

PLENARY SESSION 6: Presentations of feedback on test implementation experience

1. Bozena Slawinska, PANSa, on using ELPAC in Poland

BIO DATA

Bozena Slawinska has worked in PANSa for almost 30 years. She has been teaching English to Polish student and operational ATCOs and other staff in her company. She is also involved in testing. She is a PELA test administrator and a certified RELTA and ELPAC rater. Bozena is a vice-president and the general secretary of ICAEA.

My task here today is to talk about ELPAC test implementation in Poland. The ELPAC Test (English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication) has been developed by [EUROCONTROL](#) (the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation) to meet ICAO and European Commission language proficiency requirements in English for operational air traffic controllers.

Why ELPAC?

Before I start talking about ELPAC experience as such, I would like to answer the question some of you may want to ask, and that is why ELPAC and not a different test. The answer is very simple: because it was there.

Poland has been cooperating with Eurocontrol in the subject of testing since the early '90s. The first ideas about common tests for European controller were born in Warsaw during a visit of two gentlemen Wolfgang Leistico & John Rose who were then responsible for the PHARE training project for ATCOs from Eastern Europe. As a result the EPT – EUROCONTROL English Placement Test was created and is still used today for recruitment purposes. Then the idea of PELA was conceived developed and delivered. Poland, participated in the trialing of PELA and then in updating and trialing a new version. We never really managed to insert the whole of the PELA test into the training system but the listening part was incorporated into an ab initio training and was always seen as something very important, needed and relevant. With such a tradition we had to participate to ELPAC trialing.

Apart from wanting to participate in an international project we thought that it was a smooth way, of introducing a concept of a new test to the community of Polish ATCOs, well.... we were wrong.

Anyway, taking the above experiences into account it was only logical that PANSa decided to use this particular test as a way to measure the proficiency of our ATCOs.

ELPAC was ready in summer 2007 and Poland signed the agreement with Eurocontrol in June. The training of markers and examiners started in the autumn. Poland trained 6 ATCO's to become markers and examiners in Paper 2 (interview) and raters in Paper1 (listening comprehension) and 3 language teachers (all with substantial experience in aviation English training) to become Examiners of Paper 2. All language teachers also became administrator of the test.

Implementing ELPAC

As soon as it was possible – that is when all our staff was trained by EUROCONTROL and accredited by Polish CAO, the testing in PANSa started on the 5th of November.

We have a self access room as a part of our training facility. There are 8 computers there, so it was logical to use this room for Paper 1 purpose.

At the peak time we examined 12 people a day 8 in the morning session and 4 in the afternoon. We started with the listening and continued with Paper 2. Then the computer room changed into the examination room.

One additional room was used so that oral exams could be carried out in two parallel sessions. All Paper 2 exams were recorded using small digital recording devices, which served us quite well.

Testing was done centrally. Smaller centers do not have facilities for testing. Not this time round anyway. Besides Polish controllers are used to this system because all training except OJT practice is done at Warsaw's ATC Training Centre.

At the moment we have just over 400 air traffic controllers. We tested 393 ATCO's and 279 of them passed. That is just over 70,% of the test takers. 16 percent reached level 5, over 54% reached level 4 and 29% stayed below the minimum 4.

Test administration

The administration of the test was at times quite difficult because of the slowness of the internet connection. A lot of time was wasted because of that. Inserting candidate profiles,

preparing or closing of the testing sessions, generally using the system is a bit complicated especially when testing is so intensive.

A few times the system crashed during the testing session and on one occasion several times during one examination. But to restore it was fairly easy and not too disturbing for the test takers. They were warned about the possibility prior to each session.

We also had some other small technical problems but if in need we could always call Adrian Enright or technical support of Enovate in Norway.

Due to a shortage of staff, work load and some expected and unexpected absences just prior to the implementation, we were unable to run any familiarization courses. However the controllers were informed about the structure of the test, they were encouraged to access web site prepared by the ELPAC team containing the Sample test and the video of the Paper 2 exam.

The lack of regular familiarization training of ELPAC might be blamed for some percent of the level 3 results as 62 out of 114 failed only one paper and it was mostly Paper 1.

Feedback 1

A lot of students, especially those with the higher level of proficiency, were surprised to find their test easier than they expected. A lot of them thought the test was relevant to their job. As examiner I felt really well prepared for the job and the support we got from Eurocontrol and Enovate was really good. And one more thing. I've worked with Polish ATCO's for more years than anyone can remember. I taught all of them and I know the level they are at. In my opinion ELPAC is a very fair test, especially Paper 2

Feedback 2

The controllers generally felt it was a test relevant to their job but complained about the lack of a version specific to TWR/APP/ACC and just one sample version. A lot also considered Paper 1, listening comprehension, to be too difficult as it required good knowledge of the computer key board. Some of them criticized the lack of possibility to listen to the message again which they are so used to do in their job. They also felt there were too many questions in insufficient time.

Where are we today.

Poland filed a difference with ICAO, mainly because of the situation in the pilot's world, but also because Polish controllers, despite our efforts, were not fully compliant.

This put a totally new perspective on our efforts. But the work on improving the level of English of those who are below level 4 started in February when the first group of controllers went to England for a 3 week language course – first time in history.

We also bought the Skyguide program originally designed as a preparation for the PELA test and about a month ago people started to use it on a self access basis.

Any controller who feels ready for a resit - and also young people who are attempting to obtain the license - can take ELPAC during regularly organized sessions. Until the end of May these sessions are held every week.

As soon as this conference is over we will start to prepare the remedial in-house courses for those who need them.

Overall impression

The ELPAC project is an open project . Enovate, the software provider, launched an improved version of the ELPAC software system in January in which some of the administration tasks were improved. They also offer their help on the phone any time we need them. The same goes for Eurocontrol. New version of software is being prepared and will be available this year. We have just returned from the 1st ELPAC User Group Meeting where we had a chance to discuss all aspects of the ELPAC testing, get rid of our frustrations and also discuss improvements that we would like to see in the test and in the system as a whole. Regular re-calibration courses for the examiners and markers are also planned by Eurocontrol so we get really strong support and supervision.

We do not have much time today but if you want to learn more about the test you can visit the ELPAC web site as well as contact me or any other ELPAC user.