



FLIGHT TRAINING LESSONS AFTER LOCKDOWN

After a seven week-long Covid-19 enforced grounding, flight training schools had to consider how they would return to flying under Alert Level 2. And it wasn't just a case of opening their doors and letting the students flood back in.



Ian Calvert is the CEO of Ardmore Flying School in Auckland, which has a large contingent of foreign students.

He says they did as much preparation as they could so the school was ready for the students to come back at level 2.

“We were very mindful of the fact that they hadn't flown for a while. It depended where they were at in their training as to what we required, but for the more junior students or international students we made sure they did a dual instruction flight before they went off solo,” Ian says.

He says they got New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) approval to deliver some courses online during Alert Levels 4 and 3, which are normally done in the classroom. That way students were able to carry on with some subjects, like instrument rating.

Ian says the rules in place under level 2 changed the nature of the operation somewhat.

“We had fewer people in the building, they came in and flew, then went home again. We had some small classes running that complied with the social distancing rules. Anybody who came into the building had their

temperature taken and signed in and out to allow for contact tracing.”

Massey University School of Aviation in Palmerston North is a large flying school.

CFI Paul Kearney says when level 2 arrived, they did a phased start up, getting the staff ready first.

“Technically everybody was current but we applied the safety brush across that. So first we got the staff flying and got everybody current – three take-offs and landings in the aircraft and using the simulator for IFR guys,” Paul says.

“Once we got that all sorted as well as making sure the aircraft were all running smoothly again, the students started coming back, which was at least a week after level 2 came into force.

“And we basically said every student had to do a dual lesson first so we’re not letting a student go out on their own who hasn’t flown for 60 days.”

He says it’s important they take an individualised approach for each student.

“For example, those who are close to flight test – we need to do a bit more flying with them, not just the syllabus that’s published. We need to make sure we’re actually catering to each student because they’ve all got different needs, it’s been quite a stressful time for them as well.”

Paul says just being patient will be key.

“And any signs of any sickness – we’ve got to be a lot more tolerant in this new world with that kind of stuff. When a student has a runny nose we’ve actually got to keep them away from the centre until we can be sure they are okay, so it will be interesting times for the next little while.”

Greg Hagarty, the CFI at L3Harris Airline Academy, says they ran a series of Zoom sessions to help students

prepare for a return to flying, which meant a smooth resumption of flight operations.

“The students embraced the chance to refresh their knowledge and the Q and A sessions were full on,” Greg says.

The flight training school has a large foreign student population and they stayed in one big bubble in student accommodation near the school.

“Our students were instrumental in developing and implementing Covid-19 procedures in their accommodation, their input was vital to the effectiveness of level 4 procedures.”

Greg says re-starting flight operations was only possible after extensive risk analysis with their Covid Operating Procedures. The emphasis was put on student and instructor currency, and aircraft engineering.

“Each of the students were assessed individually and we developed a programme of additional flying for each one of them to allow a smooth progression of their training.

“The week before flight ops began, a team of instructors carried out checks as recommended by our maintenance company to ensure all aircraft were fully airworthy. In addition, the first flight post lockdown commenced with two circuits as an added safety measure.

“Our instructors were well within currency, having said that the Standards Team have been full on doing standards checks and renewals with them with special focus on the newer C-cats.”

Southern Wings flight training school in Invercargill caters to mostly domestic students.

Its CEO Bryan Jones says they were conscious of the fact that the students hadn’t been in the air for several weeks.

“So when we got back into flying operations, all students irrespective of where they were at had to have a dual check. The students are all at different levels, some getting close to completion, and some just kicking off but it was just as easy to make everyone do dual check initially,” says Bryan.

“They were all still within their currency requirements but we just sort of slowly eased them back into it rather than roaring into it.”

Greg Hagarty says the last couple of months have also highlighted the benefit of maintaining digital records.

“To be able to quickly access everybody’s expiry dates and know exactly who needed to take advantage of the CAA extensions that applied, proved very useful for us.” ➤

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