
Darren Tierney | Permanent Secretary

Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 May 2026

Dear Simon,

Today we have published the Office for National Statistics (ONS) business plan for the 2026-2029 period¹. Guided by the priorities established by the UK Statistics Authority Board, this business plan sets out how we will achieve our mission to deliver high-quality, independent statistics that underpin the UK's most critical economic and societal decisions and inform the public.

The plan sets out a practical and disciplined route forward for what we aim to achieve by 2029, focused on three interdependent priorities. We will stabilise and improve the portfolio of our critical statistics, prioritising quality and coherence across economic, population and social statistics. We will strengthen the essential services of a modern National Statistics Institute, making our data more accessible for users including Parliament, government, businesses and the public. We will also build the capabilities that make improvement sustainable, investing in our people, culture, data and technology.

The plan is intentionally outcome-led and transparent. We will report progress openly and ensure that resources, risk and benefits remain balanced. Our commitment is straightforward: dependable statistics, communicated clearly; rigorous stewardship of public money; and a modern, high-performing ONS that supports better decision-making across the UK.

Alongside the publication of the business plan, I wanted to take the opportunity to update the Committee on the progress we have made in recent months to strengthen our foundations for recovery:

- We have appointed Luke Ashton as Director General for Digital, Data and Technology. Luke joins us from Barclays where he was Group Chief Data Officer and Head of Process Automation and brings with him senior expertise across digital, data and operations, and will lead work to modernise our digital estate,

¹ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/office-for-national-statistics-business-plan-2026-27-to-2028-29/>

move away from legacy technology and build the sustainable IT architecture we need;

- We have resolved the longstanding industrial dispute regarding hybrid working, following members of both trade unions voting in favour of our new principles for hybrid working. Colleagues are expected to work together to contribute meaningfully towards an overall expectation of 40% office attendance (the maximum capacity we have in our estate), focusing on purposeful collaboration and delivery;
- We are developing a long-term People Plan for ONS. This work builds on the positive improvements that are already underway, and sets out a sustainable, long-term approach to how we develop and retain our best talent, ensuring we hold people to account for their performance, while also attracting people with the skills we need for the future. We are seeing the benefits in changes to our culture: the latest pulse survey of all ONS staff shows that the headline engagement index is up 3 percentage points to 63%, and other indicators are encouraging, for example 69% of colleagues would recommend ONS/ UKSA as a great place to work, an increase of 10 percentage points from 2025.

Following the implementation of our recovery plans, we have made real progress against our economic statistics and surveys improvement plans, completing 65 of the 93 planned milestones, as set out in our April quarterly update². This includes:

- Publishing our first Prices output using scanner data, representing a step change in how we measure inflation, giving us a more accurate, detailed picture of what people are buying, how much they're buying and how prices are changing;
- Reframing our monthly GDP statistics to remove the focus from the volatile monthly change;
- Business price surveys are now being fully collected electronically, reducing operational risk and improving efficiency. Monthly Business Survey performance is also approaching historic highs, getting close to the pre-pandemic peak;
- Reducing our reliance on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) to produce estimates of migration into and out of the United Kingdom, instead moving to an administrative data approach;
- Response levels on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) have reached levels similar to those seen pre-pandemic, with improvements in LFS sample sizes publicly recognised by the Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility;
- All previously agreed major design changes to improve data quality now being implemented for the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS);
- Publishing the Census 2031 Strategy for England and Wales, setting out how we will deliver a 'digital first' census, making the best use of administrative data and modern technology, whilst enabling participation for those who are digitally excluded.

We're also exploring how the statistical system can respond to the challenges, and opportunities, posed by AI. The ONS was one of the first national statistics institutes

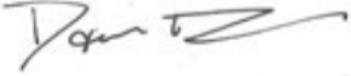
²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsimprovementplans/onseconomicstatisticsandsurveyimprovementplan/onseconomicstatisticsandsurveysimprovementplanquarterlyprogressupdateapril2026>

globally last year to deploy generative AI in the production of statistics with the in-house development of a ClassifAI application now used to code labour market statistics by type of occupation and industry. We're going further by taking steps to ensure that all data are 'AI-ready', meaning statistics remain discoverable, verifiable, and attributable when accessed through AI systems so that official figures are correctly found, interpreted, and cited, including collaboration with the IMF to explore the use of their StatGPT tool.

Over the coming months, my attention will continue to be on ensuring we remain focused on improving the quality of our economic and population statistics and embedding the hybrid working principles as we increase office attendance levels, as part of our wider cultural reset.

I look forward to delivering the priorities set out in the business plan and keeping the Committee updated on our progress. I am copying this letter to Penny Young, Interim Chair of the UK Statistics Authority Board.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darren Tierney', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Darren Tierney