

Article

# Labour market transformation – update on progress and plans: July 2025

Overview of Labour market statistics transformation plans and progress, building on previous engagement on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).

Contact:  
Labour Market Transformation  
team  
labour.market.  
transformation@ons.gov.uk

Release date:  
21 July 2025

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Transformed Labour Force Survey](#)
3. [Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey](#)
4. [Innovations and initiatives to increase survey responses](#)
5. [Actions in response to Office for Statistics Regulation reviews](#)
6. [Related links](#)
7. [Cite this article](#)

# 1 . Main points

## Transformed Labour Force Survey

- Our recently published plans for [economic Statistics](#) and [survey improvement and enhancement](#) reinforce the importance of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) for delivering high-quality labour market statistics.
- The short Core Survey (a streamlined, longitudinal, labour-market-focused questionnaire that takes 15 minutes per household to complete on average) launched in early July 2025, with a Wave 1 sample size of 90,000 households per quarter across Great Britain.
- The new Core Survey design (combined with the introduction of face-to-face supported completion in October 2025 and data rotation for Waves 2 to 5 in January 2026) are expected to reduce respondent burden, improve completion rates and representativeness, and enhance the overall data quality of the headline labour market indicators.
- We are collaborating with users to assess how the separate, cross-sectional Plus Survey is meeting the need for additional labour market, and wider household, socioeconomic and local data.
- The timing of transition to the TLFS remains an evidence-led decision, with a readiness assessment conducted in collaboration with our main users scheduled for July 2026.
- We aim to transition to our published headline labour market statistics in November 2026, although this may extend into 2027 if our (or users') assessment of quality requires more data to be collected and assessed.

## Labour Force Survey

- The Labour Force Survey (LFS) remains the lead measure for data on the supply of labour, while further development of the TLFS takes place.
- The interventions made so far to address quality concerns with the LFS have now fed through all five waves of the survey; improvements can broadly be seen in response levels and rates, as well as in the composition of respondents according to different characteristics.
- These improvements have been welcomed by the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, as they increase confidence that the LFS can be fit for purpose until the transition takes place.
- We are increasing interviewer capacity for Waves 2 to 5 to help improve response rates, as these currently remain lower than their pre-pandemic level.

# 2 . Transformed Labour Force Survey

## Design implementation

In our [April 2025 update](#), we outlined our improved Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) design, which we developed following significant research and methodological development in partnership with external experts and our main users. The resulting design was endorsed as the most effective way to respond to the main needs for future labour market statistics.

The short, Core Survey is a streamlined, labour market-focused questionnaire that takes just 15 minutes per household to complete on average. It launched in early-July 2025 with a Wave 1 sample size of 90,000 households per quarter across Great Britain. As part of the survey's longitudinal design, 45,000 of these households will be followed up at Wave 2, for a total of five waves.

The Core Survey, combined with the other design improvements outlined in this release, is expected to reduce respondent burden, improve completion rates and representativeness, and enhance the overall data quality of the headline labour market indicators. It will work alongside the separate cross-sectional Plus Survey, which collects additional labour market, and wider socioeconomic and household data. Further detail on the content collected in each survey is provided in the Core and Plus Survey content subsection.

To improve the accessibility of the survey, we have introduced new respondent materials featuring QR codes linking directly to the login page for the online survey. Pilot testing showed this increased completion on mobile devices, particularly among younger respondents.

Development continues on targeted in-home supported completion for hard-to-reach respondents. This is an expansion of the current knock-to-nudge design, which is planned for deployment in October 2025. Data rotation, which will further reduce survey length and respondent burden by not re-asking the full questionnaire for each wave, is being developed and tested for implementation in January 2026.

A crossover survey has also launched to collect vital comparison data between the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the TLFS. During July, 3,500 households that previously completed LFS Wave 5 will be invited to complete the TLFS short Core Survey online. This research will help us to understand and interpret potential differences between the two surveys. We will report on the findings as part of this regular series of labour market transformation articles.

As previously announced, transition timing will be evidence-led with a readiness assessment in collaboration with our main users taking place in July 2026. We are aiming to transition our published headline labour market statistics in November 2026. However, this could be in 2027 if our (or users') assessment of quality requires more data to be collected and assessed.

## TLFS Programme

The TLFS was established as a formal programme in June 2025, having previously been managed as distinct projects within two separate programmes. This change brings together the full end-to-end scope of delivery, with a designated Senior Responsible Owner, clear accountability, governance and measurable objectives. The Programme Board includes external representatives from the devolved governments and HM Treasury.

The programme is a core aspect of both our [Restoring confidence, improving quality: the plan for Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) economic statistics report](#) and our [ONS Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#), published on 26 June 2025. Both plans demonstrate the importance of, and our commitment to, the delivery of high-quality labour market statistics. We will keep users updated on progress with the labour market components of these plans, as part of this regular series of labour market transformation articles.

We are continuing to engage with external user forums, including:

- the [Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics](#)
- the Labour Market Technical Group
- the Household, Socioeconomic and Local Group (HSL)

The programme remains focused on restoring user confidence in our labour market statistics, and in our wider household, socioeconomic and local statistics, as well as enhancing users' readiness for change.

## Core and Plus Survey content

The TLFS programme initially prioritised the production of high-quality labour market statistics. For this reason, our initial focus was developing the content of the short, Core Survey to collect the data required to produce headline labour market estimates and productivity outputs, ahead of its implementation earlier this month. We developed a [content prioritisation framework](#) in collaboration with our main user groups, to ensure that the Core Survey content is relevant and controlled.

Because Core Survey development has been the priority, the Plus Survey content will initially be similar to the longer version of the TLFS.

The topics collected on the Core Survey are:

- household information, including name, age, sex, household structure, eligibility, relationship grid, and tenure
- sociodemographic information, including country of birth, passports, and ethnicity
- core labour market information, including unemployment, employment, and earnings
- other information, including education, health, and disability

The Plus Survey contains all the Core Survey topics and:

- additional sociodemographic information, including Welsh language, religion, national identity, marital status, and sexual orientation
- additional labour market information, including benefits, sickness, job quality, and social mobility
- other information, including veterans, accidents at work, work-related illness, travel to work, smoking, and wellbeing

Some content has been removed from both the Core and Plus surveys, including:

- shared cooking facilities
- shared living rooms and dining rooms
- the name of the owner or renter of accommodation

Data collection for those aged under 16 years has been reduced to include only name, age, sex and relationship to other people in the household. The Welsh language question will be asked of those aged under 16 years in a future iteration of the Plus Survey.

We are collaborating with users to assess how the separate, cross-sectional Plus Survey is meeting the need for additional labour market, and wider household, socioeconomic and local data. This content will contribute to a broad range of HSL statistics and analysis that are currently produced using the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey. The HSL Technical Group convenes monthly to inform and assure our approach to data collection, requirements, prioritisation and engagement. It has a diverse membership, including users from the devolved governments, central and local government, and think tanks.

We will provide updates on our progress with HSL statistics in future labour market transformation articles.

## UK data coherence

In the future, labour market information for Northern Ireland will be collected by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Labour Market Survey (LMS). The ONS will then combine the LMS data with corresponding data from the LFS (covering Great Britain) and, in time, the TLFS. These will be seasonally adjusted to enable the production of Northern Ireland (NI) and UK results. The ONS and NISRA are working through potential solutions to overcome challenges to NI and UK production timelines and to maintain aggregate UK labour market statistics as far as possible.

Work is currently underway in collaboration with NISRA to map the NI LMS data against the TLFS data. Testing the production of UK data will begin in the coming months. At the same time, as NISRA is projecting a transition to its LMS ahead of the TLFS, the ONS and NISRA are completing mapping work and testing the optimal solution for combining transformed NI LMS data with our current LFS data for Great Britain. This is to ensure the ongoing production of UK data as far as possible during the interim period.

The latest updates on NISRA's plans can be found on the [Transformation of Labour Market Statistics in Northern Ireland web page](#).

## Collection of complex variables

The collection of complex variables, specifically Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), using an online survey presents challenges. We are continuing our work to identify how to improve the quality of data collected for these variables.

For SIC, potential post-processing solutions, such as integrating an updated Classifications Index Matching Service tool (CIMS) and the use of business survey data, are being developed. CIMS is a tool currently employed as part of the TLFS processing. It is a two-step process that combines rule-based matching with machine learning, based on the free text entered by the respondent. The updated version of the tool will produce a code at the 2, 3, 4 and 5-digit SIC classification along with a confidence at each level, as well as identifying where text entered cannot be coded.

We are also exploring other data collection solutions, such as a “search as you type” question design and an innovative artificial intelligence (AI) solution. Testing for the “search as you type” question design is under way. Cognitive testing and the use of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey are taking place through July and August 2025, with a larger quantitative test to follow. We are also working to improve the quality of a “search as you type” frame using the TLFS and census data.

We are currently analysing SOC data to determine the priority of this work ahead of the TLFS readiness assessment. However some of these solutions may be adapted to enable improved SOC data quality.

In collaboration with our main users, we are developing a set of quality criteria for SIC and SOC that need to be satisfied to enable a successful transition to the TLFS.

## Increasing the role of administrative data

We continue to progress our work on administrative data, including linking HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) to TLFS and LFS. Our focus in recent months has been on assessing the quality of data linkage and ensuring the correct versions of the datasets being prioritised are used in our analysis. Alongside this, users may also be interested in work we have planned on a linked employer-employee dataset (LEED), which was discussed in our National Statistical blog post [Data linkage to shine new light on UK labour market](#) in July 2025.

A LEED provides information on the interaction between employers and employees in the labour market, including over time. This has the potential to produce complementary administrative indicators on economic activity and wages, but also new labour market statistics on job-to-job flows, hiring rates, separation rates and worker mobility, to complement those produced from the LFS and TLFS.

We continue to prioritise our areas of focus with our main stakeholders through the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics.

### 3 . Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) remains the lead measure for data on the supply of labour while further development of the transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) takes place.

This section focuses on the LFS, for simplicity. Given the linked design of the two surveys, improvements to the LFS also affect the size and quality of the Annual Population Survey (APS), but will take longer to filter through to published statistics.

#### Quality and recovery

As set out in our previous progress updates, over the last two years, we have taken several actions to address quality concerns with the LFS. These include:

- reinstating the sample boost
- returning to face-to-face interviewing
- increasing incentives
- the ongoing recruitment of additional interviewers

Improvements can broadly be seen in LFS response levels and rates, the composition of respondents according to different characteristics, and in the coherence of some LFS estimates with other data sources.

These interventions have now fed through all five waves of the LFS for the latest data periods. Response levels for Wave 1 are close to the level they were before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. However, response levels for Waves 2 to 5 and representativeness remain lower than their pre-pandemic levels.

Following discussion with our main user groups, we published our [LFS quality update](#) alongside our labour market statistics release on 13 May. This update shared improvements to quality on the levels estimates from the LFS. However, some measures of change involve comparisons with periods before the improvements were completely implemented, and we advise treating those with caution.

Further improvements are planned for the LFS, namely the recruitment of further interviewers for Waves 2 to 5 of the survey and a reweighting exercise. The reweighting exercise will also include improvements to the weighting methods used for the housing tenure adjustment. These improvements are expected to enhance the quality of the LFS further, and we will continue to monitor this closely.

Our recent improvements to the quality of LFS data have been welcomed by the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, as confidence increases that the LFS can be fit for purpose until transition takes place.

### 4 . Innovations and initiatives to increase survey responses

Our Labour Force Survey (LFS) improvements complement wider initiatives designed to improve response rates across all our surveys. For example, our commitment to creating a new social survey hub to develop innovative research is discussed in our [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#). The Survey Strategy, Research and Innovation (SSRI) hub has now been established, and comprehensive programmes of research are being scoped to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can enhance our social survey operations, and how administrative data can improve social surveys end-to-end.

We have also conducted a randomised controlled trial of differential incentives on the transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). Survey uptake rates for a sample of participants who were offered a conditional £20 incentive (for completing the survey fully) were compared with the current approach of offering £10 upon full completion. The trial demonstrated that survey uptake was significantly higher in the £20 group and that there was a lower refusal rate. However, there were only minor differences between the two groups in terms of the partial completion rate. Despite the positive impact, we are not taking forward the extra incentive because it did not demonstrate clear value for money in terms of improved overall response.

## 5 . Actions in response to Office for Statistics Regulation reviews

We continue to make progress with actions in response to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) [Systemic Review of Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) Economic Statistics](#) and ongoing [regulatory review of labour market statistics](#), and are actively building them into our plans. Our approach and commitments outlined in our [Restoring confidence, improving quality: the plan for ONS economic statistics](#) will support us to deliver these actions through the clear prioritisation of labour market statistics.

We regularly engage with the OSR about our work and progress in key areas, including:

- the launch of a dedicated webpage for the [Transformed Labour Force Survey \(TLFS\)](#) to make all information related to TLFS more accessible and transparent for users
- sharing the detail of the Core and Plus Surveys (summarised as part of this article) with members of the Labour Market Technical Group; Household, Socioeconomic and Local (HSL) Technical Group; and the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics (see Section 2: Transformed Labour Force Survey)
- providing clarity on our plans for improving the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and managing the transition to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)

We will continue to use this series of labour market transformation articles to provide progress updates.

## 6 . Related links

### [Transformed Labour Force Survey technical design review: April 2025](#)

Article | Released 10 April 2025

Findings from the technical design review to inform the future design of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).

### [Labour market overview, UK: July 2025](#)

Bulletin | Released 17 July 2025

Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

### [Labour Force Survey quality update: May 2025](#)

Article | Released 13 May 2025

Assessment of Labour Force Survey data quality, including the impact of recent changes on the statistics, response levels and rates, and respondent characteristics.

### [Labour Force Survey](#)

Methodology

Introduction to the Labour Force Survey, explaining to respondents what it is, how it functions and how it is used.

### [Shape Tomorrow study](#)

Methodology

Introduction to the Shape Tomorrow study, also known as the Transformed Labour Force Survey, explaining to respondents what it is, how it functions and how it is used.

## 7 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 21 July 2025, ONS website, article, [Labour market transformation – update on progress and plans: July 2025](#)