



Children of Žilina – Perpetuating The University Line

The Air School of the University of Žilina in Slovakia is probably unique in that most of its instructors are also university lecturers. Capt. Gerry Fretz paid a visit to learn more about the capabilities of this JAR-FCL compliant flying training organisation.

The University of Žilina (formerly the Technical University of Transport) was established in 1953 and the faculty of Transport Engineering, part of which is the Air Transport Department, has survived various political upheavals over the years.

Powered flight instruction, as opposed to glider instruction in private flying clubs, was supported and sponsored by the military and pilots were trained almost exclusively for the Czechoslovak Air Force. Applicants who signed contracts received training on single engine aircraft and the aero clubs were reimbursed for the cost of this flying training. Later in their careers some of these military pilots were released for

commercial pilot training and subsequent employment in Czechoslovak Airlines.

The alternative option taken by those not accepted by the military for training, was to join one of the gliding clubs and follow the 'self improver' route, eventually to progress to powered flying and the professional pilots licence. Not a cheap alternative and without the military background a distinct disadvantage when it came to getting a job once qualified.

In 1975 the air school was established as part of the Air Transport Department of the Transport Engineering faculty and a new, five-year professional pilot MSc course began. The aim was (and still is to some extent) to prepare

students for a career with airlines, which would culminate in a senior management position in an airline. The course was not only about teaching the technical aviation subjects required to achieve a professional pilot licence, but to encompass the wider skills and knowledge needed by senior management in the aviation industry. Hitherto this senior management had achieved various positions based on their experience and successes in the military, so the more recent graduates have had a mountain to climb to change this philosophy.

Subsequently the five-year course has been modified and there is now a three-year course leading to a first degree in operations and economics of air transport – including the professional pilot licence. There is then a second-degree option to continue on to the equivalent of MSc, which mainly extends the knowledge of the engineering subjects. Ultimately there is an option provided by the university for a postgraduate doctoral study (PhD).

Restrictions

The air school began flying training as the only professional pilot training school in Czechoslovakia, with three aircraft and, initially, 15 students. Due to restrictions imposed by winter weather on ab initio pilot training the school concentrated most ground school subjects during winter months, and most of the practical flying training during the better weather during the summer. Because all the flying instructors were also competent to give theoretical knowledge instruction, this proved to be the most practical way to proceed.

In August 2006 the school was operating 20 aircraft and it has achieved 65,000 flying hours and 700 simulator hours. Some 324 CPL pilots (147 CPL with IR) have graduated with a professional licence. Typically there are 12 to 15 new entrant students who commence studies each year. Ground school instruction is sponsored by the university and is provided free of charge to the student. However the student must fund living costs and also the cost of all flying instruction and flight examinations.

The final stage of development has been the establishment, in 2003, of the JAR-FCL compliant flying training organisation (FTO), which is separate from the Department of Air Transport of the University of Žilina. The FTO is approved by the University of Žilina and the Aviation Authority of Slovakia to provide pilot training for the PPL, CPL(A), flying instructor, MEP and ATPL (frozen) – both integrated and modular courses. Additionally basic training for air traffic controllers and ground operations can be provided. There is also a National Security Training Centre established at the University, which closely cooperates with the Air Transport Department and the FTO. The FTO is unique, being ideally situated as a bridge between eastern and western Europe. For the east the FTO gained experience during its formative years under the Eastern

European aviation training system, with use of the Russian language; for the west all instructors speak good English and the FTO is of course JAR-FCL compliant. Courses can therefore be provided to suit either system but having achieved JAR-FCL approval, the latter is the preferred option.

Currently theoretical knowledge lectures are conducted in Slovak but English and Russian speaking instructors are available and course notes in English are being prepared. As the international aviation language is English, flight instruction is conducted in English so that the fluency of spoken English is developed as a matter of course. Having access to a university library is a facility not often available to FTOs. The university's student union also represents students of the FTO and makes available to them all extramural activities.

Director of the flight training organisation (FTO), Professor Antonin Kazda, and both the head of training, Dr. Peter Blaško and the chief flying instructor Dr. Frantisek Jun, hold masters degrees in aviation studies. Head of training and the CFI are also experienced (JAR-FCL qualified) flying instructors who of course hold JAR-FCL licences, in addition to Slovakian professional pilot licences.

Dr. Blaško explained that the pilot profession is considered to be very popular in Slovakia – there is no shortage of applicants to attend the ab initio pilot training courses leading to professional licences. Pilots' salaries are more or less on a par with those in other western European countries, whereas the cost of living is much lower in Slovakia.

Due to demand there is a selection procedure to ensure that, as far as possible, those selected are capable of achieving required standards. Initially candidates must undergo a medical and sit an academic, computer orientated set of tests designed by the school to establish academic abilities, theoretical knowledge and proficiency in English. Currently pilot aptitude testing is conducted by the Institute of Aviation Medicine at Košice. But recently a visit was paid, by arrangement through the Guild of Air Pilots

Equipment used by the Air School

Quantity	Aircraft	Seats	Engine Manufacturer
5	Zlin 42 – Single engine	2	M 137 A (Motorlet –Czech republic)
9	Zlin 142 – Single engine	2	M 337 AK (Motorlet –Czech republic)
3	Zlin 43 – Single engine	4	M 337 AK (Motorlet –Czech republic)
2	L200 - Morava – 2 Engine	4	M 337 (Motorlet –Czech republic)
1	PA 34 –Seneca V.	6	Continental


There is also a Mechtronix Ascent flight and navigation procedures trainer (FNPT2), with visual, for use in MCC training.



Mechtronix-built Ascent flight and navigation procedures trainer (FNPT II).

Image credit: University of Žilina

and Air Navigators (GAPAN), to the Royal Air Force aptitude testing facility at RAF Cranwell, UK, as the school is considering a refinement to its existing process. To date no decision has been taken or further progress made.

Today former students occupy some of the most senior positions in the airlines of both the Slovak and Czech republics and most flight crews of these airlines are graduates of the Air School – in fact there are now children of graduates who are graduates from Žilina. A fine testament to the Air School, which is now at the stage where further expansion is being considered so that candidates from abroad, from both east and west, may be accommodated. 

Turbulent Times

The Czechoslovak Republic was born as a result of the Treaty of Versailles following the end of World War 1, in 1918. Czech and Slovak languages and cultures are similar so the Republic flourished and gained worldwide recognition as a successful industrial nation, which exported and imported to balance its national budget. Twenty years later the country was annexed by Nazi Germany. After the end of World War 2 it came under the domination of the USSR, so it was not until the big changes in Europe in 1989 (the so called 'Velvet Revolution') that Czechoslovakia once more became a sovereign state.

This situation continued only until 1992 when, as a result of internal political upheavals the country divided into two separate states. On January 1, 1993 the two republics, Slovakia and Czech were founded. Against this historical background there have been many changes in the development of aviation and, more specifically, to pilot recruitment and training in Slovakia that have come about during this period.

Further Reading

Simulation for Universities

<http://cat.texterity.com/cat/2006-2>

Another Landmark for BCIT

<http://cat.texterity.com/cat/2006-3>

EATS 2006 Proceedings

http://www.halldale.com/EATS_Proceedings.aspx