



National Audit Office

DATA ASSURANCE SUMMARY REPORTS

Home Office

Background and scope

1 In May 2012, the government published updated departmental business plans. These focused on the coalition's priorities and delivery of these priorities is monitored, in part, by a set of input and impact indicators. Departments are expected to publish performance against these indicators. In addition, the Civil Service Reform Plan, published in June 2012, set out extra requirements for departments in sharing management information on back-office functions such as estates, human resources and finance.

2 The National Audit Office has undertaken to review the input and impact indicator systems of all central government departments. We carried out our first review in 2011-12 and published a summary report on each department.¹ This report covers our second review on the Home Office (the Department). In this review, we examined two input indicators and three impact indicators on the Home Office Business Plan 2012–2015. In addition, this year's review also examined more widely:

- the match between the coalition priorities and the input and impact indicators the Department publishes;
- how well the operational data it uses to run its operations themselves cover the key business areas of the Department;
- the Department's wider information culture;

¹ Available on the National Audit Office website at www.nao.org.uk/search/pi_area/data-assurance-summary-reports/type/report

- the process and controls governing the selection, collection, processing and analysis of data; and
 - the reporting of results.
- 3** We selected a group of input and impact indicators for our second review which enabled us to cover the Department's frontline activities and business priorities to:
- free up the police to fight crime more effectively and efficiently; and
 - secure our borders and reduce immigration.

4 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 performance statements. This is because the existence of sound data systems reduces, but does not eliminate, the possibility of error in the reported data. We have assigned each indicator a numerical score, 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.

Our findings on completeness of information

5 The Department has developed a set of indicators covering the key high-level data which it considers will help the public assess the effects of policies and reforms on the cost and impact of public services. The Department intends the indicators will help the public judge for themselves whether its policies and reforms are achieving their aims. However, it acknowledges the input and impact indicators on their own are not meant to provide the public with a full picture of its performance. It does not publish the underlying data for the public to examine, where not required to do so.

6 We found three of the coalition's priorities are not covered by either input or impact indicators. Two coalition priorities are covered directly by both input and impact indicators. There are also five general indicators which are not specifically linked to individual coalition priorities.

Our findings on how the indicators report on performance against coalition priorities

7 We found there is a degree of disconnect between the coalition priorities and some of the indicators which have been selected with the aim of helping the public judge whether the Department is delivering its priorities. At best, in themselves the input and impact indicators provide a partial picture of delivery. When taken alongside other key data published, they provide a more complete and meaningful picture of delivery. The Department acknowledges input and impact indicators, in themselves, do not enable the public to gain a full picture of delivery against priorities.

Our findings on how performance is reviewed

8 The Home Office Executive Management Board receives substantial reports containing relevant and up-to-date information and performance against input and impact indicators and other key data for discussion at their board meetings. These enable the board to understand readily the key messages, the current level of risk to delivery of the Department's priorities, the degree of progress reached and timescales for completion. The performance report sets out the coalition priorities. It describes, directly and clearly, how the Department is performing against them, including those which do not have input and/or impact indicators. It provides a much broader picture of relevant data beyond the input and impact indicators.

Our findings on publishing performance against the indicators

9 The Department publishes comprehensive integrated information on its priorities, indicators and performance on its website. This brings together in a convenient format:

- its business plan priorities;
- for each priority, the supporting input and/or impact indicators and other key data;
- the current period (quarter or year) and previous period value for each indicator; and
- where relevant, a link from the current period value to supporting data.²

10 We found there is not always a straightforward means to access a further breakdown of the headline figure for an indicator, and in some cases the Department does not publish available breakdowns.

Our findings on information strategy

11 The Department has an information management strategy,³ which includes its information security policy, and it also has an open data strategy for 2012-13.⁴ The information strategies focus on a balance between making information available to the public while ensuring adequate protection is in place.

12 The Department and its agencies also undertake a 'Statement of data assurance' (SDA) at intervals on input and impact indicators. The SDAs examine an indicator against 10 standards. The team carrying out the review must provide sufficient supporting evidence to enable a director to approve an assurance that a standard is achieved. The SDA also includes additional quality assurance on the integrity of each statement of evidence to enable endorsement that the standards are robust and verified.

Our assessment of the indicator data systems

13 We examined five Home Office business plan indicators in our latest review. They covered the following business areas:

Input indicators:

- cost per head of population of the total police force cost; and
- cost per passenger processed at the UK border;

Impact indicators:

- percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year;
- clearance of passengers at the UK border within published standards; and
- net migration to the UK.

² *Home Office business plan 2012 to 2015: indicators and other key data*, available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-business-plan-2012-to-2015-indicators-and-other-key-data/home-office-business-plan-2012-to-2015-indicators-and-other-key-data

³ Available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/corporate-publications/ho-group-info-management-strat?view=Binary

⁴ Available at: www.data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Home%20Office%20Open%20Data%20Strategy_0.pdf

14 We found the input indicators had data systems that are generally fit for purpose. The impact indicators have data systems to which improvements can be made, or weaknesses which are being identified and addressed. This repeats our finding in 2012 for both input and impact indicators.

15 For the input indicators, we found data are drawn from existing management information systems or from data which are also being generated for wider purposes. This meant minimal additional costs are incurred in producing the input data. We also found, generally, controls and checks are in place over the data produced for input indicators, and clear guidance is in place over the data requirements. For the impact indicators, we found some weaknesses in the data systems. These are known within the Department and actions are in place to identify mechanisms to address them.

16 Where a clear target for performance is in place “for example on ‘Clearance of passengers at the UK border’ there are also clear measures developed to prevent a breach of the target, and to respond promptly to a breach when it occurs. Where there is no published target for performance, for example on “Percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year” we did not find clear measures to prevent or respond to deterioration in performance (as has occurred in the first three quarters of 2012-13). The Department considers the move away from publishing a target level of performance enables the public to make its own judgements on the performance level it has achieved.

17 The table in **Figure 1** summarises our assessment of these data systems.

18 For the indicator ‘Percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year’, at the time we conducted our review, the UK Border Agency handled asylum applications. However, on 26 March 2013, the Home Secretary announced the UK Border Agency was to be split into two entities – an immigration and visa service and an immigration law enforcement organisation; its agency status was to be removed and the new organisations would be brought into the Home Office, reporting to ministers. For the purpose of this review, we refer to the former UK Border Agency, in our coverage of the ‘Percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year’.

Figure 1

A summary of the results of our data assurance exercise

Score	Meaning	Indicators we reviewed
4	The indicator’s data system is fit for purpose	Cost per head of population of police force cost Cost per passenger cleared at the UK border
3	The indicator’s data system is fit for purpose but some improvements could be made	Percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year
2	The indicator’s data system has some weaknesses which the Department is addressing	Clearance of passengers at the UK border within published standards Net migration to the UK
1	The indicator’s data system has weaknesses which the Department must address	
0	No system has been established to measure performance against the indicator	

Source: National Audit Office

Recommendations

19 Although the Department expects the public to judge its performance for themselves against its selected indicators, it can be challenging for the public to do so, and to draw conclusions on performance, using just the reported performance. In some cases, there is no clear definition of what success against an indicator looks like. While we understand the use of explicit targets is now discouraged across central government, it may help the public to assess performance if the Department itself publishes a clear view of what level of performance it considers desirable. We recommend the Department sets out publicly a clear vision of what it wants to achieve, in terms of performance against an indicator, proportionate to the resource and effort being deployed.

20 For 'Cost per head of population of police force cost':

- the Department should provide a single clear link from the national figure directly to the police force level data for this indicator.

21 For 'Clearance of passengers at the border within published standards':

- once the Border Force has developed and implemented a robust and consistent approach across all ports of entry, it should include a link to data providing the percentage of passengers cleared within published standards at each separate UK port and airport terminal, and report separately the performance for EEA and non-EEA passport holders; and
- the Border Force should include details on the 'Impact indicator measurement annex' of how it has brought together data from different ports, including the process to generate a single national figure, as ports are using different sampling periods.

22 For 'Cost per passenger cleared at the UK border' indicator', the Border Force should:

- liaise with the Department for Transport to determine why the port of Dover has not provided data on total passenger arrivals for a number of years, and how this could be addressed;
- determine any impact on the robustness of data on passenger arrivals, given that it relies instead on monthly sea passenger arrival data provided as National Statistics by the Department for Transport, to gain data for Dover; and
- publish the revised indicator figure based on 'end of shift reports' data, setting out the reasons why this increased from the currently published £2.90 for 2011-12 to £3.18. When the work for this report was undertaken the cost per passenger was based on an initial estimate of £3.18 (higher than the previous year's figure of £2.90) due to a change in methodology. The actual result for the cost per passenger for 2012-13 is £2.85, a 2 per cent reduction on prior year.

23 For 'Percentage of asylum applications concluded in one year', the Department should:

- set out in the 'Impact indicator measurement annex' the reasons why the figures published from August 2012 are different from those previously published; and
- outline what definition changes occurred and why.

24 For 'Net migration to the UK', the Department should:

- set out in the 'Impact indicator measurement annex' the known limitations of the International Passenger Survey; and
- include the confidence interval alongside the reported headline figure on net migration.