

Tackling Airline Pilot Recruitment During the Coronavirus Crisis

Look up at the skies over the UK on any normal day and there will typically be thousands of aircraft travelling to destinations across the globe. However, to bring into focus the impact of Coronavirus on aviation, on the 25th March 2020 there were 1,415 flights over the UK compared to 6,224 exactly a year prior, down a staggering 77%¹, meaning the crisis has all but grounded the aviation industry.

IATA recently warned that falling passenger demand would cost the worldwide airline industry between \$63-\$113² billion in lost revenue. In response to these unprecedented conditions, and against the backdrop of Flybe's collapse coupled with other airlines struggling for survival, the UK airline industry has acted decisively. Major airlines have reduced routes and adapted staff working conditions: BA has furloughed 30,000 ground staff and cut pilot pay, while its parent group IAG has grounded 90% of its fleet³; Virgin Atlantic has asked staff to take 8 weeks of unpaid leave and reduced flights by 80% and TUI has cancelled the vast majority of its holidays.⁴ As a result previously healthy airline pilot recruitment campaigns are now on hold.

Jet Pathway is a pilot recruitment company run by current commercial and ex-military pilots with significant airline recruitment experience, working alongside recruitment professionals. This article aims to tackle current recruitment challenges, provide helpful advice and recruitment insight, as well as discuss future job applications.

The effect of this crisis on pilots and recruitment is complex. Current pilots who are furloughed or have been made redundant will suffer skill fade as their flying skills are not being utilised. There will be fewer job opportunities for aspiring pilots to access the industry, resulting in the risk of a growing lack of attraction to aviation as a career. Further, when the recovery comes, in whatever form it takes, the recruitment market will be more of a crowded and competitive environment than ever before.

When flying fast jets during combat in the RAF and faced with enemy action, the methodology that keeps you safe is to assimilate all relevant factors, identify the highest threats and your best defences against them, and use those defences to defeat the enemy. The same technique can be used in the face of the current crisis for you to find a way through it and ultimately secure a role on the flight deck.

At Jet Pathway we have seen a sharp increase in candidates registering with us and a decrease in job opportunities as the crisis has unfolded. So what can you do now to prepare for future job opportunities? This time of lockdowns and travel restrictions should be spent updating existing skills, developing new ones and preparing for

¹ NATS Article 'Weathering the storm' 27 March 2020

² IATA Article 'Updates COVID-19 Financial Impacts -Relief Measures Needed' 5 March 2020

³ FT Article 'BA to suspend more than 30,000 staff amid Coronavirus crisis' 2 April 2020

⁴ Sky News 'Coronavirus: VA asks staff to take 8 weeks of unpaid leave' 16 March 2020

success in selection processes. We think the best approach has two components: firstly, to take any form of available work that allows you to maintain and enhance your core pilot soft skillset and secondly, to focus on preparation to ensure success in future airline pilot assessments.

If you have lost your flying job or are an aspiring commercial pilot, there are several things you can do to maintain and enhance your soft skills. Pilot competencies that airlines require and look for at the recruitment stages include communication, teamwork and customer service to name but a few. You will have seen in the media recently good examples of transfer of skill set including pilots working as delivery drivers and in a variety of other customer service jobs, many in supermarkets. These roles allow pilots to use and develop competencies and display resilience, qualities which will shine through at interview.

Staying close to the aviation industry in any way you can through work at local flying clubs, instruction or voluntary work with organisations such as the Air Cadets will all help to keep your skills relevant. Indeed, voluntary and charity work can not only be worthwhile and rewarding, but can also develop those all important competencies while explaining employment gaps on your CV.

The second strand of our advice is to specifically prepare for success in future selection processes:

- Review your CV and be ruthlessly critical in your analysis; typos and errors go down badly with recruiters!
- Could your CV be more succinct, or display your hours and competencies more clearly? Remember in the future market recruiters will be inundated with CVs so don't antagonise them with unnecessary waffle.
- Think about your past experiences in formal assessments or interviews - how did you get on? People revise their "question answering technique", but what about overall interview technique? – your body language, how you cope with difficult questions, how you come across to the selection team?
- Are there areas of your performance that you know require work? For example, if you know you tend to waffle, what is your coping strategy going to be?

Now is the time to pinpoint your weakest areas and improve them. Consider your life experiences and start to match them to the best competency examples you can create, using the ICAO Pilot Core Competencies as a framework to shape your preparation. Online tutorials can be a great way of further bolstering confidence in your interview performance and these are often available free of charge.

While these are all areas of development that pilots can pursue independently, Jet Pathway exists to support and develop current and aspiring pilots throughout their recruitment journey and all of our services are free to our candidates. If you would like a tailor-made consultation regarding any of the preparation areas we have

outlined above, simply register your profile at www.JetPathway.com. All of our jobs and advice are posted on our LinkedIn and Facebook pages, so please follow us now to keep abreast of any new opportunities and updates.

We wish all Air League members the very best during these challenging times.

Stay safe and well,

Sophie Thalmessinger and Philip Bird
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