

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## UK Defence Statistics Compendium

*(produced by the Ministry of Defence)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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# **Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

## **UK Defence Statistics Compendium**

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *UK Defence Statistics*<sup>4</sup> (*UKDS*) and *UK Defence Statistics Factsheet*<sup>5</sup> (*UKDS Factsheet*) produced by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).
- 1.1.2 Some of the statistics within *UKDS* have already been published in National Statistics publications (which have been the subject of separate Assessments<sup>6</sup>), but some are published within *UKDS* for the first time. As well as covering the compendium as a whole, the MOD requested that this assessment cover some of the official statistics<sup>7</sup> which are released for the first time in the compendium.
- 1.1.3 Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.
- 1.1.4 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality<sup>8</sup>. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.
- 1.1.5 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=10&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-09-28&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-09-28>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=1600&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2011-09-28&disText=2011&from=listing&topDate=2011-09-28>

<sup>6</sup> Assessment Reports 155, 162, 179, 186 and 197

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Official statistics in chapter 1 (with the exception of tables 1.12b, 1.12c, 1.13, 1.14, 1.19), chapter 4 (except tables 4.6 and 4.7), chapter 6 and table 7.6

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

## 1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *UKDS* are designated as National Statistics, subject to the MOD implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2012.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 *UKDS* draws on a wide range of sources to provide an overview of different aspects of defence operations. It includes some good commentary and useful contextual information, particularly in relation to defence finances. *UKDS* includes some good graphical representations of the statistics in maps and charts.

1.3.2 Although *UKDS* is presented as a compendium publication, it includes the first release of some statistical series – but the MOD does not always make clear which of the statistics in *UKDS* are being published for the first time. It also provides limited information about the nature and extent of revisions to statistics which have already been published separately.

1.3.3 The MOD publishes some useful information about the quality of the statistics, but this does not cover all the statistics within *UKDS*. The information about the methods used to produce the statistics is too brief for some of the statistics. It is not clear whether the timing of the release of statistics which are published for the first time within *UKDS* meets the needs of users.

## 1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the MOD could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users, but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

## 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

**Requirement 1** Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics that are released for the first time in *UKDS*, publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.1).

**Requirement 2** Review whether the statistics released for the first time in *UKDS* could be released sooner, and consult users about the format and content of *UKDS* to ensure it best meets users' needs (para 3.2).

<b>Requirement 3</b>	Announce forthcoming changes to <i>UKDS</i> clearly on the MOD's website (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	(i) Explain the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that revised statistics are released; (ii) Indicate clearly which of the statistics in <i>UKDS</i> are being released for the first time; and (iii) Indicate when (and where, if not in <i>UKDS</i> ) the statistics will be updated (para 3.4).
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Improve the information about the quality of the statistics and the methods used to produce them, taking into account the points in annex 2 (para 3.5).
<b>Requirement 6</b>	Improve the commentary in <i>UKDS</i> so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.7).
<b>Requirement 7</b>	Indicate clearly which statistics in <i>UKDS</i> are not National Statistics (para 3.8).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *UKDS* is an annual compendium that brings together statistics on the MOD's finances, personnel, equipment and estate. It provides users with a single point of access to information about an organisation that employs over 275,000 people and accounts for almost £40 billion of public spending. The MOD has produced *UKDS* since 1992.
- 2.2 *UKDS* contains National Statistics on aspects of personnel, personnel health, war pensions, compensation, defence inflation and military search and rescue activities, all of which the MOD publishes first in separate bulletins. It also includes the first release of some statistics, for example on defence finance (chapter 1), equipment (chapter 4), land holdings (chapter 6) and environmental measures (chapter 7). Many of the statistics are based on data from within the MOD, but some are from other government departments and other organisations.
- 2.3 *UKDS* is used within the MOD as a reference document and to inform the development of defence policy. It is used by the media, the defence industry, special interest groups and the general public, for example to hold the MOD to account and to inform public debate. The MOD estimates that *UKDS* is accessed on its website about 11,000 times each month.
- 2.4 Until 2010 the MOD published *UKDS Pocketcards*, which presented a short summary of the key statistics from *UKDS*. The MOD consulted users about stopping the paper version of *UKDS* and *UKDS Pocketcards*. Users reported that they didn't use *UKDS Pocketcards* and therefore did not wish for the publication to continue in paper or electronic format. The statistics that were published within *UKDS Pocketcards* are still available within *UKDS* or *UKDS Factsheet*.
- 2.5 *UKDS* is produced by the Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA) directorate within the MOD. Between February and April 2012 DASA's section of the MOD's website had limited functionality, due to technical difficulties. During this time the MOD put in place contingency arrangements, publishing only its key National Statistics (including *UKDS*) and latest releases on its website and making other content available on request. The MOD resolved this issue in May 2012 and published information<sup>9</sup> that explains to users what happened and the steps it has taken to avoid similar issues in future.
- 2.6 The MOD estimates that the cost of collating and publishing *UKDS* is £140,000 each year.

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<sup>9</sup>[http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=4&thiscontent=5470&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2012-05-18&disText=\(18%20May%202012\)&from=listing&topDate=2012-05-18](http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=4&thiscontent=5470&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2012-05-18&disText=(18%20May%202012)&from=listing&topDate=2012-05-18)

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The MOD told us that *UKDS* is viewed on its website about 11,000 times each month. This suggests extensive use and reflects the importance of *UKDS* as a reference document. The MOD holds an annual consultation meeting with users of its statistics from within the MOD and a separate annual meeting open to all users from outside the MOD. These meetings are quite high level and the meeting that is open to all users is poorly attended<sup>10</sup>. The MOD could take more steps to engage with users (from outside the MOD) of the statistics that are released for the first time in *UKDS* (on defence finance, equipment and, land holdings and environmental measures)<sup>11</sup>. The MOD has not documented the needs of these users in sufficient detail. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics that are released for the first time in *UKDS*, publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the use of the statistics<sup>12</sup> (Requirement 1). Given the small attendance at the annual meetings with users from outside the MOD, we suggest that the MOD review how it engages these users of *UKDS*.
- 3.2 *UKDS* is a very large compendium publication (244 pages in 2011). The MOD releases some statistics for the first time in *UKDS*: it told us that this arrangement makes efficient use of resources. The MOD states (in the documentation that accompanies the statistics within *UKDS*) that ‘the publication date for the new statistics is dependent upon the publication date of *UKDS*, which is decided by the editorial team within DASA’. However, it is not clear whether this best meets users’ needs, either in terms of timeliness or ease of access. The MOD provided no evidence that it has discussed possible alternative release formats and timetables with users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should review whether the statistics released for the first time in *UKDS* could be released sooner, and consult users about the format and content of *UKDS* to ensure it best meets users’ needs<sup>13</sup> (Requirement 2). We suggest that the MOD consider introducing new statistical bulletins, if users express a view that they would prefer the statistics in *UKDS* to be published first in shorter, separate bulletins, as soon as they are ready.
- 3.3 The annual consultation meetings invite feedback and include discussions about forthcoming changes to *UKDS*. The MOD publishes the minutes of the meetings, which include information about forthcoming changes, but it does not announce this information more widely and it is likely that many users are unaware of changes in advance. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should announce forthcoming changes to *UKDS* clearly on the MOD’s website<sup>14</sup> (Requirement 3).

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<sup>10</sup> In 2010 and 2011 the meeting was attended by (respectively) two and five users from outside the MOD

<sup>11</sup> User engagement around those topics that the MOD publishes first in separate National Statistics releases has been discussed and addressed in the relevant Assessment Report

<sup>12</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>13</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2, 3 and 4 and Protocol 2, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>14</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

- 3.4 *UKDS* includes some statistics that have previously been published in separate bulletins, and which are revised in *UKDS* to take account of updates to the source data. In chapters 1 and 2 of *UKDS 2011* the MOD clearly explains the nature and extent of revisions and other changes. However, in other chapters it is not always sufficiently clear which of the statistics have been revised and the nature and extent of revisions. It is not always clear which statistics are being released for the first time and when and in which release the statistics will next be updated. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should (i) explain the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that revised statistics are released; (ii) indicate clearly which of the statistics in *UKDS* are being released for the first time; and (iii) indicate when (and where, if not in *UKDS*) the statistics will be updated<sup>15</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 Each chapter of *UKDS* includes an introduction that provides some information about the data sources and aspects of data quality. The MOD publishes at least one *Background Quality Report*<sup>16</sup> (*BQR*) for each chapter, which provide some useful information about methods, quality, user needs, the cost of producing the statistics and issues around data confidentiality. *UKDS* provides links to only some of the *BQRs*. Some of the information about the quality of the statistics and the methods used to produce them is not covered in sufficient detail in these reports. In particular there is insufficient information about the methods used to produce the statistics in the chapters on defence equipment, land holdings and environmental measures, and about the quality of these statistics in relation to their use (see further details at A2.8). As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should improve the information about the quality of the statistics and the methods used to produce them, taking into account the points in Annex 2<sup>17</sup> (Requirement 5). The individual chapters of *UKDS* do not adopt a consistent approach to presenting information about the source of the statistics. We suggest that the MOD improve the consistency of links to the sources of the statistics in *UKDS*.
- 3.6 Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 within chapter 7 are missing statistics for years 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2010/11 due to missing data on the MOD administrative system which is used to produce these statistics. We suggest that the MOD work with the suppliers of these data to ensure a robust flow of data in the future.
- 3.7 Each chapter in *UKDS* includes commentary that highlights the key findings, explains the data source and provides some contextual information – for example about relevant government targets. Chapter 1 (finance) includes good explanations about the financial context and practices relevant to the statistics. There are some good graphical representations of the statistics in maps and charts. In some chapters users may be expected to refer to separate National Statistics releases for detailed commentary (for example, much of chapter 3 about defence health has been previously published in separate bulletins), but *UKDS* should still explain the main trends. Chapter 3 does not provide sufficient explanation about the trend in suicide rates. Those statistics that have not been released elsewhere first should be accompanied by full commentary that aids user interpretation. Chapter 4 (about numbers of formations, vessels, aircraft

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<sup>15</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 and Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=66&pubType=3>

<sup>17</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2, Principle 8, Practice 1 and Protocol 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

and vehicles) includes some good contextual information, but only six key points about the statistics from the 15 tables. Similarly, chapter 6 does not provide sufficient commentary. In some places the commentary explains recent rises and falls in the statistics without highlighting and explaining important trends. For example, in chapter 1 there could be more commentary to explain the wide variation in the proportion of competitive contracting with the MOD's main suppliers. *UKDS* includes a detailed glossary, but some use of technical language could be avoided altogether. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should improve the commentary in *UKDS* so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics<sup>18</sup> (Requirement 6). We suggest that the MOD consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical release.

- 3.8 In 2011 the MOD incorrectly labelled some tables in *UKDS* as National Statistics<sup>19</sup>. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MOD should indicate clearly which statistics in *UKDS* are not National Statistics<sup>20</sup> (Requirement 7).

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<sup>18</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>19</sup> Tables 3.24, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8, and the official statistics in chapters 1, 4 and 6

<sup>20</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practices 1 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to *UKDS*, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

**Suggestion 1** Review how users of *UKDS* from outside the MOD are engaged (para 3.1).

**Suggestion 2** Consider introducing new statistical bulletins, if users express a view that they would prefer the statistics in *UKDS* to be published first in shorter, separate bulletins, as soon as they are ready (para 3.2).

**Suggestion 3** Improve the consistency of links to the sources of the statistics in *UKDS* (para 3.5).

**Suggestion 4** Work with the suppliers of data for chapter 7 to ensure a robust flow of data in the future (para 3.6).

**Suggestion 5** Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical release (para 3.7).

## **Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases**

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*<sup>21</sup>. While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to *UKDS* and *UKDS Factsheet*, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

### **Appropriate identification of the statistics being released**

- A2.3 The title of *UKDS* is necessarily quite general, reflecting the range of statistics included. The title includes the year of publication, while the commentary within the release clearly communicates the time period that the statistics cover. *UKDS* does not include a summary of what is included in the release, but does include a detailed contents section and an introduction that describes the main changes since the previous release. Individual chapters do include a summary of the subjects covered. It is not always clear which of the statistics in *UKDS* are new.

### **Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English**

- A2.4 Each chapter provides a summary of the key findings and most tables are accompanied by commentary that explains one or two of the key points. Chapter 1 (Finance) provides some excellent contextual information to help users interpret the statistics. However, much of the commentary in *UKDS* tends to focus on recent rises and falls, rather than drawing out and explaining trends. For example, some interesting trends in suicide rates are shown, but there is no explanation about what is driving the trends and there is no contextual information (for example, about the MOD's health policies). *UKDS* includes a detailed glossary, but also some jargon which could be avoided.
- A2.5 *UKDS* includes some helpful charts and other graphical representations of the statistics. Chapter 1 includes international statistics that help to set the statistics in context, with appropriate information about the limitations of the international data and caveats around its use. There is little information about the use of the statistics in *UKDS*, but some of this information is included in supporting documentation.

### **Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound**

- A2.6 The text in *UKDS* is impartial, consistent with the statistics presented and professionally sound.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

## **Include information about the context and likely uses**

A2.7 *UKDS* provides factual information about the policy and operational context of the statistics, including government targets which the statistics are used to monitor progress towards. Aspects of quality and reliability are sometimes discussed, for example to explain the limitations of the international data presented in chapter 1.

## **Include, or link to, appropriate metadata**

A2.8 Each chapter in *UKDS* includes summary information about the data sources that underpin the statistics, but does not always include links to the sources. The MOD publishes *Background Quality Reports (BQR)* to accompany *UKDS* which include information about the quality of the statistics and the methods used to produce them, but some information on methods and quality is not covered within these reports:

- The *BQR* for the statistics on Departmental Resources (Tables 1.1 to 1.6 and 1.8) does not provide sufficient detail about the quality concern with the data used for apportioning equipment and non-equipment in the Single Use Military Equipment category of spend;
- The MOD does not provide links to information about the methods used to compile the statistics presented in tables 2.40 and 2.41, or comment on the quality of these statistics in relation to potential use;
- The MOD does not provide, or link to, information about the quality of the statistics in tables 4.6 and 4.7, which are produced from data provided by the Department for Transport, or the methods used to produce these statistics;
- The *BQR* for chapter 7 does not make clear whether the data source departments it lists are within or outside the MOD. This *BQR* also does not include sufficient information about the accuracy of the statistics in chapter 7; and
- The MOD only publishes brief information about the methods used to produce the statistics in chapters 6 and 7 within the accompanying *BQRs*.

*UKDS* does not contain links to all the *BQRs*.

A2.9 Chapters 1 and 2 provide information about changes to methods and content, and information about revisions, but other chapters do not. *UKDS* includes a few links to other MOD releases that include the same statistics, but no indication when (and where, if not in *UKDS*) the statistics will next be updated.

## Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2011 to April 2012.
- A3.2 The Assessment team – Jacob Wilcock and Emma Bowditch – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the MOD in November. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 16 January. The Assessment team subsequently discussed its findings with the MOD during February to April.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 6 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

MOD	1
Parliament	1
Voluntary sector	2
Private sector	1
Academic	1

A3.5 Users told us that *UKDS* is a valuable source of statistics. Some use *UKDS* as a reference document, drawing on many of the chapters, for example to answer questions raised in the course of their work. Others refer to specific chapters or tables within the publication. Users reported that they find the statistics team responsive and helpful.

A3.6 Two users suggested it would be helpful if the MOD could publish employment statistics at a more detailed level (for example, by region or regiment). One user provided specific comments about the limitations of the administrative data source that underpins the statistics on Search and Rescue callouts. One user commented that some of the financial definitions used in *UKDS* differ from definitions used elsewhere across government.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

