

RMIT English language Testing for Aviation

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As most of you know there is now an English Language part of the pilot's license qualification. This requirement came from ICAO and has been building for several years. Many countries have taken different steps to ensure compliance or variance with ICAO, and as we operate under the Hong Kong license we have to comply with CAD's system.

Several people in the club have been in negotiation with CAD for over a year as to what will be required, and as a result we are now flying under a dispensation which allows us to fly inside Hong Kong airspace without ICAO compliance. This is unlikely to last, so a compliance system was needed.

The club, with the help of an Australian university based company have set up a system of testing for the CAD. It may interest you to know that system will be authorised for testing of professional pilots from outside of the club, and so is seen by CAD as fully ICAO compliant.

To ensure that we all know what is required of us I am writing to you to explain the standards and procedures of the license requirements. They can also be found in the ICAO Annex 1 1.2.9.3 and in the Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements, from the ICAO web site if you want to read the source documents.

Six grades of spoken English have been established. Level 6 is called Expert level, and level 1 is Pre-elementary. The minimum to hold a flying license has been established as 4. If you are assessed at level 6 there will be no further testing required. For those assessed at level 5, retesting will be required every 6 years, and for those at level 4, every 3 years.

To help you understand these better I shall quote from the ICAO documents. This first from the Manual referred to above.

Quote "It is not difficult to recognize "Expert" or "native" or "native-like" proficiency, and for that reason the assessment at level 6 does not necessarily need to be carried out by a language testing specialist. Native speakers of the language should be considered expert speakers provided they use a dialect or accent that is intelligible to the aeronautical community. Expert speakers also include multilingual speakers who include the language as one of their "native" languages, and foreign language speakers who have acquired

expert proficiency, through either educational background, extensive work experience, or it can occur during training or as part of the evaluation of training. The person responsible for documenting “Expert” language proficiency does not need to be a specialist but should be familiar with the relevant applicable Standards and should be able to recognize when there is a need to refer the applicant to specialized language testing.” Unquote

What CAD did with Cathay Pacific was to ensure that their Authorised Examiners (those check pilots who test Instrument Ratings and Aircraft Ratings) did a training course on Level 6 assessment. Both Bob Tandy and myself did this course, and we can now assess CAD licensed pilots as to whether they are level 6 or “undetermined”. This is called the Benchmark Test. We cannot grade lower than 6, that requires a language expert.

This is where the club sought outside advice and contracted with an organisation called RMIT University, in Melbourne, Australia. They were formed from the *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology* and have a large language section, including RELTA, or RMIT English Language Testing for Aviation. They work in many countries with ATC organisations and airlines and are very professional.

Those pilots who are assessed as “undetermined” on the Benchmark Test, or indeed those who choose not to be assessed on this test, will need to be tested by and on behalf of RELTA. A group of pilots, myself, Bob Tandy, Andrew Macmillen, Peter Wells and a third party member, Vic Leung, underwent a two day training course to enable us to work as unpaid agents of RELTA. We will take and record voice samples from pilots, and upload them to the Melbourne server for analysis and grading by RMIT linguists.

We have RELTA's equipment and will set up something like a language laboratory at the club, and we will run through with each pilot one of many scripted aviation scenarios involving Radio Telephony exchanges. Information about a flying situation, such as requesting a taxi clearance, is displayed on a screen. In the first case you are required to answer on a multi-choice answer sheet what you think is required. In the second part, you are involved in an RT dialogue and you are required to make up and give the calls. It takes about half an hour, and we are planning to make the test available on certain weekdays, evenings and weekends for the club members flexibility. Details will be provided later, when we get the system fully running but we hope to be operational in about ten days.

Below is a copy of the ICAO markers for Level 4 that RELTA will use to mark the sound files that we send them.

For further background information may I suggest the ICAO website at <http://www.icao.int/icao/en/trivia/peltrgFAQ.htm>

Example of markers.

ICAO Rating Scale for Operational Level 4

A speaker will be rated at Operational Level 4 if the following criteria are met:

Pronunciation:

(Assumes a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community.)

Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.

Structure:

(Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task.)

Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.

Vocabulary:

Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.

Fluency:

Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.

Comprehension:

Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.

Interactions:

Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.