
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Tony O'Connor
Head of Profession for Statistics
Ministry of Defence
(by email)

17 June 2020

Dear Tony

FINANCE AND ECONOMICS SERIES: TRADE, INDUSTRY AND CONTRACTS STATISTICS

As you are aware, we recently completed our short review of compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) of the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) [Trade, industry and contracts statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

We chose to review these statistics as they make an important contribution to the public accountability of MOD. We reviewed the statistics against the three pillars of the Code – trustworthiness, quality and value – and, following a constructive conversation with the MOD statisticians who produce the statistics, this letter outlines the key findings of our review.

We found many positive aspects in the way that MOD produces and presents these statistics, which enhance their value and quality, including:

- The team uses helpful visualisations to illustrate the data. In particular, the use of heat maps to demonstrate expenditure break downs helps make technical data more engaging for non-technical users.
- To ensure the statistics can be easily understood by non-technical users, the statistics team has agreed to provide definitions of technical and departmental terms at their first use in the publication. This will enhance the clarity of the statistics.
- The team, along with other analytical teams in MOD, has been working effectively to ensure its statistical bulletins meet the new accessibility requirements for public sector organisations, which came into effect in September 2019. This work will ensure a broad range of users are able to access the statistics easily.
- The quality report accompanying the statistics provides a lot of helpful information about data sources and about data issues. The *Background and Context* section – which provides information on data tables that used to be included in the bulletin, but no longer are – is clear and valuable to users, as it explains why these data are no longer provided and informs users that the team is working to reinstate them. In addition, the *Relevance* section helps users to understand how these statistics contribute to public debate.
- The team is collaborating well with commercial and finance colleagues within MOD, to be able to improve the quality of data on competitive and non-competitive contracts, which could not be included in the 2018/19 statistics. This has included discussions to ensure operational databases correctly process the data fields needed by the team for its analysis and providing training for commercial officers to make sure they understand the importance of the all the data (including the non-mandatory competitive markers) and how to complete the data forms. We are pleased to hear that the statistics team can now retrospectively include data for 2018/19 in the 2019/20 publication and is taking steps to try to ensure that data for 2019/20 can be included as well.

The engagement between analysts and colleagues in other parts of MOD is really positive and will help colleagues who play an indirect part in the statistical production process to understand how

the data they collect are used and the impact their work can have on the final statistics. High-quality analysis and statistics, which in turn will inform better organisational delivery, will always depend on high-quality input data, which are correct at the point of entry. It can also help ensure analytical requirements are considered when changes are made to operational and IT systems.

Continued collaboration with others across MOD will be important to continue to improve the quality of these data and statistics, and to reinstate other tables that have not been included in the bulletin in recent years, due to underlying data quality issues: tables showing the number of contracts and expenditure with small and medium-sized enterprises, for example. This will boost the value of the statistics for policy and decision makers.

During our discussion, you also told us that several MOD statistics are now produced using Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP) and that work is ongoing to identify further statistics that would most benefit from the adopting this approach. It is exciting to hear about these developments, which can help with quality management, presentation and offer efficiency savings: we look forward to seeing how this work develops.

Thank you to you and your teams for your positive engagement during this review. Our Crime and Security team will continue to engage with you on progress in the coming months. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further.

I am copying this letter to Paula Fredersdorff, Deputy Head of Profession for Statistics; Chris Harvey; and Julia Edwards.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead