

**Response to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts'
Report 3, Canada's Fighter Force – Canadian Armed Forces, of the 2018 Fall Reports of
the Auditor General of Canada**

Recommendation 1

That, by 30 June 2019, National Defence provide the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts with a report outlining the progress made regarding recruitment and retention strategies for fighter force technicians and pilots that are designed to meet operational requirements and prepare for the transition to the replacement fleet. Additionally, that the Department provide the Committee with progress reports every year thereafter until the Future Fighter Initial Operational Capability is achieved.

Background

In its 2018 report on Canada's fighter force, the Auditor General recommended that National Defence develop and implement recruitment and retention initiatives for fighter force technicians and pilots designed to meet operational requirements and facilitate the transition to the replacement fleet. In its 2018 Management Action Plan, National Defence committed to increasing the number of technicians and pilots in the fighter force through a range of recruitment, training, and retention initiatives to be developed and implemented throughout 2019. National Defence also committed to transferring over 200 technicians to front-line squadrons by December 2020, and to increasing the fighter force by 200 positions by 2023. National Defence stated that these measures would allow the pilot and technician workforce to grow over time to meet operational requirements, and would enable this workforce to begin transferring to future fighter squadrons in summer 2025.

In its June 2019 Government Response, National Defence accepted the Committee's recommendation and provided an initial progress report on its efforts to train and transfer technicians to front-line squadrons; increase the fighter force; and implement recruitment and retention strategies.

At the time of the last update in June 2021, National Defence reported that it grew the number of pilot and technician positions in the fighter force, increased the number of front-line technicians, recruited new pilot and technician candidates, and made progress in implementing retention initiatives. National Defence committed to provide the Committee with an update on progress made on the aforementioned initiatives as part of its annual update in June 2022. Please find this update below.

Update on the progress made since June 2021

Increasing fighter force positions

Since the last update to the Committee in June 2021, National Defence has placed an additional 42 positions into RCAF front-line fighter squadrons and units directly supporting the fighter force, for a total of 200 of the overall positions. This completes National Defence's initiative to create 200 positions in front-line fighter squadrons in advance of the 2023 milestone.

Through the establishment of 66 Air Operations Officer positions in 2019, the Royal Canadian Air Force also continues to reduce the number of non-flying positions for pilots in an effort to

decrease trained pilots' time away from flying. For example, in Fiscal Year 2021/2022, the Royal Canadian Air Force welcomed its second group of officers into the new Air Operations Officer occupation. Having transferred from their previous occupations, this group of 42 skilled officers makes up the Royal Canadian Air Force's growing cadre of Air Operations Officers.

The Royal Canadian Air Force also continues to bolster its external recruitment efforts for the Air Operations Officer occupation, with 27 new recruits enrolled in the Air Operations Officer occupation in Fiscal Year 2021/2022, missing its external intake target of 28 for Fiscal Year 2021/2022. Additionally, as of the end of May 2022, the Royal Canadian Air Force has enrolled five new recruits, with an external intake target set at 24 for Fiscal Year 2020/2023.

Transferring technicians to front-line squadrons

In its Management Action Plan and Government Response, National Defence committed to transferring over 200 technicians to front-line squadrons by December 2020. Since the last update, National Defence has increased the number of front-line technicians by an additional 84 personnel specific to line fighter units. This brings the total number of new technicians to front-line squadrons to 227.

National Defence has also used the Fighter Force Maintenance Renewal Plan to evaluate how to leverage industry for training and maintenance tasks, and make available Canadian Armed Forces personnel for front-line units. For example, from January 2021 to March 2022, several phase three activities were completed, including the transitioning of two non-deployable aircraft maintenance shops to contractors to allow trained Canadian Armed Forces technicians to fill first-line vacancies and re-allocate positions to front-line units. There remain phase three activities, which will continue with shop transfers. National Defence anticipates this transition to be completed throughout 2023, with an end date of March 2024.

Recruiting personnel

As a result of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the Canadian Armed Forces' ability to attract, recruit, and train personnel, the Canadian Armed Forces continues to make a concerted comprehensive effort to recruit and retain its most valuable asset – people.

Overall, the number of trained pilots in the Royal Canadian Air Force has increased by 25 in Fiscal Year 2021/2022. Since June 2021, the Canadian Armed Forces has also enrolled 78 pilot candidates, surpassing its Fiscal Year 2021/2022 target of 73.

Moreover, the number of trained air maintenance technicians in the Royal Canadian Air Force has decreased by 202 in Fiscal Year 2021/2022. Since June 2021, National Defence has enrolled 292 new recruits to be trained as air maintenance technicians, missing its Fiscal Year 2021/2022 target of 407.

Additionally, to address ongoing recruitment shortages, in Fiscal Year 2021/2022, the Canadian Armed Forces transferred an additional 20 individuals to the pilot occupation and 49 to air maintenance technician occupations with personnel who transferred from other military occupations.

To facilitate the recruitment of pilots and air maintenance technicians, National Defence is also modernizing its recruitment initiatives, online presence, and services, including new online

customer service tools, to focus its recruitment efforts and improve the recruiting process.

Training personnel

Training personnel is a crucial component of ensuring National Defence can effectively fill vacant positions in the fighter force with new recruits and replace personnel who leave military service.

Since the last update to the Committee, National Defence continues to work with Transport Canada to contract training, in an effort to reduce the gaps between pilot training courses, in addition to using Transport Canada simulators to gain and maintain pilot skills on multi-engine platforms. Contracted training is also being explored for air maintenance technician occupations. These efforts continue to serve the Royal Canadian Air Force in augmenting the training system and reducing the wait time for the multi-engine training course.

National Defence also continues to work with allies to augment its training capacity. For example, in September 2022, the Royal Canadian Air Force will send one instructor pilot to the international Flight Training School in Italy, with one student to follow in 2023. This training opportunity is a proof of concept that may be expanded in future years. In 2022, Royal Canadian Air Force instructor pilots will also participate in the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program, with additional placements for Canadian fighter pilots through 2030. Together, these efforts continue to allow Royal Canadian Air Force pilots additional training opportunities and the chance to work closely with allies.

Additionally, the Canadian Armed Forces continues to review its training at every level to ensure it remains ready to excel at operations at home and abroad.

Retaining personnel

National Defence continues to analyze attrition rates and tailor retention initiatives to achieve maximum retention. For example, National Defence anticipates launching a new retention strategy in 2022 to retain Canadian Armed Forces members, including from underrepresented groups. This will be complemented by efforts to maximize the staffing of recruiting centres and training schools, while redesigning basic training with a focus on professional values, resilience, and military skills to build more inclusive teams.

Although the Retention Strategy will be launched later this year, numerous elements of the Strategy, or in support of the Strategy, are currently underway or in development including:

- **Total Health and Wellness Strategy:** Launched in February 2022, the Total Health and Wellness Strategy is a new philosophy and initiative for National Defence to care for its people and military families. The goal of the strategy is to improve the Canadian Armed Forces' work environment, better support military families, build resilience through effective health care services, and remove barriers to care.
- **Seamless Canada:** Launched in 2018, the Canadian Armed Forces works with federal, provincial, and territorial partners to address the mobility challenges faced by military families. On 14 June 2022, delegates from the provinces and territories signed the terms of reference establishing the Seamless Canada Steering Committee as a permanent intergovernmental body. The Steering Committee will work together to address various relocation challenges for military families, including healthcare, child care, dependent

education, and spousal employment.

- **Renewal of the CAF Ethos:** Launched in June 2022, the new 'Trusted to Serve' ethos includes the concept of character, values of inclusion and accountability, expectations of leadership and readiness, as well as an emphasis on trust.

These efforts will further the goal of retaining experienced personnel who are critical to mentoring new pilots and technicians.

Future updates to the Committee

National Defence will provide an update to the Committee by 30 June 2023, outlining the progress made on the aforementioned initiatives.