

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 of the UK Armed Forces.

Due to a change in the format of the UK Defence Statistics (UKDS) Compendium publication in 2013, 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 2008 to 2014. 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 2008 to 2014.

Methodology and Production

Data are received annually via data suppliers from:

- Finance and Military Capability branches of the single Services within the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Military Capability)'s organisation (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 Command 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. Table 4.01.02 provides an annual “snapshot” of data at 1 April for the current year; the others provide a time series, typically from 2008 to 2014.

Definitions and explanations of the terminology used are provided within the Bulletin. With the exception of Tables 4.01.03 and 4.01.04, all the tables in this Bulletin 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 therefore outside the scope of National Statistics.

Contact details

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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 2010 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 2010 SDSR decisions on Harrier aircraft and aircraft carriers.

3. Accuracy

Due to inconsistencies identified with previously published figures, a number of corrections have been made to previously published figures. The figures in this bulletin have been verified and checked for accuracy by the single Service Finance and Military Capability branches in the MOD. The figures have also been subjected to sense checks by Government Statisticians.

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

4. Timeliness and Punctuality

As a National Statistic, the release date for Bulletin 4.01 was pre-announced on [MOD's Calendar of Upcoming Releases](#)² section of GOV.UK in accordance with the guidance set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The inclusion of data on militarily-useful British-registered vehicles reduces the timeliness of this publication. A dataset relating to this data is published as part of DfT's Shipping Fleet Statistics, which is not released

into the public domain until several months after the 1 April point in the year. The release of Bulletin 4.01 is therefore delayed until after the Shipping Fleet Statistics are released into the public domain.

The timeliness of the 2014 edition of Bulletin 4.01 has also been affected by a number of inconsistencies identified with historic figures, and so publication has been delayed to allow statisticians time investigate these issues with the single Service Finance and Military Capability branches in the MOD, and obtain assurance from the data suppliers that the figures are accurate.

5. Accessibility and Clarity

Bulletin 4.01 is published on the [Formation, Vessels and Aircraft page](#)³ on GOV.UK as a PDF document. The tables are available in 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 2013. 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. This is followed by a key findings section which includes some graphical representations of the statistics, provides further detail about the trends in the data and draws attention to contextual information that has affected these trends. The background information assists with the accessibility and clarity of this publication by setting out the context of the statistics, and listing a number of links to other websites, which provide further, more detailed information about specific formations, vessels and aircraft.

6. Coherence and Comparability

Most of the tables in this Bulletin cover the years 2000 and 2008 to 2014, 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 footnotes explain the impact on the statistics of any factors that affect coherence over time.

7. Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

Collation of this 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, thus reducing the timeliness of these statistics. Although the data are requested early, they are often not finalised until close to the publication date and could not be published earlier.

The inclusion of data on militarily-useful British-registered vehicles also reduces the timeliness of this Bulletin. A dataset relating to this vehicle data is published as part of DfT's Shipping Fleet Statistics, which is not released into the public domain until several months after the 1 April point in the year.

8. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

The MOD has previously held regular consultation meetings with users of Defence Official Statistics, which provided a forum for user feedback on their needs and perceptions. Proposed changes were set out at the consultation meetings in order to gain feedback from both internal and external users.

The MOD invites users to provide feedback to the statistical output teams on any of their publications or reports using the contact information on the front of the statistical bulletin.

9. Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

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

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 [Pre-Release Access List](#)⁵ is available online.

11. References

	Reference	Website Location
1	Statistics at MOD Homepage	https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about/statistics
2	MOD's Timetable of Future Releases of National and Official Statistics	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mod-timetable-for-future-releases-of-national-and-official-statistics
3	Bulletin 4.01 Homepage on GOV.UK	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/formations-vessels-and-aircraft-statistics-index
4	Code of Practice for Official Statistics	http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf
5	Pre-release Access List	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-statistics-pre-release-access-list

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