What Makes an Effective and Inclusive Trainer Pipeline? Trainer recruitment, motivation, skills and pipeline sustainability

Report prepared for: Women in Aviation Training (WIAT) Halldale Group

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Introduction

This report summarises findings from the WIAT workshop held at the European Airline Training Symposium (EATS) Cascais, in November 2025. The workshop focused upon trainer recruitment, selection, motivation, and future pipeline development within aviation training, in the context of a global industry shortage of pilots and trainers and the under-representation of women in the pilot and trainer role.

The WIAT workshop questions were based upon findings from a funded research study conducted by Durbin, Munns, Warren and Edwards (2022) in collaboration with The University of West of England and The Royal Aeronautical Society and funded by the Higher Education and Innovation Fund. The aim of the research was to explore the future of gender diversity in the trainer role through a survey (completed by 707 pilots and trainers) about their careers, current roles, working practices and motivations. In addition, there were four open questions at the end of the survey that attracted approximately four hundred responses and four focus groups with male and female trainers and pilots. A key finding from the workshop emphasised the trainer shortage:

> "There is a **shortage of people to train pilots**, and potentially the same issue is emerging for **maintenance (mechanic) trainers**." WIAT workshop

The Durbin et al (2022) report also revealed the need to expand and strengthen the trainer workforce, but significant challenges remain around recruitment transparency and gender representation, with organisations preferring the traditional trainer persona. It was generally acknowledged that trainer selection remains largely traditional and qualification-based, with limited emphasis on behavioural competencies or inclusivity. We also found that key skills for effective trainers extend beyond technical proficiency, focusing on empathy, communication, professionalism, and a trainee-centred approach aligned with Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) principles. The quote below demonstrates the desire for pilots to become trainers:

> "Pilots were asked if they were *interested* in a training role, 78% said they were interested in the role with no difference by gender" (Durbin et al., 2022)

However, motivations to become a trainer are influenced by both personal and organisational factors. While many individuals are driven by a passion for teaching and knowledge-sharing, organisational culture, workload, and compensation inequities can undermine engagement.

> "72% of male respondents would *actually apply* for a role compared to only 49% of female respondents" (Durbin et al., 2022)

The research, in sum, identified that building a sustainable trainer pipeline will require structural, financial, and cultural change — supported by fair recruitment, strong role models, modernised selection methods, and improved working flexibility, in particular, part-time working hours for trainers. These findings were generally mirrored in the WIAT workshop, (2025).

The findings from the WIAT workshop are summarised below. Where appropriate, we have highlighted findings from the Durbin et al., (2022) report where similar themes were raised by workshop participants. These are identified by the citation "Durbin et al., 2022".

Workshop Organisation

The workshop was organised as a 'roundtable' discussion to explore participant insights into the key challenges to attracting trainers that were identified in the 2022 study. The workshop was organised around the following themes:

- How to attract and retain more trainers into the aviation environment
- What motivates and deters pilots to become trainers
- The qualities and skills required for a future trainer pipeline
- How training roles can become more attractive, accessible and inclusive
- How organisations can attract the best talent

Each roundtable was based upon one of the following questions:

- Trainer recruitment and selection
- What makes a good trainer? Key skills
- Motivations to become a trainer?
- Ways to future proof the trainer pipeline?

Workshop Findings

The workshop began with two open questions using the tool Mentimeter. The first asked participants about the roles they currently held within the industry. 45% of respondents identified as trainers or instructors, 30% as cabin crew or pilots, and around 15% held management or HR-related roles. A smaller proportion (10%) represented engineering, academia and administrative functions. This shows a broad distribution of participants across operational and educational roles. Participants who selected 'other' included roles in marketing, regulation, training management, event coordination, accountable manager, aeronautical maintenance and training, training services sales, and non-profit leadership. This indicates a diverse professional background among participants, contributing perspectives beyond traditional flight operations.

The second question explored why participants were attending the workshop. Most said that they were attending to learn, network, and support women in aviation. Common terms included interest, empowerment, community, curiosity, and inspiration. This suggests strong engagement around learning, connection, and shared professional purpose:

1. Trainer recruitment and selection

1.1 Advertising and Recruitment Practices

Advertising for trainer roles was perceived as generally basic, based on minimal information being provided by the airlines. Some languages were identified as less inclusive as advertisements are not fully gender neutral, the tone often leading towards being academic.

Trainer roles were identified as being frequently advertised internally, limiting external access and perpetuating a narrow recruitment pool. While some organisations use social media, the overall marketing approach is not sufficiently engaging to attract new or underrepresented candidates.

1.2 Recruitment Structure and Decision-Making

Recruitment processes tended to be simple and qualification-driven, often comprising one to three pages of listed requirements. Decision-making responsibility typically sits with management and some input from HR. Feedback to candidates is inconsistent, particularly when external companies are involved.

> "Female pilots are more likely to seek advice from trainers and peers, and men from the training department and trainers but neither from HR" (Durbin et al., 2022)

However, there was some evidence of more structured and modernised selection processes, including behavioural interviews, presentations, and soft-skill assessments, in some organisations. Seniority and experience remain the dominant criteria in many cases, potentially at the expense of interpersonal aptitude or teaching potential.

There is a lack of data driven tools to assess instructors during selection to ensure suitability for the role. Where aptitude tests originally had the potential to detect ability in some roles (pilots) this form of testing is absent when assessing potential for training. This could raise the question: is more consideration and validation work required around how to select suitable trainers rather than using the historical methods currently being employed?

While some airlines do use psychometric testing or performance data from simulator sessions, the question was raised, does this correlate to their instructor ability?

1.3 Inclusivity and Transparency

> "Having a mentor and being encouraged to apply was important for female pilots but less so for male pilots" (Durbin et al., 2022)

Participants emphasised that improving inclusivity should be the focus and that organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of:

- Promoting balanced gender representation.
- Encouraging open discussion around family-life balance.
- Making well-planned, data-informed recruitment decisions.

- Showcasing internal career development opportunities.
- Addressing cultural and unconscious biases in selection.

These steps are critical to ensuring recruitment processes are fair, transparent, and aligned with the values of modern aviation training.

> "Women were more likely to experience a formal interview process in the study. They were also less likely to have informal support or encouragement than their male counterparts and no women gained the role without some selection process whereas some of their male counterparts did." (Durbin et al., 2022)

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2. Skills Required to Be a Trainer

2.1 Core Competencies

Effective trainers combine operational competence with strong interpersonal skills. Key attributes identified by participants included:

- **Enthusiasm and motivation:** The ability to engage and inspire learners.
- **Patience and empathy:** Understanding diverse trainee needs and challenges.
- **Organisation and structure:** Ensuring clear, well-prepared, and efficient instructional material
- **Credibility and professionalism:** Serving as positive role models for trainees.
- **Trainee-centred focus:** Prioritising the learner's experience and outcomes.
- **Dedication and passion** – A genuine commitment to developing others and maintaining professional standards.

While strong operational performance was believed to be valuable, the consensus was that it does not automatically equate to instructional ability. The best instruction is done by the individuals who are able to blend technical knowledge with emotional intelligence and communication skills.

Participants felt that effective instruction should come naturally to trainers but must be monitored by trainee surveys/feedback to monitor instructor quality. There was a slight preference amongst the group for female instructors, who were seen as showing greater empathy, and a shared view that 'yelling' is ineffective. Instructors should focus more on what they take in − listening and understanding − than what they put out. Leadership training is essential, as everyone in a training environment, has a leadership role and both instructors and trainees should own these roles. Given the high pressure and frequent criticism in training, for learning to be effective a nurturing approach was seen critical.

Despite the acknowledgement that operational performance and training ability were not necessarily correlated, selection in most companies has an element of identifying individuals who were good at their nominal role.

> "Both non-trainers and trainers identified "able to diagnose trainee's difficulties and give guidance" and is "approachable and support" in the top five skills required to be

> an effective trainer. There were no notable differences by gender but women did include in their ranking that a trainer should be "able to assess trainee performance fairly and provide constructive feedback". This aligned very much with the comments that they felt that as a trainee a professional environment and being treated fairly and equally was an area that required improvement." (Durbin et al., 2022)

Feedback techniques were also highlighted as being essential. Good instructors now provide feedback in a way that supports learning through open, two-way communication. Feedback should not be critical or intimidating but instead a shared conversation about performance. Asking questions such as *"Tell me how you think this flight went?"* encourages trainees to reflect on their actions. Discussions should be a collaborative critique that looks not only at what the student did, but why they did it and what they were thinking. Active listening skills are a key instructor skill and form an important part of the process to ensure trainees feel understood and engaged in their own development.

2.2 Hiring for the modern training environment

It was felt that the decision to hire an instructor should focus on several key qualities. Relevant operational and instructional experience is essential, but equally important is an outgoing and social personality that helps build rapport with learners. Effective trainers should understand the distinction between coaching and mentoring, demonstrating self-reflection, accountability, and a willingness to adapt their approach, and embrace the attitude that their students should ultimately surpass them. Successful instruction also requires the ability to engage and entertain, making the learning process enjoyable and memorable for today's 18-23-year-old trainees, whose attention and motivation may require new and creative teaching methods.

As Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) becomes the industry standard, the sentiment was that there is a growing need for instructors to develop strong skills in behavioural assessment and effective debriefing – competencies that may not have been evaluated when trainers were recruited many years ago. Above all, great trainers recognise that while students may not always remember the exact content delivered, they will remember how the instructor made them feel–underscoring the importance of empathy, enthusiasm, and positive connection in impactful training

One organisation participant recognised that diversity in age, experience, and background among trainers enhances the learning environment, allowing trainees to benefit from a wider range of teaching styles and perspectives so they actively recruit different trainer personas.

Historically, only captains were eligible for instruction roles in the pilot community, however, first officers are now increasingly becoming instructors with largely positive outcomes and no performance issues. Some work is still required around age bias to ensure that this is fully adopted.

Another participant explained their company's approach:

95% of the existing instructors were male and most new instructor applicants were also men, making it difficult to increase diversity. By asking new first officers which captains they

preferred working with and why, feedback consistently suggested that the best instructors were those who showed respect, mentored well, and communicated effectively – qualities often attributed to female captains. After reaching out to these captains and inviting them to become instructors, the training team shifted significantly - within six months, half of the instructors were women.

2.3 Continuous Development

The aviation industry faces a significant challenge in supporting experienced instructors as they adapt to training the modern generation of learners. Many long-serving instructors explained how they were selected under earlier training philosophies and have since had to transition from traditional methods to CBTA, a shift that requires some professional development in structured feedback training, and observation standards, to ensure that training becomes trainee centric and moves from a testing environment to a learning and developing environment.

Discussions included suggestions on how to train the current generation of trainees effectively, particularly younger students. Experienced instructors are encouraged to adopt a more collaborative and open approach: listening actively, creating an environment where trainees feel comfortable speaking, and treating them as colleagues deserving of respect rather than simply subordinates. When a trainee struggles it is up to the instructor to understand why they are struggling, breaking tasks into smaller elements and restarting when necessary, rather than repeating the same correction multiple times with diminishing effect. Being able to adapt to each day's training context, seeking a second instructor's perspective when needed, and focusing not only on teaching technical tasks but also on developing attitudes and a professional mindset. Collectively, these practices help bridge the generational gap, ensuring that experienced instructors remain effective, relevant, and fully equipped to support younger trainees in a modern CBTA-aligned training environment. These training techniques may also go some way to address the negative training experiences predominantly faced by female trainee pilots:

> "Women were more likely to have negative experiences during their initial training (42% of women said they were treated differently at work due to their gender, compared to 17% of men). 30% of women and 10% of men said that they had been discriminated against due to their gender. Most of the negative experiences occurred during initial pilot training . Just 60% of all pilots felt that they had been treated fairly by their trainers." (Durbin et al., 2022)

There was a general recognition that the industry is operating in a different training environment, with different training approaches needed for the next generation of trainees.

3. Motivations to Become a Trainer

3.1 Positive Drivers

Motivations for pursuing instructor roles identified by participants typically include:

- A **desire to share knowledge** and inspire others.
- A **passion for developing people** and watching trainees succeed.
- Seeking **personal challenge, leadership, and growth**.
- Pursuing **work-life balance** and stability compared with line operations.
- Contributing to the **next generation** of aviation professionals and improving diversity.

It was articulated that many trainers would also welcome being involved in the creative freedom of designing engaging courses and mentoring future professionals, seeing the role as both rewarding and meaningful.

> "Most trainers wanted to have the opportunity to give back to the future generations, however, women were more likely to be motivated by wanting to do a better job than the instructors that they had had during their training." (Durbin et al., 2022)

3.2 Barriers and Challenges

Despite these motivations, significant barriers remain for trainers:

- **High workload** due to preparation, feedback, and administrative tasks.
- **Reduced pay** relative to flying or operational roles (especially in ground training)
- **The right reasons** why someone becomes an instructor, companies must **reinforce their identity as pilots**, not just as trainers.
- **Limited flexibility** in scheduling, particularly for those with family responsibilities.
- **Lack of visible role models**, particularly for women in flight training roles.
- **Perceived exclusivity** or "boys' club" culture in some organisations.
- **Gender and age** were mentioned as barriers and work needs to be done around this to support instructors.
- **Loss of technical involvement**, mechanics may be reluctant to move away from working directly on the aircraft.
- **Pregnancy and family issues** still present some issues but are slowly being addressed through policy and practice improvements.

Female representation among pilot trainers remains notably low; just 1.6% of captains are trainers in some airlines (compared to an average of 43% of male captains being trainers across the industry (Durbin et al., 2022). Those female pilots who do become trainers often display high empathy and engagement but face steeper challenges entering the role.

> "Barriers to people going into training included lack of confidence, support and timing. The average age of a pilot trainer in the survey was 34 years and without potential lifestyle options in training, women were not likely to apply especially if they had family commitments." (Durbin et al., 2022)

3.3 Enablers for Success

Supportive management, mentorship, and visible role models were all identified as significantly influencing instructor engagement. Organisational culture is a key enabler — where inclusivity, encouragement, and recognition are present, trainer motivation and retention are markedly higher.

> "Male pilots had more information about the career pathway to the trainer role and were more familiar with current training requirements." (Durbin et al., 2022)

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4. Building and Sustaining a Trainer Pipeline

4.1 Future-Proofing the Workforce

The aviation sector faces a shortage of qualified trainers, particularly in pilot and maintenance disciplines. A sustainable pipeline depends on attracting diverse, capable instructors and ensuring that training is viewed as a valued career path.

Participants articulated that to achieve this, organisations must address the **structural and financial realities** of the trainer role:

- Ensure fair pay for preparation and debriefing time.
- Provide flexible contracts or hybrid line/instructor roles.
- Reduce administrative burdens through digital support tools.
- Recognise the professional status of instructors within company hierarchies.

4.2 Use of Technology

It was felt that technology should enhance, not replace, human instruction. Tools such as video-based debriefing, digital learning platforms, and simulator analytics can increase efficiency and support reflective practice, but the **human connection remains central** to effective training.

4.3 Regulatory and Organisational Support

Participants advocated for regulators to provide clearer expectations and less procedural rigidity, focusing on empowering training organisations to innovate and adapt.

At an organisational level, data-driven selection, mentoring programmes, and early identification of potential instructors — including targeting co-pilot and first officer instructors — can strengthen future capacity.

> "Having a mentor and being encouraged to apply was important for female pilots but less so for male pilots." (Durbin et al., 2022)

4.4 Cultural Change and Diversity

Sustaining the trainer pipeline requires cultural evolution. This means:

- Normalising gender balance across training departments.
- Promoting flexible working and family support policies.
- Encouraging open dialogue about motivation and career progression.
- Embedding inclusivity and respect into every aspect of recruitment and training.

By addressing these issues holistically, organisations can ensure the training profession remains attractive, respected, and future-ready.

Following the roundtable discussions, four further open questions were posed to all participants, using Mentimeter:

1. **How can the industry meet the current and future need for trainers?**

Participants offered 29 suggestions. Common themes included increasing representation and inclusion (for example, hiring and promoting more women; fostering diversity in management), improving work-life balance through flexible schedules and contracts to support trainers, ensuring transparent recruitment and fair pay structures and raising awareness of trainer roles through mentorship and support networks. Overall, participants emphasised flexibility, fairness, and visibility as key factors in sustaining the trainer workforce.

2. **How can we make the trainer role more inclusive?**

The 32 responses focused on organisational culture and representation. Participants highlighted the importance of increasing the number of women in training and leadership positions, ensuring transparent recruitment and promotion practices, fostering inclusive cultures, and providing mentoring and visible female role models.

Overall, participants highlighted the need for systemic and cultural changes to embed inclusion at all levels.

3. **What one action could your organisation take to make the trainer role more inclusive? (34 responses)**

Across the 34 responses, key actions suggested included recruiting and promoting more women, conducting anonymous recruitment stages, and ensuring fair evaluation processes, training managers to support inclusion, promoting female leaders (role models), providing mentorship and part-time or flexible contracts, recognising trainers' preparation work, and highlighting female trainers internally and externally (e.g., on social media). These responses point to a desire for structural reform and visible organisational commitment to equality.

4. **How useful have you found today's workshop?**

Feedback was very positive. Approximately 63% rated the session as 'very useful' or 'extremely useful', around 37% found it 'somewhat useful', and no one chose 'a little useful' or 'not useful'. This indicates the session was well-received and considered relevant and valuable to participants' professional contexts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is clear evidence, from both the 2022 Durbin et al. report and the WIAT workshop, that the aviation training community recognises the urgent need to strengthen its instructor workforce. Current recruitment and retention challenges stem largely from outdated processes, insufficient flexibility and cultural barriers. There was, in particular, a recognition of a clear lack of gender diversity and inclusivity in the trainer role and that actions should be taken to address this.

Recommendations:

1. **More transparent advertising and recruitment:** Create gender-neutral, and accessible advertisements for trainer roles; use objective recruitment and selection methods; open up external application routes.
2. **Modernise selection methods:** Ensure transparent and fair selection processes could mitigate the "old boys club" mentality and ensure that trainers are recruited for their potential to be good trainers that are aligned with modern training philosophies (CBTA principles.). There should be more focus on interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence.
3. **Develop trainers continuously:** Invest in instructor development and standardisation to ensure a professional, relevant learning environment for trainees and what that is in line with the training of the future generation that may require different methods of training. Develop trainers as 'leaders' who have the skills to encourage and nurture trainees and encourage trainees to reflect upon their own performance.
4. **Address structural barriers:** Ensure fair compensation, flexible scheduling, and recognition of trainer workload, especially for women who are balancing caring and their professional roles.
5. **Promote inclusivity and representation:** Support women and underrepresented groups through mentoring, visibility, and targeted outreach for training positions
6. **Enhance the professional identity of trainers:** Position training as a respected, long-term career option, not merely an operational sidestep.
7. **Increase the numbers of women in training roles and leadership positions more generally, through the measures suggested above. Visible organisational commitment to equality was seen as paramount.**

With these measures, the industry can build a robust, diverse, and motivated community of instructors — capable of shaping the next generation of aviation professionals.

To view the study discussed in this report, scan the QR Code below.

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