



Ministry
of Defence

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

Ref: 2021/00398

9 February 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e-mail of the 12 January 2021 requesting the following information:

I am seeking clarification on the acceptability of corrective laser eye surgery (Corneal Refractive Surgery) within R.A.F. Pilot Applicants. as per JSP 950 (Leaflet 6-7-7) Section 4 Annex A (subsection 2.F and subsection 3) I understand Corneal Refractive Surgery is permissible for entry for certain roles within the armed forces This is expanded in the "Medical condition the Preclude Entry leaflet" that is produced by R.A.F. Recruitment, which states: "the total preoperative refractive error was not outside the limits for selection i.e. +6 or -6 dioptre in either eye and the best spectacle corrected visual acuity was within selection standards." However, I cannot find any documentation that specifically relates these standards to R.A.F. Pilot applicants and as such, I am seeking: 1) clarification on whether R.A.F. Aircrew applicants, and specifically applicants for the role of pilot, are allowed corneal refractive surgery prior to their entry into the Royal Air Force. 2) the pre-operative limits (in terms of visual acuity and ref. ranges) for R.A.F. Pilot applicants who have undertaken corneal refractive surgery

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). A search for the information has now been completed and I can confirm that information in scope of your request is held.

Candidates for Aircrew may be accepted subject to the following criteria:

- (1) Corneal Refractive Surgery (CRS) by Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK), Laser-Epithelial Keratomileusis (LASEK) and Laser In-Situ Keratomileusis (LASIK) only.
- (2) A minimum of six months to have elapsed since surgery.
- (3) Minimum age at application of 22 years old.
- (4) Persons refraction to have been stable for a least three months.
- (5) Recorded pre-operative ametropia must not exceed -5.00 to $+2.00$ dioptres in any median.
- (6) Post-operative VA within current aircrew visual recruitment limits
- (7) If the preceding criteria are met, candidates are to be referred to Director of the Centre for Aviation Ophthalmology for assessment as at paragraph 10c (4) (c). Recruitment and Selection Department of Occupational Medicine will continue to screen all aircrew candidates using corneal topography to identify those with undeclared CRS.

Para 10c (4) (c)

Pre-operative assessment is to include:

- i. A full ophthalmic examination.
- ii. Measurement of refractive error.
- iii. Measurement of the best spectacle corrected Snellen Visual Acuity.

Section 16 (Advice and Assistance), it may be helpful for you to know that Aircrew are normally recruited at an age before ocular maturity when CRS may not provide long term refractive stability. CRS is not recommended below age 21 for this reason.

If you are not satisfied with this response or wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact us in the first instance at the address above. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for 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 must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

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 normally investigate your case until the MOD internal 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

Air Command Secretariat