
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

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

25 January 2021

Dear Tony

Deaths in the UK regular armed forces statistics

As you are aware, we recently completed our compliance check of the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) [Deaths in the UK regular armed forces](#) statistics against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Following a constructive conversation with yourself and the team responsible for producing these statistics, I am pleased to confirm that they should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

Overall, the presentation and format of the statistics within the regular bulletin is very good with a high level of supporting context provided that notably adds to the value of the publication. We were pleased to hear that the team is reviewing the annexes to ensure they continue to add value and that new analysis, in particular on Covid deaths, will be added to increase the value of the statistics. The intention to move to an accessible format for the publication is also encouraging.

As discussed, we consider there a few ways the value of the statistics could be further enhanced:

- To add to both the quality and trustworthiness of the statistics the methodological and quality assurance sections could be slightly expanded. For example, since the data reflect a count of a total population, additional information about the methods used to calculate confidence intervals would aid better understanding and use of these statistics and help to avoid confusion about the uncertainty in the statistics.
- The context provided highlights the level of change that can occur in data from prior years as a result of the lengthy coroners' process. However, given the level of public interest and concern round deaths and suicide in the armed forces we consider that this level of potential change should be made much more prominent. In some years the numbers associated with a particular cause have been revised to more than triple their original value and this level of uncertainty is important in the interpretation of the current year's results. As such to ensure best use of these figures this level of change needs to be more strongly highlighted in the main messages of the text as well as next to the main charts.

- It is good that you keep user needs under review, including considering requests from the public and media in the review of demand for these statistics. We recognise that resource limitations mean that not all requests can ever be met, in particular around more frequent publication of the statistics. However, we encourage you to remain open to the potential of increasing value from the statistics by continuing to engage with users regarding their needs, and the extent to which you are able to meet them. OSR has recently published [guidance to assist producers on user engagement](#) which may be worth considering to aid in future user engagement.

These statistics and the publication supporting them, while relatively specialised, are important when it comes to public transparency and accountability. That freedom of information requests and queries are submitted every year shows that they are needed, and we are glad to note that despite limited resources your team is continuing to review these in respect to improving their value.

Thank you to you and the team for positively engaging with us during this review. We 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 Lisa Baird, MOD Deaths in the UK regular armed forces lead.

Yours sincerely

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

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead