

Flying without wings and hoping for no turbulence

Sir,

It's my first day as a Foundation Year 2 co-pilot. Fully registered overnight but manned with a handful of aviation-led Team Resource Management lessons I transfer from London City to Stansted. I feel anxious but ready for the challenge.

I've heard so much has improved over the last 5 years. The New Captain's Contract means a maximum of ten 4-hour flights per week, no more long haul. New, cleaner planes. More staff and extra supervision with competency-based training. No more pleading to charity for new pilot seats (Trask, 2002).

Our airline is a good one, Easy Trust, a new subsidiary of National Airlines which has been divided into many smaller airlines. Our main competitor is Independent Sector Transcontinental Airlines (ISTC) who seem to have the edge over us by being able to offer premier class seats at a standard rate subsidized by the government. Moreover we have to ask the passengers to pay for their flights when they

get home via a huge travel agent (Trust in Primary Flights). ISTC passengers pay in advance. And if our planes are full the last 25% of passengers don't have to pay. This is called Payment by Results.

Well actually my first day should have been 5 days ago but I had to do mandatory training in seatbelt handling, Basic Lifting Skills, checking passports and safely disarming passengers. Because the airport is now divided into three trusts: the Runway Trust (one star), the Control Tower Trust (management) and the Terminal Trust (palliative care) we all had to sit through the same talks three times over.

My first job is to explain to a special group of passengers in Club Class (Choose and Book) that we all have to leave at the same time and land in one destination with no stop-overs at airports of their choice. I then have to apologise that passenger transfer between airlines is no longer possible without asking the permission of their Primary travel agent. I try to hide my concerns that we are about to take off on a new runway that is 25% shorter than it should be because of the Private Flights Initiative but to no avail so return to the flight cabin to prepare for take-off.

This is my job because computerized matching (MTAS) has put me alongside two pilots who are not registered with the Good Pilot Council and one other who has had no CRB check. Over the year I will have to complete a number of assessments to prove my competency including two Crew Feedback Questionnaires (mini EPATs), six Flight based Discussions and Examinations (CbDs and mini CEXs) and six Directly Observed Pilot Skills (DOPS). Ideally I also need to find time to attend the Advanced Airline Course (ALS) without compromising passenger care under the European Working Time Directive so that I am able to produce an adequate portfolio. I only hope that I can embark on a number of taster flights in addition so that I am able to decide upon my final destination.

Fasten your seatbelts, we're expecting turbulence.

Nicole Trask

*Foundation Year 2 doctor in Psychiatry,
General Medicine and General Practice
South Essex Partnership Trust and Basildon
and Thurrock University Hospitals Trust*

Trask C (2002) The lot of airline pilots and consultants is not so different. *BMJ* 325: 105