

Ministry of Defence (MoD) lays the foundations for improved line management capability

Improving its line management capability is almost certainly the number one training priority in every government department right now.

This is primarily because they want to support a vitally important swathe of civil servants who find themselves on the frontline of dealing with a host of workplace challenges. Alongside this however, improving alignment with the new [Civil Service Line Management Standards](#), which promote consistency and effective line management across government, is also a factor.

Management has always been a complex undertaking but it's been complicated further in recent years by changing work

patterns and employee expectations. There are considerations around inclusion, wellbeing, smarter working practices and sustainability to factor in, as well as how to make best use of all the new and emerging technology around us.

It's therefore no surprise that, having acknowledged the pressures their managers are under, departments are increasingly opting to prioritise more than ever their line management capability.

One of those departments is the Ministry of Defence (MoD) which decided to adopt the Management: Foundation training programme two years ago, making it one of the earliest adopters of the newly refreshed, cross Civil Service programme.



Daniel Okin
Head of Capability, Apprenticeships and Learning, Ministry of Defence



Danielle Skeete
Assistant Head of Learning and Development, Ministry of Defence

The investment pays off

Playing to its stated departmental ambition of wanting to field a well-run and well-led workforce, the department is now reaping the rewards of that decision, with learners from the 2023/2024 intake providing resoundingly positive feedback to the programme.

The data from feedback surveys came back with 81% of MoD participants saying they have had the opportunity to embed what they had learnt in the programme back into the workplace. A similar proportion also praised how the programme was pitched at the right level for them; testament to the work done by the MoD's learning and development team in helping finesse this centrally available programme.

Prior to adopting the Foundation programme, the MoD ran its own 12-week blended Line Managers in Defence programme, aimed at its entire cadre of line managers. However, with demand surging, the department decided to look for alternative solutions. With the newly refreshed [Management: Foundation programme](#) ready to launch (subsequently followed by the Practitioner and Senior Practitioner versions), the timing was ideal.

Danielle Skeete, Assistant Head of Learning and Development, explains:

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“Making the switch was a pretty straightforward decision. The programme’s themes and content felt like a good match for our departmental ambitions. It resonated with how we believe line management capability to be the basis of any high performing employee environment.”



A vital capability

Having a strong line management capability cuts across multiple aspects of MoD life; from team performance and efficiency through to wellbeing and pastoral care. Line managers also have a big part to play in embedding a department-wide growth mindset and encouraging everyone to buy into the bigger picture of the MoD's strategic goals and how they can contribute to them. Within the four-month Foundation programme, new line managers begin to develop the skills they'll need to do this, including decision-making, team working, communication and performance management.

When preparing the Foundation programme for its MoD roll-out, there was plenty of discussion about how much contextualisation it required. Dan Okin, Head of Capability, Apprenticeships and Learning, recalls: "Some learners wanted – and still want – Foundation to be more MoD-specific. However, there's also an argument that says line management is line management, whether you're at the MoD, the Home Office, Tesco or Google. Therefore, establishing how much organisational specificity you want or need can be a tricky balancing act."



Stay in touch

In Danielle's view, it's the peer learning group discussions that follow each of Foundation's four modules that provide the more specific MoD context that some learners still want. However, this is also an area where she knows that her team has some work to do – to make sure that more participants make the most of these groups and remain in contact with their fellow learners once the programme concludes.

"That's been my only disappointment so far," she explains. "Our evaluation has shown that we can do more to promote the benefits of the discussions in those groups and to demonstrate the value of staying in touch. We've responded by creating a community of practice that will hopefully help us do exactly that."

"Overall, all our other metrics are really pleasing though. For example, 84% of participants said how supportive their own line managers had been while they were on the programme, protecting their study time and having one-to-one discussions about how they were getting on."

"But it's the fact that 81% have been able to apply what they've learned that I find most encouraging. That means that participants feel sufficiently confident in the skills they've developed to have a difficult conversation around performance or attendance, for example. The Foundation programme represents a significant commitment but knowing that people are bringing what they've learned back to the department makes it all worthwhile."

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"From experience, new line managers tend to want to jump straight to policy guidance; a case of 'tell me what I need to do and how'. However, we're keen to stress that this is about teaching the fundamentals of line management capability more broadly. We want to introduce them to management tools and best practice techniques and, most importantly, to make sure they're confident in using these at the appropriate time. All of this is going to help us create the ideal employee culture within the department."

