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James Benford
Director General for Surveys and Economic Statistics Group

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Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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15 July 2026

Dear Mr Hoare,

Today the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published the third quarterly progress update on the Surveys and Economic Statistics Improvement Plan[1]. This combines the previously separate Plan for ONS Economic Statistics and ONS Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics, into a single, strategic plan that covers the full end-to-end process of the production of economic statistics.

The recent publication of both the ONS Business Plan and ONS Strategy has strengthened the foundations of the Surveys and Economic Statistics portfolio by reinforcing our focus on producing high-quality, business-critical statistics, and setting out a clear approach to managing competing pressures through rigorous prioritisation. This has helped refine delivery milestones and establish greater certainty about what can be delivered within the current financial year. We have agreed the key strategic priorities for the portfolios, as well as performance indicators. Together, these will support more consistent reporting and enhance transparency. In the remainder of this letter I set out our recent record on delivery, messages from the key performance indicators and the detail of our plans over the next year.

Record on delivery over the previous quarter

The last quarter has seen progress and improvements across the Surveys and Economic Statistics portfolio:

- Early data from the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), following the implementation of the final set of design changes in April, indicates that response rates in the later survey waves have improved in line with target levels. This provides a strong basis for the assessment, to be published in August, of our

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsimprovementplans/onssurveyimprovementandenhancement/onssurveysandeconomicstatisticsimprovementplanquarterlyprogressupdatejuly2026

readiness to transition to the TLFS as the primary measure of labour market statistics from 2027.

- We have strengthened the Statistical Business Register (SBR) programme, adopting an iterative delivery approach. This is already delivering tangible benefits through the deployment of enhanced search functionality. The next phase will focus on managed adoption, system integration, and building confidence to support wider implementation across the organisation.

- Within National Accounts, we have gained accreditation to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) Plus representing a significant milestone in strengthening the quality and international standing of our statistical reporting. It also enhances the accessibility of financial statistics for users.

- The publication of a broader package of analysis on GDP residual seasonality alongside Quarter 1 outputs has increased transparency regarding the methods, evidence base, and interpretation underpinning our estimates. This supports greater user understanding and confidence in the statistics.

- The move of the remaining Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) sample to digital-first collection has reduced operational costs and risks and accelerated data collection and processing.

Key performance indicators

Accredited Official Statistics are official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and confirmed to comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics. 71% of our regular tier 1 and tier 2 economic statistics that are not official statistics in development are accredited official statistics. All tier 1 economic statistics were published on time and there have been no corrections to 'higher impact' errors in statistics produced so far this year. We have corrected 17 'lower impact' errors in the period March to May 2026 – which was broadly half the number in the preceding 3-month period. We continue to learn from these through monthly retrospectives.

Since the last update we now have the results of our annual stakeholder satisfaction survey, which was run from 14 January to 15 March 2026 and achieved 135 responses. There was a marked improvement in the proportion of users whose needs were fully met for inflation and labour market statistics, likely reflecting progress improving those outputs. However, a greater proportion of users reported their needs were not met for public sector finance and global trade and investment statistics, likely reflecting the need to rebuild trust after high profile errors last year.

Across our four social surveys, the number of interviews achieved shows recovery against previous downward trends, with Labour Force Survey (LFS) performance similar to prepandemic levels seen in 2019. We have work ongoing to learn from other countries and explore the potential costs and benefits of mandating household surveys.

Across our business surveys, we are seeing encouraging signs of improvement and stability in our response rates. Our focus on labour market business surveys has generated a particularly strong post-pandemic recovery there. Improved performance on business surveys reflects progress moving them online and modernising operational processes, as well as the expansion of our large cases and account management units.

The recent LFS interviewer allocation issue has demonstrated the complexities of sustaining the demanding LFS/TLFS dual run and the need to strengthen our operational processes. Our weekly interview performance has since recovered fully. A lessons-learned exercise will ensure we look broadly at how we can use the experience to strengthen our survey operations. We understand the impacts on our statistical outputs and I am confident that our methods can manage them. We will report publicly on the work we have done to assess impacts with our next set of labour market statistics.

Plans to further improve statistics over the coming year

There is of course much more to do. Over the coming year, we will deliver further improvements in statistical quality, operational resilience and user relevance by:

- Progressing the transition to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) as the principal measure of labour market statistics in 2027, while continuing the migration of key labour market systems away from legacy technology platforms.
- Embedding the Statistical Business Register (SBR) as the default platform for search and viewing activity, alongside the controlled expansion of its use for sampling and wider integration across statistical systems.
- Incorporating data from the Annual Survey of Goods and Services into the National Accounts which will significantly improve the measurement of the UK service sector. Our recent article in June 2026 highlights this change and we will publish a further article in August describing the impact on GDP up to 2024 with the full update to GDP data following with the Blue Book in November 2026.
- Developing a new ‘component-based’ measure of productivity in line with the OECD’s latest handbook on productivity. We discussed the results at a recent Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence conference and will publish an article setting out the detail on the new method in September with a view to migrating towards it as our headline estimate in November. We expect this to materially improve understanding of productivity.
- Agreeing accreditation plans with the OSR for priority outputs where official statistics accreditation is currently suspended or where reaccreditation remains a strategic objective, including Producer Price Inflation and UK Trade statistics.

- Strengthening quality across social and business surveys through the recovery and enhancement of household financial surveys, alongside the expansion of account management for key businesses.

- Modernising priority systems and methods across trade and Balance of Payments, prices, public sector statistics, National Accounts, and GDP.

- Enhancing the use of administrative and alternative data sources to improve the quality, timeliness and efficiency of statistical production. This includes Value Added Tax, Real Time Information Pay As You Earn, Foreign Direct Investment sampling improvements, and the Digital Economy Survey pilot.

Laying a foundation for the future, including measurement of artificial intelligence

We also need to upgrade our system of national accounts and balance of payments in line with the new international standards that were agreed last year. This is a multi-year effort where we are aiming, in line with most other countries, to implement the core of the new standards that are significant for the measurement of GDP and the balance of payments by 2030/31.

We also recognise there is a need to go beyond those new standards in light of the rapid developments in, and adoption of, artificial intelligence (AI). AI is making material and rapid changes to the nature of intangible capital in the economy and is resulting in fundamental changes to the nature of work and drivers of GDP. It is critical that the economic system of measurement keeps up. In September 2026, we will publish the first in a series of articles that will work towards a new ‘thematic account’ describing the contribution of AI to the economy. This is an area where the UK is leading thinking internationally working with the IMF, OECD and other National Statistics Institutes.

Though the most pressing challenges in the UK are to restore quality, in the medium term our methods for economic measurement need to evolve to remain relevant to our changing economy. We will make steps towards addressing that relevance challenge over the course of this year and by March 2027 will have published an AI development plan setting out how we will strengthen data collection and measurement to better capture artificial intelligence in our economic statistics.

We will publish our next quarterly update in October 2026, ensuring that you and other key stakeholders continue to be kept informed of our progress.

I am copying this letter to Chair of the Treasury Committee, Dame Meg Hillier MP.

Yours sincerely,

James Benford