

Article

Labour market transformation – update on progress and plans: April 2026

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Release date:
15 April 2026

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

Transformed Labour Force Survey

- We have implemented all agreed major design improvements to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) – including data rotation, improved pay and earnings questions, and a higher respondent incentive – to strengthen data quality.
- The short Core Survey continues to improve response quality by reducing partial household responses and increasing the number of fully responding individuals.
- We are working closely with users to refine criteria and conditions for transitioning from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to the TLFS ahead of the first evidence-led readiness assessment in July 2026.
- At the readiness assessment, only one calendar quarter of data reflecting the latest set of design changes will have been collected, resulting in limited quality assessment of their impact.
- Given the limited data availability, further data collection and assessment will be needed, meaning that the earliest transition of headline labour market statistics will move from November 2026 into 2027; a 2027 transition has always been part of our scenario planning and is now considered the most likely outcome.
- The July readiness assessment will inform final design decisions, future publication plans, and the timing of the next readiness review (no later than January 2027).
- We will continue to review progress with users and provide further updates through this regular series.

Labour Force Survey

- The Labour Force Survey (LFS) remains the lead source of labour market data and continues to run alongside the TLFS while development continues.
- Response levels show clear improvement, with the survey changes now fully implemented and all waves now close to their pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic level.
- Users, including the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, continue to give positive feedback on these improvements, which offer increased confidence in the LFS data while the transition to TLFS completes.
- To strengthen representativeness, we are working to understand potential employment-related variation in non-response bias by linking LFS and TLFS survey data with HM Revenue and Customs Pay As You Earn (PAYE) real-time indicators; early results are providing useful insights and will be published later this year.

2 . Transformed Labour Force Survey

In response to user feedback, we have expanded the coverage of information on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) in this article. We welcome further feedback from users via labour.market.transformation@ons.gov.uk.

Improved design

Substantial progress has been made since our update in November 2025, with all previously agreed major design changes now implemented.

Data rotation, which has been highlighted by stakeholders and methods experts as an important improvement for enhancing data quality, was implemented in April 2026. This design change aims to improve response and data quality across the longitudinal waves of the Core Survey. For demographic questions that will not change between waves, respondents are no longer required to re-enter these data. For responses that may change, respondents are asked to confirm that their data have not changed since the previous wave. To ensure that data are protected, no actual data are presented back to the respondents. Only data relating to the composition of the household and respondents' education are rotated.

The pay and earnings questions have also been enhanced to help data quality. These questions will now be asked to respondents who are completing the questionnaire on behalf of someone else in the household (a proxy response), but were previously limited to only those responding for themselves. This change aims to increase the proportion of respondents who are eligible to answer these questions, and will therefore increase the volume of data collected for this topic. Enhancements made to the pay and earnings questions include:

- the removal of banded pay questions for respondents completing for themselves
- updated banded response options for proxy respondents
- casual workers who are paid via Pay As You Earn (PAYE) being asked the pay and earnings questions

These improvements were required before the transition from LFS to TLFS, as the Low Pay Commission will need these data to inform National Minimum Wage policies.

Cumulatively, these developments are expected to further improve data quality, overall survey performance, and to meet important user requirements.

The short Core Survey (the streamlined, longitudinal, labour-market-focused questionnaire) is continuing to improve the quality of response by increasing the proportions of fully completing households. This results in an increase in the volume of fully responding individuals included in the datasets. The Core Survey's average completion time has also reduced substantially, to around 17 minutes, based on data from July to September 2025. This is compared with almost 30 minutes on average, before July 2025.

However, overall response rates and attrition have not yet improved in line with expectations. The Wave 1 response rate for July to September 2025 was 37%, which comprises:

- fully completing households – 28.5 percentage points
- partially completing households (where at least one person in the household did not fully complete the survey) – 8.5 percentage points

Running the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and TLFS in parallel, as well as our other social surveys such as the Living Costs and Food Survey, continues to place substantial demands on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) interviewer field staff. In October, interviewer attrition increased, primarily because of higher turnover among agency interviewers. This resulted in interviewer numbers stabilising at around 850 instead of the original 1,023 target. This has made it challenging to fully resource the expanded TLFS sample since October. To manage this pressure, we have:

- reprioritised interviewer resources away from the Annual Population Survey (APS)
- strengthened onboarding and training to reduce early attrition
- introduced retention awards for interviewers with more than 12 months' service
- deployed dedicated TLFS "knock-to-nudge" teams

These actions have supported a clear improvement in achieved TLFS interview numbers in recent periods. However, capacity constraints remain in some areas, with London and Wales currently below target. Recruitment activity is ongoing, weekly targets have been increased, and we expect this continued focus to support more consistent delivery against performance expectations.

The introduction of data rotation and the increase of the conditional voucher incentive value from £10 to £20 are also expected to boost survey response. These apply to both the Core and Plus surveys, and to all waves of the longitudinal Core.

Complex variables

Collecting high-quality data on the complex Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) variables remains a priority for the TLFS Programme, and progress has been made in the development of multiple parallel solutions to align with the two-digit SIC.

Recent test results, using independent test samples of approximately 1,400 respondents have demonstrated positive improvement using a Search-As-You-Type question for SIC. This allowed 85% of respondents to select from a respondent-friendly adaptive list of industries, with 81% accuracy for the 2-digit level. The remaining respondents provided free-text information that could be coded through post-processing solutions.

Further scaled testing is planned this year to demonstrate performance on the TLFS before taking a decision on implementation. This method would be used alongside a newer iteration of the Classification Index Matching Service (CIMS) tool, which is being developed to use wider survey information (such as SOC) to classify responses post-processing. Improvements are also planned for the SOC CIMS tool to improve accuracy in the coming months.

To improve quality further, we are exploring options for a longer-term, integrated AI-supported survey assist solution. Early testing of dynamic questions to gather better quality information to code industry has shown promising improvements in codability. This innovative approach will require substantial further work to assess respondent acceptability, ethical implications, respondent burden, and the overall flow of the combined solution.

UK data coherence

In the future, labour market information for Northern Ireland (NI) will be collected by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA's) Labour Market Survey (LMS). The ONS will then combine the LMS data, including seasonal adjustments, with the corresponding data from Great Britain (GB) to enable the production of results covering the UK. Initially the GB data will be from the LFS then, in time, from the TLFS.

The ONS and NISRA have been working through potential solutions to overcome challenges to production timelines and to maintain the delivery of aggregate UK labour market statistics, as far as possible. An approach to maintain UK data outputs, as NISRA transitions to their transformed survey, has now been agreed and endorsed by our main stakeholders. Additional processing steps will increase the risks associated with generating labour market outputs to meet specific deadlines, especially in the early stages as newly developed processes are adopted. Mitigations have been considered and initial indications are that the ONS should be able to incorporate data delivered by NISRA to maintain current UK publication timelines. The ONS is also collaborating with NISRA to help match their LMS to PAYE data, to understand potential employment-related variation in the LMS data.

The latest updates on important developments and future plans with NISRA's LMS can be found on their [Transformation of Labour Market Statistics in Northern Ireland web page](#).

Plus Survey and household, socioeconomic and local data

We continue to make progress in our assessment of household, socioeconomic and local (HSL) data from the TLFS. The HSL data will replace the current Annual Population Survey (APS) datasets when they are ready. The data will include a wide range of socioeconomic themes such as education, health, travel, and wider household characteristics to support local, granular analysis across the survey. The finalised assessment will provide a complete view of the performance of the HSL survey data, which will feed into the first readiness assessment in July 2026.

Recent user engagement on the APS has clarified the need for high-quality annual HSL datasets as a replacement. This will be explored further through Phase 2 of our engagement with users, which aims to seek more detail on critical user needs for these data, and will then be used to update the assumptions around HSL data within our programme plans.

We provide regular updates to the HSL Technical Group but are keen to engage a wider range of HSL users. Those with an interest in TLFS HSL data who are not yet involved in the Programme are encouraged to contact TLFSPlusTransformation@ons.gov.uk.

Readiness assessments

The timing of transition to the TLFS for our published headline labour market statistics remains an evidence-led decision, with the first readiness assessment conducted in collaboration with our main users scheduled for July 2026.

All previously agreed major design improvements have now been implemented into TLFS, and our focus is on preparing for the July assessment. It will be an important milestone providing critical insights to inform our next steps, including final design decisions, future publication plans and the timing of the next readiness review.

As part of the preparation, we have engaged extensively with our main users, including with the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, to refine criteria and conditions for transitioning from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to the TLFS.

The first readiness assessment will be informed by our measures of success for transition, which we continue to review and refine in collaboration with users. The measures are centred around the three pillars:

- Statistical and Data Quality
- Operational Readiness
- User Confidence and Readiness

Further detail on each pillar is provided in [Section 6: Transformed Labour Force Survey measures of success](#). We are also considering the residual quality risk, enabling us to reflect elements not captured by individual measures of success. When assessing performance against the measures, we will compare results with both the current and historic performance of the LFS, as well as the quality required to meet users' needs.

We are currently meeting our Statistical and Data Quality measures of success for headline labour market status (estimates of employment, unemployment and inactivity levels from the TLFS), including breakdowns by sex. However, some breakdowns, such as selected age, and regional labour market status estimates, and the precision of quarterly change estimates, are not yet meeting required standards. Recent design improvements have not yet fully fed through, and we will continue to monitor measures of success as they take effect. We are also exploring additional options to improve response and strengthen quality, should the design changes alone not deliver the required improvement.

Scenario planning

As would be expected for a programme of this size and complexity, we are undertaking regular scenario-planning and risk assessment work in line with [Teal Book](#) best practice. The scenarios look at the timing for the arrival of TLFS data with design changes applied, readiness of methods, and analysis timelines to build a picture of our relative confidence in meeting the measures of success at different points in time. The timeline that we currently consider most likely to be followed falls within 2027, but we will continue to review and refine our confidence assessments and scenario planning as we learn more about the data quality, and we will provide further updates as part of this regular series of articles.

Publication plans

We will take a multi-stage approach to transitioning from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to the TLFS. This will include publishing an impact article once the readiness assessment has confirmed that TLFS can produce headline labour market estimates of sufficient quality, but shortly before we move to TLFS as the headline measure. This timing will enable users to prepare fully and understand the impact on the data. We will also publish a comprehensive plan setting out the timetable for releasing data and supporting materials, including documentation on survey design and methods, crossover survey results, and accompanying datasets. We will also provide familiarisation sessions for users to ensure they are well prepared and supported throughout the transition.

In collaboration with our main users, including the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, we have considered the benefits and risks of publishing experimental TLFS data. We concluded that the decision to publish will be informed by the data and made in collaboration with our main users at each readiness assessment, starting in July 2026. The overarching principle for deciding when to publish TLFS data will be whether it is in the public interest to do so, and we will consider the following criteria when making the decision:

- benefits to users of making the data available, including the additional analysis offered, and the additional feedback gleaned from the release
- likelihood of revisions to headline TLFS estimates
- ability to explain any differences in headline estimates and trends between LFS and TLFS, including over time
- risk of causing confusion or misleading users, particularly if there is still an extended period before moving to the TLFS data for headline labour market statistics

This approach balances the need to make potentially useful data available to a wider range of users and the benefits of enabling broader feedback with the importance of sufficient data quality, user confidence, and minimising confusion in the labour market narrative. This approach is supported by the Labour Market Technical Group and the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics. We will continue to update users on publication plans as part of this regular series of articles.

Transition timeline

As mentioned in our November update, the additional complexities in the implementation of some design changes (including data rotation) and methods, mean that, at the readiness assessment in July 2026, we will have more limited data than initially expected from the new design.

In July 2026 we will have:

- quality assessment of priority GB Labour Market and Productivity headline tables (Person Quarterly Dataset) prior to the implementation of the April 2026 design changes (data rotation, incentive increase, pay and earnings questionnaire improvements)
- initial view of UK-level data, following test integration of Northern Ireland data
- provisional assessment using interim provisional weights of Core Household Quarterly dataset (pre-April 2026 design changes), Two-quarter Longitudinal dataset (pre-April 2026 design changes), and Priority household, socioeconomic, and local variables

While data will become available over the coming months, in July we will not yet have:

- a full quarter of quality-assured data on following the implementation of April 2026 design changes (Person Quarterly Dataset)
- any wider datasets including data following the April 2026 design changes (Two Quarter Longitudinal, Household)
- finalised methods for weighting, discontinuity treatment, seasonal adjustment for any datasets because they depend on data collected following the April 2026 design changes, that are not yet available in sufficient volume
- Person Annual, Household Annual and Five-quarter Longitudinal datasets (would not be available until after transition, assuming quarterly datasets show no critical issues)

Although substantial progress has been made, as outlined, there will also be some important evidence and data gaps in July, for example:

- HM Treasury, the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Bank of England will not have yet been able to assess a full quarter of data following the April 2026 design changes, limiting confidence in its quality for policy advice, forecasting and monetary policy decisions
- the Bank of England will not have two-quarter flows following the April 2026 design change, limiting confidence in its ability to assess labour market dynamics and underlying inflationary pressure
- the Department for Work and Pensions will not have estimates of workless households from the new design, limiting confidence in their ability to identify at-risk households and target employment support interventions effectively

Given this limited data availability, further data collection and assessment will be needed to provide both us and our users with sufficient assurance and confidence to begin the process of moving away from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as the source for our headline labour market statistics.

This means that the earliest transition of headline labour market statistics has shifted from November 2026 into 2027. A 2027 transition has always been part of our scenario planning and is now considered the most likely outcome.

The July readiness assessment will inform final design decisions, future publication plans and the timing of the next readiness review, which will be no later than January 2027, by which time the latest design changes will have fed through the data and been assessed.

We will continue to review progress with users and provide further updates through this regular series.

3 . Labour Force 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. The LFS continues to run in parallel with the TLFS, at least until we complete the transition to the TLFS as the headline measure.

As set out previously, we have taken several actions to address quality concerns with the LFS, which are now fully incorporated into the survey. These include:

- reinstating the sample boost
- returning to face-to-face interviewing
- increasing incentives
- continuing to recruit additional interviewers

Following discussion with our main users, a further [update on LFS quality](#) was published alongside the labour market statistics release on 20 January 2026. The article discusses quality, revisions, and coherence issues affecting LFS estimates, and the implications these have for how the statistics should be interpreted. The main conclusions were that:

- response levels show clear improvement, with the survey changes now fully incorporated and all waves are now close to their pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic level as a result
- our improvements have continued to receive positive feedback from user groups, including the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics, and support increased confidence in LFS data until the transition to the TLFS
- early results of our work to strengthen representativeness and to understand potential employment-related variation in non-response bias by linking survey data with HMRC PAYE RTI are providing useful insights and will be published later this year

We continue to closely monitor LFS data quality and update users. We have increased interviewer capacity for Waves 2 to 5 to further improve response levels to their pre-pandemic levels. A full reweighting of the LFS and Annual Population Survey (APS) is underway, with the first data from the LFS Person Quarterly Dataset, used to estimate our headline labour market measures, due for publication towards the end of 2026. Further data, such as the longitudinal LFS, APS and household data will follow, but the timing may be affected by decisions relating to the transition to TLFS. Updates will be provided in future articles. The [next LFS quality update will be published on 21 April 2026](#).

As the improvements continue to feed through to the published data, we recommend that the LFS is used as part of our suite of labour market indicators alongside workforce jobs, Claimant Count, and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) estimates.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) are currently developing their own online-first version of the LFS, the Labour Market Survey (LMS). It is possible that the LMS will go live before the TLFS in Great Britain. The ONS and NISRA have worked together to ensure that current publication dates can be maintained. If there are delays in the processing of the LMS, mitigation measures will be put in place to ensure that the critical labour market data are published on time.

4 . Wider labour market statistics

Administrative Data

Research is underway to understand potential employment-related variation in non-response bias in our Labour Force surveys by linking HMRC Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The initial proof-of-concept focused on the pandemic period, when patterns in survey responses were affected by changes in data collection modes and reduced response rates. Early findings are providing useful insights and are now undergoing quality assurance, methodological refinements, sensitivity testing, and replication on more recent data. Depending on the results of the further work, the linked administrative data could provide valuable information for improving the consistency of headline labour market statistics over time. Initial results of the analysis will be published later this year.

To maximise the value of our work with administrative data and ensure a coherent, system-wide approach, we have established a cross-government steering group – including HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions – to progress the use of administrative data in labour market statistics.

Work is also progressing on the Linked Employer–Employee Dataset (LEED), which links workers to their employers and enables longitudinal tracking. In partnership with the [Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence](#) (ESCoE), we have advanced the LEED prototype and identified how a linked dataset can best support the development of labour market statistics. The first phase is assessing feasibility for enhancing quality assurance of existing labour market estimates by understanding how administrative data can complement survey results. The second phase will develop new experimental statistics on job-to-job flows. This will provide fresh insight into movements within firms and across the wider economy and will offer a more complete view of labour market dynamics.

Labour Accounts

We are also scoping the development of Labour Accounts as part of the implementation of new international frameworks, designed to provide a holistic and coherent view of the labour market aligned to National Accounts concepts and definitions. The administrative data work described above will be an important input into this framework. We are engaging with National Statistical Institutes that have already implemented Labour Accounts to learn from their approaches and identify best practice. We are also mapping differences between labour market and National Accounts concepts to inform the conceptual alignment needed for a UK Labour Accounts framework.

Improvements to labour market bulletins

As part of the development of our new website, we are improving and consolidating our publications to focus on what users need most and to deliver clearer, more streamlined information. For labour market statistics, this will involve consolidating four of the monthly releases into a single labour market overview, along with all the associated datasets. This will allow users to extract the information they need quickly and enable better understanding of developments in labour market statistics and the impact of quality caveats. The changes are expected to be introduced later in 2026.

Economic Statistics Plan and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan

The importance of, and our commitment to, making improvements to our labour market statistics is highlighted in our [Economic Statistics plan](#) and our [Survey Improvement and Enhancement plan](#), published in June 2025. We published [an update on 15 April 2026](#), which includes the latest progress with our short-term employment surveys, labour productivity, and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

Annual Population Survey

In February 2026, we confirmed the next steps in streamlining our portfolio, reducing our publications and focusing on delivering high-quality economic and social statistics that are essential to decision makers, and to inform the public. Full details are set out in our [Letter to the UK Statistics Authority on ONS prioritisation](#). In response to user feedback, we will continue to run the Annual Population Survey (APS), which is most commonly used for analysis of wider socio-economic topics and for analysis at the local and regional level. However, given practical limits on our field interviewer resources, we will have a reduction in the achieved survey sample boost in England used to produce the APS, affecting data collected from April 2026. This will enable us to support the collection of the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) given its importance for GDP, prices and household disposable income statistics. This change should only affect collection of the boost sample used for the APS and is in addition to the removal of the boost sample collected in Scotland, which came into effect with data collection starting in January 2026.

We are working closely with users on what these changes to the APS will mean for their data needs at the local and regional level, as there will be gradual impacts affecting outputs released from June 2026 because of the removal of the Scottish boost and from September 2026 following the reduction to the English boost. We are conducting analysis into the quality of APS data, including breakdowns by key demographic and geographic characteristics, and analysis of longer-term trends in important statistical outputs sourced from APS. This is to better understand and explain the effect of changes to the survey during and since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the anticipated effects of recent changes to our boost samples. This analysis will inform an article on the quality of the APS in Summer 2026.

The longer-term aim remains to address user needs currently met via the APS through the Transformed Labour Force Survey.

5 . Progress with Office for Statistics Regulation recommendations

We continue to make progress with actions in response to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)'s [Systemic Review of Economic Statistics](#) and their ongoing [regulatory review of labour market statistics](#). We regularly engage with OSR on the work that is under way and our progress in important areas. Recent updates, many of which have been presented in this article, include:

- the extensive engagement led by the TLFS Household, Socioeconomic and Local (HSL) project team over the last few months to support a wide range of users around the Annual Population Survey and TLFS Plus Survey development
- our approach on when to publish experimental labour market statistics based on TLFS data was developed in collaboration with our important users and endorsed by our Labour Market Technical Group and Stakeholder Advisory Panel
- publishing further detail on the measures of success for transition that will form an important part of the readiness assessments and decisions; the measures are centred around the three pillars (Statistical and Data Quality, Operational Readiness, and User Confidence and Readiness) and are presented in [Section 2: Readiness assessments](#) and [Section 6: Transformed Labour Force Survey measures of success](#).
- our commitment to making TLFS updates more transparent and accessible to users via ongoing improvements to the [TLFS landing page](#)

6 . Transformed Labour Force Survey measures of success

Pillar 1: Statistical and Data Quality

Pillar 1 assesses:

- the precision of estimates of labour market status, broken down by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, region, and local authority
- the precision of quarterly change in estimates of labour market status and average actual hours worked
- the achieved sample sizes for each dataset from the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)
- the representativeness of the sample and response rate ratios by region and Index of Multiple Deprivation
- the stability of survey estimates of labour market status by age, sex, hours worked, and two-quarter flows
- the coherence between TLFS estimates with Labour Force Survey (LFS) and real time information (RTI), and between TLFS estimates from the suite of datasets
- the quality of estimates from the SIC/SOC data collection and processing solution

Pillar 2: Operational Readiness

Pillar 2 assesses:

- the likelihood of sizeable revisions that could affect the stability of estimates
- the timeliness of the production of TLFS estimates, from reference period to publication
- the development of methods, including weighting and imputation methods
- the development of systems and process required to produce TLFS microdata and estimates
- the availability and quality of important Labour Market outputs
- the availability and quality of important Household, Social, and Local (HSL) topics

Pillar 3: User Confidence and Readiness

Pillar 3 assesses:

- the confidence of our Labour Market users in the quality of estimates available from the TLFS
- the readiness of our Labour Market and HSL users to use TLFS data in place of LFS and Annual Population Survey (APS), including an understanding of what will and will not be available at the time of transition

7 . Related links

[Transformation of labour market statistics landing page](#) Web page | Updated 9 February 2026 Landing page for all content relating to the ongoing transformation of our Labour Force Survey and updates and plans for the development of the new Transformed Labour Force Survey.

[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: March 2026](#) Bulletin | Released 19 March 2026 Estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

[Labour Force Survey quality update: January 2026](#) Article | Released 20 January 2026 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

8 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 15 April 2026, ONS website, article, [Labour market transformation – update on progress and plans: April 2026](#)