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Streamlining of the Aircraft Maintenance Technician Training Continuum

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Service Paper – Étude militaire

Streamlining of the Aircraft Maintenance Technician Training Continuum

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STREAMLINING OF THE AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN TRAINING CONTINUUM

AIM

1. Timely and relevant training is critical to the generation of effective aircraft maintenance technicians. Skilled aircraft maintenance technicians are an essential element of the sustain function which enables the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) to successfully deliver airpower.¹ The purpose of this paper is to propose a new training continuum for the Aviation Systems (AVN) technician occupation which would incorporate the current Apprentice Rank Qualification (ARQ) course into more robust aircraft specific maintenance courses, with the goal of increasing aircraft specific knowledge, while decreasing overall training length.

INTRODUCTION

2. The RCAF Annual Military Occupation Review for Fiscal Year 2021/2022 identified the AVN technician occupation as being “unrecoverable.”² This means that the AVN technician occupation is currently unable to force generate new technicians at a sufficient rate to counter attrition. As of September 2022, the Trained Effective Strength (TES) of the AVN technician occupation is only 85 percent of the Trained Effective Establishment (TEE).³ In other words, 15 percent of the established positions for the AVN technician occupation are vacant. The AVN technician occupation is the largest aircraft maintenance occupation and comprises approximately 42% of the TEE positions allocated to aircraft maintenance technicians below the Warrant Officer level.⁴

3. In order to mitigate the effects of attrition, it is essential that new technicians be force generated as efficiently as possible, while ensuring they are provided the necessary knowledge and skills to be effective following completion of their training. This paper will begin by providing an overview of the current training continuum for aircraft maintenance technicians, identify the challenges that exist with the current system and propose an alternative training continuum for the AVN technician occupation to overcome those challenges. Finally, this paper will explore some of the limitations of the proposed alternative continuum.

¹ Canada. Department of National Defence, *B-GA-400-000/FP-001, Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine*, November 2016, 26, <http://trenton.mil.ca/rcaf-awc/en/doctrine/pubs/b-ga-400-000-fp-001-royal-canadian-air-force-doctrine.pdf>.

² Canada. Department of National Defence, Director Air Personnel Strategy, “Record of Discussion – Fiscal Year 21-22 Annual Military Occupation Review – Royal Canadian Air Force Occupations,” March 31, 2022, 2, <https://collaboration-airforce.forces.mil.ca/sites/AirStaff/dairpersstrat/DPersStrat5/AMOR/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

³ Canada. Department of National Defence, Director Military Careers 4 – Air Tech Team, “Annual CM Brief 2022-23,” slide 17, https://cmpapp.mil.ca/dgmc/en/career/briefing/00135-00136-00138-00261-00343-00363_airtech-techaero.pptx.

⁴ Canada. Department of National Defence, Director Military Careers 4 – Air Tech Team, “Annual CM Brief 2022-23,” slide 17.

DISCUSSION

Current Training Continuum

4. Following completion of the Basic Military Qualification, aircraft maintenance technicians proceed to the Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Technology and Engineering (CFSATE) located at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Borden for completion of the Common Core course. The Common Core course is 40 training days in length⁵ and its purpose is to provide apprentices with generic knowledge and skills required for the completion of the apprentice logbook and future occupation specific training.⁶ Following completion of Common Core, technicians are typically posted to their future units, where they complete their apprentice logbook. The apprentice logbook contains a series of aircraft fleet specific, but occupation generic, tasks such as aircraft marshalling and refuelling, as well as general knowledge requirements necessary to work in an aircraft maintenance environment.⁷

5. Following a minimum period of three months, aircraft maintenance technicians return to CFSATE for completion of the ARQ course. The ARQ course is 111 training days in length for the AVN technician occupation,⁸ and is intended to provide apprentice technicians fleet generic, but occupation specific, systems knowledge and skills. Once a technician completes the ARQ course for their occupation, they are considered to have reached the Operationally Functional Point (OFP) for their occupation.⁹ At this point, they are considered TES and are returned to their home units to fill a TEE position.¹⁰ However, they are not yet qualified to perform aircraft maintenance unsupervised and further aircraft specific training is required.

6. Upon return to their home unit, an aircraft technician will commence their journeyman logbook, which contains a series of skills that they will continue to develop on their specific aircraft fleet, such as inspecting aircraft systems.¹¹ After a period of six to 12 months, technicians are then sent to their aircraft fleet's Operational Training Unit (OTU) for completion of the aircraft and occupation specific On-Aircraft Maintenance course, which ranges from 53 to 166

⁵ Canada. Department of National Defence, "RCAF Qualification Standard Common Specialty - Aircraft Technician Common Core (ALJN)," 02 September 2022, F-4, <http://res-wpg-avsabr2.forces.mil.ca/Catalog/app/search>.

⁶ Canada. Department of National Defence, "RCAF Qualification Standard Common Specialty - Aircraft Technician Common Core (ALJN)," 1-1 – 1-2.

⁷ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-050-514/PW-D02, Aviation Systems Technician (AVN Tech) Apprentice through Journeyman (QL3, 4, 5A) Log Book*, March 2014, 18-21, http://winnipeg.mil.ca/cms/Libraries/A4_Maint_SOAs_ETO/AVN_Log_Book_2014.sflb.ashx.

⁸ Canada. Department of National Defence, "RCAF Qualification Standard - Aviation System Technician Progression from Apprentice to Journeyman," 25 January 2018, 2-3, <http://res-wpg-avsabr2.forces.mil.ca/Catalog/app/search>.

⁹ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-055-002/PP-002, The Canadian Armed Forces Military Employment Structures Manual Volume 2: Occupational Specifications, Part 2: Non-Commissioned Member Occupations - Aviation Systems Technician*, Ch 15 – 2022-10-21, 7-8, <http://cmp-cpm.mil.ca/en/support/military-personnel/dpgr-specifications.page>.

¹⁰ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-055-002/PP-002, The Canadian Armed Forces Military Employment Structures Manual Volume 2: Occupational Specifications, Part 2: Non-Commissioned Member Occupations - Aviation Systems Technician*, 8.

¹¹ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-050-514/PW-D02, Aviation Systems Technician (AVN Tech) Apprentice through Journeyman (QL3, 4, 5A) Log Book*, 23-24.

training days in length¹² depending on the aircraft fleet.¹³ Once a technician’s journeyman logbook is complete and they have completed the On-Aircraft Maintenance course, they are considered journeyman technicians and are qualified to carry out aircraft maintenance on the specific aircraft fleet on which they have been trained.¹⁴ Figure 1 below provides a summary of the current aircraft technician training continuum:

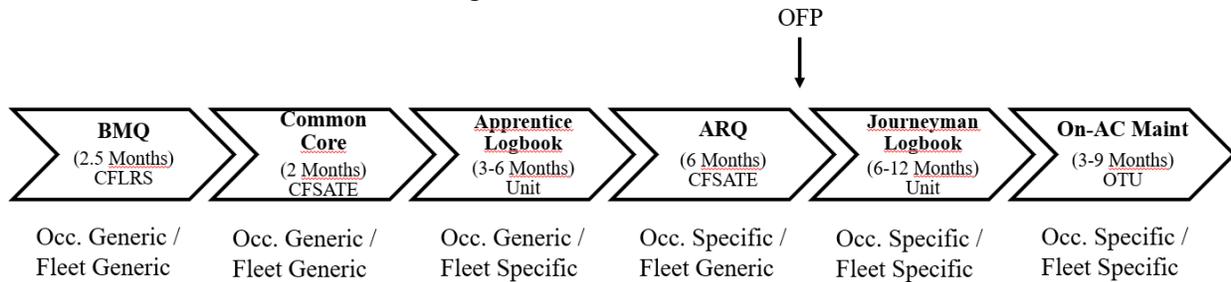


Figure 1 – Current Aircraft Technician Training Continuum

Challenges and Deficiencies

7. However, there are a number of challenges and deficiencies that exist with the current training continuum. Firstly, there is a significant amount of redundancy in the training continuum for the AVN technician occupation. The vast majority of the performance objectives which comprise the ARQ course, such as “maintain aircraft hydraulic systems”, are also contained in the fleet specific On-Aircraft Maintenance courses.¹⁵ This is deliberate, as the ARQ course is meant to provide apprentice technicians an introduction to the various aircraft systems. Retired CT114 Tutor aircraft are used as the primary training aids for the ARQ course for the AVN technician occupation as they have a simpler design than the RCAF aircraft fleets currently used for operations. However, other than technicians posted to 431 (Aerial Demonstration) Squadron later in their careers, the vast majority of technicians will never maintain the CT114 aircraft and are required to learn the tasks again for the specific aircraft that they will be assigned to. Similarly, all students are required to learn how to maintain rotary wing flight control and drive systems on the ARQ course,¹⁶ even though a significant number will never be required to maintain helicopters, resulting in unnecessary training.

8. It has also been difficult to acquire modern training aids for the ARQ course. Over the years there have been multiple attempts to procure more advanced and purpose-built training aids, as well as modernize the training delivery, for the course. Examples of this are the Canadian Air Synthetic Environment Phase 2 and Modernization of Basic Aircraft Technical

¹² Canada. Department of National Defence, “RCAF Training Catalogue & Calendar,” accessed February 11, 2023, <http://res-wpg-avsabr2.forces.mil.ca/Catalog/app/search>.

¹³ This does not include fleets for which training is conducted primarily through On-Job Training for which no firm timeline is set.

¹⁴ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-050-514/PW-D02, Aviation Systems Technician (AVN Tech) Apprentice through Journeyman (QL3, 4, 5A) Log Book*, 23.

¹⁵ Canada. Department of National Defence, “RCAF Training Catalogue & Calendar,” accessed February 11, 2023, <http://res-wpg-avsabr2.forces.mil.ca/Catalog/app/search>.

¹⁶ Canada. Department of National Defence, “RCAF Qualification Standard - Aviation System Technician Progression from Apprentice to Journeyman,” 4-10 – 4-11.

Training projects.¹⁷ Unfortunately, funding constraints, contracting challenges and infrastructure limitations have resulted in delays to the implementation of the projects. Although the CT114 is a relatively simple aircraft that is functional for introductory aircraft maintenance training, it first entered service in 1963¹⁸ and is representative of the technology of that era. As a result, it does not provide students exposure to current aircraft technology, nor does it lend itself to integration with modern training solutions, such as instructor-controlled fault insertion.

9. As all direct entry aircraft technician occupations are currently required to complete their ARQ course at CFSATE, it can result in a bottleneck when there is a need to surge training to meet intake requirements, as CFSATE is limited in the number of students that can be trained simultaneously due to instructor, training aid and infrastructure limitations. An alternative utilized in the past is to contract the provision of the ARQ courses to civilian aviation schools. Unfortunately, this entails a lead time of up to a year for release of a Request for Proposal and additional time is required following contract award for curriculum development by the school with the winning bid. An example of a bottleneck presented itself with the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, where CFSATE's student intake was limited by the accommodation and feeding capability of CFB Borden and there was no ready alternative to maintain the target production levels.

10. Currently, the OFP for aircraft maintenance technicians is following completion of the ARQ course.¹⁹ However, aircraft maintenance technicians are not qualified to carry out maintenance, other than under direct supervision, until they have completed their journeyman logbooks and On-Aircraft Maintenance course.^{20,21} This is misleading because they are considered operationally functional and fill a TEE position, but are not able to work independently. As a result, the capability of an aircraft maintenance organization to sustain operations is actually less than what is indicated by the TES to TEE ratio.

Alternative Training Continuum

11. In order to help address the challenges listed above, it is proposed that the current training continuum for the AVN technician occupation be revised such that the ARQ course is eliminated and occupation specific introductory knowledge and skills are added to the aircraft fleet specific On-Aircraft Maintenance courses. The journeyman logbook would also be eliminated and the apprentice logbook expanded to include hands-on introductions to the main aircraft systems that apprentices will be exposed to during the On-Aircraft Maintenance course. As such, following

¹⁷ “Royal Canadian Air Force: Air Tech Innovations,” Canada. Department of National Defence, accessed February 16, 2023, <http://rcaf.mil.ca/en/2-cad/air-force-training/tech-training-pages/air-tech-innovation.page>.

¹⁸ “Canadair CT-114 Tutor,” Canada Aviation and Space Museum, accessed February 13, 2023, <https://ingeniumcanada.org/aviation/artifact/canadair-ct-114-tutor>.

¹⁹ Canada. Department of National Defence, *A-PD-055-002/PP-002, The Canadian Armed Forces Military Employment Structures Manual Volume 2: Occupational Specifications, Part 2: Non-Commissioned Member Occupations - Aviation Systems Technician*, 7-8.

²⁰ Canada. Department of National Defence, *C-05-005-P03/AM-001, Maintenance Policy - Aircraft Weapon Systems Maintenance: Maintenance Activity Authorizations and Training Standards*, Ch/Mod 18 – 2022-12-06, 1-6, http://winnipeg.mil.ca/cms/Libraries/A4_Maint_Publications/C-05-005-P03-AM-001.sflb.ashx.

²¹ Canada. Department of National Defence, “1 Canadian Air Division Orders: Volume 6 – Air Maintenance,” 21 December 2022, 44, http://rcaf.mil.ca/assets/RCAF_Intranet/docs/en/1-CAD/CADO/volume-6.pdf.

completion of the Common Core course at CFSATE, AVN technicians would be posted to their units where they would complete their expanded apprentice logbook prior to being loaded onto the On-Aircraft Maintenance course. Following completion of the apprentice logbook and the On-Aircraft Maintenance course, technicians would be considered journeymen technicians. Figure 2 below depicts the proposed alternative training continuum:

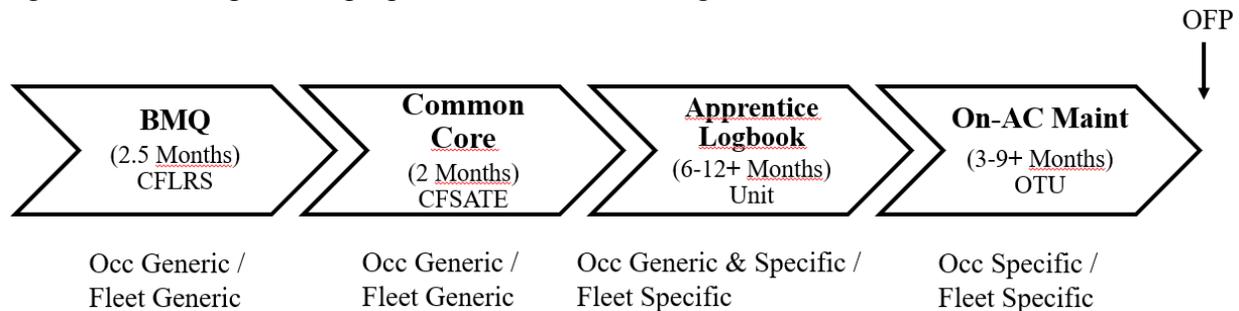


Figure 2 – Alternative Aircraft Technician Training Continuum

12. The alternative aircraft technician training continuum offers a number of advantages over the current training continuum. Firstly, as opposed to having apprentices practice maintenance tasks on an outdated aircraft fleet, they are instead provided additional exposure to the actual fleet that they will be maintaining. This will decrease the overall duration of the training, as efficiency would be gained by not having to learn a task on two different fleets. It will also increase their familiarity and level of comfort with that fleet. This extends beyond the physical maintenance tasks and would also enable apprentices to become more proficient in the use of fleet specific procedures, technical orders and electronic record keeping systems. As well, aircraft fleets that have been procured more recently, such as the CC130J and CC295, have been delivered with purpose-built maintenance training aids. In addition to providing more realistic training, some of the fleet specific training aids also enable the development of technician troubleshooting skills through the ability of instructors to insert faults in the systems for technicians to diagnose.

13. With the current training continuum, all eggs are in the proverbial single basket. When there is a requirement to surge intake, or CFSATE's production is limited due to unforeseen challenges, such as COVID-19, it negatively impacts individual fleets' ability to force generate the technicians they require to sustain operations. With the elimination of the centralized ARQ course for the AVN technician occupation, fleets with capacity beyond that of CFSATE are enabled to load their apprentices onto their On-Aircraft Maintenance course as soon as they are ready and are not required to hold them back until a slot is open at the central school before proceeding with their training.

14. With the alternative training continuum, it is proposed that the OFP would be achieved upon completion of the On-Aircraft Maintenance course. This reflects the point at which a technician is qualified to work on the aircraft fleet on which they have been trained without direct supervision and ensures that the TES of a given unit more accurately reflects that unit's ability to sustain operations.

15. The alternative training continuum would also result in a cost savings for the RCAF by eliminating the Temporary Duty (TD) costs associated with sending students on the ARQ course. While students posted to Wings other than where the OTU is located would still be on TD for the On-Aircraft Maintenance course, for which the duration would be increased, this would be a for a shorter overall duration and would affect a smaller number of technicians.

16. In addition to saving money, the alternative training continuum would also enhance the quality of life for AVN technicians, as they would no longer be required to leave their families for up to six months to attend the ARQ course at CFB Borden. This can be particularly difficult at a time when they are just beginning their careers and have only had a few months to settle into their current locations, and may not have had the opportunity to establish a support network.

17. Using the same type of equipment in the training program that technicians will eventually be maintaining upon graduation is an approach that has been employed in industry. An example of such is used by Deere & Company to train dealer technicians to service and repair John Deere equipment. The company partnered with a number of colleges in Canada and the United States to develop a technician training program which is a two-year associate's degree and is tailored specifically to John Deere equipment. Instructors are John Deere trained technicians and the schools utilize John Deere equipment, which is updated to keep pace with the company's current product line. The training program also incorporates internships at John Deere dealerships where students have the opportunity to gain experience in their future working environments, similar to CAF technicians completing their apprentice logbook at their home unit, and successful graduates are subsequently employed by John Deere.²²

Limitations

18. One of the limitations of the alternative training continuum is that an expanded On-Aircraft Maintenance course would not be suitable for journeymen technicians that are posted to another aircraft fleet during their career, as they would already possess the fundamental skills and knowledge required to perform aircraft maintenance. As such, an abbreviated course specific to off-fleet journeymen technicians would need to be developed for each fleet to cover elements that are unique to that fleet. However, given that the current On-Aircraft Maintenance courses are perceived by many as containing redundant content for journeymen, this would further increase efficiency by decreasing training time for journeymen technicians.

19. Fleets that rely on contracted training for the provision of the On-Aircraft Maintenance course, such as the CC177 for which training is provided by the United States Air Force,²³ would require special consideration. In this case, potential solutions could be amending the contract to include an introductory training period or developing an introductory training package to be completed at the home unit.

²² "Power Up Your Career with John Deere TECH," John Deere, accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.deere.ca/en/our-company/john-deere-careers/dealer-technician-training/jd-tech/>.

²³ Canada. Department of National Defence, "RCAF Qualification Standard Unique Specialty – CC177 Aviation Systems On-Aircraft Maintenance (ALOK)," 08 November 2019, 2-1, <http://res-wpg-avsabr2.forces.mil.ca/Catalog/app/search>.

CONCLUSION

20. By eliminating the requirement for AVN technicians to learn tasks on two different fleets, and adopting an abbreviated On-Aircraft Maintenance course for off-fleet journeymen, the alternative continuum would reduce overall training duration and significantly reduce TD costs. Technicians would gain a higher level of familiarity on the specific aircraft fleet they will be maintaining and have better access to technological improvements in training delivery. The alternative continuum would leverage individual fleets' ability to surge and mitigate the risk of having a mandatory training component delivered in a single location. Quality of life would also be improved for students by avoiding the need to be separated from their families for several months. In addition, the resulting change in OFP would more accurately reflect a unit's ability to sustain operations based on their TES. As a result, adoption of the proposed alternative training continuum for the AVN technician occupation would increase the speed and flexibility with which the RCAF could force generate new technicians, thereby helping offset the negative effects of attrition.

RECOMMENDATION

21. It is recommended that the proposed alternative training continuum be implemented for the AVN technician occupation. To enable this, it is recommended that the following be carried out:

- a. 2 Canadian Air Division conduct a Needs Assessment of the AVN technician training continuum, followed by Qualification Standard Writing Boards, to assess the level of redundancy and determine the optimum content of the fleet specific On-Aircraft Maintenance courses for the AVN technician occupation.
- b. The CC130J fleet be used to trial the alternative training continuum, as the entirety of the fleet is located at 8 Wing Trenton, including the OTU.
- c. If the trial is deemed successful, the alternative AVN technician training continuum be progressively rolled out for the remainder of the RCAF aircraft fleets.
- d. The OFP for the AVN occupation be changed to upon completion of an On-Aircraft Maintenance course.
- e. The instructor positions no longer required at CFSATE to deliver the AVN technician ARQ course be reallocated to fleet OTUs to offset the additional burden of delivering expanded On-Aircraft Maintenance courses.

22. If the proposed alternative training continuum proves to be successful for the AVN technician occupation, it is recommended that it be considered for implementation for the

Avionics Systems and Air Weapons Systems technician occupations, as those occupations would also potentially benefit from implementation of a streamlined training approach.²⁴

²⁴ As the Aircraft Structures (ACS) technician occupation is a skill-set based occupation, a large number of their skills, such as metal work, apply to most aircraft fleets. ACS technicians also currently have among the shortest On-Aircraft Maintenance courses. As a result, it would be most practical to retain the ACS technician ARQ course at CFSATE.

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