

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Thursday 21 May 2026

London Office

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present

Penny Young (Chair)

Dr. Jacob Abboud

Peter Barron

Ed Humpherson

Professor Dame Carol Propper

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Professor Mairi Spowage

Darren Tierney

Dr. Sarah Walsh

Other Attendees

June Bowman

Mary Gregory

Sarah Moore

Heather Bovill (for item 8)

Alex Lambert (for item 8)

Patrick Scott (for item 9)

Simon Sandford-Taylor (for item 9)

Phil Wales (for item 8)

Apologies

James Benford

Tom Taylor

Secretariat

Sally Jones

Tom Marsh

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were noted from James Benford and Tom Taylor.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1. There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

- 3.1. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 April were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(26)31]

- 4.1. The Chair reported on her activities since the Board last met. The recruitment process for the National Statistician was nearing completion. The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) report on the work of the Authority was expected in the coming months. Preparations were underway for the Interim Chair's inaugural annual reception scheduled on 2 July.
- 4.2. The Chair paid warm tribute to Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter as this was his last meeting. Sir David had been a highly valued member of the Board bringing his extensive expertise to the work of the Authority and supporting teams across the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), providing a high level of support in many areas.

5. Report from the Permanent Secretary [SA(26)32]

- 5.1. Darren Tierney provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting highlighting the following:
- i. development of the Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26 with thanks noted to Tom Taylor and the finance team on progress to date;
 - ii. publication of ONS's Business Plan on 20 May. Darren Tierney alongside Sarah Jennings held a call with all colleagues to reinforce the messaging on the outcomes and approach ONS is now taking to sequencing work and maximising delivery confidence for key areas of priority as set out in the plan: Census 2031, Statistical Business Register (SBR), Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) and Content and Website Transformation. A full review would be undertaken at the end of quarter one to reassess the financial risk;
 - iii. the work by the finance team in discussion with HM Treasury colleagues regarding the census ringfence;
 - iv. the results of the first quarterly organisation wide pulse survey with an increase of three percentage points on overall Employee Engagement Index – 63 per cent, and an increase across all questions asked;
 - v. development of the long-term People Plan;
 - vi. the appointment of Luke Ashton as Director General for Digital, Data and Technology with a start date to be confirmed;
 - vii. publication on 21 May of UK long-term international migration estimates, up to year ending June 2025;
 - viii. the publication by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on its Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations following the Supreme Court ruling in the For Women Scotland case. ONS were reviewing the guidance and any potential implications; and
 - ix. the impact of updated data for TLFS Core on the response target and actions implemented in April to address the shortfall.
- 5.2. Members discussed the update and noted the improved reporting on internal audit actions; the positive results of the first pulse survey; and the progress made on the content and website transformation. It was acknowledged that the ONS strategy scheduled for Board discussion in June, would bring together the work previously undertaken including ONS's Mission and Leadership Statement. In the longer term, further work would be needed to consider some of the longer term strategic issues for ONS including their responsibilities as a National

Statistics Institute, and key decisions on direction as the work progresses on ONS's digital strategy.

5.3. Members had welcomed the opportunity to meet several of Kate Davies' teams as part of the Board's visit to the Newport office in March, which provided the opportunity to understand the significant challenges and successes around aspects of legacy transformation. Following a ten week review of the SBR, changes had been made on a new model for the Senior Responsible Owner, including being accountable for digital resource. Additionally, given the profile of SBR users which has shown that a large proportion are using only one aspect of it, new SBR functionality could be made available to this group of users relatively quickly. It was noted that there were other complex systems that would require longer term plans to transition off, which were not yet in place. Progress on legacy issues was also being addressed through the ongoing work on the TLFS and Economic Statistics Plan.

5.4. The Board noted the report and agreed that a session would be scheduled for NEDs on the work being led by Pete Benton on data linkage, machine learning and AI, and further information would be provided on the social survey response rates.

6. Report from the National Statistician's Office [SA(26)33]

6.1. Lucinda Eggleton provided an update on activities across the National Statistician's Office (NSO) highlighting the positive progress and collaborative working by the GSS theme leads and GSS Heads of Profession on progress against the UK Statistics Assembly recommendations.

6.2. The Board heard that the first steering group meeting for the GSS Leadership Development Programme was scheduled on 29 May. Analysis in Government Month had been successful and would continue throughout the remainder of May. The Analysis Unit had delivered a number of sessions on the work they had conducted on the TLFS non-response bias. The GSS Harmonisation Team had published an update on the Analysis Function website that morning (21 May) on the sex harmonised standard.

6.3. Members discussed the update and highlighted the need for more precision on the timeline on responses to the UK Statistics Assembly recommendations to include clear dates and action owners. An update on this was scheduled for the Board meeting in June.

6.4. The Chair noted thanks to Lucinda Eggleton for her work as Director of the National Statistician's Office, particularly in the absence of a National Statistician. Lucinda would be leaving ONS for a new position in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

7. Director General for Regulation [SA(26)34]

7.1. Ed Humpherson updated the Board on the work by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) since the last meeting.

7.2. OSR had published its compliance review of ONS national and subnational 2024 mid-year population estimates for England and Wales. OSR were planning on publishing something in recognition of ONS's improvement of population and migrations statistics. A statement had been published on statistics on the Crime Survey for England and Wales following public discussion about crime rates in England and Wales.

7.3. Ed Humpherson had chaired a session at the recent Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence conference. The Royal Society had published a report on public engagement and communication of science which recommended a code of practice for scientists building on models such as OSR's Code of Practice for Statistics.

7.4. Members discussed the update. It was clarified that OSR were developing an approach to assessment of official statistics which had not been reviewed for some time, including the introduction an automated TQV checklist.

8. Transformed Labour Force Survey [SA(26)35]

- 8.1. Alex Lambert and Phil Wales introduced a joint update from ONS and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The paper focused on the dependencies between the TLFS Programme and NISRA's Labour Market Survey (LMS) and how they were working together to ensure continued delivery of UK data.
- 8.2. The Chair had visited the NISRA recently, which had included a deep dive on the LMS and the system wide complexities of UK wide labour market data.
- 8.3. The Board heard that in Northern Ireland the transformed Labour Force Survey is known as the Labour Market Survey (LMS), which had been introduced into the field in October 2023. NISRA were undertaking detailed analytical work and peer review across all key operational and statistical processes to ensure the emerging data was fit for purpose. This included a linking study to examine non-response bias. Work was ongoing to develop measures of success criteria for the new survey, which would be published over the summer and would help inform NISRA's transition timeline.
- 8.4. It was noted that currently the labour market information for Northern Ireland was collected through the Labour Force Survey using the same questionnaire as the rest of the UK. In future, NI data would be collected through NISRA's LMS, while GB data would be collected through ONS's TLFS. The continued production of UK statistics using LFS and the success of TLFS were dependent on satisfactory integration of the Northern Ireland data collected by NISRA.
- 8.5. Members discussed the dependencies between NISRA's LMS and ONS's TLFS to the continued production of high-quality and timely UK labour market statistics. The following points were made in discussion:
 - i. the need to understand the coherence of questions between NISRA's LMS and ONS's TLFS and the reasons for any differences to ensure confidence in the data that would inform UK wide data indicators;
 - ii. the timeline for NISRA's transition to LMS and the considerations as to whether it makes sense for ONS and NISRA to transition at the same time. At this point NISRA had not yet agreed a transition date, to allow enough time to make an assessment and understand the differences between the LMS compared to the LFS and HMRC data;
 - iii. the role of OSR which would include reviews of both the LMS and TLFS, noting the importance of clear criteria for both; and
 - iv. the impact of the strengthened dependency management approach between ONS and NISRA.
- 8.6. The Board noted the update and would continue to remain engaged as the work progressed. The difference in the Board's relationship with the TLFS (ONS) and LMS (NISRA) was acknowledged. NISRA and ONS welcomed the oversight by the Board as an opportunity to be held accountable together. Given the criticality of this work to UK labour market statistics members sought clarity on whether ONS or NISRA needed anything specific to help resolve the issues. NISRA and ONS welcomed the ability to work together and the support being provided by ONS to NISRA was beneficial. Within ONS there was full support across the organisation for delivery of TLFS. The issues being addressed were challenging statistical methodological issues that required time to work through.
- 8.7. Plans were in place on the sequencing of discussions within ONS by the Executive Committee (ExCo) ahead of the Board in July 2026 on the TLFS readiness assessment. These included workshops for ExCo and Non-executive Directors. With regard to timing the ONS's latest Labour Market Transformation update in April, had included the refreshed narrative on transition timing moving away from November 2026 into 2027.

9. Update from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Chair

- 9.1. The Chair reported on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which had last met on 14 May.

9.2. The Committee had considered:

- i. the pre audit financial position at year-end 2026/26 with an under expenditure;
- ii. the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26;
- iii. the updated strategic risk profile with a reduction in strategic risks reporting out of appetite reflecting the progress made across the organisation;
- iv. delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 and discussion of a number of limited assurance Internal Audit reports including FTE Forecasting, Skills and Resourcing, Economic Statistics Plan and Working with External Organisations;
- v. the Annual Fraud Report 2025/26; and
- vi. the annual update on cyber security providing a high level of assurance.

9.3. The Committee noted that the Annual Report and Accounts may need to be updated depending on the timing for publication of the PACAC report on the work of the Authority.

10. Update from the Population Statistics System Committee Chair

10.1. The Chair reported on the work of the Population Statistics System Committee which had last met on 20 May.

10.2. The Committee had considered:

- i. an update from the Executive Director for Population, Census and Social Statistics including the census risk profile and Management Information;
- ii. delivery progress of Census 2031 from a Devolved Government perspective;
- iii. a presentation on census response and wave of contact and how the Census 2027 Test would target hard to reach groups; and
- iv. the work by OSR on population estimates.

10.3. The Committee had highlighted the need for further work on risk reporting in order to provide the required level of assurance.

11. Communications Strategy [SA(26)36]

11.1. Sarah Moore and Peter Barron provided an update to the Board on ONS's evolving communications strategy, including website transformation and the latest media sentiment. Patrick Scott also joined to present on progress of the website transformation.

11.2. The Board heard that the external sentiment rating for the period since the last meeting had returned to amber reflecting some of the media coverage of economic statistics, TLFS and hybrid working during this period.

11.3. With regard to the Communications Strategy refreshed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were in place with the aim of being proactive with the media, increasing stakeholder support, maintaining public trust, building international engagement and the launch of outputs via the new ONS website platform by December 2026. The aims of the content and website transformation was to stabilise and future proof the website; to modernise content standards; and to deliver a basic Application Programming Interface.

11.4. Board members discussed the approach. The following points were made in discussion:

- i. the refreshed KPIs were stretching as they linked directly to ONS delivery. The need to mitigate risks to ensure delivery at key points as per the timeline was noted;
- ii. the importance of maintaining public trust and the challenges in relation to bringing 18-34 year olds closer to the overall trust level of 83 per cent;
- iii. the need to ensure the most effective mechanism is in place so that any AI summaries accurately reference ONS;
- iv. the operating model for updating content was centralised with a partnership model for specific releases with the business areas drafting the content; and
- v. the value placed on Nomis by users and the need to carefully consider how its replacement would provide functionality required by users. This would be considered in April 2027 as part of phase two of the programme, focusing on decommissioning legacy systems

11.5. The Board welcomed the update and commended the work and progress by ONS reaching this point. It was noted that the approach by James Benford to stakeholder engagement had been effective and would be useful to extend to other colleagues across the organisation using a similar approach.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

Thursday 21 May, 11.30-14.15

London Boardroom,
Hybrid Meeting

Chair: Penny Young

Apologies: Tom Taylor, James Benford

Attendees: Heather Bovill (for item 6), Alex Lambert (for item 6), Jennet Woolford (for item 6), Phil Wales (for item 6),

NED Session: 10.30-11.30

1 11.30-11.35 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 30.04.26
2 11.35-11.45 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(26)31 Penny Young
3 11.45-12.00 15 mins	Report from the Permanent Secretary	SA(26)32 Darren Tierney
4 12.00-12.15 15 mins	Report from the National Statistician's Office	SA(26)33 Lucinda Eggleton
5 12.15-12.25 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(26)34 Ed Humpherson
6 12.25-12.55 30 mins	Transformed Labour Force Survey	SA(26)35 Alex Lambert Jennet Woolford Heather Bovill Phil Wales
12.55-13.20 25 mins	Break	
7 13.20-13.35 15 mins	Update from Committee Chairs - Audit and Risk Assurance Committee - Population Statistics System Committee	Oral update Dr Jacob Abboud Penny Young
8 13.35-14.05 30 mins	ONS Communications Strategy and Update on Content and Website Transformation	SA(26)36 Peter Barron Sarah Moore
9 14.05-14.15 10 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: Thursday 25 June, Titchfield Boardroom, 11.00-16.00

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(26)31

Chair's Report, May 2026

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Interim Chair's activity in April. We will have an opportunity under this item to discuss our priorities as a Board in the coming months.

Review of recent activities

2. On 5 May, I met with Professor Sir John Aston and Dr Sarah Cumbers, President and Chief Executive, respectively, of the Royal Statistical Society. We discussed the upcoming appointment of new National Statistician, our expectations for the report from Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's (PACAC) inquiry, and progress at the Authority on recovery of economic statistics, the Census, and follow-up to the UK Statistical Assembly.

Correspondence

3. On 6 May I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, Kemi Badenoch MP, about her use of official statistics about trends in Universal Credit claimants.
4. On 11 May I wrote to Max Wilkinson MP to respond to his concern about a speech by the Home Secretary in March.
5. On 14 May I wrote to Seamus Logan MP in response to his concern about statements made by Sharon Hodgson MP and Dr Zubir Ahmed MP about waiting times in England and Scotland. I also wrote to them privately to explain our expectations that official data are used appropriately, drawing attention to the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) ongoing in this area.

Looking ahead

6. Invitations will shortly go out for the inaugural annual lecture from the Authority Chair, to be held in London on 2 July. I will give a speech describing the Board's approach to the PACAC inquiry and its report (if it has been published) and set out the challenges facing the next National Statistician and Chair.

Penny Young, Interim Chair, 14 May 2026

Permanent Secretary's Report, May 2026

Purpose

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity since the last Board meeting on 30 April 2026.

As we move into the new financial year, I have put in place a number of interventions to ensure we optimise our funding

2. Our financial position for 2025/26 has been finalised and we are reporting a surplus which is in line with the predicted range which I provided at the last Board meeting. This position is of course subject to the year-end audit, and as such may be adjusted.
3. We are making steady progress against our 2025/26 year-end plans – the external auditors started their review work on 5 May, and we provided them with the first complete version of the financial statements on 11 May. We have submitted a first draft of the Annual Report and Accounts performance and accountability chapters to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. These were reviewed and discussed at the May meeting last week.
4. As we move into 2026/27, we have provisional business driven data for April month end, improving the recent historic forecasting timelines by a month. This information does require refinement, but we are already seeing the adoption of key people forecasting assumptions which has a significant bearing on overall financial forecasts. Expenditure during April was in line with expectations with no early forecasting issues surfacing. It is however too early in the cycle to give any definitive views at this stage, and it will take several periods for the changes in processes to bed-in with a target of having a clear indication of trajectory by the end of Quarter 1.
5. Having access to more robust information earlier than ever before will allow us to make additional investment decisions throughout the annual cycle rather than waiting until Quarter 3 which has been the approach we have had to take in recent years. The ability to make decisions earlier is also facilitated by the increase in our financial risk appetite for 2026/27.
6. This increase in our financial risk appetite will need to be considered in the context of additional investment decisions and it's important that we do not go too far too soon, as well as considering the future year funding position when making any decisions so as to avoid creating an unaffordable future cost base.
7. Taken together, the interventions made in advance of 2026/27 should ensure we further optimise the use of funding, but it is important to restate that we operate on an annual fiscal cycle with non-negotiable budgetary limits. As such, financial management requires a delicate balancing act through the year.
8. We have now communicated business planning outcomes to colleagues across the organisation and are on track to publish the Business Plan before the end of the month. Work continues to refine and operationalise the Waiting Room process, including ensuring that there is clarity on the entry and exit criteria that change activity must meet to ensure that delivery is predictable in the future. Alongside Sarah Jennings, I held an Office for National Statistics (ONS) Direct Call to reinforce this messaging to wider staff on the approach we are now taking to sequencing work and maximising delivery confidence for our top priority programmes.

9. With progress well underway on the Business Plan, I have asked colleagues in Strategy and Policy to pull together an ONS Strategy covering the turn around period. It is my hope that this will be shared with the Board in June and published before Summer. This strategy will pull together the work done last year on the Mission, Outcomes and Outputs informing our decisions going forwards as we focus on delivery. The team are working closely with colleagues in People and Places to ensure a golden thread through the ONS Strategy and our People Plan.

Work continues on our long-term People Plan to ensure ONS is a place where colleagues can grow and thrive

10. I am pleased to confirm that Luke Ashton has been appointed as Director General for Digital, Data and Technology and will join us in the summer. Luke joins us from Barclays, bringing extensive senior leadership experience across digital, data and operations, with a strong track record of leading large-scale automation and transformation programmes. He will play a central role as we continue our recovery and transformation, including moving away from legacy technology and establishing a sustainable digital and data architecture that underpins high-quality delivery, efficiency and trust in our statistics.
11. Last month, I updated you on our first quarterly organisation-wide pulse survey. Our overall Employee Engagement Index was 63 per cent, an increase of three percentage points from the 2025 People Survey, although differences need to be interpreted cautiously given different response rates, survey context and the absence of respondent weighting. I am really pleased that this first set of results points to signs of real progress across many of our people priorities, but there is still more to do.
12. We are continuing to develop our longer-term people plan and are in the process of finalising a first draft following organisation wide consultation. A working draft will be shared with colleagues in due course, as well as being sent to the Board out of committee in the coming weeks for your feedback and comment. It is my hope that, along with the ONS Strategy, this is published in the summer.
13. Following the end of the industrial dispute, there are encouraging anecdotal indications of increased in-person collaboration. However, we are yet to see significant changes in the swipe data that we use to monitor attendance figures. This month, the Executive Committee (ExCo) will be discussing a paper on further developing our approach to measuring and reporting attendance.

Following Board endorsement, we have refreshed our strategic risk profile and continue to manage out of appetite risks as well as our Amber/ Red programmes

14. As agreed at the April meeting of the Authority Board, we have refreshed our Strategic Risk profile, with some of the appetite ranges changing. As such, only three of our strategic risks remain out of appetite. These cover trust and independence, quality economic statistics and tech infrastructure.
15. Across our portfolio, the Business Surveys Transformation Programme (BSTP) and Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) continue to report as Amber/Red. For all our programmes, the reliance on scarce specialist resource, especially from Digital Services, remains a risk to delivery.
16. The Amber/Red rating BSTP this reflects significant and unresolved challenges in planning, resourcing and dependency management. While the Statistical Business Register (SBR) is confirmed as an ONS wide priority, and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings/Integrated Annual Business Survey (ASHE/IABS) as Surveys and Economic Statistics (SES) priorities, the programme continues to operate without fully baselined plans for 2026/27, with delivery proceeding at risk. The project is currently working through a ten-week period to strengthen its organisation and approach to

delivery, focused on clarifying governance and accountabilities, tightening scope and success measures, and establishing an iterative delivery plan that releases value to users in smaller increments. The outputs from this work will inform an updated plan and timeline, which we'll update users and the OSR on at the appropriate point.

17. On 30 April we reached a significant milestone in the content and website transformation programme with the launch of our Help pages on our new content management system, Wagtail. Although this represented a nominal change to what users can see, the smooth and secure publishing of these pages establishes a strong foundation for all the user-centric content and capabilities that follow over our phased rollout of the website platform this year.
18. There were challenging messages to land in April, particularly around office working and the TLFS – all leading to an overall Amber RAG status. Media coverage was dominated by the US-Iran conflict with economic outputs viewed through that lens – whilst our inflation figures did not cover the period since the conflict started, it did mean that our figures appeared outdated given the speed of changing events. We were able to land key messages around the delay to the TLFS, the quarterly economic statistics update and the 'waiting room' concept, however coverage was more negative and focused on the delay in the context of wider ONS issues. Our regular economic releases, quarterly crime figures and population projection statistics received widespread coverage, aided by proactive work from colleagues to ensure accuracy, especially in the context of the pre-election period.

Progress continues to be made with our recovery plans and business-as-usual work

19. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has published a review of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics for the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales. This has reiterated limitations around our local estimates which we have previously acknowledged. Colleagues will review the report in detail and provided an update in the Summer on our plans to address the recommendations.
20. Census programme mobilisation continues including contract awards for the 2027 test, prioritisation of test design elements, and ongoing collaboration with the devolved governments to ensure alignment with the Devolved Governments. There has also been constructive engagement with Local Authorities where more detailed information on the 2027 test has been shared with commitments for continued regular engagement.
21. This month, we have published our quarterly update on population and migration statistics, updating stakeholders on progress and plans on the statistical approach to our estimates, international migration statistics and population projections. We are also set to publish our latest estimates of UK long-term international migration, up to year ending June 2025, on Thursday 21 May.
22. Colleagues in SES are currently establishing a Change Initiation Forum to help improve delivery confidence of the portfolio by setting initiatives up to succeed and controlling demand on enabling areas. Currently the focus is on ensuring that our top priorities in SES – TLFS, SBR and International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards (IMSS) are sufficiently resourced so we can assess what capacity is left to undertake other changes.
23. We continue to engage with other government departments as well as private sector organisations around the challenges in social surveys. In April, we hosted the first strategic sector forum, bringing together strategic leaders across the social survey sector to discuss these challenges. There was joint agreement to create a systems map of UK social surveys and a single threat statement. Initial Cabinet Office engagement around survey mandate has been well received with positive support for the project. Cabinet Office colleagues are now joining the mandate steering group.

24. As part of his new role, Pete Benton has established the Innovation and Emerging Technology Steering Group which has now convened and formally endorsed the Artificial Intelligence (AI) work programme, including agreement on the overall methodological approach and initial AI governance framework, providing a clear mandate and structure for delivery. Ongoing engagement with senior representatives from Microsoft and Google is helping to inform the approach, with both organisations contributing insight on tooling and delivery. Follow up activity is underway to translate this into practical collaboration.

Darren Tierney, Permanent Secretary, 14 May 2026

National Statistician's Report, May 2026

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of the National Statistician's Office (NSO), and wider Government Statistical Service (GSS), activity since the last Board meeting on 30 April 2026. The National Statistician's Report will continue over the coming months whilst recruitment for a permanent National Statistician is ongoing.

National Statistician's Committees and Panels

2. May has been a quiet month for many of the National Statistician's Committees and Panels, with a number of these groups having their next quarterly meetings in June 2026. This includes the next meetings of the National Statistician's Data Ethics Committee (NSDEC), Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC), Inclusive Data Advisory Committee (NSIDAC), and the Methodological Assurance Review Panel (MARP).
3. The application deadline for the **NSDEC** Lay Member recruitment was extended to 15 May 2026, with the first interviews commencing on 11 May. This month, the Committee has conducted one correspondence review, focusing on user testing of printed contact materials and conducting a post-test evaluation study for the Census 2027 test.

NSO Activity and Engagement

4. Towards the end of April 2026, the **Analysis for Action** team (formerly the Pandemic Preparedness Toolkit team) hosted project partners from Argentina, Malawi and Nepal at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) London office. This was the first opportunity for the full partnership to collaborate in person. The week's agenda focussed on progressing the Analysis for Action website, planning stakeholder engagement ahead of the September 2027 launch, and sharing knowledge and experience with ONS colleagues.
5. I represented the ONS at a virtual meeting of the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy** on 27 April 2026. We discussed the draft program of work and budget, and the accession review of Peru.
6. A **GSS ethnicity consultation update** was [published](#) on the Analysis Function (AF) website on 27 April 2026. The GSS Policy and Coordination team worked with the GSS Harmonisation team to successfully launch the ethnicity consultation update bilingually and restructure the harmonisation pages into a hub for easier user journeys locating harmonisation information.
7. On 28 April 2026, NSO colleagues from the Analysis Unit attended the joint National Institute for Health and Care Research Policy Research Unit (NIHR-PRU) and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) **Reproductive Health Data Linkage Roundtable** to discuss reproductive health data and analysis completed on the user needs for linked data on this topic.
8. In the first week of May 2026, the Analysis Unit did a number of show-and-tell sessions on the work they have conducted on the **Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) non-response bias**. These included internal sessions with colleagues from the Methodology and Quality Directorate (MQD), the Labour Market Division, and Social Surveys, and external presentations to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Labour Market Technical Group (which includes

representatives from HM Treasury, the Bank of England, Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and ONS).

9. On Tuesday 5 May 2026, Analysis Unit colleagues attended an expert advisory panel for **NHS Talking Therapies**. A topic of discussion was the inclusion of NHS Talking Therapies data on [OpenSAFELY](#) which will allow other researchers to utilise this important dataset securely.
10. On 6 May 2026, the Inclusive Research team held the first of a series of internal and cross-GSS stakeholder conversations about discovery research findings for the **Young Voices project** (children and young people's (11-24 years) perspectives on sharing their views and data with government) to help identify priority research questions for the second phase of work (to begin in Autumn 2026).
11. The **Standards for Official Statistics on Climate-Health Interactions (SOSCHI)** team successfully hosted a webinar on 11 May 2026 exploring key data challenges and solutions in climate-health statistics, focusing on how improved statistics can support robust evidence generation and policy relevant insights.
12. James Benford and Kirsten Newton visited the French National Statistical Office, **National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE)**, on 12 May 2026 to share experiences around maintaining quality in core economic statistics, especially labour force and GDP, and how we can use new forms of data and data linkage to combat falling survey response rates. This included a meeting with Director General, Fabrice Lengart.
13. While in Paris, James and Kirsten also met with colleagues at the **OECD** on 13 May 2026 to discuss a range of topics including asymmetries, large case units, the system of national accounts, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) measurement. They met with Steve MacFeely, OECD Chief Statistician and Director of the Statistics and Data Directorate, as well as Andrew Wood, the UK Ambassador to the OECD.
14. For the current spending review settlement (which covers 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029), the **International Development Team (IDT)** have launched their new project phase utilising a new approach. This approach is better aligned to ONS comparative advantage internationally, the new FOREIGN, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) approach to spending official development assistance (ODA) and ONS business planning. Early activities in Financial Year 2026/27 include supporting the Democratic Republic of Congo on analysis of the demographic and health survey (with the Population, Census and Social Statistics (PCSS) Group), improving health admin data in Nigeria (with MQD), and providing independent observation of Namibia's first official statistics assessment and designation process (with the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)).
15. In May 2026, the GSS Harmonisation team will publish an update on the AF website on the **sex harmonised standard**. At the time of writing, the exact date of publication is not known. Fieldwork for the start of the accelerated research plan for the development of the sex harmonised standard commenced on 11 May, with a publication expected in summer 2026.

Broader UK Statistical System

16. The most recent **GSS Community Call** was held on 14 May 2026 on the topic of 'Strengthening Skillsets', with items focused on the work of the GSS People Advisory Group, plans for the Leadership Development Programme, and a panel session to highlight the impact and benefits of volunteering for GSS corporate initiatives. On the latter, the Deputy Heads of the GSS have recently launched an expression of interest for volunteering opportunities for GSS work on the [AF website](#).

17. GSS Heads of Profession (HoPs) and GSS Theme leads are now more engaged with work to prepare an update on progress against the **UK Statistics Assembly** recommendations by feeding in comments and highlighting relevant work within their departments/themes. The NSO, working closely with the ONS External Affairs team, have been coordinating efforts to provide progress updates against not only the priority recommendations to come out of the [UK Statistics Assembly Independent Report](#), but also the more detailed recommendations across the remaining 11 themes covered at the inaugural Statistics Assembly. As previously mentioned, the intention is to publish a detailed update on progress over the summer.
18. Supported by the GSS Policy and Coordination team, the first steering group meeting for the **GSS Leadership Development Programme** has been set up for 29 May 2026 and will include senior representatives from across the GSS HoP community, OSR and, with great thanks, Prof. Mairi Spowage as a direct link to the Board. This is an important step forward in building leadership capability across the GSS.
19. Following the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East, statisticians in the Aviation Resilience Analysis team at the **Department for Transport (DfT)** rapidly set up live flight status reporting to support cross-government decision making on passenger safety and repatriation. The team used coding techniques and other skills acquired throughout their GSS careers to set up reproducible scripts that cross-referenced multiple data sources to support daily briefings. The response has strengthened GSS analytical capability and collaboration, and these lessons have been carried into building the evidence base for decision-making around aviation fuel supply.
20. **Analysis in Government Month** has been a tremendous success so far and will continue throughout the remainder of May 2026. With over 8000 tickets 'sold' at the time of writing, analysts across government have been treated to a number of fantastic sessions, including with Ed Humpherson, Director General for OSR, and on the Future Statistician Report. Health Inequalities, the Aqua Book, AI in the Met Office, and 'Why analysts should care about devolution' are some of the remaining topics that will be covered.
21. The beta version [Analysis Function AI Hub](#) was published on 13 May 2026, which includes training, guidance and a glossary. Further resources, including case studies and tools, will be added at a later date. This will mean analysts across government have a single easily accessible repository for resources on this important subject.
22. The **Departmental Directors of Analysis (DDANs)** meeting on 14 May 2026 focussed on Civil Service readiness to implement the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Code of Practice on Services, Public Functions and Associations, and position management in profession agnostic recruitment.
23. Most departments have completed the assessment process against the **Analysis Function Standard** alongside many of their Arm's Length Bodies, which provides assurance that analysis across government is being conducted according to best practice. The results will be discussed with the Analysis Function Standards Steering group on 18 May 2026, alongside what actions need to be taken to follow up on the results.

Lucinda Eggleton, Director, National Statistician's Office, 14 May 2026

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an overview of Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) activities.

Discussion

Credible and Rigorous Regulator

2. We have published several compliance reviews, including:
 - i. Compliance review of national and subnational 2024 [mid-year population estimates \(MYEs\)](#) for England and Wales produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). We identified significant quality concerns at subnational level and have set four requirements which ONS must address to retain accredited official statistics status by the next MYE publication in summer 2026;
 - ii. [Update report on ONS's Labour Force Survey and its Transformation](#). We found that ONS has fully met four of the twelve recommendations from our 2025 update report and has partially met the remaining eight. ONS has made encouraging progress in communication with users, and the response levels for the LFS increased in 2025, producing more precise UK-level estimates. However, running the existing survey alongside the new Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) is stretching resources, and recent methodological refinements and processing improvements must be fully assured before any full transition. We expect ONS 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; and
 - iii. [ONS report on progress with economic statistics, April 2026: OSR response](#). Overall we support the direction of travel at the ONS. We encourage ONS, through ongoing business planning, to set a realistic plan as a baseline that reflects true organisational capacity, provides a credible trajectory and strengthens confidence among both staff and users.
3. Following the launch of Code of Practice for Statistics 3.0, OSR is encouraging producers of official statistics to consider their existing procedures and practices to identify areas of strong statistical practice and any areas that require development to meet the refreshed Code standards. We have developed and published a new self-evaluation tool to facilitate this. This tool is primarily aimed at producers of official statistics, but it can be used by anyone producing data, statistics or other analysis.
4. We have also published a [statement on statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) following ongoing public discussion – by both politicians and the media – about crime rates in England and Wales and the reliability of the crime statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

System Catalyst

5. We are currently drafting our annual State of the System report, for publication ahead of the Chair's planned lecture on 2 July.
6. We are updating OSR's existing guidance on statistical models to reflect recent developments in artificial intelligence, drawing on evidence from regulatory activity and engagement with producers. We plan to publish this in the summer.
7. I have given two keynote talks in May:

- i. I gave the opening keynote for the Analysis in Government month to over 300 online attendees. My focus was on Analysis under Pressure; and
 - ii. I gave the opening keynote for the International Association of Official Statistics conference in Vilnius. I spoke about the public value of official statistics and reiterated my focus on the importance of openness and humility.
8. I participated in two system-focused events. First, I chaired a round table of criminal justice and education inspectorates on their use of data and evidence. Second, alongside James Benford and ONS colleagues, I contributed to an event for organisations in the public sector who provide data to ONS economic statistics.
 9. I also spoke at a University College London (UCL) event on measurement of prosperity and am chairing a panel at the upcoming Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence conference, focused on alternative sources of insight on regional and local economic growth.

Public Use of Statistics

10. Casework: We opened a further 21 cases since our last paper to the Board, which provided data up to 17 April, taking us to 34 cases in 2026/27 so far (as of 12 May).
11. During the pre-election period we published a [Statement on Understanding NHS planned care waiting times statistics across the UK](#) to address widespread misuse of these statistics; secured a correction to a statistic relating to greenhouse gas emissions in the SNP manifesto; and wrote to several parties privately about their use of statistics in leaflets and or public discourse.
12. The interim Chair also wrote to [Kemi Badenoch MP](#) about her use of statistics relating to Universal Credit claimants in Prime Minister's Questions, and to [Max Williamson MP](#) concerning comments by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Shabana Mahmood MP, about the fiscal impact of settlement policy.
13. Now that the elections have completed, we will consider what steps OSR can take to avoid continued misuse of health statistics to make comparisons between the nations of the UK, as this is a heavily recurring issue where we can see there is a strong public interest.
14. Finally, we have concluded our internal investigation into two complaints raised with us about the Interim Chair's [letter to Cllr Simon Hogg](#), Leader of Wandsworth Council, regarding council tax increase in March. We concluded that OSR acted in line with our published interventions policy when handling this case. We will therefore continue to consider each local case raised with us individually, in line with our established policy. However, we will consider publishing a 'council tax explainer' ahead of future elections, as this issue regularly comes up in both national and local elections.

Enhance Our Own TQV

15. We held a seminar with staff from across OSR to help develop our guidance around OSR's voice modes for different types of publications, aligned to our strategy themes and organisational values. The aim is to improve our consistency of approach. The outputs from this will then inform internal guidance and further tools to support staff in implementing the guidance.
16. Nearly 30 members of the OSR team completed a day of training on Public Engagement, delivered by the Public Engagement charity Involve. This was designed to give us a thorough introduction to public engagement, to help us feel more confident in planning and carrying out effective public engagement activities to inform OSR's work, but also to help OSR regulators support producers of official statistics to engage the public in their work.

On my mind

17. I have set out what is currently on my mind below:

- i. developing our approach to the assessment of official statistics that we have not reviewed for some time;
- ii. developing our new tool for assessing the way in which Government departments use statistics and data (which we are calling Public Use Profiles); and
- iii. maintaining a rigorous approach to casework.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 13 May 2026

Transformed Labour Force Survey – May 2026 Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides a joint update from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It focuses on the dependencies between the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) Programme and NISRA's Labour Market Survey (LMS) and how we are working together to ensure delivery of UK data.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to note and comment on:
 - i. current statuses of ONS's TLFS Programme and NISRA's LMS; and
 - ii. the strengthened dependency management approach between ONS and NISRA and the risk mitigations in place to increase LMS/TLFS delivery confidence.

Discussion

ONS's TLFS status

3. Substantial progress has been achieved since the last Board update, notably the implementation of all agreed major design changes to the TLFS, including data rotation, improved pay and earnings questions, and a higher respondent incentive. These developments were communicated externally in our latest *Labour Market Transformation – update on progress and plans* article on 15 April 2026, which also featured the refreshed narrative on transition timing (a shift from November 2026 into 2027).
4. The Programme reported Amber/Red at the April TLFS Programme Board, driven primarily by risks around data quality (specifically lower precision for measures of change) and Northern Ireland data integration – the latter being the focus of this update for the Board.
5. Precision on measures of change is a key requirement for macroeconomic policymakers ahead of transition to the TLFS as the headline measure. Improvements are anticipated from the increased incentives and data rotation introduced in April, but it is too early to assess their impact. We are undertaking a range of analysis to better understand the likely impact of different contingency options – ranging from short-term analytical approaches to longer-term design improvements – should they be needed.
6. In addition to resolving the issues above, the Programme remains laser focused on preparing for the July 2026 readiness assessment. This will be a critical point to set a reasonable bar on the minimum viable product we need for transition. This assessment will provide the Authority Board with a clear view of progress, the remaining gaps and the way forward.

NISRA's LMS status

7. In Northern Ireland the transformed Labour Force Survey (LFS) is known as the Labour Market Survey (LMS) and, following the development and successful piloting of the LMS questionnaire, it was introduced into the field in October 2023. The new survey has retained many design features from the LFS and operationally the new survey has been working well in the field, yielding an overall Wave 1 response rate of 57 per cent in the last 12 months (this compares to 52 per cent on the LFS for the same period) with over 95 per cent of responses being complete responses.

8. Detailed analytical work and peer review is underway across all key operational and statistical processes to ensure the emerging data is fit-for-purpose. A dedicated linkage study to examine non-response bias has recently been initiated, along with projects to link the new survey data to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) data and local benefit data to check the validity of key economic statuses recorded by respondents on the new survey.
9. Collectively, this work will play a pivotal role in finalising decisions around the calibration and weighting design which will support the new survey. Significant stakeholder/user engagement has been shaping the ongoing analytical work – with further engagement planned.
10. NISRA is developing 'Measures of Success' criteria for the new survey and will publish these over the summer, for consideration in the second half of the year. Completion of the UK components and having access to comparable Great Britain (GB) data will be a key determinant in NISRA's transition timetable.

Dependencies between ONS and NISRA

11. Currently, labour market information for Northern Ireland (NI) is collected through the LFS using the same questionnaire as the rest of the UK. In future, NI data will be collected through NISRA's LMS, while GB data will be collected through ONS's TLFS. As NISRA's LMS is likely to transition first, GB data will continue to be sourced from the LFS for an interim period before moving to the TLFS. Both the continued production of UK statistics using LFS and the success of TLFS are therefore heavily dependent on satisfactory integration of the Northern Ireland data collected by NISRA.
12. Integration is complex and challenging and includes the alignment of datasets (due to different survey questions), methods, timelines, and operational delivery to enable as much continuity as possible in UK labour market statistics. GB and NI transformations are progressing to different designs and timelines with the NI LMS being more locally tailored to meet NI requirements, which creates challenges when agreeing UK dataset specifications and mapping variables between the surveys.
13. Integration of NI LMS data into the GB TLFS falls relatively early in the critical path. This is to accommodate the volume of work and continuous feedback loop/improvement required for dataset merging, development of UK methods, analysis and data sharing of UK-level data and finally seasonal adjustment and discontinuity. Producing GB only data or using modelled NI data as a mitigation if issues arise with combining the NI data will also impact the critical path unless a decision is taken soon, as different methods and processing work would need to be undertaken.

Dependency Management and Risk Mitigation Approach

14. Following recent delivery challenges, ONS and NISRA have strengthened their approach to developing and governing our joint work, reflecting the criticality of success in this area. The high-level approach we have adopted is shown below.

Tiered Project Dependency Management & Assurance Model

Level 4 – Exceptional Escalation:

Used only where delivery confidence, trust, or joint commitments must be addressed or reset, including engagement with independent assurance.



Level 3 – Programme Board Oversight:

Provides routine assurance and accountability through monthly reporting, challenge on risk mitigation, and oversight of material issues.



Level 2 – Strategic Alignment & Risk Ownership:

Recently added layer of governance, where ONS and NISRA senior leaders assume joint accountability for onward messaging to Boards, jointly intervene on unresolved or material risks and agree trade-offs affecting scope, timing, or quality.



Level 1 – Operational and Project Delivery:

ONS and NISRA delivery teams collaborate daily to deliver, test, and resolve issues early, managing dependencies and risks at source.

Conclusion

15. The integration of NI data from the LMS is complex, challenging and of critical importance to the continued production of high-quality and timely UK labour market statistics. Overall, we are making tangible progress towards this, supported by the strengthened ways of working between ONS and NISRA.
16. We have a disciplined grip on the issues driving the TLFS Programme's current Amber/Red status. Significant effort is focused on agreeing the way forward on current data quality issues related to the measures of change and as detailed above, we have intensified joint delivery and accountability with NISRA.
17. We welcome the Board's support and challenge as we enter a critical period for the Programme with the first readiness assessment in July.

Dr Alex Lambert, Senior Responsible Owner, Transformed Labour Force Survey Programme, ONS, and Philip Wales, Chief Statistician, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 11 May 2026

ONS Communications Update

Purpose

1. To update on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) evolving communications strategy, including our website transformation, and provide the latest metrics that enable us to track the reputation of the ONS with external audiences.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. note the summary of external sentiment towards the ONS for April and early May;
 - ii. consider the recommended refresh to our communications strategy aims, approach and milestones for discussion; and
 - iii. note the progress and next steps on content and website transformation.

Background

3. The ONS set out a long-term communications strategy in October 2025 to support the turnaround of the organisation. Metrics enable us to assess the reputation of the ONS and to provide a benchmark for our communications objectives.
4. Our content and website transformation aims to deliver improved and streamlined content on a new, stable website platform over a phased rollout. It will enable us to meet user needs for clearer information that is easier to find while building a longer-term dissemination approach, including through Application Programming Interface (API) development.

Discussion

5. The update summarises the media and stakeholder reaction to announcements and ONS publications over April and early May 2026.
6. It also sets out a recommended refresh to our communications strategy and our plans for website transformation, reflecting the progress made so far and ensuring we have a stretching ambition that can adapt to opportunities and risks.
7. We continue to welcome views as we develop and implement our communications strategy and website transformation to meet user need and rebuild confidence in the organisation.