

Inspection of Ministry of Defence (Royal Air Force (RAF))

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 June 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Ministry of Defence (Royal Air Force (RAF)) is a national employer provider based in Cosford, Shropshire. At the time of the visit, there were 4,200 apprentices. The largest numbers were studying on the following apprenticeships: 2,470 were on the level 3 engineering technician, 437 were on the level 4 intelligence analyst, 192 were on the level 3 information communications technician, and 188 were on the level 2 HM forces serviceperson (protective services). The remaining 745 apprentices were on one of 12 apprenticeships, including the level 3 aviation ground specialist and level 3 network cable installer. At the time of the visit, 43 apprentices were under 19. Ministry of Defence (RAF) do not work with any subcontractors.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices demonstrate high standards of behaviour. They are highly respectful of each other, their staff, and visitors. They understand and uphold the RAF values effectively, mirroring the high standards they see from their instructors.

Many apprentices are in roles that pose a high risk to themselves or the lives of others. They demonstrate high levels of integrity and care for each other and those they work with when performing their duties. They follow the health and safety information which instructors give them when conducting high-risk activities. Level 3 survival equipment fitter apprentices understand their responsibilities as part of their workplaces in prioritising safety and mitigating risks for their colleagues. Instructors and workplace mentors reinforce these behaviours to ensure apprentices meet the standards expected in the RAF.

Apprentices develop confidence, resilience and teamworking skills as they progress through their apprenticeship. Instructors encourage apprentices to present ideas and projects to their peers during lessons, which develops their confidence and communication skills. Level 2 supply chain apprentices based at Cosford recently developed their communication skills by guiding and advising members of the public during the 2024 RAF Cosford Air Show.

Apprentices' attendance at their lessons and in the workplace is very high. Apprentices are committed to the RAF's values and uphold them well. They are rarely late, and staff deal with this appropriately should it occur. Leaders have taken steps to improve the support apprentices receive towards the end of their training. A significant number of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship achieve distinction and merit grades.

Apprentices' understanding of British values does not receive sufficient focus compared to the RAF values. While most apprentices can recall some discussion and teaching on this topic, their understanding of British values is less well-developed. Apprentices often struggle to articulate how these are relevant to their roles or careers.

Most apprentices in training establishments learn and live onsite in a safe environment. They know the precautions they should take, such as limiting their social media profiles. However, most apprentices' understanding of how to recognise and keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation lacks depth or relevance to their job roles.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have designed curriculums to meet the RAF's training needs. They employ apprentices in various professions and provide apprenticeships that are specifically designed to meet the unique requirements of job roles, such as intelligence analysts, operational firefighters, and air traffic controllers.

Leaders have an appropriate range of quality improvement and assurance processes to ensure that apprentices benefit from high-quality training. They routinely observe instructors' teaching and identify areas for improvement, such as the effective use of questioning techniques. Instructors benefit from peer observations and mentor support, which helps them further improve their teaching skills.

Leaders accurately monitor apprentices' progress. They know which apprentices must resit examinations, which have fallen behind, and how many are on track to complete their apprenticeship on time. Managers meet with instructors to agree on any interventions needed to ensure apprentices make their expected progress, such as extra one-on-one revision lessons to ensure apprentices' success in examination resits.

Those responsible for governance receive helpful information from managers. Consequently, they understand the strengths and areas for improvement of the apprenticeships in the RAF. They closely monitor the areas that need improvement and hold leaders accountable for making the necessary changes to improve the quality of apprentices' training. Recently, for example, they have implemented strategies to resolve the difficulties of the instructor shortage for engineering technician apprentices. As a result, managers support apprentices in continuing their learning when instructors are unavailable.

Instructors have extensive experience and expertise in the military and the professions they teach. They use this knowledge effectively to inform the highly relevant training content they provide. Most have come through the ranks in the RAF as technicians and now instructors. They draw upon their professional experience to contextualise learning and fully engage apprentices. Apprentices develop skills that reflect the current and future needs of the professions that they work in.

Most instructors use assessment well to assess the progress of apprentices. Instructors on the level 3 survival equipment fitter apprenticeship use skilful questioning to identify gaps in knowledge and inform their teaching. Apprentices complete practical tasks to demonstrate the new skills they have learned in realistic, simulated environments. By practising these skills, apprentices gain competence and confidence to apply them safely and effectively once deployed to their employer base. Level 3 engineering technicians on the weapons pathway learn about launchers, ejection seats, bombs, and missiles. They value their instructor's specialist knowledge and ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical workplace examples and simulated activities. Consequently, apprentices know more and remember more over time.

Instructors skilfully use current learning activities to revisit prior learning. Instructors on the air traffic controller apprenticeship plan a three-day cycle, starting with procedures and practical application, a demonstration in the classroom, and then a simulated one-to-one with the instructor to assess any gaps. They then move on to consolidation, leading to formative assessments. Consequently, apprentices commit this to their long-term memory, becoming proficient in their learned skills.

Instructors' verbal feedback on apprentices' work is prompt and constructive. They give apprentices detailed and helpful verbal feedback to reinforce learning and understanding. However, their written comments are often too brief in some cases and do not contain sufficient information to tell apprentices how to improve their work or achieve a distinction grade.

Instructors review apprentices' progress frequently during their off-the-job training. However, not all employers participate fully in apprentices' progress reviews. As such, the coordination of on- and off-the-job learning is not as effective as it could be for these apprentices. As a result, a minority of apprentices cannot apply theory into practice as quickly as they could, and they make slower progress.

Apprentices with additional learning needs are supported well in achieving their goals. Leaders have established a new learning mentor team, who work closely with apprentices to encourage them to declare additional learning needs or barriers to learning. The learning mentor team uses initial assessment and neurodiversity screening to identify the strategies needed to support apprentices.

Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills, and behaviours that they use effectively to build their workplace practice. On the level 3 information communication technology apprenticeship, apprentices confidently and safely complete wiring and switching involving fibre optic cables at work. Apprentices evolve into competent practitioners in their specialist fields.

Apprentices gain additional qualifications that expand their knowledge and make them more effective practitioners. Level 5 intelligence analyst apprentices complete an 'open source' course that equips them to conduct in-depth open-source research and an intelligence process systems qualification. Most apprentices will complete first aid at work, workplace safety, and fire safety qualifications.

Most apprentices understand the RAF's career structure well. They know the stages of training and career paths because staff provide well-structured advice and guidance. For example, air traffic control apprentices have ready access to a careers manager.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that apprentices develop an understanding of life in modern Britain and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism throughout their apprenticeship.
- Ensure that progress reviews involving the apprentice, employer, and instructor are implemented consistently so that apprentices are able to practise their skills in the workplace.

- Ensure that all instructors provide clear written feedback linked to skills development, so that all apprentices can achieve their best.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54191
Address	RAF Apprenticeship Management Team RAF Cosford Wolverhampton WV7 3EX
Contact number	020 7218 9000
Website	www.raf.mod.uk/our-organisation/stations/raf-cosford
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Air Vice Marshal Ian Townsend
Provider type	Employer
Date of previous inspection	8 December 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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