

Why an Aviation Industry Road Map for Training and Education Must Succeed



While at the recent AIA Conferences, KiwiFlyer attended an informative presentation from ATTTO Chief Executive Elizabeth Valentine on funding issues in the aviation training industry. Via Elizabeth, we invited ATTTO to write this article explaining a new road map and the important reasons for it.

TERTIARY Education sector performance and funding changes have provided an opportunity for the aviation sector to review the relationship between industry needs, qualifications and tertiary funding for training in the sector. Over the past year there have been clear indications that some major aviation employers and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) were not happy with aspects of aviation education. Questions over whether the TEC would continue to fund pilot training have been raised.

With the threat of funding withdrawal, an agreement between aviation industry organisations and the Aviation, Tourism and Travel Training Organisation (ATTTO) was established in late 2009 to review the current situation. This project is examining where industry-led reform across qualifications and training needs to be made. Project consultants Martin Jenkins were engaged in early 2010 to develop a way forward that would allow the aviation sector to continue to receive TEC funding appropriate to a sector so critical to the NZ economy.

The project aims are to: 1. Establish an industry-wide position on workforce requirements. 2. Establish a comprehensive view of the current training provision. 3. Establish an industry-wide position on any changes required to current training provision. 4. Influence Government decision making on investment in aviation training. 5. Identify an ongoing process for delivering on, maintaining and enhancing the above.

The consultants have been working closely with an industry Steering Group chaired by Brian Whelan of Peat Aviation. The group includes senior representatives from ATTTO, TEC, CAA, AIA, Air NZ, Ministry of Defence and Airways.

The project is now well advanced, with the Martin Jenkins team managing consultation with the industry and providing interested stakeholders with opportunities to contribute. The consultants have attended AIA council and division meetings; have visited a range of training providers and operators; and conducted workshops and telephone interviews around New Zealand.

Although it isn't possible for the consultants to meet with everyone, the Steering Group believes a representative cross section of people has been consulted. There remains a strong focus on ensuring this project is industry-led.

TEC's final decision regarding future funding for the aviation sector is on hold until the Martin Jenkins investigation is complete and proposed models, for both qualifications and funding, are submitted to TEC and the Minister for Tertiary Education. "Models need to be acceptable to industry, the CAA and to also satisfy Government policy for the sector. So there is a lot of complexity. But we're working through it," says Brian Whelan.

Now that the project team has largely completed the first round of consultation with industry at the coal-face, the next stage is to get a blue-print and action plan out for consultation and agreement.

Kevin England, Chair of the Flight Training Division at AIA and an active member of the Steering Group, says transition and implementation will need to be worked through with care to ensure desired outcomes are achieved. "Naturally any change from

the current system will see arrangements put in place to ensure a smooth transition and careful change management," he says. "There have been recent discussions with both NZQA and TEC on a range of specific matters. TEC's postponing of aviation funding decisions shows that the Government agencies concerned have a growing level of confidence that this project will deliver necessary change."

In parallel with this work, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is implementing the NZQA Targeted Review of Qualifications from 1 November. This significant change in how qualifications are described and registered on the NZ Qualifications Framework (where all aviation tertiary qualifications reside) offers the aviation sector a prime opportunity to rationalise qualifications, and ensure those that are taught are consistent and high-quality.

These two parallel projects provide an excellent opportunity to close any gaps that currently exist between student numbers, qualification standards that work for industry and qualification pathways and completion rates that work for TEC and NZQA. "The primary aviation employer concern is about how employable people are when they have been trained. So what matters is the job relevance of training at any level, irrespective of whether that training happens in the workplace, through a polytechnic, private training establishment or a university," says Elizabeth Valentine, Chief Executive of ATTTO. "If the aviation sector expects funding

investment from the government we need to clearly demonstrate the practical ways we can offer value. Going forward, all aviation-related qualifications need to meet the needs of sector employers, whether they are from an airline or general aviation."

Understanding the work done by employees, employment opportunities and career pathways across aviation has been a foundation consideration in this project.

"Through the consultation processes, industry has a growing understanding of the issues and risks particular to their part of the sector. The skills a person requires at critical stages of training and the employment pathways associated with particular skill sets have also become clearer. We have been impressed with the number of people able to put individual interests aside and work for the good of the wider aviation sector," says Valentine.

To illustrate, a group of industry flight training specialists put many hours into producing draft guidelines that can be used as a blue-print for future planning. Considerations include aviation education governance, improved selection criteria, training models and career path outcomes. An indicative implementation plan has been created to bridge the gap between where we are now and where we need to be by March 2011.

Proposals from the flight training specialists and other groups are now being discussed with the industry steering group prior to seeking industry feedback. The window to develop the Aviation Education and Training Strategy, and Map of Provision, is quite tight. With Government interest in the project high, the team will provide an indicative plan to the TEC and Minister later this year, with full proposals to follow by March 2011.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Valentine at ATTTO, email: elizabeth.valentine@attto.org.nz

"Questions over whether the TEC would continue to fund pilot training have been raised."