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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

Darren Morgan  
Director of Economic Statistics Production & Analysis  
Office for National Statistics  
(by e-mail)

6 September 2021

Dear Darren

**Assessment of Annual Business Survey Statistics**

We have today published the assessment report of the Annual Business Survey (ABS) against the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Our report found that the significant time delay on the publication of ABS data means that the data are not always used to measure the ongoing impacts of structural and cyclical changes to the UK economy. As a result, ABS data are not fully meeting users' needs for timely and detailed data on business performance.

The focus and priority on transforming short-term surveys means there has been a lack of investment in finance, staff, and systems and so ABS data have been unable to keep up with changing demands on their use. The lack of investment has curtailed ONS's efforts to improve the detail and timeliness of ABS data.

We recognise ONS's efforts to improve the timeliness of ABS data, ongoing capacity building to meet the need for more-detailed regional data and the greater efforts to engage with a wider range of stakeholders. Without significant investment however, ONS will not be able to build on the good start made to improving the public value of ABS data.

A lack of investment has been a common theme of OSR's recent assessments of ONS's structural economic surveys and statistics. We strongly urge ONS to revisit the investment needs of these outputs, to ensure structural economic data are available to assess, for example, the ongoing impact of the economic shocks of Brexit and the pandemic.

We are grateful for the positive approach of the ABS team through the assessment process and we look forward to receiving your plan to address the improvements identified in the assessment report by the end of October.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation