# Changes to drink-drive statistics

## RoSPA's response to Department for Transport's consultation

April 2022

Response to Department for Transport's consultation: Changes to drink-drive statistics

## Introduction

This is the response of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to the Department for Transport's consultation on changes to drink-drive statistics. It has been produced following consultation with RoSPA's National Road Safety Committee. We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.

The DfT road safety statistics team regularly reviews the contents of its publications to ensure they remain relevant and meet user needs. They have recently reviewed the drink-drive statistics and would welcome feedback from users.

## Proposed changes to tables issued with final drink-drive estimates

In accordance with the department's policy on spreadsheet accessibility, during 2022 they will make the drink-drive data tables accessible, resulting in some changes to the format and structure of the tables. At the same time, they are proposing to make some further changes to the tables to streamline them and make it easier for users to find the statistics of most interest to them.

They propose to group tables that we continue to publish as follows:

| Category | Table | Title |
|---|---|---|
| Overall drink-drive trends | RAS51001 | Reported drink drive accidents and casualties in Great Britain |
| Characteristics of drink-drive accidents | RAS51011 | By month |
| Characteristics of drink-drive accidents | RAS51012 | By time of day |
| Characteristics of drink-drive accidents | RAS51019 | By country and English region |
| Characteristics of drivers/riders involved | RAS51022 | By sex of driver and rider |
| Characteristics of drivers/riders involved | RAS51010 | By age of driver (cars only) |
| Casualties in drink-drive accidents | RAS51005 | All casualties, by casualty type, sex and age |
| Casualties in drink-drive accidents | RAS51006 | Driver and rider fatalities over the legal blood alcohol limit |
| Casualties in drink-drive accidents | RAS51009 | Fatalities aged 16 and over, by blood alcohol level |
| Breath tests | RAS51002 | Breath test and failures of drivers or riders involved in reported road accidents in Great Britain |
| Breath tests | RAS51016 | Roadside screening breath tests and failures in England and Wales |
| Breath tests | RAS51017 | Screening test results in England and Wales, by reason for test |

They plan to drop six current tables, which website analytics suggest have had few downloads in the past year, as listed below.

| Table | Title | Rationale for removal |
|---|---|---|
| RAS51003 | Reported breath tests and breath test failures, all drivers and riders involved by day of week and time of day, Great Britain | Overall numbers of breath tests will be retained. Table RAS51012 covers drink-drive accidents by day and time. |
| RAS51004 | Reported breath tests and breath test failures by road user type and age, Great Britain | Overall numbers of breath tests will be retained. Drivers involved in drink drive accidents by age are given in table RAS51010. |
| RAS51008 | Killed or Seriously Injured casualties in reported accidents involving young drivers and riders (17 to 24 years old) over the legal alcohol limit | Drivers involved in drink drive accidents by age are given in table RAS51010 |
| RAS51013 | Reported drink drive accidents by pedestrian, vehicle involvement, and severity, Great Britain | We have not identified any clear use for the data provided in this table. |
| RAS51018 | Results of screening breath tests following a road traffic collision: England and Wales | This table provides a breakdown by age and gender. The overall results and trends are retained in table RAS51017. |
| RAS51020 | Car drivers in reported injury road accidents, breath tests and failures by English regions and country, Great Britain | Overall breath test figures will be retained. Car drivers in drink-drive accidents by region and country are given in table RAS51019. |

## Do any of the proposed changes cause with problems with your work?

## RoSPA response

No.

## Reviewing the frequency of drink-drive estimates

The road safety statistics team are keen to improve the quality and timeliness of road safety data. Currently, provisional drink-drive estimates are released 14 months after the end of the year reported on (with a return rate around 30% from coroners), and final estimates are released 20 months after the end of the year (with a return rate around 60% from coroners).

### Limitations of provisional figures

The range of uncertainty associated with the lower return rate at the provisional stage means that it is very unlikely the provisional publication can detect significant changes in the underlying trends.

In particular, recent analysis has shown that the provisional estimates of drink-drive deaths have a tendency to be revised downwards in the final figures. In each of the last three years, the % with BAC over the legal limit has fallen as more data has been received during the year, causing the provisional estimates to over-state the number of drink drive deaths.

### Timeliness of final estimates

The road safety statistics team aims to reduce the delay from the end of the year to the date of publication by working to allow the data collection from coroners to start earlier and more regularly based on STATS19 data. Good progress was made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in increased workload for coroners in the last two years, understandably impacting on the timeliness of data supply.

### Possible future approach

We are considering replacing the current provisional and final annual statistics with one publication, which would be issued around 17-18 months after the end of the year and be based on a return rate around from coroners of at least 55% (which is 90-95% of the current final data).

Analysis suggests that at this point, estimates would change little as more data is received so that the figures would be more robust than the current provisional, but more timely than the current annual release. Any further data received from coroners following publication would be incorporated in the following year's publication so that all data collected would be used.

**We are considering two possible options:**

**Option 1 - continue with the provisional and final releases as at present**
**Option 2 - discontinue the provisional release given the issue raised above and bring the final publication forward (revising the estimate as part of the following year's publication)**

**Could you please indicate which option would be your preferred choice, and explain why?**

### RoSPA response

RoSPA would prefer the Department to opt for option two. This seems a sensible approach to us, as this would result in a statistical release that is more robust than the current provisional releases, which are often revised downward, but would also be more timely than the current final release (18 months rather than 20). RoSPA uses the final release, rather than the provisional release, when providing information to employers, practitioners and the public and conducting data analysis.

## Drug-driving statistics

The road safety team is currently exploring the feasibility of producing initial statistics on drug-driving from the same coroners' data which forms part of these drink-drive statistics. The Department has published further analysis of deceased drivers who had more than the legal amount of drugs (illegal or medicinal).

The Department aims to further develop these statistics, with an update as part of the final drink-drive statistics publication scheduled for July 2022.

### Are you aware of the department's development of drug-driving statistics?

### RoSPA response

Yes, RoSPA is aware that following the recommendations of the PACTS report, the Department conducted an initial feasibility study on developing drug drive statistics, which was published in Autumn 2021.

### Have you suggestions for how these could be developed to add value to the current evidence base?

### RoSPA response

We strongly support the Department's steps to produce statistics on drug driving. We believe that the Department should publish offence and casualty data on drug driving using coroner data and other sources, such as test results, as they do for drink driving. However, we do recognise that it is necessary to distinguish between recreational drugs and prescribed drugs that impair driving from those that do not and unlike alcohol, where there is only one thing to test for, there are many different drugs which can impair driving, with different legal limits. Drugs that impair driving can also be administered at the scene after a collision has occurred.

Should the Department opt to replace the current provisional and final annual drink-drive statistics with one publication, we would like drug drive statistics to be published at similar intervals. RoSPA would be interested to understand the overall number of road fatalities due to drivers with drugs over the legal limits (in a similar way to what is done for drink-drive fatalities).

As the initial feasibility study focussed on coroner data, we would be keen for the Department to explore what data on drug testing might be available from the CRASH system to capture cases where the driver does not die. We would also be interested in characteristics of casualties involved in these collisions, including age, gender and road user type. It would also be interesting to have access to data on the month and time of day that these collisions occur, to identify trends.

## Any other feedback

### Have you got any other feedback on the drink-drive or drug-drive statistics?

### RoSPA response

RoSPA has no further comments to make, other than to thank the Department for Transport for the opportunity to comment. We have no objection to our response being reproduced or attributed.