

Hundreds of pilots take flight from Ryanair with more planning exit

03:55, 20 April 2014 by Nicola Cooke



Between 300 and 500 Ryanair pilots have left the airline in the last 18 months. Picture: PA

Hundreds of Ryanair pilots have left the airline in the last 12 to 18 months, and hundreds more plan to leave in the next 12 months, according to information acquired by the Ryanair Pilot Group (RPG).

Between 300 and 500 Ryanair pilots are understood to have left the airline in the last 18 months to take up jobs with the new transatlantic service provider Norwegian Air Shuttle, as well as with Middle Eastern airlines and other operators such as Thomson and Wizz Air.

In a new survey of Ryanair pilots which was carried out by RPG and generated responses from 1,128 of the airline's pilots, almost one third said they planned to leave the Irish-owned airline within the next 12 months. That figure jumped to 50 per cent when it included pilots planning to leave within in the next two years.

Two in three said they might reconsider their plans to leave the airline if issues around pay, treatment and respect were improved. A Ryanair spokesman disputed the RPG's figures for pilots who have left the airline, and said the company currently employs over 2,500 pilots. In a financial statement in March 2013, Ryanair listed their pilot numbers at 2,625.

In a memo sent to all pilots on April 11 by Michael Hickey, Ryanair's group director of operations which has been seen for this newspaper, the company appears to offer new incentives to pilots in order to retain them.

These include an optional extra payment of Euro 10 per scheduled block [flying] hour for first officers who are enrolled in the command upgrade programme (to become captains) after May 1, and an improved co-pilots' "stable earnings programme. The airline is "also looking at the option of offering additional salaried contracts, through both Ryanair and third parties, according to Hickey's memo.

Ryanair spokesman Robin Kiely said the company did "not comment on departures or recruitment.

"We have a waiting list of over 2,000 qualified pilots hoping to join Ryanair on an ongoing basis, he said. "New base [employment] agreements included pay increases, roster improvements and other benefits, which is why we have pilots waiting to join at a time when pilot unions across Europe are negotiating job cuts and pay cuts in Iberia, SAS, Air Berlin and Alitalia, to name a few.

The company would not provide a breakdown of the split of captains and first officers employed as pilots. The former are

senior to, and more experienced than, the latter.

RPG chairman Evert van Zwol said, based on information provided by RPG members from across the Ryanair network, "we have very strong evidence to believe that up to 500 pilots have left the company in the last 18 months.

"There may be many reasons for pilots leaving, but our recent survey and feedback from pilots suggest it is due to dissatisfaction with terms and conditions of employment, and how pilots are treated by Ryanair, he said. "The survey provides worrying information about the intentions of current pilots to leave Ryanair, which we would like to see addressed.

.....

New Ryanair website failing to attract customer search traffic

Has Ryanair become too consumer-friendly? New figures reveal that the relaunch of the airline's website, a key plank of its new customer-focused strategy, has reduced its visibility across the main online search platforms.

According to web analytics firm Intelligent Positioning, Ryanair is no longer in the top 100 results of millions of online searches when customer seek flight details to destinations where it flies. Ryanair said the results are merely a blip, but Intelligent Positioning believe it could impact upon sales ahead of the busy summer season.

Ryanair's previous no-frills website had high visibility on country destination searches, meaning its website appeared high on searches engines such as Google when a browser sought information on flights. The new site, however, is not having the same level of traction, according to Intelligent Positioning.

Ryanair is in the midst of an image metamorphosis as it seeks to woo customers with a kinder image. Families will soon be able to pre book seats together, while second bags will be free. A business class offering, meanwhile, is just months away.