

CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE

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Background

Inadequate language proficiency has played a role in accidents and incidents and this led ICAO to adopt strengthened language proficiency requirements for radiotelephony communications.

Both ICAO phraseologies and plain language are required for safe radiotelephony communications and both have to be tested under the new requirements in ICAO Annex 1 and Regulation (EU) No 2015/340.

ICAO has established minimum skill level requirements for language proficiency for flight crew and air traffic controllers and has introduced a language proficiency rating scale ranging from 1 to 6, Level 6 being the Expert level.

Controllers are required to demonstrate proficiency in the use of both phraseology and plain language. Operational Level 4 is the minimum level of language proficiency that needs to be demonstrated by a controller to provide an ATC service.

The language proficiency requirements in ICAO Annex 1 apply equally to native and non-native speakers.

Applicants for an English and Maltese Language Test test

All applicants for a student air traffic controller licence are required to demonstrate at least ICAO Operational Level 4 in English to be issued the licence.

Applicants for the Aerodrome Control Instrument air traffic control service in Malta (LMML) are required to demonstrate at least ICAO Level 4 in plain language in Maltese. This is required to ensure that they can communicate effectively with the emergency services on the ground should the need arise. The Maltese language is not used in radiotelephony communications with aircraft and only a plain language test in the Maltese language is conducted.

All new applicants for a Malta air traffic controller licence have to demonstrate the required proficiency in the English language and if applicable also in Maltese.

Language Assessors Conducting the Tests

Language Proficiency Assessors are specifically authorised by the Director General for Civil Aviation.

Language Proficiency Assessors have specialised qualifications and training in language assessment as well as operational experience iaw Commission Regulation 2015/340.

An individual who has the role of a rater or assessor shall:

- hold or have attained a Level 6 on the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale
- have successfully completed initial rater/assessor training and subsequently complete recurrent rater/assessor training at least once each year.

Additionally, a rater or assessor shall satisfy one of the conditions below:

- hold or have held a professional pilot's licence or equivalent*
- hold or have held an air traffic controller's licence
- hold or have attained language training at an accredited university or language school and two years English language teaching experience.

*equivalent means a private pilot's licence with a minimum of 350 flight hours and flying experience in five or more ICAO states.

Assessors for ICAO Phraseology

ATC examiners authorised by the Director General for Civil Aviation to conduct tests for the issue of an air traffic controller licence/student air traffic controller licence or the issue of a rating in an air traffic controller licence can test air traffic controllers/student air traffic controllers or applicants for such licences in phraseology.

Plain Language Test Format

The test takes about 45 minutes. The candidate is graded on speaking and listening skills.

The test is administered face-to-face and voice-only and is split into three parts. It is conducted in the form of a one-to-one interview during which the Language Proficiency Assessor asks questions that refer to common, concrete and work-related topics set in a context appropriate to aviation.

The first few minutes of the test are devoted to making candidates feel at ease, and to enable the Language Proficiency Assessor to obtain autobiographical material.

During the first part of the test the Language Proficiency Assessor will present situations to the candidate by the use of audio material (recorded pilot/air traffic controller messages) and the candidate has to respond verbally to follow-up prompts delivered by the assessor. During this part of the test the communication is non-visual to ensure that the examiner does not give away any facial cues.

During the second part of the test the Language Proficiency Assessor will present situations to the candidate by the use of audio material (recorded pilot/air traffic controller messages) and the candidate has to respond multiple-choice questions. During this part of the test the communication is non-visual to ensure that the examiner does not give away any facial cues.

During the final part, the Language Proficiency Assessor asks open-ended questions on normal / abnormal / emergency situations set in an aviation context, and on human / environmental / health / technical or other aviation-related subjects.

Note: There are different scenarios for ab-initio pilots, professional pilots and air traffic controllers.

From the test the Language Proficiency Assessor, assesses the six ICAO language proficiency skills (comprehension, pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency and interactions). The test does not specifically assess phraseology and it is not intended to check technical competence which is tested by the operational examiner although the applicant is expected to understand and react appropriately to situations applicable to their level of experience.

The assessment is conducted in accordance with the ICAO holistic descriptors. The result of the test is issued as a level according to the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale. The scale runs from Pre-elementary Level (Level 1) to the highest level, Expert Level (Level 6) (See Appendix 1).

The result of the plain language test is the lowest rating among the six individual ratings. For example, a candidate whose language proficiency in the six skills is rated in the following way:

Holistic Descriptors	ICAO Level
Pronunciation	4
Structure	5
Vocabulary	5
Fluency	5
Comprehension	6
Interactions	5

The overall ICAO Level 4 rating is given – the lowest among individual ratings.

The applicant will **not** be informed of the result of the test immediately after the test session but successful applicants will be issued an assessment report by Transport Malta showing individual scores in pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and interactions.

Recording of Tests

All tests are recorded for audit purposes and the recording can be used in case of an appeal.

Minimum Requirement for Air Traffic Controllers to Use Radiotelephony Equipment

ATC controllers must pass the test in ICAO phraseology and meet at least ICAO level 4 in English plain language.

In addition controllers in aerodrome control must meet ICAO Maltese plain language level 4.

Appeal Process

The applicant has the right of appeal. Appeals have to be made within 20 days of receiving the result of the test. The candidate may also request a review to the Head of Personnel Licensing. If there is a review, the Chief Language Specialist will be appointed to hear the test audio recording to assess the applicant's proficiency. If the candidate will wish to proceed with an appeal, s/he may do so under Air Navigation Act Article 91 and the relevant EASA regulations.

- The Aviation Appeals Board will decide whether the decision was properly conducted. The decision will not be based on whether the applicant should have passed or failed but if the process was well conducted.
- If the Aviation Appeals Board is satisfied with the evidence submitted that the decision should be reversed, the Aviation Appeals Board may reverse the decision of the Director General.
- The final report issued by TM-CAD will relay the decision reached by the Aviation Appeals Board following the appeal process conducted and is to be considered final for all intents and purposes and within the remit of the law.

There is no appeal if the assessment level is at the operational level or above that is for levels 4 and 5.

There is a right of appeal when the assessment is below the operational level, that is levels 3 to 1.

Validity of Tests

Candidates who demonstrate Expert Level (Level 6) proficiency are tested every 9 years.

Candidates who demonstrate level 5 proficiency are tested every 6 years.

Candidates who demonstrate level 4 proficiency are tested every 3 years.

NB: Candidates who demonstrate an Expert Level (Level 6) proficiency in Maltese have an indefinite validity

Application Form

The application form for a language proficiency test can be downloaded from the Transport Malta website <http://www.transport.gov.mt>.

Applicants for a student air traffic controller licence have to provide proof of having completed satisfactorily the communications examinations and the RT practical test.

Important Documents for Test

Make sure that you take your Malta ID card or passport when you go for the test. The Language Proficiency Assessor will not conduct the test unless you present an official ID that includes a photo.

Guidance Material

- PEL Notice 72 – “ICAO LPR - Safety Promotional Material” for information on the scope and focus of the Rating Scale, Training aids and information on language proficiency in aviation.
- Commission Regulation 2015/340
- ICAO Annex 1
- ICAO Doc 9835

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APPENDIX 1 Language proficiency rating scale: Expert, extended and operational levels

Level	Pronunciation Uses a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community	Structure Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task	Vocabulary	Fluency	Comprehension	Interactions
Expert 6	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced, and sensitive to register.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasize a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues, and responds to them appropriately.
Extended 5	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding,	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics and mostly accurate when the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events. Is able to comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/listener relationship effectively.
Operational 4	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	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.	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.	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 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.	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.

Language proficiency rating scale: Pre-operational, elementary and pre-elementary

Levels 4, 5 and 6 are on preceding page

Level	Pronunciation Uses a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community	Structure Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task	Vocabulary	Fluency	Comprehension	Interaction
Pre-operational 3	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete, or work-related topics, but range is limited and the word choice often inappropriate. Is often unable to paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary.	Produces stretches of language, but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness in language processing may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	Comprehension is often accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. May fail to understand a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate, and informative. Can initiate and maintain exchanges with reasonable ease on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.
Elementary 2	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are heavily influenced by the first language or regional variation and usually interfere with ease of understanding	Shows only limited control of a few simple memorized grammatical structures and sentence patterns.	Limited vocabulary range consisting only of isolated words and memorized phrases.	Can produce very short, isolated, memorized utterances with frequent pausing and a distracting use of fillers to search for expressions and to articulate less familiar words.	Comprehension is limited to isolated, memorized phrases when they are carefully and slowly articulated.	Response time is slow and often inappropriate. Interaction is limited to simple routine exchanges.
Pre-elementary 1	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.

Note: The Operational Level (Level 4) is the minimum required proficiency level for radiotelephony communication. Levels 1 through 3 describe Pre-elementary, Elementary and Pre-operational levels of language proficiency, respectively, all of which describe a level of proficiency below the ICAO language proficiency requirement. Levels 5 and 6 describe Extended and Expert levels, at levels of proficiency more advanced than the minimum required Standard. As a whole, the scale will serve as benchmarks for training and testing, and is assisting candidates to attain the ICAO Operational Level (Level 4)