

Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics: Minutes 16th July 2025

Attendees:

Panel members in attendance

Jonathan Portes (Chair)

Tom Pybus (HM Treasury, Delegate for Daniel Gallagher)

Nye Cominetti (The Resolution Foundation)

Richard Murray (Scottish Government)

Alexandra Fitzpatrick (Welsh Government)

Xiaowei Xu (Institute for Fiscal Studies)

Sandy Fitzpatrick (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)

Tim Butcher (Low Pay Commission)

Laura Gardiner (Office for Budget Responsibility)

Chaitra Nagaraja (University of Exeter)

Anisha Rasan (HM Treasury)

Huw Pill (Bank of England)

Kavya Saxena (Bank of England, Delegate for Huw Pill)

ONS secretariat

Niamh Davies

ONS presenters

David Freeman

Tom Evans

Yohannes Lemma

Alex Lambert

Heather Bovill

Skevi Pericleous

Katy Nicholls

ONS colleagues

Liz McKeown

Ria Sanderson

Sumit Dey- Chowdhury

Melanie Gore

James Harris

Debbie Curtis

Sarah Ash

1. Introduction

1. The chair Jonathan Portes welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted the revised terms of reference were circulated prior to the meeting. The chair updated the panel that member Anthony Wilson (Department for Work and Pensions) has recently stepped down from the panel.

2. As the panel has now been in operation for over a year, the Chair invited members to reflect on its overall effectiveness. In response, members indicated that receiving meeting papers further in advance would enhance their ability to engage more substantively with the material. Additionally, the panel asked the ONS to consider the possibility of shorter more frequent meetings. The ONS acknowledged these suggestions and confirmed that they would give consideration to both proposals.

2. ONS Developments: Plans for ONS Economic Statistics and Labour Market Statistics – David Freeman

1. Liz McKeown (LM) introduced herself as the Director of the Economic Statistics Production and Analysis and updated the panel on recent organisational changes at the ONS following the Devereux Review, whose three recommendations have all been accepted. These include the temporary separation of the National Statistician and Permanent Secretary roles, with recruitment underway. James Benford has been appointed Deputy National Statistician for Economic Statistics. Two strategic plans have also been published, reflecting a focus on core statistical outputs.

2. David Freeman (DF) introduced himself as the head of Labour Market and Households Division and presented a summary of the newly published ONS Economic Statistics Plan, released alongside the Devereux Review on 26 June. The plan focuses on restoring confidence and enhancing the quality of core economic statistics through prioritised resourcing, modernising systems, continuous improvement, strengthened quality assurance, updated methodologies aligned with international standards, and increased engagement with external experts and users.

3. David Freeman (DF) explained how the Labour Market Statistics Plan aligns with the broader Economic Statistics Plan and addresses recommendations from the Devereux Review. He outlined key development areas, including the TLFS/LFS, earnings, jobs, productivity, and administrative data. The plan is being developed in phases from July to October, with further details to be shared at the next panel meeting in October.

4. The panel broadly supported the Labour Market Statistics Plan. One member queried areas of prioritisation within the plan, with ONS confirming that TLFS and LFS are key priorities. A question was raised about streamlining reweighting processes to better reflect population changes. ONS responded that the TLFS will offer improvements over the LFS in this area.

3. Administrative Data: Approach, plans and priorities for Labour Market Statistics – Tom Evans, Yohannes Lemma

1. Tom Evans (TE) introduced himself as Assistant Deputy Director of the Labour Market Transformation division and explained he will provide the panel with an update on the administrative data approach, plans and priorities. TE summarised the work so far and explained the short-term focus has been looking at employment coherence in both LFS and TLFS. The two parallel areas of focus have been assuring the quality of linkage via the demographic index and a proof-of concept analysis around self-employment.

2. Tom Evans (TE) presented the panel with a selection of potential focus areas for the use of administrative data in the Labour Market space. TE noted that for each output, any activity must be prioritised alongside other initiatives.

3. Yohannes Lemma (YL) introduced himself to the panel as the lead on the Linked Employer-Employee Data (LEED) and provided an overview of the project, developed in collaboration with the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence. The project aims to link HMRC tax data with the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR) and ONS surveys to enhance insights into wages and employment. A prototype is planned for this financial year, alongside experimental statistics and a technical methodology paper. The team will also explore secure access for researchers and continue stakeholder engagement across government, academia,

and research organisations. YL outlined the potential of the LEED to support labour market statistics. He highlighted its role in enhancing quality assurance, providing complementary administrative labour market indicators, enabling the development of new statistics, and supporting onward linkage to other administrative datasets.

4. Tom Evans (TE) outlined current priorities in labour market transformation, particularly around the LFS and TLFS, and highlighted ongoing collaboration with departments such as DWP and NISRA. He noted the continued development of the LEED prototype and its alignment with the Economic Statistics Plan. Finally, he asked the panel for the endorsement on the priorities and invited feedback on, balancing complexity, timescales and impact.

5. The panel discussed data linkage challenges in relation to bias and self-employment. The ONS confirmed there is planned work to investigate non-response and agreed to bring back fuller plans to the panel as work progresses for steer and direction. The chair endorsed the ONS' priorities to use RTI first to support with LFS and then TLFS going forward emphasising the priority of using RTI, both directly with LFS and TLFS and via LEED, to improve the quality of core measures of the Labour Market as opposed to wider potential for use more topics which would be more peripheral to the labour market.

4. Labour Force Survey (LFS): LFS recovery and plans for next TLFS quality article – David Freeman

1. David Freeman (DF) provided an update on response rates and quality improvements in the LFS, highlighting progress in interviewer capacity through a recruit-train-deploy approach aimed at reaching full wave allocation by end of 2025. Current performance is broadly approaching pre-pandemic levels. He outlined next steps, including a quality deep dive and ongoing work on reweighting in collaboration with devolved governments. DF invited panel feedback on coherence reporting and suggestions for future LFS quality updates. The group expressed support for a further quality update in September. 

2. The panel welcomed the quality improvements made to the LFS and discussed the importance of future communications to highlight these positive developments. Members emphasised the need to showcase progress on both LFS and TLFS in communications in light of the broader challenges faced by the ONS. The panel also stressed the importance of clearly communicating the benefits that TLFS can bring, particularly as LFS quality continues to improve, to help build understanding and confidence in the transition.

5. Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS): Introduction from TLFS Senior Responsible Owner – Alex Lambert

1. Alex Lambert (AL) introduced himself as the Senior Responsible Owner and provided an overview of the TLFS programme setup, which has progressed alongside delivery. He outlined the current focus on the business case, strategic objectives, risks, and stakeholder engagement. AL emphasised the programme's three pillars: delivering quality, sustainability, and value for money, and highlighted the mission, vision, and collaborative approach. He also noted that the programme setup aims to streamline governance, enhance assurance, and support with the provision of additional resource. AL offered panel members 1-to-1 meetings for those interested in understanding the programme and content presented in more detail.

6. TLFS Programme progress update – Heather Bovill

1. Heather Bovill (HB) provided an update on the TLFS programme, noting recent developments including the first programme board held on 24 June, the launch of the short core on 7 July, ongoing testing of UK hybrid syntax code to map NI LMS variables to LFS, and the conclusion of an assessment of an enhanced SIC coding tool. She also mentioned work underway to define the Plus dataset, with non-core labour market elements now referred to as Household, Socioeconomic and Local. A timeline was presented showing key milestones, including a readiness assessment scheduled for July 2026, which will be conducted collaboratively with users.

2. HB also introduced a review of economic activity terminology, following user concerns that the term 'economic activity' may be outdated or perceived negatively. She clarified that the aim is to update the label, not the definition, and shared examples of alternative terminology used by other statistical agencies, such as 'not in the labour force'. The ONS plans to test new terminology with users ahead of the TLFS transition, and the Labour Market Technical Group has expressed support for exploring this change.

3. The panel were supportive of ONS' proposal to review the economic activity terminology and ONS agreed to bring back recommended terminology to the group.

7. Measures of Success for Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) – Skevi Pericleous

1. Skevi Pericleous (SP) introduced herself as the Assistant Deputy Director of the Labour Market and Household division. SP provided an update on the Labour Market transition work, focusing on measures of success for improving the quality of 2-digit SIC classifications, based on prior panel feedback. She outlined ongoing improvements to tools and approaches such as the Classifications Index Matching Service tool (CIMS), Search as You Type, Survey Assist, and the Crossover Survey. SP presented draft quality criteria for SIC, categorised into showstoppers and monitoring indicators, and shared initial coherence examples using manufacturing

data. Panel members were invited to provide feedback on whether the proposed measures meet their data quality needs, with SOC measures to follow.

2. The panel confirmed that 2-digit SIC should be the priority for current quality improvements initially, with 4-digit SIC following later. They endorsed the measures of success for SIC.

8. Communication and Engagement: Upcoming engagement and communications – Katy Nicholls

1. Katy Nicholls (KN) introduced herself as the Labour Market stakeholder and portfolio lead. KN summarised the upcoming engagements which include deep dive sessions with discontinuity and nationality and regular engagements with the Labour Market and Household, Socioeconomic and Local technical groups. KN also noted the next monthly UK Labour Market statistics will be published on 17th July.

2. Katy Nicholls (KN) notified users of the upcoming *Labour Market Transformation Quarterly Update* article, scheduled for release on 21 July at 9:30 AM. The article will publicly outline key developments in the TLFS programme, including the launch of the short Core survey, design changes, and details on the Core and Plus content. It will also address challenges such as Northern Ireland data integration and complex variable collection and provide updates on LFS recovery and links to recent reviews and plans. Panel members were encouraged to provide feedback on the planned article content to include in ahead to the release.

9. Conclusion

1. The chair concluded the session by inviting feedback on the panel's operation, including meeting format and frequency. The next meeting is expected to take place in early October, with the date to be confirmed, taking into account scheduling pressures.