Background Quality Report
UK Defence Statistics Compendium: Chapter 4
Formations, Vessels, Aircraft and Vehicles of the Armed Forces

1. Introduction

Overview

This Chapter contains 15 tables, which fall into four sections described below.

Tables 4.1 to 4.4 deal respectively with the **formations** (a measure of the resources, both physical and people) of the Navy, the Army, the RAF and Joint Units at I April in 2000 (except Table 4.4) and from 2005 to 2011.

Table 4.5 shows the number of Royal Navy (RN) and Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) **vessels** at 1 April in the current year. Tables 4.6 and 4.7 show counts of militarily-useful vessels that could be requisitioned in appropriate circumstances in support of the Armed Forces at 31 December from 2005 to 2010.

Tables 4.8 to 4.10 give information size of the forward available fleet of **aircraft** for the RN Fleet Air Arm, The RAF and Joint Units at 1 April from 2006 to 2011.

Tables 4.11 to 4.15 show holdings of **vehicles and aircraft** under the Treaty on Convention Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) at 1 January from 2005 to 2011, and declared holdings and ceilings for a selection of countries in, and not in NATO at 1 January 2011.

DASA has published some statistics on vessels and formations, and merchant vessels available for defence purposes since 1992. From UKDS 2002 onwards all the subjects covered in the 2011 edition of UKDS are included.

Methodology and Production

Data are received annually from data suppliers from

- MOD Resources and Planning (Tables 4.1 to 4.5 and 4.8 to 4.10),
- Department for Transport (Tables 4.6 and 4.7)
- MOD Directorate for Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Policy (ACP) (Tables 4.11 to 4.15).

The data suppliers complete standard templates for each Table using data that are derived from their administrative systems, or in the case of information on holdings under the CFE from the CFE Data Exchange Chart IIA. Some Tables provide an annual "snapshot" of data at a specific date; others provide a time series, typically from 2005 to 2011.

Resource data of the type used here tend to be held by individual Services rather than for the MOD as a whole, and Joint Units are the responsibility of a particular Service. Consequently several data suppliers may contribute to the completion of the same template for a Table using several administrative data systems.

All the Tables are checked for any obvious anomalies, but DASA cannot make an authoritative independent assessment of the data or their quality.

Definitions and explanations of the terminology used are provided in the Chapter. There are particularly extensive notes on the CFE Treaty, its coverage and definitions, which precede the Tables about this. All the Tables in this Chapter except Tables 4.6 and 4.7 are National Statistics. The reason for the exception is that Department for Transport statistics based on (their) same data sources are not currently National Statistics.

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DASA welcome feedback on this Background Quality Report or any of the statistics mentioned.

2. Relevance

Between October 2010 and April 2011 Chapter 4 typically received 900 to 1000 hits per month, of which about 90% were from the internet rather than the MOD intranet. Between April 2010 and October 2011 the DASA enquiries helpline received two enquiries relating to Chapter Four – both from the media. Consequently it is presumed that the main users of these tables are the general public and the media, particularly those interested in the size of the Armed Forces and the vessels, aircraft and vehicles available to them. Such information 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 UKDS makes this information available publicly, regularly and as a time series. 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 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 also comparisons with past years. They also show the impact of past policy decisions, such as the SDSR decisions on aircraft carriers and Harrier aircraft.

3. Accuracy

The statistics are drawn from MOD and other administrative data systems and provided to DASA.

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 on militarily-available ships are based on data provided by the Department for Transport (DfT). Last year (UKDS 2010) they were unable to provide 2009 data. This year, the statistics provided come from their World Fleet Database. The content of this was revised in 2009 to reflect changes in the classification of ships in the underlying data provided by HIS Fairplay. Statistics prior to 2008 were based on DfT information from a range of sources, some of which are no longer available.

The outcome of this is the publication of statistics for 2009 and 2010, on a consistent basis and the establishment of a robust system for providing future data, which improves the accuracy of these data.

4. Timeliness and Punctuality

Publication dates for UKDS as a whole are agreed up to 12 months in advance and are published on the Publication Release Dates[1] section of DASA website[2] and on the National Statistics Publication Hub[3].
These statistics are published by DASA only in UKDS, and each year the tables are updated to include the latest annual data: this can be as at 1 April, 31 December or 1 January depending on the subject. The timetable for the publication of these statistics is thus driven by the timetable for UKDS as a whole. As this chapter is a relatively small component of UKDS and the statistics are produced once a year, the loss of any timeliness is thought to be outweighed by the benefits of publication in a compendium like UKDS.

5. Accessibility and Clarity

UKDS is published on [DASA website](#)[2]. Individual Chapters are available as pdfs, with individual tables and charts also available as webpages. The data underpinning the tables are also available as an Excel file to enable the data to be reused.

A search of terms such as "ships", "aircraft", "tanks", "squadron" or "patrol vessel" on [DASA website](#)[2] will bring up links to relevant Tables in chapter 4.

The introduction to this Chapter has sections on each of the groups of tables. Each section outlines the material in the tables, providing definitions and explanations of the terms used. Some include links to websites that provide further more detailed information. The introduction also includes some basic material on data sources, and a selection of key points.

A separate introductory section before the CFE Tables explains the definitions and criteria used in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

This year there are fewer web links than last year due to changes that are being made to the Royal Navy website. Once this work is complete these web links could be re-instated.

6. Coherence and Comparability

Formations: The tables in this section cover the years 2000 and 2005 to 2011, providing a seven-year time series at 1 April, together with a snapshot of the beginning of the century. The footnotes provide additional detail that explains changes from one year to the next. Table 4.4 relating to Joint Units does not include the year 2000 as the Joint Units were established after this date.

Vessels: The introductory material explains the impact on the statistics of any factors that affect coherence over time. This year Tables 4.6 and 4.7 provide for the first time statistics for both 2009 and 2010 (at 31 December). However, the introduction of a new data set has caused a break in series.

Aircraft: Tables 4.8 to 4.10 all provide statistics on Forward Available Fleets (FAF) of aircraft at 1 April. Each table provides a time series from 2006 and 2011, a period which is a little shorter than for other Tables in this Chapter. The use of FAF started in 2006 and it was thought better to provide a coherent time series, rather than include one year's data on a non-comparable basis. Next year a seven year series will be possible.

Equipment Holdings within the CFE Treaty: the Tables in this section provide both a time series at 1 January (4.11 to 4.13) and international comparisons at a point in time - 1 January 2011 (4.14 and 4.15) - of holdings and holdings in relation to ceilings.

7. Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

The new database for militarily–useful vessels which is used to feed Tables 4.6 & 4.7, discussed in section 3, will allow for greater flexibility in reporting statistics and the opportunity of including different categories in the future, as well as proving a more accurate representation of the extent of vessels available.

8. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

DASA holds regular consultation meetings with both internal and external users of UKDS, which provide a forum for user feedback on their needs and perceptions. However, it is to identify users of Chapter 4 to invite to these meetings. Another measure of user needs is the less formal evidence from customer queries to the editor of UKDS. There were two telephone requests for information relating to this Chapter between April 2010 and October 2011, for use in television programmes.

Analysis of hit rates on the external UKDS website shows that between September 2010 and April 2011 there were typically about 900 - 1000 hits per month on Chapter 4 of UKDS. This shows that there is a relatively high level of use. The fact that so few of these enquiries (less than 0.1%) resulted in a follow up query suggests that the data provided broadly meet user needs. In addition DASA actively encourages feedback from users via a link on each publication and a "pop up" survey questionnaire – very little feedback relating to UKDS Chapter 4 has been received through these mechanisms.

The new database on militarily-useful vessels offers the potential to include other categories of vessels in line with users' needs, and to reflect changes in the commercial or technological environment. DASA has recently identified a potential stakeholder for these Tables and will be discussing the scope for further improvements for UKDS 2012.

9. Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

The outputs are produced from the administrative data provided by the MOD and the DfT. The benefit of DASA 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

UKDS Chapter 4 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 DASA Pre-Release Access lists[5]re available on the DASA website. This Chapter is subject to the pre-release access arrangements for UKDS as a whole.

11. References

	Reference	Website Location
1	Publication Release Dates	http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=68
2	DASA webpage	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	DASA Pre-Release Access lists	DASA Pre-Release Access lists

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