

Poor infrastructure hampering Armed Forces initial training

Ten Armed Forces establishments have been graded good for their initial training offering. However, persistent weaknesses in resources, infrastructure and accommodation are affecting the quality of recruits' experiences.

Ofsted has published its 14th annual report on the effectiveness of care and welfare arrangements for recruits, trainees and officer cadets. The annual report draws on evidence from 13 inspections, including a single ungraded inspection of 5 University Royal Naval Units (URNUs) and their headquarters.

Recruits and trainees generally benefit from high-quality training, care and welfare arrangements. But too often, Ofsted found senior officers and their staff spending time dealing with the legacy of a lack of investment in infrastructure, or handling poor maintenance contracts. The RAF Officer Training Academy (RAFOTA) at RAF Cranwell, for example, had classrooms with leaking roofs and accommodation blocks that frequently lacked hot water and heating.

Inspectors also found that the needs of female recruits or trainees were not being considered fully. Women are often accommodated away from their male peers to ensure privacy. But this has led to some being isolated, especially in establishments where there are very few female recruits. In other instances, staff did not always ensure that female recruits were issued with uniforms or equipment that fitted them properly, increasing the risk of injury.

This was the second year that Ofsted has used the [revised inspection handbook](#) to inspect care and welfare in Armed Forces initial training establishments.

Inspectors graded the key judgement areas of:

- training and support
- personal and professional development
- quality of facilities
- infrastructure and resources
- effectiveness of leadership and management

They also provided an overall effectiveness grade for each establishment.

Ten of the Regular and Reserve establishments were graded good for overall effectiveness and most of the key judgements. ITC Catterick was judged outstanding in 2 of the key judgement areas: quality of training and support, and leadership and management. Two establishments were judged to require improvement: RAFOTA at RAF Cranwell, and the Defence Medical Academy (DMA).

Ofsted's report recommends that all Regular and Reserve training establishments:

- urgently deal with the continuing and repeated failures in infrastructure. Provide commanding officers and their teams with clear guidance and funding to improve accommodation and infrastructure so that recruits, trainees and staff can live, learn and work in good-quality, well-maintained settings
- ensure that female recruits and trainees are given suitable kit and uniforms, and accommodation that provides adequate security, privacy and facilities

His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

I would like to congratulate the commanding officers, and their teams, at the good establishments this year. Their success is indicative of the very good work that so many military and civilian staff do to train and care for recruits and trainees.

However, more remains to be done to address weaknesses in resources, infrastructure and accommodation, which affect the quality of training and recruits' and trainees' experiences. I strongly urge colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to deal with the recommendations from this report to ensure future generations of Armed Forces personnel get the high-quality training, care and welfare they deserve.

Inspections of 8 Regular training establishments and 4 Reserve units contributed to the annual report as well as the single ungraded inspection of 5 URNUs and their headquarters. Ofsted used a new inspection model for University Service Units (USUs) and now intends to carry out graded inspections of other USUs using the same model.

All inspections were carried out between October 2021 and May 2022.