

# The Flight Examiner as a Professional

They're the keepers of the standards, and the final and crucial check before a new pilot is unleashed into the skies. Here's what it means to be a 'professional' Flight Examiner.

While the Flight Examiner's role hangs off the flight test, there's an awful lot going on before, around, and after each one.

"Preparation and planning are key," says Brendon Bourne, a Tauranga-based Flight Examiner with Aspeq for the last five years.

"No two tests are the same. So I begin to think about, and plan for, an A-cat test for instance, sometimes up to a couple of weeks before the flight.

"Any Flight Examiner wants the best outcome possible for their candidate, but they also have to be aware that everyone else, in the air and on the ground, is putting their trust in the Flight Examiner to do their job well. It can never be 'once over lightly'. It has to be a really thorough examination of the candidate's flying skills, and according to the Flight Test Standards Guide.

"The Flight Examiner is really the 'upholder' of the standards, and that's a big responsibility."

Marc Brogan, CAA Aviation Examiner, says Flight Examiners are acting on behalf of the Director.

"So it's a highly significant job that's not just about assessing competence. There's a degree of mentoring and oversight of not just candidates, but instructors as well. There's also a role in feeding back to the flight school or aero club, any trends emerging in the quality of candidates being put up for a flight test.

"Flight Examiners have to possess really good communication skills. They should be positive but also honest. They should be effective communicators so the candidate, instructor, and organisation value their opinion.

"A Flight Examiner is in an almost unique role to observe the standard of aviation training across the board, but also within

organisations. They have a duty to report to those organisations what issues they see emerging from the flight training process."

Brendon Bourne agrees. "Flight Examiners totally have a responsibility to go to the school, especially if they identify a safety issue. Obviously, if the candidate has failed, the Flight Examiner debriefs with the student and their instructor. But with numerous fails, the Flight Examiner is obliged to talk with the CFI about possible improvements."

CAA's Principal Aviation Examiner, Bill MacGregor, agrees, saying that when Flight Examiners are on an airfield, their expertise isn't confined to the flight examination.

"They should also keep their eyes and ears open to note standards of behaviour being displayed, and should intervene where they see unacceptable behaviour, be that during flying or ground operations."

Marc Brogan believes the thoroughness with which a Flight Examiner should carry out their role cannot be overstated.

"It's not just about what happens in the air. During the Dual Flight Training Review of a spate of accidents in 2014, we discovered that when the instructors involved in those accidents were students, their logbooks and other records had not been kept up to date. That says something about the quality of school they learned to fly with. Final responsibility for thoroughly checking such record-keeping lies with the Flight Examiner. If records and paperwork are not complete, the Flight Examiner must question why."

Marc also encourages Flight Examiners, once in the air, to 'stretch' the candidate a little.

"Mix it up a bit. A test is just a snapshot of the ability of the candidate on a particular day. Some candidates raise

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their game to just pass the test, and thereafter their performance dips.

"We also found in the Dual Flight Training Review, too many instances of people doing just what they had to, to chin the bar on the day – but they had no 'excess in the tank'.

"While it's not the Flight Examiner's job to unnecessarily or unfairly extend the candidate during the test, there are ways the Flight Examiner can do things a bit differently so they can know the candidate understands what good flying entails.

"Basically, it's about not being predictable in your testing, and challenging the candidate's depth of knowledge."

Marc also believes it's important that Flight Examiners talk to one another about the trends they're seeing in training.

"They can do that through their parent company, on an informal basis, or at a Flight Examiner seminar. It's always handy to hear what others' experience is."

Brendon Bourne says one of the most common features of the role is in answering questions about the Civil Aviation Rules.

"A Flight Examiner really has to know what they're talking about. I get up to about five rules-related questions a week, about their requirements, or the procedures to comply with them.

"They do have to keep up to date with what is going on, rules-wise.

"They also have to be across the technical side of aviation, because a Flight Examiner is also seen as someone who should know about proper maintenance."

Brendon also says Flight Examiners need to take every opportunity to keep current.

"Most of their time is spent sitting in an aircraft while someone else flies, so they do have to grab any opportunities to pilot an aircraft, because aviation is changing all the time, and Flight Examiners need to stay abreast of those changes."

Brendon says being a 'professional' Flight Examiner is also about being someone who is looked up to – not just on the airfield, but also outside it.

"They need to be a role model in how they live their life. So they can never really let their guard down. The New Zealand aviation community is small, and they have to make sure they maintain integrity in their private, as well as professional, life. They don't want to be in the limelight for the wrong reasons!"

Marc says the critical importance of what Flight Examiners do means they always have to maintain a professional approach.

"They're the final check in the licensing system, and the gatekeeper to flying privileges. The rest of us entrust them to do their job properly, so they must be more particular than anyone else in the system – and in a way that withstands scrutiny." ■



CAA Aviation Examiner Andy McKay (right) takes Keith Stephens, of Advanced Flight, for his A-Cat and Flight Examiner renewals.

Andy says a Part 135 operational competency check is also a time to reflect with a candidate on past issues and discuss pertinent topics relevant to the intended operations.

"The CAA is now actively encouraging scenario-based competency checks particularly in VFR Part 135 helicopter operations. As the CAA moves more to an SMS-based approach, the scenario-based test allows for a greater capture of the three key elements that make a competent pilot: situational awareness, decision making, and ability in handling-based skills."