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Agenda Item 6: AIM Personnel English Language Proficiency: Levels and Documentation Creation

AIM Personnel English Language Proficiency: Levels and Documentation Creation

(Presented by the ECAR AIM Rapporteur)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
This paper seeks to outline the basic requirements for English Language Proficiency and its use in the aviation sector.	
<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic Objective 1 – Safety• Strategic Objective 2 – Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency• Strategic Objective 3 – Security & Facilitation• Strategic Objective 4 – Economic Development of Air Transport• Strategic Objective 5 – Environmental Protection
<i>References:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annex 1• Doc 9835• Doc 9432• Doc 9683-AN/950

1. Introduction

1.1 Aviation has traditionally used English as its primary language. Each country was responsible for establishing its own aviation English standard for many years. These norms differed from country to country, often resulting in misunderstandings and contributing to many incidents and accidents. To improve the safety of aviation globally, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) developed an international standard for language proficiency requirements.

1.2 ICAO requires that all pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators involved in international operations must be able to speak and understand English to a level 4 proficiency of ICAO's language proficiency rating scale. Effective communication, which includes all transfer of information, is essential for the safe operation of flight. The message might be transferred by speech, by the written word, by a variety of symbols and displays (e.g. instruments, CRT, maps) or by non-verbal

means such as gestures and body language. The quality and effectiveness of communication is determined by its intelligibility: the degree to which the intended message is understood by the receiver.

2. Background

2.1 Over 800 people lost their lives in three major accidents (one collision on the ground, one accident involving fuel exhaustion and one controlled flight into terrain). In each of these seemingly different types of accidents, accident investigators found a common contributing element: insufficient English language proficiency on the part of the flight crew or a controller had played a contributing role in the chain of events leading to the accident. In addition to these high-profile accidents, multiple incidents and near misses are reported annually as a result of language problems, instigating a review of communication procedures and standards worldwide. Such concern was heightened after a 1996 mid-air collision in which 349 passengers and crew members were killed in an accident in which insufficient English language proficiency played a contributing role.

2.1.2 Concern over the role of language in accidents led to the adoption of ICAO Assembly Resolution A32-16, in which the ICAO Council was urged to direct the Air Navigation Commission to consider this matter with a high degree of priority and complete the task of strengthening relevant ICAO provisions concerning language requirements, with a view to obligating Contracting States to take steps to ensure that air traffic control personnel and flight crews involved in flight operations in airspace where the use of the English language is required are proficient in conducting and comprehending radiotelephony communications in the English language. In 2000, the Proficiency Requirements in Common English Study Group (PRICESG) convened for the first time. PRICESG was established by the Air Navigation Commission to assist ICAO in advancing the language competency task, which included, among other elements, the following aspects:

- a) carry out a comprehensive review of existing provisions concerning all aspects of air-ground and ground-ground voice communications in international civil aviation, aimed at the identification of deficiencies and/or shortcomings;
- b) develop ICAO provisions concerning standardized English language testing requirements and procedures; and
- c) develop minimum skill level requirements in the common usage of the English language.

3. ICAO Language Requirements Holistic Descriptors

3.1 The ICAO language proficiency requirements include the following “Holistic Descriptors”.

Proficient speakers shall:

- a. communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations;
- b. communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;
- c. use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context;

- d. handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and
- e. use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

4. ICAO's Language Proficiency Levels

4.1 ICAO's language proficiency rating scale for aviation English:

Level 1 – Pre-Elementary

Level 2 – Elementary

Level 3 – Pre-Operational

Level 4 – Operational

Level 5 – Extended

Level 6 – Expert

4.2 Level 4- Operational Proficiency Level

4.2.1 All pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators involved in international operations must be able to speak and understand English to a level 4.

4.2.2 The following criteria for level 4 –Operational Proficiency apply:

Vocabulary

Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.

Structure

Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.

Fluency

Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.

Comprehension

Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is

confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.

Interaction

Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.

Communication is universally acknowledged to be critical to aviation safety. Industry understanding of communication and language as fundamental aspects of aviation safety are therefore critical aspects for all aviation personnel to understand. This includes AIM officers who are a part of aeronautical operations.