



Department for
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Sarah Champion MP
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6 September 2023

Dear Chairs,

My Department has maintained open and regular engagement with the Committee on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) on a range of operational and policy issues relating to export controls. I wanted to update you following the recent quarterly publication of the Official Statistics from the Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU) on [strategic export controls licensing](#) about a temporary reduction in the published data and a change to the way it will be published. I wanted to explain the reasons for these changes, and our plan to mitigate the impact. The Government is committed to maintaining a transparent export control system and is proud of its record of having one of the most transparent systems in the world.

As we have previously reported to the CAEC, ECJU is in the process of introducing a new digital system for export licensing, known as 'LITE', which will replace its legacy system, SPIRE. LITE aims to streamline the application process for exporters using improved service design and modern technology to support robust licence decision-making.

As LITE functionality is being released incrementally, the ability to publish data from LITE accurately and effectively is still in development. LITE is currently in a Private Beta phase, with exporters trialling the new service on an invite-only basis, gradually increasing these numbers over time. The vast majority of exporters continue to use the legacy system, whilst a small number of exporters now use LITE, with these exporters submitting a relatively low number of applications – LITE saw an average of around 75 licence application outcomes per quarter during 2022, compared to an average of around 4,500 licence application outcomes per quarter in SPIRE.

This has enabled ECJU to manually extract the necessary data from LITE for each case individually, validate and quality assure it, and then blend it with SPIRE data to create an overall view of performance for our publications. However, as we progress the development of this new system, with more exporters invited to use LITE, the number of licensing decisions involved means this manual intervention is becoming unsustainable. For 2023 quarter 1, LITE saw 229 licence application outcomes, a 300% increase from the 2022 quarterly average. Case numbers on LITE will continue to increase as more exporters are brought on board and it becomes the dominant system for export licence applications.

The Department is committed to developing the LITE functionality that will enable us to publish LITE data without the additional manual intervention currently needed, and to improve our overall approach to data publication. However, the range of services to be delivered via LITE makes this a large and complex project and involves challenging decisions on how best to use our resource to sequence a significant number of high priorities to maximise effective delivery of the system by March 2025, when our contract with our legacy provider concludes. This means we need to prioritise the development of LITE functionality that enables us to publish data without also compromising ongoing work to deliver the wider services that will support UK businesses to grow and export, whilst also upholding a robust export control system.

The Department remains committed to maintaining a transparent export control system, and the work on effective LITE data publication is progressing in parallel with other workstreams. However, we have taken the difficult decision to focus mainly on getting these future developments right, rather than continuing an increasingly complex and time-consuming manual workaround for publishing current data. In considering next steps, we must balance our transparency commitments with ensuring that we only publish data that is robust and accurate. Within the recent publication on [strategic export controls licensing](#), we have reduced data on LITE licensing decisions, whilst we make further long-term developments to the system. In practice this means that for a period of time, export licensing decisions made in LITE will not be included on our Strategic Export Controls: Reports and Statistics website (searchable database website), a website developed to allow users to create reports based on their own criteria. Our strategic export controls licensing Official Statistics publications will also omit some data on export licensing decisions made in LITE. Of these LITE export licensing decisions, whilst the data for these will not be included on the searchable database, the vast majority of data for these will still be included within the Official Statistics, which means we will still be publishing data that provides a comprehensive overview of the export control licensing system, with the reduction being in some of the more detailed breakdowns of data included in some of the underlying data tables provided within the Official Statistics.

This will be a temporary situation, only for the minimum time required. During this period, we are being transparent in our approach and caveating information appropriately so that users of these products understand the impact of the transition phase on the published data. As further LITE functionality is rolled out, we will be able gradually to increase and improve the data published from LITE. This will be an iterative process, but we anticipate a return to current transparency levels by March 2025 at the latest. We will make regular incremental improvements to the service as more exporters join LITE's Private Beta, ahead of an open public rollout planned from March 2024 (Public Beta). We will retrospectively publish all LITE data that was omitted during the transition period to ensure there are no overall reductions in transparency.

We are also using the development of LITE as an opportunity to improve the way we publish data.

We will continue to publish the strategic export controls licensing Official Statistics in the same overall format; but we will be changing and improving the overall format of how we publish data through the searchable database website.

These changes are based on research with known users of the searchable database website to make sure the format best meets their needs. We will provide updates on progress made in relation to returning to current transparency levels, along with updates on future plans, as part of the 6 monthly updates we have already committed to provide to the CAEC on LITE. I have meanwhile asked my officials to stand ready to brief you on this in more depth if helpful. If you would like to take up this offer, please could the CAEC clerk contact my officials to make the arrangements.

I hope this information has been useful to you and your members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nigel Huddleston".

Nigel Huddleston MP
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