EUROCONTROL

EUROCONTROL AVIATION LEARNING CENTRE

ELPAC

English Language Proficiency

for Aeronautical Communication

Assessment Scheme — Version 1.5

Scoring, grading and assessment criteria, and their correlation to the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale

Air traffic controllers (ELPAC ATC) and pilots (ELPAC Pilot)

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1. Purpose and scope

This document sets out the complete scoring and grading system of the ELPAC test, the assessment criteria applied by ELPAC assessors, and the correlation of those criteria to the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale. It is written for regulators, licensing authorities and recognition bodies that need to establish how ELPAC results relate to the ICAO language proficiency requirements.

ELPAC (English Language Proficiency for Aeronautical Communication) was developed by EUROCONTROL to meet the ICAO and European requirements for the assessment of the English language proficiency of air traffic controllers and pilots in aeronautical radiotelephony communication. It is a language for specific purposes test. Operational procedure and technical knowledge are explicitly not part of the ELPAC construct.

Two versions of the test exist, with a common structure and a common assessment scheme:

- ELPAC ATC — for licensed air traffic controllers, with scenario contexts matched to Tower, Approach or Area control.
- ELPAC Pilot — for holders of an airline transport pilot licence.

1.1 Levels covered

ELPAC assesses and reports ICAO Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. ICAO Levels 1 and 2 are outside the reporting scope of ELPAC: a performance that does not meet the requirements of ICAO Level 4 is recorded as ICAO Level 3.

1.2 How the final result is expressed

The final ELPAC result is expressed as an ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale level — Level 3, 4, 5 or 6. There is no separate ELPAC scale and no accumulative or averaged score. To obtain a licence endorsement, a test taker must achieve a pass in Paper 1 and at least ICAO Level 4 in Paper 2. The score obtained in Paper 1 does not influence the level awarded in Paper 2; once Paper 1 is passed, it is the level awarded in Paper 2 that determines the final score for the ELPAC test.

2. Test structure

The ELPAC test consists of two papers, delivered through a single browser-based application. Paper 1 is automatically marked. Paper 2 is delivered live by a team of two accredited assessors working in synchronised sessions.

2.1 Paper 1 — listening comprehension

Paper 1 assesses listening comprehension of radiotelephony communication. The ATC version consists of four parts and 45 items and takes approximately 35 minutes and additionally covers air traffic control coordination communication. The Pilot version consists of five parts and 45 items and takes approximately 38 minutes and additionally covers communication between pilots and cabin crew or company operations.

Table 1 — ELPAC test structure (ELPAC scheme)

Paper	Content	Marking	Result
Paper 1 (ATC)	Listening comprehension, four parts, 45 items, approx. 35 minutes.	Automatic (computer)	Pass / no pass
Paper 1 (Pilot)	Listening comprehension, five parts, 45 items, approx. 38 minutes.	Automatic (computer)	Pass / no pass
Paper 2	Oral interaction, four tasks, approx. 20 minutes, delivered live by one OPE and one ELE.	Live, by two accredited assessors	ICAO Level 3, 4, 5 or 6

2.2 Paper 2 — oral interaction

Paper 2 is made up of one non-visual task (Task 1a) and three visual tasks (Tasks 1b, 2 and 3). The scenario context is matched to the test taker's role. The two assessors share interlocution: the OPE is the interlocutor in Tasks 1a and 1b, the ELE in Tasks 2 and 3.

Table 2 — Paper 2 tasks and interlocutor roles (ELPAC scheme)

Task	Format	Duration	Interlocutor
Task 1a	Non-visual radiotelephony exchange following a script. ATC: the test taker acts as controller and the interlocutor plays several pilots in routine and non-routine situations. Pilot: the test taker acts as pilot and the interlocutor plays the controller and other aircraft.	6–8 min	OPE
Task 1b	Visual (face-to-face) verbal report on the events of Task 1a, given to the interlocutor playing the role of shift supervisor (ATC) or superior (Pilot).	3–4 min	OPE

Task	Format	Duration	Interlocutor
Task 2	Visual interaction. The test taker describes an aviation-related picture and answers follow-up questions.	3–4 min	ELE
Task 3	Visual interaction. The test taker is asked a set of questions about aviation issues in a broader context, following a script.	4–5 min	ELE

Function of the task pairs

Tasks 1a and 1b focus on the identification of the minimally competent test taker, using binary judgements to decide between a no-pass (ICAO Level 3) and a pass (ICAO Level 4). They require the test taker to demonstrate:

- appropriate use of standard ICAO phraseology
- switching between standard ICAO phraseology and plain English
- an appropriate response to a pilot or controller message
- resolving misunderstandings
- dealing effectively with the pilot–controller relationship
- negotiating a developing unusual situation
- making a verbal report in plain English

Tasks 2 and 3 focus on the assessment of ICAO Levels 4, 5 and 6. They require the test taker to give opinions, put forward arguments, evaluate advantages and disadvantages, speculate, hypothesise and produce extended speech in an aviation context.

3. Assessor roles

Paper 2 is administered by a team of two assessors — one Operational Expert (OPE) and one English Language Expert (ELE). They share interlocution with the test taker and each assesses the criteria that fall within their area of expertise. A third assessor acts as the backstop of the procedure.

3.1 Operational Expert (OPE)

The OPE holds an air traffic control or pilot licence. The OPE is the interlocutor in Tasks 1a and 1b and, in those tasks, assesses Pronunciation, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction. In Tasks 2 and 3 the OPE makes a holistic judgement to confirm or challenge the level recommended by the ELE. During Task 1a the OPE uses the traffic-light system in the interlocutor view to track the performance: green where the test taker's understanding of, and response to, a transmission is appropriate; orange where it requires clarification; red where the response suggests a lack of understanding.

3.2 English Language Expert (ELE)

The ELE has a formal education in English language teaching or language testing, or equivalent experience, or native-speaker proficiency. The ELE is the interlocutor in Tasks 2 and 3. In Tasks 1a and 1b the ELE assesses Vocabulary and Structure as a single holistic, lexicogrammatically informed judgement. In Tasks 2 and 3 the ELE assesses all six ICAO criteria and leads the grading.

3.3 Assessor accreditation

Assessors are accredited by EUROCONTROL through the ELPAC ACR (accreditation) course and maintain their accreditation through the ELPAC REF (refresher) course. Accreditation is granted up to ICAO Level 5 or up to ICAO Level 6; only assessors accredited for ICAO Level 6 may award ICAO Level 6.

Table 3 — Assessor accreditation requirements (ELPAC scheme)

Accreditation	ELE qualifications	OPE qualifications
Certified to assess up to ICAO Level 5	Formal education in English-language teaching, language testing or equivalent experience, with a minimum IELTS Level 6.5 (or equivalent), or native-speaker proficiency in English. May also be a person with an operational background at ICAO Level 5 who has successfully completed the ELPAC assessor course and is trained in the ELE role if deemed fit by the course instructors.	Operational background (holder of an air traffic control or pilot licence) and ICAO Level 5 proficiency.

Accreditation	ELE qualifications	OPE qualifications
Certified to assess up to ICAO Level 6	Formal education in English-language teaching, language testing or equivalent experience, with a minimum IELTS Level 7.5 (or equivalent), or native-speaker proficiency in English. Exceptionally, this may also be a person with an operational background at ICAO Level 6 who has successfully completed the ELPAC assessor course and is trained in the ELE role if deemed fit by the course instructors.	Operational background (holder of an air traffic control or pilot licence) and ICAO Level 6 proficiency demonstrated through the ELPAC.

3.4 Third assessor

A third assessor is called in only when the OPE and the ELE cannot agree on a final level. The third assessor listens to the recording once and assesses it using the ELE or OPE third-assessor sheet, which is on paper and not an integrated part of the test application. Their decision is the casting vote and becomes the final level. The full procedure is set out in Section 5.4.

4. Paper 1 — marking

Paper 1 consists mainly of multiple-choice and short-answer items requiring only a few characters of input. Test takers select a response by clicking the corresponding box or type a short alphanumeric answer. Marking is fully automatic.

Automatic marking improves the comparability of test scores by reducing susceptibility to construct-irrelevant variance and to co-production by the assessor. Paper 1 results are available immediately in the test taker's record in the ELPAC test system once the test is completed; the test administrator does not upload, score or moderate Paper 1.

Table 4 — Paper 1 scoring rules (ELPAC scheme)

Rule	Application
Marking method	Automatic, by the ELPAC test system. No assessor involvement.
Outcome	Pass or no pass. Paper 1 does not produce an ICAO level.
Effect on Paper 2	None. The Paper 1 score does not influence the level awarded in Paper 2.
Effect on the endorsement	A pass in Paper 1 is a necessary condition for a licence endorsement, alongside at least ICAO Level 4 in Paper 2.
Verification	On request through the appeals procedure, the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team can verify the recorded responses.

Because Paper 1 is a separate pass/no-pass gate, it does not contribute to the Comprehension rating or to any other criterion assessed in Paper 2.

5. Paper 2 — rating procedure

Both assessors observe the whole of Paper 2 and grade independently in the application. The ELE and OPE views in the application correspond to the ELE and OPE assessor sheets. Once both have submitted their grading, they complete the final result sheet together.

5.1 Division of labour between the OPE and the ELE

Table 5 — Division of assessment responsibilities by task and criterion (ELPAC scheme)

Criterion	Tasks 1a and 1b (Level 3/4 decision)	Tasks 2 and 3 (Levels 4, 5 and 6)
Pronunciation	OPE	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)
Fluency	OPE	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)
Comprehension	OPE	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)
Interaction	OPE	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)
Vocabulary	ELE (holistic, with Structure)	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)
Structure	ELE (holistic, with Vocabulary)	ELE (OPE confirms holistically)

In Tasks 1a and 1b the OPE assesses four ICAO criteria — Pronunciation, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction — while the ELE makes a holistic, lexicogrammatically informed judgement of Vocabulary and Structure. For a pass at ICAO Level 4, the OPE must mark the test taker at ICAO Level 4 in every one of their four criteria and the ELE must mark the test taker at ICAO Level 4 in their view. There is no compensatory marking.

In Tasks 2 and 3 the ELE takes over interaction with the test taker and carries the main responsibility for grading, assessing all six ICAO criteria. The OPE makes a holistic judgement to confirm or challenge the ELE's decision. Only assessors accredited for ICAO Level 6 may award ICAO Level 6.

5.2 Reaching the final level

The two assessors consolidate their independent gradings on the final result sheet and proceed in two steps. The whole process is summarised in Figure 1 below.

1. Level 4 gate (Tasks 1a and 1b). Both assessors must have awarded ICAO Level 4: the OPE in each of Pronunciation, Fluency, Comprehension and Interaction, and the ELE in the single holistic Vocabulary and Structure rating given for Tasks 1a and 1b. If either did not, “Level 4 observed by both the ELE and OPE” is ticked No: the test taker has failed and the final level is recorded as ICAO Level 3.
2. Level recommendation (Tasks 2 and 3). If the Level 4 threshold has been reached, the ELE informs the OPE of the level recommended on the basis of Tasks 2 and 3. The OPE confirms

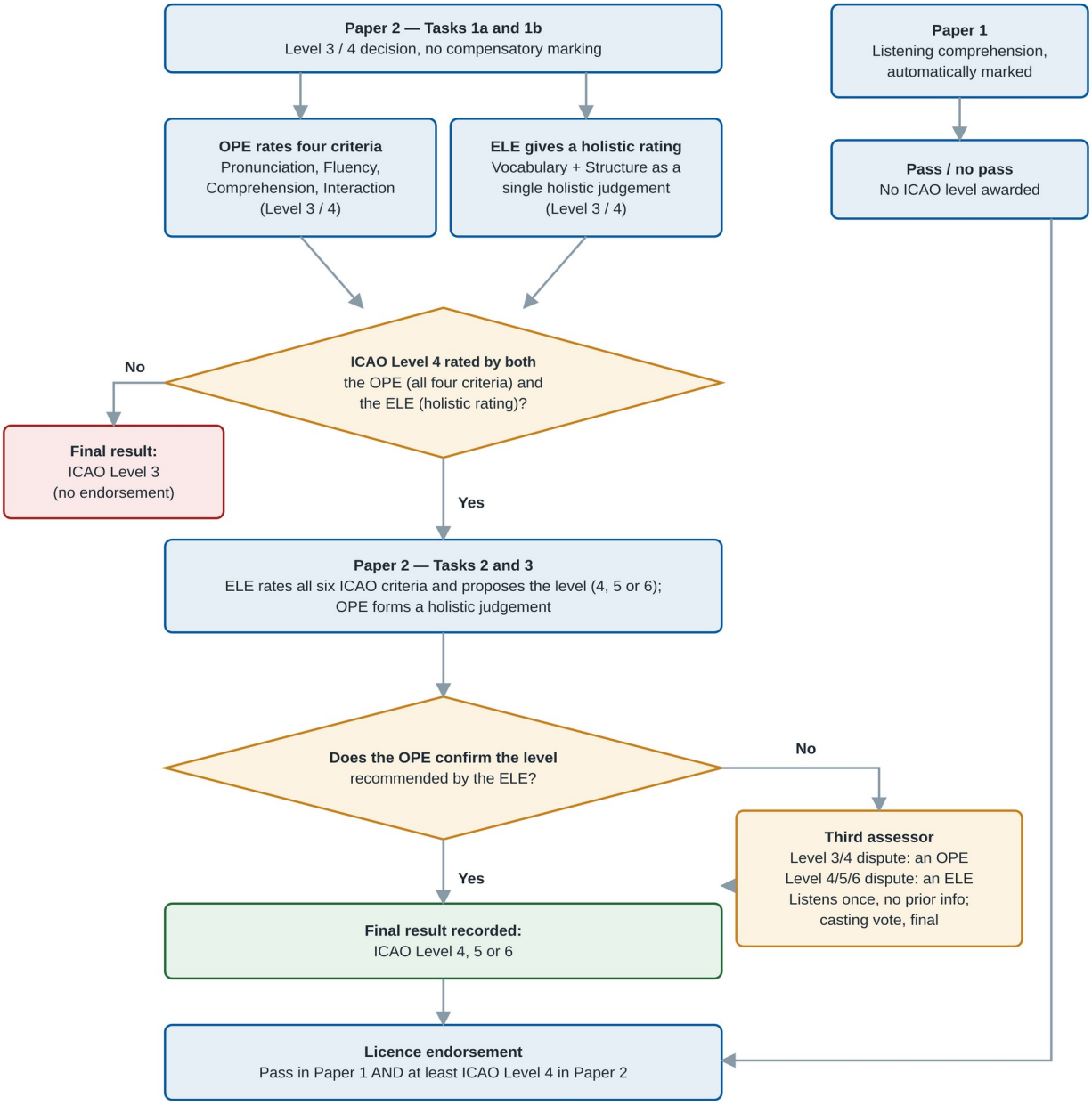
by ticking “Recommended level confirmed by the OPE” and the final level is recorded. If the OPE does not confirm, the final level is left empty pending a third assessor.

A test taker can never be awarded ICAO Level 5 or 6 without first being confirmed at ICAO Level 4 on the basis of Tasks 1a and 1b.

Table 6 — Result determination logic (ELPAC scheme)

Outcome of Tasks 1a / 1b	Outcome of Tasks 2 / 3	Final result
Level 4 not confirmed by both assessors	Not applicable	ICAO Level 3 (fail)
Level 4 confirmed by both assessors	ELE recommends a level; OPE confirms	The confirmed level: ICAO Level 4, 5 or 6
Level 4 confirmed by both assessors	OPE does not confirm the ELE's recommendation	Level left empty; third assessor assigned; the third assessor's decision is final

Figure 1 — The ELPAC scoring process, from test delivery to licence endorsement (ELPAC scheme)



5.3 Assessment criteria applied

The assessment criteria applied in Paper 2 are the six ICAO criteria, operationalised in the ELPAC assessment scheme. The ELPAC descriptors are reproduced criterion by criterion, alongside the corresponding ICAO descriptors, in Section 6 and Appendix A. In the ELE and OPE views, criteria outside the assessor's remit for the level band concerned are marked void, so that each feature of performance is judged once, by the assessor best placed to judge it.

5.4 Disagreement and the third assessor

When the OPE does not confirm the ELE's recommendation, the assessors record the main points of their discussion and their justifications in the comment box and tick Yes in the “Third Assessor required” field. The test administrator then assigns the recording to a third assessor.

- The third assessor is given no indication of the suggested level, of the test taker's performance, or of the reasons for the request.
- If the disagreement concerns the ICAO Level 3 / 4 threshold, the third assessor is an OPE. They listen to the entire recording and may not award a level higher than ICAO Level 4.
- If the disagreement concerns ICAO Level 4 or higher, the third assessor is an ELE.
- The third assessor listens to the recording once only and completes the paper third-assessor sheet, which the test administrator attaches to the test taker's file.
- The third assessor has the casting vote; their decision is final.

5.5 Issuing the final result

- The result is stored against the test taker's record in the ELPAC test system. Administrators open the test session, click the cogwheel on the test taker's line and select Paper 2 score; the scoring tab shows the final level, which is read-only.
- The test taker is informed of the outcome by the test administrator, following the testing organisation's standard reporting process.
- The result may subsequently be challenged through the appeals procedure (Section 8).

6. Assessment criteria and their correlation to the ICAO rating scale

The ELPAC assessment scheme is the operationalisation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements as described in the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale (Attachment A to ICAO Annex 1) and the holistic descriptors (Appendix 1 to ICAO Annex 1). It was developed at Lancaster University (Agius, 2018, 2024) with the input of air traffic controllers, on-the-job training instructors and pilots acting as subject matter experts.

For each of the six criteria, two tables are given below. The first reproduces the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors for Levels 3 to 6. The second gives the corresponding ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with the assessor role responsible for each level band.

6.1 Pronunciation

Pronunciation at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE, whose focus is whether the test taker is minimally competent in using a pronunciation of English that is comprehensible to an international community of controllers and pilots; the reference is the ICAO Manual of Radiotelephony (Doc 9432). At ICAO Levels 5 and 6 Pronunciation is assessed by the ELE. At Level 5 the test taker is not only understandable but easy to listen to; at Level 6 what is at stake is not native-like pronunciation but the ability to adjust pronunciation in the interest of better comprehensibility.

Table 7 — Pronunciation: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding.	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.

Table 8 — Pronunciation: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — OPE	ICAO Level 4 — OPE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker's pronunciation does not conform to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their mispronunciation of words makes them difficult to understand or even unintelligible.	The test taker's pronunciation conforms to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their pronunciation is intelligible with little effort from the listener.	The test taker has a noticeable accent, but they articulate words clearly and in a way that is easy to understand.	The test taker can adapt the way they articulate in a way that is situationally appropriate, by slowing down or speaking more deliberately for clarity.

6.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is assessed by the ELE at all ICAO levels. In Tasks 1a and 1b the ELE makes a single, lexicogrammatically informed holistic judgement covering Vocabulary and Structure together. At Level 5 the test taker draws on vocabulary from domains well beyond aeronautical radiotelephony; at Level 6 they additionally adapt their word choice to their impression of the interlocutor's ability to understand.

Table 9 — Vocabulary: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Vocabulary range and accuracy are often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete or work-related topics, but range is limited and the word choice often inappropriate. Is often unable to paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work-related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced and sensitive to register.

Table 10 — Vocabulary: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — ELE	ICAO Level 4 — ELE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker lacks control in their English language use. They have a limited vocabulary and therefore lack accuracy in speaking.	The test taker has a basic command of English sufficient for them to do their job. Their vocabulary range allows them to speak accurately.	The test taker's vocabulary range and accuracy cover a wide domain of topical knowledge that is not limited to aeronautical radiotelephony communication.	The test taker's range and accuracy of vocabulary allow them to adapt their choice of words in a way that is situationally appropriate, for example by avoiding low frequency words in the interest of comprehensibility.

6.3 Structure

Structure is assessed by the ELE at all ICAO levels, together with Vocabulary as a holistic lexicogrammatical judgement in Tasks 1a and 1b. The ICAO threshold for Level 4 is low: the test taker is not expected to use complex language and may make errors in simple structures, provided these do not get in the way of understanding.

Table 11 — Structure: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are usually well controlled. Errors in basic structures may occur, particularly in unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but have errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.

Table 12 — Structure: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — ELE	ICAO Level 4 — ELE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker only uses simple grammatical structures. They make errors which make them difficult to understand, so that the meaning can only be inferred.	They use simple grammatical structures reliably. Even when they make grammar mistakes, they remain intelligible.	The test taker makes grammatically correct sentences. Both simple and complex structures are used competently and with few isolated errors.	The test taker shows variety in their use of simple and complex grammatical structures that is situationally appropriate — for example by avoiding the use of overly complex language for clarity.

6.4 Fluency

Fluency at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE and focuses on three features of performance at the Level 3/4 threshold: speech transmitting techniques, the use of phraseology, and the use of callsigns. These descriptors are not concerned with the correct use of phraseology as such, but with radiotelephony discipline and the ability to use phraseology or plain language in a situationally appropriate way. At Levels 5 and 6 Fluency is assessed by the ELE: at Level 5 the focus is on the variety and frequency of connectors and discourse markers, at Level 6 on the ability to adjust speed and delivery to the interlocutor.

Table 13 — Fluency: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Produces stretches of language, but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness in language processing may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics, but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasise a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.

Table 14 — Fluency: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — OPE	ICAO Level 4 — OPE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker's speech transmitting techniques do not meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness, hesitations and pausing interfere with ease of comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology inconsistently: they randomly switch between phraseology and plain language. Callsigns are used inconsistently and they may fail to use phraseology correctly.	The test taker's speech transmitting techniques meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness and pausing do not interfere with comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology consistently: they prioritise the use of phraseology but can switch to appropriate plain language if necessary. Callsigns are used consistently.	The test taker uses a variety of connectors to link utterances, for example to show cause and effect.	The test taker speaks fluently and adapts the way they speak in a way that is situationally appropriate.

6.5 Comprehension

Comprehension at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE. The main difference between Level 3 and Level 4 is how the test taker handles unfamiliar or unexpected communications: a Level 3 test taker may still fail to understand even after requesting clarification, whereas a Level 4 test taker may be slow initially but applies basic clarification strategies successfully. At Levels 5 and 6, assessed by the ELE, the construct expands to understanding implicit meaning, reliably detecting miscommunication (Level 5) and negotiating for better understanding (Level 6).

Table 15 — Comprehension: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Comprehension is often accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. May fail to understand an unexpected turn of events or a situational complication.	Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics when the accents or varieties used are sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. Comprehension may be slower and require clarification strategies when confronted with an unexpected turn of events or a situational complication.	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete and work-related topics and mostly accurate when confronted with an unexpected turn of events or a situational complication. Able to comprehend a range of speech varieties and/or registers.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.

Table 16 — Comprehension: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — OPE	ICAO Level 4 — OPE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker understands routine transmissions but may fail to understand an unfamiliar accent or an unusual or unexpected situation — even after asking for clarification.	The test taker understands routine transmissions. They may be slow to understand initially in unusual or unexpected situations but can apply basic clarification strategies that lead to successful comprehension.	The test taker can handle an unusual or unexpected situation. They understand meaning even when it is stated implicitly. They reliably detect instances of miscommunication.	The test taker handles comprehension issues successfully by asking clarifying questions to check and confirm, to resolve misunderstandings, and to ensure that they have correctly understood.

6.6 Interaction

Interaction at ICAO Levels 3 and 4 is assessed by the OPE, focusing on the test taker's ability to handle misunderstandings and negotiate for better understanding, including making sure the interlocutor has correctly understood them. At Levels 5 and 6 Interaction is assessed by the ELE. Paraphrasing itself is assessed under Vocabulary; Interaction is concerned with the test taker's sensitivity to interlocutor feedback and how they respond to it.

Table 17 — Interaction: ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale descriptors (ICAO Annex 1, Attachment A)

ICAO Level 3	ICAO Level 4	ICAO Level 5	ICAO Level 6
Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate and informative. Able to initiate and maintain exchanges on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are usually immediate, appropriate and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming or clarifying.	Responses are immediate, appropriate and informative. Manages the speaker–listener relationship effectively.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues and responds to them appropriately.

Table 18 — Interaction: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors, with assessor role

ICAO Level 3 — OPE	ICAO Level 4 — OPE	ICAO Level 5 — ELE	ICAO Level 6 — ELE
The test taker is unable to detect and resolve instances of miscommunication. When a misunderstanding occurs, they lack the ability to negotiate for better understanding. They are unable to adapt the way they speak.	The test taker can adapt and vary the way they formulate transmissions on the radiotelephony frequency in a way that is situationally appropriate and leads to communicative success in the interest of safety, expediency and efficiency. They apply basic clarification strategies to ensure they have been understood correctly.	The test taker's responses are concise and to the point. They respond appropriately to meaning, even when it is only stated implicitly, by checking and clarifying.	The test taker interacts with ease with interlocutors at all proficiency levels. They provide feedback to interlocutors to indicate that they understand and ask probing questions to ensure the interlocutor is able to follow.

7. Quality assurance

7.1 Assessor accreditation and standardisation

Accreditation is granted following the ELPAC ACR course delivered by the EUROCONTROL Aviation Learning Centre. The course combines theoretical input on the ICAO rating scale, the holistic descriptors and the ELPAC assessment scheme with practical rating and interlocution practice, and candidates are recommended for accreditation in their respective assessor role on the basis of their performance. Appendix B of the ELPAC Handbook, which sets out the operationalisation reproduced in Section 6 of this document, forms a substantial part of the ACR training syllabus.

Accredited assessors maintain their accreditation through the ELPAC REF refresher course, which includes calibration activities to ensure consistency between assessors and updates on the current grading scheme and materials.

7.2 Control of construct-irrelevant variance

Construct-irrelevant variance refers to factors that influence the test result but have nothing to do with the test taker's language performance. The most common source is the assessor's own behaviour, described in the assessment literature as co-variance or co-production. ELPAC controls for this through scripted interlocution in Tasks 1a and 3, standardised follow-up questions in Tasks 1b and 2, automatic marking of Paper 1, the separation of assessor roles, independent grading before consolidation, and audio recording of every Paper 2 session.

7.3 Assessor fatigue

Language assessment requires sustained concentration. To mitigate assessor fatigue, it is recommended that one assessor team (one OPE and one ELE) does not assess more than six Paper 2 tests per day, and that assessments are scheduled so that assessors have sufficient breaks between them.

8. Re-sits and appeals

8.1 Re-sit recommendations

Statistical analysis of past results has shown that test takers who re-sit the ELPAC test after only a short period do not achieve significantly different results. Test takers who fail to achieve ICAO Level 4 should focus on improving their English language proficiency before attempting the test again. Local legislation and licensing rules prevail; ELPAC test centres are responsible for ensuring their practices comply with ELPAC guidelines and local rules.

- First-time test takers may re-sit immediately or very shortly after their first ELPAC test.
- For test takers already familiar with the ELPAC format, a period of three months between two complete ELPAC tests is recommended.
- In case of special circumstances, such as technical errors or test taker distraction, an immediate re-sit shall be organised.

8.2 Appeals

Every test taker is entitled to initiate an appeal. The appeal shall be filed within 14 days of receiving the results, using the ELPAC appeal form submitted to the test centre administrator, who confirms the start of the process. The appeals process shall be completed within four weeks. These provisions are the ELPAC default: where the local competent authority prescribes or approves a different appeals procedure or different time limits, the procedure of that authority prevails. An appeal may concern Paper 1 test conditions, Paper 1 results, Paper 2 assessor behaviour or test conditions, or Paper 2 results.

Appeals concerning Paper 2 assessor behaviour or Paper 2 results trigger the assignment of a third assessor, who reviews the recording without any indication of the suggested level, the reasons for the appeal or the test taker's identity. The third assessor's decision is conclusive for the test outcome. Only in exceptional cases may the EUROCONTROL ELPAC team be asked for an additional opinion; that opinion is not binding on the test centre administrator.

Record retention. Candidate records, including the assessors' assessment scores and the Paper 2 audio recording, are retained for 10 years. Where the final result is ICAO Level 6, the records are retained for 50 years. ELPAC test centres may, in addition, keep records of their own test takers on file. This retention practice meets the applicable regulatory requirements. The scoring process set out in this document is also part of the ELPAC Handbook.

Appendix A — ICAO rating scale and ELPAC descriptors at a glance

The table below sets out, for each criterion and each ICAO level from 3 to 6, the assessor role responsible in ELPAC and the ELPAC descriptor applied. It is a consolidated view of the tables in Section 6. Levels 1 and 2 of the ICAO scale are outside the reporting scope of ELPAC.

Table 19 — Pronunciation: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	OPE	The test taker's pronunciation does not conform to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their mispronunciation of words makes them difficult to understand or even unintelligible.
Level 4	OPE	The test taker's pronunciation conforms to ICAO recommendations for use on the RTF. Their pronunciation is intelligible with little effort from the listener.
Level 5	ELE	The test taker has a noticeable accent, but they articulate words clearly and in a way that is easy to understand.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker can adapt the way they articulate in a way that is situationally appropriate, by slowing down or speaking more deliberately for clarity.

Table 20 — Vocabulary: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	ELE	The test taker lacks control in their English language use. They have a limited vocabulary and therefore lack accuracy in speaking.
Level 4	ELE	The test taker has a basic command of English sufficient for them to do their job. Their vocabulary range allows them to speak accurately.
Level 5	ELE	The test taker's vocabulary range and accuracy cover a wide domain of topical knowledge that is not limited to aeronautical radiotelephony communication.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker's range and accuracy of vocabulary allow them to adapt their choice of words in a way that is situationally appropriate, for example by avoiding low frequency words in the interest of comprehensibility.

Table 21 — Structure: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	ELE	The test taker only uses simple grammatical structures. They make errors which make them difficult to understand, so that the meaning can only be inferred.
Level 4	ELE	They use simple grammatical structures reliably. Even when they make grammar mistakes, they remain intelligible.
Level 5	ELE	The test taker makes grammatically correct sentences. Both simple and complex structures are used competently and with few isolated errors.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker shows variety in their use of simple and complex grammatical structures that is situationally appropriate — for example by avoiding the use of overly complex language for clarity.

Table 22 — Fluency: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	OPE	The test taker's speech transmitting techniques do not meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness, hesitations and pausing interfere with ease of comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology inconsistently: they randomly switch between phraseology and plain language. Callsigns are used inconsistently and they may fail to use phraseology correctly.
Level 4	OPE	The test taker's speech transmitting techniques meet ICAO recommendations for intelligibility. Slowness and pausing do not interfere with comprehensibility. The test taker uses phraseology consistently: they prioritise the use of phraseology but can switch to appropriate plain language if necessary. Callsigns are used consistently.
Level 5	ELE	The test taker uses a variety of connectors to link utterances, for example to show cause and effect.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker speaks fluently and adapts the way they speak in a way that is situationally appropriate.

Table 23 — Comprehension: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	OPE	The test taker understands routine transmissions but may fail to understand an unfamiliar accent or an unusual or unexpected situation — even after asking for clarification.
Level 4	OPE	The test taker understands routine transmissions. They may be slow to understand initially in unusual or unexpected situations but can apply basic clarification strategies that lead to successful comprehension.

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 5	ELE	The test taker can handle an unusual or unexpected situation. They understand meaning even when it is stated implicitly. They reliably detect instances of miscommunication.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker handles comprehension issues successfully by asking clarifying questions to check and confirm, to resolve misunderstandings, and to ensure that they have correctly understood.

Table 24 — Interaction: ELPAC assessment scheme descriptors by ICAO level (ELPAC scheme)

ICAO level	Assessed by	ELPAC descriptor
Level 3	OPE	The test taker is unable to detect and resolve instances of miscommunication. When a misunderstanding occurs, they lack the ability to negotiate for better understanding. They are unable to adapt the way they speak.
Level 4	OPE	The test taker can adapt and vary the way they formulate transmissions on the radiotelephony frequency in a way that is situationally appropriate and leads to communicative success in the interest of safety, expediency and efficiency. They apply basic clarification strategies to ensure they have been understood correctly.
Level 5	ELE	The test taker's responses are concise and to the point. They respond appropriately to meaning, even when it is only stated implicitly, by checking and clarifying.
Level 6	ELE	The test taker interacts with ease with interlocutors at all proficiency levels. They provide feedback to interlocutors to indicate that they understand and ask probing questions to ensure the interlocutor is able to follow.

Appendix B — Coverage matrix

Table 25 — Criterion, task and assessor coverage (ELPAC scheme)

Criterion	Task 1a	Task 1b	Task 2	Task 3
Pronunciation	OPE (L3/L4)	OPE (L3/L4)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Fluency	OPE (L3/L4)	OPE (L3/L4)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Comprehension	OPE (L3/L4)	OPE (L3/L4)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Interaction	OPE (L3/L4)	OPE (L3/L4)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Vocabulary	ELE (holistic)	ELE (holistic)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Structure	ELE (holistic)	ELE (holistic)	ELE (L4–L6)	ELE (L4–L6)
Holistic confirmation	—	—	OPE	OPE

In Tasks 1a and 1b the ELE records a single holistic, lexicogrammatically informed judgement covering Vocabulary and Structure. In Tasks 2 and 3 the ELE rates all six criteria and the OPE contributes a holistic confirmation of the recommended level.

Appendix C — Worked examples

The following examples illustrate the two-step procedure described in Section 5.2. In every case the final result is expressed as an ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale level.

Example 1 — Fail at the Level 4 gate

Table 26 — Example 1: application of the ELPAC result determination rules (ELPAC scheme)

Step	Assessment	Consequence
Tasks 1a / 1b — OPE	Pronunciation 4, Fluency 4, Comprehension 3, Interaction 4	Level 4 not reached on every criterion
Tasks 1a / 1b — ELE	Vocabulary and Structure holistic: Level 4	Level 4 in the ELE view
Level 4 gate	“Level 4 observed by both the ELE and OPE” ticked No	No compensation for the strong criteria
Final result	Tasks 2 and 3 cannot raise the outcome	ICAO Level 3 (fail)

Example 2 — Level recommendation confirmed

Table 27 — Example 2: application of the ELPAC result determination rules (ELPAC scheme)

Step	Assessment	Consequence
Tasks 1a / 1b — OPE	Level 4 on all four criteria	Level 4 in the OPE view
Tasks 1a / 1b — ELE	Level 4 on the holistic lexicogrammatical judgement	Level 4 gate passed
Tasks 2 / 3 — ELE	Six criteria rated; Structure is the weakest at Level 5	ELE recommends ICAO Level 5
Tasks 2 / 3 — OPE	Holistic judgement consistent with the recommendation	“Recommended level confirmed by the OPE” ticked Yes
Final result	Recorded in the test taker's record	ICAO Level 5

Example 3 — Disagreement resolved by a third assessor

Table 28 — Example 3: application of the ELPAC result determination rules (ELPAC scheme)

Step	Assessment	Consequence
Tasks 1a / 1b	Level 4 confirmed by both assessors	Level 4 gate passed
Tasks 2 / 3 — ELE	Recommends ICAO Level 5	Recommendation recorded
Tasks 2 / 3 — OPE	Does not confirm; discussion summarised in the comment box	“Third Assessor required” ticked Yes; final level left empty
Third assessor	Disagreement concerns Level 4 or higher, so an ELE is assigned; listens to the recording once, with no indication of the level or the reasons	Third assessor awards ICAO Level 4
Final result	The third assessor has the casting vote	ICAO Level 4

For completeness, the principle underlying the Level 4 gate is the ICAO rule that there is no accumulative score: a test taker must reach at least Level 4 in every one of the six criteria. A profile of 4, 3, 4, 4, 5, 4 averages to Level 4 but is a fail, because of the Level 3 in one criterion.