

# News story: RAF opens close combat role to women ahead of schedule

*Updated: picture*

Speaking at the annual RAF Air Power Conference in London, Sir Michael praised the opening up of close combat roles to women, ahead of schedule, as a defining moment in the RAF's history.

The opening of the RAF Regiment to women means that from September 2017, every trade and branch in the RAF will be open to all genders.

The RAF Regiment is the Air Force's ground fighting force, protecting RAF bases, aircraft and equipment at home and abroad.

Announcing the opening of the RAF Regiment to women, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

A diverse force is a more operationally effective force. So I'm delighted that the RAF Regiment will be open to recruitment to women from September. Individuals who are capable of meeting the standards for the regiment will be given the opportunity to serve, regardless of their gender. This is a defining moment for the RAF, as it becomes the first service to have every trade and branch open to both genders.

In July of last year the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary announced that all three services would open up recruitment to ground close combat roles to women.

The RAF Regiment was due to open its recruitment to women by the end of 2018, at the same time as the Infantry and Royal Marines. However the opportunity to invite women to recruit into the Regiment earlier than expected has become available due to a review of work practices which concluded that the Regiment was closer to the Royal Armoured Corps, which is already admitting women into their training ranks, in terms of risks.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

The RAF is committed to providing equal opportunity to all, so it's fantastic to be able to open recruitment to the RAF Regiment to women ahead of schedule. We want the best and most talented individuals to join the Air Force, regardless of their gender, race, or background. A diverse force is a more effective force, and we need the best people to deliver the important work we do, be it defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria, or protecting Britain's skies.

## **Stepping up to support Allies**

Sir Michael Fallon also announced that the UK will continue to provide Air Transport support to French counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel for at least the next six months. Working together with the UK's firm ally of France in tackling extremism, the RAF has been providing C-17 air transport flights supporting the 3,500 French personnel deployed as part of the French pan-Sahel counter-terrorism initiative, Operation BARKHANE.

France is one the UK's most important European Ally on defence and security matters and both nations aim to uphold the security of Europe through sharing capabilities in the most efficient way.

## **Investing in equipment**

Today's announcements follow yesterday's investment, announced by the Defence Secretary, of around £40 million in cutting-edge technology to improve the defence of the RAF's Typhoon fighter jets that will sustain over 100 highly skilled British jobs.