

Major aviation conference flies the flag for western region

The annual Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC), held in Limerick last week, offered an opportunity for industry stalwarts to discuss the region's progress, writes **Siobhán Maguire**

A quiet revolution took place last week when the Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC), an annual networking and conference event, was staged in Limerick.

Industry giants in the aviation sector used the one-day, invite-only event to share and explore the increasing relevance of Shannon as a leading cluster of aviation services with a strong heritage supporting the lease sector since its inception. With a tagline that read 'Shannon – adding value in a competitive landscape', the event put the region firmly on the main stage, demonstrating its unique collegial culture renowned around the world.

Samantha Harding, SILC's organiser, said the gathering was an opportunity for aviation leaders to engage with one another on how Shannon can lead the way as a global services centre in the aerospace sector.

"SILC is an annual networking conference that is organised by Shannon-based aviation companies to offer an opportunity for technical representatives from the industry to meet and discuss up-to-date trends, engage in topics including the growth of Shannon and new technologies and engage in an open forum with peers," she said.

Now in its third year, SILC has grown in reputation as a key meeting point for aviation service companies. SILC is part of the International Aviation Service Centre (IASC), home of the largest aviation and aerospace cluster in Ireland, which is located in Shannon.

IASC grew out of the Shannon Group, which was established in September 2014 to build the region as a globally relevant aerospace cluster with expertise in the areas of leasing, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), corporate aviation, logistics and training.

Patrick Edmond, strategic director of IASC and director of the Shannon Group, said SILC placed a much-deserved spotlight on the western region and its tireless efforts to develop its reputation as a centre for aviation excellence.

"I think SILC is very valuable because there are already various conferences around the world for industry, but this one is unique in that it focuses on the technical side of the industry," he said.

"It looks at what is going on under the bonnet so it's a very specific niche. The value of this conference can be seen in the fact that it is now being approached by organisations in other countries who like what we are doing and want to host the exact same event in their own country, such is the benefit for the industry. That level of interest is really putting us on the world map."

The attendance list at the exclusive event read like a who's who of the aviation industry. Held at Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) and moderated by journalist Matt Cooper, it hosted key speakers such as Katherine Bennett OBE, senior vice-president of Airbus.

"We had several dynamic panel discussions on the day that showed the strength and knowledge-based Shannon region as a global contender in the aviation industry," said Harding. "SILC guests are made up of senior technical leaders from the aviation



Attending the conference last week were Andrew Murphy, managing director of Shannon Airport, Michael Fitzpatrick of GECAS, Samantha Harding of SILC, Katherine Bennett of Airbus, economist John Mc Mahon and Patrick Jordan of AAG

Pictures: Arthur Ellis



Katherine Bennett, senior vice-president of Airbus, was one of the industry leaders speaking at the event



Economist John McMahon gave an expert lecture at the conference in Limerick Institute of Technology last Wednesday

community, and the one-day conference afforded them an exclusive opportunity to catch up on latest developments within the industry and the ongoing expansion plans

within Shannon. "With 40 per cent of the world's leased fleet managed through Ireland, one of the primary goals of SILC is to create cohesion in the avia-

tion community in Ireland, and principally in the Shannon area. This was achieved on the day because the general impression among those in attendance was that Shannon

could lead the way as a global services centre."

Michael Byrt, technical services director with Atlantic Aviation Group said: "The SILC conference continues to

go from strength to strength. Ireland punches well above its weight in aviation and Shannon is the spiritual home of aviation in Ireland. It is a pleasure to have such important

and influential decision-makers in the locality to showcase our services."

Shannon enjoys a unique place in aviation history. In 1939, the flying boats of the first transatlantic scheduled air route touched down in the Shannon estuary. In 1945, the region welcomed the first scheduled transatlantic land-plane services, and in 2015, Shannon celebrated its 70th anniversary as a central aviation location with strong links with the United States and Europe.

"Innovation is in our DNA, [Shannon was the location of] the world's first duty free shop and the birthplace of the modern air-finance industry.

"We combine the backing of the Irish state with a commercial focus and a pragmatic, can-do attitude. We're an ideal location for aerospace firms, established or emerging. Shannon offers access to the European market, skilled English-speaking staff, a highly competitive cost base, and a long heritage of aerospace pioneers. Over 60 aerospace companies, employing over 2,000 staff, already call Shannon home."

What is unique about SILC is the no-nonsense approach to its discussion format. There are no sales pitches or marketing tactics.

"We have worked hard to make SILC a top-class conference where there are no salespeople or pitches," Harding said. "This is about people learning and mixing with their peers, sharing industry knowledge and understanding the positive impact the Shannon region has and can develop further in global aviation."

Edmond agreed: "The message at the conference was simple. We are saying we can learn from Shannon and we can learn from Ireland and we are on the map in an international way. We're using the conference as a calling card when we go out internationally to market Shannon as a key location because we can point to the event as an example of the scale and ambition for the ecosystem at Shannon, and that a lot of companies want to be involved in that."

For more information on SILC, go to silc.ie

IASC announces expansion plans for booming aviation services industry

Shannon is well on the way to becoming a key hub for the sector, and is investing in facilities to accommodate rising demand

Major changes are under way at Shannon as the region builds on its global reputation as a centre of aviation excellence.

Key developments include the construction of Ireland's first wide-body hangar in 20 years, five more maintenance hangars to accommodate demand from the industry, and completion of a €10 million hi-spec office block to facilitate major inward investment and employment.

The announcements were unveiled at last week's Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC), an annual invite-only networking event for the aviation industry.

Patrick Edmond, managing director of the International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) and strategy director of the Shannon Group, said the region's aviation reputation continues to grow with increased interest from American firms looking for a foothold in Europe as well as British firms seeking refuge from Brexit.

"The anchor tenants at Shannon are aircraft maintenance and aviation service companies," he said. "Part of Shannon's appeal is hangar space and we've nine hangars currently. But the region is also of great interest to manufacturers and suppliers of aircraft spare parts and aviation train-

ing companies.

"In the Shannon Group, in the coming weeks, we're going to break ground on construction of a new hangar. It's going to be the first wide-body hangar – for the largest type of aircraft – to be built in Ireland for about 20 years. This is a big milestone for us. Following on from this, we already have plans in place for a complex of up to five more maintenance hangars, because there is a very strong demand for those. We are out looking for investors for these hangars."

Shannon Group plc comprises four strategic businesses focused on delivering economic benefits for the west of Ireland and the wider national



Katherine Bennett, senior vice-president of Airbus, with Patrick Edmond of Shannon Group

economy, including: Shannon Commercial Properties; Shannon Airport; Shannon Heritage and Shannon IASC.

There was good news for Shannon IASC in August when it became the first Irish member of the elite European Aerospace Cluster Partnership (EACP), one of only 13 European Strategic Cluster Partnerships (ESCP) recognised by the European Commission.

Shannon Airport had further cause for celebration this month as Gainjet Ireland took delivery of a new jet, making history as the first aircraft in

the world to be registered on the new Irish EJ aircraft register, administered by the Irish Aviation Authority. The registration came almost 90 years to the day since the first ever Irish aircraft registration, EI-AAA, in October 1928.

Established just three years ago in August 2015 and securing their operating certificate (AOC) in June 2016, Gainjet Ireland, based at Shannon Airport, is a leading world-wide private jet charter operator and management company. The new aircraft, EJ-IOBN, an Embraer Lin-

age 1000 executive jet, joins Gainjet Ireland's growing fleet of Boeing, Gulfstream, Challenger and Citation aircraft in the worldwide executive aircraft market.

The announcement followed the launch of a major new marketing campaign at the airport. 'Shannon Airport – making it easy' aims to highlight the ease of passenger experience and builds on the airport's €40 million five-year investment programme.

Edmond said the Shannon group had great ambitions for the region and the coun-

try because of the potential for Ireland to be a key hub for the global aviation services industry, just as it has become for the pharmaceuticals and medical devices sectors.

"Shannon is already on the global map," he said. "Maintenance and leasing companies have been training people who have gone all over the world. For example, GPA started in Shannon and has created a whole cohort of industry professionals."

He said the advantages of doing business and relocating to Shannon both in terms

of work and way of life were obvious to those who had already done so. The message now is to spread that word globally, so there is a worldwide knowledge of the advantages of doing business out of the region.

"I moved here five years ago, and I love it," he said. "There are so many benefits to living and working from here. Dublin is only a two-hour drive from Shannon, and for businesses, rental costs are much lower here, and salary costs can be lower too."

"We're in the process of finishing a 55,000 square foot office block, which will be the world software engineering centre for Jaguar Land Rover for the next generation of electric and self-driving cars. They looked all over the place for a location, but in the end they chose Shannon."

"They did so because they like the Irish business environment, but once they decided on Ireland, they found Shannon was the best place within Ireland from the point of view of accommodation, quality of life and connectivity because they are right beside the airport."

"In the same way, we work with aviation companies who like to put their offices in Shannon because it's so easy for them to get there."

For more information on the Shannon Group, go to shannongroup.ie

Aviation leasing giant poised for long-term growth

GECAS, a world leader in aviation leasing and financing, captivated an audience of international industry experts at last week’s Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC), writes **Siobhán Maguire**

It was Albert Einstein who said, “the only source of knowledge is experience”. Nowhere was this more apt than at last week’s Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC), an annual networking event where leaders in aviation leasing and financing imparted their wisdom.

Against a backdrop of lively discussions on topics including Brexit and its impact on regulation and the Shannon region as a credible player on the global aviation stage, two stalwarts of industry – Sean Flannery, general manager of GECAS Ltd, and Anton Tams, senior vice-president and manager of technical planning and process control – took to the stage to share the success of a company that spans five decades.

“The presentation was about GECAS as a leader in aviation,” said Tams. “We have our headquarters in Dublin, and we run a significant portion of our operations out of Shannon. We started out in aviation financing and leasing, but over time we have adopted and responded to changes in the technical and financial and regulatory world within the industry.”

GECAS celebrated 50 years last year. The company was founded in 1975 by Aer Lingus, Guinness Peat Group and Tony Ryan to become known as Guinness Peat Aviation (GPA). During the 1980s, it became the world’s largest commercial aircraft lessor, was viewed as an innovator in aviation, and at its peak was



Anton Tams, senior vice-president and technical manager of US-Irish commercial aviation and financing firm GECAS

valued at \$4 billion (around €3.5 billion). GPA took a turn in the early 1990s shortly after placing an order for \$17 billion (€14.9 billion) worth of aircraft.

“It was the Gulf War that resulted in a big fall in the availability for financing of aircraft,” said Flannery. “Banks that had supported GPA pulled away and wouldn’t support a lot of the purchase commitments that GPA had. That’s when GE stepped in.”

GECAS, the US and Irish commercial aircraft financing and leasing business of GE, is a world leader in aviation leasing and financing. With five decades of aviation finance experience, GECAS is recognised as the pre-eminent commercial airline and

helicopter leasing company in the world. The business offers a wide range of aircraft types including narrow-bodies, wide-bodies, regional jets, turboprops, freighters and helicopters. GECAS owns or services a fleet of nearly 2,000 aircraft (1,685 fixed wing/310 rotary wing) in operation or on order, and provides loans collateralised on an additional 400 aircraft.

GECAS is poised for continued and long-term growth in the aviation industry and has a keen eye on emerging trends. Tams said the ongoing expansion and rise of the middle class in certain global regions was driving revenue passenger kilometres (RBK), aviation-speak for tracking flight traffic.

“The middle classes are



Sean Flannery, general manager of GECAS, also spoke at the conference

projected to expand from 3.2 billion to 5.4 billion by 2030, led by the Asia-Pacific region,” he said. “The growth is still there, but it’s all going to be in Asia. It is the middle class who drive travel and air transport.

“In China, there are only 2.3 aircraft per million of the population, but if you go to Paris or London, you’ll see Chinese people travelling there, so the number of people in that part of the world who are going to be able to afford to travel will double in the next 12 years. At the moment the number of aircraft per million of the population is extraordinarily low – it’s about a third of what we have in western Europe.

“The combination of those two factors tell us there is ab-

solutely going to be growth in the world in terms of aircraft numbers and revenue passengers.”

With an operational location in Shannon, GECAS still believes Ireland is a good place to continue to expand and support aircraft leasing and the aviation industry.

“You’ve got to look at why Ireland is a good place to do business,” said Tams.

“And that brings you back to tax treaties, the aviation authority support, the stable legal system, an English-speaking country – and English is the language of aviation – and a location on the west of Europe is almost the perfect spot in terms of time zones. You can deal with America at one end of the day and Asia at the other end of the day.”

Fight or flight? Why Shannon is choosing both

Already a leader in maintenance, the airport is chasing new opportunities in the creation of aircraft parts, writes **Siobhán Maguire**

Traditionally, Shannon has been focused on taking in aircraft and fixing them, but this is about to change with sights set on developing a new industry there in the design and manufacture of parts for aircraft.

Already major players in the aerospace industry, including Aero Inspection International, are looking at 3-D printing in conjunction with the University of Limerick (UL), in the making of parts.

Owen Bagnell, head of operations at Aero Inspection International, said the move towards diversification allowed for Shannon to be even more competitive in the global arena.

“We’re in talks to manufacture small parts and develop from aviation maintenance and into aerospace, where we can manufacture small parts,” he said.

“We want to get the manufacturing done here in Shannon ourselves and expand on the range of services already provided for the aviation industry here.”

Bagnell was speaking last week in relation to two panel discussions which took place at the Shannon International Leasing Conference (SILC).

One lively discussion disclosed plans to move ahead with the entry into the design and manufacturing sector, a boost to the already long-established and successful aircraft maintenance industry



Owen Bagnell of Aero Inspection International

which helps the aircraft leasing industry.

The second discussion, moderated by Bagnell, looked at skill shortages in Shannon, how more talent can be attracted to the area and the future of training.

“The talk ‘Educating for the future’ looked at how Shannon is retaining human capital, but also the need for more aviation professionals,” he said.

“There is a skills shortage which must be addressed and the way to do that is through valuable apprenticeship schemes in tandem with airlines. Shannon’s Atlantic Aviation and Lufthansa Technik, formerly Shannon Aerospace,

has already brought back in apprenticeships to help train up engineers and aviation professionals.”

Bagnell said training as an apprentice in the sector was a very attractive opportunity. Holders of a Leaving Certificate can apply and the job entails travelling the world and developing key engineering skills and qualifications.

“We want to get the message out there that apprenticeships are available and are an ideal way to get into the aviation industry,” he said. “There is an appetite to build up our talent pool and retain and generate more jobs in the industry.”



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