Operations Assistants), and in the Royal Navy (as a Naval Airman), in the Aircraft Handling branch.

Opportunities for Air Traffic Services Assistants occur at airports throughout the UK.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised on all the major job boards, on Find a Job, at Jobcentre Plus and on the NATS website.

For Air Traffic Services Assistant vacancies at non-NATS controlled airports, contact the recruitment department of each individual airport.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

There is not a set route into this career. However, having at least 4 GCSEs graded 9-4 (A*-C) in maths and English will be useful in becoming an Air Traffic Services Assistant.

There may be some courses such as BTEC level 3 qualifications or a HNC, HND or an apprenticeship in air traffic services. Take a look at our information article 'Apprenticeships – How do I apply', for more details about applying for apprenticeship positions.

Training

When you are training to become an Air Traffic Services Assistant, it will be mainly working on-the-job. You will be supervised while you learn about aircraft performance, the weather and law.

It is also possible to train as an Air Traffic Control Assistant through the RAF, where you are known as Flight Operations Assistants.

Work Experience
Previous experience gained in other aviation careers may be useful for this career.

**Progression**

Air Traffic Services Assistants can work towards becoming Air Traffic Controllers. However, this career is not always a short cut to the more senior role.

Candidates for Air Traffic Controller training, for NATS positions, must apply through the usual routes and satisfy the entry requirements (see Air Traffic Controller career profile).

**Qualifications**

To become an Air Traffic Services Assistant, you will need a minimum of 4 GCSEs at grade C/4 or above. Passes in English and maths are essential. You can also take higher level qualifications, such as A levels.

If you use the RAF route, you'll need a minimum of:

- 2 GCSEs at grade C/4 or above where passes in English and maths are essential
- a full, current driving licence

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

**Adult Opportunities**

**Age limits**

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Flight operations assistants with the RAF have an entry age range of 17-35.

**Skills/experience**

Skills gained in other aviation careers may be useful. Knowledge of the industry will be helpful.

Joining NATS as an assistant is not a short cut to becoming an air traffic controller (ATCO). Candidates for ATCO training must apply through the usual routes and satisfy the entry requirements (see air traffic controller article).

**Vision**

Your colour vision will be tested. People who wear contact lenses or glasses can work as ATSAs, if their unaided vision meets certain standards.

**Further Information**

For non-NATS positions, it's a good idea to contact individual airports to ask about any vacancies they may have.

**Contacts**

- **Apprenticeships: Get In. Go Far**
  National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)
  Tel: 0800 015 0400
  Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk
  Website: [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

- **Skills Development Scotland - Modern Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 9178000
  Email: info@skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk
  Website: [www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships](http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/modernapprenticeships)
• **Careers in Aerospace**  
  Website: [www.careersinaerospace.com](http://www.careersinaerospace.com)

• **National Air Traffic Services (NATS)**  
  Address: 4000 Parkway, Whiteley, Fareham, Hampshire PO15 7FL  
  Tel: 01489 616001  
  Email: public.enquiries@nats.co.uk  
  Website: [www.nats.co.uk](http://www.nats.co.uk)

• **Safeskys Ltd**  
  Address: Safeskys House, 84B Easton Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP11 1LT  
  Tel: 01494 558363  
  Email: atc@safeskys.co.uk  
  Website: [www.safeskys.co.uk](http://www.safeskys.co.uk)

• **Guild of Air Traffic Control Officers (GATCO)**  
  Address: Central Administration Facility, 4 St Mary's Road, Bingham, Nottinghamshire NG13 8DW  
  Tel: 01949 876405  
  Email: caf@gatco.org  
  Website: [www.gatco.org](http://www.gatco.org)

**Related Careers**

• Cabin Crew  
• Air Traffic Controller  
• Airline Customer Service Agent  
• Airline Pilot  
• Flight Dispatcher  
• Helicopter Pilot - Commercial  
• Airport Baggage Handler  
• Airport Information Assistant