AIR**PROX** *Insight*

Photo credit: Diamond Aircraft   Photo for illustration purposes only

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Circuit confusion

When it all gets a bit busy and things aren't going quite to plan, if in doubt just ask

Two solo students were flying opposite circuits in Diamond DA40s at Bournemouth when their tracks converged due to a communication misunderstanding.

DA40 (A) was flying a right-hand circuit as DA40 (B) was flying a left-hand one. While the controller was busy with a number of ground movements and other aircraft in the circuit the student in DA40 (A) had a radio problem and, after calling downwind, the controller said they were number two to the other DA40 in the left-hand circuit and to switch to the other radio.

It's possible this distracted the pilot because, although the radio was switched, the pilot then flew a downwind leg that converged onto the base leg. The controller noticed this and queried the positioning; unfortunately the phraseology was ambiguous and the student pilot took it as an instruction and turned onto base leg without being visual with the one ahead.

As always, there were a number of lessons to be drawn from this Category C Airprox (**2019330**); first, there was the age-old problem of distraction for the DA40 (A) pilot with a lot to assimilate in a

busy visual circuit (LH and RH at the same time) and the radio issues, but at the end of the day the pilot allowed the downwind track to converge onto the base-leg. The Board frequently sees Airprox where non-standard procedures, or an unusual mix of standard procedures can cause difficulties, especially in situations such as flying in the circuit. Integrating into a busy circuit can be tricky, even if all the aircraft are flying the same circuit profile — you might need to adapt your plan to accommodate people extending, turning early, operating at different heights (such as a glide circuit) or as in this case, flying a

modified downwind heading while flying an opposite-direction pattern.

Here, the converging downwind track was what first concerned the controller, unfortunately the question from ATC was ambiguous (and there is a lesson in there for controllers) in that the DA40 (A) pilot thought the controller gave an instruction to turn inbound, when in fact the controller had asked whether they were turning

Nevertheless, at that point the pilot knew they were number two to one ahead and should not have turned inbound, especially as they were not visual with the other aircraft. But they thought they were following an ATC instruction — so, what else could they have done? They could have questioned what the controller meant, or at least said that they were not visual, perhaps they could have asked for the exact position of the other aircraft to help them spot it.

The Board recognised that for a student it would have been a difficult decision to question ATC, particularly in a busy circuit; after all, ATC instructions are mandatory in an ATZ. But if it had been an instruction to turn inbound, it would have been prudent to tell the controller that they weren't visual, rather than turn ahead of someone on base-leg.

Even with the best of intentions RT phraseology isn't always standard, and if you aren't sure what a controller means it's better to ask for clarification. Luckily in this case the controller quickly realised what had happened and turned both pilots away from each other.

A final point; DA40 (B) pilot had been operating correctly and the Board assessed there was little more they could have done in the circumstances. However, they had been late getting airborne and their slot in the visual circuit had overrun by 20 minutes. ATC was being helpful in allowing an extension, but by doing so the circuit had become busier that it would otherwise have been. A point to bear in mind, perhaps, if you overrun your allocated circuit time is 'how will it affect others?'.

Full details of this incident (Airprox **2019330**) can be found at the link within this note or at airproxboard.org.uk in the 'Airprox Reports and Analysis' section within the appropriate year and then in the 'Individual Airprox reports' tab.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

The UK Airprox Board has continued working throughout the coronavirus

Diagram based on pilot reports

DA40(A) ↓600ft

CPA 1012:58

DA40(B) ~700ft
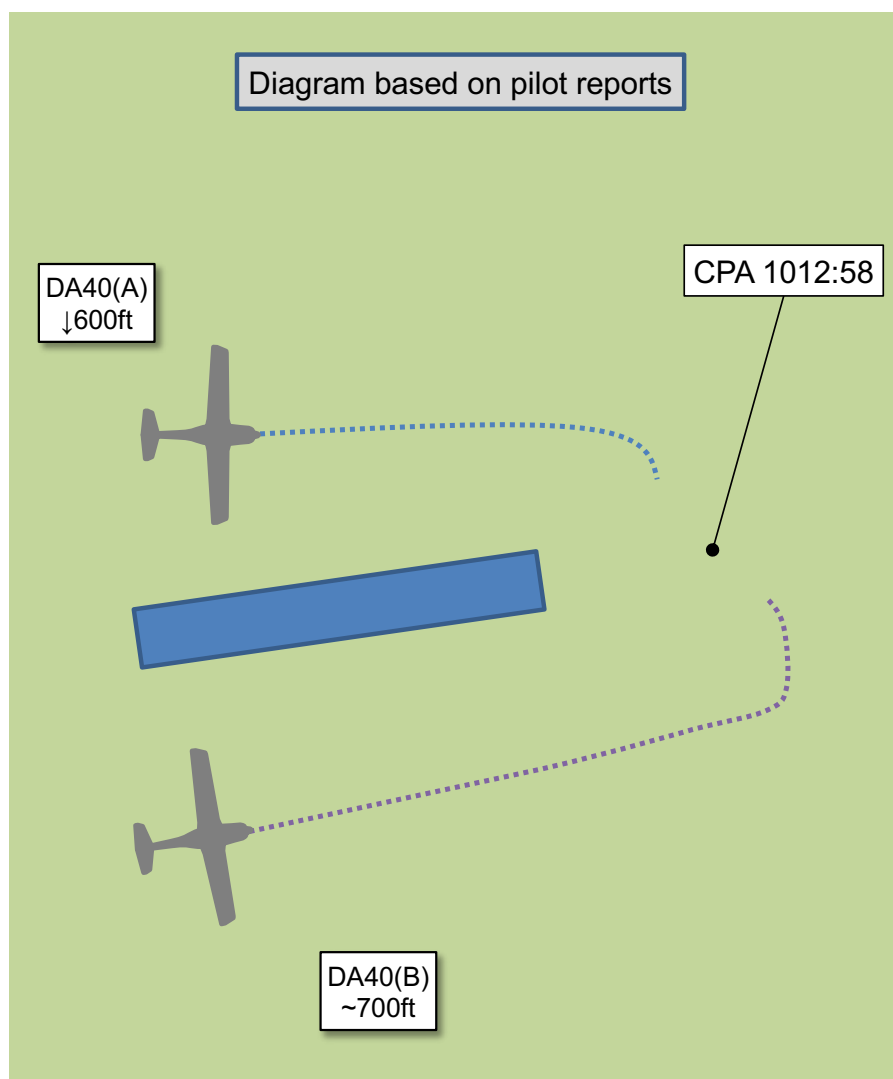
pandemic, but we have had to make a few changes. You might have noticed from our website that we are not able to process airprox reports received by fax or post – this is because we are all working from home. Also, we are conducting our Board meetings online which is proving to be an effective forum, although – just like everyone else – we are missing the human interaction that adds so much to our deliberations and discussions.

In September we considered 24 Airprox, including ten SUAS incidents, four of which were considered risk bearing – two were Category A (where providence played a major part) and two were Category B (where safety was much reduced through serendipity, misjudgement, inaction, or late sighting). Of the remaining 14 aircraft-to-aircraft airprox, two were risk bearing in Category B. The details of September's airprox reports will be available soon on our website, so do dip in and read them.

Covid-19 has had a significant effect on

the whole aviation community and we have seen airprox numbers reduce in line with flying – it might seem a good thing (which it is), but the proportion of those aircraft-to-aircraft incidents which are risk bearing is still the same. This means that if you are flying and do find yourself in an 'Airprox reportable' position, it is just as likely to be risk-bearing (Category A or B) as it was last year. Just because we know there are fewer aircraft about, doesn't mean becoming complacent with planning, communications or lookout.

While this month's Airprox of the Month is from last year, it highlights issues with planning, communication, distraction and standardisation, and there are other lessons to be learned, too.