

Background Quality Report

UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations

1. Introduction

Overview

This is an annual publication which provides information on the numbers and types of formations, vessels, aircraft and selected land equipment of the UK Armed Forces. Statistics are also provided on the numbers of militarily-useful, British-registered vessels.

Background and context

Equipment and formations statistics were previously published in the National Statistics publication 'Formations, Vessels and Aircraft'. Based on consultation feedback and discussions with internal subject matter experts, a number of changes were made to the publication in 2016¹.

The publication provides a yearly snapshot (at 1 April) of current equipment available to the UK Armed Forces, except tables 3-4 which provide a yearly snapshot as at 31 December. With the exception of tables 3-5, all the tables in this publication are National Statistics. The data in tables 3 and 4, provided by Department in Transport (DfT), are from a commercial source outside their control, and are therefore outside the scope of National Statistics. The data in Table 5 (land equipment) have not been assessed as National Statistics.

Methodology and Production

Data are received annually via data suppliers from Navy Command, Army HQ, Air Command and Joint Helicopter Command (Tables 1-2 and 5-9), and DfT (Tables 3 and 4). The data suppliers complete standard templates for each table using data that are derived from their administrative systems which are sent to and cross-checked by Government Statisticians.

Data on numbers of Naval ships and submarines, aircraft and formations are provided by associated 1* Divisional areas within Navy Command Headquarters and from across the wider Royal Navy. These numbers are collated and crossed checked internally by each area before submission.

Data on numbers of Key Land Platforms and other land equipment are provided by Head Equipment. This has been cross-checked with information available in the Joint Asset Management and Engineering Solutions (JAMES) database and verified by the single service General Staff in MOD Head Office.

Data on Army formations are provided by the Army HQ Organisation Branch, which is responsible for the structure of the Army and the supporting Management Information Systems. The data held on these systems is cross-checked by Organisation Branch staff with the Army HQ's Planning and Military Strategy branches. Part of this process includes confirming the current expected deployability (or not) of a unit or HQ – this may vary in the medium term as the institutional structure of the Army evolves.

Data on RAF aircraft numbers are provided by Air Command and are cross-checked against numbers planned in the relevant Annual Budgeting Cycle. 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.

¹ Further information about the publication changes can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-the-mods-formations-vessels-and-aircraft-national-statistics-publication>

Data on the number of Joint Helicopter Command (JHC) aircraft are taken from the annual Command Acquisition Support Plan and cross checked by the JHC Headquarters before submission.

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. For further details see the DfT note on their Shipping Fleet Statistics².

2. Relevance

The information in this publication 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 this format makes this information available publicly, regularly and as a time series. It is thought to be the only place in which information on vessels, land equipment, aircraft and formations is brought together systematically in a coherent document. Note that, following substantial changes to the publication in 2016, some time series have been lost.

This publication has a variety of users including academics, politicians, journalists, individuals with professional and business interests and the general public. While the MOD has a budget for Defence as a whole, there is much interest particularly in the media for equipment numbers. The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) 2015³ and the associated changes have highlighted such issues.

The relevance of this publication, for internal and external users, has been improved following a review in 2016. The feedback has been used to reformat the publication to better meet users' needs, for example the addition of land equipment statistics.

3. Accuracy

The figures in this publication have been verified and checked for accuracy by subject matter experts in the relevant branches in Navy Command, Army HQ, Air Command and Joint Helicopter Command. The figures have also been subjected to checks by Government Statisticians.

The 2017 and 2018 publications included revisions to some of the previously published figures. Further information is available in the supplementary Excel tables.

4. Timeliness and Punctuality

As a National Statistic, the release date for this publication was pre-announced on MOD's Calendar of Upcoming Releases⁴ section of GOV.UK.

The timeliness of this publication has been improved following the 2016 consultation and review process.

5. Accessibility and Clarity

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maritime-and-shipping-statistics>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-and-strategic-defence-and-security-review-2015>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

This report is published on the UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations page⁵ on GOV.UK as a PDF document. The tables are available in an Excel file to allow the figures to be reused.

The introduction, commentary and footnotes within the tables assist with the accessibility and clarity of this publication by setting out contextual information, providing definitions and explanations of the terms used.

Additional clarity has been provided about the definition of 'in service', in particular relation to aircraft. Although a total number of 'in service' aircraft (both Fixed-wing and Rotary-wing) has been provided, users should be aware that the definition of 'in service' is dependent upon which part of the UK Armed Forces those platforms are under the control of. Definitions have been provided as footnotes in the relevant tables to assist user interpretation.

6. Coherence and Comparability

Most of the data is as at 1 April each year, with statistics on militarily-useful British-registered vessels as at 31 December each year (tables 3 and 4). Following a public consultation in 2016, a number of changes to the definitions and terminology have been made to the publication. As a result, the comparability has been affected for the majority of the statistics. Tables 3 and 4 provide a time series covering 2009 to 2017.

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 subject matter experts, 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 therefore could not be published earlier.

8. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

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 publication. This is evident in the MOD's 2016 review on this publication's predecessor 'Formations, Vessels and Aircraft', to assess user needs.

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 Official 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

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-equipment-and-formations>

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 and comply with pre-release access arrangements. The pre-release access list is available online. Links to the Code of Practice and pre-release access list are provided below.

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/statistics/announcements
3	UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations homepage on GOV.UK	https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-equipment-and-formations
4	Review of Military Formations, Vessels and Aircraft Statistics publication	https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-the-mods-formations-vessels-and-aircraft-national-statistics-publication
5	Code of Practice for Official Statistics	https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/
6	Pre-release Access List	https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/defence-statistics-pre-release-access-list

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