



ECA
Piloting Safety

Pilot Supply

Position Paper

Executive summary

- Ensuring an appropriate supply of skilled, talented flight crews is crucial to underpin Europe's aviation sector.
- There is no issue with the **availability of licensed pilots** in most European countries. There is however a **growing issue** with the employer's perceived **quality of pilots** graduating from the flight schools.
- **Attracting, properly selecting and training the right candidates** are the core challenges that need to be considered when discussing pilot supply.
- The industry must seek **early-stage engagement with the next generation** of professional pilots, to create enthusiasm, motivation and explain the opportunities that are out there.
- **Pilot organisations must be present** at study information days and aviation job fairs to advocate an objective storyline to young people interested in joining a flight school.
- Offering future and current pilots an **attractive work environment**, incl. optimal **work-life balance** and **stability of employment and home base**, rather than precarious atypical forms of contracts used by certain airlines in the industry, are extremely important for a candidate to decide to become a professional pilot – and subsequently to stay within the profession.
- Paying the **training costs** of new desired pilots and a modest wage (e.g. airline sponsored schemes) is also an important factor the candidates consider when choosing their career.
- Any alleged 'pilot shortage' claims must **not be used to weaken European regulations** on pilot training, flight time limitations for instructors or examiners, or other relevant safety legislation.
- The pilot **training syllabus must be brought into the 21st century** providing pilots with a real 'education' that encompasses management, economic, leadership and people skills.

Introduction

What can be done to ensure an appropriate supply of skilled, talented flight crews? Do we have enough qualified pilots currently on the market? Is there a pilot shortage or not? When answering these questions, one needs to consider various aspects, such as the region, type of operation, the experience of the pilot group considered and the economics of pilot supply.

In fact, there is no issue with the availability of *licensed* pilots in most European countries. There is however a growing issue with the employer's perceived *quality* of pilots graduating from the flight schools, especially from the self-sponsored training schemes where insufficient initial screening has been performed. According to the airlines, the 'standard' of some of these graduated pilots is not 'fit for the purpose' of becoming an airline pilot.

Does a licensed pilot still equate to a skilled or qualified pilot? And if not, what are the systemic issues leading to that gap? The lack of oversight on quality by National Aviation Authorities (NAAs) is one of the problems in most EU countries – there is no prescribed legislation on Approved Training Organisations' (ATOs) quality, only on the syllabus leading up to a license (frozen ATPL). At the end of the chain the airline is the only judge of whether the quality of the graduated pilots is up to their standards.

Many potential student pilots and even license holders who have completed the basic training will choose a different career path, having looked at all the further necessary financial investments to obtain the qualifications and/or experience (flight hours) required by airlines, such as type ratings. Also, the assessment of working and employment conditions in many (low-cost) airlines – including the increasing phenomenon of precarious 'atypical' employment forms – and job opportunities in their country or region can lead to the conclusion that they are better off in another aviation job or working in another sector. Attracting and keeping the right people to and in the profession therefore depends a lot on the airlines' working environment and employment set-ups.

Finally, the 'pilot shortage' debate is very often a convenient way of covering up many structural problems in the industry. What may be perceived – or portrayed – by some in the industry as a 'pilot shortage' is in fact part of a complex discussion on accessing pilot supply. Some stakeholders' agendas appear to be about weakening safety regulation to 'unlock' pilot supply for certain airlines at a lower cost, and/or increasing profits for some training organisations. Both airlines and ATOs should have an interest in the highest quality, but this usually competes with a commercial motivation in their attitude towards pilot training.

Attracting, selecting, training and enabling the right talent – as well as providing an attractive and stable career perspectives – are the core challenges that need to be considered and changed when discussing the pilot supply issue. Addressing these challenges must not be a smokescreen for monetising pilot supply.

How to attract the most capable candidates?

Making sure that airlines attract and hire the most capable candidates should be the only way to ensure that sufficient numbers of highly skilled flight crews are joining a company.

Hiring on the basis of who can afford to pay the very high costs of pilot training is not going to create a body of pilots who are consistently self-motivated, ready to invest in their profession, and further develop themselves as instructors, trainers and examiners, or simply as good role models for those entering the profession in the future.

Unfortunately, this 'selection by wallet size' is a reality in some parts of the airline industry. There are a range of factors that human resource specialists and managers need to consider when looking to attract applications from high quality candidates with the right capability and potential. Investment in attracting these candidates is an absolute necessity if airlines are to have future pilots with the skills airlines need, rather than just those with a suitably big bank balance. This includes:

Finding the ‘future aviators’

- Strong internal motivation makes a big difference in an individual’s chances of persevering with the rigours of training, through recruitment, and with the demands of the job throughout a career. The industry must seek *early-stage* engagement with the next generation of professional pilots, to create enthusiasm, motivation and explain the opportunities that are out there.
- It is crucial that airlines, national authorities and transport departments, and professional associations take part in programs at schools that introduce children to the aviation industry and generate enthusiasm for the pilot profession early on.
- Aviation is lacking diversity and diverse role models. This results in the perception of a pilot career to be mainly an aspiration for the white, wealthy male, thereby leading many potential good candidates not to even consider it, such as females, ethnic minorities etc. This reduces the amount and quality of applicants to the profession, adversely affecting the pilot supply. Early intervention would correct this, explaining the sort of study choices that will help, and support capable and motivated candidates in the future.
- Active outreach to flying clubs and glider clubs, or even industry organised summer camps to bring the aviation ‘bug’ to a new audience would be a very good way to attract capable candidates. Early flying experience in gliders has been identified by the profession as an extremely valuable foundation for pilot training.

Involving pilot organisations

- Involvement of all national pilot organisations across Europe is necessary at study information days and aviation job fairs to advocate an objective storyline to young people interested in joining a flight school. These pilot organisations can provide a hands-on, realistic and non-commercially driven picture of the job opportunities, study costs and flight schools in their respective countries, as well as of the every-day working environment and demands of the profession.

Making the career & profession attractive again vs the available alternatives

- Nowadays, airlines are competing against alternative ‘career paths’ both outside and inside the world of aviation. With many global opportunities offered to people, be it investing in a start-up venture, pursuing a digital-nomad career, or even flying for a fast-growing drone company – there is plenty to choose from. And young people nowadays will often carry out thorough research before choosing. If not attractive enough, the pilot career will lose out.
- The attractiveness of the profession also affects however the more senior, qualified crews. With the working conditions deteriorating in many companies and regions – crews are likely to move to more attractive airlines or regions if the environment in which they work does not satisfy their work-life balance, financial or self-development needs.

Providing an attractive and stable working environment & conditions

- It is impossible to attract talented, confident people to a job where the terms and conditions are not satisfactory and precarious atypical forms of employment become ever more wide-spread. It becomes even more of a challenge when you consider the *millennials* who ‘like enjoying their life’ and will look for alternatives that allow them to do that. Optimal work-life balance due to rosters, part-time working possibilities, stability of employment and base – allowing the combination of family life with the profession as

a commercial pilot – is extremely important. It is something that a candidate will carefully analyse before deciding to become a professional pilot and considering employers.

- A serious effect in this regard is the rapidly increasing trend for existing experienced pilots to seek part time arrangements or early retirement in order to regain some work-life or family balance. This is producing a significant reduction in the “full time man power equivalent” available to the industry and has real effect on pilot supply. When squeezing the last few percent productivity from a pilot results in them becoming available for work only 50% of the time, the impact on pilot supply is obvious.
- Labour conditions allowing for possible repayment of high initial training costs linked to self-sponsored training are also crucial in this decision-making process. The balance between the complete cost of the training (easily between 80.000-140.000 euro), the starting salary and the cost of living – must allow for a ‘normal’ lifestyle for the individual to take the risk and invest time & resources in this specific career. If this balance is tilted, young people will simply move elsewhere.

Mitigating the financial cost

- Against this background, the reintroduction of airline sponsored ab-initio training schemes needs to be encouraged as a matter of urgency! This alone would make a significant difference to improving pilot supply. In some European countries these schemes still exist and show a combined investment of the candidate together with the airline which results in a long-term sustainable relationship. It is also worth expanding the (too) few states financed flight training schemes.
- Where student pilots are still funded through bank loans, they should have their loans guaranteed with university student interest rate levels and repayable in a university student-loan timeframe.
- The use of reasonable training bonds, instead of self-sponsored type-rating costs, could also provide an alternative for training financing.
- Pay to Fly schemes¹ must be forbidden. They push young pilots even deeper into financial strains, have a corrosive effect on the training environment, and conflict with flight safety.

How to select the right talent?

One of the main issues that affects pilot supply is the screening process of the candidates.

Because of that – an *independent* and *effective* assessment *prior* to the commencement of the initial professional pilot training is a must. The financial solvency of the candidate should not be the primary factor in deciding whether s/he is accepted to a flight school or not.

Overcoming Conflict of interest (ATOs)

- An independent and effective assessment would reduce the risk of a conflict of business interest by an ATO keen to get a new customer/cadet who may not have sufficient skill or ability – but might simply have enough money. To many ATOs, a pilot candidate equals a profit, and to make profit, the school needs cadets in training.

¹ https://www.eurocockpit.be/sites/default/files/eca_pay_to_fly_p2f_position_pp_15_0428_f.pdf

Standardising the assessment process

- In order to facilitate an objective process for selecting the most talented future pilots - standardisation should be created (at European level) to ensure proper assessment procedures are in place at any ATO providing training leading up to an EASA license.

Airlines to engage in recruitment

- Airline companies must be actively engaged in the pilots' recruitment process since it is the airline that knows best its operational needs and can set necessary requirements additional to the default standard.

How to satisfy the demand for qualified and not just licensed pilots?

While in most European countries there is no issue with the availability of licensed pilots, the quality of pilots graduating from flight schools – especially from self-sponsored training schemes where insufficient initial screening might have been performed – is perceived as a growing concern. How to ensure that the standard of pilots produced in the current training system is 'fit for purpose'?

- Selecting the right candidates is a first step to ensure the crews can achieve the highest standard (see point above).
- Pilots must be subject to high-quality training standards, set by legislation (both European and international) – both within an airline, and whilst undertaking airline sponsored training courses. Attempts by certain stakeholders to water down training requirements and standards to 'ease' the pilot supply, must be resisted.
- Providing adequate numbers of high quality flight instructors and examiners to the entire pilot training system is also a must. Trying to ease e.g. flight time rules for instructors and/or examiners, to increase their availability, must be resisted.
- Operators should be encouraged to invest in quality training equipment and make use of new technologies to improve training efficiency and absorbability.
- The goal must be training to *proficiency* level and not just to the minimum legal standard. Such a proficiency standard needs to be defined with the active involvement of the operators and pilot associations, not just the ATOs or regulators.

In conclusion

Ensuring a sufficient, high quality Pilot Supply DOES mean:

- **Promoting** and enabling opportunities in the profession for the next generation of pilots – early, including in schools, and from all backgrounds.
- **Attracting** applicants who are capable and enthused by the profession and by the airlines providing a professional career that is desirable, affordable, and compatible with a home and family life.
- **Selecting** from those applicants those who are highly motivated, committed to high professional standards, and capable of the skills and training needed, not just restricted to those who are able to pay.

- **Training** those selected to *more than the minimum license requirements*, i.e. to a *highly proficient* standard, and this in conjunction with airlines. The aim is that their training is properly funded, teaches the specific additional skills needed by an operator, equips them for career progression not just their first job, and is properly funded by the industry, with the stability of a job that needs to be filled at the end of a successful training program.
- **Offering** future and current pilots a positive & attractive work environment, as well as adequate and stable employment conditions, rather than precarious atypical forms of work contracts used by certain airlines in the industry.

Ensuring Pilot Supply does NOT mean:

- De-regulation or reduction of training and licensing standards, syllabus, flight time, or flying experience requirements to make training cheaper, easier, or more profitable for the training organisation.
- Pumping through high volume, low quality new trainee pilots to ensure an over-supply that keeps new pilots cheap to operators.
- Monetising operator required training or flight experience at the expense of the trainee, such as Pay to Fly schemes, which are exploitative and potentially harmful for flight safety.

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