FAA

FAA Has Taken Steps To Validate Its Air Traffic Skills Assessment Test but Lacks a Plan To Evaluate Its Effectiveness

FAA Has Taken Steps To Validate Its Air Traffic Skills Assessment Test but Lacks a Plan To Evaluate Its Effectiveness

Mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020

Federal Aviation Administration | AV2023011 | January 11, 2023

What We Looked At

FAA relies on its highly-trained Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS) to safely and efficiently manage the flow of air traffic across the National Airspace System. In 2012, FAA undertook a review of the ATCS hiring process that identified the need to update its ATCS pre-employment test. In response, FAA deployed the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA) test in November 2016. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 mandated that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) assess the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the ATSA. Accordingly, we initiated this audit to assess FAA's (1) validation of the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the air traffic controller pre-employment test and (2) administration of the test and its plans to evaluate the test's effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates.

What We Found

FAA has taken steps to validate the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the ATSA. FAA worked with a human resource consulting organization, APTMetrics, to identify the critical skills, abilities, and other characteristics (SAO) required to perform important ATCS responsibilities. FAA then worked with APTMetrics, NATCA, and various subject matter experts to ensure that the ATSA evaluates the SAOs required for entry level ATCS. Also, the ATSA identifies sufficient applicants to meet FAA's trainee hiring goals but the Agency has not established a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness. As a result, it is unclear whether the test is effective at helping the Agency identify successful ATCS candidates. Furthermore, FAA's lengthy hiring process and COVID-19 restrictions have slowed FAA's onboarding and training activities for newly hired ATCS. As a result, few applicants who have taken the ATSA and were selected as trainees have completed their training and obtained certification.

Our Recommendations

FAA concurred with our recommendation that the Agency evaluate the ATSA's effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates. We consider the recommendation resolved but open pending completion of the planned actions.

Contents

![U.S. Department of Transportation — Office of Inspector General](logo)

Memorandum

Date: January 11, 2023

Subject: ACTION: FAA Has Taken Steps To Validate Its Air Traffic Skills Assessment Test but Lacks a Plan To Evaluate Its Effectiveness | Report No. AV2023011

From: Nelda Z. Smith
Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits

To: Federal Aviation Administrator

Safety is the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) top priority. FAA relies on Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS) to safely and efficiently manage the flow of air traffic across the National Airspace System. At the end of fiscal year 2021, FAA indicated that there were 13,850 ATCSs, of which 10,580 were Certified Professional Controllers (CPC).[1] It can take up to 5 years for an ATCS to attain certification as a CPC, and the specific timeframes depend on the individual, the type of air traffic control facility[2] they are assigned to, and the staffing levels at that facility. Every fiscal year, FAA expects to lose controllers—due to retirements, promotions, resignations, and terminations—and hires ATCSs on an annual basis to replace those individuals.

In 2012, FAA undertook a review of the controller hiring process that identified the need to update the Air Traffic Selection and Training (AT-SAT), the Agency's air traffic controller pre-employment test. Subsequently, in November 2016, FAA replaced the AT-SAT with the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA). Given the significance of the pre-employment test in FAA's controller hiring decisions, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020[3] mandated that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) assess the assumptions and methodologies used to develop this test. Accordingly, we initiated this audit to assess FAA's (1) validation of the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the air traffic controller pre-employment test and (2) administration of the test and its plans to

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[1] CPCs are ATCSs who are fully certified on all positions within their assigned areas. Collectively, ATCSs and CPCs are commonly referred to as controllers. CPCs also act as on-the-job training instructors for all controllers that are new to the facility.

[2] Types of facilities include airport towers, terminal radar approach control, air route traffic control centers (en-route center), and combined control facilities.

[3] Pub. L. No. 116-92 (2019).

evaluate the test's effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates. In a separate audit, we are reviewing staffing and training issues related to controllers at critical air traffic control facilities.

We obtained and reviewed FAA air traffic controller hiring process documents and interviewed key FAA and industry officials associated with developing the ATSA. Our audit covered information and sources from 2016, the year that the ATSA was developed, through November 2022. We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Exhibit A details our scope and methodology. Exhibit B lists the organizations we visited or contacted, and exhibit C lists the acronyms used in this report.

We appreciate the courtesies and cooperation of Department of Transportation (DOT) representatives during this audit. If you have any questions concerning this report, please contact me or Jaydeep Borwankar, Program Director.

cc: The Secretary
        DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
        FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100

Results in Brief

FAA has taken steps to validate the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the ATSA.

The Agency has taken action to validate the assumptions and methodologies for developing the ATSA to ensure that the test evaluates the key skills and abilities required for entry level ATCSs. FAA's review of the air traffic controller hiring process identified that the AT-SAT, the Agency's pre-employment test at the time, needed to be replaced. According to the Agency, the AT-SAT did not sufficiently test an applicant's skills and abilities related to current job requirements and was not designed to capitalize on today's improved technology and security features. Additionally, the Agency found that the AT-SAT had been leaked to the public, compromising its ability to objectively test applicants' qualifications. As suggested by Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance, FAA worked with a human resource consulting organization, APTMetrics, to identify the critical skills, abilities, and other characteristics (SAO) required to perform important ATCS responsibilities. Subsequently, FAA and APTMetrics identified two vendors with software that could test for the majority of these SAOs. Further, FAA administered the ATSA to experienced CPCs and newly-selected trainees to ensure that the ATSA would test the SAOs and could be completed within FAA's preferred timeframe. FAA then implemented the ATSA in late 2016. Overall, the steps FAA followed to develop and validate the ATSA provide reasonable assurance that the test addresses the SAOs ATCSs need to support flight safety.

ATSA identifies sufficient applicants to meet FAA's trainee hiring goals but lacks a plan to evaluate test effectiveness.

The ATSA has identified sufficient applicants for FAA to meet its ATCS trainee hiring goals. While FAA evaluates the hiring process at the end of each hiring cycle, the Agency has not established a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness. Each year, FAA sets hiring goals and issues job announcements to meet current and future hiring needs. FAA is able to find most of its ATCS trainees from its top two hiring bands,[4] which consist of applicants with passing ATSA scores exceeding 84 percent. Between 2018 and 2020, the ATSA identified over 3,000 applicants who could have been invited to attend basic training at the FAA Academy (Academy);[5] that number exceeded the Agency's hiring goal for

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[4] In 2018, FAA introduced hiring bands based on applicants' passing test scores.
[5] The FAA Academy provides technical and managerial training and development for the Agency's workforce and the aviation community.

inexperienced applicants.[6] However, FAA's lengthy hiring process and COVID-19 restrictions have slowed FAA's onboarding and training activities. As a result, less than 15 percent of the applicants who have taken the ATSA and graduated from the Academy, have obtained their certification. Overall, while FAA has enough applicants to meet its hiring goals, without establishing a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness, it is unclear whether the test is effective at helping the Agency identify successful ATCS candidates.

We made a recommendation for FAA to evaluate the ATSA's effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates.

Background

The primary goal of FAA's hiring process is to ensure there is a pipeline of ATCSs to replace controllers who leave the Agency or retire. The hiring process—from job announcement to onboarding—can be lengthy because it includes multiple screening activities. For example, FAA must verify the candidate's medical history, security clearances, and technical aptitude for air traffic control. Prior to being hired as ATCS trainees, applicants must complete FAA's initial screening steps (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Steps Prior To Hiring Track 1 ATCS Trainees
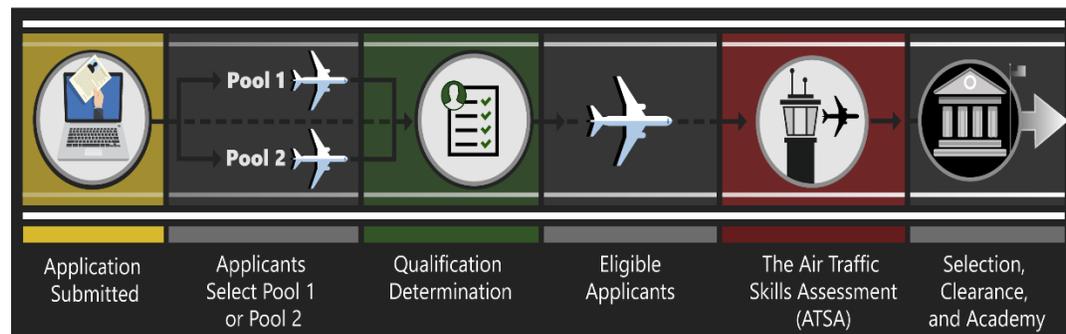
Source: OIG analysis

The ATCS hiring process begins with FAA's Office of Labor Analysis establishing an annual controller hiring goal. There are two tracks through which individuals can apply for an ATCS position. Track 1 includes applicants who do not have prior air traffic control experience whereas Track 2 includes applicants who have at

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[6] FAA defines inexperienced applicants as those with less than 52 consecutive weeks of air traffic control experience at qualified facilities within 5 years of application.

least 52 consecutive weeks of full-time air traffic controller experience.[7] The Agency begins to meet its hiring goal by issuing a vacancy announcement for Track 2 controllers and hiring qualified experienced ATCS candidates. If there are not enough Track 2 candidates to fulfill FAA's controller hiring goal, a second vacancy announcement is released for Track 1 applicants.

Our review focused on the Track 1 applicants, who must meet certain minimum eligibility requirements, including passing the ATSA, to be eligible for air traffic controller basic training at the FAA Academy. Track 1 is divided into two applicant pools. Pool 1 includes military veterans and graduates from one of FAA's Collegiate Training Initiative[8] programs. Pool 2 includes candidates from the general public. Notably, FAA selects more Track 1 applicants than it needs to meet its annual hiring goal. However, in the event FAA cannot meet its hiring goal because of the quality of applicants, the Agency has indicated that it can issue additional vacancy announcements.

Once the Track 1 applicants complete the ATSA exam, the testing vendor gives FAA the test results. FAA has a proprietary algorithm built into the web-based application[9] that scores the tests. Applicants must score 70 percent to pass the exam. In 2018, FAA implemented three hiring bands based on applicants' test scores—"best-qualified" (90 percent or above), "well-qualified" (85–89 percent), and "qualified" (70–84 percent)—to group applicants for selection. If selected, the applicants must obtain required medical and security clearances before they are hired as ATCS trainees and subsequently sent to the FAA Academy for training. Most Track 1 candidates are trained as en-route center controllers.

Once applicants have successfully completed their FAA Academy training, the Agency hires them as ATCSs and assigns them to an air traffic control facility, where they complete their on-the-job training. The flow chart below depicts the ATCS hiring process from individuals applying to the FAA announced vacancy to hiring an individual as an ATCS (see figure 2).

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[7] Track 2 applicants are not required to take the ATSA before being placed at an air traffic control facility for on-the-job training.

[8] The Collegiate Training Initiative is a network of partnerships between FAA and educational institutions that prepares students to pursue an FAA career. It is designed to provide qualified candidates for developmental air traffic control specialist positions. Collegiate Training Initiative schools offer 2- and 4-year non-engineering aviation degrees and teach basic courses in air traffic control and aviation administration.

[9] FAA developed the Automated Vacancy Information Access Tool for Online Referral (AVIATOR) to assist human resources and selection officials in the controller hiring process.

Figure 2: Track 1 ATCS Hiring Process
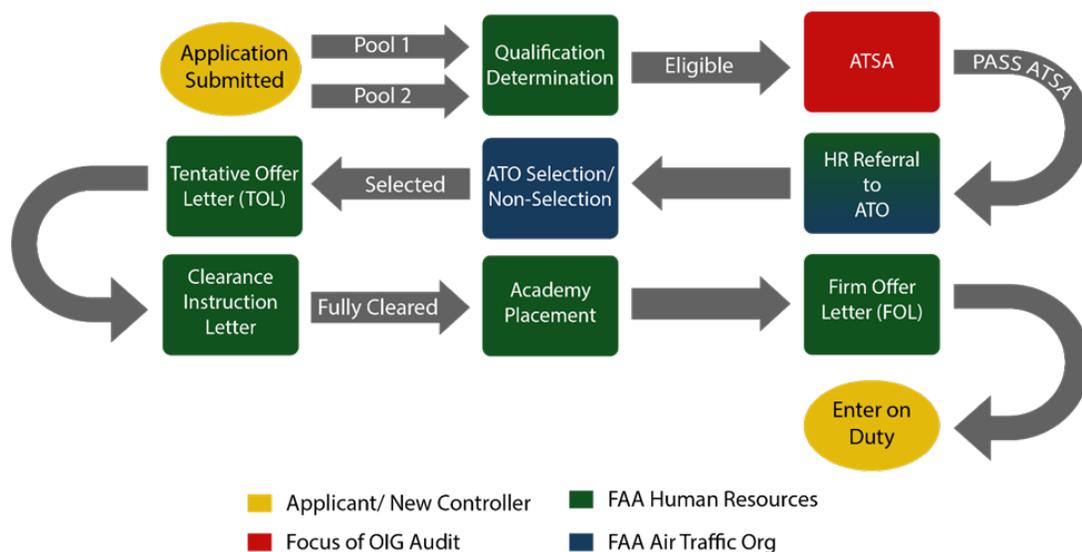
Source: FAA

FAA Has Taken Steps To Validate the Assumptions and Methodologies Used To Develop the ATSA

The Agency's actions to validate the assumptions and methodologies for developing the ATSA provided reasonable assurance that the test evaluates the key skills and abilities required for entry-level ATCSs. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) states that the design of selection tools, such as the ATSA, should be "based on an up-to-date job analysis and supported by strong validity evidence. Agencies not familiar with validation research methodology are encouraged to consult a measurement expert"[10] and the "assessment strategy should begin with a review of the critical competencies."[11]

FAA assesses the adequacy of its selection procedures at the end of each hiring cycle to determine if the process supports its ability to hire well-qualified controllers. In a 2012 review, FAA identified the AT-SAT, the Agency's pre-employment test at the time, needed to be replaced. Specifically, the AT-SAT did not sufficiently test an applicant's skills and abilities related to current job

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[10] Validity evidence refers to the relationship between performance on an assessment and performance on the job. There are different types of validity evidence. Which type is most appropriate will depend on how an agency uses the assessment method to make an employment decision.

[11] More information on OPM's assessment and selection policies can be found on its website www.opm.gov.

requirements and was not designed to capitalize on today's improved technology and security features. Further, FAA found that the questions and answers to the AT-SAT had been leaked to the public, compromising its ability to objectively test applicants' qualifications.

In accordance with OPM guidance, FAA hired APTMetrics, a human resource consulting organization, in 2013. APTMetrics conducted a job analysis to identify important ATCS responsibilities.[12] It also worked with FAA and used the job analysis information to identify the critical SAOs required to perform the ATCS position responsibilities.

FAA contracted APTMetrics again in 2017, this time to develop and validate the ATSA.[13] The data gathered through the job analysis provided information for two FAA stakeholder teams that worked directly with APTMetrics. An FAA ATCS Executive Steering Committee served in an advisory and decision-making role, and an ATCS Implementation Team, including a representative group of FAA and external stakeholders, executed a project plan to develop and implement the ATSA. FAA ultimately contracted with two vendors—Airways New Zealand and SHL/CEB—which had commercially available software that served as the basis for the ATSA and could assess whether test applicants had the required SAOs.

FAA chose a total of 15 Airways New Zealand and SHL/CEB assessments[14] to review, validate, and consider for inclusion in the ATSA. With encouragement from the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA), more than 1,380 individuals—from a randomly selected sample of more than 4600 CPCs—took the ATSA to validate the 15 assessments. As part of this process, those CPCs who took the exam were rated by their supervisors against specific performance criteria developed for this process to ensure the correlation between performance and ATSA scores was valid. Additionally an estimated 620 Academy students in the Air Traffic Basics course took the validation exam, and FAA compared the student's results to their final Academy grade. Subsequently, FAA worked with APTMetrics, NATCA, and various subject matter experts—such as organizational psychologists—to evaluate its validation results and selected 7 of the 15 assessments to include in the ATSA. According to FAA officials, these seven assessments did the best at testing a majority of the SAOs, and applicants could complete the assessments within FAA's preferred timeframe. With the assistance of APTMetrics, FAA also used the test results to validate that the ATSA fairly assessed different groups of applicants who took the test.

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[12] APTMetrics issued its report titled *FAA ATCS Technical Documentation Volume I: Job Analysis Study* in 2014.
[13] FAA, *Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA) Development and Validation*, April 20, 2017. The sample of CPCs selected for participation was a stratified random sample based on facility type, complexity, race, ethnicity, and gender.
[14] The assessments are proprietary to the vendors, and FAA-selected applicants can only access them through FAA's testing vendors' facilities.

FAA uses the ATCS Executive Steering Committee to oversee the hiring process. The committee meets periodically as issues arise and at the end of each hiring cycle to determine if any changes are required in the hiring process and identify potential process improvements. To date, the committee has not identified any issues or needed improvements to the ATSA. We also spoke with representatives from NATCA, who did not express any issues concerning the ATSA or FAA's process for developing and implementing the test.

Overall, based on our evaluation of FAA's process to develop the ATSA, we concluded that the steps the Agency followed provide reasonable assurance that the test addresses the SAOs ATCSs need to support flight safety.

ATSA Identifies Sufficient Applicants To Meet Hiring Goals but FAA Lacks a Plan To Evaluate Test Effectiveness

Using the ATSA allows FAA to identify enough applicants to meet its ATCS trainee hiring goals. However, while FAA evaluates its hiring process at the end of each hiring cycle, the Agency has not established a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness and few applicants who have taken the ATSA, and were selected as trainees, have completed training and obtained certification.

The ATSA Identifies Sufficient Applicants To Meet FAA's Trainee Hiring Goals

Each year, FAA sets hiring goals and issues job announcements to meet current and future hiring needs. The ATSA test plays an important role by providing a sufficient number of applicants to meet FAA's Track 1 trainee hiring goals. For example, since FAA changed its ATCS hiring policy and implemented the three hiring bands—best-qualified, well-qualified, and qualified—in 2018, over 24,000 applicants have responded to air traffic controller hiring announcements and the Agency selected close to 17,000 applicants to take the ATSA. From the applicants selected, the ATSA identified over 3,000 qualified applicants,[15] which exceeded the Agency's Track 1 hiring goal of 2,700 controllers (see table).

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[15] Since 2018, FAA has only hired candidates who have scored in the best- and well-qualified hiring bands.

Table. FAA's Track 1 ATCS Hiring Goals Compared to Best- and Well-Qualified Applicants

Year	FAA Annual Hiring Goal[a]	FAA Track 1 Hiring Goal[b]	Track 1 Applicants[c]	Applicants Eligible To Take the ATSA[d]	Applicants That Passed the ATSA	Best- and Well-Qualified Applicants
2018	1701	1350	6,825	4,967	2,862	707
2019	907	680	9,265	6,418	1,390	1,296
2020	910	682	8,336	5,603	2,589	1,070
Total	3,518	2,712	24,426	16,988	6,841	3,073

[a] The annual hiring goal is established by FAA's Office of Financial and Labor Analysis.
[b] The portion of the goal applied to Track 1 selection.
[c] FAA's Office of Human Resources ensures that the applicant's qualifications, such as work history, meet minimum position guidelines.
[d] Applicants who passed the ATSA and are referred to FAA Air Traffic Organization for selection processing.

Source: OIG analysis

FAA Lacks a Plan To Measure the ATSA's Effectiveness

While FAA's Executive Steering Committee reviews the air traffic controller hiring process at the end of each hiring cycle, the Agency has not established a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness as required. Specifically, the Government Accountability Office's Federal Internal Control Standards[16] stipulate that Agencies are responsible for ensuring that their policies and procedures are achieving their intended objectives. Furthermore, the lengthy hiring process and COVID-19 have hindered FAA's onboarding and training for newly hired ATCS trainees, leading to less than 15 percent of the applicants who have taken the ATSA having completed training and obtained their certification.

First, the CPC certification process is lengthy and can take 3 to 5 years. There is a significant amount of time between applicants submitting their applications and being invited to attend the FAA Academy. And once candidates are selected to

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[16] Government Accountability Office, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G, September 2014.

attend the Academy, their medical and security screenings—which they must pass before they can enroll—can take up to a year. Additionally, training an ATCS to become a CPC is a lengthy, three-step process that includes (1) air traffic basics, (2) tower or en-route center training, and (3) on-the-job training at an air traffic control facility. Moreover, trainees experience life changes, such as having to relocate to their assigned air traffic control facility after completing training, which adds time to the hiring process.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on FAA's air traffic controller hiring and selection process. The pandemic has led to the closure of testing centers, hindered on-the-job training at air traffic facilities, and slowed security and medical clearance processes. Also, due to the decrease in staffing level requirements for air traffic controllers, caused by the pandemic-based reduction in air traffic, FAA made the unusual decision to lower its fiscal year 2021 hiring goal from 910 to 500 ATCSs.[17] In 2022, the Agency reported that while approximately 1,000 applicants had taken the ATSA and graduated from the Academy since fiscal year 2018, only 126 (less than 15 percent) have obtained their certification.

Overall, while FAA has enough applicants to meet its hiring goals, without establishing a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness, it is unclear whether the test is helping the Agency identify successful ATCS candidates.

Conclusion

To fulfill its critical safety mission, FAA must find the best candidates to fill vacant ATCS and CPC positions at air traffic controller facilities across the National Airspace System. While FAA has taken reasonable steps to measure applicants' qualifications using the ATSA, it lacks a plan for evaluating the test's effectiveness. As the Agency collects more data on its ability to identify qualified candidates, it will be in a better position to evaluate the ATSA's effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates. More important, FAA will be in a better position to reassure the flying public that its air traffic control facilities are adequately staffed by the best-qualified personnel.

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[17] Testing sites in several States were closed in 2020. When the sites reopened, all applicants were eligible to retest, given updated scores, and subject to the lower hiring goal.

Recommendation

To ensure that the ATSA is identifying successful ATCS candidates, we recommend that the Federal Aviation Administrator:

1. Establish a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness.

Agency Comments and OIG Response

We provided FAA with our draft report on November 17, 2022, and received its formal response on December 16, 2022. FAA's response is included in its entirety as an appendix to this report. FAA concurred with our recommendation and provided appropriate planned actions and completion date. Accordingly, we consider the recommendation as resolved but open pending completion of the planned actions.

Actions Required

We consider recommendation 1 resolved but open pending completion of planned actions.

Exhibit A. Scope and Methodology

This performance audit was conducted between October 2020 and November 2022. We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Our audit objectives were to assess FAA's (1) validation of the assumptions and methodologies used to develop the air traffic controller pre-employment test and (2) administration of the test and its plans to evaluate the test effectiveness in identifying successful ATCS candidates. We prepared this report in response to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, which directed OIG to assess the assumptions and methodologies FAA used to develop its pre-employment test.

Our audit analyzed the ATSA's development and implementation, including preparation, launch, and rollout. We obtained and analyzed documents from and conducted interviews with managers and staff in FAA's Office of Human Resources, Air Traffic Organization, Office of Financial and Labor Analysis, and Office of Aerospace Medicine. Additionally, we met with the NATCA for their insights into ATSA effectiveness. We also analyzed Federal regulations and documents, including the National Defense Authorization Act. We reviewed FAA's air traffic controller hiring documents and systems related to the application, application processing, and applicant selection. Further, we reviewed and analyzed operations data, policies, guidance, meeting minutes, briefing slides, presentations, and program overviews. We obtained and reviewed records from the Office of Human Resources, Air Traffic Organization, and FAA Academy to determine how many of the candidates who took the ATSA eventually became CPCs, which is a measure for success in FAA's hiring process.

We talked to FAA personnel responsible for air traffic controller applicant selection, training, data gathering, guidance and policy. We also interviewed FAA program managers tasked with the hiring process and who set hiring goals, select candidates, and oversee applicants at the FAA Academy. We obtained Agency documentation to verify the information gathered from testimonial evidence.

In addition, we measured the reliability of FAA's AVIATOR applicant reports by reviewing processes for entering data into and extracting data from the repositories for electronic data, security, and access controls. We also analyzed procedures to assess data quality, including the 2019 Federal Information

Security Management Act review,[18] which evaluated AVIATOR among other systems.

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[18] Pub. L. No. 107-347 (2002) requires agency's senior officials to provide security for the information and systems that support their operations and assets and to develop plans and procedures to ensure the continuity of such information and systems.

Exhibit B. Organizations Visited or Contacted

FAA Headquarters

Air Traffic Organization

Air Traffic Services

Office of Aerospace Medicine

Office of Financial and Labor Analysis

Office of Human Resources

FAA Field Offices

Technical Requirements and Forecasting Group, Onboarding and Placement Team

Other Organizations

National Air Traffic Controllers Association

Exhibit C. List of Acronyms

ATCS	Air Traffic Control Specialist
ATSA	Air Traffic Skills Assessment
AT-SAT	Air Traffic Selection and Training
AVIATOR	Automated Vacancy Information Access Tool for Online Referral
CPC	Certified Professional Controller
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DOT	Department of Transportation
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
SAO	Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics

Exhibit C. List of Acronyms   15

Exhibit D. Major Contributors to This Report

JAY **BORWANKAR**	PROGRAM DIRECTOR
JOE **HANCE**	PROJECT MANAGER
VICTORIA **SMITH**	SENIOR AUDITOR
JAMES **MULLEN**	INFORMATION SYSTEMS ANALYST
SUSAN **CROOK-WILSON**	WRITER-EDITOR

Appendix. Agency Comments

Federal Aviation Administration

Memorandum

Date: December 16, 2022

To: Nelda Z. Smith, Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits

From: Erika Vincent, Acting Director, Office of Audit and Evaluation, AAE-1   ERIKA S VINCENT   *Digitally signed by ERIKA S VINCENT Date: 2022.12.16 09:56:54 -05'00'*

Subject: Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Response to Office of Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report: FAA Air Traffic Controller Pre-Employment Testing and Its Use in ATC Candidate Selection

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provides the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world. The FAA relies heavily on Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS) in accomplishing its safety-driven mission. Given the multi-year investment in training each ATCS, the FAA administers a pre-employment aptitude assessment to identify applicants who are most likely to successfully complete ATCS training in this mission-critical occupation. The FAA periodically reviews the adequacy of its pre-employment testing and selection procedures to determine the extent to which the FAA is meeting its hiring needs. To enhance the selection and hiring process, the FAA replaced the Air Traffic Selection and Training assessment with the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA) in 2016. The updated assessment provides candidates with an opportunity to demonstrate their job-related capabilities for the ATCS position and allows the FAA to hire the most qualified candidates.

Based on the FAA's review of the draft OIG report, we concur with the OIG's recommendation to establish a plan for evaluating the ATSA's effectiveness. We plan to complete actions to address the recommendation by October 31, 2023.

We appreciate this opportunity to offer additional perspective on the OIG draft report. Please contact Erika Vincent at Erika.Vincent@faa.gov if you have any questions or require additional information about these comments.

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