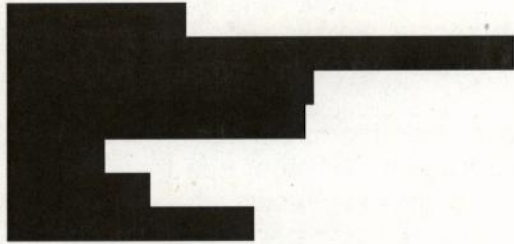




Ministry
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18 September 2015

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 13 August where you asked four questions about the Watchkeeper Remotely Piloted Aircraft programme:

Q1. The disaggregated numbers of Suitably Qualified and Experienced person (SQEP) in each area of the Watchkeeper stakeholder community (e.g.: broken down into categories including Airworthiness Certification, Training Certification, Safety Management) and the number of SQEP considered by MOD to be adequate. As it were, the numbers that enabled the government to make the assessment, in its response to the Defence Committee..., that numbers of SQEP were inadequate. Please provide this information broken down by year, using whatever annual accounting point is most appropriate for how this information is stored (e.g. start of financial year).

Q2. The disaggregated numbers of SQEP in each area of the Watchkeeper stakeholder community required to meet Full Operating Capability (FOC) in April-July 2017.

Q3. Total number of qualified military and civilian Watchkeeper operators and instructors at present time (or closest convenient accounting point), and the projected total number of qualified military and civilian Watchkeeper operators and instructors at end FY 2016/17.

Q4. The number of qualified military and civilian Watchkeeper instructors and operators assessed to be needed for the Watchkeeper system to reach FOC in April-July 2017.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and I apologise for the delay in responding to you. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that some information is held in relation to your questions and it is shown below.

Q1 & 2. In September 2013, at the time that the House of Commons Defence Committee report was written, the team delivering the endorsed Watchkeeper programme consisted of 7 programme and project managers, 9 project engineers, 3 safety managers and 6 logistics, training & sustainability staff. The team now includes 11 programme and project managers, 16 project engineers, 3 safety managers and 6 logistics, training & sustainability staff. The team is supplemented by contracted SQEP technical support for airworthiness and clearance activities. All staff are SQEP and now sufficient in number to concurrently support the Watchkeeper system in service and deliver the Watchkeeper upgrade and clearance activities required to support full

operating capability in 2017. The Army Capability Directorate also has 4 Unmanned Aircraft System related posts, all filled with SQEP (as at 24 Aug 15).

Q3 & 4. The Army currently has access to 6 Watchkeeper trained pilots, half in instructional roles and consists of 4 military and 2 civilian personnel. In addition there are 24 launch and recovery personnel and 20 maintainers. By the end of FY 2016/17 it is projected there will be 24 pilots in a mix of instructional and operator posts (predominantly military). In broad terms, this remains the number of SQEP at full operating capability. The capability then grows over the following years to approx 100 trained pilots in operational, instructional and assurance roles.

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If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <https://ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

Army Secretariat