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ATEC Publishes Annual Pipeline Report: Downturn Hampered Mechanic-pipeline Growth Trajectory, But Doesn't Shift Long-term Needs

Push to address projected mechanic shortage gets some good news as graduate population grows more diverse, enrollments grow

JENKS, Oklahoma – Strong momentum at the front of the mechanic pipeline in 2019 was slowed by the historic industry downturn, but the long-term need for more skilled technicians has not changed, says a new report from the Aviation Technical Education Council (ATEC). This, the 2021 Pipeline Report adds, increases the urgency to the already-established priority of ensuring the pipeline is leveraging all available resources, including capacity in aviation maintenance technician schools (AMTS).

In 2020, the FAA issued 30 percent fewer airframe and powerplant (A&P) mechanic certificates than it did the previous year—a devastating drop given the workforce development strides made in 2019 when more individuals achieved FAA mechanic certification than in any of the previous 17 years. While the dip is likely an anomaly related to the COVID-19 pandemic's ramifications, the long-term effect of the pandemic on the mechanic pipeline remains unclear.

Demand, however, has not changed. Commercial air transport passenger traffic is on track to recover by 2023-24, and the U.S. market is already approaching 2019's capacity figures. Despite the short-term decline in maintenance demand triggered by reduced flying and related employment reductions, long-term forecasts continue to project a shortage in qualified mechanics.

The mechanic population is expected to increase 13 percent over the next 20 years, but ultimately fall 12,000 mechanics short of meeting commercial aviation needs in 2041. This optimistic scenario assumes pre-pandemic certification rates return.

Despite the overall drop in newly certified A&P mechanics, 2020 did include some positive development. AMTS reported 11 percent of A&P graduates were female, compared to 2.6 percent representation in the broader mechanic population. In addition, 40 percent of graduates represent a racial or ethnic minority. In addition, AMTS enrollments increased 5 percent in 2020—a drop over 2019's increase, but still a welcome sign during an historic downturn.

"The entire commercial aviation industry was brought to its knees in 2020, and the mechanic pipeline was no different," said Crystal Maguire, ATEC Executive Director. "Despite the decline in newly certificated mechanics, the uptick in enrollments and the expanding diversity of new

graduates are not only encouraging signs, but clues to how we can help bridge the gap between the number of mechanics we will have and are projected to need in two decades.”

Industry's need to innovate quickly during the pandemic has led to some positive developments. Virtual learning gained acceptance, for instance, and ATEC's new foundation, Choose Aerospace, was re-envisioned to better serve the maintenance industry by focusing on high school curriculum development.

"Successful leadership means embracing the opportunities that a crisis creates," said Gary Hoyle, ATEC President and Director of Campus Operations at Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics. "ATEC's leadership did not lose its focus on the most important issues to members and the aviation maintenance industry, and are leveraging some of the downturn's silver linings to help our community recover and grow even stronger."

Download the 2021 Pipeline Report & Aviation Maintenance School Directory at
www.atec-amt.org/pipeline-report.

Register to attend a Nov. 10 informational briefing at
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5380706859821051919>.

About ATEC: ATEC is a partnership of aviation maintenance training schools and employers. The council is dedicated to promoting and supporting technician education through its communications, advocacy programs and networking events. To learn more, visit <http://www.atec-amt.org/>.