

REINSPECTION REPORT

The Royal Air Force Reinspection

05 May 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Training Group is part of the Royal Air Force (RAF) Personnel and Training Command based at RAF Innsworth, near Gloucester. It is responsible for overseeing the recruitment and selection of all RAF personnel and for the policy and delivery of RAF non-operational training.
2. The aim of the Training Group is to support the operational effectiveness of the RAF through the timely provision of military and civilian personnel trained to standards agreed with customers. The Training Group's portfolio of flying courses provides elementary, basic and advanced flying training for fast jet, rotary-wing and multi-engine aircraft. In partnership with its contractors, the Training Group operates a fleet of more than 400 aircraft and employs just over 9,300 people.
3. The Training Group provides a range of training similar to that provided by the further and higher education sectors. Its role in apprenticeships is to determine policy and provide guidance and support to RAF trade training schools. Work-based learning for young people on advanced apprenticeships and apprenticeships is offered in a variety of ground support trades at 14 RAF ground training schools. These programmes are funded by the RAF's contract with the National Employer Service of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).
4. The Training Group apprenticeship management team comprises 12 RAF and civil service staff, and manages policy, finance, management information, quality assurance and contact with learners. This team is based at RAF Innsworth and is responsible for the overall performance of the RAF apprenticeship scheme, for securing government funding and for liaising with the LSC.
5. There are currently 2,229 advanced apprentices, 471 apprentices and 290 dedicated accreditation staff involved in the RAF apprenticeship scheme. Most of the accreditation staff are based at the ground training schools and their duties include assessment, verification, administration, management and co-ordination of the relevant programmes. These staff include 26 apprenticeship co-ordinators, and 70 full-time assessors located at main operating bases or within regional teams, who support engineering sector learners and part-time vocational assessors. Eight more apprenticeship co-ordinators are being recruited.
6. The ground training schools, some of which are part of Defence Colleges, run as autonomous units with direction, guidance and support from the Training Group. They are responsible jointly to their RAF trade sponsor and the Training Group. Day-to-day management is carried out by staff in the accreditation cell at each school.
7. Recruits initially attend a nine-week basic military training course at RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire, before progressing to their designated trade training at ground training

schools. Early in the training course, recruits undergo a literacy, numeracy and language skills initial assessment using a computer-based programme and a specific learning difficulties self-assessment.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

8. There are 2,208 learners on engineering programmes. Of these, 1,646 are on advanced apprenticeships in engineering maintenance at Number 1 School of Technical Training, part of the Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering, Cosford. The remainder are on advanced or foundation apprenticeships in communications, electronics and telecommunications operation at Number 1 Radio School, part of the Defence College of Communications and Information Systems at RAF Cosford. Programmes for learners at the schools include aircraft avionics and electrics, aircraft engine and airframe technology, aircraft weapons systems and safety equipment and communication and information systems. Learners complete key skills training and, depending on programme, all or most of the technical certificate requirements in full-time study during their time at the schools. At Number 1 School of Technical Training, learners are subsequently supported in their technical certificate completion by 14 distance learning tutors who provide workshops at units and e-mail support. This stage of training varies in length from 26 to 65 weeks, depending on the trade area. On completion of their college-based training, learners are dispersed around 20 operational stations, where they complete the remaining elements of a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 or 3, according to their apprenticeship framework requirements, and where applicable, the remaining units of the technical certificate. Learners are supported in their learning at the training college by teams of specialist instructional staff, both military and civilian. During their work-based phase, Number 1 School of Technical Training learners are supported by a team of 90 work-based assessors and 30 internal verifiers, and Number 1 Radio School learners by teams of assessment/verification staff strategically positioned in regions throughout the UK. Subcontracted, specialist training providers also provide additional assessment and verification staff and key skills support.

Business administration, management & professional

9. There are 190 apprentices on business administration, management and professional programmes, all working towards qualifications at level 2. All apprentices were recruited either during 2003-04 or 2004-05. There was no new recruitment during 2005-06. Apprentices are recruited as personnel administrators, medical administrators or catering accountants. All apprentices have off-the-job training which varies according to the school they attend. Learners in personnel administration train in the Secretarial Training School, Defence College of Police and Personnel Administration at Southwick Park. Catering accountants train at the Catering Training Squadron (RAF), Defence Food Services School, Defence College of Logistics at RAF Halton. Medical administrators are trained at the Director General Medical Services (RAF), Defence Medical Services Training Centre at Keogh Barracks.

10. Personnel administrators achieve the whole of the NVQ during initial off-the-job training, while medical administrators and catering accountants work towards key skills qualifications and achieve the NVQ once they have been posted to an operational station. Assessors visit the workplace regularly to carry out assessments and reviews. Each school has a team of assessors and a firm of consultants is used to provide additional work-based assessors.

Information & communications technology

11. There are 46 information and communications technology (ICT) learners on ICT apprenticeships employed at 21 RAF stations across the country. The RAF provides training for the apprenticeship at three schools, the School of Fighter Control at RAF Boulmer, the Medmenham Training Delivery Wing, part of the Defence College of Intelligence at Chicksands, and the Central Air Traffic Control School at RAF Shawbury. Trade training takes between eight and 18 weeks. All learners start their key skills qualifications during their trade training. On successful completion of the trade training, learners are posted to their first operational unit. Each school has specific staff responsible for the operational management of the apprenticeship scheme.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

12. Twenty-three learners are following apprenticeship programmes in distribution, warehousing and storage operations. Their trade training is carried out at the Logistics and Supply Training Squadron, Defence College of Logistics, RAF Halton, and subsequently at one of 14 RAF operational units across the UK. The planned duration of the apprenticeship programme was two years, but has recently been halved. Recruits have nine weeks of basic RAF training before they join the training squadron. Their off-the-job training takes 13 weeks and is followed by on-the-job training at their operating bases. NVQ assessment takes place at the training squadron and in the workplace, and is carried out by qualified staff with occupational experience.

Health, social care & public services

13. The RAF offers an apprenticeship in providing security services for learners at the Defence Police College, Defence College of Police and Personnel Administration at Southwick Park, and the RAF Regiment Training Wing at RAF Honington. Currently, there is one RAF Police learner and 153 RAF Regiment learners on programme. Following induction, learners complete an intensive period of trade training lasting 22 weeks for the RAF Police and 20 weeks for the RAF Regiment. Defence Police College learners complete their apprenticeship at the college within the 22-week timeframe. RAF Regiment learners are assessed for some of the key skills qualifications, the technical certificate and NVQ units during this phase. The remainder of the apprenticeship is completed when their learners are posted to operational units throughout the RAF, and is assessed in the workplace.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	10
Number of inspection days	68
Number of learners interviewed	198
Number of staff interviewed	227
Number of subcontractors interviewed	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	34
Number of visits	3

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

14. At the previous inspection in February 2005 the RAF's leadership and management and arrangements for quality assurance were judged unsatisfactory. The approach to equality of opportunity was judged satisfactory. Provision was outstanding in visual and performing arts and media and good in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel. Provision in business administration, management and professional, and in ICT was satisfactory. Retailing, customer service and transportation programmes were outstanding and programmes in warehousing and distribution were satisfactory. Hospitality, sport, leisure and travel provision was good. Programmes in engineering, technology and manufacturing, and in health, social care and public services were judged unsatisfactory.

15. This reinspection covered all those areas previously judged satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Inspectors focused their attention primarily on on-the-job training activity at a wide range of RAF stations in England and Scotland. At the end of the reinspection all areas inspected were good, with the exception of equality of opportunity which remains satisfactory. In many cases, weaknesses originally identified have been eradicated and no new weaknesses were found.

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grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Grades awarded at previous inspection

Leadership and management		4
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality assurance		4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	4086	4

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration - Apprenticeships for young people	388	3

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Apprenticeships for young people	342	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Transportation - Apprenticeships for young people	80	1
Warehousing and distribution - Apprenticeships for young people	133	3

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Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hospitality and catering - Apprenticeships for young people	133	2
Leisure, sport and recreation - Apprenticeships for young people	51	1

Health, social care & public services		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Public services - Apprenticeships for young people	340	4

Visual & performing arts & media		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	10	1

Grades awarded at reinspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality assurance		2

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	2208	2

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration - Apprenticeships for young people	190	2
Information & communications technology		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Apprenticeships for young people	46	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Warehousing and distribution - Apprenticeships for young people	23	2
Health, social care & public services		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Public services - Apprenticeships for young people	154	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

16. **Engineering learners' overall success rates have improved significantly.** Full framework achievement for the 2001-02 intake of engineering learners has risen to 64 per cent from 4 per cent. Thirty-one per cent of the 2002-03 intake of learners have now completed their framework, compared with 1 per cent at the previous inspection. The achievement rate for the 2000-01 intake of telecommunications and mechanical engineering learners has improved to 57 per cent. All engineering learners who have joined the programme since 2004-05 are progressing very well. Six per cent of telecommunications learners who joined in 2004-05 have already completed the full apprenticeship framework. Key skills qualification achievement is now very good. The retention rate for engineering programmes continues to be very good.

17. **Overall success rates in business administration have improved well.** Fifty-four per cent of all catering accountants have now achieved their qualification and a further 46 per cent are close to completion. Fifty-four per cent of personnel learners have completed their framework, with 31 per cent still in learning. On average, 46 per cent of

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all learners recruited in 2003-04 and 52 per cent of those recruited in 2004-05 have now completed their frameworks. Good retention rates have been maintained since the previous inspection and exceed 80 per cent.

18. **In ICT, achievement rates and progress towards achievement have substantially improved and are now good.** Success rates for the 2003-04 intake have improved from 13 per cent to 67 per cent, and from zero per cent to 73 per cent for 2004-05 learners. All learners who started in August 2005 completed their frameworks within nine months and the November 2005 intake is progressing well, with 42 per cent having already achieved the full framework. Retention rates remain very good at all three schools.

19. **The overall success rate of warehousing and distribution learners is now very good,** having previously been judged satisfactory. In 2003-04 the achievement rate was 98 per cent, and 46 out of 67 learners who started in 2004-05 have already achieved their qualification. Key skills qualification achievements continue to be good. The retention rate is good.

20. **Security learners now have very good overall success rates for full apprenticeship frameworks,** having previously been judged poor. The achievement rate for 2002-03 was 16 per cent and is now 84 per cent. In 2003-04 the achievement rate was 9 per cent and is now 74 per cent, with 17 per cent of the intake still in learning. The achievement rate for 2004-05 was zero per cent but has now risen to 55 per cent, with 32 per cent still in learning. Progress for current learners is good. The retention rate remains very good on both the RAF Police and the RAF Regiment programmes.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2	2	0	0	4
Total	2	2	0	0	4

21. The table above shows only the areas of learning in which two or more learning sessions have been observed and graded. All of the observed sessions were good or better.

22. **Engineering learners develop good practical skills.** This strength has been maintained since the previous inspection. **Teaching and training in engineering continue to be very good.**

23. The standard of work in business administration portfolios is good. **On-the-job training continues to be effective.** Learners shadow a more experienced member of staff for up to two months on their first posting, gradually carrying out work of increasing complexity.

24. ICT learners gain very good personal skills and excellent trade skills far in excess of

those required by the apprenticeship framework. Good use is made of real work activities and evidence is presented in well-structured portfolios. **Teaching and learning remain very good.**

25. **Learners' development of skills and knowledge in warehousing and distribution remains good.** Off-the-job training is effective and well structured, including both background knowledge and practical sessions. Learners develop good supply skills in a simulated working environment.

26. **Learners on the RAF Police and RAF Regiment programmes continue to develop good, transferable occupational skills.** RAF Regiment learners acquire a high level of technical skills in the use of industry-standard equipment. RAF Police learners develop very good skills in interviewing, control and restraint techniques and use of firearms.

27. **Resources for teaching and training in engineering remain excellent** and there have been some further improvements, particularly in increased access to ICT. The physical resources for training continue to be exceptional. **However, some engineering learners do not have equal access to some resources.**

28. **The good resources available to business administration learners have been maintained.** Although there has been some upheaval and loss of facilities associated with the relocation of the personnel school, the process has been managed well. A good simulated learning environment has been completely transferred and upgraded with the use of closed-circuit television for assessment purposes.

29. **Accommodation and physical resources for teaching and learning in ICT continue to be very good.** Most classrooms have computer-aided presentation facilities and practical training areas with access to equipment learners will use in the field. All learners have access to an on-site learning centre, a well-equipped library and to the RAF intranet.

30. **Resources within the warehousing and distribution programme remain particularly good.** Training accommodation is of a high standard and very well equipped. It includes classrooms with electronic presentation technology, computer suites for supply software training and a purpose-built simulated working environment.

31. **Resources for security learners are now very good,** previously having been judged as good. The new ICT suite at the RAF Regiment is equipped with industry-standard personal computers, printers and an interactive whiteboard, and learners make good use of the facilities. All but one of the Regiment squadrons has access to online testing for key skills qualifications.

32. Support for engineering learners has improved from good to very good. A substantial increase in the number of assessors and internal verifiers, organised in local or regional teams, has been a key factor in providing increased support, more frequent reviews and reduced assessment intervals. Learners who are required to complete their technical certificates through distance learning receive insufficient support.

33. **Good support for business administration learners has been maintained since the previous inspection.** Instructors support learners well on an individualised basis, particularly for key skills. Assessment and internal verification practices are satisfactory. All appropriate assessment methods are used to meet the needs of individual learners

34. Trainers provide good levels of support for ICT learners. There are now sufficient numbers of assessors and this aspect is now satisfactory. **Learners are set some insufficiently challenging targets.** For example, the level of key skills qualifications is insufficiently challenging. All learners are on a two-year target achievement date when many could or should achieve within a shorter period.

35. **Support for warehousing and distribution learners continues to be good,** and some past weaknesses have been eliminated. Assessment and verification practice is now satisfactory, having previously been judged as poor. The detail of some of witness statements remains poor. Internal verification practice for the NVQ is now satisfactory, having previously been judged as poor. **Some reviews of learners' progress are weak.** Reviews include insufficient detail and specific information on the progress that learners have made since their previous review.

36. **The support for security learners continues to be very good.** Assessment practice is satisfactory. There is appropriate preparation and planning for assessment and satisfactory notes and feedback are promptly provided to learners and assessors.

37. Security learners who have additional literacy, numeracy or language skills support needs receive at least 30 hours of additional support. Specialist staff have been appointed to assist and support learners with specific learning difficulties. Learners are far more willing to ask for additional help than in the past. The arrangements for literacy and numeracy support are now satisfactory in all other areas of learning. Learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs are assessed during their phase 1 recruit training. The transfer of information on learners' individual needs has improved, but is not routinely communicated to instructors or to all those responsible for groups of learners.

Leadership and management

38. **The Training Group has developed particularly good strategies and actions to manage and improve the apprenticeship programme.** The apprenticeship strategic management group was formed in May 2005 and has been a key forum for devising and directing change and improvement. Good use is now made of data to support judgements on progress, subsequent decision-making and action-planning. Attendance has been high at all meetings.

39. Senior RAF staff have given good support for the improvement programme. The apprenticeship programme has a much higher profile than in the past. Operational management systems have been overhauled and restructured. Staffing has been increased, particularly assessors and internal verifiers. The use of subcontractors to clear a historical backlog of key skills qualification achievement has been particularly effective

in raising achievement rates in the engineering provision.

40. An effective quality improvement team has been formed and new and effective quality assurance procedures devised and implemented. There has been good development of a new, bespoke and web-based management information system, and consequent effective use of consistent data at station and school level. However, some staff have not yet received training in its use and there are some problems with slow internet connectivity at some stations.

41. Throughout the change and improvement process, previous high standards in and strong emphasis on health and safety and environmental protection in the apprenticeship programme have been maintained.

42. **Good management of physical and human resources continues to be a strength.** Further improvements and additions to staffing and training resources have been made, particularly at schools and at some stations.

43. **The previous strength in training and development of staff has been maintained.** Records over the past 12 months indicate that there has been a very strong emphasis on training and development activities directly related to improvements in and understanding of the delivery and improvement of the programme.

44. Initial training continues to be particularly effective. The programme is highly structured and provides an effective introduction to the RAF's ethos and values. The RAF's policy on bullying and harassment is introduced to learners very early in the programme and effectively reinforced. Completion rates are good and have improved.

45. Equality of opportunity remains satisfactory. The RAF is rectifying weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. **Since the previous inspection, a more active approach has been taken to equality of opportunity.** Improvements have been made to the way in which the equality and diversity policy is followed up and reinforced with learners, although their understanding is often cursory.

46. All learners receive good, detailed booklets relating to the RAF's zero tolerance of harassment and bullying and its ethos, core values and standards. The booklets are written in dense text and sometimes use language which is not accessible to all.

47. The introduction of the Basic Skills unit as part of phase 1 training at RAF Halton now provides a satisfactory approach to initial screening, diagnostic testing and subsequent support. However, learners do not always have the time in their busy phase 1 training schedule to take full advantage of the support sessions available to them.

48. The equality and diversity policy is satisfactory. There is a clear and satisfactory complaints procedure. Satisfactory logs for formal and informal complaints are now kept at each station. Some learners express a reluctance to make a formal complaint using the chain of command. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection to the collection of data on equality and diversity.

49. Equality and diversity training for staff and learners is insufficiently developed.

Increased use is now being made of innovative and well-received equality and diversity theatre workshops. This was made available only to mid- and senior-ranking personnel rather than learners. The establishment of an annual programme of refresher training is still in its early stages. A diversity toolkit has been introduced as a short-term, temporary, measure.

50. The management and co-ordination of the arrangements for quality assurance are now very effective, having previously been judged as unsatisfactory. Significant improvements have been made in applying and monitoring quality assurance procedures. The Training Group's approach to quality assurance has developed from audit compliance to a clear focus on the effect of those procedures which directly affect the learner, from initial assessment and induction to individual learning plans and progress reviews. The quality improvement team has been expanded.

51. Quality improvement is good. Since the previous inspection achievement rates have improved in all areas of learning. The Training Group has made good use of visits to partner and civilian organisations to gather information on ways to improve the quality assurance arrangements. Comprehensive and learning-focused reports are issued to training schools which are required to produce action plans for development. Action points are followed up in subsequent visits. The culture of improvement is enthusiastically and effectively supported by the quality improvement team.

52. The approach to the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is insufficiently coherent across the service. Most instructors are observed annually but the documents used to record and feed back the results of these observations vary and in some, there is an insufficient emphasis on learning. At the previous inspection, it was identified that there was an inconsistent approach to the monitoring of on-the-job training. No developments in this area have since taken place.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- particularly good management strategies and actions to improve the programme
- good management and deployment of resources
- good staff training and development
- particularly effective management of training
- strong commitment to equality and diversity
- very effective management and co-ordination of quality assurance arrangement
- good quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed equality and diversity training
- insufficiently consistent approach to the monitoring of teaching and learning

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good improvements in learners' achievement rates
- good development of practical skills
- very good teaching and training
- excellent resources for training and learning
- very good monitoring of progress
- good local management of the programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of line managers in the review process
- inequitable access to some resources for some learners

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration

Strengths

- good improvement in achievement rates
- effective on-the-job training
- good resources
- good support for learners
- effective strategies to raise awareness of apprenticeships
- good local management of the programme

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good teaching and learning
- very good resources
- good mapping of programme to learners' career aspirations
- very strong commitment to the programme by all levels of management
- effective management initiatives to improve the quality of the programme

Weaknesses

- some insufficiently challenging targets

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good development of skills and knowledge
- particularly good resources
- good support for learners
- good local management

Weaknesses

- some weak reviews

Health, social care & public services

Public services

Strengths

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good development of occupational skills
- very good resources
- very good support for learners
- effective management actions for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDING

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly good management strategies and actions to improve the programme
- good management and deployment of resources
- good staff training and development
- particularly effective management of training
- strong commitment to equality and diversity
- very effective management and co-ordination of quality assurance arrangement
- good quality improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed equality and diversity training
- insufficiently consistent approach to the monitoring of teaching and learning

53. There have been particularly good strategies and actions to improve the management and improvement of the programme. A key forum for devising and directing change and improvement has been the apprenticeship strategic management group, chaired by the deputy assistant chief of staff training plans, a group captain, which had its first meeting in May 2005. The group has met monthly in the run-up to the reinspection. The group is a very large forum including representatives from all schools and stations with responsibility for the apprenticeship programme. It has a clearly stated and strong commitment to improvement of the programme, particularly in the area of achievement rates, which is shared by all its members. Each meeting has been well structured with well-documented and evidenced agenda items focusing on quality and operational improvements, and good action-planning. Good use is made of data to support judgements on progress, subsequent decision-making and action-planning. Attendance has been high at all meetings.

54. The outcomes of the apprenticeship strategic management group include a range of effective actions to rectify key weaknesses, notably capturing and disseminating the support of senior RAF staff. The apprenticeship programme is now seen by most staff involved to have a much higher profile than in the past. Operational management systems have been overhauled and restructured, providing Training Group staff with a clearer and more authoritative remit, and more time to devote to the programme. Staffing levels have been increased, particularly of assessors and internal verifiers who have subsequently been instrumental in improving achievement levels. Where permanent staff could not be appointed, very good use has been made of subcontractors to supply internal verification and assessment contract staff. The use of subcontractors to clear a historical backlog of key skills qualification achievements has

been particularly effective in raising achievement in the engineering provision. Funding for increased or enhanced training resources has been secured and good new resources installed at some schools and stations. An effective quality improvement team has been formed and new and effective quality assurance procedures devised and implemented. There has been good development of a new, bespoke and web-based management information system, and consequent effective use of consistent data at station and school level. However, some staff have not yet received training in its use and there are some problems with slow internet connectivity at some stations. The overall scale of change, the management of that change and its effect have been good across all apprenticeship programmes. In engineering there has been insufficiently prompt action by the apprenticeship strategy management group to ensure that all training schools improve at the same rate, although this has recently been dealt with.

55. Throughout the change and improvement process, previous high standards in and strong emphasis on health and safety and environmental protection in the apprenticeship programme have been maintained. New staff arriving at schools and operational stations are required to undergo a mandatory health and safety and environmental protection induction within three months of arrival. Learners' health and safety practices are closely observed while they carry out their practical trade training in the schools and the workplace. In the schools and the workplace, procedures for the use of personal protective equipment are strictly enforced.

56. Good management of physical and human resources continues to be a strength, as cited within area of learning reports. There have been further improvements and additions to staffing and training resources, particularly at schools and at some stations.

57. The previous strength in training and development of staff has been maintained. However, this strength is further reinforced by the nature of training and development activities in which staff involved in the apprenticeship programme take part. Records over the past 12 months indicate that there has been a very strong emphasis on training and development activities for a large number of staff, directly related to improving the programme and understanding programme delivery. In addition, staff now have the option to take a well-structured range of management qualifications at levels 3, 4 and 5 as part of their personal career development. The RAF continues to provide good financial support for staff taking assessors' and internal verifiers' qualifications and for other courses related to their work. The RAF supports lifelong learning by providing financial assistance to all RAF personnel in the form of a standard learning credit of £175 a year. It has introduced an enhanced learning credit, currently £3,000 over three years, and up to £6,000 over three years after an eight-year qualifying period, which can be used to access further or higher education.

58. Initial training continues to be particularly effective. While initial, or phase 1, training is not inherently part of apprenticeships, which formally start at phase 2, this is a key militarisation and awareness raising period in recruits' experience of the RAF. All RAF recruits, except those entering the RAF Regiment, attend nine weeks of intensive initial training at RAF Halton. The programme is highly structured and provides an effective introduction to the RAF's ethos and values. Learners receive basic military training, and

take part in teamwork and practical exercises. Their health and fitness is promoted through structured physical training routines, 24-hour access to medical services and dietary advice and guidance. The RAF's policy on bullying and harassment is introduced to learners very early in the programme and effectively reinforced. Learners value the training they receive and comment favourably on the support their instructors give them. Completion rates are good and have improved following the introduction of initiatives to support recruits who were experiencing difficulties on the programme.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

59. There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity and the RAF is responding well in taking action to remedy weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Careful consideration has been given to the ways in which the equality and diversity policy is implemented and to its effectiveness on learners. Since the previous inspection, a more proactive approach has been taken to equality of opportunity. Improvements have been made to the way in which the equal opportunities and diversity policy is followed up and reinforced with learners who now, generally, have a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities. This understanding is not comprehensive and is often cursory, however.

60. All learners continue to be issued with a 'zero tolerance to harassment and bullying' booklet which clearly explains the RAF's equal opportunities and diversity policy and its complaints procedure. All learners are also given a copy of the 'ethos, core values and standards' booklets. They are routinely reminded of the values of, for example, excellence and respect which are related well to their everyday activities in their training phase. However, the information booklets given to learners are written in dense text and sometimes use language which is not accessible to all.

61. There is now satisfactory access to learning for all learners through the introduction of the Basic Skills flight as part of phase 1 training at RAF Halton. This provides a well-structured and clearly defined approach to initial screening, diagnostic testing and subsequent support. Specialist literacy and numeracy tutors provide good support to learners. However, learners do not always have the time in their busy phase 1 training schedule to take full advantage of the support sessions available to them. The results of individual literacy and numeracy assessments are, in most cases, effectively communicated to designated phase 2 training sites. However, this information is not always successfully communicated to individual instructors or to all the corporals responsible for groups of learners.

62. The equal opportunities and diversity policy is satisfactory, as are the procedures for its implementation. There is a clear and satisfactory complaints procedure. Formal complaints continue to be satisfactorily recorded and dealt with by appropriately trained staff. Improvements have been made to the recording of formal and informal equality and diversity-related complaints since the previous inspection. Satisfactory complaints logs for formal and informal complaints are now kept at each station. The number of complaints recorded in some areas has increased. However, while most learners have a satisfactory understanding of the complaints procedure, some express a reluctance to

make a formal complaint using the chain of command. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection to the collection of data on equality and diversity. Data is now routinely collected and analysed and action is taken where adverse trends are identified.

63. Learners' success is routinely and effectively celebrated through presentations and photographic records. Learners take a pride in their achievements. A national advertising campaign has made use of effective and accessible promotional materials for prospective recruits.

64. The number of women recruited has increased, with women now representing around 12 per cent of the overall workforce. Recruitment from minority ethnic groups has also increased, although the RAF has not achieved its agreed target. The current representation from minority ethnic groups is around 2.5 per cent. The RAF routinely collects and analyses staff views through anonymous questionnaires on a range of subjects related to life in the RAF. From summary reports available up to May 2005, it is notable that between a half and three-quarters of women and minority ethnic staff responding reported that harassment, discrimination and bullying are prevalent within the service.

65. Equality and diversity training for staff and learners is insufficiently developed. All learners and staff receive initial equality and diversity briefings. Increased use is now being made of the innovative and well-received equality and diversity theatre workshops since the previous inspection, although this has only been available on a voluntary attendance basis to mid- and senior-ranking personnel rather than learners. A recently revised defence policy has identified six levels of equality and diversity training. Within the policy is a requirement for annual refresher training. Work is currently under way to review equality and diversity training at each level but the establishment of an annual programme of refresher training is still in its early stages. The most recent RAF annual equality and diversity report acknowledges the need for further training. A diversity toolkit has been introduced as a short-term, temporary measure.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

66. The management and co-ordination of the arrangements for quality assurance are very effective. A quality improvement manual has replaced the former operations manual and clearly documents the procedures to be used at each stage of the learning process. It provides schools and training stations with standardised criteria to use but allows for the appropriate flexibility in each establishment. Significant improvement has been made since the previous inspection in the way in which these procedures are applied and monitored. The approach to quality assurance has developed from audit compliance to a clear focus on those procedures which directly affect the learner, from initial assessment and induction to individual learning plans and progress reviews. The quality improvement team has been expanded. Clear and well-documented procedures exist for carrying out the regular quality improvement visits. All the apprenticeship training establishments have been visited and reviewed. The procedures are applied in a thorough and consistent way and a written summary of progress against a series of

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identified areas is produced. Good use is made of staff from the training schools to share identified examples of good practice. They routinely join the quality improvement team visits. A copy of the final report is sent to the officer in command, the group captain and the wing commander responsible for apprenticeship training.

67. Satisfactory feedback about learning programmes is regularly collected from learners. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection in the use made of this information. Data is now analysed and action taken. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory, as is the self-assessment process.

68. Quality improvement is good. Since the previous inspection, achievement rates have improved in all areas of learning. Good use has been made of visits to partners and civilian organisations to gather information on ways to improve the quality assurance arrangements. The system is now more effectively applied. The culture of improvement is enthusiastically and effectively supported by the quality improvement team. Comprehensive and learning-focused reports are issued to training schools which are required to produce action plans for development. Action points are followed up in subsequent visits. Good practice is effectively shared through the use of training school staff on quality improvement visits and also through joint workshops and seminars, where debate and challenge is encouraged. Improvements have been made to the quality and consistency of progress reviews, internal verification and individual learning plans since the previous inspection. Quality improvement progress against standardised criteria is recorded on an effective colour-coded 'centre state' notice board which is prominently displayed in the quality improvement team office. Senior management and the quality improvement team are all very committed to improving the quality of the learning experience. Regular quality reports are given to the senior management group meetings. The profile of quality improvement has been significantly raised since the previous inspection.

69. The approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is insufficiently coherent across the provision. Most instructors are observed annually but the documents used to record and feed back the results of these observations vary and, in some, there is an insufficient emphasis on learning. Data is not collected or analysed to allow the RAF to establish a profile of the quality of teaching and learning across apprenticeship training. However, the focus on learning in some observations has improved since the previous inspection. For example, a new instructor development report visit form has been introduced at RAF Halton. Observations are regular and thorough and grades are given for the quality of teaching and learning. Development points are recorded and are followed up in subsequent visits. This approach has been highlighted as an effective model by the management team at RAF Innsworth, although the team does not have the authority to implement this as a preferred model across RAF training establishments. The Defence Centre of Training Support has recognised and given good support to the need for a more effective instructor training programme. It has produced a new 'training the trainer' programme which includes a wider range of teaching and learning aspects such as leadership, behavioural and motivational skills. All new instructors now take this programme and existing instructors have been given additional training. At the previous inspection, it was identified that there was an

inconsistent approach to the monitoring of on-the-job training. No developments in this area have since taken place.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	2208	2

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good improvements in learners' achievement rates
- good development of practical skills
- very good teaching and training
- excellent resources for training and learning
- very good monitoring of progress
- good local management of the programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of line managers in the review process
- inequitable access to some resources for some learners

Achievement and standards

70. There have been good improvements in learners' overall success rates in mechanical engineering and telecommunications. The upward trend in achievement has been particularly good from May 2005 onwards, with a steep and sustained rise in the achievement of qualifications since October 2005. Learners who have joined the programme since 2004-05 are progressing very well. Six per cent of telecommunications learners who joined in 2004-05 have already completed the full apprenticeship framework. There is good achievement of technical certificates using distance learning, with the Training Group providing a responsive help desk for learners. At the time of the previous inspection, the apprenticeship achievement rate for 2001-02 starters in mechanical engineering was only 4 per cent but this has now improved to 64 per cent. Only 1 per cent of 2002-03 starters had completed, compared with a current figure of 31 per cent. The combined achievement rate of 2001-02 learners has improved, overall, to 57 per cent. The retention rate for engineering programmes continues to be very good, as identified at the previous inspection, currently averaging 93 per cent for mechanical engineers in the period 2001-04 and 86 per cent for telecommunications over the same period.

71. An action plan to rectify low achievement rates was produced following the

previous inspection. Good levels of support are currently provided through an improved number of qualified assessors and internal verifiers.

72. Key skills qualification achievement is very good, with over 2,900 learners achieving their key skills qualifications since February 2005. Over 3,000 learners who left last year have now completed their key skills qualifications. However, a few learners have been delayed in completing the key skills element of their apprenticeship, almost all for operational reasons such as deployment overseas. The RAF's policy for the achievement of key skills qualifications has changed since the previous inspection and engineering learners now stay at their training college until they have satisfactorily completed this aspect of their programme.

73. Achievement is celebrated with end-of-course graduations, where awards are presented to celebrate progression during training. Senior officers and parents are invited to attend the graduation day. Regular newsletters are produced to publicise achievement.

Quality of education and training

74. Learners develop good practical skills while at the trade training schools and in the workplace. This strength has been maintained since the previous inspection. Learners develop and demonstrate confidence and maturity in the workplace, using complex tools and equipment in carrying out their work. Trade instructors at the schools set challenging, realistic practical exercises and assignments, using a wide range of innovative methods which extend learners' knowledge and understanding. They quickly develop good systematic approaches and techniques to the diagnosis and rectification of faults on aircraft simulators. Learners receive good, extensive experience in the workplace appropriate to their RAF trade group. Learners are employed at one of a number of operational RAF flying stations, servicing and repairing first-line aircraft, or at second-line units on scheduled aircraft maintenance programmes. Learners are given early responsibility for carrying out servicing and maintenance on in-service aircraft.

75. Learners' portfolios are good. They contain a diverse range of work-based evidence which is clearly indexed and assessed against nationally recognised standards.

76. Teaching and training continue to be very good. In the previous inspection, 29 lessons were observed at the colleges, both in the training workshops and the background knowledge classrooms, of which 21 were graded good or better. None of the observed lessons was judged unsatisfactory. Although a much smaller sample was observed during the reinspection, the grades were comparable, with two of the four lessons observed graded outstanding. There are many innovative training exercises to reinforce practical skills. An example is the use of simulators, where instructors are able to create faults in operational conditions and learners respond in a realistic environment similar to real situations. Many of the staff have excellent qualifications including higher national certificates, degrees and teaching qualifications. Since the previous inspection, some supervisors have gained assessors' qualifications. Learners are offered an extensive

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variety of learning opportunities and experiences. Some learners are given the opportunity to work in other sections of squadrons such as plant maintenance and mobile breakdown repairs, which extends their skills and knowledge. Following the previous inspection, managers and supervisors now allocate a wider range of work to help learners in the process of evidence collection to meet the standards required in the NVQ.

77. The resources available for teaching and training remain excellent and there have been some further improvements, particularly in increased access to ICT. For example, engineering telecommunications learners at Cosford can use a new cyber café which is open until the evening and has 12 computers with broadband connections. A new radar simulator has been sited in one of the practical training classrooms. All classrooms are being fitted with interactive whiteboards over the next 24 months. Handouts are good and well presented and cover health and safety topics well. Training workbooks are very detailed with some excellent graphical representations of equipment.

78. The physical resources for training continue to be exceptional. At the training schools, learners can learn on the equipment they will use at their operational stations. At the operational stations and in the workplace, learners benefit from training on the full range of in-service equipment. Aircraft engineering learners receive additional specialist training at the aircraft training schools and on the squadron aircraft at the main operating stations.

79. Monitoring of learners' progress has improved from good to very good. A substantial increase in the number of assessors and internal verifiers, organised in local or regional teams, has been a key factor in providing increased support and reduced assessment intervals. Prior to the previous inspection the RAF had begun to introduce a much improved system for monitoring learners' progress. Since that inspection, these systems had started to become established into the progress monitoring cycle, and were increasingly used by assessors. However, a lack of centrally monitored and consistent information on progress remained, with stations, schools and the Training Group not always working to consistent data or information on progress. A new management information system has recently been introduced to collate and monitor progress centrally and locally. This is a web-based system using a central server. Although there are some operational difficulties, not least in terms of speed of access and the roll-out of training to all staff, it is being used effectively by assessors and internal verifiers throughout the UK. Since the previous inspection the quality of progress reviews has improved and learners now get a copy of their reviews. The review document has been redesigned and is more effective. For example, various checklists have been introduced and the process is more comprehensive and detailed. Nonetheless, targets set are often not specific, measurable and timebound and involve few vocational targets. The monitoring of learners' understanding of equality and diversity is generally superficial.

80. Mechanical engineering learners receive good individualised support and general assistance from the modern apprenticeship co-ordinators, based at RAF stations, otherwise known as main operating bases. Close monitoring involves detailed examination of individual elements of work in progress at each level. The modern

apprenticeship co-ordinators' responsibilities are progressively being increased, through appropriate training, to go beyond carrying out learners' reviews and to include assessment of learners' work. Telecommunications learners are supported by regionally based teams of assessment and verification staff throughout the UK. Some gaps in manpower exist, however, but this is being resolved through 'call off' support from a contractor which is providing additional assessment and verification support in the workplace.

81. The arrangements for literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory. Learners' literacy, numeracy and language support needs are assessed during phase 1 recruit training. If learners are identified as requiring additional support subsequently during their phase 2 trade training then specialist resources are available to support them. If the relative expertise is not available, then arrangements are usually made with local colleges for additional support. However, information on learners' individual needs is not always communicated to instructors or to all the corporals responsible for groups of learners.

82. An effective initial assessment process to identify the needs of telecommunications learners has been introduced since the previous inspection. Instructors have been specially trained to identify learners with special needs. A new process to support learners who have been out of training for a long period and get them back into learning is also now being trialled. However, it was too early to identify the effect of this initiative at the time of the reinspection.

83. There is inequitable access to some resources for some learners, particularly learners working in high-pressure, high-turnaround roles. Learners are expected to work shifts if needed and be ready for worldwide deployment at short notice on exercises or active operations. Operational needs take priority and training staff often do not have sufficient influence or consistent control over the planning of on-the-job training. A reduction in manning levels in the RAF has also reduced managers' flexibility to release learners for apprenticeship-related activities, although the consequences are generally well managed by modern apprenticeship co-ordinators. However, some learners do not have enough time for portfolio-building, distance learning, writing up technical certificates or for doing specific training assignments.

84. Insufficient support is provided for learners who are required to complete their technical certificates through distance learning. The support team for this work is based at the training college, rather than the main operating bases. The support is variable. For example, learners may telephone for help but cannot always find the appropriate person. Since the previous inspection the support team has begun to visit the different bases on a planned schedule and this is effective. However, due to operational arrangements some learners miss the scheduled visits.

Leadership and management

85. The management of the programme at local level is good. Staff in main operating bases work effectively as a team. Internal communications are good. Staff share their

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problems and good practice. Staff are occupationally trained and experienced and they are encouraged to develop their skills occupationally as assessors and tutors. Training is documented well. Learners' files and portfolios are well presented. The use of data to monitor and improve the programme has been developed using the new overall management information system and locally produced, data-based monitoring systems. The awareness and understanding of the programme by learners and staff has improved significantly following better written and verbal communications and has been further reinforced by the written and widely communicated support of high-ranking staff within the RAF. Managers and staff at local level are enthusiastic and eager to be involved.

86. Line managers have insufficient involvement in the review process. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection within a wider weakness of weak management of on-the-job training. While overall management of on-the-job training is no longer a weakness, supervisors have little involvement, and in some cases no involvement, in reviews. There is no structured plan for operational line training, and the planning of training is not reviewed with all supervisors. Some line managers only receive informal feedback on learners' progress, while others receive formal feedback with open discussion on action plans. A recent change in line managers' written responsibilities has reinforced their need to be involved in learners' personal development. This is being communicated through mandatory management training or by a rolling presentation to all line managers, but is at a relatively early stage.

87. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory. There has been a considerable investment from the RAF in improving staff awareness of equality and diversity staff, including the creation of a range of appropriate materials and training. There are some good examples of good practice. On one base, courses in driving and in language support have been run for the wives of Gurkha staff. However, there continues to be insufficient depth in the monitoring and reinforcement of equality and diversity in learners' reviews. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues is generally cursory.

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business administration</i> - Apprenticeships for young people	190	2

Business administration*Strengths*

- good improvement in achievement rates
- effective on-the-job training
- good resources
- good support for learners
- effective strategies to raise awareness of apprenticeships
- good local management of the programme

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

88. Since the previous inspection there has been good improvement in overall success rates. Overall rates are now close to national rates. At the previous inspection in 2005, learners were achieving some aspects of their programme but were making very slow progress towards completing frameworks. Achievement rates were also on a downward trend. Inspectors identified that there were insufficient assessor staff to conduct reviews, coaching and assessment in the workplace.

89. A number of additional assessors has since been appointed and their effect on improving achievement has been marked. At the time of the previous inspection, only one catering learner out of 13 had completed their framework. However, seven have now completed their full framework, two are awaiting certification and four are close to completion. Of 104 learners starting personnel programmes, just over half have now completed full frameworks and nine are close to completion. There are 32 learners still in learning. At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a lack of opportunities for personnel learners to complete the required ICT element of their programme and this is still affecting 23 of the learners. Seventy-nine medical secretaries are being assessed by consultants and are also making good progress. Fifty learners in medical administration have completed full frameworks and another 11 are close to completion. On average, 46 per cent of the learners recruited in 2003-04 and 52 per cent of those recruited in 2004-05 have now completed full frameworks. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is good.

90. Good retention rates have been maintained since the previous inspection and exceed 80 per cent.

Quality of education and training

91. On-the-job training is effective and off-the-job training is satisfactory. On first posting, learners shadow a more experienced member of staff for up to two months, gradually carrying out work of increasing complexity. The RAF's trade ability tests are used to reinforce NVQ learning and develop learners' competence in the workplace, although the tests are not linked to the NVQ. Medical administrators have one day a week of training in clinical and administrative skills, which takes into account the requirements of the NVQ.

92. The good resources available to learners have been maintained, although there has been some upheaval and loss of facilities associated with the relocation of the personnel school. This school has temporarily lost use of its website, the electronic learning centre and internet access. However, the good simulated learning environment, giving learners access to their own simulated registry, has been completely transferred and upgraded with the use of closed-circuit television for assessment purposes. All the teaching rooms have been upgraded and are well equipped with individual learning stations and a full range of audiovisual equipment. Some rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards.

93. Good support for learners has also been maintained since the previous inspection. Instructors support learners on an individual basis, particularly for key skills qualifications. Where on-the-job support is not available, stations are using local colleges to provide ICT training, or learners are given the opportunity to attend intensive one-week courses at other RAF stations. Key skills instructors visit learners during the first nine weeks of basic training so that learners have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the staff and ask questions. All learners are sent a reminder letter before their next review which also identifies the focus of the visit.

94. At the previous inspection, insufficient use was made of initial assessment. Since then, links between phase 1 and phase 2 training have improved. Instructors and assessors now have the results of the initial assessment from the learners' basic training. The Secretarial Training School also administers an additional key skills assessment and any learner identified as having an additional need is either recommended for specialist help or given extra help during phase 2 training. Literacy and numeracy needs are met through providing extra help for key skills qualifications. For example, one learner at Honington has individual tuition in application of number. Instructors use learner-friendly methods such as appropriate fonts for handouts and different-coloured acetates as a matter of course.

95. Assessment practice is satisfactory. All appropriate assessment methods are used to meet the needs of individual learners. Better use is being made of naturally occurring evidence. For example, group exercises involving learners are being used to provide

evidence for the key skill of working with others.

Leadership and management

96. Local management of the programme is good. The relocation of the Secretarial Training School to another station has been managed particularly well. Several key processes have been improved and systems put in place to maintain this improvement. For example, assessment and review documents have been developed significantly to raise learners' involvement and improve the recording process. Quality assurance reports are acted upon immediately. Good use is made of learners' questionnaires to identify immediate issues. Internal verification is well planned and thorough and covers all of the constituent elements such as standardisation, learners' interviews and monitoring of assessors, as well as portfolio verification. As members of the apprenticeship strategic management group the three schools now meet more regularly, operate much more as a team and share good practice. Monitoring of progress is now good, and all schools can identify exactly what each learner needs to achieve to complete all aspects of the qualification.

97. All schools have put in place effective strategies to raise the profile of apprenticeships. At the time of the previous inspection, not all learners or supervisors were informed well enough about the qualification or the implications for workplace performance and evidence collection. Trade ability tests were used well to provide evidence of work competence but other opportunities to generate evidence were missed because of a lack of understanding of the qualification. Learners now have an improved induction pack which describes all aspects of the programme. The induction pack also has links to useful source material, a list of staff involved and a glossary of terms. The number of learners' reviews has been increased, and as part of a centrally driven programme, learners are routinely asked questions to confirm their understanding of apprenticeships. Line managers have been made more aware of the importance and implications of apprenticeships by a series of individual visits, presentations and a regular newsletter.

98. There is satisfactory reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity, partly through the qualification and partly through the review process using a bank of centrally provided questions. Oppressive behaviour is challenged and dealt with promptly and, where appropriate, parents are kept informed.

99. All staff are involved in their own local and overall self-assessment reports. Judgements within the reports are honest and realistic and identify most of the strengths and satisfactory elements found by inspectors.

Information & communications technology

Information & communications technology		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Apprenticeships for young people	46	2

Using IT

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good teaching and learning
- very good resources
- good mapping of programme to learners' career aspirations
- very strong commitment to the programme by all levels of management
- effective management initiatives to improve the quality of the programme

Weaknesses

- some insufficiently challenging targets

Achievement and standards

100. Success rates and progress towards achievement have substantially improved and are now good. Of particular note is that all learners who started in August 2005 completed full frameworks within nine months and the November 2005 intake is progressing well, with 42 per cent having already completed the full framework. Overall achievement rates are now 58 per cent for learners who started in 2001-02, compared with 53 per cent at the previous inspection, and 74 per cent for the 2002-03 intake, compared with 38 per cent previously. The completion rate has improved from 13 per cent to 67 per cent for the 2003-04 intake, and from zero per cent to 73 per cent for 2004-05 starters. Some learners from each of those years are still in learning. The national sector framework average is 54 per cent. Retention rates remain very good at all three schools.

Quality of education and training

101. All learners are acquiring very good practical and personal skills during their intensive trade training, developing self-confidence, team-working skills and interpersonal skills through highly structured programmes. Weekly self-assessment takes place and learners receive clear feedback from assessors on their strengths and areas for improvement.

102. Learners gain excellent trade skills far in excess of those required by the apprenticeship framework. Good use is made of real work activities and evidence is presented in well-structured portfolios. Learners' success is celebrated, certificates are presented at morning station briefing meetings and photographs are displayed in central areas.

103. Teaching and learning remain very good. All lessons observed during the reinspection were graded good. Some key aspects of teaching and learning identified at the previous inspection include highly structured lessons with information given in clear, measurable steps. Learners understand key concepts and demonstrate their competence in a simulated environment. Trade training is intense and effective, and takes place in small classes. Key skills training is integrated well with the trade training programme. Assignments provide good opportunities for gaining evidence and many learners complete or nearly complete the key skills requirements before moving to their operational station. There is good on-the-job training at the operational stations. Line managers are very supportive and allocate demanding tasks to the learners.

104. Accommodation and physical resources for teaching and learning also continue to be very good. Most classrooms have computer-aided presentation facilities and practical training areas with access to equipment that learners will use in the field. In one school, all learners are now issued with their own laptop computer to use during their trade training. Another school has recently bought, but not yet deployed, laptop computers for the learners. Instructors, assessors and managers are highly experienced, competent staff with good subject knowledge. There is good uptake of civilian vocational qualifications in teaching, assessing, and learning and development. All learners have access to an on-site learning centre, a well-equipped library and to the RAF's intranet.

105. There is good mapping of the NVQ programme to learners' career aspirations. Job roles are well matched to the qualification and it is easy for learners to collect evidence in the workplace. Off-the-job training programmes are good. They are well organised, structured and intense. There is a strong focus on learners gaining a good level of trade skills which can be applied at the operational stations. Trainers provide good levels of support for learners, encouraging them to progress to higher-level courses in computing.

106. A previous weakness in respect of insufficient numbers of assessors in some operational stations has been eliminated and this aspect is now satisfactory. Learners who are posted to the Control and Reporting Centres at Boulmer and Scampton now have full-time assessors based on site. Learners posted to other stations benefit from part-time assessors and frequent visits from peripatetic assessors based at the apprenticeship accreditation centre, School of Fighter Control at RAF Boulmer. Overall assessment and internal verification practices continue to be satisfactory. The number of assessors and internal verifiers has increased at the School of Fighter Control, and there are sufficient fully trained staff to ensure that learners are reviewed, supported and coached effectively, on a planned and/or informal basis.

107. Literacy, numeracy and language skills support for learners is satisfactory. All learners take initial and diagnostic assessments, including an assessment of learning

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styles, during their phase 1 and phase 2 training, irrespective of their previous achievements. Learners who need to develop their key skills further use occupationally relevant books and have been allocated more time in which to study. Further support is available to learners in the learning centre.

108. Learners are set some insufficiently challenging targets. For example, the level of key skills qualifications studies is insufficiently challenging. The framework requires learners to achieve key skills qualifications in communication and application of number at level 1, although all learners take level 2 key skills irrespective of their previous level of attainment or the results of their initial assessment. However, entrants to this trade are required to have general certificates of secondary education in English and mathematics at grade C or above. All learners are also on a two-year target achievement date when many could or should achieve within a shorter period. There are few challenging targets in progress review documents or individual learning plans. Many learners have identical individual learning plans with identical achievement dates, and take the same optional units despite working in very different operational stations and having significantly different individual needs.

Leadership and management

109. There is very strong commitment to the programme and the ethos of lifelong learning at all levels of management. The apprenticeship programme is well promoted and most airmen on the basic trade training take the opportunity to join it. Once learners are posted, assessors actively encourage them to use their standby time productively and to make progress towards their learning goals.

110. There have been numerous initiatives that have been successful in improving the quality of the programme. The increase in the number of assessors has significantly improved learners' access to assessment, and rates of achievement have improved. The duration of trade training at the School of Fighter Control has been increased from 12 to 18 weeks. The time allocated to the apprenticeship framework has also been increased and is now scheduled for 64 hours across the 18-week period. NVQ staff have a clear vision for the apprenticeship programme. They have clear job roles and access to good staff development opportunities. There are well-structured procedures for key processes, including quality improvement, using locally produced data and the central management information system. The operational management of the assessment groups is highly organised with a particularly systematic approach to record-keeping.

111. Promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners demonstrate a basic understanding of the concepts of equality of opportunity, the complaints processes and the external welfare organisations available to them.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Warehousing and distribution - Apprenticeships for young people	23	2

Warehousing and distribution*Strengths*

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good development of skills and knowledge
- particularly good resources
- good support for learners
- good local management

Weaknesses

- some weak reviews

Achievement and standards

112. The achievement rate for apprenticeships is now very good, having been judged satisfactory at the previous inspection. In 2003-04 the achievement rate was 98 per cent, and 46 out of 67 learners who started in 2004-05 have already achieved their qualification. The remaining 21 learners are still on programme, with portfolios awaiting final verification. Overall, the retention rate is good. All 21 learners who started in the year 2005-06 are still on programme, with the potential to achieve their qualification. Of all learners who started in the past three years, only two left the programme before completion. Learners produce a good range of evidence in their portfolios. Their development of skills and knowledge remains good. Key skills qualification achievements continue to be good. Key skills assignments show a high standard of work and detail. Learners with suitable levels of ability have the opportunity to access key skills qualifications at a level higher than that required for the apprenticeship, to further enhance their learning.

Quality of education and training

113. Off-the-job training in the logistics and supply training squadron is effective and well structured, including both background knowledge and practical sessions. Learners develop good supply skills in a simulated working environment. On-the-job training at operating bases greatly enhances learners' capabilities in a range of operational supply activities, and some learners acquire specialist skills in the supply trade. Others have

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taken the lead in their supply sections by being the first to be trained in new parts control systems. Learners also greatly improve their wider personal skills during training. They demonstrate greatly increased confidence and use of their own initiative in dealing with demanding internal customers, and develop useful team-working and problem-solving skills. Learners recognise what they have achieved, and line managers confirm their progress. Some officers and non-commissioned officers acknowledge a higher calibre of learner coming onto operating bases since the programme was introduced.

114. Resources within the programme remain particularly good. Training accommodation is of a high standard and very well equipped, including classrooms with electronic presentation technology, computer suites for supply software training and a purpose-built simulated working environment. Learners have access to the local defence services learning centre, and more recently, an internet suite, as an additional resource for learners doing key skills work. Training materials used by staff and learners are of a very high quality. All programme staff have substantive service stores experience, consistently maintained through a range of appropriate updating activities. Supply squadrons where learners are based provide a highly suitable working environment, with industry-standard equipment and systems.

115. Support for learners on the apprenticeship programme continues to be good, and some past weaknesses have been eliminated. For example, additional learning needs are now identified promptly through a range of assessment methods, and support for such needs as literacy, numeracy or dyslexia are arranged and provided by programme instructors or external specialists. Learners feel well supported by accreditation cell staff. Line managers at operating bases provide good support, helping learners with queries and production of evidence for their NVQs, and allowing them time for their NVQ during working hours when possible. Learners under 18 years of age are assigned a mentor to ensure their overall safety and well being. Some learners are given substantial and sustained support in coping with personal difficulties.

116. Assessment and verification practice is now satisfactory, having previously been judged as poor. Both the lead assessor and the accreditation cell manager have recently devised effective systems for assessment planning and monitoring of learners' progress. Learners' portfolio evidence includes assessors' detailed observations of their personal performance and answers to written questions, as well as some personal statements and work documents. Assessors' observation reports are sufficiently detailed and are linked to performance criteria. Feedback on learners' performance during assessment is recorded well on assessment reports, and learners are now assessed at work on their respective operating bases by NVQ assessors. Evidence of learners' performance in trade ability test activities relies heavily on witness statements. The detail of some of these statements is still inadequate, and they do not always confirm learners' performance over a sustained time period.

117. Internal verification practice for the NVQ is now satisfactory, having previously been judged as poor. The strategy developed for the programme is adequate to enable effective verification, and an appropriate sampling plan has been drafted. However, this is not yet sufficiently developed. Good use is made of visual aids for verification

planning by the lead verifier. Sampling reports include appropriate feedback and action points for assessors, and key points for the improvement of assessment decisions and quality of evidence are identified to assessors. Where action points for assessors are recorded, they are made aware of these and sign to indicate that they will take appropriate action.

118. Some reviews of learners' progress are weak. Insufficient detail and specific information on the extent of learners' progress since their last review is provided in many instances. Targets set in action plans are not always specific, measurable and time-bound, and do not always clearly state what learners must do to achieve them. Overall review records are inconsistent in their content and quality. Learners and non-commissioned officers are often unclear whether line managers should be involved in the review process, although line managers are kept informed by assessors.

Leadership and management

119. Management of the learning programme at a local level is good. Measures to improve the quality of many aspects of the apprenticeship have been particularly effective. The new senior programme manager is strongly committed to its further improvement and development within the RAF. Key staff and some senior officers have regularly attended strategic apprenticeship management group meetings, and an understanding of the programme and its significance is now much more widespread. Line managers have more understanding of their responsibilities to learners and of the correct use of programme documents such as the trade ability test logbook, although more work is required to fully integrate this in off-the-job training. They also have a greater awareness of NVQ standards, and how they relate to supply activities. Assessment of learners is in the process of being transferred to operating bases, rather than being based on simulated workplace activity. Learners who have been assessed in this way have a higher quality of evidence in their portfolios. Effective systems are used by the accreditation cell senior non-commissioned officer to monitor learners' progress, and good use is made of local management information to support full implementation of the web-based central management information system.

120. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners demonstrate a reasonable understanding of equality of opportunity, but details of any equality and diversity issues raised during review are often too brief. Learners receive briefings on equality and diversity at key stages of their training programme. All logistics and supply training squadron staff currently undergo an annual computer-based updating and training workshop on equality and diversity and a useful accompanying equality and diversity self-study booklet has recently been produced and issued to all learners.

121. All training school staff were involved in drafting of the self-assessment report, but most officers on operating bases had not taken part in the process. However, the training school self-assessment report is accurate in many aspects, and identifies a number of strengths found by inspectors on reinspection.

Health, social care & public services

Health, social care & public services		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Public services - Apprenticeships for young people	154	2

Public services

Strengths

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good development of occupational skills
- very good resources
- very good support for learners
- effective management actions for quality improvement

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

122. Overall success rates for full apprenticeship frameworks are now very good. The achievement rate for the 2002-03 intake was 16 per cent at the previous inspection and is now 84 per cent. The 2003-04 intake's achievement rate was 9 per cent and is now 74 per cent, with 7 per cent of the intake still in learning. Achievement for the 2004-05 learners was zero per cent but has now risen to 55 per cent, with 32 per cent still in learning. Progress for current learners is now good. Five of the 51 RAF Regiment learners who started their apprenticeships during 2005-06 have already completed a full framework.

123. The retention rate remains very good on both the RAF Police and the RAF Regiment programmes. In 2002-03 the retention rate was 87 per cent, and in 2003-04 it rose to 93 per cent. The figure of 93 per cent retention was maintained in 2004-05.

Quality of education and training

124. Learners on the RAF Police and RAF Regiment programmes continue to develop good transferable, occupational skills. RAF Regiment learners acquire a high level of technical skills in the use of industry-standard equipment. RAF Police learners develop very good interviewing skills, using methods accepted as best practice in the civilian police force. They are taught control and restraint techniques and use of firearms by local civilian police staff.

125. Resources were previously judged good and are now judged very good at the schools and operational stations. At the RAF Regiment school the new ICT suite is equipped with industry-standard computers, printers and an interactive whiteboard, and learners make good use of the facilities. All but one of the squadrons has access to online testing for key skills qualifications. At the RAF Regiment school a senior manager is now in post to manage learners with specific learning difficulties. There are also additional assessors and a part-time specialist to support learners with such difficulties. All learners are issued with operational-standard personal protective equipment which is constantly maintained and reviewed for its effectiveness. Excellent learning materials are used for developing interview techniques. All RAF operational stations provide realistic work environments for learners. Learning centres are available at all camps, including for those on active duty abroad.

126. Training staff are highly qualified and experienced in their occupational fields. Assessors attend an intensive off-the-job training programme that combines background knowledge and practical application in the workplace. They continue to receive a high level of advice, guidance and support from their internal verifiers.

127. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is insufficient differentiated learning in some background knowledge sessions. In the best lessons, instructors make particularly good use of classroom discussions and the use of role-play exercises. The 22-week RAF Police and 21-week RAF Regiment courses are carefully prepared with very detailed schemes of work and individual lesson plans. Programmes build on learners' initial training, effectively equipping them for the roles they will perform. Learners posted to the Tactical Provost Wing receive excellent continuous professional development through a well-constructed, flexible individual training programme.

128. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Potential learners must take a three-day practical assessment on the base and in the field. This is effectively used to test learners' attitude and aptitude. Initial screening is used to identify learners' key skills levels and any possible learning difficulties. Work-based assessment practice is satisfactory. There is appropriate preparation and planning for assessment and satisfactory notes and feedback are promptly provided to learners and assessors. Learners' progress is reviewed appropriately by experienced and well-qualified tutors and managers. The monitoring of learners' progress has been improved.

129. With the approval of the awarding body, RAF Police learners are assessed in a realistic working environment during their final intensive police trade tests week. All these learners now leave their programme having completed their apprenticeship framework. In the RAF Regiment, learners complete their key skills qualifications and technical certificates during their 21 weeks at the training school, and the remainder of the NVQ in the workplace. The key skills assignments used are now contextualised into the security sector and are seen by learners as far more relevant than previously. Work-based assessors carry out observations during active tours of duty abroad, using digital cameras, audio equipment and witness testimony. Learners are also encouraged to take key skills examinations in the field learning centres, sometimes under fire in operational

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areas. This flexible approach enables learners to progress quickly with their learning and achievement of the NVQ. Assessors also use activities on the camp such as patrols and guard duty to gather evidence for the NVQ. There are plans to improve the progress of learners further by adding additional time to the programme after basic gunner training, to allow assessors to complete the NVQ assessments at the Honington station before learners are sent on active duty on the squadrons.

130. Individual learning plans are satisfactory, although learners all follow the same optional units and do the same key skills assignments.

131. The support for learners continues to be very good. Training staff regularly make themselves available outside their normal duty hours to provide advice, guidance and extra tuition for learners. When a learner starts to under-perform, very good support is provided to enable the learner to succeed. They are referred to the Training and Development Unit where they receive effective diagnostic testing and/or referral to an educational psychologist. In the RAF Regiment school, learners who are diagnosed as having dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia receive additional hours of support from a specialist teacher. This support is used well to equip learners with simple, effective strategies to cope with their programmes. Examples include the use of pictures to show how kit and lockers should be correctly laid out, or to illustrate the many badges of rank in use in the RAF. This technique helps learners to memorise things more quickly and effectively. Learners who have additional literacy, numeracy or language needs receive at least 30 hours of additional support. This is given in small groups or individually. Learners appreciate the extra help, and in many cases it is the first time their learning difficulties have been recognised. All of the instructors and assessors are now much more aware of the need to support learners effectively to achieve their goals, and there is far less need to remove learners from training before they receive support. There is now no stigma attached to receiving such support and learners are far more willing to ask for additional help.

Leadership and management

132. At the time of the previous inspection there was insufficient clear management and co-ordination of the apprenticeship programme between the first phase of training and workplace assessment on the squadrons. There is now effective management at all levels which supports quality improvement of the apprenticeship programme. Senior management have a strong commitment to the programme and a better understanding of programme requirements. Local management is very strong. There are sector standardisation meetings involving senior staff from both training schools. Internal verifiers have reviewed the activity levels and currency of qualifications of their work-based assessor bank. They now keep a database of all active assessors and record their continuous professional development to ensure that the quality of assessment is maintained. The quality assurance arrangements at local level are now effective and include sound internal verification systems and procedures, assessor standardisation sessions and training, and mechanisms to collect feedback from learners and assessors. There is good use of the new centrally based and local management information systems

to manage learners' and assessors' performance. Staff members' personal development and training are good, with all key team members achieving or working towards key skills and learning and development qualifications.

133. There is satisfactory promotion and understanding of equality of opportunity among learners and staff. Senior members from both uniformed and civilian staff are trained in equality and diversity and there are regular meetings to discuss the topic. An equal opportunities session is part of the induction for all learners and instructors. There are effective measures to deal with complaints and appeals and to record all minor incidents.

134. The self-assessment report is critical. It is accurate in identifying strengths and appropriately supports weaknesses with judgements. However, all of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been rectified by the time the provision was reinspected.