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Australia's Rex starts training at new pilot school

By Nicholas Ionides

Australia's Regional Express (Rex) has begun pilot training at its new school near Melbourne which has been established in part to help it resolve a crew shortage problem that has been affecting its operations.

Rex says in a statement that an initial group of 17 students started training at the new Civil Aviation Training Academy (CATA) this week.

The students are expected to graduate within 32 weeks with a commercial pilot licence, multi engine rating and command instrument rating, after which they will go through another three months of training before starting to work as a first officer with the airline.

The carrier says it received more than 1,000 applications for places in its new cadet pilot programme and a second group of 20 students should start training in three months.

"The Academy intends to accept up to 80 pilots in the first year with plans to grow the intake to 350 a year by the third or fourth year of operations," says Rex. "It is intended that CATA will be the premier institute for training professional pilots in Australia."

CATA is a joint venture between Rex, Moorabbin Flying Services and Mangalore Airport near Melbourne, where the training school is located. It plans to train pilots for Rex as well as for other airlines in later stages.

Saab 340 operator Rex is Australia's largest independently owned regional carrier. It recently warned of a "looming catastrophic shortage" of pilots in Australia, where there has been rapid growth in the domestic air transport sector, and has been forced to suspend some of its services due to a lack of crews.

Rex has said that larger airlines are hiring many pilots away from smaller carriers that cannot pay the same wages.