

Update report of progress with
recommendations

Labour Force Survey Transformation

Statistics producer: Office for National Statistics
Report by: Office for Statistics Regulation

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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.

Compliance review

A compliance review is a review of any official statistics (or [accredited official statistics](#)) to establish the extent to which they meet the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value in the Code of Practice for Statistics. We might undertake a review with a view to accrediting a set of statistics (this type of compliance review is called an assessment), focus on a specific issue or involve a high-level check of ongoing compliance.

A range of factors determine the scope of and approach to a compliance review, including the type of statistics, their accreditation status, the producer history, the profile of the statistics and the reasons for initiating the review.

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Overview

At the time of this report, statistics from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) remain as official statistics in development.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s labour market overview is a compendium release, using a mix of administrative and survey sources for its estimates. The LFS remains the main source of data about the employment rate, the unemployment rate and the inactivity rate across the UK.

In February 2025, we published an [update report](#) on statistics from the LFS. We gave ONS twelve recommendations for how it can continue to support the transformation of the LFS into a new online survey.

Why we did this review

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has been periodically reviewing labour market statistics from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), as well as ONS's ongoing activity to transform the survey to include online data capture, the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).

Following our update report in 2025, we have continued to look at how ONS is progressing with the transformation of the LFS into two surveys. The first survey, to replace the LFS, is a quarterly online survey for households asking questions covering labour market topics, such as employment and unemployment. It is called the TLFS Core. The second survey, planned to replace the current Annual Population Survey (APS), is an annual online survey covering wider themes, such as socio-demographic information. It is called the TLFS Plus.

This current report reflects on ONS's progress so far and brings together feedback shared by users in autumn 2025 and spring 2026. As well as reviewing published material, to help us develop our judgements, we have been speaking to a range of users of these statistics and have observed user workshops. These user views are captured throughout this report. The users we spoke with included officials from UK central government departments and the devolved governments, researchers from think tanks and other public bodies. A list of [organisations we engaged with](#) can be found at the end of the report.

Highlighted findings

- ONS has improved its communication with users by publishing detailed updates about LFS quality and the development of the TLFS Core and Plus surveys. Users value these updates and the opportunities for engagement through various user groups and forums. Many APS users have noticed more engagement with them, especially recently, but some feel that the level of engagement is still not satisfactory.

- In its [April 2026 update](#), ONS set out the considerations it is discussing with stakeholders with regard to publishing experimental TLFS data. ONS also said that it will assess, in July 2026, when it is likely transition to the TLFS and has explained why it is considering 2027 as the most likely transition date. Many users emphasised that the online transition of the Labour Force Survey is just one step, and they appreciate that ONS's Plan for Economic Statistics covers the developments for labour market data more broadly.
- Dual-running the LFS and TLFS Core continues to strain resources, and ongoing methodological refinements and processing improvements need to be resolved before a full transition to the TLFS Core. ONS is undertaking work to assess the impact of the transition to online data, for example, discontinuities and mode effects, and will publish the results in future update articles.
- Whilst the achieved sample size for the LFS increased in 2025, leading to more-precise estimates at the UK level, the sample size does not yet support more-detailed regional or devolved analyses. Users also noted that sample attrition remains high and that some longitudinal series have experienced breaks. ONS is continuing to publish information about the quality of the estimates from the LFS.
- Risks remain around the development of coherent UK labour market estimates, given the divergence of work on the respective labour force surveys by ONS and the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency (NISRA). But an approach to maintain UK data outputs as NISRA transitions to its transformed survey has now been agreed.

Our judgement

ONS has fully met four of the twelve recommendations from our [2025 update report](#), and has partially met the remaining eight, as detailed in the section [Progress against recommendations](#). ONS has been increasing the response for the LFS and prioritising the design of the transformed survey. There has been encouraging progress in communication, engagement and development of the TLFS Core, and we recognise the effort invested in these areas.

There remain challenges to overcome in continuing to deliver the TLFS programme. Extended dual running of the LFS and TLFS continues to strain resources. ONS is focusing on ensuring that methodological and design developments are delivering improvements. To strengthen user confidence in the transition to the TLFS, ONS should publish a plan outlining broader user engagement and communication as it nears the transition and continue its work to overcome the remaining methodological and processing challenges, completing the [remaining recommendations](#) during 2026.

Next steps

ONS has agreed to continue to publicly report its progress through its quarterly [updates on progress and plans](#) for labour market transformation and updates on its [Economic statistics and surveys improvement](#) plans.

OSR will publish a report on NISRA's progress with its labour market statistics transformation.

Related links

[Statistics from the Labour Force Survey](#)

List of outstanding recommendations

- a) To ensure that the whole breadth of LFS and APS users can prepare for the change, ONS should publish a plan outlining broader user engagement and communication as it nears the transition.
- b) To ensure that the public can have confidence in using the statistics to make decisions and take actions, ONS should:
 - Release a comprehensive variable list for TLFS Core and Plus surveys, which should include an explanation of how the variables harmonise with LFS variables, and the frequency and coverage of each variable.
 - Publish an impact analysis on data discontinuities, explaining how TLFS Core estimates compare to the LFS estimates, the expected effects on time series and guidance for interpretation.
 - Make these documents easily accessible and signpost them from the TLFS landing page.
- c) To support APS users, ONS should continue to engage more fully with them to understand critical user needs and inform its future planning.
- d) To inform its quality assurance approach and promote public confidence in the data, ONS should publish its analyses on employment-related non-response and the LFS/TLFS Cross-over Survey, once they have concluded.
- e) To understand mode effects and inform the appropriate use of these statistics, ONS should share findings from the Cross-over Survey comparing LFS and TLFS Core responses, once the analysis has concluded.
- f) To ensure users can easily access the information needed to enable them to appropriately use these statistics, ONS should ensure clear navigation between the TLFS landing page and the labour market bulletins.
- g) To ensure that the public can have confidence in using the TLFS statistics to make decisions and take actions, ONS should clarify when it expects to finalise and publish its approach to TLFS weighting.
- h) To support trust in the statistics, and their acceptability amongst users, ONS should publish information about the level of quality of each success measure before transition.
- i) To improve user confidence, ONS should publish more detail about the delivery of coherent transformed UK labour market estimates, once the plans have been finalised.

Context

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the main household survey used to produce official estimates of the UK labour market. In 2023, persistent low response rates raised concerns about the representativeness and reliability of the LFS, leading ONS to temporarily suspend the production of LFS-based estimates.

In response to these challenges, ONS has been transforming the LFS through the development of the TLFS, an online-first survey designed to modernise labour market data collection and improve resilience, inclusivity and efficiency. ONS has continued to operate the LFS while simultaneously developing and dual-running the TLFS to allow detailed quality comparisons.

The design of the TLFS separates the original LFS into two components: the TFLS Core and TFLS Plus. The TLFS Core is a streamlined longitudinal survey focused on priority labour market variables, such as employment status and hours worked, with a target completion time of around 15 minutes. The TLFS Plus is a larger cross-sectional survey collecting wider socioeconomic and local information, with a quarterly sample of around 90,000 households. Both surveys follow an online-first, multimode approach, with targeted telephone or face-to-face follow-up to support participation by digitally excluded or hard-to-reach groups.

OSR has been reviewing labour market statistics from the LFS and the development of the TLFS on an ongoing basis. In February 2025, OSR published an [update report](#) on statistics from the LFS, setting out twelve recommendations to support the transformation programme. The report consolidated OSR's judgements across both the LFS and TLFS. ONS has fully met four of the twelve recommendations and partially met the remaining eight, as detailed below.

As ONS approaches a formal readiness assessment scheduled for July 2026, this report reflects on ONS's progress against the remaining recommendations and brings together feedback shared by users in autumn 2025 and spring 2026. These user views are captured throughout this report.

Progress against 2025 recommendations

This section provides detail about ONS's progress. It is framed around the twelve recommendations from our 2025 [update report](#).

To support user confidence in the programme, ONS should publish more detail about the plans to transition to the TLFS by April 2025, including a consideration of whether routine data from the TLFS could be published prior to the transition.

- Actions taken by ONS: Since we released our update report, ONS has published a [series of updates](#) on its progress and plans in April, July and November 2025 and April 2026 detailing the design, timelines and readiness criteria for the TLFS. The updates discuss achievements and set out some of the design and method complexities that are still to be overcome, for example, ensuring the accuracy of self-reported industry and occupational classifications. The [April 2026](#) update discusses in detail the considerations about data publication, and notes that ONS will publish a comprehensive plan setting out the timetable for releasing data and supporting materials, including documentation on survey design and methods, crossover survey results and accompanying datasets.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Met. The recommendation aims to maintain user confidence through transparency and early data sharing. ONS has been transparent about the issues in the balance regarding sharing TLFS data in the public interest.

ONS should set out its plans for regular reporting on the progress of the interim action plan (from the lessons learnt exercise) by April 2025.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS set out plans from the [lessons learnt review](#) in its [April 2025 update on progress](#). The [July 2025 update on progress](#) notes the strategies ONS published in response to the recommendations for improvement set out in OSR's [Systemic Review of ONS Economic Statistics](#) and the [Devereux Review](#).
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Met. ONS has reported on the lessons learnt and actions for improvement in its TLFS updates on progress and plans. ONS also regularly reports progress with its economic statistics programme through its [Economic Statistics Plan](#) and its [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#) updates.

To support trust in the statistics, and their acceptability amongst users, ONS should continue to widen its engagement and publish updated stakeholder engagement plans by April 2025.

- Actions taken by ONS: At the start of the transition programme, ONS prioritised the development of labour market variables with users. ONS has since widened its engagement over 2025, using technical groups, advisory panels and workshops. ONS has commenced a Household, Socioeconomic and Local (HSL) technical group to focus on the development of non-labour market variables using the TLFS Plus. ONS also invites users to contact the teams in its quarterly updates on progress.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. In its quarterly updates, ONS discusses how users participate in shaping the transition programme and how their views are considered, but has not yet published a plan outlining broader user engagement and communication as it nears the transition.
- Further action required: To ensure that the whole breadth of LFS and APS users can prepare for the change, ONS should publish a plan outlining broader user engagement and communication as it nears the transition.

ONS should publish adequate information on finalised variables and questions (including harmonisation and frequency and coverage of TLFS variables) for the TLFS and its analysis of data discontinuities, explaining any impact on time series.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS has developed a [suite of guidance for users](#), including a variable mapper document and some technical design details for the TLFS. ONS has progressed with making changes to the TLFS design, followed by developing the estimation methods. ONS told us it will communicate the methodological details once they have been quality assured and agreed. As noted in its July 2025 update on progress, ONS also launched the LFS/TLFS Cross-over Survey in July 2025 to formally assess discontinuities, with further data collection in autumn 2025, and has yet to report its findings. The Cross-over Survey is a piece of research to provide comparisons between results of the LFS and the TLFS Core.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Work is in progress, but detailed information is not yet available due to the change in the survey design being the priority. ONS has shared some methodological details, and progress is evident, but details are pending about the harmonisation of variables, the frequency and coverage of TLFS variables and an analysis of data discontinuities. This information is critical to enable users to understand comparability between the LFS and the TLFS Core.

- Further action required: To ensure that the public can have confidence in using the statistics to make decisions and take actions, ONS should:
 - Release a comprehensive variable list for the TLFS Core and Plus surveys, which should include an explanation of how the variables harmonise with LFS variables, and the frequency and coverage of each variable.
 - Publish an impact analysis on data discontinuities, explaining how TLFS Core estimates compare to the LFS estimates, the expected effects on time series and guidance for interpretation.
 - Make these documents easily accessible and signpost them from the TLFS landing page.

ONS should continue to support user needs for the Annual Population Survey data and publish timescales about the future availability of datasets by May 2025.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS has been providing regular updates on progress and plans, including developments with the APS. ONS has involved APS users in forums and workshops that discuss the development of the TLFS Plus survey. In February 2026, ONS published a [letter](#) explaining its plans for the APS, communicating funding changes and expressing plans to address user needs using the TLFS Plus. In its April 2026 update on progress, ONS indicated that it would be publishing an article about the quality of APS data in 2026, and plans to publish timescales about the future availability of APS datasets following the July readiness assessment.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. ONS is engaging with APS users to ensure their needs will be met by the TLFS survey. Some stakeholders feel well informed, but others have reported ongoing gaps in forward plans, being less confident that their needs will be met in future and that they would appreciate more bilateral engagement around the development of the TLFS Plus.
- Further action required: To support APS users, ONS should continue to engage more fully with them to understand critical user needs, the gaps in users' knowledge and inform its future planning.

ONS should explain how it is triangulating the TLFS data with other data sources as part of the quality assurance process, provide users with regular updates on progress and include its high-level plan for the next phase of work.

- Actions taken by ONS: In April 2025, ONS announced plans to compare pilot TLFS data with administrative data to understand potential employment-related non-response in the LFS.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. ONS updates users about its progress and plans at workshops, in quarterly articles and by involving them in various formal groups. Analyses are still ongoing, and the results of the research noted above have yet to be published.
- Further action required: To inform its quality assurance approach and promote public confidence in the data, ONS should publish its analyses on employment-related non-response and the LFS/TLFS Cross-over Survey, once they have concluded.

ONS should publish its analysis of mode effects on the TLFS.

- Actions taken by ONS: In April 2025, ONS published the [findings from the TLFS technical design review](#). It is evaluating the results of the LFS/TLFS Cross-over Survey.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. Transparency about the TLFS programme is improving, but analyses are still underway. These will be essential for understanding survey comparability and bias. ONS has published the findings from the review of the TLFS's technical design, but results from the TLFS/LFS Cross-over Survey are not yet available. These will be helpful to understand how the survey mode influences responses to the TLFS Core.
- Further action required: To understand mode effects and inform the appropriate use of these statistics, ONS should share findings from the Cross-over Survey comparing LFS and TLFS Core responses, once the analysis has concluded.

When publishing the methodological information, ONS should ensure that all relevant technical papers are accessible and well signposted.

- Actions taken by ONS: The technical design article has been signposted from the TLFS updates and LFS bulletin. ONS has created a new [landing page](#) for the transformation to bring links all into one place. ONS is developing its website and reviewing the labour market outputs to improve accessibility.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. ONS has improved signposting on its website, including through a new

landing page. Accessibility is improving, but ONS should ensure all future articles are linked and can be easily found by users.

- Further action required: To ensure that users can easily access the information needed to enable them to appropriately use these statistics, ONS should ensure clear navigation between the TLFS landing page and the labour market bulletins.

ONS should publish information about the final TLFS weighting methodology.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS has published some information about the weighting approach it is planning to take.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but information is not yet available due to the change in the survey design being prioritised. In its [November 2025 update on progress](#), ONS published some information about the approach it is planning to take to deal with missing data, involving imputation and weighting, but has not yet indicated a date when the full weighting methodology might be available.
- Further action required: To ensure that the public can have confidence in using the TLFS statistics to make decisions and take actions, ONS should clarify when it expects to finalise and publish its approach to TLFS weighting.

ONS should continue to examine the accuracy of estimates from the LFS and publish details about the causes of uncertainty and bias to assist appropriate use of the data alongside its bulletin in May 2025.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS has published [quality reports](#) and includes an analysis of current LFS bias in its [labour market overview bulletins](#). In June 2025 and February 2026, ONS published a [dataset of the LFS sampling variability](#), illustrating the level of uncertainty around key survey estimates.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Met. ONS has published evidence of LFS quality monitoring.

ONS should set out the detailed principles and readiness criteria it will consider in making further LFS improvements and deciding to transition to the TLFS by April 2025. This should include a greater level of detail around how statistical and data quality will be measured, what is good enough and how different perspectives will be managed.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS's [April 2025 update on progress](#) mentions that it is refining a set of quality criteria which will form part of the TLFS transition readiness assessments. In its April 2026 update on progress, ONS noted that it has engaged with its expert users to develop and ratify the criteria and conditions for transitioning to the TLFS. In this update, ONS provided detailed measures of success, based around statistical and data quality, operational readiness and user confidence and readiness.
- OSR's evaluation of evidence: Partially met. Much work is in progress, but gaps remain. Although ONS has published the detailed measures of success, and how it is continuing to manage user views through the readiness assessments, it has not provided specifics on what level of quality is good enough – for example, in terms of precision or achieved sample size.
- Further action required: To support trust in the statistics, and their acceptability amongst users, ONS should publish information about what level of quality is expected for each success measure before the transition, once they are finalised.

ONS should publish details about the impact of LFS household survey interviewer resource allocations on other household survey instruments and their outputs by July 2025.

- Actions taken by ONS: ONS has published its Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan and an update on progress. On 27 June 2025, ONS published its plans for surveys. Section 6, [Annex 1](#) to the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics includes detail about the various household and business surveys that are used to compile economic statistics, and the improvements that will be made to each. The plan and annex allow users to judge the sequence of investment and the quality targets that each survey is trying to achieve.
- OSR evaluation of evidence: Met. ONS [reported on progress](#) with the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan in December 2025 and has committed to reporting on progress quarterly.

UK data coherence

While progress has been made around developing coherent UK labour market estimates, risks remain, given the divergence of work on the respective labour force surveys by ONS and the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency (NISRA). In parallel to ONS transforming the LFS for Great Britain, NISRA is transforming its labour force survey in Northern Ireland, by developing a shorter Labour Market Survey (LMS). Users told us that they were concerned about UK comparability, the availability of UK-level estimates and stressed the importance of this. Currently, ONS and NISRA plan to transition to their respective online surveys at separate times.

ONS is working collaboratively with NISRA to ensure that user needs are met and to overcome these challenges. NISRA and ONS have presented together on the topic of UK coherence to the technical and wider user groups. ONS also includes a section on UK data coherence in its [TLFS updates on progress and plans](#).

NISRA and ONS have agreed a plan to overcome a recent challenge around a shorter period in which the data need to be processed and the UK estimates generated. ONS will combine the LMS data, including seasonal adjustments, with the corresponding data from Great Britain to enable the production of results covering the UK. Initially the GB data will be from the LFS; then, in time, they will come from the TLFS. To improve user confidence, ONS should publish more detail about the delivery of coherent transformed UK labour market estimates, once the plans have been finalised.

Organisations engaged during this review

Bank of England

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Department for Education

Department for Work and Pensions

Health and Safety Executive

HM Treasury

House of Commons Library

Institute for Fiscal Studies

Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Office for National Statistics

Resolution Foundation

Scottish Fiscal Commission

Scottish Government

SOCial ECONomic RESearch

Welsh Government

