



National Defence

Défense nationale

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

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Ottawa, Ontario
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Ottawa, (Ontario)
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June 25, 2024

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 its update on Recommendation 1.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Beck

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. This recommendation was further reflected in the Committee's Recommendation 1, under *Report 3 Canada's Fighter Force – Canadian Armed Forces, of the 2018 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada* (March 2019).

Since then, and in line with the National Defence 2018 Management Action Plan and the 2019 Government Response to the Committee's Report 3, the Defence Team has provided regular updates to PACP on its efforts to train and transfer technicians to front-line squadrons, increase the fighter force, as well as to implement recruitment and retention strategies. These updates have further included information on Defence commitments to transfer over 200 technicians to front-line squadrons by December 2020, and to increase the fighter force by 200 positions by 2023.

In its last update to the Committee in June 2023, National Defence reported that all 200 positions earmarked through *Strong, Secure, Engaged* had 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 front-line squadrons. Further to a request from the Committee on 15 June 2023, National Defence also provided statistics on pilot "fill rates" for front-line fighter squadrons.

Please find below, the latest update from National Defence to the Committee.

Update on Progress Since June 2023

Staffing at fighter squadrons (known as "fill rates") continues to be 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 64% for pilots (up 1% since the last update) and 83% for air maintenance personnel (up 3% from the previous update). In addition, pilot and maintainer candidates are currently in various stages of their training process; once completed, this will further increase the fill rates.

Recruitment

Since its last update to the Committee in June 2023, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has enrolled 86 pilot candidates. In terms of air maintenance technicians, 480 new recruits have been enrolled since April 2023.

National Defence continues to analyze recruitment trends, particularly in highly skilled positions and is working to identify innovative ways to improve recruitment and membership. In fall 2022, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) stood up an attractions team to highlight specific careers in military aviation. Today, the team has nine members located across Canada. Over the course of 2023, they participated in more than 125 events in 2023. Of note, the team conducted an attractions campaign in fall 2023 specifically aimed at increasing Air Maintenance Branch (AMB) enrolments.

The RCAF is further leveraging subsidized education programs. For example, the Non-Commissioned Member Subsidized Training and Education Plan (NCM-STEP) utilises paid education opportunities in partnership with 14 aviation colleges across Canada. The RCAF enrolled 17 members through NCM-STEP last fiscal year and an additional 39 through the Semi-Skilled and Skilled Entry Plans.

In addition, the RCAF Intake & Liaison Team (AFILT) supports the enrolment of members with previous military experience, including previously serving RCAF members and Foreign Skilled Military applicants. In 2023, AFILT facilitated the enrolment of 61 fully qualified members into the RCAF.

Training personnel

Since June 2023 a total of 62 pilots have completed their training. Further, in Fiscal Year 2023/24, a total of 329 air maintenance technicians completed their training. During this same time period, the CAF also transferred an additional 17 individuals to the pilot occupation and 74 individuals to air maintenance technician occupations, directly from other military occupations; thereby reducing the length of training required towards fighter force proficiency level.

Further, the RCAF is streamlining its pilot training courses which has significantly reduced the time pilots need to wait to proceed to the next phases of course training. In Fiscal Year 2023/24, wait times were reduced by over 40% for phases I and II of pilot training. The RCAF will continue to monitor this trend, and work with allies and partners to identify and implement lessons learned and best practices to get more pilots trained and into the cockpit quicker.

The Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Technology and Engineering (CFSATE), which is responsible for training aircraft technicians and engineers, has increased the number of common core aircraft technician training courses offered and increased class sizes by 33%. This now allows for more technicians to obtain their core qualification each year. Additionally, instructor training will be delivered throughout the summer posting season to allow new instructors to achieve their Basic Instructor qualification expeditiously.

Retaining personnel

Since the last update, National Defence is implementing a pilot pay scale to support retention efforts. The new pay scale compensates pilots based on their experience and qualifications

through the introduction of a new skills and competencies-oriented pay system. As an example, a pilot at the top of the Captain-rank pay scale can now earn 40% more than they could previously.

Other recent RCAF retention initiatives include:

- Ongoing work to apply a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lens to policies and programs, to remove systemic barriers and make the organization more inclusive and responsive to its members.
- The establishment of a dedicated Family Advocate, to represent the specific interests of RCAF families and to enhance communications with RCAF families.
- The creation of a digital communications platform, to amplify members' voices to senior leadership and enable them to share ideas and concerns.

Future updates to the Committee

National Defence will provide an update to the Committee by 30 June 2025, outlining the progress made on the aforementioned initiatives.