Airline pilot

Job description
An airline pilot is responsible for the safe and economic operation and management of aircraft carrying passengers and/or freight. They make sure that the controls of the aircraft are working properly, check weather conditions and liaise with air traffic control. Their job is in no way routine and demands unconventional hours in a very complex workplace.

Pilots are responsible for pre-flight preparation, filing the flight plan and calculating fuel required, taking into consideration meteorological information and passenger and cargo loads. They liaise with operations control staff, engineers and cabin crew and check that the aircraft and its systems are prepared for departure. They conduct checks on controls, instruments and engines.

Between take-off and landing the crew operates and navigates the aircraft, communicates with air traffic control, listens to weather reports, monitors engines and systems, checks fuel consumption, and advises passengers on the progress of their flight. Duties are usually shared with a co-pilot.

After landing, when the aircraft has been taxied to its final position, the Pilot shuts down the engines and writes a flight report, noting any problems or technical difficulties.

Work activities
- Carrying out pre-flight checks of aircraft systems and making sure the aircraft insurance certificates and other legal paperwork are up to date.
- Acquiring information about the route, weather, passengers and aircraft to calculate best fuel quantity required.
- Liaising with engineers, dispatchers, cabin crew and controllers.
- Briefing cabin crew, following air traffic control instructions and keeping passengers informed about progress.
- Monitoring in-flight data and making adjustments to deal with changing weather patterns.
- Monitoring aircraft conditions and passenger needs.
- Interpreting complex data, exercising hand-eye coordination and situational awareness.
- Reacting quickly and making vital decisions in a changing situation.
- Writing flight reports after landing, highlighting any problems with the aircraft or the flight path.

Work conditions
Travel: including overseas is a normal part of the working day, with absence from home overnight frequent on long haul flights.

Working hours: required to work irregular work patterns and unsociable hours, including weekends and bank holidays. They are also required to spend time away from base (overnights) and time on call.

Location: mainly in commercial airports. May be required to relocate to an overseas base.

Typical employers
- Commercial airlines
- Executive jet owners
- Air-taxi operators.

Career development
Most airlines have structured career progression. Substantial flying and aircraft experience is necessary for promotion. Captaincy may take 8-10 years. Depending on the company there are several options for promotion:

- Senior first officers with relevant level of experience can apply to become a captain. They will have to pass a rigorous training program and demonstrate that they have the right skills to do the job.
- There may be an option of moving to a larger type of aircraft instead of becoming a captain, and operating long haul routes.
Airline pilot (continued)

- Captain could eventually take on the role of training new pilots and maintaining company standards. This involves a lot of time spent in the simulator and less time actually flying passengers.
- Senior pilots may be offered management positions in the company, or a role in the recruitment team.

Salaries

Salaries vary depending on the employer you fly for, as well as what size craft you fly and how much experience you have. Airlines will have their own pay structures and employment policies.

Entry requirements and training

Open to non-graduates and graduates of any discipline.

Other relevant degree subjects

- Aviation management
- Aviation management with pilot studies
- Engineering particularly aerospace
- Physics
- Mathematics
- Meteorology.

Postgraduate study

A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not a requirement.

Specific entry requirements

To start work with an airline as a first officer in Europe you need a Joint Aviation Authority (JAA) “frozen” Air Transport Pilot License. This becomes “unfrozen” when you have been flying 1500 hours (with at least 500 hours as first officer) with an airline.

The frozen ATPL implies:
- CPL - Commercial Pilot License
- ATPL-Theory
- ME - Multi Engine Rating
- IR - Instrument Rating
- MCC - Multi Crew Co-Operation

You must speak clear and fluent English, possess a current class one medical and valid passport without any restrictions.

There may be additional minimum and maximum height requirements imposed by airlines.

Training

Integrated training: A full-time program conducted at an approved training provider that brings you to a level where you can apply to an airline for a position as a first officer. An integrated program is more cost efficient and takes less time to finish compared to modular courses. A list of JAA approved flying schools can be obtained from the Civil Aviation Authority website.

Modular courses: The flight training is broken down into smaller parts and gives the same qualification as the integrated course but is done on part-time basis where students still have the option to work while completing
their training. This enables the student to take first a PPL (Private Pilot License) and then add on the other courses. The training can also be done at different training organisations. Many candidates therefore choose to stay in full-time employment at the same time as they are studying. Modular courses take longer than an integrated course, from approximately 18 months to 2 years as the modules have to be completed one at the time.

Airline Sponsor:
In the past this was the preferred and most popular way to achieve a career as an Airline Pilot. An Airline would advertise openings for a cadetship and sponsor the student for their training and offer them a job at the end. In recent times, due to the changing economic structure of airlines, this is being phased out, with currently little airline sponsorship available, and most pilots are self-sponsored.

Air Corps:
Similar to the Airline sponsor, the Defence Forces offers a cadetship for the Air Corps where they train you and contract you for minimum of ten years. At the end of this time you can move onto an airline with flying experience.

Tips for applications
It is strongly advised to undergo a comprehensive medical exam with the Irish Aviation Authority’s Medical examiner to the level required by the license or rating before commencing training. Consider becoming a certified flight instructor which allows you to build the hours you need to make your next move.

Skills and qualities
• Ability to understanding technical detail.
• Strong aptitude for mathematics and physics.
• Dexterity and co-ordination to handle the aircraft skilfully.
• Ability to think quickly and make decisions and work calmly under pressure.
• Ability to give clear, confident instructions to crew members and passengers.
• Ability to inspire confidence in both passengers and air crew.
• Flexibility in working unsocial hours.
• Physically fit with excellent vision, including normal colour vision.
• Self-motivation and the determination to succeed.
• High degree of discipline and teamwork is an essential element of the job.

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