



Office for  
Statistics Regulation

Systemic Review Programme

# State of the UK Statistical System 2025

17 July 2025

# Foreword

As with previous years, this State of the Statistical System report reflects our views on the performance of the UK statistical system through exploring areas of progress, innovation and challenge. However, unlike previous years, this report is being published during a time of unprecedented scrutiny and challenge for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority).

Throughout the last year, significant concerns have been raised about the performance of both the ONS and the Authority, with their ability to effectively deliver core functions being called into question. These concerns are explored in both the [Devereux Review](#) and the two Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) oral evidence sessions which were held shortly before the publication of this report in response to the inquiry on the work of the Authority.

Whilst PACAC has not yet published its report, it is our view that the concern of the Committee was clear and that there is a considerable challenge ahead for ONS to rebuild quality and confidence in its statistics.

Although there has been much focus on ONS over the last year, it is important to remember that our regulatory work covers the broader statistical system across the UK. This system remains robust and is working hard to meet diverse user needs. We see statisticians across the UK committed to maintaining quality, integrity and trustworthiness of their outputs, ensuring a resilient and effective statistical system, as reflected in this report.

Looking forward to the coming year, OSR will remain consistent in our role of ensuring the trustworthiness, quality and value of official statistical across the UK as these challenges are navigated.

**Ed Humpherson**

**17 July 2025**

# Executive Summary

Drawing on our work as the UK's statistics regulator, this report shares our views on the performance of the statistical system and the challenges facing it, highlights areas of progress and innovation and sets out our recommendations for advancing the system.

The UK's statistical landscape is currently under scrutiny. Concerns have been raised about the Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s performance, governance and culture, and its ability to deliver its core functions effectively. As the UK's National Statistical Institute, some perceive ONS as synonymous with the entire Government Statistical Service (GSS) – it is not. In this context, there is risk that any issues affecting the reputation of ONS may influence public confidence in the broader statistical system.

In our recent interactions with ONS, we have seen a more open and transparent assessment of the challenges it faces. The recent publications of its [plans for economic statistics](#) and [household and business surveys](#) provide the foundations to restore confidence. However, we do not underestimate the challenge ahead for ONS in rebuilding quality and user confidence.

The level of risk facing specific statistics and producers helps shape our regulatory work programme. In this context, our work has been more focused on ONS this year than usual, and this is reflected in the balance of this report. However, the UK statistical system and our regulatory responsibility remain much broader than ONS.

Our regulatory work shows that the broader statistical system in the UK remains robust, and that producers are effectively meeting a wide range of demands. We see statisticians across the UK that are committed to maintaining quality, integrity and trust in their outputs, ensuring a resilient and effective statistical system.

## **There are several high-profile initiatives to strengthen confidence and support**

The UK statistical system is currently undergoing multiple reviews with the objective of enhancing trust and improving quality. These reviews are focused on different components and leadership within the system.

Our [Systemic Review of Economic Statistics](#), which evaluates the quality and reliability of economic data produced by the ONS, was published in April 2025. The [review led by Sir Robert Devereux](#) on the Office for National Statistics' performance and culture was published on 26 June 2025, along with a joint response from the [UK Statistics Authority and Cabinet Office](#). The House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC)'s [inquiry into the UK Statistics Authority \(the Authority\)](#) and its governance, accountability and efficacy is ongoing at the time of writing. Two hearings have taken place on [1 July](#) and [8 July](#) with oral evidence provided by Sir Robert Chote, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority; Emma Rourke, Acting National Statistician; and Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation. The inquiry report is expected in autumn 2025.

Heads of Profession for statistics (who are accountable for professional statistical matters in departments and agencies) have acted to enhance the identity of the profession through the development and publication of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) vision – [Strength in Numbers](#), which focuses on capability and community, among other core areas. While resourcing remains a challenge, the

Deputy Heads of the GSS are enhancing the GSS's connections, including with the broader Analysis Function, ensuring alignment with the vision and sustainable funding for critical initiatives. A partnership with the Royal Statistical Society was established to reflect on the evolving role and skills required for statisticians, leading to a summary report in April 2025.

- **Recommendation.** The positive steps the Government Statistical Service (GSS) is taking to deliver its vision must continue. It is important this work is supported by resources from across the whole GSS.
- **Recommendation.** We want to see more information made publicly available about the numbers, skills and resources that the GSS has at its disposal. This will help in understanding the pressures faced by the statistical system and identifying any necessary actions.

### **There are demand, resourcing and engagement pressures**

Demand for official statistics in the UK continues to grow, reflecting a strong need for timely, high-quality data across government, industry and the public. Statistics producers are increasingly undertaking strategic prioritisation to balance the demand for new high-quality statistics that provide insights with funding constraints. As a result, some statistics producers are reducing their existing outputs to reallocate resources to new priorities.

Engaging with users is critical to producing evidence and statistical outputs that meet their needs and answer their questions. Since our last report, we have seen new examples of good engagement, the most significant of which was the debut of the [UK Statistics Assembly](#). However, despite some recent positive developments there is still progress to be made in this area.

- **Recommendation.** Statistics producers must continue to balance the current and emerging needs for high-quality, relevant statistics through strategic prioritisation and clear communication. Continued transparent decision making and seeking user feedback are essential.
- **Recommendation.** The statistical system needs to build on the positive momentum generated by the Statistical Assembly in January 2025 and continue to develop and refine its approaches to user engagement.

### **Maintaining quality is a key focus for ONS and for the wider statistical system**

While many statistics across the system are produced to a high quality and meet the needs of users, declining responses to statistics household surveys are negatively affecting the quality of key UK statistics. Long-standing challenges with household survey response rates have become critical, particularly in some ONS surveys. Statisticians are having to take additional actions to ensure that statistics can be maintained at the quality that is needed.

- **Recommendation.** It is becoming critical that the factors which affect variations in response rates to statistical surveys across the UK and topic areas are better understood by the whole statistical system. We consider that is now essential that the statistical system proactively researches, develops and works to implement system-wide solutions.

Our systemic review of ONS economic statistics set out requirements for ONS to take decisive action to restore confidence in its portfolio. ONS's publication of its [plan for economic statistics](#), its [Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#), and its forthcoming revised strategic business plan provide activities that, if successfully executed, can restore confidence, ensure strategic transparency and enhance focus on the quality of data inputs.

- **Recommendation.** It is critical that ONS continues to take action to restore confidence in its portfolio of economic statistics.
- **Recommendation.** As statistics producers transition to modern data collection and processing methods, they must proactively address potential IT shortcomings to safeguard the quality of their statistics and maintain user confidence.

Allocating resources and funds to specific change programmes can help statistics producers mitigate risks and ensure the use of modern methods and data sources. However, balancing innovation with the need to maintain essential statistical outputs requires careful resource allocation and strategic planning. ONS acknowledges the need for a revised approach to implementing change in its [plan for economic statistics](#), placing a greater emphasis on continuous improvement and dedicating the right mix of skills to each production area, while continuing to use change programmes where appropriate.

- **Recommendation.** The challenges and lessons learned from change programmes apply across to the entire statistical system, and it is important that best practice is widely understood.

While the use of administrative data is advancing, the maturity of these data and systems as statistical data sources has not progressed as quickly as hoped. This sentiment was echoed in the [Independent Report on the 2025 UK Statistics Assembly](#).

- **Recommendation.** The UK Statistics Authority and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should take a stronger leadership position in a significant scaling up in the use of administrative data across the portfolio of sources of official statistics.
- **Recommendation.** We encourage producers to build and maintain strong collaborative relationships with data suppliers and operational areas to support the quality of their statistical outputs.

### **There are other important, system-wide issues**

Despite ongoing innovations, progress on data sharing and data linkage across government has been slow. While some government departments effectively share and link data to enable the operational delivery of public services, and there are instances of successful data sharing and linkage for statistical purposes, significant work remains to be done to establish these practices as standard rather than the exception within the UK statistical system. Achieving this will require investment from the wider statistics and data ecosystem.

- **Recommendation.** We want to see partners, both within the statistical system and beyond, continue to review and implement the recommendations to improve on data sharing and data linkage set out in our [2024 follow-on report](#).

Artificial intelligence (AI) models offer significant opportunities to enhance the production and communication of official statistics. As the statistical system explores and implements this technology, it is crucial to build public confidence by managing and mitigating its real and perceived risks. A comprehensive understanding of how AI is being used across the statistical system is needed, with clearer leadership to translate and implement existing AI guidance for use within the UK statistical system.

- **Recommendation.** We encourage producers to explore the potential of using AI in official statistics in a transparent, responsible and collaborative way, drawing on existing guidance. We recognise our role in supporting innovation and best practice in this area, including by developing guidance on using AI in line with the Code.

Recent reviews have highlighted the difficulties in comparing the experiences and outcomes of citizens across different parts of the UK. Despite the commendable efforts of statistics producers, significant challenges remain in achieving meaningful UK-wide comparability across key measures. Our [review of the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data](#) provides recommendations to help the UK statistical system better understand comparability issues and prioritise resources.

- **Recommendation.** We want the GSS to act on our comparability review, which provides a clear framework to help the UK statistical system meet user needs for comparable statistics across the UK. While our recommendations are challenging, they are necessary to drive the changes needed to address longstanding issues.

### **Applying the principles of intelligent transparency and communicating uncertainty are key focus areas for statistics producers**

Embedding the principles of [intelligent transparency](#) across the UK's governments is OSR's flagship public campaign. Over the past year, these principles – equality of access, enhancing understanding and independent decision making and leadership – have gained recognitions among producers and analysts in the statistical system and beyond. This will be further strengthened by their inclusion in the revised Code of Practice for Statistics which will be published in the autumn.

- **Recommendation.** We want the principles of intelligent transparency – equality of access, enhancing understanding and independent decision making and leadership – to become the norm across the statistical system and all areas of government.
- **Recommendation.** We want to see producers proactively considering how intelligent transparency can be implemented and embedded, including through engagement with senior leaders, operational departments and communication teams beyond the statistical system whenever necessary.

Effective communication of statistics ensures better data-based decisions and enhances confidence in the statistical system. Statistics producers are actively seeking ways to improve how their statistics are communicated. We want to see good examples of the communication of quality and uncertainty continue to be shared across government to help embed best practice. The UK Government's mission-led approach offers the opportunity for clearly communicated statistics to become standard, providing the public with clear parameters for measuring government performance.

- **Recommendation.** Further training on communicating uncertainty in statistics should be delivered by the GSS, to complement producers sharing best practice on the communication of quality. The statistical system will be supported in these actions through the revised Code of Practice, which will continue to be at the core of OSR's regulatory approach.



# Introduction

Drawing on our work as the UK's statistics regulator, this report shares our views on the performance of the statistical system and the challenges facing it, highlights areas of progress and innovation and sets out our recommendations for advancing the system.

The level of risk facing specific statistics and producers helps shape our regulatory work programme. This has meant that this year, our work has been more focused on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) than usual, and this is reflected in the balance of this report compared to previous editions. However, we continue to undertake a wide range of regulatory work across the system and use that evidence to draw together the conclusions in this report.

The UK's statistical system includes those who collect, produce, disseminate and regulate official statistics, alongside central bodies that set its strategic direction. We want this report to support the continuing collaboration across, and evolution of, the UK statistical system to support the public good. Our [Guide to the UK's Statistical System](#) provides more information about its key features.

This year's report has been written at time where the UK Statistics Authority, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and our own organisation, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), are undergoing a period of scrutiny. This attention can be seen in various sources, including media coverage, parliamentary debates and stakeholder commentary. While there has been some commentary on recent ONS errors, the broader narrative has been one of overall concern in the ONS's performance, governance and culture, and there has been a lack of confidence in ONS's ability to deliver its core functions.

At the core of this scrutiny are the principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, as set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. These principles ensure that statistics are produced and used in ways that meet users' needs, maintain public confidence and can adapt to meet new challenges. Some of the statistics produced by ONS are struggling to meet these Code principles – as evidenced by the increased number of de-accreditations. But these concerns do not affect all ONS statistics, and we have also seen important improvements in some ONS statistics. For example, we [reaccredited the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) in July 2024.

As the UK's National Statistical Institute, some perceive ONS as synonymous with the entire Government Statistical Service (GSS). However, the statistical landscape is much broader than ONS alone. In this context there is a risk that any issues affecting the reputation of ONS may influence public confidence in the broader statistical system. While the ONS faces specific challenges, it is our view that the broader statistical system in the UK remains robust and is acting well to meet a wide range of demands. This report highlights multiple successes across various statistical bodies in the UK. Statistics producers across the UK are working hard to maintain the quality and integrity of their outputs, improve data collection processes and strengthen engagement with stakeholders to help ensure their statistics meet the needs of various users.

The publication of the [Devereux Review of the Office for National Statistics performance and culture](#), the [UK Statistics Authority and Cabinet Office response to it](#), and ONS's recent [plan for its economic statistics](#) and its [household and business](#)



[surveys](#), published in response to our [review of ONS economic statistics](#), provide the right foundations to restore confidence in ONS. In our recent interactions with ONS, we have seen a more open and transparent assessment of the challenges it faces. We also welcome a refreshed openness to feedback through initiatives like the UK Statistics Assembly and an expansion of its advisory committees. However, we do not underestimate the challenge ahead for ONS in rebuilding quality and user confidence.

While some of the issues ONS has faced are institution-specific, others have system-wide implications. It is important that the whole statistical system learns from any lessons, and from each other's practices, to safeguard public confidence. As statisticians across the UK refine their ways of working and prioritise resources to meet new and anticipated demands, the quality and trustworthiness of their outputs must remain uncompromised.

We have structured our views in this report in five main sections:

1. **Strengthening confidence and support:** This section outlines the landscape of independent reviews, the development work being undertaken within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and our work to update the Code of Practice for Statistics.
2. **Demand, resourcing and engagement:** This section looks at the different demands on the UK statistical system, how statistics producers are addressing these, the challenges of balancing demand with resources and the continuing work across the statistical system on understanding and addressing statistics users' views.
3. **Maintaining and restoring quality:** This section focuses on quality issues within the UK statistical system, concentrating on declining survey response rates, specific ONS economic statistics quality concerns, change programme considerations and the future role of administrative data.
4. **Other system-wide issues:** This section examines the system-wide topics of data sharing and linkage, artificial intelligence and UK-wide comparability.
5. **Communicating statistics:** This section shares our current views on embedding intelligent transparency, our flagship public campaign, as the norm, and provides examples of good communications focusing on the communication of core statistical outputs and uncertainty.

# Strengthening confidence and support

This section outlines the landscape of independent reviews, the development work being undertaken within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and our work to update the Code of Practice for Statistics.

## Independent reviews and findings

On 1 April 2025, the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) and the Cabinet Office jointly launched an [independent review](#) into ONS's performance and culture led by Sir Robert Devereux, former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions. Its aim was to assess how effectively ONS delivers its core statistical outputs and major programmes, as well as to evaluate its organisational culture, leadership and structural dynamics. It also examined ONS's sponsorship relationships with the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury.

The [findings of the Devereux Review of the Office for National Statistics performance and culture](#), and [a joint response](#) from the Authority and Cabinet Office, were published on 26 June 2025. The review made three recommendations: ONS needs a focused and consistent effort to improve core statistics; changes are needed in the way in which ONS is led; and the governance of the ONS and the wider system merits further consideration. The Authority and Cabinet Office have agreed with all of the recommendations.

On 7 April, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), which is responsible for overseeing the Authority's work on behalf of Parliament, announced a separate [inquiry](#) into the work of the UK Statistics Authority. The ongoing inquiry aims to assess how well the Authority is fulfilling its statutory duties and whether it is equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving data landscape. The Committee [has published the written evidence](#) received in response to this inquiry, including evidence provided by the Authority [covering both ONS and OSR](#). In addition, two hearings have taken place on [1 July](#) and [8 July](#) with oral evidence provided by Sir Robert Chote, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority; Emma Rourke, Acting National Statistician; and Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation. The inquiry report is expected in autumn 2025.

On 7 April, we published our [Systemic Review of ONS Economic Statistics](#). Prompted in part by common issues in our regulatory work, the review aimed to identify high-level, cross-cutting issues across ONS's economic statistics and support ONS through systemic recommendations for improvement. We plan to review ONS's response to our report in autumn 2025 and then publish the overall findings, including relevant insights from Sir Robert Devereux's review.

These reviews also coincide with changing leadership in the Government Statistical Service (GSS), ONS and the Authority. In May 2025, [Sir Ian Diamond stepped down as National Statistician](#). Sir Ian decided that due to ongoing health issues, he was unable to commit to the role as desired and highlighted the need for energetic leadership for the next phase of delivery for ONS, including overseeing the implementation of the Devereux review findings. In July 2025, [Sir Robert Chote announced](#) that he would be stepping down from his role as the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority Board in autumn 2025.

The reviews discussed above are being undertaken in the broader context of the publication, in 2024, of two further wide-ranging reviews:

[The Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority](#), published in March 2024, was commissioned by the Cabinet Office as part of its Public Bodies Reviews program and conducted by Professor Denise Lievesley CBE. The review focused on the governance, accountability, efficacy and efficiency of the Authority. The Authority [responded](#) to the review in September 2024.

A key recommendation of this review was for the Board to establish a triennial statistical assembly to consult widely with statistics users and producers to understand the range of views regarding the priorities and data needs for the UK. The inaugural Statistic Assembly was held in January 2025 and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including from central, local and devolved governments, business and industry, academia, civil society and charities. The [Independent report on the 2025 UK Statistics Assembly](#) was published in March 2025. The [Authority has committed](#) to working across the statistical system to act on the high-level recommendations from the Assembly. Feedback from stakeholders following the Assembly was very positive. Where relevant, we have highlighted specific findings and user views captured in the UK Statistics Assembly Independent Report within this report.

The PACAC report [Transforming the UK's Evidence Base](#) was published in May 2024. The report set out the findings of its inquiry exploring the changing statistics and data landscape, and the UK's readiness to respond to it. The Authority [responded](#) to the report in November 2024.

This period of review and reflection is particularly significant given the key role that official statistics play in informing public debate, shaping policy and supporting democratic accountability. Understanding and fostering trustworthiness in official statistics is essential – not only for the credibility of the statistics themselves, but for the institutions that produce and regulate them.

The Authority's existing five-year strategy [Statistics for the Public Good](#), which sets out its aims, priorities, mission and values for the UK official statistical system, is coming to an end. A refreshed version is due to be published later in the year to cover the 2025/2030 period. The ongoing reviews and inquiries discussed in this section offer an opportunity to assess how well the UK statistical system is delivering on its responsibilities and where improvements may be needed.

## Government Statistical Service (GSS) developments

We have previously highlighted that there was a growing perception of a loss of identity of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) – both its distinct identity as part of a broader analytical function and the impact of limited resources on support for the GSS and GSS activity. Heads of Profession (who are accountable for professional statistical matters in departments and agencies) have acted to enhance the identity of the profession through the development and publication of the [GSS vision – Strength in Numbers](#) – in October 2024. We welcomed its publication, as did statistics producers and users.

The GSS vision sets out four areas of work (Coordination, Cooperation and Leadership; Capability and Community; Setting Standards; Transformation and Innovation), each underpinned with a vision statement. The document sets out a vision for furthering cooperation and impact, alongside strengthening the identity of the GSS.

The National Statistician also appointed three deputy heads of the Government Statistical Service to work together, with the aim of getting the best out of the GSS community. They operate together to oversee the implementation of the GSS vision, building future capability and linking the profession to the UK Statistics Authority and the broader Analysis Function. These have been positive steps in promoting and developing the identity of statisticians in government.

While still in early stages, the GSS has taken steps to ensure that the profession is focused on delivering against the vision. One aspect is the partnership between the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and the GSS to consider the [future role of statisticians and the statistical profession](#). This is reflecting on how the role of statisticians will evolve and what skills the profession will need in the future.

As part of this work, a round table was held in November 2024, and a [summary report](#) was published in April 2025. The report sets out the areas that are likely to remain consistent, areas that are likely to evolve and the drivers of change. These drivers include changing technology and data, public perception of trust and transparency, budgetary constraints and skills. The RSS and GSS are currently seeking feedback to inform the next stages of their work.

The GSS vision set out the ambition for a permanent central GSS support team that had a sustainable funding model. Central GSS activity is currently funded by a mix of:

- ONS resource dedicated to the GSS
- wider ONS resource to support the GSS, ONS and Analysis Function
- volunteer-led initiatives
- individual-funded activities

While resourcing remains a challenge, the Deputy Heads of the GSS have taken additional oversight to ensure that resources are directed to the highest-priority activities to deliver for the GSS. It is our view that certain services can be delivered more cost-effectively by the GSS centrally rather than by individual producer organisations. We have seen enhanced clarity on priorities in areas such as coherence and harmonisation. These are welcome steps, as much of this work requires central coordination to be effectively and efficiently delivered across the system.

## Updating the Code of Practice for Statistics

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) (the Code) ensures that statistics are not just numbers but reliable tools for understanding the world. When statistics and data are produced in line with the core principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) set out in the Code, they serve the public good.

We manage and maintain the Code, which has set the standards for the production of official statistics since 2009. The second edition, introducing the TQV framework, was published in 2018. The Code is not only a set of guidelines but also a source of inspiration and support for producers and users of statistics. It has become firmly embedded in the work of analysts producing official statistics.

It is important that the Code remains relevant as, in recent years, there have been substantial changes in the data landscape. These include the rapid growth of AI

technology, an increased desire for statistics from users and developments in the ways statistics are produced and disseminated. This year, [we consulted on](#) a proposed refreshed version of the Code. The consultation ran for 16 weeks, closing in February 2025, and we published our [consultation findings](#) in May 2025.

We received 61 consultation responses, with 43 of these responses coming from organisations and individuals in official statistics producer settings. The producer organisations reflected the four nations and different sizes and types of producer bodies from government departments, agencies and organisations listed on an [OS Order](#). We also received 17 responses from other non-producer stakeholder settings. Respondents covered a range of interests, including regulatory, public bodies, commercial, fact checking and genealogy.

The responses we received from across the statistical system show the commitment of producers and wider stakeholders to the Code and the value of official statistics. The consultation responses showed strong overall support for the proposed design of Code 3.0, which retains the current Code framework of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. We received many insightful and valuable comments on areas we could further strengthen, in particular in the detail of the 'Standards for Official Statistics', which set out specific statistical practices that those producing official statistics must follow.

Code 3.0 also introduces a new component which sets out what anyone communicating statistics in public bodies needs to do to ensure an open, clear and accessible approach. These standards embed our existing principles of intelligent transparency more clearly in the framework of the Code and were welcomed overall by consultation respondents.

The comments received through the consultation have informed our redrafting of the Code, which we are further testing with key stakeholders. All the feedback that we have received will be used to support a refreshed Code that supports our vision that statistics should serve the public good. We aim to release the refreshed Code of Practice in autumn 2025.

## Recommendations

The positive steps the Government Statistical Service (GSS) is taking to deliver its vision must continue. It is important this work is supported by resources from across the whole GSS.

We want to see more information made publicly available about the numbers, skills and resources that the GSS has at its disposal. This will help in understanding the pressures faced by the statistical system and identifying any necessary actions.



# Demand, resources and engagement

This section looks at the different demands on the UK statistical system, how statistics producers are addressing these, the challenges of balancing demand with resources and the continuing work across the statistical system on understanding and addressing statistics users' views.

## Demands in the statistical system

Demand for official statistics in the UK continues to grow in 2025, reflecting a strong desire for timely, high-quality data across government, industry and the public. This includes increasing demands for policy-relevant data and statistics. We are hearing from Heads of Profession that this includes a strong appetite to use data in the UK Government, including to make international comparisons.

The inaugural UK Statistics Assembly in January 2025 provided useful insights into the current demand for data and statistics. Following a call for contributions, sessions covering the following topics were held: Economic statistics and measuring progress; Coherence; Data sourcing, quality and methods; User engagement; Health disparities; Public sector performance; Data linkage; Net zero; The future of the Census; Business statistics; Equalities; Artificial intelligence (AI) and technology; Crime; Labour market; and Local and regional data.

This broad spread of topics meant the Assembly provided insights into user needs, data gaps and the challenges and opportunities confronting the UK statistical system. The [Independent report on the 2025 UK Statistics Assembly](#) was published in March 2025. While the Assembly serves as an important engagement exercise, it will be important to prioritise the most critical issues, which may require coordinated efforts across departments. We expect statistics producers to act to understand how they can meet any user needs, including addressing the most critical data gaps, that were identified.

Data gaps arise where there are limited statistics on an existing topic, where there are new emerging issues or where different breakdowns of existing statistics are desired. As society's information and data needs evolve, gaps in topic areas can become more prominent. Feedback from users can help identify gaps and prompt efforts to expand coverage and address emerging issues.

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC)'s report [Transforming the UK's Evidence Base](#) tasked the UK Statistics Authority with establishing a framework for identifying and prioritising demands for evidence and recommended not only an Assembly, but alongside this, research on data gaps and public understanding. It further recommended that we (OSR) support this activity by preparing regular and public reports on data gaps in the UK.

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) has implemented a theme-based approach to provide a way for users of government data and statistics to interact with their area of interest and to collaborate with producers of official statistics. There are [12 core themes](#), each led by a senior civil servant who is an expert in their subject and at least one deputy from another government department. This approach supports cross-department collaboration.

The UK Statistics Authority is coordinating efforts to enhance cross-GSS topic prioritisation. Each GSS theme group is currently piloting an approach to develop standardised prioritised work plans for their respective areas. These individual plans will be reported to the National Statistics Executive Group and statistical leaders across government to provide a high-level overview of statistical activities related to cross-government responsibilities.

The GSS plans to update these annually to align with government priorities, support departmental business planning and improve data quality. The planning process aims to reduce duplication of efforts and promote collaboration, coherence and best practices across the GSS. Additionally, the plans aim to identify any significant data gaps. The GSS intends to publish high-level information from the thematic plans on the Analysis Function website to ensure transparency. The work is ongoing, with the GSS aiming to publish its findings in the autumn of 2025.

We fully support this approach by the GSS. By coordinating efforts, it has the potential to bring together the needs of users in a transparent way.

Given that this work is ongoing, we will await the publication of the plan in the autumn before determining whether any specific regulatory support would be beneficial, particularly regarding additional support for statistics producers to address data gaps.

During our Code consultation, external stakeholders expressed an interest in the Code being stronger to support producers in addressing data gaps and users in having a greater role in informing decisions on statistical priorities. These views are contributing to the refreshed Code of Practice, which will also be published in the autumn.

## Meeting demands – examples of new statistics and insights

The UK Government has launched an ambitious programme of mission-led government, built around five missions and three foundations, as set out in its [Plan for Change](#). Each of the missions is underpinned by statistics. Statistics are used to define the problem and set milestones for progress; monitor progress; and identify links and key drivers of outcomes.

Though missions are a new tool for the UK Government, programmes for government have already existed in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for some time. The Northern Ireland Executive has the [Programme for Government](#) 2024-2027, and similar resources are available for Scotland in the [Programme for Government 2025 to 2026](#) and through Wales's [Programme for government](#). These programmes are often underpinned by statistical frameworks.

Statistics producers are responding to government demands for data in several ways. Efforts here have included new ad hoc statistical releases, which share insight into a topic as a one-off publication; extending existing official statistical publications, for example to include new breakdowns; and publishing new official statistics or management information data. Examples of statistics producers acting to meet these demands include the following:

- The Department for Education (DfE) has published ad hoc statistics on the [schools eligible for RISE intervention](#) and new management information on [Breakfast clubs early adopters: schools in the scheme](#).



- The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has developed a timelier indicator for monitoring progress in building 1.5 million homes. The indicator combines MHCLG's annual accredited [Net Additional Dwellings](#) statistics with weekly Energy Performance Certificate data, and is published in its [quarterly indicators of new housing supply](#).
- NISRA has worked with the Department of Education and their cross-departmental group to develop a new questionnaire and conduct the first official Northern Ireland childcare survey. The [results are published as official statistics](#) and provide a new evidence base for future policy on childcare.
- The Home Office is developing new official statistics on neighbourhood policing numbers, and ONS is developing a new survey to understand the prevalence of child abuse in children and young people aged 11–25 years.

Currently there is no central source of publicly available information on the metrics underpinning the UK Government's missions.

The Independent report on the Statistics Assembly identified meeting user needs for more-granular statistics as a high-level priority for the UK Statistics Authority and the Government Statistical Service (GSS). It recommended that a portfolio of official and unofficial sources, along with the use of appropriate methodologies (small areas, urban/rural, sub-groups of society, under-represented groups and so on), be developed.

Responding to user needs, statistics producers are working to provide more-detailed and granular statistics, as demonstrated by the following examples of producer activities:

- In 2025, the Welsh Government published, for the first time, [supply and use tables and input-output tables](#). These tables, which are the culmination of three years of work, provide a snapshot of the Welsh economy and detail the buying and selling relationships of goods and services between all parts of it for 2019.
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has published data for the [Participation Survey](#) and [Community Life Survey](#) at the local authority level for the first time. It has worked in partnership with the Arts Council and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, respectively, to achieve this.
- The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has acted to fill a data gap we identified in our [2019 review of statistics on post-16 education and skills in England](#). It has developed a new official statistic in the form of a UK-wide area-based measure of deprivation: the [Socioeconomic Index for Small Areas \(SEISA\)](#).
- The Welsh Government has been [reviewing equality data sources and outputs](#) to highlight remaining gaps in data on protected characteristics and provide a baseline to continue improving the granularity and availability of data on protected characteristics in Wales. It has since filled a number of gaps.
- The launch of a new, award-winning [ONS Explore Local Statistics \(ELS\) service](#), which went live in April 2025, enables people to find, visualise, compare and download subnational data, accessibly presented to both the public and local policymakers.

- NISRA's [Programme for Government Wellbeing Framework](#) and award-winning [Wellbeing Dashboard](#) categorises indicators by different demographic and protected groups, including sex, age, marital status, religion, disability, ethnic group, sexual orientation, dependants' status and political opinion. Geographic breakdowns are also provided to identify inequalities between council areas, assembly areas, urban and rural areas and areas of multiple deprivation.

Statistics producers are striving to meet new needs and provide new insights, whether this be through increased data sharing or data linkage opportunities, collaboration with government departments, introducing new data sources, developing more efficient and effective methods or a combination of actions:

- The Scottish Government has developed [Criminal Justice Journey Times](#) – a new data product that estimates the time taken for cases to progress from offence to conclusion. Justice Analytical Services collaborated with Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service to link data across the justice system. The resulting [bulletin](#) and interactive [dashboard](#) provide insights to support pandemic recovery, improve efficiency and inform decisions by the Criminal Justice Board.
- Producers are continuing to invest in reproducible analytical pipelines (RAPs) to deliver quality and efficiency benefits. The Home Office has developed tools, including the [Analytics Workbench](#), to support this way of working.
- The Welsh Government is adopting RAPs as a standard, using a set of common analytical tools. This effort has involved extensive skill-building, supported by a community-led learning program. They are starting to see time savings and expect improvements in quality, capacity and the wellbeing of statisticians over time.
- In Northern Ireland, NISRA has developed a RAP strategy with the aim of automating all key statistical processes and outputs by 2029, in line with their new Corporate Plan. Training pathways have been established for producers and their managers, supported by peer-to-peer guidance and the Tech-Lab centre of excellence to assist with RAP implementation. Initial feedback indicates significant capacity savings after initial resource investment, which allows statisticians to focus on value-added activities, while users notice improvements in output quality and timeliness.
- To advance the use of RAPs and open-source tools, the Scottish Government has developed sgplot, an R package for creating accessible charts using Scottish Government colour schemes based on the [Government Analysis Function Data Visualisation guidance](#). In 2024 the Analysis Function published [afcharts](#), its own version of the package recognising the work done in Scotland.

## Balancing demands and resource challenges

The Code of Practice for Statistics highlights the importance of sufficient resources to deliver statistical services for the public good, and that producers should review the statistics they produce to ensure their value to users. Statistics producers are facing consistent demands for new data and insight, whilst also acting to meet the expectation of their users and sustain current outputs. Statistics producers across the

UK are increasingly having to balance these needs, and at times, this is requiring them to make tough choices.

The mix of demands being placed on statistics producers means they are increasingly having to make decisions to cut back, or think about cutting back, on some of the statistics they produce. This can involve reducing the detail of statistics, supporting content and commentary and the frequency of production, or in some cases stopping producing some statistics. Expectations from users can make decisions to stop or reduce statistics publications challenging for producers. Views shared at the Statistics Assembly in January highlight the importance that users place on statistics producers clearly explaining their decisions and their needs to balance competing demands.

We have supported where producers have been transparent about taking these decisions, both through [our correspondence](#) and by publishing [Northern Ireland case studies](#) and [Scotland case studies](#).

In May 2025, [we supported Public Health Scotland \(PHS\)'s decision](#) to pause data collection for, and production of, the quarterly statistics on adherence to the NHS Scotland 18-week referral to treatment (RTT) standard. PHS explained that it is acting to prioritise its work and release capacity when new information needs arise – in this case, the development of key statistics to monitor progress towards the Scottish Government's [commitment to treat 150,000 more patients by March 2026](#). PHS has consulted with core users and is seeking feedback to assess the impact of the decision. It has also published a blog describing its approach to supporting NHS renewal with data and explaining the pause in RTT statistics.

The Ministry of Defence has identified a need to free up resource for other work, including new analysis, and has engaged with users to help it make decisions on what statistics can be ceased or reduced in frequency. For instance, it has consulted on and ceased the [UK service personnel amputation statistics](#) and the [defence personnel NHS commissioning statistics](#) and is currently [consulting](#) on reducing the frequency of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme statistics.

As we shared in our April 2025 [Review of ONS Economic Statistics](#), making sufficient resources available for its high-priority economic statistics has been a consistent challenge for ONS. Despite increasing resources after the [2016 Bean review](#), growing demands and recent changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have made it difficult for ONS to maintain real-terms funding for core economic statistics and supporting data sources. To help manage these challenges at an organisational level, ONS has set out in its [2025/26 Strategic Business Plan](#) what statistics it is stopping, reducing or slowing down work on this year. It has also, with the publication in June 2025 of its [plan for economic statistics](#), set out its intention to re-prioritise its published business plan, redirect analytical teams from social and public policy topics to work on its core statistics and streamline management roles and consolidate its supporting functions. Collectively these measures aim to bring an additional £10m investment (which will fund around 150 new skilled roles) into core economic and population statistics over the next two years.

The Scottish Government's [statistical strategic priorities](#) for its Statistics Group are centred on how it can improve statistical work to focus on what provides the greatest value in producing statistics for the public good. The Scottish Government has told us these priorities are supporting its statisticians to uphold their impartial role and responsibility to produce statistics for the public good. These may involve considering the bigger picture in their work and making difficult decisions to discontinue certain

statistics. A recent review across the Scottish Government and National Records of Scotland showed that nine statistical publications had been paused or stopped to better reflect user needs and reprioritise resource elsewhere.

In our [Statement to Government](#) published in September 2024, we stated that it is crucial that core statistics are sufficiently resourced and funded in order to serve the public good. Limited resources are impacting the ability of statistics producers to innovate and improve statistical methods whilst also continuing to deliver core business-as-usual statistics that meet the needs of those who use them.

The UK Government [spending review settlements](#) for the period 2026 to 2028 were published in June 2025, but any pressures across the UK statistical system are not easily visible. As of 31 March 2024 (the most recent data), there were 3,505 people recorded as working in the statistics profession in the UK Civil Service in [published civil service statistics](#). Of these, approximately 18% work in the UK Statistics Authority, which includes ONS. Northern Ireland has a separate civil service, and as of 1 April 2024 (the most recent published data), had 334 members of staff recorded as statisticians in its [published personnel statistics](#).

We want to see much more detailed information made publicly available about the numbers, skills and resources that the Government Statistical Service (GSS) has at its disposal. This information would make it easier for the statistical system to understand the totality of the pressures it faces, how these are changing over time and to identify any necessary actions. Although the system must address financial constraints faced by all government areas, it is important that core statistics receive adequate resources to serve the public good.

The current demand and resource issues show that statistics producers are making significant decisions to meet user needs. Statistics producers must balance the need for high-quality, relevant statistics with funding limitations through strategic prioritisation and clear communication. Transparent decision making and seeking user feedback are essential to adapting to new data requirements.

## Engaging with users

Understanding the needs of users helps producers to communicate and explain their statistics, respond to challenges and determine how they can best position their outputs in a societal context. We have previously highlighted that users wanted to see official statistics producers listen more, be more transparent and be less defensive when facing criticism.

In July 2024, the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) published its report [Public Statistics](#), which outlined a fresh approach and vision for statistics to serve the wider public good. The report highlighted the importance of starting with user need when thinking about public good, and how access to and insight from a wide range of datasets from inside and outside government can meet that user need.

Recognising the user landscape and the recommendations of the Lievesley review, the first Statistical Assembly, jointly organised by the Authority and the [Royal Statistical Society \(RSS\)](#), took place on 22 January 2025. This important initiative sought to bring together the widest possible range of users and producers of official statistics to discuss the priorities, opportunities and challenges facing the statistical system in the short to medium term.

As part of the Assembly, specific views were sought on how effectively the statistical system engages with users. From these views, recommendations were made on how producers can develop and improve user engagement practices. These recommendations included adding a 'Comments' box to publications; developing mechanisms allowing producers to explain their decisions and prioritisation, and why things may not be happening; and developing a joined-up strategy formalising an approach to user engagement that considers balancing views, explaining decisions and supporting theme groups. Firm commitment to implement these recommendations is now needed from across the statistical system to ensure that user engagement improves.

Enhanced engagement is critical to improve users' understanding of the uses and limitations of statistics, including associated uncertainty, and to better understand users' needs. Recent OSR assessments, including those undertaken on [ONS's UK business enterprise research and development statistics](#), [Skills for Care's adult social services departments workforce in England statistics](#), [ONS's admin-based population estimates statistics](#) and [ONS's business investment statistics](#), have highlighted the need for better communication with users on such matters.

Whilst engaging with producers and conducting our regulatory work, we have also seen good examples of user engagement:

- Throughout the Northern Ireland [Census 2021](#) process, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) demonstrated strong user engagement practices by conducting two public consultations to shape outputs, seeking external expert input, holding community liaison events to raise awareness and maintaining an open dialogue with users to understand their diverse needs. Through this engagement, NISRA developed a good understanding of the wide range of potential users of its outputs from both within the statistical system and in wider society. Our [Phase 3 Assessment report](#), published in February 2025, found that effective user engagement had been instrumental in ensuring that NISRA had recognised the range of potential uses for the statistics. As a result, users felt that the census results had value in both describing society and aiding research and decision making.
- The Department for Education maximises the use of having its own publishing platform, [Explore education statistics](#), by tracking a range of user behaviour. It has developed and released an analytics app for staff that can show a range of user analytics information at a service and publication level. Teams are encouraged to use the tool to help prioritise work and assess impact. Furthermore, each page on Explore Education now features an 'is this page useful?' prompt to allow users to provide feedback quickly.
- The Welsh Government has undertaken an engagement process involving a report, seminars and a [user survey](#) to understand user opinions on plans for developing indicators for the next [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(WIMD\)](#).
- Our reviews of the [Price Index of Private Rents](#) and the [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) statistics, both published by ONS, highlighted good-practice examples of open and active engagement with users.
- ONS's engagement with users of labour market statistics has improved. ONS has developed ways to work more closely with expert users, such as



introducing a monthly Technical Engagement Group to provide a forum to discuss upcoming developments and improvements in an open and transparent manner. In June 2024, ONS established the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, chaired by Professor Jonathan Portes. In addition, ONS has consulted with a range of experts from academia.

- We recommended in our September 2024 [review of ONS's 2021 England and Wales Census gender identity statistics](#) that stakeholders should be fully involved and engaged in future work to help build and restore confidence. Since our review, ONS has written two blogs explaining the work being undertaken, and the GSS has published a [detailed workplan](#) on the topics of sex and gender identity and successfully rolled out a series of regional events for stakeholders.

As in previous years, we have seen good examples of user engagement across the system, with a general sense of improvement in this space. However, there is still a need to share best practice more widely across the statistical system and consult with a broader range of users. We encourage producers to act on the findings from this year's Statistical Assembly and consider them when conducting future work.

## Recommendations

Statistics producers must continue to balance the current and emerging needs for high-quality, relevant statistics through strategic prioritisation and clear communication. Continued transparent decision making and seeking user feedback are essential.

The statistical system needs to build on the positive momentum generated by the Statistical Assembly in January 2025 and continue to develop and refine its approaches to user engagement.

# Maintaining and restoring quality

This section focuses on quality issues within the UK statistical system, concentrating on declining survey response rates, specific ONS economic statistics quality concerns, change programme considerations and the future role of administrative data.

## Survey response rates

To produce high-quality reliable statistics, it is essential to have high-quality data inputs. Statisticians aim for data collections that provide representative coverage, whether sourced from surveys or administrative records. While many statistics across the system are produced to a high quality and meet the needs of users, declining responses to statistics household surveys are negatively affecting the quality of key UK statistics.

In the UK, and in other countries worldwide, there has been a consistent decline in household survey response rates. Although the pandemic has worsened this trend, issues with response rates existed prior to this crisis. This year, challenges with household survey response rates have become particularly significant, especially in ONS surveys.

It is important to note that, although survey response rates are an important factor in determining quality, they do not solely determine the overall quality of the resulting statistics. While high response rates contribute to extensive coverage and reliability, it is essential to understand them as just one proxy for overall quality. It is also important to consider the extent to which the sample remains representative of the general population.

We have set out in Annex A, for broader information, the trends in survey response rates for a number of key surveys. These data show that the picture is not uniform. As an example, surveys in Northern Ireland do not appear to have experienced the same reductions in response rates as have been experienced by other surveys. It should be noted that while ONS has experienced large drops in response rates, it appears that rates for some of its surveys may be stabilising. It is becoming critical, however, that the factors which affect variations in response rates to statistical surveys across the UK and topic areas are better understood by the whole statistical system.

Our [systemic review of ONS's economic statistics](#), which was published in April 2025, identified that ONS has faced significant challenges in consistently ensuring that the data feeding into economic statistics are of high quality. Most notably, our review noted the long-term reduction in response rates to household surveys, including the [Labour Force Survey](#) (LFS), has severely impacted data quality. The LFS, which is produced by ONS, is the source of the most important official statistics collected by social surveys in the UK.

[We have been reviewing labour market statistics](#) from the LFS and the development of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) for a number of years. The quality issues with the LFS due to declining survey response rates have impacted statistical outputs across and beyond ONS. We [removed the accreditation of ONS's Great Britain LFS-based estimates and datasets](#) in November 2023. To date, 13 other statistical outputs have had their [accreditation temporarily removed](#) due to issues with the quality of the LFS and associated Annual Population Survey (APS) produced by the ONS. This knock-on effect to key statistics produced by government departments and the



governments of Scotland and Wales illustrates the complete dependence on ONS data that exists in some topic areas in the UK.

ONS's Social Surveys Quality Recovery Project aims to improve household surveys by increasing the number of field interviewers and sample sizes. Communication campaigns, incentives and better pay and benefits are aimed at enhancing participation and retention and have led to an increase in responses for the Labour Force Survey. ONS has made progress in 2025 in securing improved response to the Labour Force Survey, but the long-term challenges have been associated with a decline in the quality and reliability of some of its key economic statistics. We found in our economic statistics review that action should have been taken sooner and at a greater pace, with the necessary funding put in place, and the emerging survey problems should have been better publicly communicated. As such, we set out a requirement for ONS to produce a fully resourced plan for its survey operations implementing a rolling programme of regular reviews of individual surveys and other data sources.

ONS [published this plan on 26 June 2025](#) in response to the urgent need to address survey challenges and to support a wider strategic shift within ONS to focus on sustaining surveys into the future. ONS aims to restore confidence in its survey operations, enhance data quality and modernise systems and methodologies.

ONS has had notable success in moving its business survey collections online; around 2.1 million of the total 2.4 million questionnaires issued are now sent online. The response rates to ONS business surveys reflect substantial recovery towards pre-pandemic levels. For example, response rates for the Annual Business Survey averaged 77.2% for the three years prior to the pandemic, dropping to a low of 53.0% for the reporting year of 2019, but recovered to 77% for 2023.

Although business survey response rates have held up well, reflecting the mandatory nature of these surveys, there is a growing risk to their quality and representativeness. As highlighted in our review of ONS's economic statistics, there are notable challenges associated with sample reviews, rotation and quality assurance. These challenges indicate that ONS needs to make additional efforts to prevent the associated risks becoming a serious quality issue.

As noted earlier, if a survey sample remains representative of the general population despite a reduction in response rates, it can still give users confidence in the quality of the data. In October 2024, [we reaccruited the estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#), which had been temporarily suspended since July 2022 due to quality concerns. ONS has demonstrated that the representativeness of the Crime Survey sample remained broadly consistent before and after the pandemic. On that basis, we were satisfied with the quality of the current estimates, and that ONS provides sufficient assurance to users about the limited impact of the lower response rate.

Northern Ireland collects data for its own separate quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is unaffected by the ONS LFS accreditation decision and therefore remains an accredited official statistic. Since July 2021, a 'knock to nudge' strategy of visiting addresses, securing cooperation and conducting phone interviews later has boosted response rates close to pre-pandemic levels. This strategy to try to maintain household response rates is being implemented whilst work to move to an online-first transformed Labour Force Survey called the Northern Ireland Labour Market Survey (NI LMS) is also underway.

The independent report on the Statistical Assembly suggested that more proactive research was needed on what influences response to surveys and what is an acceptable level of response. We fully support this view. Research on this topic currently includes work being conducted by ONS and also through the [UKRI-ESRC-funded Survey Futures](#), which aims to deliver a step change in approaches to collecting population survey data in the UK. Currently, however, there are no UK-statistics-system-wide solutions for the challenges with survey collections. We consider that this is a critical area for the statistical system to address.

## Quality of ONS economic statistics

The UK's economic statistics are evolving, with new and innovative data becoming available. The economic statistics produced by ONS, the UK's national statistical institute, are vital for understanding the economy and a key source of information and intelligence for those making important decisions on tax, spending and interest rates. These statistics need to be of good quality, use data sources that reflect the modern economy and clearly communicate any uncertainties.

Since the UK's departure from the EU, Eurostat no longer verifies UK statistics. As the UK's independent regulator of statistics, we have developed a [Spotlight on Quality](#) framework based on the Code of Practice for Statistics and incorporating frameworks like the ESS Quality Assurance framework and the IMF Data Quality Assessment Framework.

Our Spotlight on Quality assessment programme provides a detailed review of many of the data sources and components that feed into the production of gross domestic product (GDP) and the broader National Accounts. This regulatory work has been vital to highlight issues and areas for improvement in economic statistics, which are produced primarily by ONS.

Over the last few years, a number of economic shocks have brought increased interest in, and scrutiny of, the economic statistics produced by ONS. Over the last year in particular, there has been growing external criticism of ONS.

Common factors identified in our regulatory work of ONS economic statistics are the limitations and potential impact to quality posed by software systems and 'legacy system' issues:

- The performance of supporting IT systems was a key source of concern in our October 2024 assessment of ONS's [business investment statistics](#) – we found that many of the systems used to produce business investment statistics are outdated. For example, Common Software (a legacy system) cannot be updated and so increases the risk of errors in the statistics.
- In May 2025 [ONS wrote to us](#) to advise that, during an investigation for future improvements, an error was found in the existing production system for Producer Price Indices (PPI). ONS advised that the system was outdated and needed to be uplifted as a matter of urgency. This error had resulted from the chain-linking approach introduced in November 2020 being incorrectly coded. At ONS's request we have suspended the accreditation of PPI outputs while ONS undertakes further analysis of their quality.
- Our May 2025 assessment of [ONS's trade statistics](#) found that ONS is working to move away from the legacy system and is developing requirements for a new

system as the legacy system used to process trade in services data is inefficient, no longer fit for purpose, putting strain on resources and restricting capacity for continuous improvement.

In the light of our emerging common concerns about the quality of economic statistics arising through our Spotlight on Quality programme, we initiated a Systemic Review of ONS Economic Statistics in 2024 and [published the first report in April 2025](#). We concluded that it is critical that ONS takes decisive action to restore confidence, and we set out a number of requirements for ONS to meet by July 2025.

Our requirements included that ONS publish a resourced plan that sets out the risks that continued data quality challenges pose to economic statistics; be more explicit on how resources are aligned with its core purposes and outputs as a national statistical institute; publish a regularly updated vision and strategy for the data sources used to compile its economic statistics; and take a more strategic and systematic approach to quality reviews of its data sources.

ONS's [plan for economic statistics](#), published on 26 June 2025, aims to restore confidence and improve the quality of its core statistics. ONS is open about the current situation and where it needs to do better. The publication of the plan is a crucial part of its response to actioning the immediate requirements in our review of its economic statistics.

When considered alongside its [Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#), which seeks similar improvements in ONS's household and business surveys and was also published on 26 June 2025, and its forthcoming revised strategic business plan, we conclude that ONS's actions meet the immediate requirements identified in our review. But there is clearly much more to do.

## Change programmes and administrative data

By focusing resources and funding on specific programmes of change, statistics producers can reduce risk and use modern methods and data sources to deliver improved statistics more efficiently. We consider that the importance of producers understanding and mitigating any risks emerging during any transitions to new methods and data sources has become more pronounced, as the risks associated with change work have become clearer.

All transformation work is a form of change management. The distinction between a change and a transformation can often be unclear and may vary depending on the context of the change. Transformation is a fundamental and strategic shift in how things are done. In the context of data and statistics, it can mean rethinking and redesigning the way data are collected, processed and used. This might involve moving away from traditional surveys towards more-integrated systems that use administrative and other big datasets (sometimes integrated alongside survey data), new digital tools and new statistical models to process these data. Such work can also serve to reduce production risk, providing an opportunity to review methods, systems and processes to ensure they are fit for purpose.

ONS is undertaking a significant amount of change work. Specifically, it is transforming how it produces labour market statistics for Great Britain and population statistics for England and Wales. It is also undertaking work in other areas, for example UK long-term international migration and GB travel and tourism statistics.

ONS has been developing a transformed version of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), known as the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), using a digital collection approach. ONS has been developing and dual-running the TLFS alongside its recent work to improve the LFS. The TLFS was intended to address many of the concerns and shortcomings of the LFS, but this work has also faced significant delivery challenges.

On 3 December 2024, ONS published an [interim action plan](#) for the TLFS based on the results of its [lessons learnt review](#) conducted in summer 2024 and published the detail of an [independent methodological review](#). In [our February 2025 update](#), we noted that ONS has increased its engagement, communication and openness on the programme and set recommendations for ONS to set out detailed plans for transitioning to the TLFS and for regular reporting on the progress of the interim action plan from its 'lessons learnt' exercise. [ONS shared an update in April 2025](#) on the improvements it has made to the TLFS and on its plans to carry out a readiness assessment in collaboration with its main users in July 2026.

The [Devereux Review of the Office for National Statistics performance and culture](#), published on 26 June 2025, highlights several areas where change is needed in how ONS manages its programmes. In its [plan for economic statistics](#), ONS has recognised the need for a revised approach to implementing change, which places greater emphasis on continuous improvement. This approach includes dedicating the right mix of skills to each production area, while continuing to use change programmes where appropriate.

NISRA is also [improving labour market statistics](#) through survey transformation and increasing the use of administrative data and other data sources. NISRA intends to move to a new online-first Northern Ireland Labour Market Survey (NI LMS) later this year. NISRA's LMS is being developed in collaboration with ONS, and ONS and NISRA are working together to enable UK-wide key labour market statistics, derived from a combination of the TLFS and NI LMS, to be available.

Balancing innovation with the need to sustain essential statistical outputs is a significant challenge that requires careful resource allocation and strategic planning. It is necessary to balance the ambitions for research and development required for any change programmes with the need for consistent operational delivery that meets user requirements and resource constraints. This challenge applies to the entire UK, not just the ONS.

Administrative data sources play a key role in many change projects, particularly as data sharing and data access capabilities increase. Administrative data are collected for operational purposes, often when people interact with public services, with statistical use being a secondary purpose.

Our [review of ONS's economics statistics](#) looked in depth at the role and potential role that administrative data can play. We found the following:

- There have been good examples of the use of administrative and big data sources in core ONS economic statistics, including the introduction of rail transaction data in price statistics, but our review found that progress on the use of administrative data has been much slower than expected at the time of the [2016 Bean review](#).

- Overall progress in utilising administrative data has been slow due to practical and cultural barriers within government departments. These barriers include issues related to data privacy, data quality and the willingness of departments to share data. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for the successful integration of administrative data into statistical processes.
- There is a growing recognition that administrative data cannot always replace survey data directly. A more nuanced approach is needed to assess how these data sources can complement each other, which involves understanding the strengths and limitations of both administrative and survey data and finding ways to integrate them effectively to enhance the overall quality of statistical outputs.

ONS is actively transitioning towards using admin-based population estimates (ABPEs) as the official population estimates for England and Wales. ABPEs have potential to provide more timely, and potentially more accurate, population data compared to estimates derived using the traditional cohort-component method. Following its [recent evaluation](#), ONS intends for the ABPEs to become the official population estimates for England and Wales in 2026. Given the extensive use of population statistics, it is vital that this new methodology has appropriate oversight and scrutiny.

We are undertaking a phased assessment approach to provide reassurance to users on ONS's new methods for producing population estimates in England and Wales. ONS has used the findings of [our first assessment](#) to help shape and steer its development work for the ABPEs. In October 2024, ONS published an [action plan](#) for how it will develop population statistics. We will continue to engage with ONS and consider any learning from this transformation work for the wider statistical system.

More broadly, ONS aims to make more use of administrative data as part of its Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) programme. This programme of work includes considering the future of the census.

The National Records of Scotland (NRS) and NISRA are also engaged in research and are developing methods to make more use of administrative data in their population statistics. In December 2024, NISRA [published a research paper](#) exploring the creation of a statistical population dataset for Northern Ireland using a range of administrative datasets. In February 2025, [NRS published its latest statistical research](#), presenting a revised version of Scotland's Administrative Data Based Population Estimates. This research includes administrative-based estimates of population, household and ethnicity for the period 2016 to 2022, created by acquiring and linking data from a range of sources.

The UK Statistics Authority [has recommended](#) that the UK government commission a census of England and Wales in 2031, to be delivered by ONS. The Authority recommendation sets out an approach that delivers a high-quality census for England and Wales in 2031, while further developing population estimates based on administrative data – such as tax records, NHS data and driving licences, which have the potential to deliver more-frequent and higher-quality population estimates. It considers that this approach will strengthen the statistical system so that it is ready to adapt to the technological and social changes of the next decade.

In Scotland, the National Records of Scotland [has recommended a mandatory questionnaire-based census approach in 2031](#) which will incorporate learnings from



the 2022 census, including the effective use of administrative data. In Northern Ireland, [NISRA has recommended conducting a full Census of Population and Housing in 2031](#), emphasising the need for high-quality data on various demographics and advocating for government support in accessing administrative data.

### **Case study – data sources in the criminal justice system in England and Wales**

Building strong relationships with data suppliers and service areas helps statisticians to better understand administrative data and improve their outputs. It also helps data providers appreciate the importance of accurate reporting.

In spring 2024, HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) identified inaccuracies in the Crown Court data that are used to produce HMCTS's monthly management information and [MoJ's quarterly accredited official statistics on the criminal court system in England and Wales](#). Statistics releases and use of the data were paused and, upon investigation, a range of causes for the Crown Court data inaccuracies were identified by the MoJ. These included human error, technical issues which allowed the use of free-text fields and data coding issues. In [our March 2025 review](#), in which we confirmed the continued accreditation of the statistics, we commended both organisations on their collaborative approach – known as 'One Crown' – to investigating and addressing the Crown Court data quality issues and to creating a more transparent and reliable dataset that benefits all users. Better collaborative working between statisticians and data providers has enhanced the understanding of the administrative data sources and improved the quality of these statistics.

In summary, while the use of administrative data is undoubtedly advancing, the maturity of administrative data sources and systems as statistical data sources has not progressed as quickly as hoped. Concerns about progress on the use of administrative data in statistics were highlighted in the [Independent report on the 2025 UK Statistics Assembly](#). Based on engagement with stakeholders during the Assembly, the report identified as a priority the need for the Statistics Authority and Government Statistical Service to take a leadership position in a significant scaling up of the use of administrative data across the system.

## **Recommendations**

It is becoming critical that the factors which affect variations in response rates to statistical surveys across the UK and topic areas are better understood by the whole statistical system. We consider that it is now essential that the statistical system proactively researches, develops and works to implement system-wide solutions.

It is critical that ONS continues to take action to restore confidence in its portfolio of economic statistics.

As statistics producers transition to modern data collection and processing methods, they must proactively address potential IT shortcomings to safeguard the quality of their statistics and maintain user confidence.

We consider that the lessons learned from change programmes are applicable across the whole of the UK statistical system, and it is important that best practice is widely understood.

We encourage producers to build and maintain strong collaborative relationships with data suppliers and operational areas to support the quality of their statistical outputs.

The UK Statistics Authority and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should take a stronger leadership position in a significant scaling up in the use of administrative data across the portfolio of sources of official statistics.



# Other system-wide issues

This section examines the system-wide topics of data sharing and linkage, artificial intelligence and UK-wide comparability.

## Data sharing and data linkage

Last year's report highlighted the need for overcoming cultural and technical barriers to data sharing and linkage. The data sharing, access and linkage landscape continues to be marked with welcome pockets of innovation and progress. Nonetheless, the overall story of data sharing and linkage remains one of individual successes, rather than a coherent and consistent delivery of improvements in access to, and joining up of, government data. This, alongside an ongoing lack of strategic direction and resource allocation, is leading to a failure to realise data's full potential to fuel policy innovation and socio-economic development. Nonetheless, there are many parts of the statistical system with ambition for this important area of innovation and development. We recognise that comprehensive, safe and sustained data sharing and linkage for the public good cannot be achieved by statistics producers alone and requires other partners.

Many of the challenges and barriers which have limited recent progress in this area were highlighted in our follow-up report, [Data Sharing and Linkage for the Public Good](#), which was published in July 2024. A year on, the issues remain largely the same.

At the heart of these challenges are the perceived risks of sharing data for data owners, which can seem greater than the perceived benefits which may accrue to other departments or policy makers beyond the statistical system. As a result of this imbalance, despite positive statements about the importance of sharing data from ministers and senior civil servants, there can be inertia and a lack of strategic leadership, inhibiting further progress. The inactivity in this area is compounded by the practical challenges around the process, technical and funding sides of sharing. The positive examples that we do see are often resource-intensive to achieve.

These challenges may have been a factor in the ONS's [Integrated Data Service](#) (IDS) not being able to fully deliver on its ambition to dramatically increase the number of linked datasets available to analysts across government and accredited researchers outside of government. In the ONS [Strategic Business Plan: April 2025 to March 2026](#), ONS set out its prioritisation of resources with a greater emphasis on core economic and population statistics. This change has an impact on resources for the IDS. Our understanding is that the IDS will no longer support government-wide analysis, but will continue to support ONS's production of statistics. As these changes take place, we will focus our attention on ensuring continued access for external researchers through the Secure Research Service. Making linked data available in a secure way to external researchers is one of the most significant ways in which the ONS can continue to support improved data sharing and linkage.

Despite this mixed strategic landscape, the potential for significant progress remains, and ambitious examples of data sharing and powerful use cases have provided important insight over the last year:

- The Ministry of Justice (MoJ)'s cross-government [Better Outcomes through Linked Data \(BOLD\)](#) programme continues to demonstrate how system-level

developments can directly improve outcomes for the public, with recent advances in sharing data for linked analysis to inform evidence in multiple departments. This includes the Department of Health and Social Care beginning to publish new [drug and alcohol treatments for victims and suspects of homicide statistics](#) in collaboration with the Home Office.

- The [ONS Research Excellence Awards 2025](#) offer examples of impactful work made possible by sharing and linking data, including through the ONS's Integrated Data Service (IDS).
- In March 2024 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published initial illustrative data in its [Family Resources Survey Transformation: integrating administrative data into the FRS](#) publication to demonstrate the value of linking to DWP benefits administrative data.
- The DWP, the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England and ONS have also been bringing together labour market, census and health data to understand the impact of health on the economy; resulting publications include [The impact of bariatric surgery on monthly employee pay and employee status, England](#) and [The impact of NHS Talking Therapies on monthly employee pay and employment status, England](#).
- The Home Office is making continued progress in data sharing with ONS to collaborate on new long-term migration statistics.
- Some departments are also making welcome improvements to their data sharing services, such as by reducing the time it takes to access their data. The Department for Education (DfE) reduced the average turnaround time for data requests by 32% over 2024, despite receiving and processing a 36% increase in applications via the DfE Data Sharing Service.

More broadly, there is growing recognition of the need for the coordination of processes and sharing best practice. The Data Sharing Network of Experts (DSNE) and the [Data Linkage Champion Network](#) continue to be positive initiatives for knowledge sharing and problem solving, demonstrating the importance of a community-wide approach to overcoming barriers. The new [GSS strategic vision](#) has also set out the case for “increased leadership to influence data sharing”, one outcome of which has already been a knowledge sharing network for methodological expertise among Heads of Profession and their departments. The Scottish Government has used its experience of data sharing partnerships with UK Government departments to share best practice and build new technical solutions to transfer data securely from DWP and HMRC, with a focus on eradicating child poverty. The case for optimism was made in OSR's post on the [growing bottom-up drive](#) to make better use of datasets in specific policy areas.

Beyond central government, the number of use cases showing the real-world impact of access to data and linked datasets has notably increased. The 2023/24 [ADR UK impact report](#), published in September 2024, shows how the analysis of linked data has fed directly into policy development across multiple thematic areas, demonstrating the benefits of extending the reach of data beyond government to academic research communities.

Of note, ADR Wales led the development of a reproducible analytical pipeline for transferring data from the Welsh Government into the [SAIL Databank](#). This innovation

has streamlined data preparation and transfer processes, resulting in the availability of higher-quality administrative data for research purposes. In Northern Ireland, the [Longitudinal Education Outcomes](#) initiative with ADR NI continues to make new data available for research through its linked, de-identified database.

The research community's approach to data sharing initiatives continues to benefit from the work of the [Public Engagement in Data Research Initiative](#) on social licence. This increasing maturity and UK-wide facilitation has been reflected in UK Government programmes, such as the [MoJ's Data First](#).

Looking to the future, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is working on a National Data Library, which it hopes can provide a central coordinating mechanism for data sharing and access, while the government's missions and the [Plan for Change](#) provide a powerful user need for data that are joined up across departments.

Recent events like OSR's May 2025 seminar for government analysts on data linkage demonstrated the ongoing need for education and positive use case proliferation to spread understanding about data sharing, access and linkage beyond the statistical system and across all areas of government. In addition to the statisticians, there needs to be more widespread recognition that analysts and chief data officers in data-holding organisations have crucial roles to play in facilitating and embedding effective and safe sharing. The UK Statistics Assembly identified the need to accelerate and improve the capacity for the linkage of data as a common theme of feedback from the statistics community.

Insightful analysis can be undertaken when cultural and technical barriers to data sharing, access and linkage are overcome, driving significant and impactful improvements to people's lives and society from both within and outside government. Sharing and linking data provides greater insights into society and the economy, enabling policy development and stimulating innovation, and is vital for socio-economic development.

A key ambition of [NISRA's Corporate Plan 2025-2029](#) is to work with data owners to mobilise more administrative data and develop new linked datasets that support joined-up policy making. A new cross-departmental data forum is being established to advance cross-government analysis, consider a new Data Strategy for the Northern Ireland Civil Service which outlines future data mobilisation needs, and recommend the legislative changes needed to deliver this vision.

We want to see partners, both within the statistical system and beyond, continuing to review and implement the recommendations set out in our [2024 Data Sharing and Linkage for the Public Good: Follow-Up Report](#). We recognise that comprehensive, safe and sustained data sharing and linkage for the public good cannot be achieved by statistics producers alone but requires strategic leadership and the buy-in of the wider data ecosystem. Through our regulatory and systemic work, we will continue to advocate for the six 'enablers for change' outlined in our publication [How government can make more data available for research and statistics in 2025](#). Our commitment is also reflected in the proposals for our revised Code of Practice for Statistics, which contains a new practice relating to social acceptability for data and statistics, alongside practices relating to enabling data re-use and linkage. OSR will continue to seek opportunities to influence, contribute to and collaborate with partners within and outside government to enhance the public good of data and statistics through enhanced data sharing, access and linkage. We want to minimise missed opportunities

for data use and ensure the benefits are fully realised, while upholding public confidence in secure and ethical data sharing.

## Artificial intelligence (AI)

There continues to be considerable discussion about the potential and realised use of AI in producing and communicating official statistics. This is especially true at the international level. The recent [UNECE Generative AI and Official Statistics Workshop](#) showcased a wide range of examples of national statistics offices using AI, including to make official statistics more discoverable and accessible, to improve the efficiency of statistical report writing, to improve survey data quality and for automatic coding. Within our own statistical system, OSR is starting to hear of producers exploring specific use cases of AI, such as to enhance the quality of survey response classification, and to support summarising and drafting text.

It is positive to see AI starting to be used in official statistics; however, there are still risks to using AI, which could impact on the trustworthiness, quality and value of official statistics. If not effectively mitigated, these risks (as explored in our [2024 blog](#)) will impact the ability of official statistics to deliver public good and to inspire public confidence.

Many organisations have developed guidance on how AI should be used, which statistical producers should use to guide their own use of AI. Of particular significance are the [AI Playbook for the UK Government](#), which offers guidance on using AI safely, effectively and securely for people working in government organisations; a white paper, [Large Language Models in Official Statistics](#), published by the UNECE; and the [Guidance on the Impact Evaluation of AI Interventions](#), published by the Evaluation Task Force. Many government organisations also have their own internal AI principles and policies.

What has not yet emerged is a single overall view of how much AI is currently being used, or could be used, across the statistical system, or clear leadership to translate and implement existing AI guidance for use within the UK statistical system. It is encouraging to see the ambition to implement a focus on the use of AI in statistics in the new [GSS strategic vision](#), which was published in 2024. Having a stronger network across the GSS for discussing methodological expertise, which has already been established as part of the new vision, should help improve collective knowledge and share best practice.

OSR has a role to play here too. The Code of Practice for Statistics can be used to help ensure the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced using AI. Our [Guidance for Models](#) explains how the framework of the Code helps in designing, developing and using statistical models. Given the recent rapid developments of AI and feedback from our recent consultation on the Code, we are planning more-specific guidance on how to use AI in line with the Code.

The use of AI brings opportunities but also risks. The understanding of how AI can be used in a reliable, transparent way which supports public confidence is still evolving. The statistical system needs to be equipped to respond to the needs and questions that arise in this area to adopt AI in a responsible way that enhances the trustworthiness, quality and value of official statistics.

The potential future benefits of AI use in official statistics are significant, and we expect this to be a growing area of interest for the system. We would like to see producers

exploring the possibility of using AI in official statistics in a transparent, responsible and collaborative way, drawing on existing guidance.

We will engage with producers to support innovation and best practice in this area. We intend to develop guidance on using AI in line with the Code, working collaboratively with producers and learning from other regulators in different sectors.

## UK-wide comparability

In June 2025 [we published a systemic review](#) which looked at the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data. Though statistical producers have done good work in this area, the comparability of statistics across the UK has long been a challenge in the UK statistical system. In many ways this challenge is a consequence of the UK political and [statistical system](#), where responsibility for policy, data collection, analysis and evaluation is devolved to different levels. We want our review to help the UK statistical system to address the persistent challenges in delivering UK-wide comparable statistics on priority topics, such as on health and education outcomes.

Our review responds to recommendations from the [Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee](#) in 2024 and the [Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority](#), which both highlighted the difficulties in comparing the experiences and outcomes of citizens across different parts of the UK. Additionally, the UK Statistics Assembly held in January 2025 highlighted the importance of the statistical system recognising the need for UK-wide statistics and [recorded this as a high priority](#).

To address these challenges, we have proposed a comparability framework to help the UK statistical system better understand where data comparability issues exist and prioritise resources to develop statistics where comparability should be improved. In addition, we have made four key recommendations for the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to facilitate a step change in delivering UK-wide comparable statistics on priority topics. The recommendations focus on reviewing legal frameworks for data sharing, engaging with users, reviewing governance and seeking cross-UK political commitments to adequately finance meaningfully comparable statistics at national, regional and local levels.

Given the long-running and complex nature of this issue, our recommendations are challenging and will require careful thought and oversight to successfully deliver. But in our view, they are all necessary to drive the changes needed to address the issues highlighted in recent reviews and, importantly, meet the needs of statistics users.

## Recommendations

We want to see partners, both within the statistical system and beyond, continue to review and implement the recommendations to improve on data sharing and data linkage set out in our [2024 follow-on report](#).

We encourage producers to explore the potential of using AI in official statistics in a transparent, responsible and collaborative way, drawing on existing guidance. We recognise our role in supporting innovation and best practice in this area, including by developing guidance on using AI in line with the Code.

We want the GSS to act on our comparability review, which provides a clear framework to help the UK statistical system meet user needs for comparable statistics

across the UK. While our recommendations are challenging, they are necessary to drive the changes needed to address longstanding issues.



# Communicating statistics

This section shares our current views on embedding intelligent transparency, our flagship public campaign, as the norm, and provides examples of good communications, focusing on the communication of core statistical outputs and uncertainty.

## Embedding intelligent transparency

Statistics and data should serve the public good. They should allow individuals to reach informed decisions, answer important questions and provide a mechanism for holding government to account. Statistics and data also underpin the successful implementation of government policies, and individuals' views on the effectiveness of policy decisions.

In last year's report, we outlined how we wanted the government to bolster public confidence in its use of analytical evidence in the public domain by adopting an open, clear and accessible approach to the release and use of data and statistics. Our overarching ambition is that when data and statistics are used publicly to inform parliaments, the media and the public, they are made available to everyone and published with appropriate explanation of the context and sources.

Transparency and clarity support public confidence in statistics and the organisations that produce them and minimise the risk of the misinterpretation of statistics and data. To support this aim, since 2022, OSR has promoted the principles of intelligent transparency – equality of access, enhancing understanding and independent decision making and leadership – through both its regulatory activities and wide-ranging engagement across government.

Over the last year, our work in this area has continued at pace. Ahead of the 2024 UK General Election, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Robert Chote, clearly set out our expectations for intelligent transparency in his [letter to political party leaders](#). In October 2024, we published a blog on [embedding the habit of intelligent transparency](#), looking at the importance of the concept for governments across the UK and reflecting on our work in this area to date. The Scottish Government has been particularly proactive and has established a group of intelligent transparency champions across different departments and agencies to be a point of contact between the Office of the Chief Statistician and analytical areas. Central government departments have also responded well to this initiative; for example, the Department for Education has targeted internal guidance to reinforce intelligent transparency in relation to the increasing publication of management information.

The issues highlighted through our [casework function](#) have been key to refining our approach to intelligent transparency, and in 2024/25 we made several interventions to uphold the principles of intelligent transparency with regard to the cases we investigated.

In February 2025, we applied the principle of independent decision making and leadership to our casework regarding the Scottish Health and Wellbeing Census. Our [public letter](#) requested assurance on the processes and governance within the Scottish Government regarding the independence of Scotland's Chief Statistician. The Chief Statistician subsequently [wrote to us](#) on 3 March to reassure OSR that the



importance of independent decision making around statistics is fully recognised across the Scottish Government.

Separately, in March 2025, we [publicly intervened](#) to challenge the misleading use of a figure by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in a press release on Universal Credit. After applying the principle of enhancing understanding, the department corrected the press release, with the DWP also committing to involve statisticians at all stages when communicating official statistics. Further examples from our casework are highlighted in our [Annual Review of Casework: 2024/25](#), which was published in June 2025.

Although there is now a greater understanding of the need for transparency among producers, analysts and the statistical system, more work is needed to fully embed the principles of intelligent transparency consistently across government. Among the projects being undertaken by OSR to support this aim are:

- an ongoing review of intelligent transparency within ministerial departments and devolved governments. We intend to report on how well the principles are embedded in these areas of government, what risks and challenges are being presented and positive case studies. We hope to publish our high-level findings in autumn 2025.
- research on the feasibility of producing intelligent transparency ‘report cards’ for public bodies, building on a recommendation in PACAC’s 2024 report, [Transforming the UK’s Evidence Base](#). This has involved looking into how other organisations measure compliance using score cards.
- ongoing engagement with external stakeholders, producers, departments and other partners to deliver training sessions and seminars on intelligence transparency.

Most importantly, OSR is embedding the principles of intelligent transparency in the Code of Practice for Statistics as part of our 2025 revision of the Code. This work is ongoing at the time of publication; we are currently engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including senior statisticians and policy professionals, on the proposed additions. Once finalised, the standards will become the basis for our wider work on intelligent transparency, providing a strong tool for implementing and regulating the concept.

More broadly, we recognise that the wider landscape in which statistics and data are used is continually evolving. We reflected on these changes and the implications for OSR in a recent think piece, [Reflecting on the role of statistics and OSR in an evolving public sphere](#), which was developed with the help of several external philosophers. This work will complement the development of intelligent transparency and our research on [how official statistics shape personal decisions](#) to improve the knowledge base on the statistical user landscape.

We want the principles of intelligent transparency to become the norm across all of government. Statistics producers have an important role in helping to achieve this aim and will be bolstered by intelligent transparency being a core element of the revised Code of Practice. Beyond the Code, we will continue to raise the profile of intelligent transparency with senior leaders, policy and operational professionals, and communication teams.

By applying the principles of intelligent transparency across government, we consider that public confidence in data, statistics and the public bodies which use them is supported. When the principles of equality of access, enhancing understanding and independent decision making and leadership are upheld, public conversations can focus on the important issues rather than the validity and transparency of the data. Ultimately, we believe that intelligent transparency supports democratic debate, sound decision making and a functioning public sphere.

## Communicating core statistical outputs and the associated uncertainty

Good communication is essential for statistics to be used and understood effectively. When good-quality statistics are communicated well, public good is increased, people make better data-based decisions, and confidence in the statistical system is enhanced. Our engagement with producers and organisations continues to reinforce the importance of giving attention to factors such as balance, data visualisation, overemphasis, the use of dashboards and technical language in the communication of uncertainty in statistical publications.

Many producers are demonstrating good practice in their routine publications. For example, the DWP employed the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data](#) (QAAD) framework to inform its users of survey data in the Family Resources Survey, making its findings on the strengths and limitations of the methodology clear in its [Quality Assessment Report](#). Separately, in October 2024, the Scottish Government published its [Agricultural Statistics Hub](#), transforming how agricultural data in Scotland are shared by bringing together datasets in one user-led, accessible platform. Statisticians in the Department for Culture, Media & Sport have told us they have developed their partnership with their communications team, writing an internal statistics communication strategy and making communication a key theme of its work for the coming year.

Over the last year, many statistics producers have proactively engaged with the issue of effectively communicating uncertainty.

In May 2025, we wrote about how effectively [communicating uncertainty in GDP](#) can benefit both the public and government decision-makers in a crucial area of government activity. We highlighted that by effectively communicating uncertainty, statistical producers can enhance trustworthiness and credibility.

Over the past year, we have been looking in detail at concerns raised with us on how well the gender identity census question in England and Wales was understood, and the effects of possible misinterpretations on the quality and usability of the gender identity data from the 2021 Census for England and Wales. [Our final report on gender identity data in the Census](#) was published in September 2024. We have endorsed ONS's decision to publish these statistics as official statistics in development rather than accredited official statistics. We also made recommendations for ONS to improve the guidance on the use of the census identity data, including providing more practical information to help users understand the uncertainty inherent in the data and how this affects their use and interpretation.

In March 2025, ONS published a new [research publication](#) providing additional guidance on the appropriate use of the gender identity estimates from Census 2021 in England and Wales and information on the uncertainty associated with them. The

publication includes example use cases at different levels of geography and population, and addresses likely anomalies and implausibilities. We consider that this additional information will support users to better understand the uncertainty in the gender identity census data and its implications for use, and [we wrote to ONS](#) setting out the details of why we consider that our recommendations related to guidance for use of the census gender identity statistic are now actioned.

An important part of our work over the coming year will be giving consideration to what new training should be offered within the GSS, particularly to communications professionals, while also seeking to embed good practice. To help highlight positive examples, we have been developing a series of case studies which aim to support statistics producers around various aspects of managing and communicating uncertainty. These include [Effectively Communicating Uncertainty in GDP](#) and [Communicating uncertainty for Scotland's Census 2022](#)

We are also working with the Durham University academic network to explore how statistics are communicated to different audiences for different purposes – a core consideration of effective communication. This summer, we intend to publish our guidance on producing dashboards in line with the principles of the Code, building on positive liaison with the GSS presentation champions. Our aim is to bring this work together in a new OSR webpage on communicating uncertainty, which will signpost relevant guidance, blogs and case studies.

The role of management information (MI) in the communication of government information has been an important area of OSR's regulatory work over the last year. In January 2024, [we published guidance for statistics producers](#) on the essential characteristics of official statistics and MI and what separates the two. Departments often release operational data (management information) to provide transparency about their services and delivery. The data collected are representative of the systems involved and present important indicators of interest to the organisation. MI can fill a gap by providing statistics on progress towards a specific policy. Statistics published as MI do not need to follow the Code of Practice for Statistics; however, producers are encouraged to voluntarily adopt the Code. With the data needs of the government missions, we expect that MI may become more commonplace as part of the evidence base published by departments. Like with official statistics, we expect MI publications to note limitations and quality concerns to enable their appropriate use, especially given their potential as gauges for government ambitions.

From our interactions with departments who produce MI, we have been impressed with the commitment to ensuring MI publications meet many aspects of the Code, including standards related to the communication of statistics. While MI has a role in aiding transparency, we encourage producers to ensure that the publication of MI is done appropriately. MI should not replace official statistics as the primary source of public statistics published by government.

We want to see the Cabinet Office work with statistics producers to support understanding of the government's missions, whilst also ensuring that best practice on the communication of quality and uncertainty continues to be shared across government. Statistics producers should aim to use the most effective and transparent ways of communicating statistics, noting the benefits to both producers and users of statistics.

## Recommendations

We want the principles of intelligent transparency – equality of access, enhancing understanding and independent decision making and leadership – to become the norm across the statistical system and all areas of government.

We want to see producers proactively considering how intelligent transparency can be implemented and embedded, including through engagement with senior leaders, operational departments and communication teams beyond the statistical system whenever necessary.

Further training on communicating uncertainty in statistics should be delivered by the GSS, to complement producers sharing best practice on the communication of quality. The statistical system will be supported in these actions through the revised Code of Practice, which will continue to be at the core of OSR's regulatory approach.

# Annex A – More information on survey response rates

This annex shares response rates for a selection of key statistical surveys. It aims to illustrate response rates across the UK from a range of surveys and producers, highlighting the declining trend in household survey response rates.

- Each of the surveys listed below will have its own specific caveats and may have undergone changes in method that impact their measured response rates. For example, in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the introduction of national lockdown restrictions, many surveys changed their fieldwork operations for the 2020 to 2021 period.
- From April 2020, and for the whole of the 2020 to 2021 survey year, most data collection was conducted by telephone instead of face to face. This shift in mode of interview was accompanied by a substantial reduction in the number of interviews achieved. Other surveys were suspended during the same period, carried out for different lengths of time, or experienced other method changes.
- Readers must refer to the original sources for each listed survey response rate to gain a detailed understanding, and prior to replicating or making use of the information provided in this annex.

## Office for National Statistics

### Labour Force Survey, total response rate, Quarter 1 (January to March) – Office for National Statistics

2020 Q1 – 36.2%  
2021 Q1 – 23.6%  
2022 Q1 – 22.6%  
2023 Q1 – 16.9%  
2024 Q1 – 16.7%  
2025 Q1 – 21.3%

[Labour Force Survey performance and quality monitoring report: January to March 2025 – Office for National Statistics](#)

### Living Costs and Food Survey – Office for National Statistics

2017/18 – 43%  
2018/19 – 43%  
2019/20 – 40%  
2020/21 – 24%  
2021/22 – 27%  
2022/23 – 22%

[Living Costs and Food Survey: technical report data tables – Office for National Statistics](#)

## Crime Survey for England and Wales – Office for National Statistics

2018/19 – 70%  
2019/20 – 64%  
2020/21 – suspended (COVID-19)  
2021/22 – suspended (COVID-19)  
2022/23 – 42%  
2023/24 – 46% (provisional)

[Crime Survey for England and Wales data quality review: June 2024 – Office for National Statistics](#)

## Wealth and Assets Survey – Office for National Statistics

Wave 5 (2014-16) – 65%  
Round 6 (2016-18) – 63%  
Round 7 (2018-20) – 58%  
Round 8 (2020-22) – 41%

[Wealth and Assets Survey QMI – Office for National Statistics](#)

## UK Government departments

### Health Survey for England – NHS England

2017 – 60%  
2018 – 59%  
2019 – 60%  
2020 – suspended  
2021 – 32%  
2022 – 36%

[Health Survey for England – NHS England Digital](#)

### National Travel Survey – Department for Transport

2019 – 54%  
2020 – 16%  
2021 – 38%  
2022 – 31%  
2023 – 32%

[NTS 2023: Quality report – GOV.UK](#)

### Family Resources Survey – Department for Work and Pensions

2018/19 – 50%  
2019/20 – 49%  
2020/21 – 23%  
2021/22 – 26%  
2022/23 – 28%  
2023/24 – 32%

[Family Resources Survey – GOV.UK](#)



## Scottish Government

### Scottish Household Survey – Scottish Government

2018 – 64%

2019 – 63%

2020 – not applicable

2021 – not applicable

2022 – 44%

2023 – 46%

[Scottish Household Survey 2023 – methodology and fieldwork outcomes – gov.scot](#)

### Scottish Health Survey – Scottish Government

2018 – 57%

2019 – 56%

2020 – telephone only

2021 – 31% (part sample approach)

2022 – 38%

2023 – 42%

[Scottish Health Survey – gov.scot](#)

### Scottish Crime and Justice Survey – Scottish Government

2018/19 – 63%

2019/20 – 63%

2020/21 – no survey carried out due to COVID-19

2021/22 – 47%

2022/23 – no survey carried out

2023/24 – 46%

[Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2023/24 Technical Report](#)

## Welsh Government

### National Survey for Wales – Welsh Government

2018/19 – 54.2%

2019/20 – 55.7%

2020/21 – 58.4%

2021/22 – 41.8%

2022/23 – 38.3%

[National Survey for Wales: technical information | GOV.WALES](#)

## Northern Ireland

### Labour Force Survey (NI), Quarter 1 (January to March) – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Q1 2019 – 69.9%

Q1 2020 – 65.8%

Q1 2021 – 21.1%

Q1 2022 – 33.3%

Q1 2023 – 48.0%

Q1 2024 – 36.1%

Q1 2025 – 30.9%

[Labour Market Report – Historical | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

### Northern Ireland Health Survey – Department of Health (NI)

2018/19 – 53%

2019/20 – 59%

2020/21 – 18%

2021/22 – 47%

2022/23 – 56%

2023/24 – 53%

[Health Survey \(NI\): First Results 2023/24 | The Northern Ireland Executive](#)

### Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey – Department of Justice (NI)

2019/20 – 56%

2020/21 (NI Safe Community Telephone Survey) – 15%

2021/22 (NI Safe Community Telephone Survey) – 40%

2022/23 (NI Safe Community Telephone Survey) – 49%

2023/24 (NI Safe Community Telephone Survey) – 49%

[Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey | Department of Justice](#)