

Mike Beckers notes on Flight Examiner history and possible future for the HAI Training Working Group 2023

Historical:

Introduction:

The mid-20th century marked a transformative period for aviation, with General Aviation (GA) playing a crucial role in connecting communities and fostering economic growth. As the demand for qualified pilots increased, so did the need for standardized testing and evaluation of newly trained pilots. This led to the introduction of the designated or approved flight examiner, a key figure in ensuring the competency and safety of aviators.

1950s-1960s:

In the post-World War II era, civil aviation experienced rapid growth in all western countries. Each regulator took significant steps to regulate and enhance aviation safety. During the 1950s, flight examiners were typically experienced airline or military pilots approved by the regulator to conduct check rides for aspiring private and commercial general aviation pilots.

This means the standards of assessment were reflecting the current standards in the then airline or military organisation. Those within the Civil Aviation organisation for the country relied heavily on this process and in most cases employees within the civil regulator were themselves ex airline or military pilots.

1970s-1980s:

With the establishment of a more robust Civil Aviation Authority in each individual country (FAA, CAA etc) a more structured and centralized approach to aviation regulation emerged. Each regulator started taking back the reins of the testing and instead employed directly ex airline or military pilots who then went about engaging with the General Aviation industry providing advice, mentoring and most importantly examinations. It is important to note that during this period there was available to the regulator experienced pilots for this role. They were paid sufficiently, were given a budget to maintain their own competency and currency and were given the delegation to examine solely because they worked for the regulator.

On top of this, some General Aviation industry pilots were able to apply for and become examiners themselves but there was a lot of nepotism involved in this process where the new examiner was given the ability to examine not necessarily based on their experience and merit but where the regulator thought there was a need and if they deemed the individual to be worthy of the delegation. In many cases ex airline and military people were given this opportunity simply because of their background ahead of a pilot that had been bought up solely in the GA and commercial world.

Each regulator assumed responsibility for overseeing flight testing and certification allowing for a more streamlined process, supposedly fostering consistency and standardization in pilot assessments.

1990s-2000s:

Advancements in technology, changes in aviation regulations and the thought process that some industry examiners were simply passing candidates because they had paid their money to pass led the regulator to lose faith in industry examiners so they decided to take back the majority of testing within the local area offices.

This necessitated updates to the role of examiner and how they were approved. The FAA for example, introduced the Designated Pilot Examiner Program in the 1990s, formalizing the selection, training, and oversight of examiners. DPEs were required to undergo recurrent training and evaluations to ensure they remained current with evolving regulations, best practices and able to set and maintain the required standard.

2010s - Present:

With massive changes in regulation around the world and with the dwindling experience internally of the regulators due to budget cuts, process overload, and no time for examining plus the lack of confidence by employees within the regulators to make decisions and take responsibility for any decision they made (understandable as they would be held accountable for adverse decisions with no internal support) saw a change in how a pilot could become an examiner.:

Currently we are still within this process of change with each Country still grappling with how to produce future examiners within a reasonable time frame too a consistent standard.

Future:

1. Examiners need to come from within industry with oversight by the regulator
2. Becoming an examiner needs to be a qualification that anyone can apply for based on meeting pre-requisites and having undergone training and testing
3. The qualification can be added to their licence in the same manner any other rating is added (for example Flight Instructor, Instrument rating, Flight Examiner.)
4. An examiner should be able to examine ANYTHING they themselves are qualified and current in. An examiner rating should not be restricted to just one area and retrained and tested for every additional licence, rating or endorsement. An examiner rating should be independent and able to be exercised at any location within the Country they are qualified.
5. Like any rating, when converting an overseas licence the Examiner Rating should also be able to be carried over in the same manner an instructor rating or instrument rating is.
6. Market forces will decide how much an examiner charges and supply and demand should determine how many are active. It is not up to the regulator to decide who is an examiner, or how many are qualified (just like they do not determine who can become a pilot) based on perceived need but who wants it, who meets the pre-requisites, who has done the training and who has passed the qualification.

Examiner process:

Typically, ICAO Countries are now starting to move towards a standard system for the eligibility, training and qualification of examiners. Some are on the right track, others are making it overly complicated, some still require that someone within the regulator anoint the application which slows or stops the process. We are in yet another period of change with regards to examiners.

In general terms the items below list what the process to become an examiner.

Meet Eligibility Requirements: Prospective Flight Examiners typically need to meet certain eligibility criteria, including holding the qualification they want to examine and being current in that activity.

Having a history with the regulator and meeting minimum total hour flying requirements.

Complete an Application: Submit an application to the regulator expressing their interest in becoming a Flight Examiner. This may involve providing details about flying experience, qualifications, and a summary of their aviation career.

Attend Training: If your application is accepted, then attend specific training sessions or courses conducted by the regulator. These sessions cover the responsibilities, standards, and procedures associated with being a Flight Examiner.

Pass Examinations: Successfully complete any required examinations or assessments during the training process. This may include written tests and practical evaluations to ensure that the candidate understands and can apply the necessary standards.

Gain examiner experience: The regulator typically requires a certain amount of mentoring by another examiner to observe, participate and be assessed as an examiner.

Approval and Designation: On meeting all of the above the regulator can issue a Flight Examiner qualification allowing the individual to issue licences, ratings and endorsements on behalf of the regulator.

Ongoing Requirements: Flight Examiners are typically required to maintain their proficiency, stay current with regulations, and undergo periodic training and assessments to ensure they continue to meet the standards set by the regulator.

Regulator responsibility:

The regulator has a responsibility to

1. Facilitate the ability for industry to have enough examiners within the system at any time to meet demand
2. Provide a pathway to become a flight examiner
3. Provide standards and an examiner manual outlining the standards and process
4. Provide training and assessing

References to current Flight Examiner material available by each regulator

UK CAA Examiner process

<https://www.caa.co.uk/commercial-industry/pilot-licences/instructors-and-examiners/flight-examiner/>

Australian CASA Examiner process

<https://www.casa.gov.au/licences-and-certificates/flight-examiners/flight-examiner-rating-course#HowtoenrolintotheFERC>

<https://www.casa.gov.au/licences-and-certificates/flight-training-and-examiners/flight-examiner-ratings-and-proficiency>

USA FAA Examiner process

https://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/designees_delegations/individual_designees/dpe/become

https://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/designees_delegations/individual_designees/dpe/information

Canada Transport Canada Examiner process

<https://tc.canada.ca/en/aviation/publications/pilot-examiner-manual-seventh-edition-tp-14277>

EASA Flight Examiner process

<https://flight-examiner.com/questions/easa-flight-examiner>