NFTE: A Mindset Shift in Delivering Multinational Flight Training



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Air Commodore Rob Caine

Head of Flying Training

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Introduction

Modern air forces are facing a training revolution. With fifth- and sixth-generation aircraft entering service and operations become increasingly integrated, pilot training must evolve beyond national borders. The NATO Flight Training Europe (NFTE) initiative is at the heart of this transformation - creating a harmonised, multinational network to train the next generation of NATO aircrew efficiently, consistently, and collaboratively.

In this interview, Jas Hawker, Principal Officer Branch Chief for NATO Flight Training Europe at the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA), discusses how NFTE is reshaping multinational flight training and strengthening interoperability across the Alliance.

Supporting comments are provided by Air Commodore Rob Caine, Head of Flying Training for the Royal Air Force and the Chair of the NFTE Steering Board



Jason Hawker

Branch Chief NATO Flight Training Europe, NATO Support & Procurement Agency

Jas is the Branch Chief for NATO Flight Training Europe at the NATO Support and Procurement Agency.

Jas spent almost 30 years in the Royal Air Force and has amassed over 5000 flying hours on the Tornado and Hawk aircraft, which included 3 years as leader of the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Red Arrows. He is a graduate of the Australian Advanced Command and Staff College and has extensive experience of working in the UK Ministry of Defence, Multi-National Headquarters and delivering Military Flying Training Programmes.



Air Commodore Rob Caine

Head of Flying Training Royal Air Force and NFTE Steering Board Chair

Air Commodore Rob Caine joined the RAF in 1994, becoming an operational pilot on the Tornado before serving multiple operational tours and instructor roles. A Qualified Weapons Instructor and Advanced Qualified Flying Instructor, he was instrumental in introducing the Hawk T2 into service and has led numerous QWI courses. Rob has held key staff positions, including Head of Requirements for the UK Military Flying Training System, and commanded IV(AC) Squadron, responsible for training all RAF and Royal Navy fighter pilots prior to frontline Typhoon or F-35 operations.

The Chair of the NFTE Steering Board is a rotational position among members, Air Commodore Caine is the current Chair.

Interview with Jas Hawker, Branch Chief NFTE, NATO Support and Procurement Agency

Q1. NFTE brings nations together for a shared training approach. How does this cooperation help prepare pilots for fifth- and sixth-generation aircraft?

The NATO Flight Training Europe High Visibility Project is ambitious in its intent to create a network of harmonised flight training campuses, both for the present and enduring into the future. The first tasks were to determine the multinational requirement across all streams of flying training in order to develop processes and mechanisms that bring efficiencies, and to identify where the pain points were in flying training pipelines from a multinational perspective. That first stage is complete, but will endure as NFTE Participant Nations develop national and multinational airpower training requirements and capabilities for 5th and 6th generation aircraft. Developing future training concepts together enhances interoperability in a number of areas as new platforms are introduced into service.

Q2. Many nations are replacing or upgrading fleets simultaneously. How can NATO balance the need to introduce new capabilities quickly while maintaining stability in training programmes?

Pre-front line aircrew training is a national responsibility, not a NATO responsibility. However, as NFTE has an Alliance view of training demand and supply, rather than purely from a national perspective, as the NFTE network and training capacity continues to grow it will be able to offer stability and/or resilience to training pipelines undergoing transformation.

Q3. Interoperability remains a major challenge in multinational training. What are the main obstacles to achieving it, and what steps are being taken to improve alignment across allied nations?

Harmonisation of training requirements has been the main obstacle to achieving interoperability across the NFTE





network of training campuses. However, in order to create a network, NFTE has drafted a harmonisation document that details the minimum training requirements for each phase of training, for each type of training (Fast Jet, Rotary, Multi-Engine and RPAS). This document is currently being staffed through the NATO Standardisation Office with a view to publishing a NATO Standardisation Recommendation (STANREC) document in early 2026. This will facilitate easier coordination, greater interoperability and alignment across the NFTE training network.

Q4. How does the NSPA work with industry partners to deliver technologies, such as synthetic and simulator-based training, that NATO needs for the future?

As NATOs designated organisation for multinational acquisition, support and sustainment, NSPA, and particularly the Aviation Support Programme is engaged on a number of projects to deliver both fixed wing and rotary wing simulator-based training to our customer Air Forces, Navy's, Army's, and civil protection / state-owned aircraft operations. We are updating FSTDs/CBTs with latest technologies with the OEM of the FSTDs and are tendering procurement/development of new FSTDs/CBTs with latest technologies or prototyping new FSTDs/CBTs such as rear cabin trainers, tactical trainers, AR/VR/MR trainers.

Q5. With pilot shortages across the Alliance, what new approaches to recruitment and retention could help strengthen NATO's training pipeline?

NFTE's mission is to ensure that there is sufficient aircrew training available, delivered to the highest of quality that our Air Forces demand, and that is our focus; recruitment and retention rightly remains the responsibility of individual Air Forces. However, from a personal perspective as an aviator who now flies a desk, I have the privilege in my NFTE role of seeing the innovative world-class flying training systems across the Alliance, and it is impressive.

Supporting Comment: Air Commodore Rob Caine, Head of Flying Training, Royal Air Force and NFTE Chair

"We often forget the importance of Joint Endeavour, Joint Risk Management and ensuring we are closely aligned with the front-line," said Air Cdre Rob Caine, reflecting on the shared challenges of delivering modern flying training. "The more we work in an aligned way the better able we are to work in a nimble pragmatic way."

Final thoughts

Rather than each nation working in isolation, NFTE is bringing them together under a shared vision for how pilots are trained and supported. It's a practical shift as much as a cultural one - pooling expertise, resources, and technology to ensure NATO's future aircrew are ready for the challenges of modern air combat.

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