

## Podcast 014 – The Licence Proficiency Check

Hello everyone! And welcome to another nail biting and edge of your seat sitting edition of our 737 Talk where we will be discussing the LPC. As a very regulated industry, with high safety standards, we as pilots are required to demonstrate our health and skill proficiency on a very regular basis during numerous events. As we are tested, at the very least, once a year, Ian and I thought it would be a good idea to give you a bit of background about the test/check, give you some definitions, what is legally required, and how with specific targeted preparation, your next visit to the simulator will be with a little less trepidation. As a current TRE, or type rating examiner, examining in the UK and Europe, I am continually assessed to show that not only I can still meet the required standard during my own LPC, but also that I am testing to the approved and consistent standard, and every three years I have to have refresher training and an examiner assessment of competence too, to make sure I am checking or testing correctly.

Let's get one thing out of the way. Most pilots approach the check with varying degrees of wariness, trepidation or in some cases – fear. Before we do anything, we have to be able to handle this, and develop strategies to help manage this. Some, positively look forward to their check, but I guarantee even those steely eyed boys and girls are bending the truth if they tell you there is not some trepidation. And why is that? Well to break it down, quite simply, is that if we don't meet the required standard, then we will not be allowed to fly the aircraft, and eventually that will lead to a loss of income if not rectified and the standards met.

Before a cold sweat starts to permeate down your back, nearly all operators and examiners do want you to meet the standard, and generally a higher standard than required. The examiner in the back is desperate to sign your licence. The days of examiners known for their 'chopping ability' have long gone. She or he has to follow a fairly regimented check or test regime, and although they can have some subjectivity, most items you are tested on, have prescribed limits. That said, your nontechnical skills will also be assessed, and again if the examiner deems them not up standard, they are quite within their right to not sign your licence – and you can fail a check on NOTECHs alone.

Let's start by clearing up some definitions and phrases. Firstly, the LPC or Licence proficiency check. This is our main focus today. In accordance with EASA and now UK Part FCL regulation (or the law) you are required to show your proficiency once a year on certain prescribed events. And also, you need to show that you are proficient in the normal and abnormal operation of a minimum of 3 different systems, left to the examiners discretion, and that you can handle again a minimum of 3 abnormal and emergency procedures. We'll expand more on the requirements of the LPC later. The LPC, if passed, will give you that examiners signature on your licence, and show that you are legal to exercise the privileges which the licence confers on you for another year

A different regulation or section of the law, (PART-ORO if you're really interested), deals with requirements for air operations and operators. This section of the law requires us as pilots to perform another test or check and this is known as the OPC or operator proficiency check.

This doesn't give you a signature in the licence, but your validity is kept by the operator. Many of the requirements are the same, although a few subtle differences.

A lot of the time this OPC is combined with the LPC – so you satisfy both regulations at the same time. But the general guidance, tolerances, expected standards including repeat and retest requirements are the same. We'll talk about repeats and retests later. The OPC is valid for 6 months, under a standard testing regime.

You might have also heard or seen another acronym on your roster, LOE. As we know this industry is famous for its TLAs, or three letter acronyms. This one stands for Line Operational Evaluation. There's a risk of total boredom here, so just remember you can skip 30 seconds at a time on some devices. Or if you've had enough already just press stop and move on to another one of our more technical topics.

But here we go.

EBT or evidenced based training, is the great panacea which all the regulators aspire to. That is tailored checking and testing to our theatre of operation. We have been doing the same sort of manoeuvres for decades now, designed in a different era for different aircraft. For instance, once a year you will have to manually fly a one engine inoperative go around at minima.

The argument these days is that, should you find yourself with one engine out, you will almost certainly have picked an airfield to return or divert to that has suitable weather, is long enough, good facilities and maybe even under a mayday. You may have even been given priority landing clearance, with the runway clear and sterile. ATC will be bending over backwards to help you, quite rightly. What I am alluding to, is that the chances of you having to manually fly this OEI G/A are extremely remote – almost up there with the chances of you having that one weekend off in the summer, and the sun actually shining while you light the BBQ. But once a year, you will still have to demonstrate that you can fly this manoeuvre.

What EBT will do, is move away from these prescribed events, and offer tailored training and checking events. But it is a long process, probably slowed down by BREXIT and the pandemic.

However, there is an interim phase, called mixed EBT, which is kind of like a halfway way house. We still have the LPC and associated manoeuvres to fly to proficiency, but mixed EBT gives the operators more tailored training. A form of EBT is called ATQP, or Alternative training qualification Programme.

An ATQP allows operators to provide a more effective and more operator-specific recurrent training and checking package for its crews. Once the airline or operator has put in all measures for the ATQP, usually over a couple of years, the operator is allowed to extend the validity of the OPC to a year and some ATQP operators put an LOE in the interim period. An LOE is designed to give certain scripted events and you will be assessed as a crew how you deal with these and then if necessary trained to competency. Also, other operators are moving to SVT (yep - that's another TLA) or single visit training, where all the training and checking is done in one fell swoop, sometimes involving 3 or 4 consecutive days in the simulator. It is understandable that some pilots will view this SVT as sitting somewhere in between Dantes fourth or fifth circles of Hell...

These events are carefully thought out and are usually from recent experience from other operators as well. As well as extending the OPC by six months, your yearly line check will move to a two-yearly check too under full ATQP. The training department like ATQP because they can deliver more tailored training, and the airline accountants like it because less OPCs mean less examiners required, as the LOE can be performed by a TRI. And fewer line checks mean less training captains too.

That was a little bit of background knowledge for various checking and testing sim regimes, and I did warn you it was a little meaty, but hopefully that'll help in decoding the roster a bit better.

Circuitously, we'll now move on to the main topic of this podcast and that of the LPC – Licence proficiency check. Back to me again as Ian couldn't pronounce circuitously.

As discussed, you need to perform an LPC once a year for each type rating you hold. If you have your LPC whilst you are still in check or valid, then it's known as a revalidation. If it has expired but still on the licence, then you'll need to do a renewal.

This will involve an element of training before the LPC, under the auspices of an ATO (Airline Training Organisation). But let's assume you are still valid, and then it'll be a revalidation. The LPC will be performed by a UK, or at the moment an EASA TRE/SFE, following the UK rules. I say at the moment, as after the BREXIT transition period ended on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2020, the UK CAA is allowing EASA examiners another two-year period where their examining certificate is UK recognised. To all intents and purposes here a TRE and SFE are the same thing. The TRE is allowed to perform tests on the aircraft where the SFE, only in a FSTD. Join us next week for a whole show on aviation acronyms. FSTD, Flight simulator training device, or sim.

Just a point worth highlighting here. Your TRE may indeed work and be employed by your same company. You might fly with her or him on the line – indeed maybe even share the cheese board over the Aegean. You might be forced to laugh at their attempts at humour – or listen as they recount some fairly uninteresting golfing stories. This said, during the LPC, they are there working and examining on behalf of the authority or regulator – together with your company.

The TRE/SFE will sometimes be being observed for his own Examiners check. The first you might know of this is when you rock up at the sim centre. A senior examiner will be assessing the examiners conduct and performance. This will all be briefed to you. They are not looking at you, but at the examiner. And sometimes the senior examiner is being watched too, maybe by a CAATI, CAA training inspector. This can go on and on, with sometimes enough people in there for good game of 5 aside footie afterwards. It's when you have the secretary of state for transport pitch up, then you know it's time to go home.

Let's talk about the format of the check or test...

Firstly, to be able to be checked, you will need to present a licence to your examiner, for them to check, and a medical, your medical can be expired, and they can still sign your licence – but you won't be able to exercise the privileges of the licence until the medical is renewed.

Current LPC times vary from operator to operator, either all on one day, or spread over the course of two days, interspersed with some other forms of training. That said, your examiner should make it very clear when you are being checked, and when you are being trained.

After coffee, convivial moans and chats in the canteen, they will then give you a brief of the check. Don't be surprised if this appears a little formalised and scripted. Apart from giving you info about the check, there is a very good reason why it needs to be rather formal, and we'll mention that later. Make sure you are in the correct mental and physical shape and fitness for the check – exactly as you would a normal flight. Using an excuse post test that you were not fit, will and should not cut any weight with your examiner.

The test standards are mostly objective, and can be found in CAA Standards Doc 24, version 5 is the current edition. Or if you want to have a look at the EASA law, regulation PART FCL, starting on page 1224, of the easy access rules. The list of tolerances you need to fly to are all in there, suffice to say you will of course fly as accurately as you can all of the time, and let the examiner work out if you are within the prescribed tolerances on a particular item.

What will you have to do? As we described earlier there are a number of normal/abnormal system operations you will be tested on, emergency procedures, and then there are other mandatory items too. They can choose to examine you on anything covered on your type rating, but as time is usually of the essence, it will generally only be the mandatory items that get examined, sometimes with the odd other item if the examiner is feeling particularly generous. You will be briefed that the automatics are available throughout the whole check. Except there are certain items that need to be performed manually. And they are: The OEI 3D approach. The OEI G/A, and the OEI landing. There will also always be an Engine failure, with the engine failing between V1 and V2. Your examiner will need to see you perform these manually. The rest of the time, the automatics are available, should you wish you use them.

The check is generally a two-attempt test, i.e., you get 2 attempts at each item. This is where it gets a little complicated again, and again this is just for background. On the first attempt of a particular item, the examiner has discretion for you to repeat the item and have another go at the first attempt. This discretion is down to the examiner and will apply if you have made a minor procedural or technical or physical error. How do they decide if it's a repeat or you need to be retested at the second attempt?

Lets look at an example...

An engine failure just after takeoff. EFATO, you get airborne, but you slightly sink after departure, -200 fpm for a second or two. Eagle eyes in the back will have noticed this. They know exactly when to put the sudoku down and to look, and where to look. They have a choice now. To either award you a fail at the first attempt on the EFATO, and look at it again at the end of the check, or to stop the sim and consider repeating it at the first attempt. If you can satisfy the examiner you knew exactly where the minor error occurred, for example in this case, an over rotation, leading to a speed loss, leading to the AFDS commanding a pitch down to regain the speed and sinking, then he has the discretion to reposition you and have another go.

And if successful at the repeat, it will go down as a pass at the first attempt. If they decide the error was too great, or you are completely oblivious as to why you sank after takeoff, then

they will fail the item at the first attempt, complete all the other items and then you will need some retraining.

Then you will then complete the item or items you failed. Only after you have had some retraining – whether in the sim there and then or, in the classroom, and complete it the following day. If now you fail the item at the second attempt, then unfortunately the whole test will need to be marked as a fail and attempted again at a later date.

Now, during your test, if you think you have failed an item – don't let it put you off. You may have done, or you may have gotten away with it, as the examiner does have some discretion during certain manoeuvres as long as you are correcting without delay. We all have bad days, and even some of the best pilots I know have had wobbles in the simulator.

We always set ourselves high targets and expectations as pilots, but just sometimes you have an off day. This is no one's fault, and certainly not the examiners. If you haven't met the high standards that the UK CAA and European regulator requires, then it isn't the examiner failing you, it is you not meeting the standard on that particular day for whatever reason. Most ATOs and airlines are fully prepared, and budgeted for, retests from time to time, with gaps built into their training rosters to accommodate any extra training. And those worth their salt will proactively help you where re training is required. We will all need retraining through our career, and it is a mark of our resilience that we pick ourselves up, learn and meet the standard the next time.

A note here too. The LPC is not a LOFT exercise. And with that in mind, your examiner might reposition you for certain manoeuvres to save time. They should keep you fully aware of your position, but it can be confusing sometimes – so if you ever unsure of where you are and the config of the aircraft, or, what you are doing now- just ask.

A little word of caution. Sometimes pilots will go sick before their sim, leaving it sometimes necessary for the crewing department to use a standby pilot, sometimes known as a sandbag. This is not a helpful term, as it implies the sandbag pilot is just there to make up the numbers and isn't under check.

Whilst this is true, and the standby call out pilot will probably not have their licence signed as they didn't need an LPC, if the examiner is not happy with their performance they cannot release them back to the line without additional training. So, if you are lucky/unlucky (whichever way you view these things) to be called out to 'sandbag' for want of a better term, if you look on it as you can't pass the check as you're not under check, but you can fail it, then you won't go wrong.

If you are unhappy that your examiner won't sign your licence, as they say you haven't met the standard, and you want to challenge this. Be aware. Whilst you can challenge the way the test was carried out, ie the conduct of the test, you cannot challenge the result itself. This is known as a reg 6. This is why the brief, safety brief, and debrief might all seem a little formalised.

So that was a brief overview of what is required for your LPC – we hope that has dispelled a few of the myths and acronyms bounded about as well and given you a bit of confidence as what is expected of us all when it's that time of year again.

Our advice is to try and use any simulator as a learning tool. Accept you make errors, and the sim is the best place to make errors – and to learn from them. Your examiner is there to examine yes on behalf of the authority, but you will find he is probably much happier in the training role, and there will be opportunities to learn and grow as pilots even during your LPC.

The Covid19 pandemic and our lack of currency will have seen our skills erode, so it may be with some trepidation that you make your next visit to the simulator. The standards thankfully have remained as high as they always been, so maybe take an extra day or two to prepare for your LPC and have a think of those manoeuvres that the examiner will need to see.

With all this in mind, Ian and I have developed a subscription based online supplemental learning portal, for the 737NG, with lectures, animated briefs, simulator demonstrations and other material in our virtual briefing room on all the major items that you will need perform for your LPC, together with so much more.

We have shot videos of these manoeuvres and they are there for you to watch and study to give you an advantage when it comes to your next check. We will be adding content all the time to help you. It was designed primarily to give you confidence during your next check and take that confidence with you as operations start to get back to normal and we head back out onto the line with a busy roster.

If you are interested, head over to [B737Training.org](http://B737Training.org), and have a look what we can offer. We'll put a link up below this pod and also across our socials.

Hopefully that starts to clear the murky waters of those LPC requirements. It's something that gives us all a slight case of nerves when it appears on the roster, even the most seasoned pilot, so we hope that being armed with the knowledge of what to expect at least calms them a little. No doubt this subject will continue to evolve and as and when it does, we'll try to keep you updated.

That's it from us this week, we'll be back again soon so please keep that talk going over on social media and if you're enjoying the podcast do let us know with a review and we'll read them out here as we get them. Until next time, fly well and stay safe.