



Ministry
of Defence

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Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email dated 4 August 2014 where you requested the following information:

“Under the Freedom of Information Act, could you tell me how many members of the Armed Forces have committed suicide while serving. I would also like the name of the individual, the number of suspected suicides, those deaths pending inquests and open verdicts on personnel who have died while serving. I would like the figures broken down by date going back to 2005.”

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000.

I am writing to advise you that following a search of our recorded information, I have established that information in scope of your request is held by the Ministry of Defence.

Some of the information falls entirely within the scope of the qualified exemptions provided for at section 38 (Prohibitions on Disclosure) of the FOIA and has been withheld.

Under section 38 (1)(a) of the FOI Act, information is exempt for release where disclosure of the information would endanger the physical or mental health of any individual. We believe providing the identity of each individual suicide from 2005 could cause psychological and emotional distress to relatives, to whom the MOD has a residual duty of care. This exemption is a qualified exemption and, as such, it has been necessary to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

The MOD recognises that there is continuing interest in deaths amongst personnel serving in the UK Armed Forces and that in releasing information the MOD would be promoting accountability and transparency. However it is likely that the disclosure of the names of those personnel who died as a result of suicide or open verdict death would prejudice the psychological and emotional well being of next of kin and the MOD has a residual duty of care for the next of kin of those Service personnel who die whilst in-Service. In conclusion there is an overriding public interest in withholding the information requested.

Between 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2013 (latest information available), there were **90** coroner confirmed suicides and **21** Open verdict deaths to **servicing** UK Armed Forces personnel. Figures are for tri-Service regular personnel and only those reservists who have died whilst on operational deployment.

In addition, there were a further **13** deaths for which an inquest has yet to be held (waiting verdicts) and the mechanism suggests the possibility of suicide. Therefore the number of suicides presented here may be subject to change when the results of the inquests are known. **Table 1** presents this information by year.

Table 1: UK Armed Forces¹ suicide, open verdict and awaiting verdict deaths² by year, 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2013, Numbers

	All	Year								
		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Verdict	124	22	12	11	12	15	8	16	20	8
Suicide³	90	19	8	6	7	13	5	13	14	5
Open verdict	21	3	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	0
Waiting Verdict^{4,5}	13	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	5	3

1 Figures are for in-Service personnel only.

2 Figures are for regular personnel and only those reservists who have died whilst on operational deployment.

3 As confirmed by a coroner or the procurator fiscal for Scotland.

4 Deaths where the mechanism of death suggests suicide but for which a verdict has not yet been received.

5 Awaiting verdicts since 2007

The date of death for each UK Armed Forces suicide, open verdict and awaiting verdict death in **Table 1** has been provided in the attached Microsoft Excel worksheet : 20140813_ FOI2014_04091_Table2_O.

Under section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you might like to note:

Defence Statistics (Health) compiles the Department's authoritative deaths database for all UK Armed Forces personnel who died whilst in Service going back to 1984. Information is compiled from several internal and external sources from which we release a number of internal analyses and external National Statistics Notices.

When providing statistics on suicides, Defence Statistics (Health) rely exclusively on the information provided by coroners in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland. This ensures the Department's objectivity, as all accidental deaths and those resulting from violent action have to be referred to these officials for investigation. For sake of brevity these sources of information have been labelled collectively as "coroner's verdicts".

The statistics provided include both coroner-confirmed suicides and open verdict deaths, in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), since research has shown that these deaths share many similarities with suicides except that in the case of open verdict deaths, the intention of the deceased to take their life has not been sufficiently proven to the satisfaction of the coroner.

In order to identify deaths that may result in a coroner returning a suicide or open verdict (awaiting verdicts), Defence Statistics (Health) use the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) reporting category (violent and unnatural causes (VUC) as an indicator for suspected suicides. Defence Statistics (Health) exclude from this number any death that has been identified as an assault on the Notification of Casualty form (NOTICAS).

More detailed analysis on deaths and suicides in the UK Armed Forces can be found in the following National Statistic publications produced by Defence Statistics at the end of March each year.

Suicide and Open Verdict Deaths in the UK Regular Armed Forces 1984 - 2013

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-suicide-and-open-verdict-deaths-index>

Deaths in the UK Regular Armed Forces

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-deaths-in-service-statistics-index>

Would you like to be added to our contact list, so that we can inform you about updates to our statistical publications covering suicides in the UK Armed Forces and consult you if we are thinking of making changes? You can subscribe to updates by emailing: DefStrat-Stat-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.uk

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Defence Statistics (Health) Head (B1)