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James Benford
Director General for Surveys and Economic Statistics Group

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

Dear Mr Hoare,

Today the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published the fourth quarterly progress update on the Surveys and Economic Statistics Improvement Plan[1].

Over the last quarter, we have maintained our focus on improving the quality of core economic and labour market statistics, strengthening operational resilience, reducing reliance on legacy systems, and ensuring our statistics continue to evolve to meet the needs of users and a changing economy. We are moving to a new phase, moving from recovery to improvement.

Record on delivery over the previous quarter

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

- The Labour Force Survey is now back on track after the issue affecting telephone interviews in May and June, supported by a larger interviewer field community. Performance has since recovered to levels seen during the equivalent period last year. We have set out the actions we are implementing from our lessons learned review, which are strengthening operational controls broadly. Learning transparently when things go wrong is vital to improving surveys and economic statistics and trust in them.
- Labour Market Transformation continues to move forward. Following the implementation of survey design improvements earlier this year, performance of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) has continued to strengthen. Early evidence suggests improvements have become further embedded as additional survey cohorts have progressed through the redesigned approach. The first readiness assessment has clarified the remaining work required to support a data-led transition to the TLFS as the principal measure of labour market statistics. We remain on track to deliver that transition in 2027 and are engaging actively and

[1]https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsimprovementplans/onssurveyimprovementandenhancement/onssurveysandeconomicstatisticsimprovementplanquarterlyprogressupdateoctober2026

transparently with users and the UKSA Board to make sure the transition works for them.

- The Statistical Business Register (SBR) programme remains on track to deliver its first transition state by the end of 2026. This will enable a substantial group of users to begin moving from the legacy Inter-Departmental Business Register and marks an important milestone in modernising the infrastructure that underpins business statistics. It will give us a platform to interrogate the make-up of the economy under the new Standardised Industry Codes that we published earlier this year.
- Recovery across social surveys has continued, supported by successful recruitment activity. For the first time since implementation of the improvement plan, the Social Surveys field force has exceeded its minimum target level. In addition, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) achieved the largest achieved sample in its history following the move to digital-by-default collection.
- Methodological improvements are generating important new insights into the economy. The incorporation of data from the Annual Survey of Goods and Services into the National Accounts indicates a larger service sector and more secondary production of goods than previously measured. A new component-based measure of productivity provides a richer understanding of changes in productivity growth since the financial crisis, while exploratory research linking Labour Force Survey data with HMRC payroll data has improved our understanding of potential employment-related non-response bias.
- We have strengthened our measurement of the emerging AI economy. This includes enhanced measures of investment in digital infrastructure, which indicate strong growth through 2024 and 2025, and publication of the first article in a programme of work developing an AI thematic account. This included analysis of more than 5,800 UK businesses with a specialism in artificial intelligence and contributes to wider international work on measuring the economic impacts of AI.

Key performance indicators

The latest performance indicators show continued progress in several important areas. All Tier 1 economic statistics publications have been delivered on schedule and the proportion of accredited official statistics across our Tier 1 and Tier 2 economic statistics remains stable at 71%. There have been no higher-impact corrections since January 2026 and the six-month rolling correction rate has continued to fall, reaching around half the level seen at the start of the year. This reflects the sustained focus on quality assurance, learning from errors and strengthening production processes.

Employee engagement within the Surveys and Economic Statistics group has also improved, with the Employee Engagement Index increasing to 65%, reflecting the commitment of colleagues delivering these improvements while managing significant operational pressures.

Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Specialist resource constraints have affected delivery in a number of areas, including work on international classifications, the Integrated Annual Business Survey and Trade in Goods processing systems. Teams have also responded effectively to operational disruptions associated with system downtime and delays in third-party data supplies, ensuring that statistics continued to be published on schedule while identifying opportunities to reduce future risks.

Looking ahead, financial pressures remain challenging. The need to continue the Labour Force Survey and Transformed Labour Force Survey dual run into 2027, alongside wider cost pressures and ongoing recruitment challenges, means we have scaled back recruitment plans over the coming six months. We are pursuing productivity and savings initiatives, including wider deployment of AI-enabled tools, while carefully balancing delivery of priority improvements against emerging demands and resource constraints.

Plans to further improve statistics over the coming quarter

There is, of course, much more to do. Over the next quarter, the priorities we are delivering for users include:

- Continuing Labour Market Transformation, including publication of a further update on readiness for transition from the Labour Force Survey to the Transformed Labour Force Survey, monitoring the impact of recent survey improvements and further improving industry data quality.
- Publishing the first experimental statistics from the Linked Employer-Employee Dataset (LEED), providing new insights into labour market dynamics and workforce mobility across the UK.
- Delivering the first transition state of the Statistical Business Register, allowing a substantial group of users to begin moving from the Inter-Departmental Business Register by the end of 2026.
- Publishing the Blue Book and Pink Book, incorporating updated survey and administrative data alongside methodological improvements that provide a more complete picture of UK economic activity.
- Exploring how supplementary analytical information can support interpretation of monthly economic statistics, helping users better understand underlying economic trends in periods of volatility.
- Advancing plans for seasonally adjusted CPI and CPIH, with quality assurance and testing now underway to support more consistent analysis of underlying inflationary pressures.
- Publishing Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) results based on the largest achieved sample in the survey's history, strengthening the quality and granularity of earnings statistics.
- Progressing implementation planning for new international statistical standards, including assessment of forthcoming System of National Accounts and Balance of Payments Manual changes and their implications for UK economic statistics.

- Developing the subnational statistics work programme, including improvements to regional productivity estimates, coherence across subnational data and the evidence available to local decision-makers.
- Reducing reliance on legacy technology, through continued modernisation of business survey processing and migration of statistical production systems onto more resilient platforms.

Laying foundations for the future

Alongside addressing immediate quality and delivery priorities, we continue to invest in the long-term development of UK economic statistics. Recent work on productivity measurement, AI thematic accounts, linked data sources and enhanced economic measurement demonstrates the opportunities available through methodological innovation and greater use of administrative data.

At the same time, we recognise the need to carefully sequence improvement activity in light of financial and workforce constraints. We will continue to prioritise those activities that deliver the greatest benefit to users while ensuring that the quality and resilience of our core statistics remain our foremost concern.

We will publish our next quarterly update in January 2027, 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