



ONS reports on progress with economic statistics, December 2025: OSR response

January 2026



Office for
Statistics Regulation

The Office for Statistics Regulation

Statistics should serve everyone, helping enhance knowledge about every section of society and the economy, and people's place within them.

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) provides independent regulation of official statistics produced in the UK. Official statistics are statistics produced by Crown bodies and other organisations listed within an [Official Statistics Order](#), on behalf of the UK Government or the devolved governments.

We aim to enhance public confidence in statistics produced by government by setting the standards that they must meet in [the Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers uphold these standards by conducting reviews of statistics against the **Code**. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

Overview

In July 2024 [we initiated a review](#) of economic statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). We published an [interim report](#) in April 2025, and a [final report](#) in November 2025. At our request, in December 2025, ONS published its first quarterly reports detailing its progress on its plans to improve key economic statistics. This report sets out our response and further recommendations.

Overall assessment

In assessing the progress set out in ONS's first quarterly progress reports, we have benefited from discussions with key stakeholders. We have also considered progress reported by ONS against recommendations made in previous OSR assessments of individual economic statistics.

OSR welcomes the evidence of early progress presented by ONS in its first quarterly reports and reflected in decisions on re-prioritisation in the autumn.

OSR judges that the first quarterly reports provides evidence that ONS is meeting the immediate requirements set out in the interim and final reports of our systemic review. The transparency shown in reporting and ONS's engagement with OSR and stakeholders demonstrates a positive cultural change in ONS senior leadership. However, the quality problems that ONS faces are both real and challenging to address, and the response programme remains very ambitious.

There have been early successes, including the resumption of regular publications of producer price statistics, restoration of response rates to the Labour Force Survey to near pre-pandemic levels and the publication of a successful Blue Book update. Alongside its cultural reset, ONS will need to ensure ongoing re-prioritisation, clarity and realism as it progresses delivery.

Some stakeholders have commented that in the past ONS has over-promised, and that in consequence timely delivery of the commitments made in its plans is vital to fully restore confidence.

OSR acknowledges the speed and transparency with which ONS has responded to recent errors. Stakeholders told OSR that they welcomed ONS's more transparent approach and that it was important that all users recognised that the transparent identification of errors and their rapid correction was an indication of an improving organisation rather than a sign of continuing failure.

Stakeholders also noted that some commentators fail to distinguish between errors and revisions, and that the latter are an inevitable feature of the production of timely and reliable statistics.

ONS's creation of a stakeholder engagement group has been widely welcomed, though stakeholders noted that it was too early to assess its effectiveness. In addition, stakeholders commented that it was vital that the new group did not displace working-level engagement, which has often been the most important route to ensuring that stakeholder needs were being met.

This report sets out further recommendations on additional steps that ONS can take to increase transparency on its progress. Given the comparatively short time between progress updates and our response, we expect ONS to iteratively implement these recommendations in the next two quarterly updates.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To increase the usefulness of updates for users, ONS should ensure future updates are more succinct, accessible and user focused.

Recommendation 2: ONS should make a more disaggregated analysis of the costs associated with each of its major outputs available in its business planning and prioritisation processes.

Recommendation 3: In its next update, ONS should provide further information on a prioritised programme of quality reviews, recruitment and retention and legacy systems.

Context and timeline

In July 2024 [we initiated a review](#) of economic statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). OSR launched the review in response to systemic issues identified within assessment reports we had undertaken on individual ONS economic statistics, including declining survey response rates, other quality issues and stakeholder concerns about similar issues.

We published an [interim report](#) in April 2025, and a [final report](#) in November 2025. At our request, in December 2025, ONS published its first quarterly reports detailing its progress on its plans to improve key economic statistics. This report sets out our response.

Our [interim report](#) concluded that ONS needed to take urgent action to rebuild trust in its core economic statistics and placed four immediate requirements on ONS. These requirements asked ONS to provide greater clarity about its core purpose, re-prioritise resources to reflect this, and take urgent steps to recover key surveys.

As OSR was progressing its systemic review, Sir Robert Devereux undertook a [review](#) into ONS's organisation and culture. Sir Robert's review judged that the problems with ONS's core economic statistics reflected issues with its organisation and culture, including ineffective prioritisation.

In response to the requirements from our interim report, and to the subsequent Devereux review recommendations, in June 2025 ONS published its [Plan for Economic Statistics](#) and [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#). These plans set out ONS's intention and planned steps to restore quality and confidence in its economic statistics.

The final report confirmed the findings of the interim report and judged that, while the initial steps that ONS had taken in response to the interim report represented good progress, more action was needed. The report also set out OSR's future approach to the regulation of ONS's economic statistics, including regular assessments of reports published by ONS demonstrating its progress.

In December 2025, ONS published its first planned quarterly reports on its progress in implementing its improvement plans. Alongside an overarching [strategic improvement update](#), ONS published reports on its progress implementing its [Plan for Economic Statistics](#) and [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#) since June 2025. It also published [The data that matter - a new approach to critical data sources for core statistics](#), outlining the principles, priorities and practical initiatives underpinning how data are sourced and used.

Monitoring progress

ONS's progress reports rely heavily on text and include only a brief overarching summary of progress against milestones identified in the original plans, rather than a comprehensive presentation.

The report of progress on the Plan for Economic Statistics notes that, of the 40 milestones planned for delivery in 2025/26, 5 have been delivered, 15 are on track, 15 are on track but face challenges, and 5 are at risk. It then discusses progress in individual output areas. A similar approach is taken in respect of the actions set out in the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan.

The original lists of milestones and actions were very lengthy and often referenced deadlines only in terms of "end of financial year". They included regular outputs (such as the Blue Book) and commitments that pre-date the new plans, as well as new developments. The milestones covered both major stakeholder-facing outputs and enabling actions.

Based on the published progress reports, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the extent to which progress is on track, of risks and contingencies, and – crucially – of the relative importance to users of specific delays or other changes to plans.

It would increase transparency if, in future reports, information on progress were summarised more succinctly. This summary could take the form of a straightforward table focused on user-facing outcomes, presented on a prioritised basis, and with "RAG" status identified. Reporting should include clear deadlines, be clear when deadlines change, and where appropriate provide an assessment of delivery risk.

Stakeholder views, including as expressed in the stakeholder engagement forum, should be reflected in the content and format of the progress summary.

Making such improvements to reporting could both increase transparency and reduce the burden associated with producing a quarterly report.

More generally, improvements to ONS's website should facilitate the monitoring of progress by improving the accessibility of new outputs (including progress reports). It would be helpful to include a date for all material published on the website, which is not currently always the case.

Recommendation 1: To increase the usefulness of updates for users, ONS should ensure future updates are more succinct, accessible and user focused.

Areas for further reporting

Our systemic review made two recommendations for longer-term action by ONS.

First, it recommended that ONS produce a more disaggregated analysis of the costs associated with each of its major outputs. This would facilitate more effective engagement with stakeholders on prioritisation (including during future meetings of the UK Statistics Assembly). It would also enable ONS to engage with stakeholders based on information about the relative costs of various outputs as well as the benefits. Without this, engagement risks delivering an un-prioritisable wish list that increases pressure on ONS to spread resources too thinly.

OSR recognises that providing detailed and accurate cost information for individual outputs is challenging, particularly as many costs, including those for key data sources, are shared across outcomes. However, they are an important component in enabling stakeholders and users to contribute their views to ONS's prioritisation discussions, enabling them to consider the opportunity costs alongside the benefits.

We expect to see such information included in ONS's forthcoming business plan as a foundation on which to build in subsequent business planning prioritisation.

Recommendation 2: ONS should make a more disaggregated analysis of the costs associated with each of its major outputs available in its business planning and prioritisation processes.

Second, OSR recommended that ONS should supplement its risk-based approach to quality assurance with a prioritised programme of quality reviews covering its key outputs. Future versions of the progress report should set out how ONS plans to respond to this recommendation. i

A key issue identified in the systemic review, and emphasised by stakeholders, is the risk posed to recovery by the recruitment and retention of expertise. While the progress report on the survey improvement plan refers to measures taken to improve the position in respect of interviewers, future progress reports should provide more evidence of progress on steps being taken to address recruitment and retention.

ONS has acknowledged that replacing legacy systems is key to delivering its plans. Future versions of the progress reports should include more information on the implementation of new systems across business areas, with associated dependencies and deadlines. Without this, stakeholders cannot assess whether ONS is addressing the root causes of its performance issues.

Finally, the data sources strategy, published alongside the plans, also responds to a recommendation from our systemic review. Publication of the strategy is welcome. The

strategy is presented at a high level, setting out broad principles and aspirations. Further information will be needed, in either an updated version of the strategy or future progress reports, on the specific plans for key outputs. These plans should provide a vision for how survey and administrative data will be used in an integrated way to improve delivery across key outputs and “roadmaps” setting out how this vision will be delivered.

Some recent problems have arisen through errors in administrative data supplied by other government departments, including a series of issues with data supplied by His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Leadership within the wider statistical system should consider whether there is need for stronger incentives on data suppliers to increase focus on the quality of data supplied, and if so, the best option for achieving this.

Recommendation 3: In its next update, ONS should provide further information on a prioritised programme of quality reviews, recruitment and retention and legacy systems.