

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## Statistics on UK Defence Personnel

*(produced by the Ministry of Defence)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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# **Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the following sets of statistics, produced by the Ministry of Defence (MOD):

- *Quarterly Civilian Personnel Report*<sup>4</sup> (QCPR);
- *UK Armed Forces Monthly Manning Report*<sup>5</sup> (MMR);
- *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Manning Report*<sup>6</sup> (QMR);
- *UK Armed Forces Annual Manning Report*<sup>7</sup> (AMR); and
- *UK Reserve Forces Strengths*<sup>8</sup> (TSP7).

1.1.2 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality<sup>9</sup>. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dasa.MOD.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=510&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-10-27&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-10-27>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dasa.MOD.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=160&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-12-01&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-12-01>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dasa.MOD.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=170&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-11-10&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-11-10>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dasa.MOD.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=180&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-05-26&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-05-26>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dasa.MOD.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=70&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-05-26&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-05-26>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

## 1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in Defence Personnel are designated as National Statistics, subject to the MOD implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by May 2012.
- 1.2.2 The MOD has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The MOD publishes annual user feedback reports that usefully document its engagement with users, and findings from recent user consultations. The MOD also has regular contact with the departmental users of its defence personnel statistics. However, it has little engagement, and awareness of, users outside the MOD.
- 1.3.2 The MOD publishes Background Quality Reports on the quality of the statistics, which includes 'Key Quality Indicators', but information about the strengths and weaknesses of the statistics in relation to the range of uses is brief. The MOD publishes little information about the quality of the statistics presented in *TSP7*.
- 1.3.3 The releases contain useful key points at the beginning of the release but lack sufficient commentary about comparisons over time, or information about the policy context in which the statistics have been collected and will be used.

## 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the MOD could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

## 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Requirement 1</b> | Investigate and document more fully the use made of these statistics and seek to identify, and engage more with, users outside the MOD (para 3.1).                       |
| <b>Requirement 2</b> | Publish a plan for improving the quality of the reserve force data used for <i>TSP7</i> , and improve the published quality information for these statistics (para 3.2). |

**Requirement 3**

Improve the commentary in the defence personnel releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.3).

**Requirement 4**

Publish the tables included in the defence personnel releases in forms which encourage re-use. In meeting this Requirement, the MOD should also produce a guidance document for the online table tool to assist users in finding the information that they need (para 3.4).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The statistics on defence personnel measure the strength<sup>10</sup>, intake and outflow of UK Regular, Non-Regular and Reserve Forces, as well as civilian personnel employed by the MOD.
- 2.2 *QCPR* presents information about the changes in the composition of all civilian personnel for the five most recent quarters as well as the previous three financial years. The release presents a range of civilian personnel statistics by characteristics such as employer, working pattern, ethnicity and disability status. The MOD compiles its civilian statistics from several data sources:
- data for core the MOD personnel have been taken from the MOD's Human Resources Management System (HRMS) monthly from April 2004;
  - data for other staff such as those in Trading Funds<sup>11</sup>, the Defence Support Group and the UK Hydrographic Office, are supplied as monthly extracts from those organisations' HR systems to the MOD; and
  - data for Locally Engaged Civilians<sup>12</sup> are provided by Top Level Budgetary areas within the MOD.
- 2.3 *MMR*, *QMR* and *AMR* provide regular information about the strength, intake and outflow of the UK Regular and Non-Regular Forces. *QMR* complements *MMR* by providing greater detail about the sex and ethnicity of the Armed Forces. *AMR* provides a summary of the statistics in *MMR* and *QMR* and presents more detail about the age and rank of the Armed Forces in the UK. *MMR* and *QMR* were first published in July 2009 as the result of consulting users<sup>13</sup> about combining five separate statistical reports into one monthly and one quarterly publication. *AMR* was published for the first time in May 2011, following a formal consultation exercise<sup>14</sup> to replace three previous publications with a single release. The data for these statistics are taken from the MOD's Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system, as well as single-service legacy systems.
- 2.4 *TSP7* presents annual information about the strength of the UK Reserve Forces, including Regular and Voluntary Reserves, broken down by service (Royal Marines, Royal Navy, Army, and Royal Air Force). The data used for producing these statistics are taken from the JPA and single-service systems.

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<sup>10</sup> Strength refers to the number of persons currently employed by the MOD

<sup>11</sup> Trading Funds were introduced by the *Government under the Trading Funds Act 1973* as a 'means of financing trading operations of a government department which, hitherto, have been carried out on Vote'. They are self-accounting units that have greater freedom, than other government departments, in managing their own financial and management activities. They are also free to negotiate their own terms and conditions with their staff and for this reason their grading structures do not always match that of the rest of the MOD

<sup>12</sup> Locally Engaged Civilians (LECs) are recruited overseas exclusively for the employment in support of the UK Armed Forces deployed in theatre. This includes the dependents of UK military or UK-based civilian staff employed overseas. LECs are not civil servants

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=66&pubType=4>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/ConsultationsandCommunications/PublicConsultations/ConsultationOnDasasAnnualManpowerNationalStatisticsPublications.htm>

- 2.5 The statistics are used for planning MOD staffing resources to ensure they have the right personnel deployed to defend the nation's interests, and to fund benefits such as resettlement packages. They are also used within the MOD in response to public, official and Parliamentary queries and for briefing senior staff.
- 2.6 The MOD told us that the annual cost of producing these statistics is about £20,000, which includes collating and quality assuring the statistics, and producing the final reports.

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The MOD published its 'User Engagement' policy<sup>15</sup> in January 2010; it provides information about how the MOD will communicate with users and how users can make contact with the MOD. The MOD holds an annual consultation meeting to set out any proposed changes to its statistics for the year ahead. Two meetings are held each year – one with users from within the MOD, and one for the general public. The MOD publishes the minutes<sup>16</sup> of these meetings on its website. The MOD also conducts an annual user consultation through its website, and feedback from these consultations is published in an annual 'User Feedback Report'<sup>17</sup>. The MOD has made some changes to its defence personnel statistics that have been communicated to users through these 'feedback reports'. For example, both the 2009 and 2010/11 reports included information about the proposals to combine a number of National Statistics publications into one monthly report, summarised on a quarterly and annual basis<sup>18</sup>. The MOD told us that no responses were received from outside the MOD to either of these consultations. Whilst the statistics team has good knowledge of the use made of these statistics within the MOD, it has little knowledge of the use made outside the MOD. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should investigate and document more fully the use made of these statistics and seek to identify, and engage more with, users outside the MOD<sup>19</sup> (Requirement 1). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that the MOD refer to the types of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>20</sup>, when documenting use.
- 3.2 The MOD publishes 'Background Quality Reports' (BQRs) alongside the release of *QCPR*, *MMR*, *QMR* and *AMR*, which provide useful information about the relevance, timeliness and reliability of the statistics. The MOD provides some brief information about the quality of these statistics in relation to the range of potential uses. The releases also include some information about the quality of the statistics to aid interpretation and analysis. The MOD does not publish a quality report for *TSP7* and the release includes little information about the quality of the statistics. Due to the reorganisation of the data supplier, and a change in the HR system used to record staffing information, the MOD is concerned about the quality of Naval Service Reserve data and Army Reserve data within *TSP7*. As a result, this data has remained unpublished for 2009, 2010 and 2011. The MOD also has some concerns about the quality of the Volunteer Reserve data on its JPA system, which is also used to create *TSP7*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should publish a plan for improving the quality of the reserve force data used for *TSP7*, and improve the published quality information for these statistics<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 2).

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=66&pubType=4>

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 14

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 12

<sup>18</sup> See paragraph 2.3

<sup>19</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

- 3.3 The defence personnel releases contain short summaries of the key points at the start of each release. Each release also contains a useful glossary section, but these are not always comprehensive; for example, no definitions are provided for 'Regular' and 'Non-Regular Forces' in the glossary of the service personnel reports. The commentary is technical in places, and does not provide clear explanations for noteworthy features of the statistics and trends in the time series, where presented. The releases also provide little information about the policy context in which the statistics have been collected and will be used. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should improve the commentary in the defence personnel releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics<sup>22</sup> (Requirement 3). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the MOD should consider the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.4 The defence personnel statistics are available for download and analysis through the online 'build your own table' web tool. The MOD has also produced a short report providing an overview<sup>23</sup> of the tool and a supporting data revisions policy. There is also a 'help' document, but this does not explain to users which statistics are available on the tool, or make users aware of how they can find the information they need. Users are able to select a range of different outputs and criteria for the tables, and the MOD has recently updated the tool so that users can download the data in a spreadsheet format for re-use. However, the online tool does not appear to include the most recent statistics that have been released; for example, the most recent extract available for the civilian personnel statistics is 1 July 2009. The MOD told us that a new tool will be launched later this year. We consider that some users may be put off by the lack of guidance available for this tool and the data it can provide. The tables and charts presented in the releases are also provided as separate webpages, but are not available to download in any other format. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should publish the tables included in the defence personnel releases in forms which encourage re-use. In meeting this Requirement, the MOD should also produce a guidance document for the online table tool to assist users in finding the information that they need<sup>24</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 During this Assessment, the MOD requested an exemption from Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*. The MOD will not publish the contact details of the responsible statistician in its statistical reports, for security reasons. The Authority has confirmed<sup>25</sup> that in these specific circumstances it is acceptable, instead, to provide a generic email address and telephone number.

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<sup>22</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 12

<sup>24</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 6 and Protocol 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/exemption-request---mod---070212.html>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the MOD defence personnel statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

**Suggestion 1** Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics* when documenting use (para 3.1).

**Suggestion 2** Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.3).

## Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*<sup>26</sup>. Whilst this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with Defence Personnel Statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

### Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 All releases have a title which describes their coverage and the period to which they relate. They also include the name of the originating department and contact details, but *QCPR*, *MMR* and *QMR* do not contain the name of the responsible statistician. We consider that the use of term ‘manning’ in the reports could be reviewed to reflect the presence of both men and women within the Armed Forces.
- A2.4 All releases include a contents section at the beginning of the release which shows what is included in the release in terms of tables and subjects discussed.

### Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

- A2.5 All releases include key points at the beginning of the release. For *TSP7* and *QCPR*, this is the only commentary included in the release. *MMR* and *QMR* contain a section entitled ‘Commentary’ near the beginning of the release, presented separately from the graphs and tables. *AMR* includes commentary throughout the release alongside graphs and tables, but the presentation is not clear and the font is small. The commentary within the releases uses technical terms in places that are not explained in the text.
- A2.6 The releases make comparisons over time and between services, and for other characteristics such as age and ethnicity using charts and tables. The comments in the releases relate to the comparisons presented in the charts and tables. *AMR* does not contain any useful time series analysis that could aid user understanding. The releases do not provide clear explanations for patterns and changes in the statistics.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

## **Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound**

A2.7 The text included in the releases is impartial and descriptive statements are consistent with the statistics. Non-sampling variability is not discussed in the text.

## **Include information about the context and likely uses**

A2.8 The MOD publishes some information about the operational context in which the data used to produce these statistics have been collected, but not the policy context in which they have been produced and will be used. The MOD publishes 'Background Quality Reports' (BQRs) to accompany the statistics in the Armed Forces manning reports and *QCPR* which include some information about how the statistics will be used, but this is brief.

A2.9 The BQRs provide some useful information about the quality of the statistics, but the MOD publishes little information about the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to their range of potential uses. There is no BQR for *TSP7*; the MOD publishes some information about the accuracy of the statistics within the release, but no information about other aspects of quality, such as relevance, timeliness and accessibility.

## **Include, or link to, appropriate metadata**

A2.10 The releases and the BQRs include definitions and information about data sources, methods, and the accuracy and reliability of the statistics. The BQR for *QCPR* includes information about the data validation checks the MOD carries out on the source data, but does not explain the cause of inaccuracies and potential sources of error. The MOD does not present the extent to which revised figures differ from provisional figures for these releases.

A2.11 The MOD marks clearly which figures are subject to revision and which are revised figures, but does not state when users can expect provisional figures to be revised.

A2.12 The MOD has published information about the changes in the underlying data source it uses to produce the statistics on strengths, inflows and outflows of military personnel (as presented in the reports covered by this assessment). It does not publish information about the extent of the difference to the statistics created by using the Joint Personnel Administration system, rather than the single-service administration systems.

A2.13 The BQRs explain that the statistics are not always comparable with those produced by other countries due to definitional differences of what constitutes an Armed Force. The MOD does not comment on the comparability of the statistics presented in *QCPR* or *TSP7* with similar statistics produced by other countries.

## **Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views**

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2011 to February 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Emma Bowditch and David Duncan-Fraser – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the MOD in October 2011. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 1 November 2011. The Assessment team subsequently contacted the MOD during December 2011 to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

### **Summary of users contacted, and issues raised**

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 3 responses from the user and supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

MOD policy	2
MOD data supplier	1

A3.5 Positive user feedback included that the statistics are easy to find on the MOD's website and that the statistics team is helpful, friendly and knowledgeable. However, a supplier said that they felt that the communication with the producer could be improved. One user said the statistics lacked helpful commentary and definitions, and two users said they require further breakdowns than are presented in the statistical releases, such as greater granularity of grade, location and speciality.

### **Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document





