

Becoming a part-time instructor



*Despite the half-baked nonsense – soon to be abandoned – of having to pass the CPL exams, it's still worth going for an FI rating, says **Matt Lane***

Let's all face it – the pay of your average PPL instructor isn't going to make most of us give up established careers and take up flying instruction full-time. Especially when it's going to cost eye-watering amounts to fill the car up with diesel to get to the airfield for a start! However, I know from reading the internet forums and chatting to people around the flying club that a lot of people are interested in furthering their flying beyond the PPL and would like to get into part-time instructing. Unfortunately, you currently need to have passed at least the CPL ground school exams to undertake the FI course and gain a FI(R) rating on your PPL. Having completed the CPL ground school exams, most people also do the flying element and gain a CPL as well so they can be paid for instructing. This could all be changing, though – the advent of EASA may be about to sweep this CPL exam requirement away, and we may see a resurgence of part-time instructors into GA.

I had been instructing for many years on Vigilant motor gliders for the Air Cadet Organisation and, keen to expand my instruction onto SEP types, I gained a Class Rating Instructor (CRI) rating in 2004. I really enjoyed part-time instructing with my CRI, and in 2005 I decided to take the plunge and work towards my FI rating. Firstly this entailed getting the Class 1 medical, and I then studied

for the nine CPL ground school exams through distance learning. With this complete, I am now just finishing my FI course part-time and will hopefully be ready to start *ab initio* instruction before the summer ends.

Knowing there may be many people out there considering going down this route part-time, and potentially more so with EASA changes, I thought it might be useful to write an article on things you might like to consider before committing time and money. These are only my thoughts, but are based on some experience of having struggled through it myself.

What exams to choose?

You have a choice here (while the present system is still in force) – either the full 14 ATPL exams or the nine CPL exams. The ATPL exams will also give you theoretical knowledge credit for adding an IR, but you have to apply for issue of the IR within 36 months from the end of the month of the date of the final exam pass. I knew time and money would preclude me getting an IR within this timescale so I plumped for the lesser workload of the CPLs. If you have any inkling of getting an IR or flying for the airlines, my advice is to go for the ATPLs as doing the CPLs will only give you subsequent credit for one examination (VFR Comms) out of the whole ATPL set. Also be



Top: newly-minted instructor Matt Lane, almost ready for action
Above: Matt originally taught Air Cadets on Vigilant motor gliders

aware the CPL exams are only available at Gatwick so may incur extra travelling costs depending on where you live.

Which ground school provider?

There are a number of well known providers, but the bigger organisations generally only do ATPL ground school, which may influence your choice. My advice is that you must go and visit any potential providers – check you like the look and feel of their training manuals, check how you will get distance learning support, check how often their manuals are updated and whether there are internet-based

aids you can get access to. You will also have to do a mandatory amount of classroom attendance – check the timetable and arrangements for this will suit you. The distance you may have to travel and cost of staying over is a significant factor in the overall cost, and you may want to think hard about trying to get a more local provider that you could commute to. I went for a smaller provider who was prepared to be flexible around my work schedule and let me take exams in the order and at a rate that suited me – other friends preferred a more regimented approach that kept them on track.

How to tackle the study?

I defy anyone not to be scared the day a Parcelforce van arrives with two crates full of thick A4 manuals to learn. However, if you stick to the schedule your provider will have given you, it is possible to see a way through them. Avoid the temptation to delve into more interesting sections rather than the one you are supposed to be studying – you will have to do it all eventually. A routine for study is vital. During the course of my study I had to spend every Wednesday night away from home with work in a hotel. This became my crammer night, where I disciplined myself to do a good four hours a week study without distractions which gave me a head start each week. You must get the agreement and cooperation of other family members, and get some kind of schedule going where you can retreat to a quiet and comfortable place and do some quality study each week. The kitchen table while being harassed by dogs and children is not the place! It is also important to get to know others doing your course. I made some good friends and we had a support network going by email for when we got stuck, and it is great to meet up with some friendly and supportive faces at exam time. Above all, don't panic. The provider support is there for you and the exams are not that difficult – there is just lots to learn and get through. There are no shortcuts. A final note about online question banks – they are a brilliant learning tool to help to test yourself and get a feel for what the questions are like, but be under no illusion that you will need to know the theories and techniques to get through the exams.

Below: despite the internet, a certain amount of classroom attendance is required



Moreover, if you've blagged your way through by question spotting it will soon show up on your FI course.

What instructor rating to do?

The CRI can be done in a week and costs around £2,000 with test fees. The FI course takes some four to six weeks full-time in our climate and costs nearly £7,000 with test fees. There are also minimum hours requirements for both – LASORS section H is your friend on these. Time and money will perhaps dictate which rating is realistic for you to tackle. As has been written in this magazine previously, the CRI is an excellent rating and a good stepping stone to an FI course and you won't need to do the CPL exams. If you decide to go for the FI, you must be prepared for plenty of ground school and to work very hard. The course is rightly tough, and people are often unprepared for the rigours of teaching and flying at the same time. It doesn't matter if you have thousands of hours touring, are an aerobatic ace or have just got the minimum pilot in command hours, the skill is mainly in imparting knowledge to the student in an effective and clear manner. The course is enjoyable and everyone I have ever spoken to agrees that your flying will be sharper and more professional at the end of it.

What flying training provider to choose?

The choice here is often more limited – due to the current demand for courses, not many schools will offer part-time FI courses. Again, the key is to visit potential schools, check whether you like the instructors, their style, the notes they use and how well the school location works for you. Recommendations from previous students are very useful as well. It is also worth checking what aircraft they will be using and trying to get the same type, if you know what you will start your instructing career on. I chose a well recommended school with all ex-military staff which suited my style and background, was in daily commuting distance and flew the PA28, which I would be instructing on once I had my rating. My advice (easily said, admittedly) is to try and ignore the cost – the lifetime benefits to you as an instructor of having your grounding from a good school far outweigh saving a few hundred pounds. Also think carefully about training from busy airports or in busy airspace



Above: 'it doesn't matter if you are an aerobatic ace or have just got the minimum pilot in command hours, the skill is mainly in imparting knowledge to the student in an effective and clear manner'

– the holding times may rob you of valuable airborne instructing practice time on the course.

How to approach the FI course?

Presuming you are doing the course part-time, my advice is to try and schedule at least two full weeks to start the course off. This will give you some initial continuity, and get you through all the early upper air basic exercises. Ideally, you can then finish it off in week-long blocks around work and family commitments. When you are on your course is it vital that you do whatever pre-reading and preparation the school recommends and that you totally dedicate the time to it – that means totally clearing your work and social diary, mobile phone off during the day, and getting good nights sleep. Also, be realistic about UK weather – you will get non-flying days. Don't get wound up about these. There is a lot of ground school to get through and some of my biggest learning points have been acquired over a coffee staring out at the rain. At most schools you will often be working two students to one instructor. Take the opportunity to sit in on the others student's briefs and flights wherever possible – it is a brilliant opportunity to listen and absorb the teaching points of the lessons without the pressure of you flying as well.

This is just a very brief canter through some of the issues you might like to consider. It is a long and hard route to get that FI rating, and you must be committed to the nature and responsibility of instructing. Overall though, it is immensely rewarding and enjoyable, and gives your flying a real sense of purpose as you bring on the next generation of pilots, and that has got to be good for the future of GA. ■