

Commercial Flight Training

By Alex Ramos & Kieran Westlake, recent graduates from Leading Edge Aviation

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”

Most pilots will have heard this quote at some point in their life, and most of them live by it. For most people that get into aviation they are said to have caught ‘the aviation bug’ when they were quite young. However, whether it’s flying a small turbo prop around a tropical paradise or flying a jet aircraft packed with hundreds of passengers, all pilots have to go through the same rigorous training process. At the end of the day, most pilots will finish their training with the same qualifications to ensure that the standard in this safety orientated industry is pretty much the same but how they get there can massively vary. We’ve tried condensing many of the ways of completing flight training into some generic brackets to make it easier for you to understand what a commercial pilot will experience in their training journey.

Integrated or Modular:

An integrated course is an Ab Initio (from the beginning) full time course that is completed succinctly, taking you from zero experience all the way to your final Airline Transport Pilots Licence (ATPL) qualification. Modular is exactly as it sounds, you can study each module independently, taking your time and choosing different training providers for each element. Neither is better than the other, it all comes down to individual circumstances and choice. On initial inspection, integrated appears to be more expensive but takes less time to complete



as it's an intensive course which is appealing to the airlines. There can be other advantages such as Training Guarantees and included Degree programmes that are not included with the modular route. If you choose the modular route it’s likely to be slightly less expensive but may take longer to complete, it also offers quite a lot of flexibility as to how you complete your training, which can be a great advantage for some. An integrated ATPL course will give you a frozen Airline Transport Pilot Licence (fATPL) which nearly all airlines require. Most modular cadets choose to do their training and gain a frozen ATPL as well however they can choose to stop earlier at either a CPL (Commercial pilot licence) or a CPL IR (Commercial pilot licence with Instrument rating) depending on the job they are aiming for.

ATPL Ground School:

ATPL Ground School is the classroom part of pilot training, where you’ll study the theoretical knowledge required for the ATPL. Integrated students will usually complete this in 6 months on a full-time basis, this option is also there for modular students but most elect to do this on a part time basis studying in their own time, often around a job.

The theory will cover a wide scope of subjects as diverse as Air Law, Flight Planning and Human Performance. The theory will set the foundations for your flight training and for your future career. To be successful in this stage you must pass the CAA exams in all 13 ATPL subjects within a period of 18 months of sitting your first exam and achieving a minimum pass-mark of 75%.



Getting the hours and experience for licence:

This is where the fun starts and where you will actually get to start flying. On an integrated course the flying part of the course is normally split into two phases: foundation and advanced. The foundation phase starts at the successful completion of ATPL ground school exams and it'll see you learning the fundamentals of flying and working towards gaining your commercial pilot licence (CPL). Whether it's completing your first solo flight, conducting your qualifying cross-country flight to two airports travelling over 300 nautical miles (a great day out- trust us!), learning some basic instrument flying skills or the first time you shut down an engine in flight in a multi-engine aircraft there is a lot to look forward to in this phase!



Meanwhile, on a modular course after gaining your PPL (Private Pilot Licence) it'll be up to you to get the hours and experience needed ready to join a modular commercial pilot training course. For those wanting a UK Multi-Engine CPL, currently the minimum number of hours to start a modular CPL course is 150 hours (however be warned that in order to take the CPL exam you will need 200 hours so most schools do ask for more than 150 hours on joining).

You could gain the hours by purchasing an hour building package or hiring an aircraft at your local airfield. Hours building in this way offers modular students a lot more flexibility with their training allowing them to fly at their own pace, fitting in their flights around their jobs and other commitments. Don't worry though for those that are thinking they are missing out on a great day doing their qualifying cross-country you still need this for a modular course (you could even do multiple ones while building your hours!).

Commercial Pilots Licence.

Arguably (in our opinion) this is one of the hardest parts of your commercial flight training- the CPL exam. Normally completed in a multi engine aircraft, the exam will see you being tested on a variety of skills that you have learnt in your training to date. Your examiner will usually explain to you that for the context of the exam you will be the pilot in command of the aircraft and that they are simply an 'interested passenger' (probably one of the most knowledgeable 'passengers' you will ever have on a flight with you...). It will be your job to plan a route to a destination chosen by the examiner and to also assess the weather and any other relevant information to ensure that it is safe to operate the flight.

In the exam, commonly at or near the destination the examiner will ask you to divert to a new location and from there you will perform some general handling (steep turns, stalls and basic instrument flight work) before heading to an airport to complete 4 circuits. These 4 circuits (in a

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multi-engine aircraft) show the examiner that you are able to land the aircraft with everything working but also in a variety of undesirable configurations. After completing a normal touch and go you will then perform a flapless one (this is where you simulate having a flap failure and land in a 'clean' configuration). However, this time when you take off from the flapless touch and go your examiner will normally simulate an engine failure to see how you deal with an engine failure after take-off. You will then be required to make an asymmetric approach (with only one engine working) before doing an asymmetric go-around and finally an asymmetric landing and that's it! After taxiing back to parking, the examiner will debrief you and let you know if you have passed and that you are now a commercial pilot!

Instrument Rating:

While those on the modular route may choose to end their training journey at CPL (allowing them to commercially operate a single pilot aircraft in visual conditions), many choose that they want to do their Instrument Rating at this stage and so like those on the Integrated course they'll now progress onto the next phase of their training. This rating focuses on operating an aircraft solely based on the instruments under instrument meteorological conditions. A large portion of this training is done in a flight simulator replicating the real aircraft that you'll go on to fly. This is great in that you can easily create any adverse weather conditions that may not actually happen during training and you are free to learn without any consequences that you may find when flying the aircraft itself.

This part of training will be a very steep learning curve as the method in which you operate completely changes; you'll be flying routes in controlled airspace with aircraft from the airlines, carrying out a lot of different procedures and some pretty quick mental maths to ensure you're on top of everything the aircraft is doing. Your route flying will take you to different airports around your home base and here you'll carry out the different types of approaches that there are; these are an ILS, NDB, VOR, RNAV and SRA. You'll repeat these constantly to have an understanding of how to carry them out whilst also being comfortable in doing so. At the end of the day this is the section of your training that will translate the most into your future career especially if you end up flying for an airline. Once you have completed the required training and your instructor is happy with your level you'll be submitted for an exam. This will consist of a full route section, some holding at the airport you fly to and then a few different approaches. Once you

What does it cost?

Embarking on a professional flying qualification is a huge commitment. There are several things to consider before you take either a modular or integrated course:

Health. You'll need to fit and healthy enough to pass a full Class 1 aviation medical. It is worth checking you will be able to qualify for this before committing money to training. See <https://www.caa.co.uk/Commercial-industry/Pilot-licences/Medical/Medical-examination-information/>

Cost. The costs of training are significant. Expect to be spending around £100,000 to get your qualification and don't forget you'll need to support yourself living for two years too. There will not be any opportunity to get part time employment during an integrated course so if the finances look tight, explore the modular route.

Further training. In most cases, unless an airline snaps you up, you may need to factor in a type rating after your course to be more appealing to employers. Expect to pay anywhere between £15 to £20,000 depending on the type course taken.

Paying it back. Research your career field for when you finish. The average First Officer salary is £30-35,000 per annum rising over time to around £100,000 per annum for highly experienced Captains. Factor in your salary expectations against any repayments you will need to make.

complete those, you'll divert back to your home airport and on the way carry out a small bit of general handling before potentially doing your final landing in flight training!

AUPRT:

This is likely to be one of the last parts of your training. It's a very short course (5 hours) but a lot of fun, but don't let that distract you from the importance it has. Standing for Advanced Upset Prevention and Recovery Training, the course is now mandatory and will take your flying skills to the next level. It's a combination of theory and flight training, where you'll learn how to apply the correct recovery techniques if you ever come across an unusual attitude in flight at any point in your aviation career.



MCC:

This part of your training focuses on getting you ready for operating in a multi crew environment. Standing for multi-crew cooperation there are a number of courses all providing slightly different approaches but all focusing on teaching you to be able to operate in a multi-crew environment, for example in a commercial jet aircraft. Most integrated courses either offer an MCC JOC (Multi Crew Cooperation course and Jet Orientation Course) or a newer course APS MCC (Airline Pilot Standards Multi Crew Cooperation course). Most airlines require pilots to have an MCC JOC or an APS MCC in order to apply for a pilot role (with airlines beginning to favour the APS MCC due to its ability to better prepare pilots for operations within a multi-crew environment). For those modular students who are wanting to apply to airlines they would (as with their hour building, CPL and IR) get to choose where and when they complete their APS MCC training.

MORE ABOUT LEADING EDGE AVIATION:

Leading Edge Aviation is a rapidly expanding pilot training academy with a fresh approach and an emphasis on holistic training. Offering the highest standards of regulatory technical training, students also benefit from a comprehensive professional and personal development curriculum to enhance non-technical skills.

Leading Edge delivers modular commercial training and the LEAP (Leading Edge Airline Preparation) course; a full-time integrated course with BSc degree. Based at London Oxford Airport, Leading Edge students receive wellbeing support, along with the most advanced learning aids. Virtual and mixed reality technology and neuro-training techniques are used to embed and refine new knowledge and skills, creating pilots who enter the industry airline ready, with strong leadership skills.



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