

Heather Bell

BCAC PRESENTATION TO HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE



Document Presented by the British Columbia Aviation Council

to the

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

BCAC Comments to Motion M-177

Instruction to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and
Communities (Canadian flight training schools)

February 7, 2019

HEATHER BELL

BOARD CHAIR BRITISH COLUMBIA AVIATION COUNCIL

Info@BCAviationCouncil.org

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ABOUT BRITISH COLUMBIA AVIATION COUNCIL

Aviation is critical to both maintaining and growing the British Columbia economy. Air transport supports British Columbians in their lives every day, not only as a means of personal transportation and for the movement of goods, but also for land use planning, research, wildlife tracking, critical aerial firefighting, medical evacuation and organ transfer. It is vital to note that many remote British Columbian communities are air access only for months at a time.

The British Columbia Aviation Council is a 340 member-driven charitable organization established under the British Columbia Society Act. Our Mission is to promote, stimulate and encourage the development, growth and advancement of aviation and aerospace in British Columbia.

ABOUT HEATHER BELL

Heather Bell is the current chair of the British Columbia Aviation Council and has 36 years of experience in the aviation industry. Heather has worked as both a VFR and IFR operational Air Traffic Controller, and retired from NavCanada as the General Manager of the Vancouver Flight Information Region, where she was responsible for all Air Navigation Services provided in the province. Heather has also been a board member of the Aviation Leadership Foundation, sits as a member of the Federal Aviation Labour Shortage steering committee, consults to both Vancouver International Airport and Toronto Pearson Airport on their Master Plans. Industry recognitions include the Surrey Business Woman of the year in 2011 and the Northern Lights Award in Business for 2017. Heather is also the co-founder of an Aviation project entitled, "Give Them Wings," a program created to introduce careers in aviation (particularly pilot training), to Indigenous youth.

LABOUR RESOURCE CRISIS

As outlined by previous submissions, the Aviation and Aerospace sector is a vital economic driver for the Canadian economy, generating almost \$30B in revenue and more than 200,000 direct and indirect jobs. Today Air Transport has become a "taken-for-granted" mode of transportation in the developed world. The looming human resource shortage across many

sectors of this industry is a substantial threat to the sustainability of Canadian Aviation and may have far-reaching negative impacts to the health and welfare of businesses, remote communities, and individuals. With respect to Pilots, it is estimated that by 2025, the Canadian industry will have a shortfall of 3000 pilots. At BCAC, our concern is with the imminent adverse and cascading effects.

WHY THE SHORTAGE

Historically the path to become a commercial pilot was somewhat predictable. The road was long, the price (both in dollars and personal sacrifice) was high, and the reward was not universal or guaranteed. Until fairly recently, there has been a sufficient number of people entering the pilot “pipeline” to ensure available staffing for airlines along each stage of career progression, and to meet the diverse array of industry needs. Before being hired by regional, corporate, or national airlines, newly licensed commercial pilots could expect to either “build time” by becoming Flight Instructors, or by moving north to fly in remote communities. With increasing levels of attrition at top airline levels, the trend over the past few years has seen this path for new pilots substantially shorten. While the cost of becoming a commercial pilot remains high, new pilots are now able to secure positions at the national air carrier level without spending the five or ten years as Flight Instructors or flying in remote communities, like in the past. Lower level air carriers are now struggling to attract, find, and keep qualified pilots for more than one or two years. Additionally, careers in aviation do not seem to have “the draw” they once did with fewer students choosing Aviation as a profession. Many organizations have been attempting to identify barriers to entry but it has proven to be inherently difficult to access individuals who chose alternate career paths. The focus of attention is on those who do enter the industry and struggle with challenging, unappealing working conditions and poor quality of life.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student funding

We have heard from both our Flight Training Units and student population that lack of access to sufficient student funding is the single greatest impediment to success. Currently student funding is provincially regulated and the available funding is not universally accessible across the country. For instance, in British Columbia, the funding for an aviation program is based on “weeks” of training rather than the cost of that training. On average, the cost to obtain a Canadian Commercial Pilot Licence with an Instructor Rating will exceed \$75,000CAD, and yet the funding available for a student pursuing this will be less than \$14,000. Other provinces do offer more financial aid than BC, but still not to the level required by most Canadian aviation

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students. There is work being done by organizations such as ATAC to organize commercially available loans for flight training, but institutions are looking for federal support in the form of guarantees. At BCAC, we delivered over \$50,000 in scholarships last year and we work to increase that amount year over year. The recognition of the need to support students is alive in the industry, but something more sustainable needs to be done immediately.

Recommendation: The Federal Government support and implement mechanisms to make the availability of student financial aid for flight training consistent across Canada, and that funding should be at a level requisite with the financial requirements of the flight training program.

Flight Instructor Retention

We are increasingly seeing ab-initio pilots being hired into Commercial Pilot positions immediately upon reaching the requisite flight hours (or before, as some foreign airlines are using enhanced “in-house” training methods attracting low-time pilots). This is leaving Canadian Flight Training Units (FTUs) without the requisite Instructors to continue training new pilots in Canada. Flight instructors are vital to the sustainability of the Industry and as such BCAC supports previous recommendations made with respect to recruitment and retention.

Recommendation: A program of loan forgiveness be instituted such that Pilots who serve as Flight Instructors or choose to spend time flying in Northern and remote communities can earn credits against outstanding student loan debt.

Regulatory Impediments

Many schools report that along with market drivers for retention (high demand/low supply for Instructors), regulatory requirements around licencing (hours-based rather than competency-based), hours worked (fatigue management regulations) and the inability to use simulation as a more primary means of instruction is inhibiting their ability to be innovative around how instruction is delivered and by whom. Again, in this instance, BCAC fully supports the work done by ATAC and A/Professor Kearns of Waterloo University to research and recommend improved methods of training, specifically Competency Based Training and a framework for Approved Training Organizations.

Recommendation: A focus be placed on supporting the near-term completion and approval of the framework for designing and implementing Approved Training Organizations intended to improve and streamline the training process.

Increase Industry Diversity: Outreach and recruitment of Women and Indigenous Peoples

Women and Indigenous People continue to be vastly underrepresented in the aviation industry. At this time, less than 7% of Canadian commercial pilots are female, with the number of Indigenous pilots likely not registering as a trackable percentage. As females make up 50% of our population, and Indigenous youth have been reported as the fastest growing demographic in Canada, these are two areas where some concentrated effort could prove advantageous at many levels.

Recommendation: Support outreach programs focused on increasing Diversity in aviation. While we believe Women and Indigenous People are two demographics that have the capacity to make a demonstrable difference to the industry, how we reach and energize these groups is not the same. Outreach focused on gender may have some impact with respect to making more females aware of the logistics of entering a career in aviation; the What, How and Where. With respect to energizing Indigenous people there needs to be grassroots connections made at the community level; programs that are culturally relevant and aviation focused taken to communities will likely have the greatest impact. For outreach to Women we support and recommend the work being done by Elevate Aviation. We would like to see this work enhanced with a strong focus on assisting women to enter careers as pilots.

<https://www.elevateaviation.ca/>

For outreach to Indigenous people, I have included, as an example a link to a local program I have co-founded called “Give Them Wings.” Our inaugural event will take place at Boundary Bay airport in March. We will bring together a supportive group of Aviation Professionals with local Indigenous Youth with the goal of introducing this growing Demographic to careers in Aviation.

<http://givethemwings.ca/>

I would like to thank the Committee for the time and effort given to address this critical situation.

Sincerely

Heather Bell
Board Chair
British Columbia Aviation Council