



AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE ENGINEER'S AND TRAINING: WILL SAFETY BE AFFECTED?

Aviation is booming. Passenger numbers have increased significantly and the majority of industry commentators agree that the future looks bright. Airbus in their latest report are projecting an incredible 120% increase in aircraft numbers.

Airbus 2007 Global Market Outlook ¹

Aircraft	2006 Fleet	2026 Fleet	New Aircraft Deliveries
Passenger	13,284	28,534	23,385
Freighters	1,696	4,249	877
Total	14,980	32,783	24,262

Good news then for aircraft engineers and maintenance organisations, or is it? Figures released by the UK CAA show that aircraft engineer numbers have halved during the past 30 years despite the increase in numbers of operational aircraft.² Similar trends have also been witnessed in other major aviation countries. Although this reduction of engineering manpower has, to a degree, been alleviated by investment in new aircraft, which need less maintenance in the early years of their life, shortages of engineers already exists and with most industry prognoses more or less aligning with Airbus, the shortage will become severe. Add to this the growing demographic problem with the UK for example showing that more than 50% of today's highly skilled workforce are over the age of 40; the problem suddenly reaches critical mass.³

Industry and governments although well aware of the rapidly approaching skills shortage have in the main failed to respond by launching any real initiatives to counter the worrying trend. Training programmes and initiatives to attract a new younger generation to the aviation engineering industry remain sadly few and far between. The aviation industry being safety critical can only demand the highest standards in order to protect not only the travelling public but also those innocently going about their daily lives below the ever increasing number of aircraft flying overhead.

AEI has long been highlighting the close relationship between manpower levels, training standards and safety. The statistics appear to show that those warnings have not been heeded. With industry booming, it will not be possible to maintain the required high levels of safety without a corresponding boom in training initiatives.

AEI therefore compels industry to adopt training and recruitment as its number one priority.

¹ Airbus 2007 Global Market Outlook. <http://www.airbus.com/en/corporate/gmf/>

² UK Government Report on The Training of Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Published 2000 amended 2004

³ UK CAA Statistic Oct 2004 http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/177/srg_eld_statistics_02.pdf