

# WATS 2011: Australia's Rex cuts GA pilot pipeline

By John Croft [Source: Flight Global (<http://www.flightglobal.com>)]

Australia's Regional Express Airlines no longer expects to obtain pilots from the general aviation community, a pipeline that as of two years ago had supplied the airline with most of its pilot recruits.

"We don't include general aviation entry in our forecasting [of pilot recruits] any more," says Chris Hine, Rex's chief operating officer and director.

The cut off comes as Rex has achieved success in a relatively new in-house pilot cadet programme, a service he says the airline is now marketing as a third-party ab initio training source to other airlines.

Rex before 2008 typically had a 15% pilot turnover rate per year, with a resupply of new pilots primarily coming from the ranks of aspiring general aviation (GA) pilots. Rex is Australia's largest regional airline, with 51 Saab 340 turboprops flying to 31 regional destinations. The airline has approximately 280 pilots and 150 flight attendants located at nine bases in its network.

A booming airline market in the 2007 timeframe saw the attrition jump to 50%, with major airlines hiring away the pilots. "Historically we sourced pilots from GA," says Hine, speaking at the World Aviation Training conference in Orlando, Florida on 20 April, "but we couldn't find enough to qualify or to meet our standards. We were lucky to hire 50% of the candidates we met."

Rather than be subject to the "randomness in the cycle", Rex decide to open an in-house cadet programme to "future-proof" the carrier and to ensure a supply of "suitable pilots", says Hine. The new business is called the Australian airline pilot academy.

The academy is currently teaching its eight and ninth student class, each of which takes 32 weeks in total and results in private and commercial pilot licenses and a multi-engine rating for those who complete the programme and begin flying with Rex. Loans are provided, and graduates who remain at the airline for six years have their interest rate halved; those that stay seven years have their debt forgiven.

In addition to comprehensive pre-acceptance screening, the program tailors the training environment so that graduates will succeed at Rex. "We're not teaching private pilots; we're not teaching commercial pilots; we know where [students] are going," says Hine. "We regularly and formally screen out anyone who isn't going to make it fairly early on."

Proof of the success of the project comes from benchmarking that revealed that two years after instituting the program in 2008, cadets were scoring slightly higher than direct entry recruits, which Rex continues to accept when applicants have the desired skills.

To date, 106 cadets have been inducted into the programme, 82 of whom have graduated and 58 of whom are now line-checked to operate the Saabs, says Hine.