



National Defence

Défense nationale

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0K2

Quartier général de la Défense nationale
Ottawa, (Ontario)
K1A 0K2

The Honourable John Williamson
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Williamson,

As agreed upon in the Government Response to the Sixtieth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, entitled *Report 3, Canada's Fighter Force*, National Defence submits an update to Recommendation 1, due June 30, 2023.

Sincerely,

Bill Matthews

Enclosures: 1

**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 2022, 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 providing the Committee with an update on progress made on the aforementioned initiatives as part of its annual update in June 2023. Please find this update below.

Update on the progress made since June 2022

Increasing fighter force overall positions

As indicated in the last update, all 200 positions earmarked through *Strong, Secure, Engaged* have been allocated to fighter squadrons to augment the fighter force in preparation for the arrival of the F-35A aircraft. In addition, a total of 254 air maintenance positions were reallocated to the front-line squadrons.

This reallocation of positions was a key initial step to grow front line squadrons and allowed the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) to initiate training production adjustments and workforce transition plans. National Defence continues to focus on hiring pilots, including staffing all fighter force positions to facilitate the delivery of the first F-35A in 2026 and Initial Operational Capability of the F-35As in 2029.

The staffing (known as “fill rates”) at the fighter squadrons is monitored closely, and several initiatives are underway to increase percentages through targeted recruiting, training, and retention strategies as described below. The current fill rate at front line fighter squadrons is 63% for pilots and 80% for air maintenance personnel. In addition, other pilot and maintainer candidates are currently in various stages of their training process and, once completed, this will further increase the fill rates.

Recruitment

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) continues to make a concerted, comprehensive effort to recruit and retain its most valuable asset – people.

Since June 2022, the CAF has enrolled 92 pilot candidates, up by 14 compared to Fiscal Year 2021/22 numbers, and coming very close to the Fiscal Year 2022/2023 target of 100. During this period, a total of 56 pilots also completed their pilot training, more than double the number in the June 2022 Update.

The number of trained air maintenance technicians in the RCAF has decreased by 105 in Fiscal Year 2022/2023. However, since June 2022, National Defence has enrolled 284 new recruits to be trained as air maintenance technicians. Despite these efforts, projected targets were not reached (missing the Fiscal Year 2022/2023 target of 449). This can be attributed to the tight labour market and the overall challenges facing reconstitution of the CAF.

National Defence continues to analyze recruitment trends, particularly in highly skilled positions and is working to identify innovative ways to improve recruitment and membership. As such, an RCAF attraction team was stood up in fall of 2022 with the aim to reach more Canadians and generate interest in a career in the RCAF. This attraction team travels across Canada attending large events, academic institutions, training establishments, and job fairs. A transportable replica of an F-18 cockpit has been created to bring with the team to various events, generating interest to join the RCAF.

The Royal Canadian Airforce strategy, released in February 2023, will also build upon wider CAF efforts to showcase and leverage existing recruiting allowances, pay incentives, and subsidized education programs to help with recruitment.

Training personnel

Training personnel is a crucial component of ensuring the RCAF can develop an operational advantage. The RCAF is taking steps to increase training capacity and streamline training to get pilots flying sooner.

National Defence also continues to work with allies to augment its training capacity. For example, the RCAF currently has one instructor pilot posted to the International Flight Training School in Italy and will send two student pilots to the school for Fighter Lead-in Training (FLIT) in July 2023. Additionally, the RCAF continues to participate in the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot

Training Program, with additional placements for Canadian fighter pilot instructors and Fighter Lead-in Training students through 2032. Together, these efforts continue to provide RCAF pilots with additional training opportunities and the chance to work closely with allies.

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, a total of 285 air maintenance technicians completed training. The projection for Fiscal Year 2023/2024 is 306. The RCAF is also adopting strategies to recruit skilled or semi-skilled entries, as well as to re-enroll qualified technicians and pilots to shorten the training timelines associated with these trades and positions. In Fiscal Year 2022-23, 13% of the recruited air maintenance technicians were skilled or semi-skilled entries.

Additionally in Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the CAF transferred an additional 17 individuals to the pilot occupation and 51 to air maintenance technician occupations from other military occupations, thereby reducing the length of training required towards fighter force proficiency level.

The RCAF continues to assess solutions to increase the training of maintenance technicians. In 2022/23 the RCAF surveyed Canadian Colleges who offer Aircraft Maintenance Engineering programs to identify suitability to augment military training establishment in future years.

Retaining personnel

Several initiatives intended to retain experienced pilots, expand pilot absorption capacity, and augment pilot training capacity are currently under development and implementation. In September 2022, National Defence began implementing the Treasury Board approved pilot pay restructure with the intent of aligning pay with industry-based skills and qualifications. Implementation of the restructure is ongoing.

National Defence continues to analyze attrition rates and tailor retention initiatives to achieve maximum retention. In October 2022, National Defence launched the Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy to retain CAF talent and reduce attrition through a data-driven and evidence-based approach.

As retention affects occupations across the CAF differently, the CAF Retention Program Office is undertaking a Targeted Retention Study on specific occupations, including the Aviation Technician. The purpose of this study is to provide immediate support to targeted occupations and set the stage for a longer-term plan to address how different ranks and groups are being trained, employed, and managed to reduce unhealthy attrition. While these efforts are not specific to Fighter Force technicians, increased retention will be felt across multiple operational fleets.

Future updates to the Committee

National Defence will provide an update to the Committee by 30 June 2024, outlining the progress made on the aforementioned initiatives.