

The English for Aviation Language Test (EALT)

Introduction

The English for Aviation Language Test (EALT) is a test of English language proficiency in the context of aviation specifically developed in response to the ICAO 2008 Language Proficiency Requirements.

The EALT is intended for flight crew and air traffic control personnel requiring the assessment and certification of their English language proficiency in accordance with the ICAO March 2008 standard. The EALT allows non-native English speaking aviation personnel to demonstrate their proficiency in the English language in the context of aviation and aeronautical communications. Although designed for operational personnel, set in the context of the operational environment, and reflecting language use in professional situations, the focus of the test is on *language proficiency*, not on operational procedures.

The EALT is a valid, reliable and practical test for use by the aviation industry in the language proficiency assessment of its personnel. Comprising the *EALT Test of Listening* and the *EALT Test of Speaking*, the EALT is a comprehensive test of communicative competence in which the demonstration of a candidate's actual listening and speaking ability in English is required. Both parts of the EALTS are administered and assessed by approved and certified examiners with the candidates being rated against the criteria contained in the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale and the ICAO Holistic Descriptors of operational language proficiency. Candidates are awarded their final ratings after the independent assessments of a minimum of four accredited assessors.

The EALT assesses across the full range of the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale (*Pre-elementary Level 1 - Expert Level 6*) and in each of the six discrete features of language (*pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction*).

Combining specialist input from subject matter experts, qualified and experienced language assessors, language trainers and aviation professionals with current research in oral language testing and assessment best practice, the EALT has been developed with detailed reference to *ICAO Doc 9835: Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements* and *ICAO Cir 318-AN180 Global Harmonisation of Testing Criteria* and has been approved by UK CAA as being fully compliant with all relevant ICAO standards and recommended practices and associated supporting guidelines.

The innovative design of the EALT allows it to be customised to suit the operational aviation environment of individual candidates. These adaptations are not, in themselves, specialised tests of distinct varieties of language proficiency but have been developed as a consideration of the comfort of the test taker. There are adaptations available for flight crew and air traffic controllers, and further separate adaptations for pilots of *heavy* and *light* aircraft both *fixed-* and *rotary-wing*, and *Tower*, *En Route* and *Approach* controllers. The assessment criteria remain the same in all test adaptations.

The EALT has been used to assess the English for Aviation language proficiency of pilots and air traffic controllers from over 50 ICAO Member States for benchmarking and/or license endorsement purposes, making it one of the more widely used English for Aviation language tests currently available and conferring upon it important aviation industry and regulatory validation.

The EALT is an appropriate tool for obtaining the necessary gradable language sample from which can be made accurate and reliable assessments of language proficiency for professional licensing purposes in accordance with the ICAO 2008 Language Proficiency Requirements.

The EALT is a component of the English for Aviation Language Testing System (EALTS) and is administered by LTAS Ltd.

LTAS Ltd has been approved and certificated by UK CAA as an ICAO and EASA compliant English for Aviation Language Assessment Body and as complying in all respects with the ICAO requirements published under ICAO Doc 9835 (see overleaf).

The EALT components

EALT Test of Listening

The *EALT Test of Listening* is an adaptive, on-line mediated test of listening comprehension. The test assesses a candidate's comprehension across a range of professionally-related communications in both routine and non-routine situations. There are separate adaptations of the test for flight crew and air traffic controllers.

The recordings used in the *EALT Test of Listening* range from short standard transmissions to longer communications and are a combination of simulated and authentic radio-telephone and telephone communications concerning routine, non-routine and unexpected events.

Through a series of comprehension checks of increasing complexity, the *EALT Test of Listening* assesses the accuracy of a candidate's comprehension of common, concrete and work-related communications as well as his/her level of understanding when confronted with situational complications or unexpected events.

In order to assess a candidate's comprehension across a range of speech dialects, accents and registers, a variety of accents are used in the recordings. These accents or varieties of language have been trialled and reviewed by language specialists and subject matter experts and have been judged to be sufficiently intelligible to the international community of aeronautical personnel. The speakers on the recordings all interact at a speeds varying from the ICAO recommended 100 words per minute to native or near-native speaker speed.

The *EALT Test of Listening* lasts approximately 40 minutes.

Test of Speaking

The *EALT Test of Speaking* assesses a candidate's use of spoken English by means of a series of exchanges or language tasks in a direct interview comprising elements of both face-to-face and voice-only interaction. From the language sample produced by the candidate, the certified EALT examiners are able to draw inferences relating to his/her language proficiency in the context of aeronautical communications in both routine and non-routine situations and so assess the candidate's language against the criteria contained in the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale and the ICAO Holistic Descriptors.

Typically, candidates take the *EALT Test of Speaking* in pairs. They may know each other, or they may never have met before. If there are an uneven number of candidates sitting the test in any one session, one of the interviews of the session will be with a single candidate. Adaptations of the test are available to suit both pilots and air traffic controllers.

There are two examiners present at the test: an interlocutor/assessor and an observer/assessor. The interlocutor asks the questions, instructs the candidates and sets the test tasks. The assessor does not take part in the interaction. The interview is recorded.

The *EALT Test of Speaking* assesses the language proficiency of the candidate (controller or pilot) in three distinct parts and includes elements of both face-to-face and voice-only communication.

Typically, the candidate will be asked to demonstrate English language proficiency in: *responding appropriately to interaction in an aviation context; comprehending and interacting in both plain English in the context of aviation operations; resolving misunderstandings by checking, correcting, clarifying and confirming information; giving information, both general and detailed; negotiating meaning; responding to messages and situations requiring communicative action; making a verbal report in plain English; and managing the speaker/listener relationship.*

Additionally the candidate is given the opportunity to show English language proficiency in: *stating, explaining, describing and discussing procedures; stating, evaluating and exchanging ideas and opinions; proposing and supporting arguments; agreeing and disagreeing, evaluating options and incidents (ranking, eliminating, identifying, comparing and contrasting, determining advantages & disadvantages etc); speculating and hypothesising; producing extended speech in an aviation context.*

Candidates are assessed against the criteria contained in the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale and against their ability to:

- *communicate effectively in voice-only and in face-to-face situations;*
- *communicate on common, concrete and aviation operations related topics with accuracy and clarity;*
- *use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognise and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or aviation operations related context;*

- *manage the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine operational situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and*
- *use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.*

The *EALT Test of Speaking* lasts approximately 20 minutes.

Candidate assessment in the EALT

Given the high-stakes nature of ICAO compliant English for Aviation language testing, the assessment of a candidate's performance in the EALT is appropriately valid and reliable.

The *EALT Test of Listening* is assessed simultaneously at the time of its being taken with the candidate's results being held on the Central EALTS Administration database.

Assessment in the *EALT Test of Speaking* is necessarily more complex. The examiners (the interlocutor/assessor and the observer/assessor), individually and without discussion, award marks based on the language proficiency demonstrated by the candidate during *live* interview. One set of ratings is provided by the interlocutor and a second by the observer. No indication of these ratings is given to the candidates. The ratings, along with examiner comments and the audio file of the interview, are then forwarded to Central EALTS Administration.

Central EALTS Administration records the two sets of ratings received and forwards the audio file to two *remote* assessors. The *remote* assessors are trained and certified EALT examiners. The *remote* assessors listen to the speech sample provided by the candidate and each provide a further set of language proficiency ratings. They return their ratings and comments to Central EALTS Administration. In this way, each candidate's language proficiency is assessed by four trained and certified examiners: two in a face-to-face situation and two in a voice-only situation.

These four sets of ratings are then reviewed by Central EALTS Administration with reference to the candidate's performance in the *EALT Test of Listening* before final ratings are determined and recorded. The candidate can then be certified.

If the four examiners are discordant in their rating of any candidate beyond established margins of tolerance, the recording of the interview is passed to two senior examiners via Central EALTS Administration for their further consideration before final ratings are awarded.

The certificates of achievement in the EALT are typically available to the candidate within ten working days of the completion of the test.