

UK FIRST SIMULATOR-BASED AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL FULL UNIT TRAINING - ANSL

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Air Navigation Solutions launched a ground-breaking Unit Training Programme that enables Air Traffic Control Officers to utilise simulators as a key training element throughout full unit training. It is the first On-the-Job Training programme that uses simulators consistently throughout the entire Unit Training Plan to be approved for use in the UK and is leading around the world – finally taking Air Traffic Control training to the level that Airline Pilot training has been at for decades.

When arriving at a new airport, every ATCO needs to undergo unit training which prepares and validates them to be a Controller at that specific location. However, the live operation at large hub airports does not present trainees with many opportunities to practise their basic skills during the initial phase of training due to consistently high traffic levels. At less busy airports the lack of traffic can sometimes hinder progress in the later stages of training.

The structured use of simulators under ANSL's newly created Unit Validity Course, part of the enhanced UTP, ensures that ATCOs can receive initial 'light traffic' training – which can easily scale as trainees gain skills and experience – in a controlled traffic environment.

The UVC is a 14-week assessed classroom and simulator course, and replaces the previous Level 1 training phase that was carried out in the live operation. This course must be completed before ATCO trainees can progress to handling live traffic in the Visual Control Room .

The simulators also form a large part of the second and third phases of the new UTP. The advanced technology gives trainers the ability to generate any specific traffic scenario required at any given point in the training, regardless of what the live environment is able to provide. In addition, the ability to pause the simulation to reflect and discuss decisions during training offers an extra dimension that is not available with live traffic.

The simulators have also been approved for use as part of the final unit endorsement assessment, limiting the impact of interruptions to the VCR, should it be required.

Nichola Ashcroft, Head of Training at ANSL, said: “Our state-of-the-art simulators ensure that trainees get to see and experience anything that cannot be delivered by the operation at that moment in time – which could be anything from heavy traffic levels or weather phenomena to the complexities generated by long term apron and manoeuvring area closures as seen during the pandemic.

“This innovative training approach has enabled us to not only overcome the unique challenges of On-the-Job Training at large hub airports, but to future-proof our training courses by giving ATCOs the ability to train regardless of real-world conditions.”

ANSL's first implementation of the UVC training course commenced in April at their Gatwick operation. With the knowledge and experience from this first UVC implementation, ANSL is now able to support the implementation of similar Unit Training Programmes elsewhere.

Paul Diestelkamp, Head of Business Development & Solutions at ANSL, said: “The systematic use of simulators throughout the entire OJT not only provides highly effective training but also improves predictability and reduces training times substantially.”

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