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ELPAC

English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication

Information leaflet

ELPAC is developed by EUROCONTROL in cooperation with:

ENOVATE

ENOVATE is responsible for the technical infrastructure required to host and operate the ELPAC test including the provision of technical support to users on request.



ZHAW, the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, is responsible for the English language and linguistic aspects of the ELPAC test and is involved in the development and evaluation of ELPAC test items, ELPAC test format and ELPAC examiner training.

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Introduction

With the implementation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements in 2011, the international aeronautical community is taking a significant step in improving safety in aviation. Now all air traffic controllers and pilots operating in internationally designated airspace and on international air routes have to demonstrate their proficiency in the language(s) they use for aeronautical communication. In order to maintain the operational standard, air traffic controllers and pilots must achieve at least a level 4 according to ICAO's language proficiency requirements. Their language proficiency is a licence endorsement without which air traffic control and pilot licences cannot be issued.

EUROCONTROL (the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation), together with its partners ZHAW (the Zurich University of Applied Sciences) and ENOVATE, has developed a test of English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication (ELPAC) to help the Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSP), Aircraft Operators (AO), National Supervisory Authorities (NSA) and Training Organisations (TO) meet the ICAO language proficiency requirements.

ELPAC is a test of English in aeronautical communication. It is designed for operational air traffic controllers and pilots and reflects the range of tasks undertaken in air traffic control and pilot communications. The focus of the test is on language proficiency, not operational procedures.



Language testing in aviation

Reliability and integrity are imperative for language testing in aviation. A controller or pilot who fails to demonstrate compliance with the ICAO language proficiency requirements may have their licence suspended or even withdrawn – with potentially serious implications on the professional development of the individual but also on the providers of air traffic services or the aircraft operator.

Therefore, language testing in aviation is the shared responsibility of the entire aeronautical community. That is why the providers of air traffic services and the air operators must ensure that the language proficiency tests they work with are reliable, effective and appropriate for the aviation industry and the speakers they set out to test.

Aeronautical communication is highly specific. Consequently, a language proficiency test for aviation professionals – such as air traffic controllers and pilots – should reflect the aviation context.

The ELPAC test fully meets these requirements. The fact that it is currently the only language proficiency test endorsed by ICAO is a testimony to the validity and integrity of ELPAC. More information about ICAO test endorsement can be found on: <https://www4.icao.int/aelts>.



ELPAC test development team

ELPAC test development began in November 2004 following extensive feasibility studies. In February 2005 a core development team, consisting of air traffic controllers and English language experts from six countries and Eurocontrol began designing the test specifications and items/tasks in accordance with the ICAO language proficiency requirements.

EUROCONTROL is the project leader for the ELPAC project and manages the test. Technical assistance is provided by ENOVATE A.S. (Bergen, Norway), who has developed the software and technical infrastructure for the project. Linguistic expertise is provided by the ZHAW (Winterthur, Switzerland), who have developed the ELPAC level 6 test and provide support with the maintenance and ongoing development of the ELPAC test. The ZHAW also provides ongoing support to ELPAC training courses for ELPAC examiners and other ELPAC staff. An independent language testing expert is connected to the project.



ELPAC test design

There are currently two versions of ELPAC available which were designed specifically to reflect the communicative functions of ATC controllers and ATPL pilots.

ELPAC tests English language proficiency at ICAO level 4 (operational) and level 5 (extended). Both phraseology and plain language are included in the test. Plain language proficiency is an essential component of radiotelephony communications as it is not possible to develop phraseologies to cover every conceivable situation.

ELPAC is partly a web-based test. This will not only ensure that test administration is as economical as possible but it also fosters a high level of test security and ensures confidentiality of all content.

There are two test papers – Listening Comprehension and Oral Interaction.

ELPAC for ATC controllers

Paper 1 (Listening Comprehension) tests understanding communications between pilots and controllers and between controllers and controllers in both routine and non-routine situations. The recordings are based on authentic material and range from short standard pilot transmissions to longer communications in which the controller deals with non-routine or unusual situations.

ELPAC Paper 1 for ATC controllers is administered via internet and takes around 40 minutes.

Paper 2 (Oral Interaction) assesses the controller's proficiency through non-visual and visual communication in three tasks. This includes:

- the correct use of standard ICAO phraseology
- switching between structured phrases [RTF] and plain English
- making an appropriate response to a pilot message
- resolving misunderstandings
- dealing effectively with the relationship between pilot and controller
- negotiating a developing unusual situation
- making a verbal report in English (of the unusual situation)
- producing extended speech in an aviation context

ELPAC Paper 2 is administered by two ELPAC examiners, a language expert and an operational expert, and takes around 20 minutes.

Sample versions of Paper 1 and Paper 2 for ATC controllers are available for familiarisation on: www.elpac.info

ELPAC for pilots

Paper 1 (Listening Comprehension) tests understanding communications between pilots and controllers in both routine and non-routine situations. The recordings are based on authentic material and range from short standard pilot transmissions to longer communications in which the pilot deals with non-routine or unusual situations.

ELPAC Paper 1 for pilots is administered via internet and takes around 35 minutes.

Paper 2 (Oral Interaction) assesses the pilot's proficiency through a series of different tasks. This includes:

- switching between structured phrases and plain English
- making an appropriate report of an unusual ATC related event
- resolving misunderstandings
- dealing effectively with the relationship between pilot and controller
- negotiating meaning
- producing extended speech in an aviation context

ELPAC Paper 2 is administered by two ELPAC examiners, a language expert and an operational expert, and takes around 20 minutes.

Sample versions of Paper 1 and Paper 2 for pilots will be available for familiarisation from March 2014 on: www.elpac.info

ELPAC level 6 test for ATC controllers and pilots

After the first series of language proficiency tests have been completed organisations wishing to test their staff at ICAO level 6 may implement the ELPAC level 6 test, called Paper 3.

Paper 3 (level 6 test) assesses the ATC controller's or pilot's proficiency at ICAO level 6, verifying in four tasks that, according to the ICAO rating scale description of a level 6 speaker, the candidate is able to:

- understand and avoid idiomatic English
- recognise and avoid ambiguity
- use clear and concise English
- negotiate meaning
- clarify potential misunderstandings

The ELPAC level 6 test can be taken only after the candidate has demonstrated ICAO level 5 first in the regular ELPAC test.



ELPAC test implementation

ELPAC is currently available to Air Navigation Service Providers, Aircraft Operators, CAAs and Training Organisations around the world.

ELPAC can support many organisations in meeting the ICAO language proficiency requirements. In particular, the implementation model of ELPAC is attractive in that it is delivered by trained local operational experts and language experts. As a result, ELPAC can support an organisation in reaching the required standards, while at the same time fostering a culture of awareness and commitment to these standards.

Organisations intending to use ELPAC will be required to:

- Sign a licence agreement with EUROCONTROL (respecting test security, confidentiality of data and maintaining ELPAC test standards)
- Select qualified personnel (English language and operational aviation experts) to receive training from EUROCONTROL as test administrator, marker, assessor and interlocutor
- Have these personnel accredited (following a one week training course)

Once these conditions are fulfilled the organisation will receive the ELPAC test and can start testing their licence holders.

ELPAC examiner training

To maintain standards in ELPAC testing and to support the effective use of the ELPAC test by organisations that have concluded an ELPAC licence agreement, EUROCONTROL offers a number of courses:

- ELPAC accreditation course, to train nominated ELPAC test administrators, markers and examiners in the use of the test and in their role as ELPAC test examiner and assessor and prepare them for accreditation by their regulatory authority
- ELPAC refresher course, for accredited markers and examiners
- ELPAC level 6 examiner course, for experienced ELPAC examiners wishing to use the ELPAC level 6 test

Initial certification training for ELPAC examiners and the mandatory examiner refresher training is included in the ELPAC license fee. Course dates and locations will be published in the EUROCONTROL IANS course catalogue.

For on-site ELPAC training courses and additional courses on request a separate fee will be invoiced to cover the examiner and travel cost.

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