



Office for
Statistics Regulation

ONS report on progress with economic statistics, July 2026: OSR response

September 2026

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, OSR initiated a systemic 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](#). Our reports, alongside evidence gathered from stakeholders, identified consistent cross-cutting concerns about data quality, survey response, the use of administrative data, stakeholder engagement, prioritisation and the transparency of resource allocation decisions.

In June 2025, ONS published its [Plan for Economic Statistics](#) (ESP) and [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#) (SIEP) in response to both OSR's interim report and the [Devereux Review](#). OSR's final report confirmed the concerns identified in the interim report and found that, while ONS had made initial progress, further action was needed. We judged that ONS's plans met the immediate requirements to restore confidence, improve strategic transparency and strengthen data quality, while noting that continued assurance would be needed to assess delivery and user-facing improvements.

At OSR's request, ONS committed to publishing quarterly public progress updates. OSR responded to the [first ONS update](#) in [January 2026](#) and the [second ONS update](#) in [May 2026](#). The January response set three further recommendations on user-focused reporting, cost information and further reporting on quality reviews, recruitment and retention, and legacy systems. In May, we assessed progress against those recommendations. We judged that ONS had met the recommendation on further reporting on quality reviews, recruitment and legacy systems; had partially met the recommendation on user-focused reporting; and had made progress on improving transparency around cost information. We also set out what ONS would need to demonstrate in its July update. The Progress on Recommendations section of this report sets out these recommendations and assesses the progress made.

ONS's July 2026 update brings the Economic Statistics Plan and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan into a more integrated Surveys and Economic Statistics plan. It describes a clearer portfolio model, revised milestones, a developing KPI framework, a waiting room for work that should not yet proceed, and further progress in priority areas including the Statistical Business Register, the Transformed Labour Force Survey, National Accounts, prices, public sector statistics and digital-first collection for the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).

This report responds to ONS's third update published in July 2026 and sets out our assessment of progress made by ONS to the OSR recommendations.

Overall assessment

ONS's July 2026 update marks a further and important step in its response to the findings of our systemic review of economic statistics. There is evidence of stronger leadership, greater transparency, and a renewed focus on engagement with users. We welcome the clearer and more disciplined approach to managing the Surveys and

Economic Statistics (SES) portfolio, the move towards a smaller set of priorities and indicators, and a more transparent account of where work is being sequenced, deferred or dependent on further evidence. ONS has also taken steps to strengthen its performance reporting and to explain the choices it is making in an environment of constrained capacity.

In light of ONS's progress, we intend to move to annual OSR assessments of progress, as opposed to the current approach of publishing OSR assessments of progress every quarter.

However we recognise that significant risks remain, because of the scale and complexity of the challenges ONS faces. In the light of these risks, we will maintain our requirement that ONS itself publishes a quarterly update on progress, and OSR will continue to assess progress through our ongoing [regulatory work programme](#).

Progress on Recommendations

Progress on OSR April 2025 requirements

Our interim systemic review set four immediate requirements for ONS. In our [November 2025 final report](#), we judged that ONS's improvement plans met our immediate requirements to take action to restore confidence, ensure strategic transparency and enhance focus on the quality of data inputs. The assessment below focuses on the extent to which ONS has continued to deliver and embed the improvements needed to support the recovery of economic statistics.

Requirement 1

To restore the confidence of its users, ONS should publish a fully resourced plan to recover its social survey operation and reduce risk in its business survey operation.

Assessment: Met, with delivery continuing. ONS met this requirement through the publication of its survey improvement plans. Since then, it has made further progress in survey recovery, including improvements to labour market surveys and stronger portfolio management arrangements. Recovery remains ongoing and future updates should demonstrate that improvements are sustained and operational risks are effectively managed.

Requirement 2

The overarching annual ONS business plan should be explicit on how resources are aligned with its core purposes and outputs as a national statistical institute. ONS should implement a more transparent and engaged approach to the way it prioritises across its output of economic statistics. This work should include an annually updated strategic plan for economic statistics.

Assessment: Met, with further evidence needed on resource allocation. ONS has improved transparency around prioritisation through its integrated Surveys and

Economic Statistics portfolio, revised milestones and clearer reporting of delivery confidence. However, further information is still needed on how resources are allocated across outputs and how resource trade-offs inform prioritisation decisions.

Requirement 3

In addition to the recovery plan and drawing on the overall strategy for economic statistics, ONS should develop and publish a regularly updated vision and strategy for the data sources used to compile its economic statistics.

Assessment: Met, with implementation continuing. ONS has established a clearer strategic approach to managing survey and administrative data and has continued to develop key programmes such as the Statistical Business Register. Future updates should demonstrate how this approach is improving the quality, resilience and integration of data sources across economic statistics.

Requirement 4

ONS should implement a prioritised rolling programme of regular reviews of individual surveys and other data sources focusing on maintaining quality.

Assessment: Met, with evidence of implementation emerging. ONS has established a prioritised programme of quality reviews and has begun reporting on its delivery. Continued transparency on review findings, actions and residual risks will help provide assurance that quality issues are being effectively identified and addressed.

Progress on January 2026 OSR recommendations

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

May 2026 update: We judged this as **partially met**. We welcomed the increased transparency on milestones, prioritisation and ongoing challenges, but said the update could be more useful as a standalone account of progress. We also suggested that ONS should rationalise milestones and introduce a small set of KPIs, showing delivery by topic area and linking missed milestones to impacts on quality, risk and delivery.

July 2026 progress: ONS has made progress by introducing clearer topic-based portfolio reporting and aligning this closely with its [Business Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29](#). It has included KPIs covering corrections and error reporting, business survey response rates, and internal and stakeholder satisfaction measures. It has also included [Annex B](#), which lists activities confirmed for delivery in the financial year, activities where delivery confidence is lower, and the status of activity previously communicated in the ESP/SIEP. Stakeholders we spoke to welcomed this as a more transparent approach to reporting.

We therefore judge this recommendation to be **largely met**. Further improvements would strengthen users' understanding and confidence, including by setting statistically driven targets or thresholds for survey-related indicators, so that performance is assessed against the level needed to support statistical quality rather than only against previous performance. Future reporting would also be strengthened by including more

KPIs linked directly to statistical outputs and providing clearer explanations of why delivery confidence is lower for some activities in Annex B.

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.

May 2026 update: We judged this as **progress made but not fully met**. We recognised that ONS was undertaking business planning at the time and acknowledged the difficulty of allocating shared costs, but stated that cost information disaggregated by output would support more informed and effective engagement with stakeholders.

July 2026 progress: ONS has committed to developing a more disaggregated view of the costs associated with delivering surveys and economic statistics, including indicative estimates for its most critical outputs. This is intended to link financial information more clearly to the activities that drive costs and support more transparent portfolio management. However, as this information is expected in a future update, this **recommendation is only partially met**. A commitment to develop indicative cost estimates is positive, but users will need to be able to understand the scale of resource trade-offs by output or portfolio area, including how these trade-offs affect prioritisation, delivery choices and value for money.

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

May 2026 update: ONS set out explicit prioritisation with a tiering framework addressing quality concerns and transparent quality reviews. It also launched a data governance framework supporting an integrated approach to data sources for both surveys and administrative data. We judged that ONS's second update provided **evidence that this recommendation had been met**, though further transparency remained important.

July 2026 progress: **This requirement has been met** and further evidence is provided on quality reviews, portfolio risks, legacy-system work and operational resilience.

Cross-cutting expectations for future reporting

- **Align ambition with capacity and delivery risk.** In April 2026, we noted that over one quarter of 2025/26 milestones had been delayed, suggesting that the original plans may have been over-ambitious. ONS needed to reset the plan so that it reflected organisational capacity, showed a credible delivery trajectory, and explained delays, sequencing and dependencies. The July update **substantially improves transparency** through the integrated SES portfolio, Waiting Room and reset milestones. However, given the scale and timescales of the overall programme, future judgement will depend on whether the new baseline remains stable and whether ONS reports slippage transparently against it in future updates.
- **Improve transparency on survey response and sample performance.** In April 2026, we welcomed progress on the LFS achieved sample size but noted continuing challenges in restoring response rates across social surveys more

generally. Stakeholders welcomed greater openness about quality and operational issues, including the LFS, but continue to seek clearer explanations of the implications for users and statistical quality. Future reporting should build on this by setting out clearer targets or thresholds for response rates and achieved sample sizes, and explaining how these support users' understanding of the quality and reliability of the resulting statistics

- **Improve transparency on quality-review findings.** ONS needed to explain how quality-review findings would be reported and how users could track issues, improvements and residual risks. It has introduced its programme of end-to-end quality reviews, starting with Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information. It has also set out its intention to improve collaboration between government data suppliers and official statistics producers, demonstrating a commitment across the Government Statistical Service (GSS). This work is underway, and sustained progress will help build further user confidence.
- **Build on the clearer focus on delivery in the July update.** Stakeholders welcomed the more structured account of delivery across the Surveys and Economic Statistics portfolio, including clearer milestones, topic-based reporting, delivery confidence assessments and the Waiting Room for work not yet ready to proceed. Future reporting should continue to develop this approach by drawing out more clearly what has been delivered, what impact this is having for users, and where barriers or residual risks remain across the portfolio.
- **Stakeholder engagement.** Our systemic review identified stakeholder needs and engagement as a cross-cutting issue. ONS's July update references stakeholder and user feedback throughout and incorporates KPIs from the ONS Annual Satisfaction Survey, including a measure of trustworthiness in economic statistics. This is a welcome step in showing how user perspectives are being reflected in reporting. OSR's review of ONS user engagement, which we have recently initiated, will provide further evidence on whether these arrangements are supporting meaningful user input into prioritisation, delivery choices and improvements to the quality and value of economic statistics.

Future reporting and next steps

Given the progress ONS has made in improving the clarity and usefulness of its public updates OSR will continue to consider whether ONS is achieving sustained improvements in the quality, resilience and public value of its economic statistics, and whether users can see the effect of those improvements in practice. Our wider programme of regulatory activity will provide further evidence on these issues, including through our ongoing engagement with ONS and users, our review of ONS user engagement, and our continued monitoring of quality, delivery and risk across priority economic statistics.