

FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF ICAO'S AVIATION ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST SERVICE (AELTS)

This Journal Report describes the evolution of the ICAO English Language Test Service (AELTS) and explains its role in supporting States in their implementation of Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs).

 **The decision to address language proficiency for pilots and air traffic controllers was first made by the 32nd Session of the ICAO Assembly in September 1998 as a direct response to fatal accidents in which the lack of proficiency in English was identified as a contributing factor.**

In March 2003, the ICAO Council adopted a comprehensive set of Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) that strengthened language proficiency requirements for pilots and air traffic controllers involved in international operations. It was further determined that pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators involved in international operations should speak and understand English to a level 4 proficiency of ICAO's language proficiency rating scale when involved in international operations. The SARPs became applicable on 5 March 2008.

States have found that the implementation of these language proficiency requirements have been challenging. In particular, States and industry identified the scarcity of dependable language testing expertise as an important obstacle to the implementation of language proficiencies. While some regional and national language endorsement programmes exist and certain testing programmes are self-regulated, no universal system of aviation language test endorsement currently exists.

In an effort to support the implementation of its Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs), ICAO committed to establish a mechanism to provide States with impartial recommendations in the selection or development of aviation English language licensing tests that meet ICAO criteria. In October 2011, ICAO announced the introduction of the Aviation English Language Test Service (AELTS) to assess language tests in order to help its Member States more accurately assess the speaking and listening ability in English of pilots and air traffic controllers.

This Service benefits States by providing them:

- Trusted Test Service Providers (TSPs) who have developed a test with which the decision on the endorsement of licenses can be done confidently
- Improved regulation of the aviation language testing industry

This voluntary Service allows for Test Service Providers from around the world to apply for and receive recognition for tests that rate proficiency in English used in aviation according to ICAO LPRs. The Service is offered via a portal that brings together Test Service Providers, evaluators and anyone interested in the aviation language testing process. Tests are evaluated against the ICAO criteria by a team of experts. They determine if the tests are in partial or full conformance with the ICAO SARPs and ICAO Doc 9835 *Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements*. If it is determined that the test partially or fully conforms, the recognition periods are one year or three years, respectively.

ICAO has made significant changes to the Service in order to improve efficiency. "The Aviation English Language Test Service is unlike anything ICAO has done before. We are forging new ground with this Service and, as a result, we expected a few growing pains with the process. We have received feedback from the testing community regarding the Service, and we are using that feedback to improve it," commented Dawn Flanagan, AELTS Manager at ICAO. So far, this feedback has resulted in a new, more user-friendly website that:

- Provides information on the Service, including background, purpose, ICAO LPRs and guidance material, as well as fees for the Service
- Includes a pre-assessment questionnaire that provides feedback to Test Service Providers to help them self-assess if their tests meet ICAO SARPs for LPRs and ICAO Doc 9835 prior to submitting it to ICAO for assessment
- Provides detailed instructions and guidance on how Test Service Providers submit their tests to ICAO for assessment
- Maintains all test information, and generates direct, secure and confidential communication between ICAO and Test Service Providers regarding each stage of the assessment service.

ICAO developed the Service in partnership with recognized international professional associations: the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA), the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) and the International Civil Aviation English Association (ICAEA). These partners continue to support ICAO through representation on the Aviation English Language Test Service Steering Committee. These partners, as well as highly qualified experts from States, participate in the AELTS Steering Committee and advise ICAO on best practices to address any problems and to improve the Service.

For more information about the Service, please visit www.icao.int/aelts. ■