

Background Quality Report for the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) – May 2021

1 Introduction

1.1 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey

The annual [Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey](#) (AFCAS) is a key strategic survey for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and is one of the main ways the Department gathers information on the views and experiences of Armed Forces personnel. The information from this survey helps shape policies for training, support, and the terms and conditions of service.

AFCAS is a National Statistic and is produced and published in line with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The publication date is pre-announced on the [GOV.UK Official Statistics Release Calendar](#).

1.2 Brief History

AFCAS was introduced in 2007, following a direction by the Under Secretary of State for the existing single Service (Royal Navy (then known as the Naval Service), Army, RAF) attitude surveys to be combined and run as a single survey, owned and co-ordinated by the Deputy Chief of Defence staff (now known as Chief of Defence People or CDP).

Defence Statistics (Surveys) is tasked by CDP with administering the survey including collation of responses, validation and analysis of data, and publication of the tri-Service AFCAS report. In 2009 AFCAS was given Official Statistics publication status, and following assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, was made a National Statistic in June 2013.

During 2014 a major review of AFCAS recommended a substantial reduction in survey length, focusing on the key strategic areas for the Department, as identified by customers and stakeholders. The [results of the external consultation](#) on these changes are accessible in the Consultations section of GOV.UK.

For the 2021 survey, fieldwork was conducted between September 2020 and February 2021. The timing of the survey is designed to meet the requirements of key customers such as the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

1.3 Documentation

The AFCAS 2021 report contains the following sections:

- Main Report – a narrative and graphical report outlining the main findings and methodology.
- Reference tables – tables of estimates and margins of error for every question in the survey, broken down by each Service and by Officers and Other Ranks/Ratings in ODS format.
- Questionnaires – as administered for the 2021 survey.

1.4 Summary Production Process

There are nine stages in the AFCAS process. Each of these stages is briefly described below.

Stage 1: Questionnaire design

A working group comprised of staff from CDP, single Service Occupational Psychology teams and Defence Statistics agree the questionnaire. There are four separate questionnaires, one for each Service. The majority of questions are common to all Services; however, each Service has a small number of questions applicable only to their Service.

Stage 2: Sample design, selection and cleaning

A disproportionate stratified random sample of approximately 28,000 trained UK Regular Service personnel was selected for the AFCAS in 2021. Defence Statistics designs and selects the sample.

The sample is stratified by Service (Royal Navy (RN), Royal Marines (RM), Army & RAF) and Rank group. Different ranks are known to attract different response rates, so the stratification helps to ensure sufficient representativeness across the groups:

- Senior Officers (OF7-OF10)
- Officers (OF1-OF6)
- Senior Ranks (OR6-OR9)
- Junior Ranks (OR1-OR4)

The exception is the RM, which is substantially smaller than the other Services. In order to maximise the accuracy of RM results, a census is taken of RM personnel.

Stage 3: Survey distribution and communications

The survey is distributed bi-modally. Sampled personnel are sent a personalised email to invite them to complete the survey online accessed using their Service Number. Paper questionnaires were also sent out to personnel in the sample to help maximise participation and response rates. Paper questionnaires are printed, packed and distributed by an external contractor. Online questionnaires are produced and administered internally by Defence Statistics. Personnel are offered two options to complete the survey online either via the Internet or the MOD Intranet, in order to maximise online responses. CDP and single Service Psychologists help to publicise the survey and support on communications through Chains of Command.

Stage 4: Data input

Online survey responses are held securely on MOD servers. Paper survey responses are input by the external contractors using a 100% verification technique.

Stage 5: Data cleaning

Two weeks after the survey closing date Defence Statistics receives four separate single Service Excel data sets from the external contractor. These are then combined with the two sets of electronic responses from the online surveys to create a single dataset. Any invalid responses (e.g. completely blank responses) are removed and do not contribute to the response rate.

Each respondent is identifiable by their Service number and this is used to link respondents with demographic data held on the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system. Many questions are then recoded to simplify the output. For example, all 5-point Likert scale responses are recoded into a 3-point positive, neutral, negative scale. Responses are weighted by rank and Service. This accounts for bias caused by disproportionate stratified sampling and differing levels of response. Full details of the weighting plan are available in the methodology section of the Main Report.

The Service number is also used to identify duplicate responses (where, for example a person started but did not complete the online survey, then filled in the paper survey). In these instances, the record with the greatest number of questions filled in is retained. Finally, the data is transferred into SPSS.

Stage 6: Production of results

Tables of results are produced using SPSS Complex Samples to ensure estimates and their corresponding standard errors are correctly weighted. Where year-on-year comparisons are possible, Z-tests at the 99% confidence level are carried out. Each estimate carries a margin of error to enable users to observe the level of uncertainty in the estimate. In-year tests between Services are also carried out, and non-significant changes are not described as changes in the narrative reporting.

Stage 7: Checking

There are several stages of both automated and manual validation built into the data cleaning process. A copy of the single Service SPSS data set and draft output tables are provided to each of the single Service psychologists for quality assurance purposes.

Each section of tables, along with the content of the narrative report, undergoes several layers of scrutiny. These include cross-checking by at least two members of Defence Statistics as well as checking carried out by CDP statisticians and single Service psychologists.

Stage 8: Publication

AFCAS is published on the [MOD statistics external webpage on GOV.UK](#).

2 Relevance

2.1 The principal users of the AFCAS publication are CDP-Strategy division, and Central MOD and single Service policy makers. The statistical information is used to inform and measure Service personnel strategy and policy. Following a larger review in 2015, subsequent years have only involved minor changes to the questionnaire to ensure the questions remain relevant to the context and priorities of the department.

AFCAS is the largest regular survey of UK Armed Forces personnel. AFCAS attracts a relatively high response rate (37% in 2021) compared to other MOD surveys. The range of topics covered by the AFCAS mean that it is one of the most comprehensive attitudinal surveys of Service personnel within the MOD, and the results are valued and widely used within the Department to monitor various projects and programmes. The information is used to inform the Defence Board and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, as well as the Service Conditions and Welfare team. The information can also be used to answer parliamentary questions and Freedom of Information requests. See Section 8 for further information about the uses and users of the AFCAS statistics.

The non-anonymous nature of the survey enhances the value and relevance of the findings, as the results can be segmented by rank, administrative area or unit, and in some cases, individual trades.

Defence Statistics (Surveys) conducted a user consultation exercise between October and December 2020 proposing the removal of the Key Questions section in the AFCAS and Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FamCAS) reports. Out of 16 responses only one reported that the proposal would have an adverse impact, but they would be content if the information was all still available in the Reference Tables which accompanied the report. As the figures published in the Key Questions section are all available in the Reference Tables, and selected questions/Service comparisons are summarised in the Main Report, the decision has been taken to no longer publish the Key Questions sections in AFCAS and FamCAS from the 2021 reports onwards.

3 Accuracy & Reliability

3.1 AFCAS collects mainly attitudinal data from a disproportionate stratified random sample of approximately 28,000 trained Regular Armed Forces personnel. The sample size is designed to achieve a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points for each of the estimates. A number of questions are only asked of a subset of respondents and they typically carry a larger margin of error. For example, questions on satisfaction with Service Accommodation are only asked of those living in Service Accommodation.

The AFCAS raw data is passed through a range of automatic and manual validation and editing routines. Many aspects of the AFCAS data analysis have been automated, and where possible existing source code is used. This helps to minimise the risk of error and improves timeliness. Where year-on-year comparisons are possible, 99% confidence level Z-tests are carried out. This level is used to minimise the possibility of finding false positive differences that can be expected when performing a large number of significance tests.

As the AFCAS does not achieve 100% response rates there is always the risk that those who returned questionnaires have differing views from those who did not. We assume that all non-response is Missing At Random (MAR) within each weighting class. This means we have assumed that those people who did not return their questionnaires do not differ from those who did respond in their perceptions and attitudes.

If those who did not respond have different attitudes to those who did respond then the observations in this report will be biased and will not represent the attitudes of all trained Regular Armed Forces personnel; rather, our observations would only represent the views of the *responding* population. In order to counter this, Defence Statistics monitors response patterns over time. Results do not differ outside normal expectations over time, which is one indication that the results are reliable.

One area of concern is low response rates among certain groups. Response rates tend to be lower at the more junior ranks, which is especially true in the RN and Army. The response rate for the lowest rank (OR-2) is 19%. This may be partly due to distribution issues; a large number of the invitation emails to this group 'bounce' suggesting they do not access the Intranet or electronic systems. This group is oversampled to compensate for expected low response rates.

In 2021 a lower proportion of paper responses were received than in previous years. This year, 15% of valid responses were received via paper questionnaires compared to 21% in 2020. This reduction in paper returns may be due, in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic with disruption to postal services and more personnel working at home rather than their stationed location where their questionnaire will have been sent.

The results are weighted to account for the differing response rates observed in AFCAS. This ensures that the results reflect the distribution of Service and rank within the population of trained Regular Service personnel. A lower response rate means that those at the lowest ranks had relatively high weights when compared to other ranks.

The AFCAS is designed to give an up-to-date snapshot of the attitudes and perceptions of our Armed Forces. While the AFCAS is reported on an annual basis it should be remembered that these attitudes and perceptions are liable to change within the calendar year, for example, as a result of events or even due to the time of the year that the responses were collected (a seasonality effect).

The AFCAS sampling process excludes deployed personnel, and those on training courses, because of the low response rates typically achieved from these personnel. Until 2014, the Army did sample deployed personnel; however, the sampling method was changed in 2015 to align with the other Services.

Defence Statistics do not present any results where the responding group size is less than 30 as results for groups of this size are considered too unreliable, yielding margins of error far outside the target range of plus or minus three per cent.

3.2 Data Revisions

There are no scheduled revisions. Any required corrections will be released in updated reports, along with the reasons for the corrections, on the GOV.UK website.

4 Timeliness and Punctuality

4.1 Timeline

The AFCAS takes approximately 8-9 months from agreeing the questionnaires to publishing the AFCAS report. The survey fieldwork period is approximately 20 weeks, with the remaining time spent on creation and distribution of questionnaires, data cleansing, analysis and report production. The survey is in field for a relatively long period of time due to the time taken to distribute and receive

postal surveys, especially from personnel serving overseas. This, along with the large and complex nature of the survey, means that there is a large gap between the beginning of fieldwork and publication of the report, so findings are not current.

The timing of data collection (from September 2020 to February 2021) is driven by AFPRB reporting requirements and this timing has had the presentational benefit of allowing results to be published within the same calendar year as the data was collected.

4.2 Punctuality

All pre-announced publication deadlines have been met.

5 Accessibility and Clarity

5.1 Access to publications

All AFCAS publications dating back to 2010 are available free of charge in pdf format and, from AFCAS 2012, copies of the reference tables in Excel format online, however these versions are not fully accessible. From the 2021 report onwards, the Main Report and accompanying reference tables will be published in fully accessible formats.

From 2021 we will no longer be publishing a five-year printable pdf version of the data tables as they do not meet accessibility requirements for GOV.UK. All information previously published in these tables will still be available in the accompanying ODS reference tables. If users require a printable version of the tables (which is limited to the previous five-years), please contact Defence Statistics (Surveys) at: Analysis-Surveys-Enquiries@mod.gov.uk.

5.2 Clarity

In addition to this Quality Report, the AFCAS report highlights the main findings on the front page, contains a narrative section which aids users' interpretation of the data, a methodology section including target population, information on the sample, respondents, weighting, statistical tests used, and notations and definitions used. In 2017 the reporting format was reviewed to enhance clarity, including a substantially higher number of graphs and charts. Data quality boxes in the Main Report highlight any changes or issues with the underlying data which may affect users' interpretation of the results.

An ODS version of tables with detailed results are made available to accommodate different user preferences. These include tables showing margins of error for each estimate. Relevant footnotes are shown below tables to indicate any filters that have been applied to the data, data quality issues or time series comparisons.

6 Coherence and Comparability

6.1 Coherence

AFCAS is the definitive source of attitudinal data about Service personnel and their perceptions of working and living in the Armed Forces. There are no other tri-Service data sources that collect the same attitudinal information with which to ensure coherence.

There is coherence with other MOD surveys. The 2014 Review aligned several questions with those in the Civil Service People Survey (including engagement questions), with the Reserve Forces survey (RESCAS) and the tri-Service Families Survey (FamCAS).

6.2 Comparability over Time

AFCAS surveys are considered to be broadly comparable over time. However, the major review conducted in 2014 has meant that a number of questions, whilst broadly similar, have changed

sufficiently to prevent comparisons over time. These are highlighted in the Main Report and background tables.

This year saw two new questions – one on the importance of promotion and the other on whether personnel had experienced sexual harassment in a Service environment. A previous question about the Service Complaints Ombudsman has been reworded this year to better assess awareness of the Ombudsman and the Service Complaints process in general amongst Service personnel.

7 Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

7.1 Timeliness and costs versus Quality

The main trade-off is between timeliness and quality. The tables are only broken down by Service and rank status and very few cross-tabulations of AFCAS questions by each other, nor does the analysis employ any data reduction methods. This is so that the basic statistical information can be made available to policy users and the public as soon as possible in a clear and accessible format. Additional analysis for policy users is available on request and external requests for further information would be considered under the usual Freedom of Information process.

8 Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

8.1 Description and Classification of Users

Defence Statistics work closely with the main customer and survey sponsor, People Strategy CDP and other occupational psychologists and researchers from across the department so that AFCAS reflects policy user requirements.

8.2 AFCAS Internal Users/Uses

(For decision making about policies, programmes and projects):

Defence Transformation and Strategic Defence and Security Review

Programmes:

Royal Navy: Royal Navy & Royal Marines People & Training Strategy

Army: Army People Strategy

RAF: RAF Strategy, RAF Strategy for People

The main aim of each of the Services is to deliver the force structures outlined in the Integrate Security and Defence review.

AFCAS measures: To help achieve this, AFCAS provides the following performance indicators:

a) Resilience and feeling valued: To meet the requirements of resilience, those AFCAS questions relating to: **Morale, Fairness, Welfare and Health, and Reserve Forces** are valuable indicators. The RAF also identifies 'feeling valued' as an important human capability goal and the AFCAS questions related to: **Leadership, Training, Professional and Personal Development, Sport, Adventurous Training and Commitment** will provide intelligence on the current state of affairs.

b) Recruitment and retention: AFCAS has an extensive list of questions gauging attitudes towards all terms and conditions of service as retention factors which provide vital intelligence to identify problem areas in retention and to formulate recruitment strategies.

c) New ways of working: AFCAS has a large bank of questions relating to agreement/satisfaction regarding: **training undertaken (both ops pre-deployment and non-ops), job suitability (i.e. the right people for the right jobs), development opportunities, educational attainment,**

equipment/systems availability and suitability, which identify areas where training policy needs to be revised/implemented.

A Modernised Employment Offer for the Armed Forces

The Defence People Strategy provides a vision for the future Defence workforce based around five areas of focus:

1. Workforce Transformation - making sure there are plans in place to build a more sustainable, diverse and skilled Workforce.
2. Maximising skills and talent - making better use of skills across Defence through modern recruitment, training and career management.
3. Attractive offers - providing attractive offers that access and retain talent by improving wellbeing and the lived experience.
4. People Function Transformation - creating an empowered evidence-driven People Function.
5. Diversity & Inclusion - making sure Defence is an inclusive organisation that values the strengths of every individual.

This year, work has continued on a number of activities that support the Defence People Strategy. Some examples include:

Flexible working in the Armed Forces

The package of flexible working opportunities for Service personnel includes Alternative Working Arrangements (AWAs) such as remote working and variable-start-and-finish-times; and Flexible Service, which allows Service personnel to work part-time and/or restrict their separation from home base. All flexible working opportunities are subject to maintaining operational capability.

Hundreds of Service personnel record an AWA each year and Defence's Remote Working policy has supported tens of thousands of Service personnel during the COVID-19 Pandemic. 300 SP and their families have benefitted from Flexible Service since its introduction on 1 April 2019. It has helped them balance their busy committed careers with personal responsibilities and changing circumstances and helped many continue service while fulfilling caring responsibilities, taking respite or pursuing personal development.

Defence continues to develop its flexible working offer for the Armed forces with the aim to become a more modern, flexible and attractive employer that is agile and responsive to changing needs.

Future Accommodation Model (FAM)

Affordable, good quality accommodation is a key part of our employment offer to Service personnel. Over the next decade we will invest around £1.3bn in improving new single living accommodation. We will also provide Service personnel with more choice over where, how and with whom they live, through the Future Accommodation Model (FAM). FAM entitlement will be based on need rather than rank, age or marital status.

The roll-out of a three-site FAM pilot began in September 2019, at HMNB Clyde, Aldershot Garrison in January 2020 and RAF Wittering followed in June 2020. The pilot will last for approximately three years and will then be assessed. We are planning for wider roll-out across the UK through the 2020s and 2030s.

Existing accommodation policy has now also been amended to allow cohabitation in surplus Service Family Accommodation for Service personnel who are in a long-term relationship (established). Under FAM, this allows Service personnel who are in long-term relationships (established) and parents who have a residential responsibility for child(ren) over 80 nights per calendar year to now be entitled to Service Family Accommodation.

Wraparound Childcare

Service families are at the very heart of the Armed Forces community and it is vital that we provide our people with the appropriate flexibility and support to bring up their children while they serve. As part of a revised Families Strategy, we will introduce measures to ease the burden for parents who might be deployed at short notice, including investing £1.4bn over the next decade to provide Wraparound Childcare.

Through spousal employment initiatives, increasing opportunities for flexible service and a modern approach to societal relationships, we are determined to make the Armed Forces a more family friendly employer, encouraging our people to pursue long and fulfilling careers in uniform.

Discover My Benefits

Discover My Benefits is an online tool for finding out about the extensive range of benefits, allowances and support that Service personnel are entitled to because of the unique demands of military life and operations. It covers most benefits and entitlements for Service Personnel, ranging from flexible service and relocation support to reimbursements and accommodation.

Investing in health, wellbeing and welfare support

We are further investing in our people's health, wellbeing and welfare and have created HeadFIT, a mental health support website designed specifically for the Defence community that provides 24/7 access to self-help tools. We are also working to harness the lessons from elite sport and performance coaching to ensure that our finest asset – our people – are nurtured, trained and looked after in the way that they deserve.

Partnering with Everywoman

All Defence personnel now have free access to a wealth of professional development tools and resources available on the external Everywoman platform. By providing personnel with membership, people can tailor their development at a pace and level that suits them. They can choose to refresh or enhance their own skills as well as use the platform to build high performing and inclusive teams.

AFCAS measures: AFCAS includes a section on accommodation and questions on flexible working. AFCAS also has an extensive list of questions gauging attitudes towards all terms and conditions of service.

Armed Forces Covenant

Programme: The Armed Forces Covenant exists to redress the disadvantages that the Armed Forces community faces in comparison to other citizens, and to recognise sacrifices made.

AFCAS measures: AFCAS provides the MOD Covenant team with performance indicators relating to the Covenant themes including the provision of healthcare, education, and housing and perceived advantages and disadvantages of Service life as compared to the general population.

Army People Strategy (v1, Oct 2019)

Programme: The concept at the heart of the Army People Strategy is Develop – Nurture – Achieve. The Army's people are developed, their talent is nurtured, and they are given the opportunity to achieve great things. Our (The Army) Vision is: A competitive, adaptable and inclusive Army imbued with a warrior spirit and an unwavering will to win; where people feel they belong; where talent is nurtured; where health is positively promoted, and opportunity maximised.

AFCAS Measures: AFCAS provides current trends and a range of performance indicators that are used to inform the development of various personnel policies in support of Our Vision.

RAF Strategy

Programme: The RAF recognises people are and must remain central to capability and the RAF Strategy puts people issues at the heart of the ability to deliver air power and succeed on operations. Looking to the future, the RAF initiative Astra will ensure a world-class integrated, capable and inclusive Air Force delivering decisive effect across all domains. AFCAS provides evidence to evaluate and monitor the degree to which personnel feel valued, supported and work within an organisational culture which is professional, diverse, joint and that values respect, integrity, service and excellence. AFCAS provides an understanding of the success of people transformation, retention efforts and how the RAF can empower and motivate our people to unlock their full potential.

This is supported by a diverse programme of additional evidence collection including the RAF Leavers' Survey and the RAF Occupational Wellbeing Survey; as well as bespoke projects including understanding the motivation to undertake flexible working, issues related to wellbeing, and identification and development of potential solutions to key retention issues.

AFCAS measures: In particular, AFCAS provides trend and current intelligence in a number of areas including **future career plans and retention indicators; career management; Whole Force working; line management support; flexible working; and organisational support including feeling valued, welfare and accommodation.**

Royal Navy People & Training Strategy

Programme: The Royal Navy recognises that its people are, and must remain, at the heart of capability. In response to the Royal Navy's ambition to transform, to improve the lived experience of its people and enable productivity, the Royal Navy's People Vision, was introduced in 2020. It offers our people 'unique opportunities to thrive and unlock potential; valued and respected as individuals, who operate and fight to win'. The People and Training Strategy 2020 is the mechanism by which this vision will be delivered. One of the ways of measuring the success of this is the evidence from AFCAS. This will be used to test policy development and implementation, to understand engagement drivers across different service demographics, and to inform future policy to support the delivery of the vision and strategy.

The Royal Navy continues to work to improve exploitation of the family of Continuous Attitude Surveys in order to further validate and enhance the People and Training Strategy.

AFCAS measures: Job satisfaction / engagement / policy awareness / policy implementation effectiveness

8.3 AFCAS External Users

Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB)

AFPRB uses AFCAS statistics to inform their recommendations for remuneration and charges for Service personnel. In recommending levels of pay and charges, the AFPRB seeks to enhance the recruitment, retention and motivation of Service personnel, and AFCAS statistics provide members a broad view of Service life in general to help inform their deliberations. AFCAS statistics used in AFPRB reports include those on **pay, allowances and pension benefits, the push and pull factors associated with serving in the Armed Forces, meals, value of accommodation and efforts to improve and maintain, morale and satisfaction with Service life in general.**

Service Complaints Ombudsman (SCO)

AFCAS includes a section on fairness, asking questions about experience of discrimination and harassment and bullying, knowledge of how to get information about how to complain and, since 2021, awareness of the SCO role. The SCO's Annual Reports have provided information from the

AFCAS surveys as a baseline on which to measure trends in relation to incidence of discrimination, harassment and bullying, and use of the Service complaints system to resolve such problems.

National Audit Office (NAO)

The NAO scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. NAO have used AFCAS statistics in reporting on MOD **capability and leadership, Service Family Accommodation, Single Living Accommodation, and recruitment and retention in the Armed Forces.**

Service Families Federations

Service Families Federations exist to give Service families an independent voice and work with Senior Officials, including the Minister and Service Heads, to help improve the lives of Service families. The Service Families Federations use AFCAS statistics as a source of evidence when voicing the situation for serving personnel and their families. A range of AFCAS statistics have been reported on Service Families Federation websites often accompanied by a link to the full AFCAS report.

Media

The media have previously reported AFCAS statistics on Service morale and satisfaction with accommodation.

Academic research

Academics and students.

8.4 Obtaining Information on User Needs

The review of 2014 included a comprehensive review of user needs, with the aim of focusing on questions of the greatest strategic importance to the Department. In addition, an external consultation exercise captured the views and needs of a number of external users. This resulted in some changes being made to the content of the 2015 survey. Results of the [2015 AFCAS consultation](#) can be found on gov.uk. Ad-hoc requests for information, along with requests for changes to the survey, are monitored to ensure that needs are being met. The AFCAS research team continually works with policy users to identify their ongoing information requirements.

In May 2021 we are seeking users' views on proposed changes to some of the AFCAS questions including proposed questions for deletion and minor wording amendments. Further details about this user feedback exercise can be found on [the AFCAS webpage](#).

9 Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

9.1 Performance and Cost Effectiveness

The estimated cost of producing the AFCAS 2020 report was approximately £200K. This comprises both Defence Statistics staff costs and external contractor costs. Costs are closely monitored and Defence Statistics and the working group strive to balance quality and timeliness against costs. The sample size is calculated to be the most efficient in order to meet the levels of precision outlined in Section 3.

9.2 Burden

Response to AFCAS is voluntary. Participant information is provided within the questionnaire to encourage informed consent. The majority of respondents complete the survey within 30 minutes, and the majority rate the length of the survey as 'about right'.

Respondent burden is minimised by obtaining demographic information about respondents from the Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) database rather than asking respondents these questions in the questionnaire. This also helps to minimise costs.

10 Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

10.1 Security

All staff involved in the AFCAS production process adhere to the MOD and Civil Service data protection regulations. In addition all members of the working group have to follow the relevant codes of practice for their professional groups; the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and the Government Social Research (GSR) Service. All data is stored, accessed and analysed using the MOD's secure IT system.

10.2 Confidentiality

AFCAS is a confidential survey rather than anonymous. The paper survey contains a unique barcode that can only be linked to an individual's unique Service number by the Defence Statistics AFCAS team and the external contractor responsible for data input. Only a small number of individuals in Defence Statistics have access to the person-level data including the unique identifier. In addition, a small number of named individuals in the single Services and an approved contractor have access to record-level data stripped of the unique identifier. Access is managed under Data Access Agreements. No person from any respondent's Chain of Command is able to access individual level data. No record-level data is provided to anyone not directly involved with the analysis, unless covered by a Data Access Agreement signed by the survey sponsor.

10.3 Transparency

The AFCAS report is published with details of the methodology and footnotes beneath statistical tables alerting readers to potential issues. This Quality Report informs users of the method, production process and quality of the output. Any significant errors identified after publication will result in revisions along with explanations as to the cause of the revisions.

Last Updated: 20 May 2021