

# NATS (En Route) PLC

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 2791020

**Name of lead inspector:** Sara Woodward, His Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** Employer

**Address:** 4000 Parkway  
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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

NATS (En Route) PLC is an employer provider based in Whiteley, Hampshire. It is the largest initial training organisation (ITO) for air traffic controllers in the UK, approved and regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). NATS (En Route) PLC is part of NATS, a main provider of air traffic control services in Swanwick in Hampshire and Prestwick in Ayrshire. NATS also operates out of 22 airports nationally and internationally.

NATS (En Route) PLC registered as an employer provider in January 2020, but did not offer provision during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ITO re-registered successfully in July 2023 and the first apprentices started in October 2023. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 70 apprentices in learning, all of whom were studying the level 5 air traffic controller standard. Apprentices attend training on 5 days per week, for approximately one year to 18 months. On successful completion of the apprenticeship, apprentices gain a CAA accredited student licence that enables them to progress to the next phase of training in live air traffic management workplaces. NATS (En Route) PLC does not work with any subcontractors.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?**

#### **Significant progress**

Leaders have a clear purpose for offering the level 5 air traffic control apprenticeship. They have a strong national reputation for training and delivery in air traffic management. Leaders work closely with the government, Ministry of Defence and CAA to meet skills gaps in this highly specialist sector. As a result, they support the national demand for qualified air traffic controllers very successfully.

Leaders have developed an ambitious and challenging curriculum that enables apprentices to link theory and practical learning very effectively so they can make rapid progress. Leaders have invested significantly in high-quality resources to support apprentices' training. Expert instructors help apprentices to quickly develop

their knowledge and skills using simulators that mirror the types of live air traffic control scenarios. As a result, apprentices understand how to respond accurately to situations that they will encounter in their careers.

Leaders make sure that instructors have extensive experience as air traffic controllers and trainers. They provide instructors with valuable opportunities to develop their teaching skills and maintain their vocational expertise. As a result, apprentices benefit from industry standard training, which prepares them very well for roles in the air traffic control sector.

Leaders and managers have a very comprehensive understanding of the strengths of their provision, as well as areas for further improvement. For instance, they are working to increase the number of instructors who have a level 3 and 4 teaching qualification. Leaders use feedback from apprentices to adapt provision to meet their needs well. For example, they extended the induction period so that apprentices have more time to settle in.

Leaders and managers review the quality of provision continuously, using a range of suitable processes, such as visiting lessons and sampling work. As such, they make sure that apprentices' training is of a high quality and meets the stringent standards set by the CAA.

Leaders are held to account very effectively by the executive and non-executive boards of NATS. Those responsible for oversight use their skills and experience to fully support and challenge leaders to achieve ambitious targets in apprentices' recruitment and pass rates.

<b>What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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Staff have high expectations for apprentices. Apprentices become increasingly capable and confident trainee air traffic controllers. Instructors expertly help apprentices to develop new knowledge of a wide range of concepts successfully, including aviation theory, types of aircraft and the influence of weather conditions. They support apprentices to apply this knowledge using simulators in increasingly complex air traffic control scenarios effectively. For example, apprentices start by controlling 17 aircraft, then progress gradually to 23 aircraft in more challenging situations. As a result, they quickly gain fluency in the essential principles of air traffic control.

Staff make sure that apprentices develop the ability to work calmly under pressure. For example, instructors help apprentices to improve their communication, problem-solving and decision-making skills effectively. Consequently, apprentices become more resilient and are prepared very well for their future job roles.

Staff carry out thorough assessments of apprentices' existing knowledge and skills at the start of their training. They use this information to adapt their teaching to meet apprentices' needs effectively. Staff make sure that apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from individualised support, such as additional one-to-one coaching. As a result, these apprentices progress very well, in line with their peers.

Staff help apprentices to improve their mathematics and English skills throughout their apprenticeship extensively. They make sure that apprentices have the skills they need to be successful. For example, instructors teach apprentices how to quickly calculate the rates at which aircraft climb and descend.

Staff have a clear and detailed knowledge of apprentices' progress. They use assessment and feedback skilfully to help apprentices improve their work to a high standard, which almost all do. Staff prepare apprentices for their examinations and practical assessments thoroughly. Consequently, almost all apprentices pass their assessments on the first attempt.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Significant progress**

Leaders and managers have created a strong safeguarding culture in which apprentices feel and are safe. Apprentices know how to report concerns to staff about themselves or their peers confidently.

The well-qualified, designated safeguarding lead works closely with managers and staff to identify and respond swiftly to any concerns about apprentices.

Apprentices value the high-quality support staff provide for their welfare and well-being. Staff support apprentices to improve their knowledge of topics, such as online safety and mental health awareness, successfully.

Leaders have put in place a comprehensive 'Prevent' duty risk assessment. They work effectively with external partners so that apprentices understand fully the risks associated with radicalization and extremism. Staff teach apprentices a wide range of safety critical topics, including counter terrorism awareness and insider threat. As a result, apprentices know how to stay safe from these risks in their personal lives and when working in the air traffic control sector.

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