

The UAV Academy is Flying High with TestReach, Delivering Accredited Drone Flight Training Online with Examinations via Remote Invigilation



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Background

The UAV Academy (UAVA) is a UK-based organisation who train and assess pilots of Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA). The UAV Academy is a National Qualified Entity (NQE) approved by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), focussed on helping pilots to engage in safe and effective commercial drone operations. Successful completion of the UAVA course culminates in a recommendation to the CAA that the learner be issued with a Permission For Commercial Operations (PfCO).

The decision was taken by The UAV Academy to move the whole PfCO course online (apart from the practical in-field assessment) because it became apparent that those who accessed material online were learning as much, if not more, than those participating in the original classroom-based approach. Learners could study at their own pace, rather than spending two days engaged in intensive classroom learning, immediately followed by the paper-based theory test. Moving online was more convenient and flexible for students, who did not have to travel to a specific location or take days off work. The challenge for UAVA was how to move the entire theoretical part of the course online - including the final theory examination. How could the examination be provided online in a way that maintained the security and integrity of the result? And if this were possible, could it be done in a way that would comply with the requirements of the accrediting body - the Civil Aviation Authority?

Solution

UAVA found the answer when they discovered TestReach. With TestReach, UAVA could deliver the final theory examination online using secure remote invigilation (online proctoring). The exam hall experience is re-created in an online environment, and the exam candidate is monitored over the web for the duration of their exam using video, audio and remote screenshare. This remote supervision is an integral part of the comprehensive assessment application, with invigilation provided by in-house TestReach trained supervisors, ensuring a secure and professional service.

The Civil Aviation Authority, as the accrediting body, reviewed the TestReach remote invigilation service and approved this exam delivery method for the PFCO theory exam. It was clear to both UAVA and the CAA that TestReach remote invigilation was as secure as in-person invigilation. Each candidate is more closely monitored than in a group classroom environment, with each test taker and their screen being viewed on a clear video feed, and everything is recorded for future review if required.

TestReach has other beneficial functionality that appealed to UAVA. The ability to create a number of question pools was very useful as a way to manage the various topics included in the theory exam. UAVA also welcomed the flexibility to use a wide range of engaging question types to test real understanding, allowing the inclusion of visual case studies like maps. With TestReach a unique test paper could be created for each candidate, by automatically pulling randomised questions from each question pool according to pre-defined rules. The TestReach marking module enabled the exam to be marked automatically, with results and detailed feedback issued to candidates as soon as they had finished their examination.

Results

TestReach remote invigilation has facilitated moving the PFCO course completely online. This has provided numerous benefits for UAVA. The PFCO training industry had become very localised, with participants picking the nearest training centre to where they lived. Now UAVA can provide training and qualifications to people all over the UK and internationally, with candidates coming from as far afield as Malawi, Gibraltar and even The Falkland Islands. Candidates greatly appreciate this convenience, which saves them having to take two days off work to travel and attend classroom sessions.

Initially there were fears that the quality of the output would be lowered without classroom-based training, but the results have proved otherwise. Practical flight examiners find that students now have a higher level of understanding and knowledge. Feedback from students illustrated that they prefer to study at their own pace, and take time on the areas they find difficult.

When they feel ready the student can book their slot and take their exam within a few days. Candidates sit their exam when it is convenient and when they feel prepared. This is preferable to waiting for a test venue to be set up and then having to travel, or sitting the theory exam at the end of classroom training and becoming stressed or underperforming due to lack of preparation time.

When the test was paper-based, exam questions would be unchanged for a period of time increasing the risk that they could become compromised. With TestReach, each candidate now has a unique exam paper with an equivalent difficulty level, as questions are pulled randomly from each question pool. This means that there is no easy way to share or know in advance what questions will be presented, which maintains a higher level of security.

“Taking the course online and being able to provide the exam online has no doubt spread our net wider across the UK, as we get bookings from much further afield than we used to,” said Andrew Bailey, founder and Head of Training at The UAV Academy. “Instead of having to commit to a two-day classroom training session with an exam at the end, our students can do this completely online, with only a half day of in-field face-to-face practical assessment. It has made a big difference as our volumes are significantly higher and we’re driving our fixed costs down to the minimum, so we can offer our course at a much more competitive price. Our position in the market is one of convenience as we are much less disruptive to the learner’s life – they can now study at their own pace and take their accredited theory exam when they feel ready for it. We’re also delighted to see that the quality of our learners’ output has increased overall.”

“The TestReach solution is the missing piece of the jigsaw that we needed in order to move the theory training and examination fully online,” said Bailey. “They have been great to work with and I am a very happy customer. TestReach was very supportive in helping us obtain the CAA accreditation for our exam with remote invigilation delivery, and feedback from exam candidates is that the support team are very efficient and helpful. TestReach has hit on a really good combination of services to solve a particular problem and I’m very pleased to be working with them.”