

MSU/4/8/1/2

3 April 2025



Thank you for your letter dated 4 March 2025 and for taking the time to meet with me this week. I am pleased that my commitment to increased openness and transparency with the Committee, and more generally with Parliamentary colleagues, is welcomed, and I want to re-iterate my intent to deliver this for the duration of this Parliament. The HCDC is a vital partner to Defence, ensuring we are being held to account and scrutinised on behalf of the electorate.

I hope the ongoing series of visits to MOD sites, classified briefings and engagements are proving useful in providing greater insight into the complex and wide-ranging work of the Department.

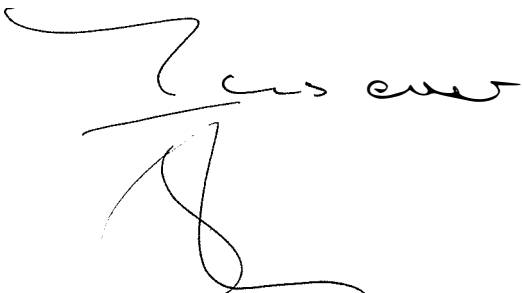
In response to the issues you raised:

- In relation to force elements, we no longer record or publish the data as it was presented to the HCDC back in 2013 hence this was not referenced against the list of information I sent with my letter in January. However, as you note, you were provided with a private briefing from MOD Officials earlier this month on readiness, which I understand was very well received, which gave the Committee the more detailed information it needed to ensure proper visibility of the issues being managed. I will ensure the HCDC is provided with this format of briefing and updates on readiness at least once per calendar year as requested.
- I apologise for any confusion on the de-classified information, but not all of the information I sent to you was classified as Official and therefore able to be disclosed into the public domain. The data on Workforce Capability Gaps (formally Pinch Points) remains classified as Official-Sensitive due to the heightened security and threat environment we now face, and we would not want to expose any detailed information to our adversaries in this context. This information will therefore remain accessible to the HCDC only, and not for public disclosure. On your request for the next iteration of that data to include more detail on specific roles, we will provide this to you in a closed setting – classified at Secret before Summer recess.

- In relation to Readiness days by Ship Class, the HCDC has now been briefed in a private session at Secret, regarding the current and future availability of the Royal Navy's surface fleet. However, I recognise that readiness data by ship class is also due to be published - to meet our obligation of transparency to Parliament - and I can confirm that the Royal Navy is collating this information and will ensure it is published by April 25. My recommendation to the Committee is that this data be provided on a fixed 6-month basis going forward, with the next scheduled update in Autumn 2025.
- On the expected number of Frigates and Destroyers in the Fleet, the Royal Navy would like to confirm that the policy towards releasing future availability data has not changed, and for security reasons this information will not be released in the public forum. By providing the total numbers of frigates and destroyers at certain dates, it is possible to derive the in-and-out of service dates for individual vessels. Therefore, the Royal Navy has previously withheld this from publication. Further, this information is classified at Secret. However, to ensure transparency to Parliament, this information has been provided to the HCDC in Secret-level briefings, most recently during the HCDC's recent visit to HMNB Portsmouth on 27 February 2025.

Finally, I recognise your requested timelines for declassified information sets to be provided every 6 months. I understand you have already received updates on F-35, A400M and Pilot training, with those relating to Armoured Fighting Vehicles and Ship building and ship availability due shortly.

I hope the above information clarifies the issues set out within your letter, but please do contact me again if not. I remain fully committed to ensuring the HCDC has the information it needs to allow it to discharge its duties and act as our critical friend in Parliament.



THE RT HON JOHN HEALEY MP
The Secretary of State for Defence