
James Benford | Director General, Surveys and Economic Statistics Group

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Office for Statistics Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation
(by email)

29 January 2026

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter setting out the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) assessment of our first quarterly progress reports on the Economic Statistics Plan and the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan. Your suggestion that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish these quarterly reports has been helpful in creating a clear and transparent way to set out progress, surface risks and engage users and stakeholders.

I welcome your recognition of the early progress we are making. This includes the resumption of producer price statistics, the restoration of the achieved sample size for the Labour Force Survey to close to the pre-Covid point and the methodological improvements that came with the Blue Book to increase coverage of research and development in the economy and more accurately account for the output of multinational pharmaceutical companies. These changes directly improve the quality of the UK's core economic statistics.

You will also have seen that yesterday we announced our 'go' decision to incorporate grocery scanner data into the consumer price index, alongside other changes to the measurement of hotels and computer game prices to reduce their volatility. These changes, and the broader modernisation of the data pipelines and analytical processes, represent a step change in the measurement of UK consumer prices. When we implement the changes in March, the index will be more comprehensive, with grocery price data covering purchases across all goods and days of the month and including the effect of store card discounts, and less sampling volatility. The modernisation of our systems and processes also gives us a platform to onboard more big data sets to improve further how we measure consumer prices as they become available.

I am grateful also for your recommendations on how we can further improve our quarterly reporting. The ONS is currently undergoing a multi-year business planning process that will be critical to carefully sequencing our work to improve statistics so that the Economic Statistics Plan is realistic and prioritises what matters most to users. Given the scale of our commitments – including double-running the existing and transformed labour force survey, delivering a new statistical business register, preparing for the new international macroeconomic standards and progressing Census 2031 – we are taking deliberate decisions about sequencing. Where necessary, this means pausing or slowing some planned activity in order to safeguard the quality and delivery of our most critical existing workstreams. As we [announced last year](#), we are also working with key users to review the scope of the statistics the office produces and looking for opportunities to narrow the scope of our outputs and will set out our conclusions in the coming weeks. These prioritisation decisions are taken to protect statistics that underpin the most critical economic and societal decisions.

Our next progress report, to be published in April, will report progress against the milestones we set ourselves in 2025/26 and set out clearly our priorities and where work has been deferred as part of the planning process. The subsequent update in July, will come alongside our decision, informed by user engagement, on whether to progress immediately to the transformed labour force survey and will set out the detailed milestones that follow.

I would like to recognise also the work the OSR is undertaking to follow up its review of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) statistics against the Code of Practice. Errors in data supplied to the ONS by third parties have been a major source of errors in ONS statistics over the past year, including data supplied to us for public finance and trade statistics. Our quarterly report noted these errors as a major issue we are facing as we seek to improve the quality of economic statistics. As you will be aware we have already strengthened procedures around the checking of source data for public finance statistics, adding comparisons with independent feeds during collective assurance, between HM Treasury, the ONS, HMRC and the Office for Budgetary Responsibility, of taxes data. Our data governance team has also set out a new framework for managing third party data sources and I welcome your initiative to set up a joint event between the OSR, the ONS and government data suppliers in the coming months to discuss practices in supplying data to us. We look forward to the findings from your follow up review and stand ready to do whatever more we can do to improve the quality and reliability of important source data from HMRC.

Thank you for your continued engagement on our plans and your focus on improving the quality, trustworthiness and value of ONS statistics.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J Benford', written in a cursive style.

James Benford
Director General, Surveys and Economic Statistics Group