



National Audit Office

## INFORMATION ASSURANCE SUMMARY REPORTS

# Ministry of Justice

### The purpose and scope of this review

**1** During the period November 2011 to February 2012, the National Audit Office carried out an examination of a sample of the Department's indicators and operational data systems. This involved a detailed review of:

- the match between the indicators the Department publishes, the operational data they use to run themselves and the priorities and key business areas of the Department;
- the process and controls governing the selection, collection, processing and analysis of data; and
- the reporting of results.

**2** Our conclusions are summarised as numerical scores. The ratings are based on the extent to which departments have put in place and operated internal controls over the data systems that are effective and proportionate to the risks involved.

**3** This report provides an overview of the results of our assessment. It does not provide a conclusion on the accuracy of the outturn figures included in the Department's public performance statements. This is because the existence of sound data systems reduces but does not eliminate the possibility of error in reported data.

## Overview

**4** Alongside other central government departments, MOJ has published a Business Plan setting out its aims in the form of Strategic Reform Priorities and key input and impact indicators by which the public will judge the Department's performance. The Business Plan indicators cover all of the Department's Strategic Reform Priorities, although coverage is variable and only two of the five are covered by both input and impact indicators. The Department also lists a range of other information in its Business Plan which may fill the gaps; in particular, more information on operations and processes across its agencies.

**5** The MOJ Departmental Board receives a wide range of information on performance to help it manage itself, including balanced scorecards for the Department's major arm's-length bodies and external information. This is a strong basis for the Board to make strategic decisions and plan for future demand.

**6** We examined 17 data systems in our latest review, of which four were Business Plan indicators, six were operational data sets and seven were common areas indicators. They covered the following business areas:

- Business Plan indicators and operational data sets both covered the work of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS); and
- the Common Areas of Spend covered the whole departmental family.

**7** NOMS has to collect data from many different parts of the organisation (individual prisons and probation trusts) and our review has shown that it has developed robust systems to help it collect meaningful and reliable data. They have tended to score highly because of the mature nature of the systems. These findings may not be duplicated in our future work on other parts of the departmental family where systems are less mature or rely on more disparate data sources.

**8** **Figure 1** summarises our assessment of the Department's indicator data systems.

**Figure 1**

A summary of the results of our validation exercise

Score	Meaning	Indicators we reviewed that received this score
4	The data system is fit for purpose and cost-effectively run	<p><b>Two Business Plan indicators and six operational indicators</b></p> <p>Adult reoffending</p> <p>Adult reoffending following release from custody</p> <p>Category A prisoner escapes (operational indicator)</p> <p>Serious assaults on staff (operational indicator)</p> <p>Percentage of prisoners held in accommodation designed for fewer prisoners (operational indicator)</p> <p>Rate of positive drugs tests (operational indicator)</p> <p>Average number of days lost to sick leave among staff (operational indicator)</p> <p>Proportion of ethnic minority staff employed within NOMS (operational indicator)</p>
3	The data system is adequate but some improvements could be made	<p><b>Two Business Plan indicators and seven estates and workforce indicators</b></p> <p>Cost per prison place</p> <p>Cost per prisoner</p> <p>Total size of office estate</p> <p>Total cost of office estate</p> <p>Estates cost per full-time equivalent</p> <p>Estates cost per square metre</p> <p>Full-time equivalent staff numbers</p> <p>Average staff costs</p> <p>Contingent labour</p>
2	The data system has some weaknesses which the Department is addressing	<b>No indicators</b>
1	The data system has some weaknesses which the Department must address	<b>No indicators</b>
0	No system has been established to measure performance against the indicator	<b>No indicators</b>

Source: National Audit Office analysis

## Recommendations

9 We have made the following recommendations to MOJ:

- The Department provides cost information for inclusion in the Ministry of Justice Quarterly Data Summary, but does not set targets or compare year-on-year performance for its input indicators (cost per prison place and cost per prisoner). The Department has stated that this is because of the frequency of changes to accounting policies, and in 2010-11 they published a set of rebased costs for 2009-10 which facilitated comparison over the two years. However, the lack of consistency makes it difficult for users of the data to understand performance, and especially direction of travel. **We recommend that the Department establishes baselines for public reporting to facilitate comparisons and highlight direction of travel.**
- The Quarterly Data Summary, which is defined by the Cabinet Office, excludes some smaller properties held by the Department. Therefore it does not report against the Common Areas of Spend for a consistent set of arm's-length bodies. This means that users do not have complete information about the whole departmental family and cannot make meaningful comparisons. **We recommend that the Department works with the Cabinet Office to resolve the inconsistency in what is reported in the Common Areas of Spend.**
- The Department is developing processes for collecting information on estates quarterly rather than annually. **The Department should consider the need for additional review of the data, including more regular checking of the figures. It should also carry out reconciliations of quarterly returns to annual reporting to ensure that the quarterly figures are accurate.**
- The Department has effective controls over the extraction and processing of data for its own workforce figures, but it was not able to provide information on the processes behind data supplied by the non-departmental public bodies which feed into this indicator. **The Department should understand the risks to accuracy of data in its non-departmental public bodies. It should also require formal sign-off of data returns, which should include a statement that adequate controls are in place to manage the risk of significant inaccuracies in the data.**