

LOW COST & REGIONAL **airline business**

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High flyers

For some time, the airline industry has faced a crucial pilot shortage but now, training providers are expanding their facilities and are investing in new partnerships to meet demand. **Rob Coppinger** reports

The costs associated with pilot training are concerning
(photo: BAA Training)

Training companies are investing in new facilities in Europe and North America, preparing for the greater numbers of cadets, as the routes candidate pilots can take to the right-hand seat are changing. "As you may know, currently most student pilots from China, India and elsewhere do their training in North America," says Scott Firsing, Americas Sales and Business Development Manager at French flight training solutions company ALSIM. "We see big growth there, but in Latin America as well. We will soon open an ALSIM simulator assembly and production facility in the US to help meet this demand."

L3 Commercial Training Solutions (CTS) estimates that Europe will need almost 50,000 new pilots within the next five years and about 8,000 of those will be for

low cost and regional airlines. Historically, the training routes those prospective pilots would have had are the traditional airline sponsored programme or the integrated method. The integrated method is where a training provider has an airline agreement. The more recent route is the modular one, where students choose an affordable institution for each step in their education before applying to an airline. At whatever stage of a pilot's education, airlines engage with training providers, the industry is planning for a busier future.

Unfortunately, airline sponsorship has become a rarity and the single training provider integrated approach comes with a bill of about £90,000 for the student. "There is still a high cost of training and high dropout rate," says Firsing. Such a high cost is

a viable route for everyone. The modular approach is one answer for the 'skilled people who can't afford £90,000,' says Ben Whitworth, Director of Student Pilot Preparation Firm, AirlinePrep.

The overall solution to this complex situation of student training costs and pilot supply is expected to lead to new partnerships with greater cooperation between the aviation community. "It should be so much more structured. Airlines could start working together," says Whitworth. What was inconceivable a few years ago, according to ALSIM, is the long chain of regulators, aircraft and simulator manufacturers, airlines, cargo operators and military air forces talking together. "We now see the full spectrum of entities involved in aviation at the same conferences at the same time," says Firsing.

Firsing points to airlines starting their own training academies with heavy simulator use as another example of facilities investment and partnerships with simulator providers to deliver the pilot numbers the industry demands. ALSIM is also seeing institutions investing in lower cost simulator technology. "We are seeing a lot more training moving from your larger multi-million dollar, three storey motion full-flight simulators, to your fixed base, non-motion devices," explains Firsing.

He sees airlines looking to fill first officer seats as quickly as possible. He says: "[This] can mean taking someone with only 150+ hours or even zero hours and training them all the way up to the commercial level in a very short period of time." ALSIM's technology can train the student from their first taxi around an airport in a Cessna, all the way up until they are hired by the airline and start their type specific aircraft training.

While not necessarily a low cost or regional airline, on 8 May TUI Airways announced that it would



Classroom training at GTA in Madrid
(photo: Global Trainikng Aviation)

take pilot candidates with just 500 hours of flying experience. "We understand that it can be really challenging for people to get started in the world of aviation," TUI Airways says. The airline is investing internally, using its own trainers for the new less experienced candidates. While TUI is a charter airline its decision reflects a wider industry trend.

In Whitworth's view, it shows an airline being prepared to invest in pilots who it would not have previously considered eligible. While TUI is using its own trainers, decisions by an airline to get involved in pilot training at an earlier stage reflects Whitworth's opinion that a structured and less expensive approach is needed. "I think the biggest difference we are seeing is a big shift from traditional integrated being the only method of training." ▶



There is a pressing need to expand training facilities
(photo: ALSIM and Tim Fox)



L3 CTS has expanded its capacity with the opening of a new centre (photo: L3 CTS)

However, there is no silver bullet to solve this pilot training and candidate affordability problem for the industry. "I think this problem [of insufficient numbers of cadets able to afford the training] is going to continue for the foreseeable future," Whitworth adds. "The real issue, [that] there is a massive gap between airlines and training providers, they don't work together unless they have too."

José Luis Parra also sees an affordability problem. He says he had noticed "a few years ago many low cost and regional airlines moving their training costs to the pilots." He is President of Madrid based training provider Global Training Aviation (GTA) which has facilities in Madrid and Jakarta. GTA provides type rating training for the ATR-72, Boeing 737, Boeing 757 and Airbus A320. Parra also says he has seen a "problem from the pilots' basic training, in certain occasions." To address skill shortfalls, GTA will reinforce the pre-simulator training, such as human factors knowledge.

The consensus is that greater involvement by airlines, in the training of pilots at an earlier stage in their career would be welcome. And the demand is there. Parra sees a natural demand for training from pilots that have worked at regional airlines because a typical route for pilot progression is to start on turboprops and then eventually move on to, 'reach the point of flying jets'. In the meantime, Parra's business plan is for "the opening of two new training centres in South America and the development of three new simulators".

While predictions of new training paths may flourish, the traditional integrated approach is still growing. L3 CTS has expanded its capacity. Its new L3 European Airline Academy facility is able to serve up to 500 cadets a year. Located at the Ponte de Sor Airport, the L3 CTS Academy will get new flight instructors, additional aircraft and the on-site facilities are to be expanded.

"This new expansion will further allow the company to offer tailored international training solutions for aspiring pilots and L3 CTS's airline customers," says L3 CTS European Airline Academy Director, Mário Spínola.

He expects a lot of custom from low cost and regional airlines because the academy is on the site of the G Air school which trained 150 students per year and low-cost and regional airlines frequently recruiting G Air's graduates. This is despite it not having, 'official agreements with any airlines,' explains Spínola. "Since the recent integration [of G Air and L3] this [capacity] will have already grown to around 300 for this year," he adds.

L3 CTS has contracts with a wide variety of airlines including low cost and regional operators. Its clients include easyJet and Wizz Air. "Many airlines work with us to provide tailored MPL [Multi-Crew Pilots Licence] courses which ensure that training incorporates the airline requirements and standard operation procedures from day one," Spínola explains. Historically, within the L3 European Academy, the majority of cadets undertake the integrated airline transport pilot licence route resulting in recruitment by the airlines once they complete their training.

Global training partner CAE is also expanding in the Americas. It announced at the 2018 World Aviation Training Summit, held in Orlando, FL in April, that it would be deploying new full flight simulators (FFSs) across its network. "We are delighted to expand our training footprint across our network in the Americas, to support our longstanding airline partners and regional customers' increasing pilot training needs," said CAE's Civil Aviation Training Solutions Group President, Nick Leontidis. Its network locations that are getting new FFSs include Montreal, Mexico and Vancouver.

In Vancouver, the new FFS for the Bombardier Q400 is for regional operators in Canada and the United States. While in Mexico, by July and August, "the new Airbus A320 FFS in Mexico will be ready," CAE says. "[This is] to support the increasing demand for the A320 fleet in the country, mainly driven by low cost carriers."

CAE says that for Montreal: "The new Airbus A320 FFS in Montreal will be ready for training in the first half of 2019, to support the overall demand of customer in the region, including Air Transat as they begin to receive deliveries of their new A320 aircraft." Montreal already has Airbus A330, ATR 42 and ATR 72 and Boeing FFSs at the centre.

The growth in the number of pilots is driving investment by training providers in new facilities, new simulators, their capacity for training cadets, and new aviation community cooperation. However, there is also an expectation by some that airlines will need to do more to secure pilots, in order to help solve the cost challenges that come with training. ■