WINGS ALLIANCE LOOKS TO TRANSFORM UK PILOT TRAINING

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A new **training** system initiative about to be launched in the **UK** is intended to offer prospective commercial **pilots** a route to the cockpit at around half the cost of the integrated courses created for major airlines.

Being established by partners including Bristol Groundschool, Cardiff Aviation and several other approved training organisations, the **Wings Alliance** will be formally launched in London on 7 November, at theHeathrow Flight Training exhibition.

The initiative is based on provision of connected modular training at a choice of facilities around the UK, with applicants having the option of conducting individual phases while holding down a regular job.

"Young pilots currently coming into the industry really only perceive one path through," says Bristol Groundschool managing director – and Wings Alliance chairman – Alex Whittingham, referring to the attraction of major providers which prepare students for carriers including EasyJet and Flybe via integrated courses.

Whittingham describes the new system as a not-for-profit trade alliance which will "offer prospective pilots a quality-assured route to airline employment".

In the UK, its other pre-launch supporters include concerns such as Airways Flight Training of Exeter, Multiflight, Stapleford Flight Centre and Tayside Aviation, with Ultimate High to provide upset-recovery training. Other backers include individual representative companies in France,

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Greece, Jordan, the Netherlands and Poland.

The Wings Alliance also can count on the backing of Scottish operatorLoganair. Whittingham adds that the initiative is attracting the interest of other airlines who regularly see their younger pilots leave in pursuit of what he describes as a perceived *Catch Me If You Can* lifestyle at the major carriers.

Student pilots using the new system will typically take between two and four years to complete their training, and Whittingham expects the total cost to range between around £45,000 ($69,400) and £65,000, with the ability to "pay as you go". This can compare with up to £120,000 at an integrated provider.

"This is another route, with lower costs and greater maturity for the students, who are not led by the nose," says Whittingham.

Cardiff Aviation chairman Bruce Dickinson is a strong advocate of the modular training route, having used it when he pursued an interest in aviation during his thirties.

"Flight training in Europe is frankly overpriced, and people have been getting away with it," argues Dickinson.

"This is something that the industry has been quietly screaming for," he says of the Wings Alliance.

Dickinson – who is now a training captain on the Boeing 737-400 and has past experience also including the 757 – says trainees will complete their instruction with 40h on Cardiff Aviation's 747-400 full-flight simulator, at which point they will receive a pass or fail rating.

"I got my break through the modular route, and would have been happy flying a rusty old turboprop," says Dickinson, who notes that several of his training contemporaries have also gone on to take senior command posts.

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