



Ministry
of Defence

Army Secretariat
Army Headquarters
IDL 24 Blenheim Building
Marlborough Lines
Andover
Hampshire, SP11 8HJ
United Kingdom

Ref: FOI2019/10624/04/02

E-mail: ArmySec-Group@mod.gov.uk
Website: www.army.mod.uk

XXXXX XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

14 October 2019

Dear XX XXXXXXXX,

Thank you for your email of 11 September in which you asked the following question.

My understanding is that Phoenix was taken out of service and replaced by leased Hermes 45 UAVs in 2007 which were used on operations in Afghanistan from 2008 – 2014 until it was replaced by Watchkeeper (a variant of the Hermes 54). I am therefore interested in Phoenix operators and mission controllers who transited through intermediate systems, such as the Hermes 45, to Watchkeeper.

I believe the term “pilot” was introduced at some point for the Watchkeeper. But I am unclear on if this was a new “trade/stream” or just a renaming of a previous role such as a Phoenix operator or Phoenix mission controller. The 2012 version of the RA Career Management pamphlet for TUAV does not have a pilot stream but it is in the 2016 version. Both are enclosed.

I realise that it may be difficult to find the exact numbers but what I am seeking to know is if qualified Phoenix operators and mission controllers were converted to new UAVs coming into service. If so at what rank level?

If they then converted to the Watchkeeper did they have to go through the pilot selection process and then a TUAS Level 3 Course (RSA) as outlined in the 2016 version of pam 10 or did they just have to do a conversion course to be a pilot. My interpretation of the diagram in the 2016 version is that the selection process and Level 3 course became the only way to progress a career from LBdr rank within the GUNNER Tactical UAS Pilot Career stream. However, I believe SNCOs and WOs could complete the Level 4 Gnr UAS MxC Course (RSA) without being qualified as a Gnr UAS (TUAS) Pilot. Is this correct?

If this is correct, then my question on trained Sgt to WO1 UAV establishments will refer only to Sgt to WO1 appointments which required a Level 4 Mission Commander qualification for interim UAVs and eventually Watchkeeper.

I am treating this and your original correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. For clarity I have extracted what I interpret to be

questions, a search has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that the information held is detailed below:

1. *If qualified Phoenix operators and mission controllers were converted to new UAVs coming into service. If so at what rank level?*

No individual was automatically transferred to Watchkeeper. Due to the increased selection, training and governance demands placed upon those who operate the Watchkeeper system, the term 'Pilot' was adopted for Watchkeeper trained individuals who had completed specific pilot training and had been awarded the Watchkeeper Pilot Brevet.

2. *Did they have to go through the pilot selection process and then a TUAS Level 3 Course (RSA) as outlined in the 2016 version of pam 10 or did they just have to do a conversion course to be a pilot.*

Those who fly Watchkeeper are selected through an extremely rigorous screening process.

Although the Main Trade for Pay (MTfP) RA TUAS (Pilot) is open to all applicants, due to the vastly increased complexity of the system (which is governed by the Military Aviation Authority) to become a Watchkeeper Pilot, a soldier/officer must:

- a. Hold minimum rank of LBdr.
- b. Pass Pilot aptitudes testing (conducted at RAF Cranwell).
- c. Pass military Flying Medical.
- d. Pass a Pilot Selection Panel (Board convened by HQ Watchkeeper Force).
- e. Pass the Watchkeeper Pilot course (full details of course below).
- f. Sign agreement to complete a 36-month Training Return of Service (TRoS).
- g. Have a minimum of 36 months residual service upon completion of the Pilot course.

The Watchkeeper pilot course is broken up into four modules. A Watchkeeper pilot has to complete all four module to be awarded his or her wings and become qualified. The modules are as follows:

- a. Module 1: TUAS Ground School (TUAS Level 3 Course)
- b. Module 2: Airmanship Development flying module
- c. Module 3: Watchkeeper system training & Simulation package
- d. Module 4: Watchkeeper live flying

Under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you may find it useful to note that fewer than five soldiers/officers who started on the Phoenix system became pilots on the Watchkeeper system. The exact number cannot be disclosed to ensure confidentiality.

3. *SNCOs and WOs could complete the Level 4 Gnr UAS MxC Course (RSA) without being qualified as a Gnr UAS (TUAS) Pilot. Is this correct?*

3.a If this is correct, then my question on trained Sgt to WO1 UAV establishments will refer only to Sgt to WO1 appointments which required a Level 4 Mission Commander qualification for interim UAVs and eventually Watchkeeper.

As per question two, all Watchkeeper pilots are required to undertake the same training programme in full. No exceptions are made to this.

4. Was the extension of service from VEng(Full) to VEng(Long) for Watchkeeper trained pilots and mission Commanders considered to resolve perceived under manning?

The watchkeeper Regiment does not suffer from under-manning, particularly in the Sgt to WO1 range. Due to the time and nature of Pilot selection and training, as well as the 'into service' challenges of new equipment, there has not been opportunity to grow a regimental structure of qualified pilots. Those who have trained as Watchkeeper Pilots are distributed across the whole rank structure; from LBdr to Capt. Therefore, there has been no consideration of the use of VEng (Long) to ease that problem. However, Under Section 16 of the Act (as above) you may find it useful to note the Army does consider the use of VEng (Long) in order to retain individuals or trade groups with specific skills of value. Due to the time and considerable expense invested into the training of a Watchkeeper Pilot, the RA has identified the need to retain this unique cohort for as long as possible. Although the introduction of a VEng (Long) contract for Watchkeeper Pilots has been discussed, no such offer has yet been made.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance. Following this, if you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely,

X XXXXXXXX
Manning Team
Army Secretariat