
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Jo Peacock
Deputy Director and Chief Statistician
Ministry of Justice
(by email)

16 September 2021

Dear Jo

Mortgage and landlord possession statistics, England and Wales

We recently completed our compliance check of the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) [Mortgage and landlord possession statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic there have been several government policy interventions in the possession process, including a stay on most possession proceedings in the county court, which has meant that the latest statistics may not be representative of general trends in possessions actions. We commend the team for publishing an analysis of the impact of these policy changes in an additional annex to the statistical publication, which provides insight to users about these interventions. As the policy interventions come to an end, and the number of possession claim actions is expected to increase, there will be a continued focus on these statistics in monitoring the impact of these interventions. It is therefore good that the team has committed to continue to publish this annex as part of future releases.

More generally, our review found a range of positive features that demonstrate the trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics:

- The team is leading the way across MoJ in introducing Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP) to its production process for this set of statistics and three other statistical publications that the team is responsible for. We especially welcome that the team is sharing its knowledge and best practice with other statistics teams within MoJ to help them also move to a RAP approach. Time savings that result from adopting a RAP approach mean that analytical time and skills can be better used to increase value for users, for example, by doing additional analysis of existing data. However, these time savings have not yet been realised due to the team being under-resourced. The team told us that it plans to take advantage of these time savings once resource on the team has been increased back to its original level.
- Demonstrating innovation and improving accessibility of the statistics through the creation of the new [data visualisation tool](#), the first external tool of this kind developed by MoJ. We understand that there are some issues with users within government not being able to access the tool through their own departmental websites, so we recommend that the team explores how accessibility can be improved to help maximise usefulness.

- The team is feeding views and requirements into the development of the new justice data system, being led by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). This is expected to lead to more-granular data and the potential to address known data gaps such as on the reasons why people are evicted, which in turn could add further insight to the statistics.
- Improving user accessibility by switching the statistical release from pdf to html and publishing the statistical tables in an open data format.

We also identified some areas where we consider that more needs to be done to improve the trustworthiness, quality, and value of the statistics:

- Aside from a user consultation run last year on the published data tables, the team told us that its engagement with users is very much driven by the users themselves. By widening its engagement and being more proactive with users, the team could gain useful feedback and demonstrate transparency when planning developments to the statistics. For example, the team should consider reaching out to housing charities and academics and investigate joining up user engagement activities with those carried out by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) analytical teams. The team may find our [regulatory guidance on user engagement](#) and the Government Statistical Service's [user engagement top tips](#) helpful when planning user engagement activities.
- The trustworthiness of government statistics is in part determined by them being known to be produced independently from outside influence and this perception can be brought into question when pre-release access is too wide. Given this, the list of individuals granted [pre-release access](#) for this set of statistics should be reduced substantially and we welcome that the team has confirmed that it will work with those who have access, with a view to reducing this number.
- The team told us about its approach to quality assurance. To provide reassurance to users about the quality of the data and their suitability, we expect producers to communicate this assurance to users in an accessible way. The team, should publish information about all aspects of quality, including limitations of all data sources, and the reproducible analytical pipeline. Our [administrative data quality assurance guidance](#) might provide a helpful framework for structuring information.
- To maximise the opportunities for linking repossessions and other data, the team should engage with and feed into the [Data First data-linking programme](#) being led by MoJ and [Administrative Data Research UK](#) (ADR UK). Linking with other administrative data sets has the potential to add further insight, for example by helping to answer important questions about the reasons for possession hearings. We welcome that the team has started discussions with the ADR project and is mapping out potential data shares.

I would like to thank your team for their positive engagement on this review. Our Crime and Security domain lead, Job de Roij, will continue to engage with your team 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 Rita Kumi Ampofo and Harjinder Singh, the responsible statisticians.

Yours sincerely



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