



Ministry
of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

[REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Ref: 2017/09053

27 October 2017

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your emails dated 11 and 19 September 2017 requesting the following information:

- *How many women are stationed at RAF Benson?*
- *What roles are the women in?*
- *How many women are currently trained to fly Puma helicopters?*
- *Where are these women currently based – are any of them overseas?*
- *How long does it take to train as an RAF pilot?*
- *Could you give us more details about Pumas – where are they based around the globe – or are they involved with any missions currently?*

'Since the merger with te RAF XXX women have been trained to fly every type of aircraft from Tornados to Typhoons.

[REDACTED] *– qualified as a pilot in X'*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA 2000).

A search for the information requested has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and I can confirm that information in scope of your request is held. However, some of the information falls entirely within the scope of the absolute exemptions provided for at sections 21 (Information reasonably accessible by other means) and 40 (Personal Data) of the FOIA and has been withheld.

The MOD holds information in relation to each of your following questions:

193 Servicewomen are stationed at Royal Air Force (RAF) Benson.

The roles these Servicewomen are in at RAF Benson are as follows: Administration, Catering, Communications Engineer, Dental, Engineering, Flying, Logistic Support, Medical, Operations Support, Physical Education, Provost, and Legal.

The number of Servicewomen currently trained to fly Puma helicopters is ~. In accordance with the Data Protection Act and our obligations in relation to the protection of confidentiality when handling personal data, data has been rounded to the nearest 10, where "-" denotes zero and "~" denotes a number less than or equal to 5.

Since the RAF merged with the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), the number of women who are recorded as trained pilots is 121.

I am aware that you have already been provided with the information regarding [REDACTED] [REDACTED] direct from RAF Benson.

Section 21(1) has been applied to some of the information, because the length of time it takes to train as an RAF pilot, and information on where Pumas are currently based around the globe and the missions they are involved with, can already be found in the public domain and therefore are reasonably accessible to you by other means:

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/roles/roles-finder/aircrew/pilot/>

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/RAFbenson/aboutus/pumahc2.cfm>

Section 40(2) has been applied to some of the information in order to protect personal information as governed by the Data Protection Act 1998. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and there is therefore no requirement to consider the public interest in making a decision to withhold the information.

Under section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance), you may wish to note, we have provided a figure for the recorded number of trained female pilots, for all aircraft, from 1994. This was the year the WRAF merged with the RAF. The current administration system used which has been in effect since 2006 accurately records the number of trained female pilots.

The system used to record data prior to 2006 may be inaccurate, but shows 25 women served as pilots from 1994 to 2006, which is shown in the total above.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

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,
[Original Signed]

**Air Director Resources Secretariat
Air Command**