



WORKING PAPER

**SPECIAL AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN (AFI)
REGIONAL AIR NAVIGATION (RAN) MEETING**

Durban, South Africa, 24 to 29 November 2008

**Agenda Item 5: Development of a set of comprehensive work programmes in the safety field
(Safety Committee)**

ENGLISH TRAINING STRATEGY FOR ASECNA AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

(Presented by ASECNA¹)

SUMMARY

This paper describes actions taken by ASECNA to develop a specific English language training programme for the Agency's air traffic controllers.

Action by the meeting is in paragraph 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ICAO Resolution A36-11, which concerns proficiency in the English language used for radiotelephony communications by pilots and air traffic controllers, requires ICAO Level 4 language proficiency as of 5 March 2008.

1.2 Audits conducted within the framework of the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) have revealed deficiencies and inadequacies in the English training given to air traffic controllers.

1.3 Thus, in compliance with the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of ICAO Annex 1 — *Personnel Licensing* and Annex 10 — *Aeronautical Telecommunications* regarding language proficiency requirements, ASECNA has initiated a programme aiming to strengthen the English language skills of flight operations personnel.

1.4 In a multicultural organization where French, Spanish and Portuguese co-exist, raising the English proficiency of approximately 400 air traffic controllers to ICAO Level 4 is not an easy task.

1.5 Thus, considering the difficulties in implementing this Standard, the representatives of ASECNA Member States, in a meeting of the Agency's governing board, adopted a resolution

¹ Presented by Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Togo, ASECNA Member States

establishing a three-year transition period (from 2009 to 5 March 2011) by the end of which ASECNA is to have resolved all the deficiencies associated with the matter.

1.6 The action plan established on orders of the ASECNA supervisory authorities comprises different stages. These stages include the revision of the initial and continuous training programmes at CELICA/CA and targeted training at national language centres.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Greatly concerned and aware of the urgency of the situation, in 1999, ASECNA immediately began implementing various training measures with a view to improving the English language skills of its air traffic controllers. These measures are based on an action plan which includes, among other elements, on-site training and training at the Agency's schools, and seven-week immersion courses in England.

2.2 Objectives of English-language Practice by ASECNA Personnel

2.2.1 The objectives of English-language practice by ASECNA personnel are the following:

- a) compliance with ICAO language proficiency requirements;
- b) the improvement of expression and comprehension skills in order to increase the fluency of communication among air traffic controllers and between air traffic controllers and pilots;
- c) the facilitation of discussion in forums and with different users; and
- d) better knowledge of technical developments through the use of English publications by officers.

2.3 The Agency's Implementation Strategy

2.3.1 In order to achieve greater effectiveness, the Agency established the following objectives:

- a) the establishment of a level of English proficiency both at the beginning and at the end of each training procedure;
- b) the introduction of a proficiency test to ascertain each controller's strengths and weaknesses as regards English-language learning;
- c) the development of individual English-language training plans for each controller which will focus on the areas needing improvement in order to reach the level required;
- d) the establishment of mechanisms for training plan assessment in order to make the necessary corrections;
- e) the establishment of contracts with national English-language training centres;

- f) the establishment of contracts with private teachers to meet the requirements of the aforementioned plans;
- g) the organization of air traffic controller exchanges with Anglophone centres;
- h) immersion sessions in an Anglophone country; and
- i) the periodic revision of the English-language teaching content for air traffic controllers.

Initial Training Strategy

2.3.2 In order to reach the objectives indicated above, ASECNA has taken the following innovative steps:

- a) it has raised the passing mark for the written English test;
- b) it has introduced an oral English test;
- c) it has established the requirement of a level of English proficiency equivalent to at least ICAO Level 3 in order to qualify for air navigation controller (ANC) training;
- d) it has established the requirement of Level 4 proficiency in order to obtain the air navigation controller diploma;
- e) it has introduced the “Anglophone Country Immersion” module as part of the initial training of air navigation control students;
- f) it has enrolled all air traffic controllers in a language centre (the American Cultural Center and the British Council, for example); and
- g) it has financed the immersion of operational controllers in an Anglophone country (at the Bell Institute in London) with ASECNA funds since 2001.

Continuous Training Strategy

2.3.3 The objective of continuous training is the maintenance and continuous improvement of proficiency in general and technical English. The continuous training programme comprises:

- a) courses at language centres;
- b) ATS centre training cell courses (CELICA/CA);
- c) the establishment of teaching tools for the learning of English; and
- d) complete immersion in an Anglophone environment.

2.3.4 In addition, specific practicums are organized for other fields in order to ensure 1) the acquisition of basic knowledge; 2) the improvement of reading and text comprehension skills; and 3) the ability to adequately communicate with Anglophones in any situation. This involves such elements as the following:

- a) pronunciation practicums for officers who, despite having a good level of English, have difficulty in making themselves easily understood;
- b) grammar practicums for officers who wish to review the basics;
- c) oral comprehension and expression practicums for officers who must regularly communicate with Anglophones and whose comprehension is weak; and
- d) practicums for beginners.

2.4 Specific Measures for the Attainment of ICAO Level 4

2.4.1 ASECNA decided to further the efforts already initiated by implementing a proficiency assessment programme for all the Agency's controllers. This was undertaken in cooperation with the French DGCA and the French Air Navigation Services Department (DSNA). The two major objectives of this programme are:

- a) to train English teachers in the English proficiency assessment of air traffic controllers; and
- b) to develop, based on the proficiency test results, an individual training programme for each controller so that he/she may either reach Level 4 or maintain his/her level if it is equal to or higher than Level 4.

2.4.2 A training plan was developed following the English proficiency tests given to all ASECNA controllers. This plan is expected to be carried out over a three-year period beginning in 2008.

2.4.3 With the financial relief provided by the European Union within the framework of the EDF, an extensive training programme was implemented. The following, in particular, was made possible:

- a) a seven-week immersion practicum for 145 controllers in 2006 and 2007; it is currently under way at the Oxford Intensive School of English (OISE) in Bristol, England;
- b) a training practicum at OISE in June 2008 on the design, administration, safeguarding, assessment and conducting of English proficiency tests; this was given to five English teachers; and
- c) a thirty-day immersion practicum for ATC training centre and Agency school instructors involved in practical training in air traffic control; these training measures are currently under way.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to note the measures taken by ASECNA to strengthen the English language skills of air traffic controllers in compliance with the requirements of ICAO Annexes 1 and 10.