UK Statistics Authority

Penny Young, Interim Chair

Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF
chair@statistics.gov.uk
statisticsauthority.gov.uk

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

11 November 2026

Dear Simon,

I am writing to respond on behalf of the UK Statistics Authority to the Committee's report on 'The work of the UK Statistics Authority', published on 11 September 2026. As an independent, non-ministerial body reporting to Parliament, we recognise the significance of our accountability to your Committee. We are grateful for the rigorous scrutiny, analysis and engagement that has gone into the Inquiry.

We fully recognise the problems set out in the report; and we accept the findings and recommendations. As a Board, in August 2025 we publicly accepted responsibility for our part in the problems and stated that we were acting urgently to restore trust. We give a fuller response to the recommendations in the appendix, and I will give an overall assessment of progress in this covering letter. Before I do so, can I also thank the Committee for recognising progress over the last year, and for stressing the importance of independence in official statistics.

We are a good way into the turnaround of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The Board is grateful to the ONS Permanent Secretary for his visible and impactful leadership. He has built a strong leadership team; work has been prioritised strategically; the team are engaging openly with stakeholders; and there has been widespread work on culture (with improvements in engagement scores). There have been many improvements in statistical products and the underlying processes. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has acknowledged progress on economic statistics and surveys. Stakeholders are beginning to comment publicly on improvements. But as I also said in the inaugural Chair's lecture in July this year (a recommendation in the Lievesley Review), it takes time to turn an organisation around. There is more to do on shifting statistical production away from legacy technology, and on developing further maturity in programme and resource management. The coming year also sees crucial decisions on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), and the need to deliver a successful Census 2031 Test.

Our regulatory arm, the OSR has strengthened its operating model, under the guidance of the Board's Regulation Committee. The updated Code of Practice[1] (published in November 2025) is broader in scope and more direct in its requirements than the previous version, and has since seen OSR intervene visibly across the political spectrum. Its updated strategy is built on being a credible and rigorous regulator, and to being clearer in its conclusions and regulatory requirements. An example of this is its assessment of ONS mid-year population

[1] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-statistics/

estimates where it made very clear its challenging requirements of the ONS in order to retain accreditation[2]. The ONS successfully responded to this.

As a Board, we have focused on strengthening our oversight and leadership of the ONS, our work with OSR and our engagement with leaders across the statistical system. We have benefited from the additional skills and insight brought by NEDs who joined the Board in February 2025. In relation to the ONS, we have leaned into issues and provided challenge but also support. We have implemented the findings of the external Board Effectiveness Review, in relation to working with the Executive on more meaningful performance information, deep dives, and use of individual expertise. We will benefit from additional expertise once the current recruitment for new NEDs is complete. We have increased scrutiny of and support for Census planning with a new sub-committee. We have also focused hard on engaging with the Chief Statisticians in the Devolved Governments, and with the Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

So, our assessment is that there has been good progress over the last year, and I thank colleagues for making this happen. It's important to recognise that the ONS turnaround is not complete, and system wide opportunities are far from being fully realised. But the foundations are stronger, and we are entering a new phase in the life of the statistical system. Most obviously, André Loranger has started as National Statistician; someone who brings a wealth of experience and expertise. In the current split of responsibilities as proposed in the Devereux review, he will provide support and advice to the ONS as it continues to improve. He will provide advice to the Board on key matters such as TLFS transition and Census design. He will also provide leadership and momentum on the system wide opportunities identified at the UKSA's Statistics Assembly in January 2025: improvements to data sharing, coherence and harmonisation, local and granular data, and user engagement. As leader of the GSS, he will work with the deputy heads on developing the profession, as identified in the excellent Royal Statistical Society and GSS report on the role of the Future Statistician[3]. This system-wide leadership matters to the Board.

The momentum in this new phase will be further strengthened by the arrival of three new NEDs in the new year, and of course the recruitment of a permanent Chair which is now underway. As well as their focus on immediate challenges, the permanent Chair will lead the Board's development of the longer term UKSA strategy. This should include questions as to how the UK statistical system can work together most effectively, and what the long-term ambition of the ONS as the UK's National Statistics Institute should be. The permanent Chair will also want to consider how to further enhance Board effectiveness including sub-committee structures.

We welcome your continued scrutiny and support, and engaging with you over the coming year.

Yours sincerely,



Penny Young
Interim Chair

[2] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/osr-reponse-to-ons-report-on-progress-with-economic-statistics/2/
[3] https://rss.org.uk/membership/professional-development/the-future-statistician/

UK Statistics Authority response to the report by PACAC on the work of the Authority

November 2026

Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)

"The UKSA should keep us informed of progress towards the successful delivery of the Transformed Labour Force Survey on a quarterly basis. The UKSA and the Cabinet Office should also update us on efforts to explore the consequences of mandatory completion of the Labour Force and other surveys to date in their responses to this report." (Paragraph 28)

We will be pleased to provide updates on the TLFS, particularly as we work towards the key assessment point in July 2027 as to whether it is safe to start transitioning to the TLFS in November 2027. As set out in a recent update[4], the Authority is conscious that dual running TLFS and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) comes at a price. While the ONS is running and maintaining LFS alongside TLFS, its ability to get the best out of TLFS is more limited: it puts pressure on methodological, testing and digital capacity. It also reduces capacity to improve broader surveys and statistics. Equally, it is important not to transition at any price, and the Board will scrutinise the data on the agreed acceptance criteria: statistical and data quality, user acceptance and readiness, and operational readiness.

Building on the existing quarterly update reports on ONS improvement plans for surveys and economic statistics, the quarterly TLFS updates will be an opportunity to provide the Committee with more detail as the ONS works through remaining issues, engages with stakeholders and users, identifies any trade-offs, and develops its post-transition programme.

The updates will align with our quarterly labour market transformation updates published on the ONS website and shared with the Committee. The next update is due in November 2026, and the February 2027 update will draw upon a substantial discussion at the January Board meeting on progress against the acceptance criteria. We will keep the Committee informed of any significant developments between updates.

The Authority also welcomes the opportunity to update the Committee on our work to explore the costs, benefits and practicalities of mandatory completion of the Labour Force Survey and other surveys, following a recommendation in the Lievesley Review[5]. Declining response rates to social surveys is well documented, and interventions to achieve modest improvements are costly. International evidence indicates mandating surveys can be a significant positive contributor to survey quality. However, there are a wide range of issues. An initial phase of work (phase one) is underway to provide a balanced assessment on the case for and against, considering policy, ethical, legal, statistical and operational considerations as well as stakeholder and public acceptability workstreams. It is intended to ensure any decision on mandating surveys is taken on strong evidence. The ONS will continue working with the Cabinet Office, because any recommendation to mandate would require ministerial approval.

Phase one will conclude in January 2027, with the ONS Executive Committee presenting initial conclusions and making a recommendation to the Authority Board on whether to pursue further work on mandatory surveys or not. The Authority will then brief the Committee on the findings and conclusions.

---

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

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-uk-statistics-authority-uksa-2023

Government data sharing

"The Cabinet Office and the UKSA should update us on the long-term plan to improve data sharing across government in light of the failure of the Integrated Data System in its response to this report and quarterly thereafter. In particular, the Government should clarify where responsibility for integration of the work of the IDS with the National Data Library's Kickstarter Programme now sits, following the closure of the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)." (Paragraph 34)

This is a particularly important recommendation: improving data sharing across government is essential to delivering better statistics, stronger evidence for public policy, and better value from data already held across the public sector. The success of the current government's priorities on devolution and re-wiring the state will depend upon a step change. We also recognise the Committee's concern that previous approaches, including the Integrated Data Service, did not deliver the scale of change originally intended. As observed by Professor Lievesley, and in turn the Committee, the Integrated Data Service (IDS) did not have a clear enough scope but also faced systematic and cultural barriers to responsible data sharing across government. Overcoming these barriers will require cross-government action, buy-in from the wider data ecosystem, and moving beyond individual successes, as discussed in OSR's *State of the UK Statistical System 2026*[6] report.

There has been progress, but it has required huge commitment and determination; and the potential from data sharing is far from realised. We are not yet in a position to give you a full answer on the long-term plan but this initial update does set out what needs to be done and by whom.

On the positive side:

- An excellent example of increased use of administrative data is the fact that ONS migration data is now purely based on administrative data, and no longer relies on the International Passenger Survey. And PAYE Real Time Information is also being used in a range of core statistics, supported by more regular and automated supply. It has been shared with ONS and NISRA, and work is under way with National Records of Scotland, which will support more coherent statistics across the four nations.

- The National Statistician's Office has worked with colleagues across GSS to support the promotion and accessibility of guidance, training and tools that help practitioners make effective use of administrative data for statistical purposes.

- The ONS is developing its offer in support of the Government's Rewiring the State agenda, to support local authorities and Mayoral Strategic Authorities, building on the ONS Local service as a front door to ONS expertise, supporting local users to navigate existing data and analytical products, and improving other dissemination tools, geography and statistical infrastructure.

But there are real issues and risks too. New data shares require a huge amount of determination and friction to overcome. Existing data supplies do not have the resilience required. For example:

- In the ONS, increasing the use of administrative data in the production of critical statistics has the potential to deliver great value, but also creates a significant dependency on an effective and consistent supply chain for those data, a supply chain which is fragile. Two recent delays and failures in the supply of administrative data to the ONS by government departments have risked core migration and labour market outputs being delayed. Continuity and security of supply are as important as new shares.

[6] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/state-of-the-statistical-system-2026-2/

- Administrative data has huge potential for use in Census 2031, for example, improving the address frame, helping to target field activity, informing quality assurance, and adding value through linkage to other data sources. But it also depends on guarantee of supply.

- The Devolved Governments have been frustrated by reliance on the ONS for onward shares of key data sets.

In terms of what happens next:

- The Authority, working through the ONS, OSR and the National Statistician's leadership of the GSS, will continue to play its part by identifying priority data sources for official statistics on an annual basis.

- The ONS will continue to develop a more coherent approach to stewarding data and managing data supplies, as set out in *The data that matter*[7].

- The Authority will use its voice to make clear where it has concerns about data supply on key statistical processes, and communicate what needs to happen to ensure security of supply.

- The incoming National Statistician will provide leadership across the GSS and work with colleagues across government. But it is for the Government to set out how responsibility for enabling and ensuring cross-government data sharing now sits across the Cabinet Office, the Authority and the relevant delivery bodies following machinery of government changes, including the splitting of the Central Digital and Data Office across the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Government Digital Service (GDS) and the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Technology (BIST). It would also be useful for the Government to clarify how the learning from the Integrated Data Service is being carried forward into the National Data Library and Strategic Data Roadmap, including how statistical, analytical and operational data priorities will be aligned and governed.

- We accept the Committee's recommendation to provide updates on progress. We propose writing again with a substantive update once the National Statistician has had time to review the approach. We propose to follow up with a further response jointly with the Cabinet Office, once the longer-term operating model for government data sharing and the National Data Library is agreed. We would then welcome discussion with the Committee on the most appropriate reporting cadence. Our view is that a time-limited reporting arrangement, or an annual public update on priority data sources and data-sharing progress, would provide greater transparency while avoiding an open-ended quarterly process that risks duplicating existing reporting routes.

ONS leadership and independence

"As and when a National Statistician is appointed, the Government and the UKSA Board will need to clarify the structure, including who ultimately leads the ONS, and how the arrangement aligns with the relevant legislation." (Paragraph 54)

"That the leadership of the ONS is at arm's length from government is an important protection designed to ensure the integrity of official statistics. Should the Government wish to make permanent changes to the National Statistician's role leading the ONS, it will have to change legislation. Should it do so, we expect it to demonstrate suitable protection for the integrity of official statistics in any change." (Paragraph 55)

[7] https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsstrategies/thedatathatmatteranewapproachtocriticaldatasourcesforcorestatistics

"The principle that official statistics are produced in a system designed to protect from political intervention remains an important one. We do not recommend changes to the relevant legislation nor to the structure of the UKSA or the ONS at this stage." (Paragraph 92)

The Authority is committed to the importance of protecting official statistics from political intervention. Professional independence for official statistics is fundamental to their trustworthiness, quality, and value in informing public debate and decision-making. This principle, enshrined by Parliament in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007[8], guides all of the Authority's work.

The current executive members of the Authority Board are the Director General of Regulation, the National Statistician, and the Permanent Secretary of the ONS.

Darren Tierney, as ONS Permanent Secretary and Principal Accounting Officer, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the ONS and for developing its strategic direction in consultation with the Board. This includes leading the organisation's continued recovery and accounting to the Board for the performance of the ONS. André Loranger, as National Statistician is the principal adviser on statistical matters to the Authority Board as well as to Ministers and government. In relation to the ONS, he will provide support and advice to the ONS, and also advise the Board on key issues such as the decision to transition to the Transformed Labour Force Survey; Census design, and other key statistical issues. As Head of the Government Statistical Service, André provides system-wide statistical leadership and leads work to strengthen capability and collaboration across the Government Statistical Service. He will be guided by evidence and priorities from across the statistical system, including the UK Statistics Assembly, OSR's State of the Statistical System report, and the Heads of Profession network. Darren and André work closely within these distinct roles.

The Authority Board stated as part of the announcement on André's appointment that it would review the longer-term leadership and governance arrangements for ONS, taking account of legal advice and the views of the statistical community. This review will start shortly and will take account of the findings of the Lievesley and Devereux[9] reviews and the Committee's report.

The Authority will keep the Committee involved in reviewing these leadership arrangements as this work develops. We note the Committee's view that certain changes to the role of National Statistician would require primary legislation, and we will work with the Government on this if required. The Board's view is that whatever the outcome of the review it is conducting on the separation of the responsibilities, a more explicitly permissive and flexible approach in the Act to distributing the National Statistician's responsibilities depending on circumstances would be desirable. But above all, our view is that the test of any split of responsibilities is whether they ensure that wider system priorities including across the four Nations are given real attention; that the ONS leadership is strong statistically and operationally; and that independence and integrity of official statistics are safeguarded.

Board recruitment

"The Cabinet Office's decision to disregard the Chair's request to reappoint experienced non-executive directors significantly weakened the UKSA Board at a crucial time. It is the responsibility of the Cabinet Office to ensure an UKSA Board that is equipped to perform its role, not least by ensuring that it has a full complement of appointments and proper and timely succession planning to maintain capability as its membership evolves." (Paragraph 76)

"It appears that the appointment of a new National Statistician will precede the appointment of a new permanent Chair of the UKSA. This means the appointment of the next National Statistician has been overseen by the interim Chair, and, while the role is split with the ONS Permanent Secretary, will have to ensure clear responsibilities and lines of accountability for both. That the Government has left

[8] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents
[9] https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/devereux-review-of-the-office-for-national-statistics-performance-and-culture/

responsibility for this in the hands of an interim appointment is regrettable. A permanent chair of the UKSA should be appointed as soon as possible." (Paragraph 81)

Decisions about appointing members of the Authority Board are for Ministers to take, as set out in sections 3 and 4 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. Like any effective board, the Authority Board requires a balance of experience in areas including leadership, technology, governance, and audit. It also requires specialist knowledge relevant to official statistics. Much of the value that individual members bring is built through sustained engagement with the Authority, ONS and the wider statistical system. New members bring valuable experience and challenge but will not immediately replace the knowledge and expertise lost when several experienced members leave within a short period. Timely succession planning is therefore essential to maintain the effectiveness of the Board. Competitions should be initiated well in advance of known departure dates to allow appointments to be completed and, where appropriate, an orderly handover to take place.

The Authority agrees with the Committee that the Board has been hampered by delays in appointments and by decisions neither to reappoint existing members nor to maintain momentum on their timely replacement. Appointments to the Authority Board have repeatedly taken too long over a period of several years, despite the end dates of members' terms being known well in advance and repeated representations from the Authority about the need to begin recruitment in good time.

Experience over recent years suggests that while ministerial changes add additional delays, the Cabinet Office has not consistently had sufficient capacity to ensure key public appointments are made within the necessary timescales. The Authority is discussing with the Cabinet Office sponsorship team how the arrangements can be improved. The Authority would be willing to provide greater administrative support for future competitions, as it has done previously, where this would help them proceed in a timely way, while respecting the decision-making role ultimately reserved for Ministers.

The Authority welcomes the competitions for a permanent Chair and three new non-executive members, which began in October, and hope these will be completed in a timely fashion.

The Authority would welcome the Committee continuing to take a close interest in the administration of future appointments. The Authority will keep the Committee informed of progress on current competitions, the appointment of a permanent Chair and its discussions with the Cabinet Office about more sustainable arrangements for future appointments.

Framework document

"An updated Framework Document should make clear the Cabinet Office's responsibility for ensuring a properly functioning UKSA Board." (Paragraph 83)

The Authority's Strategy and Policy Division has been working with the Cabinet Office sponsorship team to update the Framework Document since the conclusion of the Lievesley Review. This process was paused during the period of change in the Authority's senior leadership, but a revised draft was agreed earlier in the year by the Committee, the Authority Board and Cabinet Office officials.

This revised Framework Document provides for oversight of the Authority's performance while respecting the statutory and operational independence of the statistical system. Following discussion with the Chair, the Minister may communicate the Government's priorities and statistical needs as a user of official statistics, through an annual, public letter to the Chair. The Interim Chair and sponsoring Minister met in September to discuss the performance of the Authority, and will continue this engagement.

In light of the Committee's report, the Authority and Cabinet Office will review the document again to determine what further clarification should be included about the sponsor

department's responsibility for supporting an effective Board. As discussed elsewhere in this response, this includes arrangements for succession planning and appointments to the Authority Board.

The proposed additions will be discussed with the Cabinet Office sponsor team, before the Framework Document returns to the Authority Board and Ministers for final approval. We hope that this can be finalised by the end of the year.

Office for Statistics Regulation

"The OSR's responsibility for escalating concerns to the UKSA Board with greater urgency needs to be made clearer and its leadership held accountable for doing so. While it is proper that the OSR works through the UKSA Board, this Committee remains an appropriate mechanism through which concerns can also be raised." (Paragraph 89)

The Authority welcomes the Committee's consideration of the work of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) as part of this inquiry and recognises and accepts the findings and recommendation.

Under the oversight of the Authority Board's Regulation Committee, OSR has developed and implemented a new strategy for 2026-29[10], which places a stronger emphasis on clearly communicating findings, following up more systematically on the action taken in response, and maximising the impact of regulatory work. The strategy is securing greater impact from OSR judgements. The Regulation Committee will monitor the success of the strategy and report to the Board on this.

OSR will continue to provide consistent, independent and fair judgements, undertaking reviews as set out in its work programme which is informed by priorities within the statistical system – with its work always focussed on how best to serve the public good.

Within our governance structure, the Regulation Committee provides robust assurance and challenge to OSR's assessments and wider regulatory activity. As a sub-committee of the Board, it scrutinises regulatory judgements and emerging concerns and escalates them to the Board where appropriate. In 2026 Regulation Committee took the decision to appoint two external members to its Committee.

Through the Regulation Committee, and the contribution of its members, including the Director General for Regulation, the Board will continue to receive regular updates on OSR's regulatory judgements relating to compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. This will help ensure that the Board is sighted on matters affecting trustworthiness, quality and value across the statistical system, including issues relating to ONS statistical outputs and wider risks to the integrity of official statistics. As a result of the early stages of the Committee's Inquiry, the Chair of Regulation Committee has provided fuller updates to the full Board after each meeting.

The Director General for Regulation will also continue to work closely with the Authority Chair to ensure that OSR's independent regulatory perspectives are fully reflected in Board discussions and decision-making. The Chair discusses regulatory interventions in relation to elected politicians in detail before publication.

In line with the Committee's recommendations, OSR will also continue to maintain a constructive and transparent relationship with PACAC, supporting effective parliamentary scrutiny through regular engagement and by ensuring that significant regulatory concerns are communicated clearly and promptly where appropriate.

[10] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/how-we-will-strengthen-trust-and-confidence-in-statistics-2026-2029/pages/3/

The Board, through the Regulation Committee will hold OSR to account for delivering the commitments in its strategy, assessing progress through the strategy evaluation programme, and reporting transparently on the impact of the changes being made. The Authority would be happy to update your Committee on how these arrangements are operating and welcomes its continued scrutiny of their effectiveness.

Funding and prioritisation

"While all similar public sector organisations can make a case for increased funding to deliver more, we conclude that poor internal processes, particularly around prioritisation, were more of an issue for organisational failings than the total funding envelope. Resource constraints were exacerbated by the failure to prioritise the production of core statistics adequately.

"The removal of much of the ringfencing around specific pots of money is sensible. However, if demand for statistics from government is not accompanied by discussion about resource or trade-offs, it will mean little. We expect the revised Framework Document between the Cabinet Office and the UKSA to include clear mechanisms to reconcile demands for statistics with funding to provide them." (Paragraphs 97 and 98)

We recognise that, in the past, the ONS has tried to do too many complex things at once, which reduced the resources available for core statistical production. The ONS has already strengthened its approach to prioritisation, with a clear commitment (as articulated in the ONS 2026-29 business plan[11]) to successful delivery of a focused portfolio of work. Delivery of the most important statistical outputs remains a core purpose for the organisation, and increased transparency through quarterly updates is making visible the choices about sequencing work in the ONS recovery plans (ensuring, for example, that neither the delivery of the Census nor critical economic statistics compromise each other). ONS is now much more deliberate in taking focused decisions on what new initiatives to progress, based on whether they directly contribute to its strategic objectives and whether the conditions for success are met, including robust delivery and resource plans. Longer term, the Authority will need to return to the strategic question of whether there are other user needs that ONS, as the national statistical institute, should meet when there is more flexibility in prioritisation.

As the Committee's report makes clear, a significant proportion of ONS funding was classified as 'ring-fenced' prior to 2025/26. This constrained the organisation's ability to reprioritise. The removal of all ring-fenced funding in advance of 2026/27 (with the exception of the Census programme) provided the organisation with much more flexibility to allocate resources to its priorities. The ONS business plan for 2026/27 shows a significant increase in the funding dedicated to core statistical production as a result, consistent with the recommendations made in the Devereux Review and the expectations in our Spending Review 2025 (SR25) settlement[12]. The latest quarterly update on the ONS surveys and economic statistics improvement plan[13] demonstrates how this more focused approach is being applied across surveys and economic statistics, directing resources towards work expected to have the greatest impact on the quality, resilience and relevance of key outputs. However, as noted in the update, running the LFS and TLFS in parallel continues to constrain resources and limit investment in wider statistical improvements.

The SR25 settlement affords the ONS further flexibility in the use of Census programme funding. Subject to HM Treasury approval, up to £30 million of Census funding may be used for other purposes in 2026/27, including activity related to the ONS recovery plans.

Looking further ahead, the ONS will face funding challenges later in this Spending Review period, driven in part by the financial pressure associated with the continued dual running of the Labour Force and Transformed Labour Force Surveys. ONS is working with HM

[11] https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications/office-for-national-statistics-business-plan-2026-27-to-2028-29/
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document/spending-review-2025-html
[13] See footnote 4.

Treasury to produce an affordability plan for future financial years, covering the savings, productivity improvements and prioritisation necessary to sustain investment in core statistical priorities. The plan will set out its key assumptions and the impacts should those assumptions change. The ONS and HM Treasury will formally discuss the plan in December 2026.

Historically we have negotiated directly with HM Treasury through the annual Estimates and longer-term Spending Review processes. We expect to continue this direct engagement but we will explore how the Cabinet Office could be involved in the processes to ensure transparency and provide support. Dan Tomlinson MP, in his role as Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office, and in his role as Authority sponsor minister, has already offered his support. We will reflect any updated change in the framework document, noting that we would continue to participate directly in the Spending Review through established processes for non-ministerial departments.

Government Statistical Service (GSS) capacity review

"To support better prioritisation, we reiterate the recommendation made in the Office of Statistics Regulation's report on the State of the Statistical System 2026, that the National Statistician, once appointed, should publish a baseline view of capacity across the statistical system. This should include workforce data and identify any relevant skills gaps and constraints. It should be updated regularly. This will ensure that future discussions about funding, prioritisation, and demands for new statistics, are supported by a clear picture of existing resources." (Paragraph 99)

As head of the GSS, the incoming National Statistician will establish and publish the baseline view of capacity across the statistical system called for in the OSR's State of the Statistical System 2026[14], including workforce data and evidence of skills gaps and constraints. This will comprise an ongoing exercise to collect data to understand capacity, capability and pressures across the statistical system and will present an opportunity for the National Statistician to use this information for stronger system-wide oversight, influence and leadership.

Work led by the National Statistician's Office will collect both quantitative data on the size and shape of the Government statistical community along with qualitative data focused on capability and capacity. Existing data sources will be utilised as well as potential new collections.

Assessments of skills and capability gaps will be informed by work that is already underway to implement the recommendations of the 'Future Statistician' collaboration with the Royal Statistical Society, refresh of the GSS competency framework and a new GSS leadership development programme.

The arrival of the National Statistician provides an opportunity to utilise all this information to understand capability and capacity pressures across the system and identify areas where action is needed, and provide leadership to strengthen the statistical system as a whole. A summary of the findings will be published and a sustainable approach will be established to enable this assessment on an annual basis.

More generally, the Board sees the arrival of the National Statistician as an opportunity for the Board to consider how a distributed system (across different Nations, government departments and non-departmental bodies) can work most effectively.

External commentary and scrutiny

"While there have been enormous problems at the ONS, we also note that not all the commentary about the ONS's performance has been well-informed, or constructive. Attempts to right long-standing, historical problems have sometimes been used as evidence of the ONS's ineptitude, rather than as necessary steps which help us better understand the UK economy and society. Good news

[14] See footnote 6.

stories, such as the immense transformation of migration statistics or the introduction of new data sources into inflation data, have attracted far less attention." (Paragraph 40)

ONS will build a positive understanding of progress and achievements into its media and user engagement and external communications. Additionally, we will surface this finding with key stakeholders, including from the media, to generate ideas and gain support on encouraging balanced and forward-looking media coverage of our work. We currently have a range of media and stakeholder briefings, fora and events around our statistical releases, development and improvement activity and prioritisation plans. We share updates, seek feedback, surface challenges and work together with users where there are decisions or trade-offs.

The ONS also welcomes opportunities to engage with Parliament, including through the wide range of select committees with an interest in particular statistics and policy areas. We would be glad to discuss areas in which PACAC's attention and convening power could support the statistical system through further scrutiny, advice and investigation. This could include, in addition to scrutiny of the work to improve statistics, topics like barriers to data sharing across government, the case for mandating responses to household surveys, the responsible use of artificial intelligence in producing and disseminating statistics, adapting the system of measurement to account for growing role of artificial intelligence in the economy, and the development of the data and statistical capability needed across government.

Organisational culture

"An organisational culture in which challenge was apparently resented and in which bad news was not escalated appropriately until it was too late lay at the heart of many of the ONS's problems. This appears to have been addressed by the senior leadership which has been proactive in communicating not only good news, but also ongoing challenges, with us and with the wider statistics community. We welcome this and expect it to persist as the organisation returns to 'business as usual'." (Paragraph 63)

The Authority agrees with the Committee's conclusion that organisational culture was a significant factor in the challenges experienced by ONS. In particular, the organisation did not consistently create the conditions in which constructive challenge was welcomed and difficult messages were escalated and acted upon. We recognise the seriousness of this finding and agree that the more open and transparent approach demonstrated by senior leadership must be sustained as ONS continues its recovery and improvement journey.

The ONS has developed a new mission statement and leadership commitment[15] to establish clear expectations for how it delivers its priorities and how leaders are expected to behave. This work is aligned with the ONS People Plan, which provides the wider strategic framework for strengthening leadership capability, improving colleague experience and embedding the culture and behaviours needed to deliver the ONS's mission. Building on these foundations, the ONS has introduced a practical behavioural framework designed to translate those expectations into everyday decisions, conversations and ways of working. The framework provides a shared language for the culture the ONS is seeking to build and reflects themes consistently identified through extensive organisational listening, including staff surveys, focus groups, People Action Groups, staff networks, Culture Champions, leadership workshops, organisational reviews and wider colleague feedback.

There are encouraging early indications from the ONS's regular 'pulse' surveys that morale is improving. Half of respondents (51%) in October 2026 were confident that senior leaders were using staff survey feedback to inform their decisions, compared with 31% responding positively to the equivalent Civil Service People Survey measure in 2025. The overall Employee Engagement Index was 64% in July 2026, compared with 60% in the 2025

[15] https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsstrategies/onsstrategy2026to2028

People Survey[16]. A key part of ONS' cultural transformation was ending the industrial dispute with our trade unions, and implementing the hybrid working principles, which seek to achieve 40% overall organisational attendance, with colleagues attending the office when there is a clear purpose. Attendance levels have been moving in the right direction: across July to September, office attendance averaged 28% (taking into account absences and working patterns), an increase from the 23% recorded in April 2026 when the hybrid working principles were introduced. Attendance by Senior Civil Servants averages 60%, aligned to the higher target introduced for that cadre.

The Authority welcomes the Committee's recognition of the progress already made and is committed to ensuring that openness, constructive challenge, effective listening and timely escalation remain central to how the ONS operates. The Authority will continue to oversee this work, monitor evidence of progress and hold the organisation accountable for delivering sustained cultural change over time.

[16] Comparisons with the People Survey are provided for context, although differences in survey design and response rates mean that these are indicative rather than like-for-like measures.