Review of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Average weekly earnings in Great Britain

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, the Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s statistics on average weekly earnings (AWE) in Great Britain are published as accredited official statistics.

AWE statistics provide estimates of the average gross weekly pay of employees in Great Britain, giving an indication of wage growth, labour market conditions and changes in living standards. The statistics are used by the Bank of England, HM Treasury and other government departments, and help the public understand labour demand and whether earnings are keeping pace with rising prices.

This review assesses whether AWE statistics continue to meet the standards of the Code of Practice for Statistics 3.0, particularly given the importance of these statistics and ongoing development work in this area.

Why we did this review

The ONS Economic Statistics Plan identifies AWE series as an important measure of earnings growth that is used extensively as a key economic indicator. ONS believes there is a high risk that the quality of the statistics could deteriorate because parts of the methodology have not been reviewed for several years. To address this risk, ONS has committed to a programme of improvements for the series, including a full methods review covering areas such as sample allocation, seasonal adjustment and small business adjustments.

Given the prominence of AWE statistics in public and political debate, alongside the programme of development currently underway, OSR has decided that now is an appropriate time to carry out a high-level review. Our review has focused on ensuring that AWE statistics continue to meet the Code standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, as well as the Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis.

Findings

- ONS has demonstrated integrity, publishing AWE in an orderly way with objective commentary and a commitment to quality, as shown by its regular reviews of seasonal adjustment and transparent reporting of revisions.

- The Economic Statistics Plan published in June 2025 set out a clear direction for developing the AWE, and this work is ongoing. However, due to resource constraints, ONS is reviewing the viability of some of the original milestones for this work. It plans to inform users of its conclusions in the October update of the Surveys and Economic Statistics Improvement Plan.

- The quality and methodology information (QMI) report for AWE has not been updated since 2017 and so does not fully reflect recent developments or clearly explain the AWE's comparability with other statistics about the labour market, limiting its usefulness to users. ONS told us it intends to update the QMI as soon as possible.

- ONS engages regularly with a variety of stakeholders, including the Bank of England, HM Treasury and other government departments. It also engaged with a wider group of users through the Earnings Symposium held in 2025. ONS told us it values user views and plans to explore how it will engage with users further, for example by organising another earnings symposium in 2027. This wide engagement, however, is not articulated in the AWE bulletin or QMI.

- User needs for AWE statistics have evolved over time; for example, earlier demand for outputs by firm size has been replaced by more recent interest in changes in employer contributions. While ONS is aware of these emerging user needs, it is unclear how these requests are being prioritised. ONS has not been completely transparent about how it plans to consider and respond to new areas of interest.

- ONS has communicated revisions and corrections of errors transparently and managed them in line with its policies. For example, in 2025, an error in the vehicle tax data that the Department for Transport provided to ONS led to an overstating of consumer price inflation (CPI). ONS clearly communicated the CPI error in a note published at the top of the AWE bulletin according to its revisions policy, and indicated that the impact was minimal. This note would have further supported users if it had clearly expressed why it considered that the impact to AWE was minimal.

Our judgement

Our review concludes that the statistics on average weekly earnings (AWE) continue to meet the standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should retain their accreditation status.

Overall, the AWE statistics appear to be robust, credible and supported by ongoing methodological and system improvements. For example, ONS has committed to a full methods review of sample allocation and seasonal adjustments, alongside its longer-term plans of moving away from legacy systems. It is doing this work is to ensure that the AWE statistics demonstrate ONS's commitment to meeting the standards of the updated Code of Practice, as set out in its statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

We have identified some recommendations for ONS to improve the transparency and accessibility of the statistics, in line with the Code:

- To keep users updated on the planned improvements for AWE, ONS should prominently communicate any changes to the development plans for AWE, and the reasons for these changes.
- To ensure users can easily access up-to-date supporting information, ONS should update the QMI report, including fixing broken hyperlinks and ensuring all referenced materials are accurate, accessible and up to date.
- To ensure that users understand how to engage with ONS, and that the statistics remain relevant, ONS should publish more information on how it plans to engage with users, what users have requested and what it has done to address their needs.
- To ensure users understand how their views are considered, ONS should ensure that users' needs, for example for data about employer contributions, are appropriately reflected in its development plans. The necessary resources and analytical focus should be directed to enhancing this work.

Next steps

We expect ONS to provide a public update on progress against all these recommendations by October 2026.