

Kiwi Pilot Training: Are we meeting reasonable expectations?



KiwiFlyer recently asked John Clements what he thought about our standards of Kiwi Pilot training and flight tests. With 22 years as a Civil Instructor and Flight Examiner, backed by 27 years in the military, John is very well qualified to comment.

I HAVE been asked to write a short article on this topic. I feel flattered that anyone would seek my views. I retired last year!

Having spent nearly 50 years in the flying 'game' and having acquired about 15000 hours on 20 or so aircraft types, ranging from Sunderlands to Sioux, when asked: "Which is the best aircraft you've ever flown?", my answer was invariably: "That one we just landed in". For it represented the 'monument' to success!

If success means (among other things) no accidents, I did OK. I had a few close calls but no accidents, nor any incidents of note. I put that down to good training and testing - but perhaps more to good management and 'sixth sense' (situational awareness?). Those two things lead to good luck. One creates one's own good luck - and bad!

I was fortunate to fly with a lot of different nationalities and in quite a few parts of the world. I concluded in my dotage that Kiwi trained and tested pilots

are as good as most. In many cases better. Put that down to whatever you wish. I think that the 'Kiwi can' attitude, the vast range of tasks we undertake, our variable terrain and very variable weather, are the ingredients to turn out pilots likely to be the 'right stuff'. New Zealand has produced some outstanding aviators in both the military and civil sectors. As with sports, in flying we box well above our weight.

Nonetheless, there have been bad patches. Certainly, the helicopter fraternity has not always enjoyed an impeccable record. I recall about ten years ago, Frank Robinson accusing us of being a "bunch of cowboys". Sadly, I think a few 'cowboys' did bite the dust. Flying is unforgiving if you push the envelope too much.

About that time, folk had a poor image of R22s. However, once governors were fitted, R22 accidents dropped right off. Some thought that 'awareness training' (isn't that what training is all about?) solved the problems. It may have had an effect but I think governors were the key.

Sometimes we don't look in the right places for the answers to problems. Often folk in high places are quick to damn. Like Frank. And others! I think that the standard of training and testing in New Zealand has improved

a lot over the years. And (surprisingly for some, perhaps!) I think aviation 'command and control' has taken a notch up.

In my time as a Flight Examiner, I heard few complaints about the quality of flight tests. There are (were?) problems with lack of standardization and expectations between different FEs, but I think ASL/CAA/FE seminars have gone some way to resolving those issues. If candidates think they have been hard done by or unfairly treated, they should make it known. No FE that I know tried to catch out candidates. I encouraged students who

passed (as well as those who did not) to provide feedback. Few do.

If we were to do anything about flight tests, my suggestion would be (and has been!) to make CPL tests more 'task orientated' - as is done in Australia and Canada. That encourages candidates to think and apply 'command decisions' (commonsense?), rather than simply 'doing a circuit'. I think we teach and test a bit too much by 'numbers'. These are refinements I suggest might be trialed and built in with the passage of time.

So, in response to what I was asked to comment on: 'Kiwi Pilot Training: Are we meeting reasonable expectations?', I'd say: "Yes".

John Clements (73!)
2 years RAF, 25 years RNZAF,
22 years Civil Instructor/FE

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