

PERMANENT SECRETARY

D/PUS/11/7/1(156)

27 August 2020

Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
Sent electronically

Dear Chair,

MILITARY FLYING TRAINING SYSTEM

Thank you for your letter of 29 July 2020 in which you requested an update on the progress of Military Flying Training System (MFTS), following concerns raised by an individual on past findings from National Audit Office reporting.

MFTS is an ongoing programme that is now delivering state-of-the-art training to UK military aircrew in preparation for the operational front-line; it is the biggest transformation of UK military aircrew training in a generation. MFTS is now expanding further to address the capability increases outlined in the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015.

The National Audit Office (NAO) reports

The MOD welcomed the National Audit Office (NAO) reports in both 2015 and 2019, cooperating fully with the NAO in its investigations. While we accept that there have been challenges with MFTS, and it has taken longer than planned for students to complete their flying training, much work has been done since the NAO findings resulting in a steady improvement in the progression of aircrew through their training.

MFTS performance

As you will be aware, in 2019, the NAO reported that MOD and Ascent had most training components in place: the picture has continued to improve since and, before COVID-19, the number of students progressing through their training was steadily increasing. The programme has delivered thousands of individual courseware items, cleared five types of new aircraft into Service, and introduced an array of new synthetic training devices.

Although this has been a challenging undertaking, Defence now has the modern aircraft

and technology it needs for the future, and the opportunity to fully exploit their potential and make the most of our investment.

Next steps

The Secretary of State for Defence has requested for the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, to oversee the aircrew training throughput and to further reduce the steadily decreasing number of pilots on hold waiting for training. As of 5 August 2020, there were 184 RAF pilots on training courses compared to 111 on 1 July 2018. The current backlog of holding student aircrew is around 130, from a peak of approximately 200 at the end of 2018. We expect holding student aircrew to be at MOD's working target level of 80 (25 Royal Navy, 25 Army and 30 RAF) by August 2021 (having been delayed by four months by the impact of Covid-19).

While I can assure you that the RAF has sufficient numbers of aircrew to meet Defence's current front-line operational commitments, the MOD continues to work closely with our industry partners to drive improvements in the programme to ensure it meets Defence's needs: implementing contract reform, pipeline streamlining, increasing aircraft availability, introducing innovation and new technologies and personnel 're-joiner' programmes to boost instructor levels.

We are by no means complacent, but MFTS shows a steadily improving picture and I can assure you that the programme is delivering the aircrew that our Armed Forces need, and will continue to do so.

I hope this clarifies the current position.

Yours sincerely,



STEPHEN LOVEGROVE