



Ministry of Defence

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

Our Ref: FOI2023/02698

Mr Chris Cole
Dronewars UK
By email

2 June 2023

Dear Mr Cole

Thank you for your email of 1 March 2023 requesting the following information:

“Please can I ask under the Freedom of Information Act for the following information:

1) The number of RAF Reaper Pilots and Sensor Operators currently assigned to i) 13 Squadron; ii) 39 Squadron, (iii) embedded with the USAF, iv) embedded or serving with any other national force at today's date (1st March 2023)

2) At today's date (1 March 2023), the total number of personnel who have qualified as an RAF Reaper Pilot or Sensor Operator since 1st January 2018?

3) At today's date (1st March 2023), the number of RAF personnel qualified to operate Protector

3) The current Initial Operating Capability date and Full Operating Capability date for Protector..”

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 within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that all information in scope of your request is held. Section 10(1) of the Act states that, subject to certain provisions allowing extensions of time, the public authority must comply with the requirements of section 1(1) promptly and in any event not later than the twentieth working day following the date of receipt. I acknowledge that this response has not met the timelines as set out in Section 10(1) for which I apologise.

The information you requested about the number of RAF Reaper Pilots and Sensor Operators assigned to 13 and 39 Squadron as of 1 March 2023 is provided in the table below:

13 Squadron	39 Squadron
143	Nil

Under Section 16 (Advice and Guidance), 39 Squadron disbanded in July 2022.

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/news/articles/no-39-squadron-standard-lodged-at-raf-cranwell-following-disbandment/>

As at 1 March 2023, there are two personnel currently embedded with the United States Air Force. There is no-one embedded with, or serving with, any other national force. The total number of personnel who have qualified as a Reaper Pilot or Sensor Operator since January 2018 is 123.

As at 1 March 2023, the total number of RAF personnel qualified to operate Protector is three. Under Section 16 (advice and guidance) the first Aircrew Conversion training course has subsequently commenced for Protector, as detailed in this article.

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/news/articles/aircrew-training-commences-on-protector/>

The information you have requested about the current Initial Operating Capability (IOC) date and Full Operating Capability (FOC) date for Protector is contained in the Answer to a Parliamentary Question as follows:

UIN 184579, tabled on 11 May 2023

Question

John Healey – Labour - Wentworth and Dearne

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) initial operating capability and (b) full operating capability dates for the Protector drone programme.

Answer

James Cartlidge - Conservative - South Suffolk

Answered on 19 May 2023

On current planning Protector is expected to enter RAF service in late 2024, with an Initial Operating Capability declared in 2025. The projected Full Operating Capability date will be confirmed later.

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]

Secretariat 3a
Air Command