Ministry of Defence

Recruit Trainee Survey – Background Quality Report 2025/26

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Background Quality Report for the Recruit Trainee Survey 2025/26

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Recruit Trainee Survey (RTS) is a Tri-Service survey administered to understand Phase 1 Recruits' and Phase 2 Trainees' background, attitude, perceptions and experience of training. It also investigates their views on the facilities, food, support, fairness of treatment, general perceptions of the course and hopes for the future. The aim of the survey is to:

- Elicit attitudes towards the quality and benefits of training provided.
- Monitor the fairness of treatment for Recruits and Trainees.

The Recruit Trainee Survey (RTS) was established following an appraisal of initial training (Phase 1 and Phase 2) by the Defence Operational Capability (DOC) in 2002. The survey was trialled by the Army between November 2003 and May 2004. It has been used operationally by the Army since May 2004.The survey was introduced operationally by the Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Air Force (RAF) in November 2004. The survey was subject to the MOD ethical scrutiny process.

All Recruits and Trainees who have completed at least two weeks training on Phase 1 or Phase 2 courses are invited to participate in the survey. All respondents complete an anonymous and confidential online questionnaire and are reassured that their responses cannot be attributed to them individually.

Performance is reported by Service only and not for individual units; it is further sub-divided into Phase 1 and Phase 2. By analysing all responses over the 12-month period an overview of the results is provided focusing on key findings and trends over time, and in so doing complement and build on the monthly unit-specific reports. From 2021/2022 reporting format of the RTS annual report results are split by TLB with the responsibility for the training rather than by a split by the Service of the individual taking the survey, to better meet user needs. This change only impacts Phase 2 reporting.

1.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes all the key questions raised by the Defence Operational Capability Audit and was developed by a Tri-Service group. On commission, IFF Research made minor adjustments to the format and design of the questionnaire. Questions have been added, modified or removed since inception as part of a continuous improvement and review process. As such, there may be more trend data for questions which have not changed throughout the lifetime of the survey. For the purposes of the 2025/26 report, trend data is shown for the past 5 years.

Regular workshops have been conducted to gain feedback from Recruits/Trainees, survey administrators and the end users of the reports to support the process of continuous improvement. In addition, on occasions the questionnaire is tested on Recruits from different schools in order to examine and evaluate the content, length and language and ensure all respondents can understand the questionnaire. Cognitive testing of the questionnaire was conducted in 2024 to ensure Recruit understanding of the questions asked.

1.3 Continuous Reporting

During the course of the year the Services use the survey results to monitor the views of Phase 1 Recruits' and Phase 2 Trainees' to inform continuous improvement activity and instigate changes to processes if required. The data is uploaded to an online portal to which each training unit has constant access. The online portal was implemented in June 2013 after consultation with various survey data users. Workshops have been conducted to gain feedback from survey administrators and the end users of the reports to support the process of continuous improvement.

1.4 Summary Production Process

There are seven stages in the RTS process. Each of these stages is briefly described below.

Stage 1: Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed by a Tri-Service group with technical expertise on questionnaire design provided by IFF. A questionnaire review is conducted once a year to ensure the survey content remains relevant for all users – feedback is requested from attendees of the User Group meeting and the questionnaire is agreed by stakeholders a dedicated Tri-Service Steering Group meeting.

Stage 2: Survey distribution and communications

All Trainees and Recruits who have completed at least two weeks training were invited to participate in an on-line anonymous survey between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. All Phase 1 and 2 training establishments are included in the survey.

Instructions are provided by the current survey provider, IFF Research, to the training schools to explain how the survey should be administered. This includes a paragraph that should be read out to Trainees explaining the purpose of the survey and how the findings will be used. The survey is hosted on-line and schools are given passwords to identify the location; these passwords do not identify any individual. It is requested that the survey is conducted under controlled examination conditions, with access available through mobile devices. Trainees should not leave the session early or discuss answers with each other.

Stage 3: Data input

Online survey responses are held securely on IFF Research secure data collection platforms. These responses are made available on the online portal on a monthly basis and can be downloaded at any time in the process by the colleges and other Service users.

Stage 4: Data cleaning at data collection stage

Data cleaning is scripted into the survey itself in two ways:

a) Routing instructions which dictates who is shown a question, for example a Phase 1 specific question will only be shown to Phase 1 Cadets. Some questions are shown to respondents according to previous answers.
b) Data cleaning at point of data capture with rules applied when responding. For example, if the answer to a question can only be Yes or No the question is set-up as a single code response allowing just one response. This can also apply to specific responses where multiple answers are allowed, for example, 'None of the above' would be set to be an exclusive response. This avoids capturing any irrelevant data. Only surveys completed to the end are included in the final data set.

Stage 5: Production of tables of results

Tables of results are produced by IFF and level t-tests are carried out (at the 99% confidence interval) on the following comparisons:

Current vs last year:

- Army 2025/26 vs Army 2024/25
- Royal Navy 2025/26 vs Royal Navy 2024/25
- RAF 2025/26 vs RAF 2024/25
- Royal Marines 2025/26 vs Royal Marines 2024/25

Stage 6: Analysis of key findings

The tables of results for each section are analysed and summaries of the key points and figures are collated into the Main Report. Verbatim answers to open-ended questions are collected but are not included in the report.

Stage 7: Data Checking
There are several stages of validation built into the data checking phase of the tables, main report and the online reporting platform. Data tables are designed and then programmed into a software analysis package. The data tables are built on previous data tables to ensure the continuation of any data edit rules and to ensure that only new changes need to be programmed. All data tables are checked against the raw summary data and also against the data portal. For the main report, the data is input by the team and then checked by a separate team.

Stage 8: Publication
The RTS Annual Report is an Official Statistic and is produced and published in with the Code of Practice for Statistics[2]. The publication date is pre-announced on the GOV.UK Official Statistics Release Calendar[3]. 24hr pre-release access is given to those listed on the published RTS pre-release access list. The RTS Annual Report is published on The Ministry of Defence external webpage (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about/statistics[4]).

2. Relevance

2.1 Survey Scope
The principal users of the RTS publication are Defence People – Talent, Skills, Learning and Development (TSLD), Service level assurance teams, Phase 1 and 2 training establishments and their respective Headquarters. The statistical information is used to inform and measure training and development personnel strategy and policy so it is important that stakeholder requirements are represented.

The RTS captures information on the following topic areas:
- Preparing for training
- Facilities and food
- Support
- Complaints procedure
- Fairness, equality and diversity
- Setbacks during training
- General
- Hopes for the future

The information can also be used to answer parliamentary questions and Freedom of Information requests.

The survey is anonymous and confidential.

3. Accuracy & Reliability

3.1 Data Collection
The RTS collects data from all eligible Recruits and Trainees who have completed at least two weeks training. Survey estimates, and error margins are published for each of the three services these are outlined in Annex A of the main report.

As the RTS does not achieve 100% response rates, there is always the risk that those who returned questionnaires have differing views from those who did not. We assume that all non-response is Missing at Random (MAR). This means it is assumed that those people who did not return their questionnaires have (on average) the same perceptions and attitudes as those who did respond.

Attitudes and perceptions are liable to change within the calendar year, for example, as a result of events or even due to the time of the year that the responses were collected (a seasonality affect). As the RTS is carried out over the course of the calendar year, results over time might be impacted by the varying times within the years that responses are completed.

3.2 Data Revisions
From 01 Apr 18 the survey was offered once to each Recruit for each Training Establishment where they spend at least two weeks of training. The survey was delivered close to the end of the course (normally

within the last two weeks of the course) and was offered to each Recruit whether they completed the course or were discharged for any reason. This revision excludes those who are back classed, as from reviewing completion rates this group are difficult to identify and were not consistently identified to complete the survey.

3.3 Statistical Testing

Statistical tests are carried out between various subgroups of the population and over time for certain key indicators. This includes the following:

Current vs last year:

- Army 2025/26 vs Army 2024/25
- Royal Navy 2025/26 vs Royal Navy 2024/25
- RAF 2025/26 vs RAF 2024/25
- Royal Marines 2025/26 vs Royal Marines 2024/25

Testing is done using independent t-tests where categorical dependent outcomes are split into component binary variables indicating the presence or absence of a response in each category using a '1', '0' coding. This equates to a t-test of a difference between the proportion answering yes to a particular categorical outcome at time t and the counterpart proportion at time t+1. The t-test, as with the z-test, is appropriate for testing differences between the means of two groups, i.e. whether the two group means are drawn from the same underlying population distribution or from different population distributions. A one per cent, two-tailed, Type I error is imposed for the significance tests following a review in 2016/17 which identified that using this level of error increased the robustness of the analysis. In this instance, the mean is defined as the proportion, i.e. the number in the given category divided by the total sample size responding to the question. The t-test is chosen over the z-test because it is more robust for smaller sample sizes, though, in the majority of cases presented in this report, either test would be viable. No tests are applied when the base is below 30. No adjustments are made in this report for multiple significance testing.

4. Timeliness and Punctuality

4.1 Timeliness

The RTS questionnaire is agreed approximately 2 months prior to the start of the data collection period to allow the survey to be scripted. Once the fieldwork is closed, the data is checked, analysis completed, and the report produced and quality assured. The first draft of the report for review is typically produced around 8 weeks after the close of fieldwork. Fieldwork closed on 31 March and findings represent the period from 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026.

The timing of data collection was driven by the Services, to align the results with other military timescales. The survey is continuously in field to ensure all Recruits and Trainees are given the opportunity to complete the survey. The release date for this publication was pre-announced on the MOD's Calendar of Upcoming Releases[3] section of GOV.UK."

4.2 Punctuality

All pre-announced publication deadlines have been met.

5. Accessibility and Clarity

5.1 Accessibility Regulations

The regulation known as the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 came into force on 23 September 2020. The regulations state that all content on GOV.UK, needs to be made more accessible by making it 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'. Every possible effort has been made to ensure that the reports meet these regulations, as well as the Equality Act (2010) which outlines a legal obligation to provide equal access to people with disabilities.

5.2 Access to publications

The 25/26 annual report is published alongside reports from previous years on the statistics section of GOV.UK as a PDF Executive Summary document (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/recruit-trainee-survey[1]) with supporting ODS tables.

5.3 Clarity
A cover note is provided giving an introduction to the bulletin, summarising the methodology of the survey as well as providing the contact details of the responsible statistician. Within the report there is further information on the methodology and advice to users of caveats in the data.

6. Coherence and Comparability

6.1 Coherence
This is the only source of information about the specific experiences of Recruits and Trainees. There are no other Tri-Service data sources that collect the same data with which to ensure coherence. However, the questionnaire and other methodological issues are harmonised with the Officer Cadet Survey where possible, so that results can be compared.

6.2 Comparability over time
Given changes in response rates for the individual Services, Tri-Service results are not comparable with previous years therefore are not presented.

7. Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

7.1 Timeliness and costs versus Quality
The main trade-off is between timeliness and quality. Except for a small number of questions where it is felt relevant to analyse results by demographic questions, the reporting does not provide any cross-tabulations by each other, nor does the analysis employ any data reduction methods. This is so that the basic statistical information can be made available to policy users and the public as soon as possible in a clear and accessible format.

8. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

8.1 Description and Classifications of Users
Occupational Psychologists from the project team work closely with the main users of the survey within Defence to ensure that content reflects policy user requirements.

8.2 RTS Users
Internal users of the RTS include:

- All Phase 1 and 2 training establishments
- Army Individual Training Command (AITC)
- Land Warfare Centre (LWC)
- Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST)
- 22 Training Group RAF (22TrgGp)

The MOD has previously held regular consultation meetings with users of Defence Official Statistics, which provided a forum for user feedback on their needs and perceptions. Proposed changes were set out at the consultation meetings in order to gain feedback from both internal and external users.

The MOD invites users to provide feedback to the statistical output teams on any of their publications or reports using the contact information on the front of the publication.

9. Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

9.1 Performance and Cost Effectiveness
The estimated cost of running the RTS and OCS surveys and producing reports is approximately £250K. This includes external contractor costs in production and running of the external survey, data cleaning and analysis and production of the report. Costs are closely monitored, and MOD strive to balance quality and timeliness against costs. A census approach has been taken due to the small number of Recruits and Trainees, who the survey is targeted at.

9.2 Burden

Response to the RTS is voluntary, participant information is provided at the start of the questionnaire to encourage informed consent. Respondents are reassured that their answers are confidential and anonymous. The average time taken to complete the survey is around 30 minutes.

10. Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

10.1 Security

All staff involved in the RTS production process adhere to the MOD and Civil Service data protection regulations. All data is stored, accessed and analysed using restricted systems.

10.2 Confidentiality

The survey is anonymous and only aggregated results are provided to anyone not directly involved in the analysis, results are not presented for groups containing less than 10 respondents.

10.3 Transparency

We adhere to the principles and protocols laid out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics[2] and comply with pre-release access arrangements. The Defence Statistics Pre-Release Access lists[5] are available on GOV.UK. The report is published with details of the methodology alerting readers to any potential issues. Any significant errors identified after publication will result in revisions along with explanations as to the cause of the revisions.

11. References

Recruit Trainee Survey Collection
Code of Practice for Official Statistics
MOD's Timetable of Future Releases of National and Official Statistics
List of National and Office Statistics published by the MOD
Recruit Trainee Survey Pre-release Access List
Defence Statistics Disclosure and Confidentiality Policy - Identifiable Survey Data

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