

## Business

# The sky is the limit for private pilot training enterprise

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HAWKE'S BAY REPORTER

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**TAKING OFF:** Air Hawke's Bay chief executive Kevin English, right, with student Liam Northcott.

The clear sky above Hawke's Bay is proving a popular training ground for new pilots.

Each year Air Hawke's Bay produces qualified pilots and each year more international students are coming to the region to gain their wings.

The favourable weather and abundance of airspace means learner pilots are likely to clock up more mileage in Hawke's Bay.

Chief executive Kevin England said this coupled with fewer air traffic delays and no air traffic control costs helps contribute to the success of the flight school at Hastings Aerodrome.

Air Hawke's Bay is a wholly-owned company of the Hawke's Bay and East Coast Aero Club Inc. It specialises in full-time training for domestic and international students as well as providing an air charter service.

Training two years for a commercial pilot's licence can cost up to \$100,000. With the recent budget announcement, on student-loan restrictions specific to pilot training, future students will have to fund about \$30,000 themselves.

Mr England worries this will impact the supply chain of instructors.

"Short-changing the supply chain with instructors will be an impediment to our growth plans."

Air Hawke's Bay was the first New Zealand flight training provider to be accredited with Civil Aviation Authority, training and assessment certificate, back in 1997.

Prior to the formation of Air Hawke's Bay in 1996, the aero club delivered aviation education for more than 75 years.

Over the past decade Air Hawke's Bay has delivered an internship programme in partnership with Eastern Institute of Technology.

This year marks Air Hawke's Bay's first year as a private training institute, and as the sole provider of the qualification in the region. Fifteen qualified instructors teach the students in an aircraft fleet that includes Piper Tomahawks and Cherokees, Cessna 172s, a Rockwell Commander and Twin Engine Piper Senecas.

Students who enrol with Air Hawke's Bay will be joining one of the five flight training organisations selected to partner with New Zealand Aviation Institute in providing training options for aspiring pilots.

Under the new national qualification, government funding provides 25 positions on the two-year course for New Zealand students, but the door is always open to international students, many of whom come from Asia, the South Pacific and the Middle East.

An international student brings in significant revenue as well as an economic flow-on which contributes to the \$10 million to \$12 million the aerodrome generates.

The school hosts up to 40 international students a year, but Mr England and his team want to push this up to between 40 and 60.

"To achieve this target requires an adequate supplement of flight instructors which is challenging in an active job market," Mr England said.

This year, the Hastings Aerodrome entered into a partnership with Hawke's Bay Airport, Business Hawke's Bay, Hawke's Bay Tourism, Hastings District Council and Napier City Council to build an aviation cluster under the banner of Hawke's Bay Aviation Partnership.

The New Zealand aviation industry is forecast to grow to \$12.6 billion by 2015 and with Hawke's Bay's "wealth of real estate and airspace" Mr England wants the region to have a share of that.

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