

## PEL Notice No. 31

Reference: ICAO Annex 1 and Commission Regulation 1178/2011 - FCL.055



### CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE Personnel Licensing Section

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000. [cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt](mailto:cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt) [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

## Language Proficiency Test Pilots – Information to Applicants

### 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.

ICAO phraseologies and plain language are required for safe radiotelephony communications and both must be tested under the new requirements in ICAO Annex 1 and Regulation (EU) No. 1178/2011.

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.

Applicants must meet at least Level 4 (Operational Level) proficiency on the ICAO Rating scale to have the English Language Proficiency Level endorsed in the licence. Level 4 is minimum level required to have the privilege to use the radio telephone as English is the language used for the provision of ATC services in Malta.

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

Demonstration of actual speaking and listening ability is required.

### The Language Proficiency Assessor

The Language Proficiency Test is conducted by a Language Proficiency Assessor authorised by the Director General for Civil Aviation.

Language Proficiency Assessors have specialised qualifications and training in language assessment as well as operational experience as pilots or as controllers.

### The Language Proficiency Test

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 using audio material (recorded pilot/air traffic controller messages) and the candidate must respond verbally to follow-up prompts delivered

**CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE  
Personnel Licensing Section**

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000. [cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt](mailto:cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt) [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

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 using audio material (recorded pilot/air traffic controller messages) and the candidate must 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.

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

*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 test phraseology which is tested by a radiotelephony examiner and it is not intended to check technical competence which is tested by flight examiners 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

## PEL Notice No. 31

Reference: ICAO Annex 1 and Commission Regulation 1178/2011 - FCL.055



### CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE Personnel Licensing Section

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000. [cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt](mailto:cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt) [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

Malta showing individual scores in pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and interactions.

#### Application Form

The application form for a language proficiency assessment can be downloaded from the Transport Malta website.

Applicants are required to complete their details on the application form and submit the form, a copy of the ID card or Passport and payment to Transport Malta Civil Aviation Directorate.

Applications shall be sent at least 15 days in advance. Applicants will be informed of the date and time of the test preferably via email and asked to confirm their acceptance. Once the appointment is confirmed an applicant who does not turn up for the test will forfeit the application fee.

Tests are conducted at Transport Malta. Test takers must present their ID Card or Passport on the day of the test. If this is not presented the test will not be conducted and the application fee will be forfeited

Ab-initio pilots, applicants for a flight radiotelephony operator licence and microlight pilots applying for a certificate of validation must provide proof of having completed satisfactorily the communications examinations and the RT practical test.

The fee for the test is EUR 60.00 or as established by TM CAD at the time.

#### Appeals

The applicant has the right of appeal. Appeals must be made to the Director General for Civil Aviation within 14 days of receiving the result of the test. If there is an appeal the Chief Language Specialist will be appointed to hear the test audio recording to assess the applicant's proficiency. His/her decision will be final.

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.

Refer to PEL Notice 57 which outlines the process of an appeal.

#### Reassessments

Those who are assessed at Level 4 (Operational Level) are tested every 4 years.

Those who are assessed at Level 5 (Extended Level) are tested every 6 years.

Those who are assessed at Level 6 (Expert Level) do not require retesting.

## PEL Notice No. 31

Reference: ICAO Annex 1 and Commission Regulation 1178/2011 - FCL.055



### CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE

#### Personnel Licensing Section

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000. [cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt](mailto:cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt) [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

#### 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 1178/2011 – Part FCL.055
- ICAO Annex 1
- ICAO Doc 9835

#### Personnel Licensing Section

**CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE  
Personnel Licensing Section**

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000 cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

**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
<b>Expert 6</b>	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.
<b>Extended 5</b>	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. Can comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/listener relationship effectively.
<b>Operational 4</b>	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.

**CIVIL AVIATION DIRECTORATE  
Personnel Licensing Section**

Transport Malta, Malta Transport Centre, Pantar Road, Lija LJA 2021 Malta. Tel:+356 2555 5000 cadexaminations.tm@transport.gov.mt [www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

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
<b>Pre-operational 3</b>	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.
<b>Elementary 2</b>	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 fewer 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.
<b>Pre-elementary 1</b>	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. The scale will serve as benchmarks for training and testing, and is assisting candidates to attain the ICAO Operational Level (Level 4)