

PLENARY SESSION 6: Presentations of feedback on test implementation experience

4. Christel Schipper, LVNL, on using RELTA with controllers in the Netherlands

BIO DATA

Christel has been working as a vice chairwoman of the exam committee for air traffic controllers for about 10 years.

In addition she is involved in different projects, like the implementation of the ICAO language requirements and since 2007. She is an Aviation English instructor and one of the 6 RELTA examiners at the LVNL (Dutch ATC).

1. History

In January 2006 a project team was formed to implement the ICAO requirements regarding the language proficiency.

Team members were found within several segments of the training department and recruitment & selection.

Our regulator was informed right from the start about all we did and therefore was able to approve the test we chose without any delay or discussion.

The work was divided into 4 tasks:

- 1 - a selection instrument to test plain English proficiency during the selection of ab initio's.
- 2 - an Aviation English training program Initial Training.
- 3 - an English language test for air traffic controllers according the ICAO requirements.
- 4 - a training program for those controllers who did not meet the ICAO requirements after testing.

Informing the controllers and gaining their support was one of the most important challenges for the project team.

2. Target group

All the controllers and flight information service officers (FISO) from atc the Netherlands and two small regional airports, not operated by atc the Netherlands but for which we are responsible regarding training and competence. In total 300 people.

All ab initio's who qualify for a student controller license. An average of 15 persons a year.

3. The test

We did a thorough research for available tests meeting all the ICAO requirements. Eurocontrol was one of the first that came into view. On the internet we found some tests and test developers approached us to sell their products.

Two serious candidates emerged from this lot.

The ELPAC test from Eurocontrol. We had the opportunity to participate in two trial sessions which were very useful and from which we learned a lot about testing. It is a high quality test with a solid scientific background.

The RELTA test from RMIT. One of the team members went to Melbourne and came back with a lot of information. This too was rated by the project team as a very good test. Finally we presented a number of tests with the advantages, disadvantages and costs to the Operations management team.

The Management decided to go for the RELTA test because it caused the least strain on the duty rosters and could be administered by non controllers.

We then started the process of purchasing the test and the necessary equipment and the training of the examiners.

The rating is not performed by ourselves but by RMIT. We deliberately have the rating done by RMIT to exclude any discussion with the controllers about the results. We explained to them how the rating is done: by a team of professional raters.

4. The actual testing

On July 30, we started out on one of our regional airports, Eelde. Two examiners travelled to the northern part of the Netherlands and in a couple of days tested all controllers. In our personnel magazine "Behind the Screens" an article was published which served as an advertisement of how it was to take the test. During these first sessions we became more and more familiar with the test and the equipment.

In September through December the Enroute controllers had their turn at the RELTA test. The controllers at Beek and the FISO's at Budel passed the test in the last quarter of 2007. In 2008 all the Schiphol based tower-approach and ground controllers and FISO's will do the test. In March the FISO's from Lelystad airport took the test. We expect a small overrun into 2009.

5. Some numbers and results

6 certified examiners and more to be trained in the near future.

1 Program Manager with a back up.

Amsterdam En- route controllers: 79

Amsterdam FISO's : 22

Eelde Tower/Approach 13 and FISO: 6

Beek Tower/Approach: 16

Budel FISO's: 4

Lelystad FISO's: 6

Schiphol Tower Approach controllers: 18 (and many more to go)

Schiphol Ground controllers and FISO: 1 (and many more to go)

Ab Initio's: 5 (a continuing process all through the year)

Level 3: 1

Level 4: 11

Level 5: 92

Level 6: 96

Scoring range of the listening test: the majority has a score between 24 and 29.

6. What we think of the test and the work involved

We all believe it is a robust test and the results we've got so far are fair and correct. For the examiners it is fun to do, they get to know their colleagues from a completely different side than in a normal working situation. You create a totally new bond with a candidate, some are nervous and need to be calmed down a bit and especially in section 3, the interview, it is a challenge to make them talk about the aviation issues. You hear some really nice or interesting stories!

The work involved is not difficult but there are a lot of things that must be taken care of. The updating of the dongles, creating classes, enlisting students, planning the test and finding available examiners, uploading sound files and entering the listening test results in a database, distributing and logging the results. Etc.

The RMIT manuals are very useful and we've created an examiners checklist.

Another important thing that must be well organized is whether the test equipment is complete and working properly when we go to another test location. For instance we once forgot the adapter for the mixing panel, fortunately the technical department of the airfield had an adapter that fitted. Otherwise we could have gone home and messed up a duty roster for a whole day. That would have been a costly error.

Originally the speaking test is done with one laptop with the test and the recording software. We use two laptops, one with the test and the other one for the recording. We think it is more comfortable to keep an eye on the recording during the speaking test instead of switching from the test to the recording between the different sections. Sometimes the recording doesn't work that well but you'll find out after a whole section when you use only one laptop. With two you'll notice it immediately when there is something wrong and can take action to adjust the recordings.

7. Customer satisfaction

Our customers, the controllers, are quite happy with the RELTA test. Once they have taken the test their initial reluctance is gone and say they actually liked it. Especially the speaking test section 3. They sometimes grumble about the listening test but their overall performance is very well. (see 5) When they hear their marks for the listening test the grumbling ceases immediately!

We expect when people take the test for a second time and be more familiar with the test

their hesitance or even anxiety will disappear completely.

All together I can state that the RELTA test is a good test, the results so far are just and fair, people like the test and feel comfortable when taking the test. Until now we received no complaints and nobody felt 'mistreated'.