

Background Quality Report

Statistical Series 4 – Equipment

Bulletin 4.01 - Formations, Vessels and Aircraft

1. Introduction

Overview

Within this Bulletin, Tables 4.01.01 to 4.01.10 provide information on formations, vessels and aircraft.

Due to a change in the format of the UK Defence Statistics (UKDS) Compendium publication, Bulletin 4.01 is the successor of Chapter 4 of UKDS, Tables 4.1 – 4.10. Therefore, this publication will only contain information on formations, vessels and aircraft. Information on equipment holdings within the scope of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, originally published in Chapter 4 (Tables 4.11 – 4.15), has already been released in a separate publication (Bulletin 4.02).

Table 4.01.01 shows the number of vessels in the Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) as well as squadrons in the Fleet Air Arm, at 1 April each year. The number of RN and RFA operational vessels or vessels undergoing refit, at 1 April in the current year, are shown in table 4.01.02. Tables 4.01.03 and 4.01.04 show counts of militarily-useful vessels that could be requisitioned in appropriate circumstances in support of the Armed Forces, as at 31 December each year. Tables 4.01.05 to 4.01.07 show the formations (a measure of the resources, both physical and people) of the Army, the RAF and Joint Units at 1 April in 2000 and from 2006 to 2013.

Tables 4.01.08 to 4.01.10 give information on the size of the Forward Available Fleet of aircraft for the RN Fleet Air Arm, the RAF and Joint Units at 1 April from 2007 to 2013.

Methodology and Production

Data are received annually via data suppliers from:

- Ministry of Defence (MOD) Finance and Military Capability (previously known as MOD Resources and Plans) (Tables 4.01.01 - 4.01.02 and 4.01.05 - 4.01.10),
- Department for Transport (DfT) (Tables 4.01.03 and 4.01.04).

Data on numbers of Naval ships, aircraft and formations are extracted from Naval Plans.

Information on militarily-useful British-registered commercial vessels is provided by the DfT who purchase the data from IHS Global, a commercial supplier, under contract. The figures from 2009 onwards are taken from the DfT's World Fleet Database and reflect changes in the classification of ships within the underlying data provided by IHS. Prior to 2008, the data were based on DfT information from a variety of sources, some of which are no longer available. For further details see the DfT note on their [Shipping Fleet Statistics](#).

Data on RAF aircraft numbers is provided by Air Commands and cross-checked against numbers planned in the relevant Annual Budgeting Cycle, previously known as the Planning Round. Information on RAF Squadrons and Formations has been incrementally generated from planned force structure changes, which are recognised when they have taken place and cross-checked against details held elsewhere, such as the RAF station as well as Force information held on the RAF website.

The Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) Forward Available Fleet is calculated by the JHC HQ engineering staff and represents the total number of aircraft held by the Command that are available for use and not undergoing depth maintenance. Forecasts will therefore be driven by the size of the total (Departmental) fleet and usage or engineering factors.

The data suppliers complete standard templates for each Table using data that are derived from their administrative systems. Some Tables provide an annual "snapshot" of data at a specific date, whereas others provide a time series, typically from 2006 to 2013.

Definitions and explanations of the terminology used are provided within the Bulletin. All the Tables in this Bulletin (except Tables 4.01.03 and 4.01.04) are National Statistics. The data in Tables 4.01.03 and 4.01.04 are from a commercial source outside the control of DfT and are outside the scope of National Statistics.

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Defence Statistics welcomes feedback on this Background Quality Report or any of the statistics mentioned.

2. Relevance

The information in this Bulletin contributes to the public accountability of the MOD and collates information in one place from the three Services. While internal systems may be sufficient for internal use, publication in Bulletin format makes this information available publicly, regularly and as a time series. Bulletin 4.01 is thought to be the only place in which information on vessels, aircraft and formations is brought together systematically in a coherent document. The Tables include definitions and other information so that the data are set in context and can be understood by a lay audience as well as those with professional interests.

While the MOD has a budget for Defence as a whole, there is much interest in the media in, for example, the size of the Navy and the number and types of ships that it has. The recent Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the associated changes have highlighted such issues. These Tables provide information on the current position and comparisons with past years, as well as demonstrating the impact of past policy decisions, such as the SDSR decisions on Harrier aircraft and aircraft carriers.

3. Accuracy

The data on Royal Navy ships is considered to be very accurate. The data are extracted from live Navy plans and are checked by Government Statisticians who validate changes to figures against independent sources.

Figures on commercial vessels have been provided by Government Statisticians who consider them to be of good quality by DfT statisticians.

No information is available on the quality of information on Army Formations. The figures are subjected to sense checks by Government Statisticians, so there is some level of quality control.

Information on RAF aircraft and formations is validated against an independent source by the data supplier and subjected to sense checks by Government Statisticians. They are considered to be of good quality.

4. Timeliness and Punctuality

As a National Statistic, the release date for Bulletin 4.01 was pre-announced on the [Release Calendar](#)¹ section of the [Defence Statistics website](#)² and on the [National Statistics Publication Hub](#)³ in accordance with the guidance set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Following guidance from an assessment carried out by the UKSA on UKDS, the different chapters of UKDS have been separated and are being released as individual statistical bulletins. This is to allow information on various topics to be published when the data becomes available, rather than waiting for other chapters to be

completed, as was the case with previous editions of UKDS. A key benefit of this change is that timeliness of the statistics is improved, reducing the amount of time between reference date of the statistics and the time of release.

5. Accessibility and Clarity

Statistical Bulletins are published on the [Defence Statistics website](#)². The tables are available as an Excel file to enable the figures to be reused.

A brief introduction to the Bulletin is provided on the front page, which also informs the user that this publication updates figures previously released in UKDS 2012, Chapter 4 and information about the changes to UKDS. A summary of key points and trends, a link to the Background Quality Report and the contact details of the responsible statistician are presented on the Bulletin front page. The introduction assists with the accessibility and clarity of this publication by setting out the context of the statistics, identifying key conclusions that can be drawn from the statistics, providing definitions and explanations of the terms used and giving information on methods and data quality. A list of links to other websites, which provide further, more detailed information about specific formations, vessels and aircraft, is also included.

6. Coherence and Comparability

Formations and vessels: Most of the tables in this section cover the years 2000 and 2006 to 2013, providing a time series as at 1 April each year, together with a snapshot of the beginning of the century. The footnotes provide additional detail which explains changes from one year to the next. The introductory material and footnotes explain the impact on the statistics of any factors that affect coherence over time.

Aircraft: Tables 4.01.08 to 4.01.10 a time series as at 1 April each year for 2007 to 2013.

7. Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

Collation of data from a number of sources takes considerable time and there are often delays due to operational commitments and the need to discuss information with suppliers. Although the data are requested early, they are often not finalised until close to the publication date and could not be published earlier.

8. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

Defence Statistics holds regular consultation meetings with both internal and external users of Defence Official Statistics, which provide a forum for user feedback on their needs and perceptions. Defence Statistics also publishes a summary of proposed changes on the home page of its website, inviting users to comment on the proposals by email. Proposed changes are also set out at the consultation meetings in order to gain feedback from both internal and external users.

9. Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

The outputs are produced from the administrative data provided by the MOD and the DfT. The benefit of Defence Statistics publishing these statistics is that outputs from these administrative data are placed in the public domain and as National Statistics, in a way that ensures their independence from political interference and adherence to quality standards. The small burden that this places on the data suppliers is considered to be worthwhile to achieve this and the consequent public accountability provided by their publication.

10. Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

Bulletin 4.01 does not contain any identifiable personal data.

All staff involved in the production process have signed the Data Protection Act and all MOD, Civil Service and data protection regulations are adhered to. All data are stored, accessed and analysed using the MOD's restricted network and IT systems.

We adhere to the principles and protocols laid out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)⁴ and comply with pre-release access arrangements. The [Defence Statistics Pre-Release Access lists](#)⁵ are available on the Defence Statistics website. This Bulletin is subject to the pre-release access arrangements..

11. References

	Reference	Website Location
1	Publication Release Dates	http://www.dasa.mod.uk/index.php/release-calendar/upcoming-releases
2	Defence Statistics website	http://www.dasa.mod.uk
3	National Statistics Publication Hub	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html
4	Code of Practice for Official Statistics	http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf
5	Defence Statistics Pre-Release Access lists	Defence Statistics Pre-Release Access lists

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