

Definition of an ATCO

Presented by PLC

SUMMARY

In the absence of a clear definition of air traffic controllers (ATCOs) within the ICAO Annexes or IFATCA TPM, air traffic controllers, have been carrying out their duties without an accurate definition of their role or responsibilities. With a history in air traffic control spanning over a century, providing a precise definition is of utmost importance. The profession bears significant responsibilities, and clarifying this definition can lead to an improvement in the status of air traffic controllers as a whole.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Air traffic controllers have been operating air traffic control duties without a clear definition within IFATCA or ICAO documentation.
- 1.2. ICAO PANS ATM Doc 4444 has definitions for air traffic control services and air traffic services (ATS), but no definition for air traffic controllers (ATCO). There is no definition of an air traffic controller in the IFATCA TPM.
- 1.3. The ICAO PANS ATM Doc 4444 defines the pilot in command, which clarifies and includes their scope of responsibility.
- 1.4. Although we have been working in a non-defined environment, in some countries air traffic controllers are less recognised than other professions, and it is difficult for there to be an understanding of the work, or an acceptance of the responsibility of an ATCO because their titles are not on the list of professions.
- 1.5. In such countries, there is also a danger that the government could inaccurately define the profession of an air traffic controller, so measures are needed to address this problem.

2. DISCUSSION

- 2.1. In ICAO Doc 4444, Air Traffic Management, air traffic service (ATS) is defined as:

A generic term meaning variously, flight information service, alerting service, air traffic advisory service, air traffic control service (area control service, approach control service or aerodrome control service)

2.2. Similarly, air traffic control service is defined as:

A service provided for the purpose of:

- 1) Preventing collisions:***
 - a) between aircraft, and***
 - b) on the manoeuvring area between aircraft and obstructions; and,***
- 2) expediting and maintaining an orderly flow of air traffic.***

2.3. While an air traffic control service is clearly defined, there is no mention of who is responsible for the service. For reference, in Doc 4444, pilot-in-command is defined as:

The pilot designated by the operator, or in the case of general aviation, the owner, as being in command and charged with the safe conduct of a flight.

2.4. As defined in Doc 4444, the first priority of air traffic control service is to prevent collisions between aircraft or between aircraft and obstacles. To prevent collisions and maintain safe separation, ATCOs issue clearances and instructions that pilots must follow. This service requires advanced knowledge, skill and communication ability and must be provided by qualified persons with sufficient training.

2.5. It is well recognised that such qualified persons are called Air Traffic Controllers, but without a definition of the ATCO, their responsibilities are unclear, and prohibit to obtain an adequate job evaluation of the professionalism and difficulty of their work.

2.6. A second priority to ATCOs is to expedite and maintain an orderly of air traffic. Not only are clearances and instructions required to form an orderly air traffic flow, but also to provide pilots with information on weather, airport and related facilities and traffic conditions. Furthermore, ATCOs coordinate among themselves to operate the airspace and the aerodrome efficiently.

2.7. Responding to emergency situations and providing assistance to distressed aircraft are also crucial responsibilities of ATCOs.

2.8. To protect the safety and reliability of air traffic control services, it must be performed by qualified persons. In order to clearly distinguish between qualified and unqualified persons and to prevent unqualified persons from providing air traffic control services, a definition of ATCOs is necessary.

2.9. In TPM TRNG 9.4.2, IFATCA states the following policies regarding the use of unqualified persons:

For the purpose of guaranteeing safety, controllers shall not be replaced by personnel who do not hold ATC licences in accordance with ICAO Annex 1, with the ratings, recency and competency appropriate to the duties that they are expected to undertake for the position and unit at which those duties are to be performed. (Jerusalem 95.C.3, amended Kaohsiung 06.

- 2.10. Unqualified persons who do not meet the required level of knowledge and training may not be able to give correct instructions or make correct judgements, and may be at risk of causing accidents. In addition, since communication between pilots and air traffic controllers is based on trust, the provision of unsafe services by unqualified persons may lead to a loss of trust in air traffic control services and lower job evaluation for qualified air traffic controllers. In the end it will jeopardise safety.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1. In order to clarify who is responsible for providing an Air Traffic Control Service, it is proposed that IFATCA insert a definition of an ATCO into the appropriate section of the Technical and Professional Manual and inform ICAO of our definition and our reasons for it.

4. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended to insert the definition of an air traffic controller into the TPM.

- 4.1. **Air Traffic Controller: A person qualified to provide an air traffic control service.**

5. REFERENCES

ICAO (2022). Doc 4444

IFATCA TPM (2023) Version 66 – TRNG 9.4.2

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