

ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

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Summary

EAC has been involved in the development and implementation of Language Proficiency Assessments for Air Traffic Controllers since 2004 and so far delivered tests to ATCOs from UAE and other Gulf States. In addition EAC has just commenced the testing of almost 2 000 airline pilots from Emirates Airline.

EAC is convinced that the two current tests that are provided, are very competent and meeting the ICAO-UAE GCAA- and the clients' requirements commercially and logistically.

Background

The information below contains the experience that Emirates Aviation College/ATM Training Department has gained regarding Language Proficiency Assessment for Air Traffic Controllers since year 2004. That includes the development, implementation and delivery of Aviation English Language Proficiency Assessment (RELTA) to Air Traffic Controllers in the United Arab Emirates.

In addition, EAC has recently been involved in the implementation of another Aviation English Language Proficiency Assessment program, designed by Jeppesen and primarily aimed for pilots.

Based on the ICAO Aviation English Language Proficiency requirements as from March 2008, Emirates Aviation College together with RMIT-English Worldwide approached the UAE Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) year 2004 with the aim to develop and implement Aviation English Language Proficiency Assessment and related training programs in the UAE.

RMIT-English Worldwide had at that time already developed the program, RELTA – RMIT English Language Test for Aviation. (Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots)

First step was to “tailor-made” RELTA for Air Traffic Controllers to the UAE national requirements considering ICAO Annex 1, Annex 10 and Doc 9835.

Implementation of the Language Test for Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots

Air Traffic Controller Test

RELTA was modified and “fine tuned” and after final testing and evaluation by EAC and GCAA, it was ready for official approval in the beginning of 2005.

Furthermore, RMIT required the EAC staff involved; **Test Raters** (English Language Experts) and **Examiners** (ATC Experts) to be appropriately trained and accredited prior to delivering RELTA and evaluating the results.

The UAE Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) were amended to include the procedures for Language Proficiency Assessment for Air Traffic Controllers. The regulations also included the requirement for

ATCO trainees to be tested in order to demonstrate ICAO Level 4 or higher, prior to obtaining an OJT permit.

In addition the procedure “Demonstration of Proficiency at the Expert Level (6)” was implemented in UAE CAR, supported by ICAO Document 9835.

In order to become an assessor of “Demonstration of Proficiency at the Expert Level (6)”, GCAA required an additional endorsement to the Air Traffic Control Examiner Rating.

For a candidate to be considered as Expert Level (6) speaker, following criteria need to be fulfilled;

- the candidate has to verify by undersigning a statement that he uses English as his first language; and
- the assessor has to verify that the candidate is a “clear Level 6” having no impediment of the English language skills.

Pilot Test

A Language Proficiency Assessment designed by Jeppesen and intended for pilots was recently granted approval by UAE GCAA. This test is designed to meet the huge demand of pilot tests urgently required before March 2008 and obviously also thereafter.

Delivery of the Language Test for Air Traffic Controllers

EAC commenced the language testing of UAE Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs) in year 2005 which is currently ongoing.

There are 228 licensed ATCOs in the UAE. The ATCO population consists of 55 % native (or native-like) English speakers from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, UK and US. The remaining 45 % are UAE nationals and other non-native English speakers.

55% has been evaluated according to the procedure “Demonstration of Proficiency at the Expert Level (6)” and the remaining 45 % of the UAE ATCOs have been tested using RELTA

The overall spread (228 ATCOs) of the respective ICAO Level 6, 5 and 4 in the UAE is as follows:

ICAO Level 6	- 60 %	(128 considered “Expert Level 6” plus 8 of 100 tested by RELTA).
ICAO Level 5	- 17 %	
ICAO Level 4	- 21 %	
ICAO Level 3	- 2 %	

All new ATCOs in the UAE are being tested using RELTA prior to commencing the OJT at an ATC unit.

Of all tested ATCOs, 2% (or 4 % of the candidates tested by RELTA) did not achieve ICAO level 4 or above, thus failed. These candidates were required to undergo additional language training prior to the re-test, earliest 90 days after first test.

The test result would thereafter be reported to GCAA and the ICAO Language Proficiency Level would subsequently be endorsed to the ATCO License.

Delivery of the Language Test for Pilots

EAC will provide the Jeppesen Language Proficiency Assessment to almost 2 000 pilots from Emirates Airline, starting 6th May 2007. This assessment program is scheduled for 21 weeks, finishing in OCT 2007. A number of other airlines are also planned for this test at EAC soon.

Conclusion - Future of the Language Tests for Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots

The demand for testing and training of controllers and pilots from states not yet started, is huge. That includes i.a. several states in Middle East and Central Asia.

The number of pilots versus Air Traffic Controllers is considerably larger in all states, why the demand of pilot testing will be much greater than for Air Traffic Controllers. E.g. UAE has almost 10 000 licensed pilots versus just over 200 licensed Air Traffic Controllers.

Based on the numbers above for UAE ATCOs, the recurrence test interval of 3 and 5 years respectively, does not appear challenging. However, for other states having majority of ICAO Level 4 candidates, the demand will obviously be higher.

To meet clients' logistical requirements, EAC is currently conducting RELTA on-site to other clients in the Middle East using a portable test infrastructure. An increased number of on-site tests are scheduled to start soon.

Advantages / Implications

Obviously there is an enormous business potential for test centers that are ready to deliver cost- and logistically viable language tests and training programs.

One must ask the question;

What kind of test do the clients want?

- a) A highly sophisticated test with all "bells and whistles"?
- b) A simple, cheap and quick test, just to satisfy the national authority?

There is an obvious difference to the design and philosophy behind the existing language tests. The challenge will be for the respective state authority to ensure that the respective tests comply with the ICAO International Standards and recommendations before they are granted approval.

Due to the huge business potential, there is an imminent risk that tests and test centers are implemented in a less sophisticated way to make quick profit by riding on the tight time schedule for the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements.

References

ICAO Annex 1
ICAO Annex 10
ICAO Document 9835
UAE Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR)

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