
How to be a senior person



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Cover photo: Jason Haggitt is the operations manager and a senior person with Helilink, which operates the Wellington-based Westpac Rescue Helicopter on behalf of the Life Flight Trust.

Opposite page: Senior persons must demonstrate authentic leadership skills. But, rather than asking, 'how does this person's leadership skills contribute to the organisation's bottom line?' the CAA asks, 'how does this person's leadership skills contribute to developing an effective safety culture?' Photo: istockphoto.com/pixelfit

Every effort is made to ensure the information in this booklet is accurate and up-to-date at the time of publishing, but numerous changes can occur with time, especially in regard to airspace and legislation. Readers are reminded to obtain appropriate up-to-date information.



See the CAA website for Civil Aviation Rules, advisory circulars, airworthiness directives, forms, and more safety publications. Visit www.caa.govt.nz.

Introduction

So you want to be a senior person? It's a rewarding position which gives you the opportunity to provide safety leadership and add value to the business. But it's not for the faint-hearted.

The role cannot be underestimated and requires a commitment to the continual enhancement of safety, and a commitment to the time it takes to do that properly.

The role

The safety-critical role of a senior person is pivotal to an aviation organisation's success.

It's also a requirement of the Civil Aviation Rules. An organisation cannot become the holder of a certificate without senior persons in place, or continue to carry out its planned activities, if a senior person position remains vacant.

Senior persons effectively manage all the functions associated with an operation, and foster the safety culture of the organisation. They exercise an appropriate level of control, direction, and responsibility to ensure the continued safety, and effective running of the varying operations.

The rules require a senior person, identified as the chief executive, to be responsible for ensuring that the activities of the organisation can be financed and carried out in accordance with the rules. With the introduction of safety management systems (SMS), the chief executive also has ultimate accountability for the implementation and effectiveness of the SMS.

Depending on the type of certificate, other senior persons are responsible for certain supervisory functions. In the case of an air operator, this would include: air operations, supporting ground operations, training and competency assessment, the control and scheduling of maintenance, the system for safety management, air operator security, conducting occurrence investigations, and ensuring the organisation complies with its exposition.

While not necessarily senior in years, senior persons are experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable. They have sufficient time, resources, and authority to fulfil their responsibilities.

By their actions and words, the chief executive and the senior management team – which includes senior persons – set the boundaries of acceptable performance for the organisation's personnel.

Senior persons need to emphasise and support the adherence to safe practice, policies and procedures, and open sharing of information and concerns.

They must understand human factors, and find the right balance between managing human error and holding individuals to account.

They have a responsibility to create a positive organisational culture to enhance safety performance, and prevent accidents.

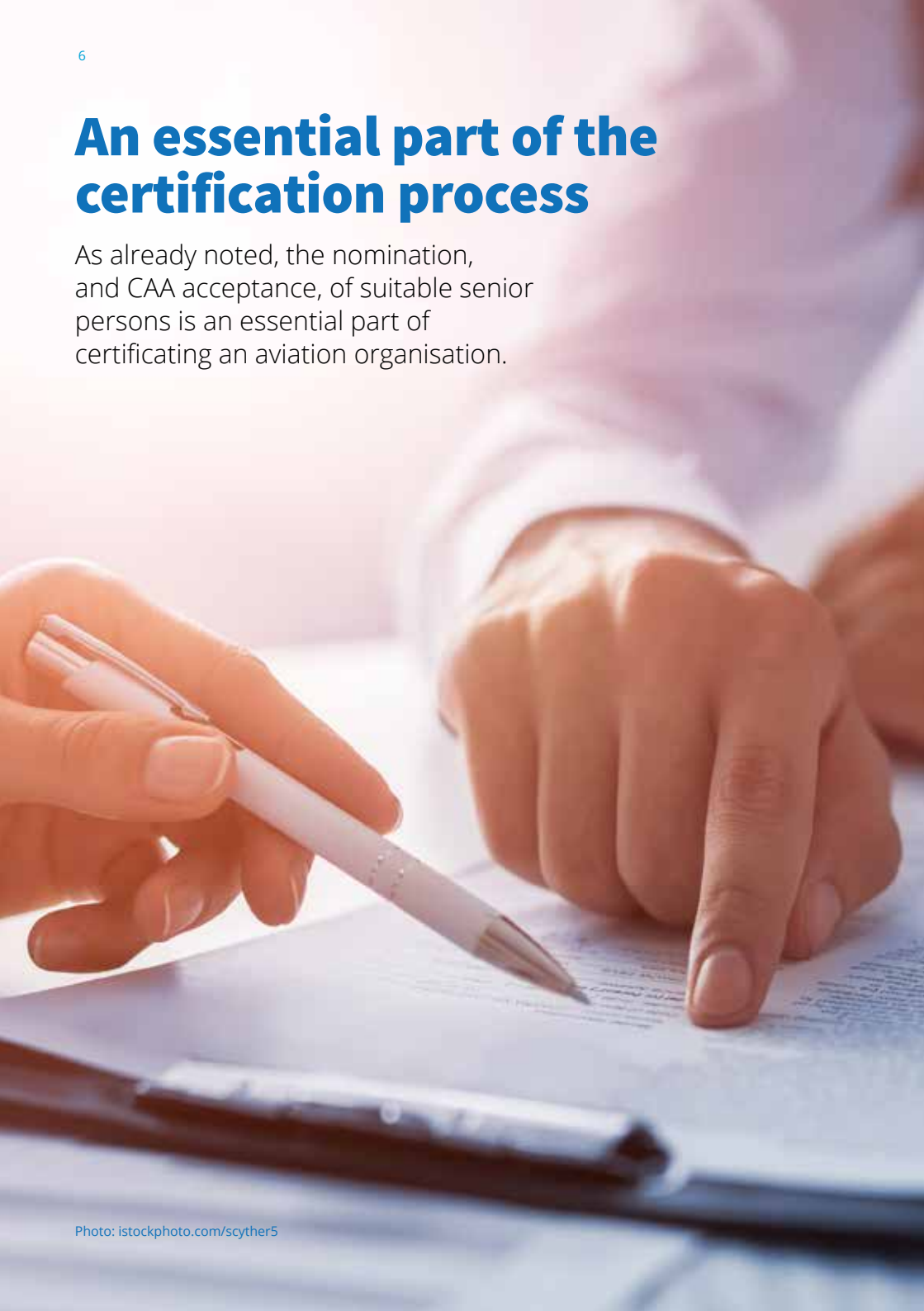
>> The candidate must have an in-depth knowledge of their company's exposition, and a good working knowledge of the applicable rules and advisory circulars.





An essential part of the certification process

As already noted, the nomination, and CAA acceptance, of suitable senior persons is an essential part of certifying an aviation organisation.



Approval of a nominated senior person is never automatic, and it's not uncommon for a senior person candidate to be declined by the CAA.

Often that's because they, or the applicant on whose behalf they are applying, or both, have insufficient understanding of what the role involves.

One candidate, having been initially declined as a senior person, was at first aggrieved by the decision. Later, however, after more experience in the role – supervised – and in management, they admitted that being declined was understandable: that in the beginning, they literally didn't know what they didn't know.

But being turned down by the CAA is stressful to the candidate, an added cost to the applicant that has put them up for the interview, and can cause delays in certification.

// It is the responsibility of the chief executive to ensure only capable and qualified senior person candidates are nominated. Putting the 'right' person forward for senior person will maximise the likelihood of a successful application. //

An applicant can minimise such unhappy situations by considering, in good faith, whether their candidate:

- has the necessary experience, knowledge, and expertise to fully carry out the role
- has the time and attention to fully carry out the role
- is fully prepared for the senior person interview
- understands the obligations of the role
- will be able to carry out the role unimpeded by any barriers or behavioural problems
- doesn't just meet the regulatory requirements, but has the good character, the right culture, and the ability to lead by example.

That last trait is particularly important. It's not enough for the senior person to say 'everyone must act safely'. The candidate must be able to demonstrate to the CAA that they live and breathe that.

To that end, a positive attitude towards communicating, including and importantly with the CAA, is an essential trait in a senior person.

The CAA will be asking things like:

- what is the candidate's attitude to employees reporting problems to them?
- what is their response to employees offering good suggestions about improvements?
- what is their attitude to employees reporting occurrences to the CAA?
- if they had a serious occurrence or deficiency at their organisation, who would they talk to about that?

Given the critical nature of the supervisory aspect of the senior person role, it's important any candidate can demonstrate how they are prepared to go beyond simple compliance with the rules, describing how they would raise the safety bar at their organisation. SMS provides a framework to assist them.



Don't delay

Nominating suitable people is just one thing an applicant can do to make sure becoming certificated is a smooth process.

They also need to nominate their senior person candidate early in the application process. It's not uncommon for an organisation – having made a major financial commitment, and putting themselves in a position of having to generate cash flow sooner rather than later – to overlook the basic requirement of the certification process of nominating appropriate senior persons.

Sometimes, an organisation considers the personnel requirements so late that – while everything else may be in place – their application is much delayed.

If an applicant has no one they can nominate from within their own organisation, they can contract from outside – at least until such time as someone else gathers enough experience to apply successfully to be a senior person.

Do your research

The Civil Aviation Act 1990 is the primary legislation underpinning aviation safety in New Zealand, and a good understanding of its requirements is essential.

The candidate must have an in-depth knowledge of their company's exposition, and a good working knowledge of the applicable rules and advisory circulars.

Some other fundamental requirements for the nomination of senior persons are found in the Act: Section 9 *Grant or renewal of aviation document* and Section 10 *Criteria for fit and proper person test*. Other information can be found in Section 12 *General requirements for participants in the civil aviation system*.

The candidate must be a natural person (not a body corporate) and must be employed, contracted or otherwise engaged to work sufficient hours so they can fulfil the senior person functions appropriate to the size and scope of the organisation's business.

The person nominated by the applicant also has to be experienced in the particular area they will have oversight of.

Having the time

Any candidate for senior person should be assessing whether they have the time to do justice to the role they're going to be employed or contracted to do.

In asking that question of themselves, if the honest answer is 'no' they should be having a talk with their chief executive before their application gets to the CAA.

Since people often hold multiple roles in an organisation, or multiple roles within industry, the CAA needs to be convinced the candidate will have enough time to be effective. For instance, if not full time on site, will they spend enough time there, will they dedicate enough time to do the job properly? The CAA needs confidence that not only is the candidate capable, but they're actually going to be dedicating sufficient time to their responsibilities.

Senior persons, particularly in a small organisation, don't have to be on site all the time. In an era of mobile phones and internet meetings, a certain amount of time can be spent away from the base of operations. As they're in a supervisory role, however, it's very hard to promote change, and to supervise and monitor the organisation completely from afar. So it's expected they will exercise visible leadership and allocate an appropriate amount of time to on site activities.

>> If not full time, and with perhaps multiple roles in industry, will a senior person candidate spend enough time on site? Will they dedicate enough time to do the job properly? Photo: [istockphoto.com/poba](https://www.istockphoto.com/poba)





The interview

Section 9 of the Act requires the applicant for certification (that's the aviation organisation) "and any person who is to have or is likely to have control over the exercise of privileges under the document (that's the organisational certificate) is a fit and proper person to have such control". It also provides for the Director to be satisfied that granting the document "is not contrary to the interests of aviation safety".

To help establish that, the CAA will assess a nominated person during a formal, recorded, more-or-less 90-minute interview, to establish the candidate's competence to perform their designated roles and to ensure the continuing safety of the operation.

Following an initial review and discussion of the applicant's qualifications and experience, the candidate will be expected to be able to:

- describe how their experience and skills are relevant and applicable to the intended position
- give an accurate overview of their intended role
- demonstrate their knowledge of the organisation, its activities and its exposition
- demonstrate their knowledge of the intended duties, their responsibilities and accountabilities and position description, and the extent of their authority to make decisions, including any financial authority
- explain what resources are available to them to fulfil their role

- describe the time they will dedicate to the role, and how any other commitments that could interfere with the exercise of their responsibility will be managed. They may even be asked to quantify the hours they plan to spend carrying out the role
- explain where they will be living in relation to the organisation's location, and whether this could impact on their ability to perform in the role
- demonstrate their knowledge of the Act, rule and advisory circular requirements, and describe how the various regulatory requirements apply to their intended position
- demonstrate their knowledge of applicable standards and best practices
- demonstrate knowledge of hazards and risks applicable to their organisation and role, and how those risks will be managed
- explain and demonstrate their attitude toward compliance and safety by their understanding of safety and risk, and how they intend to achieve good safety performance within their area of responsibility
- describe how any potential conflicts of interest will be managed.

Usually within a few days, the CAA will review the outcome of the interview and complete any required follow-up before providing the candidate with the results of their assessment.





And then ...

The CAA is always interested in the ongoing ability of the senior person to do their job.

Senior persons are expected to keep themselves up-to-date with professional development, with rule changes, and with changes to their company's exposition. They are expected to attend user group meetings or relevant professional gatherings. They need to stay ahead of the game.

It would be a mistake for a newly appointed senior person to think they were now 'through the gate' and they can take their foot off the pedal. Attitude is demonstrated through behaviour so a senior person must, to retain

the position, constantly illustrate that they are positive, proactive, and constructive.

Their ability to effectively carry out the role will continue to be monitored, as will their ability to meet the fit and proper person requirements. It's definitely not a matter of a box tick every five years.

Good senior persons can be trusted by the CAA to get on the phone to the Authority to discuss anything concerning them about their organisation. They're trusted to communicate



Good senior persons can be trusted by the CAA to get on the phone to the Authority to discuss anything concerning them about their organisation. Photo: istockphoto.com/sierrarat

quickly, clearly, and not to 'manage' the message. The CAA will be interested to hear what they have done, or intend to do, to address the issues in terms of corrective or preventative actions.

They must also demonstrate authentic leadership skills. But, rather than asking, 'how does this person's leadership skills contribute to the organisation's bottom line?' the CAA asks, 'how does this person's leadership skills contribute to developing an effective safety culture?'

If your senior person changes

Because a certificated organisation's senior persons are named in its exposition, if they change, so too must the exposition.

That change must be formally notified to the CAA on specific documentation, and approved by the CAA, before executing the change. For more, visit www.caa.govt.nz and search on 'forms'.

And we recommend that if you're a senior person leaving an organisation, you make sure you receive written acknowledgement from that organisation, of your intended departure date.

It may also be appropriate to let the CAA know that you are moving on.



Read on

- Visit www.caa.govt.nz, and search on 'senior person' in the rules, and advisory circulars
- Also have a look at advisory circular AC100-1 *Safety Management Systems*
- And review the Fit and Proper Person Policy.



Good Aviation Practice



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New Zealand Government

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