

DREAMS, SKILLS AND DOLLARS

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Training and
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guide

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FLIGHT
INTERNATIONAL

DREAMS, SKILLS AND DOLLARS

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As the global fleet expands in line with soaring demand for air travel, carriers and training providers alike are struggling to attract enough competent pilot candidates to keep pace



As modern aircraft have evolved, so has flightcrew instruction – but paying for that knowledge thwarts many applicants



To sustain operations, sector needs crews that have aviation skills, not just licences



Airbus eyes common beginners' standard to help all students become "great pilots"

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Money matters

Changing career attitudes and dramatic growth in the world airline fleet point to a severe shortage of flightcrew – but the cost of earning a pilot's licence deters many candidates



The models look great, but real pilots – lots of them – are needed to fill the uniforms

DAVID LEARMOUNT LONDON

The world's largest flightcrew instruction company, CAE, says the training industry is theoretically capable of churning out licensed pilots in sufficient numbers to meet unprecedented future airline demands. But, it says, attracting suitable candidates in sufficient numbers is going to be a challenge, and a lack of affordable finance for training is a large part of the problem.

CAE's global head of standards, David Owens, observes that many of today's poten-

tial pilots "are not applying for the reasons we did". By that he means today's applicants for pilot training are more likely to be hard-nosed and practical about the skills they will invest in, and will investigate what return they can expect from the investment.

Ryanair calculates that the outlay for a three-year university degree is less than one-third of the cost of pilot training. Meanwhile university courses are propped up by grants, government-backed low-interest loans and tax concessions, but this does not always extend to investors in a pilot qualification.

The Europe-based Air Training Policy Group (ATPG) says the ability to find suitable finance is "the largest discriminator in pilot career choice", and points out that this factor limits the pool of talent that the industry can recruit from.

CAE Civil Aviation Training Solutions was invited to present on future pilot supply at the 5th Airports Council International (ACI)-World Bank annual aviation symposium in London from 12-14 March. The airports trade body says it wants "a data-driven understanding of potential demand and various scenarios [to give] aviation stakeholders insights for effective decision-making".

DEMAND PUSH

Global airport passenger traffic, says ACI, is "poised to double in less than 20 years... and over the long term it is projected to grow at an annualised rate of 4.1%, reaching 20.9 billion by 2040". Passenger number increases may not be precisely reflected in fleet growth as the average aircraft unit grows slightly larger. But regardless, a drive to make more efficient use of a growing fleet will increase the number of crews needed; if aircraft spend more time in the air and less on the ground, pilots' flight time limitations become a pressing concern.

However, ACI continues: "With a shift away from liberalised economic policies, how can we quantify the downside risks to air transport demand amid sanctioned trade wars and ongoing geopolitical tensions? On the other hand, based on 'business as usual' traffic projections, what are the supply-side considerations, capacity constraints and bottlenecks that we face?"

Perhaps it is the latter question that CAE was invited to answer.

Before the conference, ACI director general Angela Gittens said the intention was to "detail the risks and opportunities for global lenders and investors in the airport industry", adding: "Participants can expect valuable analyses of global and regional economic forces that airport executives and investors need to understand."

For the commercial air transport industry to work, it needs infrastructure, aircraft, finance and skilled personnel. The infrastructure may be capacity constrained, but it is there. The



Friedemann Vogel/EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock

CAE calculates that global fleet growth will require 160,000 more airline pilots by 2028



Aviation Images/REX/Shutterstock

Single-pilot cockpits are no longer being touted as a technical fix for crew shortage



lego/REX/Shutterstock

Ryanair finds that 40% of licensed pilot candidates do not meet its basic requirements

manufacturers are churning out the necessary aircraft. The finance is readily there for the infrastructure and aircraft, but the missing piece of the jigsaw is skilled personnel.

The supply of the latter, and finance to enable it, is not guaranteed, so it could bring down all the rest. The manufacturers know there is no point building aircraft when there are insufficient pilots to crew them. Talk of single-pilot cockpits for commercial passenger aircraft was a livelier topic three years ago than it is now, so a technological solution to the pilot shortage appears many years away. A struggling commercial air transport industry will profoundly affect the global economy. That is why ACI and the World Bank talk to each other.

GATHERING PACE

It was Owens, on behalf of CAE, who addressed the ACI-World Bank symposium. His presentation was headed: "Developing better pilots, faster". That headline may be what the audience hoped to hear, but in September last year at the Royal Aeronautical Society's International Flight Crew Training Conference, there was general agreement that training quality could be improved – but not delivered in a shorter time than at present.

Outside the corporate environment Owens admits: "We can't short-cut experience." But CAE's plan to accelerate pilot progress through training depends heavily on attracting and selecting the right material so as not to lose instructor time on remedial training for struggling stragglers. There does not seem to be any co-ordinated industry plan for attracting more interest in industry careers, however.

Meanwhile, the airline pilot training industry worldwide faces a perfect storm of competing demands. The rapidly growing world fleet and massive order backlogs at aircraft manufacturers are driving an unprecedented global demand for fully trained crews.

CAE says that in 2018 there were 305,000 active airline pilots and 55,000 business aviation pilots. Between now and 2028, the number of those that will need to be replaced because of retirement is respectively 110,000 and 40,000. CAE calculates that one-third of active pilots are aged over 50. But in addition, fleet growth will add the need for 160,000 more airline pilots and 10,000 extra business aviation pilots.

By 2028, the numbers of active pilots, therefore, will be 465,000 airline pilots and 65,000 business pilots – adding up to a grand

total of more than half a million active professional pilots.

At the same time, air training organisations (ATO) are under pressure – or even under compulsion in the case of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) – to implement new training paradigms. These new ways of delivering training include competency-based training and assessment (CBTA) at the ab initio level and evidence-based training for airline recurrent training.

Under today's performance-based regulation system, ATO and airline training departments now have the responsibility to design the instruction programmes they will use to produce the defined competencies in the students, and they must have these programmes approved by their national aviation authorities (NAA). At the same time, widespread underinvestment in NAA means many authorities are unable to provide the guidance and oversight needed at a time of change combined with high demand. Owens concedes that the oversight required for CBTA is "more sophisticated" than it was for the old syllabus-based courses.

Instructors need time to prepare for the different kind of instructional approach they need to adopt to deliver CBTA and to change recurrent training from an adversarial testing process to sessions aimed at fostering learning and improvement in crews. Instructors now need to be facilitators in the learning process, rather than pushing trainees towards a test pass. As EASA has observed regarding recurrent training: "When training is »

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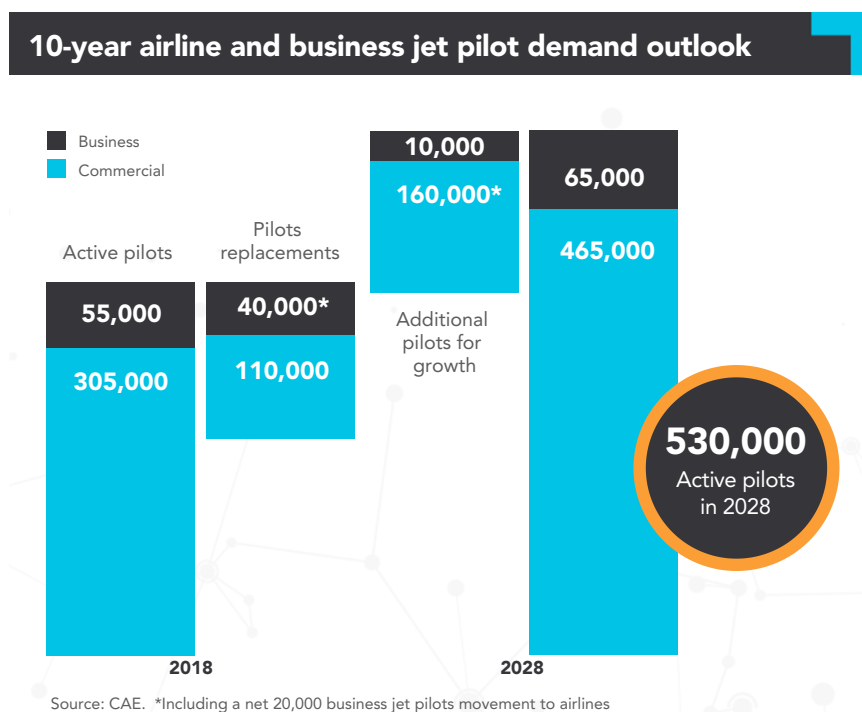
» combined with the checking programme, too little time is available for training.”

A dearth of instructors, especially good ones, has always been something of a problem, but according to projections, it will grow worse. A higher demand for pilots will push up airline pay, so unless instructor pay keeps pace, there will be an exodus to the airlines. And if quality is to be maintained and improved, instructors need to be retained.

The ATPG is putting pressure on EASA to simplify instructor categorisation to make the best use of existing airline talent and experience. The group provides just one example of how the existing system makes poor use of experience: if an airline captain/instructor with 30 or more years of experience and a type rating instructor simulator qualification loses his medical certificate but is capable of continuing to do his simulator teaching, the present system downgrades him to a synthetic flight instructor, explains the ATPG. He is still allowed to teach students in a simulator, but unable to train new instructors, meaning his 30 years of experience are no longer fully utilised.

QUALITY CONCERNS

Gerda Pardatscher, senior expert flight crew licensing (FCL) in EASA's aircrew and medical standards implementation section, says that, as demand begins to exceed supply, those licensed pilots who have previously been turned down for airline jobs will be back



on the market, perhaps with a realistic prospect of being hired. Ryanair's experience of recruiting from the pool of licensed pilots was that 40% did not meet its own basic entry requirements, and after further losses among those who made it as far as a simulator check,

the overall pass rate was 35%.

Quality is a real issue, because recent years have shown that something is missing from training in the way it has traditionally been delivered – especially on today's digital flight-decks. EASA's flightcrew training oversight chief, Georges Rebender, says that, for EASA, the penny finally dropped after the 2009 loss of Air France flight 447 – an Airbus A330 – over the South Atlantic. But there had already been two decades before that in which loss of control in flight emerged as the big threat at a time when most other risks were decreasing.

EASA's "new paradigm" for flight training, which is due to be in place across the EU and EASA-contracting states by 31 January 2022, came out of an agency training needs analysis driven by data from the airline industry, starting in 2013. One of the input sources was the ATPG, a consultative body of airline training chiefs and EASA FCL specialists.

They all agreed that there seemed to be a problem among many new pilots – and even among some who had accumulated some airline experience: they could assimilate enough aviation knowledge to pass exams, but did not understand it well enough to apply it to the operating environment. According to Andy O'Shea, Ryanair head of training and chairman of the ATPG, one of the principal factors enabling unsuitable candidates to get through the system on minimum standards, and still end up with a licence, is failure to undergo a pre-course aptitude assessment.

The ATPG has set out the requirements for a sustainable system that has a chance of pro-



Promoting aviation as a career path will be vital in attracting new talent to the industry

viding sufficient high-quality pilots for the industry's future needs. The first step is to attract high-ability candidates by making a pilot career path – not just a job – visible and attractive to young people early in education.

When they have applied, the next step is to put them through an independent pre-training assessment process. Those who pass the assessment are to be organised access to affordable finance because they are highly likely to pass. When they have completed the course successfully – and fully assessed pilots have a greater than 90% chance of doing so – they are employed immediately by an airline.

Pre-assessment is the key to a sustainable supply system, because if the training cost is borne by a student who has no guarantee of graduating, let alone of a job, finance for the course becomes difficult or impossible. Indeed the ATPG directs a hint strongly at the European Commission, suggesting that if it were to enable affordable financing for pilot students, it would also advance its social equity and mobility objectives.

COLLABORATION REQUIRED

If industry and government were more mutually supportive in the generation of aviation skills, the worries about future supply of pilot and other skills would not be so acute. For example, the UK government's green paper entitled "Aviation 2050: The Future of UK Aviation" does not even mention training and the provision of skills.

Meanwhile, the Aviation Skills Partnership (ASP), a private initiative begun nearly six years ago in the UK to pull together the components of an unco-ordinated aviation skills supply system, has just been acquired by Cheltenham-based specialist engineering training services group Pennant International. ASP itself covers all aviation skills paths to employment, from pilots and cabin crew to engineering and airport services.

It helps to present aviation, both civil and military, as a prospective career to young people at school and direct them to organisations that can channel their enthusiasm and guide them into training.

This effort has included starting the first pilot degree course available in the country, persuading the government to treat the acquisition of aviation skills as a tax-deductible, student-loan-attracting form of training, and providing training academies in association with local councils and the military.

In most countries, an effective system of co-ordination across the airline industry and working with governments, NAA and the education system to generate interest in the acquisition of aviation skills does not exist. So if the pilot shortage becomes acute, the industry mainly has itself to blame. ■

AIRBUS FLIGHT ACADEMY

To train a 'great pilot', start from the beginning



Student pilots at Angouleme advance from the Cirrus SR20 to Diamond's DA42 twin

Airbus is taking a bottom-up approach to filling a looming airline pilot shortage – by expanding its own training system to include ab initio schooling. By starting with raw beginners, Airbus hopes to help meet the expected demand for more than 540,000 new pilots – including some 94,000 in Europe – over the next 20 years.

Starting from its own base in Angouleme in France, the Airbus Flight Academy will deploy Airbus standardised flight instructors to deliver the ab initio pilot cadet training programme as approved by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) at the end of 2018.

Building on a 50-year heritage, the academy today delivers intermediate and advanced training through a network of 17 centres worldwide, and the new scheme hopes to complement this; the aim in Europe is to train about 200 pilot cadets per year.

Expansion of the Airbus Flight Academy beyond advanced training is in part a response to the need for volume. "We need to support our customers," says Airbus

head of flight training Jean-Michel Bigarre.

But the airframer's move into the very beginning stages of a pilot's learning journey is about more than making up the numbers. There is, adds Bigarre, a world market for pilots and Airbus believes there should be a competency standard that applies globally; a trained pilot should be competent to fly anywhere.

Airbus wants to establish a training path every candidate can follow from "day one" and that lets each of them "become a great pilot", says Bigarre. The company also intends to promote its own standards as a benchmark for quality and thus wants to cover every stage from ab initio all the way up to recurrent training of active-duty pilots.

But, stresses Bigarre, "we are not going to reinvent the wheel". The goal is to work with existing and new training partners and develop best practice.

Airbus Flight Academy Europe's facility at Angouleme is in fact the second Airbus-affiliated site open to ab initio candidates,

with the first students set to start their programme in April. A first group has already begun training at the Escuela de Aviación Mexico (EAM). Further locations should be announced from 2019 on.

The scheme is open to high school graduates aged over 18. Bigarre says the goal in Europe is to have four groups of students per year, with class sizes building up to meet the goal of 200 students per year by 2022-2023.

As for equipment, the aircraft used will be determined by the fleet available to the partner school, with the basic requirement being the capacity to advance into twin-engined models. EAM operates Cessna 152/172 and Diamond DA40 piston-singles, as well as DA42 piston-twins. At Airbus Flight Academy Europe, the fleet consists of 26 Cirrus SR20s and SR22s, one DA42-VI and a DA42, as well as an Alsim AL42 and a Redbird G1000 simulator.

Airbus Flight Academy Europe is a wholly owned Airbus subsidiary, formerly known as Cassidian Aviation Training Services. ■

Cape crusader

One US commuter service is expanding a successful recruitment scheme that attracts pilots at both ends of their flying careers by linking to independent mainline carriers



Aspiring crew members commit to two years with the airline before moving on

MURDO MORRISON LONDON

For any airline dealing with a market shortage of pilots, encouraging some of your most promising young captains to move to another carrier once they have 3,000 flying hours under their belts might seem counter-intuitive. However, for US piston commuter airline Cape Air, its “Pilot Pathway” partnerships with two of the country’s independent mainline operators has proved to be a highly effective way of recruiting ambitious aviators in the first place – and keeping them motivated.

The Cape Cod, Massachusetts-based carrier – which flies a fleet of 88 Textron Aviation Cessna 402s under Federal Aviation Adminis-

tration Part 135 rules – launched its tie-up with JetBlue Airways 12 years ago, and is now expanding the scheme to fellow low-cost carrier Spirit Airlines. So far, 66 Cape Air captains have made the transition to JetBlue, and the first candidate for Spirit is completing his twinjet training, says Cape Air’s director of pilot industry relations and sourcing, James Fletcher.

STEADY STREAM

While giving your most experienced aircrew a structured route to leave the company may sound illogical, Fletcher believes that only by providing a clear career pathway can the independent airline hope to attract the steady stream of aspiring pilots it needs. “We have our eyes wide open,” he says. “We know that

most people want to fly a big, shiny jet, and if we can get them for a snapshot in time, we are happy with that.”

Under the initiative, Cape Air – which marks its 30th birthday this year and flies routes in New England, the Caribbean and the Midwest – takes on pilots as first officers after they have completed between 500h and 750h in entry-level roles, such as instructing. Once they have flown as co-pilots on the Cessnas for a total of 1,500h, they are promoted to captain. Then after a further 1,500h – a process that usually takes around two years – they become eligible to join JetBlue or now Spirit.

Originally, recruits hoping to go on to fly for JetBlue had to be studying for a degree at one of seven recognised aviation schools, and

had to complete one year as a flight instructor with the institution before joining Cape Air. However, as part of the agreement with Spirit, the airline will be able to cast its net wider and recruit anyone with 500h of experience – and not just those who have completed a college flying degree.

The programme, says Fletcher, allows young pilots to “bridge the gap” between qualifying or working in entry-level jobs such as flight instructing, and gaining the 1,500h necessary to become a first officer on a jet airliner. However, rather than joining a mainline carrier as soon as that 1,500h milestone is reached, the scheme requires the pilot to fly for two years as a captain for Cape Air. “We get that commitment,” says Fletcher.

Cape Air believes it offers its pilots plenty of other inducements. Pay is lower than at most mainline airlines, but there is often an opportunity to work more hours. Part 135 rules mean crew can fly up to 1,200h a year, although most Cape Air pilots average around 850h, says Fletcher. They go home every night to one of the around 30 bases Cape Air uses. “We don’t do overnights,” he says. “The last flight is always back to base, so it’s more like having a normal job.”

Pilots also get the opportunity to learn fast. Under Part 135 rules, Cape Air can fly single-pilot operations in most circumstances, although around two-thirds of its flights have two crew in the cockpit. This is not for safety or passenger perception reasons, says Fletcher, but to ensure a steady supply of captains by giving experience to pilot recruits. Flight-crew are also the “face” of the airline, he says, giving the safety briefing and dealing with passengers in the absence of cabin attendants.

Another inducement is that Cape Air pilots



Pilots can chart their professional journey through Spirit’s ‘Jetway Programme’

Charles Kupa/AP/REX/Shutterstock

will soon be the first in the world to fly an entirely new aircraft. The airline began working with Italian manufacturer Tecnam in 2009 to design a piston replacement for the 402 that met its specific short take-off and landing needs. The P2012 Traveller is the first new type in this segment for decades. Cape Air has just taken delivery of its first example, three years after it confirmed an order for 100 of the 11-seat, Lycoming TEO-540-powered twins.

MODERN CHOICE

The remaining aircraft will arrive over the next 10 years or so, eventually replacing the airline’s entire Cessna fleet. “The idea is that we will introduce the P2012s slowly, mostly around our home base initially, retiring our higher-hour airframe 402s and growing into new markets,” says Fletcher, who describes the acquisition as “pretty exciting stuff”. He adds: “The Cessna is still a great servant for

Cape Air, but we needed to move onto something lighter, and more modern.”

According to Fletcher, the aspirations of millennial pilots have changed. “At the time I was learning to fly it was all about which airline would pay me most money. Today, pilots are looking more at quality of life and a known career pathway,” he says. “When I took over as director of pilot sourcing in 2017, my biggest goal was to try to find ways to attract pilots, but also to give them a pathway to develop their career.”

As with the JetBlue scheme, pilots applying for the Spirit “Jetway Programme” have one joint interview with Cape Air and Spirit. Once accepted, they are assigned a mentor from the mainline carrier, who will provide advice and feedback during the pilot’s time at Cape Air. Ryan Rodosta, Spirit’s chief pilot, says the initiative will help solve many of the airline’s recruitment challenges, and “help us maintain a skilled and robust pilot workforce for years to come”.

While Cape Air is keen to recruit ambitious young pilots, it also has a plan to offer those at the other end of the age scale a chance to prolong their career. Under its Grey Gull programme, pilots who face a mandatory retirement age at 65 from Part 121 operators such as Spirit can go on working for Part 135 operators such as Cape Air, as long as they maintain a first-class medical. Fletcher says the airline has retired pilots from almost every major carrier, with the oldest currently flying aged 77.

“We came up with the idea of Grey Gulls when we were sitting around thinking about how to get more pilots,” says Fletcher. “We work with different pilot retirement organisations, and the great benefit is that we can offer these older guys very flexible scheduling. They can work for us as much or as little as they want. It helps tremendously in terms of mentorship of our younger pilots, and that has been great for us.” ■



Grey Gull scheme offers opportunities for employment beyond retirement age

Cape Air

CAA INTERNATIONAL (UK CAA)



CONTACT INFORMATION

CAA International (UK CAA)

Civil Aviation Authority,
Aviation House, Gatwick Airport South,
RH6 0YR UK

Tel: +44 (0) 3300 224401

Email: training@caainternational.com

www.caainternational.com/training

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HIGHLIGHTS

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PROFILE

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