


NATS (En Route) PLC

Address: 4000, Parkway, Whiteley, Fareham, PO15 7FL

Unique reference number (URN): 2791020

Inspection report: 3 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met


The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, and leadership and governance

Strong standard	
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Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have fully embedded a culture of care, support and inclusion. They have very effective, well-trained teams and carefully thought through strategies that enable all staff to provide high-quality support that fully meets apprentices' needs.

Leaders and managers monitor the progress of apprentices diligently. Instructors are skilled at identifying where apprentices develop specific learning needs during their apprenticeship. They use their expertise, alongside careful monitoring of apprentices' performance data, to spot quickly where apprentices are at risk of failing or falling behind. They implement well-considered and targeted support that gets apprentices back on track. Instructors review the support regularly and adapt it well to meet the needs of the individual, reducing it over time where appropriate. As a result, any barriers to learning that apprentices have at the start, or develop during their training, are swiftly removed. Apprentices, regardless of their starting points or learning needs, gain independence and make rapid progress.

Staff support extremely well younger apprentices for whom their training at NATS results in them living away from home for the first time. They help them to find suitable accommodation, check in regularly on their wellbeing and provide bursaries to help with transport costs.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders have rapidly implemented a highly effective apprenticeship that meets the demand for the national shortage of properly trained, highly skilled air traffic controllers.

Leaders have an accurate picture of the many strengths and very few areas for further development in their training programme. They use data very effectively to track and monitor performance. They understand precisely what high-quality training looks like and have implemented this successfully. Leaders have ensured that all their instructors are skilled and knowledgeable and have a very effective programme of training that quickly enables them to become highly competent teachers. Leaders use apprentices' and instructors' feedback very effectively to continue to improve the quality of their training. For example, apprentices identified that their online learning tool would benefit from a search function, and this was rapidly installed.

Leaders on the NATS executive board, alongside the Civil Aviation Authority, ensure that senior leaders responsible for training are challenged and held accountable for their performance. The executive board ensures it is kept well informed of the progress of apprentices through detailed and accurate monthly reports. It sets ambitious targets for performance and supports its staff very well to achieve these.

Leaders take very seriously the work-life balance of all their staff and carefully manage their workloads so that they do not work beyond their contracted hours. Staff have access to a

wide range of useful information to support with their wellbeing. All staff value highly being part of the NATS community.

2. Apprenticeships

Strong standard



Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Apprentices demonstrate very high levels of competency in both their theoretical understanding and its practical application. They master quickly how to use industry-standard technology, and this results in them making rapid progress right from the start.

Apprentices work to an extremely high standard and demonstrate in their assessments rapid broadening and deepening of their skills and knowledge over time. Instructors ensure that apprentices become highly proficient with the appropriate terminology, codes and language that they must use, such as when speaking to pilots, alongside the mathematical skills that they need in, for example, calculating rates of climb and descent.

Apprentices achieve very well, regardless of their starting point or background, and they are extremely confident moving on to their next steps. Nearly all continue with their training to become fully licensed air traffic controllers.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have implemented a highly effective and exceptionally well-resourced curriculum that ensures apprentices make rapid progress regardless of their starting points or any barriers to learning that they may have. It prepares apprentices extremely well for their next steps in training and supports them on their journey to becoming proficient air traffic controllers. The curriculum offers very well-considered opportunities for apprentices to broaden their understanding of, and interest in, the aviation industry. For example, they try out the A320 aircraft simulator and benefit from experiencing what it is like to take off and land a plane, alongside talking first-hand with pilots. Apprentices access a wealth of high-quality online resources that support and enhance their training.

Instructors teach increasingly difficult topics, skilfully connecting new ideas with existing knowledge and understanding. For example, they introduce no-fly zones and increase airspace congestion so that apprentices master ever-more-complex scenarios. Apprentices readily grasp and retain what they are learning and apply it with very high levels of confidence and expertise. Instructors expertly adapt their teaching to suit their apprentices' ability by, for example, speeding up or slowing down the movement of aircraft.

Instructors assess apprentices' progress very accurately. They ensure that apprentices know how well they are doing and what they need to improve. Managers have skilfully designed the teaching schedule so that when individual apprentices require more time to develop particular skills, such as the use of strip scans, there is capacity built in for them to practise and consolidate their skills without falling behind.

Participation and development

Strong standard 

Leaders have very high expectations of the behaviours and attitudes of all their staff, and they model these clearly and explicitly. They ensure that all staff feel highly valued. They have created a workplace that is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. As a result, apprentices very rarely miss training, their attitudes to learning are exemplary and they are rightly very proud to work for NATS.

Apprentices benefit from expert guidance on their next steps. If they choose not to carry on with their training on completion of their apprenticeship, they receive plenty of useful information on how to work in other areas within NATS, such as in operations or airspace design, alongside opportunities in the wider aviation industry.

Apprentices rapidly gain a thorough understanding and appreciation of the diversity of their workplace and the communities in which they live. As a result, they become fine ambassadors for NATS and its culture of inclusivity, confidently applying what they learn not only at work but also in their personal lives. Apprentices have access to a wide variety of sporting, cultural and community activities in which they participate enthusiastically.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Apprentices, many of whom have no previous experience of the aviation industry, are very enthusiastic about their training. They are highly motivated to do their best and thoroughly enjoy training and working at NATS. Apprentices readily grasp and retain what they learn and apply it with ever-increasing levels of confidence and expertise on the simulators. They benefit from a culture where all staff feel safe and valued and where their differences are celebrated. They value highly that NATS is an extremely respectful and purposeful, yet relaxed and friendly, environment in which to work. As a result, attendance is exceptionally high, apprentices achieve their qualification and they are very well prepared for their next phase of training.

Apprentices benefit from the bespoke professional skills framework that leaders have implemented. This ensures that they rapidly develop the confidence and resilience that they need to be successful in the high-pressure environment in which they are going to work. It also means that when apprentices start at NATS, they quickly build very positive relationships with leaders and instructors, alongside developing strong bonds and friendships with their peers. They learn quickly the need to become independent in their learning and to take responsibility for their own progress. They participate enthusiastically in a wide range of additional activities, such as a 3-kilometre staggered run and the debating club, and learn how to look after their physical and mental wellbeing. They thrive both professionally and personally.

Apprentices have access to a wide range of high-quality resources, such as areas where they can work together in groups and learn from each other, comfortable and relaxing social areas and a wealth of interesting online resources. These all support apprentices' training and wellbeing extremely well, alongside giving them valuable experience and knowledge of the wider aviation industry.

Next steps

- Leaders, including those on the executive board, should continue to sustain the excellent training that apprentices receive and their high rates of achievement.
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About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with apprentices, leaders, line managers, members of the executive board and other stakeholders during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the provider:

Leaders offer the level 5 air traffic controller apprenticeship. At the time of the inspection, there were 156 apprentices in training, all of whom were aged 18 or over. Apprentices spend all their time when training at the NATS site in Whiteley, near Fareham, Hampshire.

Director of operations training: Jodie McMenamin

Lead inspector:

Stewart Jackson, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Kay Hedges, Ofsted Inspector

Emma Leavey, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

Number of learners

Apprenticeships

156

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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