

Annual Population Survey quality update: September 2026

Assessment of Annual Population Survey data quality, including the impact of longer-term challenges and more recent changes on the statistics.

Contact:
Data Advice and Relations team
socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk
+44 1633 455329

Release date:
15 September 2026

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Overview](#)
2. [About this update](#)
3. [Background to the LFS and APS](#)
4. [Recent factors affecting APS quality](#)
5. [Longer-term quality of the APS](#)
6. [What this means for users](#)
7. [Future developments](#)
8. [Detailed collection changes that could cause discontinuity](#)
9. [Related links](#)
10. [Cite this page](#)

1 . Overview

- This article explains longer-term challenges and more recent operational and strategic changes to the Annual Population Survey (APS) data collection and what they mean for quality and use of APS statistics.
- The APS remains an important source of local labour market and socio-economic statistics and continues to provide useful evidence for many purposes, despite a smaller sample than historically.
- The impact of reduced sample sizes is not uniform. The APS achieved sample is substantially smaller than historically, reducing the precision of estimates and increasing uncertainty, particularly for small areas, small population groups and detailed breakdowns.
- Estimates for larger populations and broader geographies are generally less affected and remain more reliable than highly granular analyses.
- Users should assess whether individual APS estimates are sufficiently reliable for their intended purpose. In particular, they should consider confidence intervals and other published quality measures and take care when interpreting APS estimates to avoid assuming that small differences between places, groups or time periods represent meaningful change.
- Recent changes to APS collection, including changes to boost samples in Scotland and England, have not yet fully fed through APS datasets and outputs. Further impacts on sample size and quality will emerge gradually as affected data become available.
- Once these changes have fully fed through, APS sample sizes are expected to be lower than they are today, with impacts varying across geographies, population groups and topics. ONS will continue to assess these impacts as new data become available.
- Our strategic solution to the challenges affecting the APS is the transition to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), which will replace APS-based outputs when evidence shows it can meet user needs and quality requirements.
- As part of this work, we will also assess the comparability of APS and TLFS-based outputs and identify where alternative data sources may provide useful context or assurance during the transition period.
- The Office for National statistics (ONS) will continue to monitor quality, publish guidance alongside APS outputs, undertake further analysis where particular statistics or user groups may be more affected, and work with users to support interpretation and future transition planning.

2 . About this update

The [Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#) is an important source of labour market and socio-economic statistics for local areas across the UK. Like many household surveys, it has been affected by long-term reductions in response and, more recently, by operational and strategic changes to survey delivery.

This article explains how the size and composition of the APS data has changed, what this means for the quality and use of APS statistics, and how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will continue to assess and support their use. It distinguishes between effects already visible in APS data and the expected effects of more recent collection changes, which will be assessed as the relevant data become available.

The strategic solution to the challenges affecting the APS is the transition from the [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\)](#) and APS to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). We are working with users so that TLFS-based outputs meet their needs and will replace those currently produced from the APS. Updates on progress and plans are published quarterly in our [Labour market progress and plans article series](#).

3 . Background to the LFS and APS

The Annual Population Survey (APS) is a continuous household survey covering the UK, with the aim of providing information on important socio-economic and labour market variables down to a local-area level. It uses combined data collected from Waves 1 and 5 of the main Labour Force Survey (LFS) and data collected from local sample boosts, giving it the largest coverage of any UK household survey.

Published APS statistics enable monitoring of estimates between censuses for a range of policy purposes and provide local-area information for labour market estimates. Such purposes include analysis of [Families and households in the UK](#), [Personal well-being in the UK](#), and [Adult smoking habits in the UK](#), among many others.

Household surveys in the UK and in comparable countries have been facing the challenge of falling response rates for many years. Some of the common difficulties are outlined in a recent report [Understanding and addressing trust barriers in social surveys](#). There have also been challenges in collecting and processing survey data since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Quality concerns about the LFS led to [the suspension of labour market publications based on LFS data](#) between October 2023 and February 2024, and the [withdrawal of accredited official statistics status for publications based on APS data](#) from 2024 onwards. In a [letter to the Office for Statistics Regulation in August 2026](#), the ONS confirmed that outputs based upon the APS will not be considered for reaccreditation until they have transitioned to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), after which accreditation status will be reviewed.

In response to these concerns, several changes were made to the operation and processing of LFS data since late 2023. These are detailed in our quarterly [LFS quality](#) updates.

Throughout this article, we refer to the collection of APS data for Great Britain, and results of APS data covering the whole of the UK. The operational responsibility for data collection is split between the ONS for Great Britain, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) for Northern Ireland, but the ONS has the responsibility for publishing statistics at the UK level.

4 . Recent factors affecting APS quality

The Annual Population Survey (APS) has been affected by a combination of long-term challenges facing household surveys across the world and more recent operational and strategic changes to survey collection.

Response rates to household surveys have been declining across the UK and internationally for many years. These challenges intensified during and after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and contributed to wider concerns about the quality of Labour Force Survey (LFS) and APS data. In response, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has undertaken a range of recovery and improvement activities, while continuing to assess the quality and suitability of survey outputs.

Despite considerable efforts to improve the quality of the APS, which has led to increased response, since January 2026, four main changes have affected APS data collection, and therefore quality.

Main changes affecting APS data collection

Removal of the Scottish boost sample

The funding was discontinued for the sample from Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025 to allow Scottish Government to explore alternative sources that may better suit users' needs. This decision is explained in detail in the Scottish Government's [Changes to Labour Market Statistics in Scotland: What You Need to Know](#) article. The ONS maintained collection of the Scottish boost sample for Quarter 4 2025 to allow safe decommissioning, therefore Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2026 was the first quarter without the Scottish boost sample.

Reallocation of fieldwork capacity in England from LFS boost samples to the Living Costs and Food Survey from April 2026

The decision was made to prioritise limited interviewer resources towards the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) given its importance for Gross Domestic Product (GDP), prices and household disposable income statistics, reducing the capacity available to collect the LFS English boost.

Operational issue affecting LFS data collection between May and June 2026

There was a temporary resourcing error in LFS telephone operations that reduced the number of survey cases being worked on during this period.

Subsequent decisions to remove LFS English boost Waves 3 and 4 from data collection

These decisions were made to formalise the intended reallocation of fieldwork capacity in England. While guidance and soft controls had been implemented from April 2026, boost cases were still being treated and the prioritisation from LFS to LCF was not operating as expected. We therefore actively removed English boost Waves 3 and 4 from collection in late August 2026 to implement a harder control on allocation of cases. LFS English boost Waves 1 and 2, and all waves of Welsh boost, are still being collected.

Overall impact of these issues on APS

As a result of limited interviewer capacity, changes to boosts, and operational issues outlined in this section, the LFS and APS have experienced a reduced number of achieved interviews (for more details on these changes, see [Section 8: Detailed collection changes that could cause discontinuity](#)). This prompted questions from users about the potential impact on the quality, reliability and availability of APS estimates, particularly for local areas and detailed population groups.

We had previously expected the impact on quality because of removing the Scottish boost and reducing capacity for the English boost to affect the July 2025 to July 2026 APS data published from September 2026. However, the full effect of changes to the English boost was only formally implemented from August 2026, meaning there will continue to be a period of volatility in the size and composition of APS data.

The first APS dataset with the full effects of all changes to samples, collection and reweighting will be the October 2026 to September 2027 annual person dataset expected to release in November 2027. Including the effects of changes to the English boost and withdrawal of the Scottish boost means that eventually the entire APS dataset will decrease in size by around 15%, reducing it to levels similar to those seen in 2023.

Although capacity to collect data has been reduced, it has happened uniformly across all local areas and demographics. We have not specifically targeted any reduction, aside from minor operational differences where capacity has changed with ongoing recruitment of new interviewers.

5 . Longer-term quality of the APS

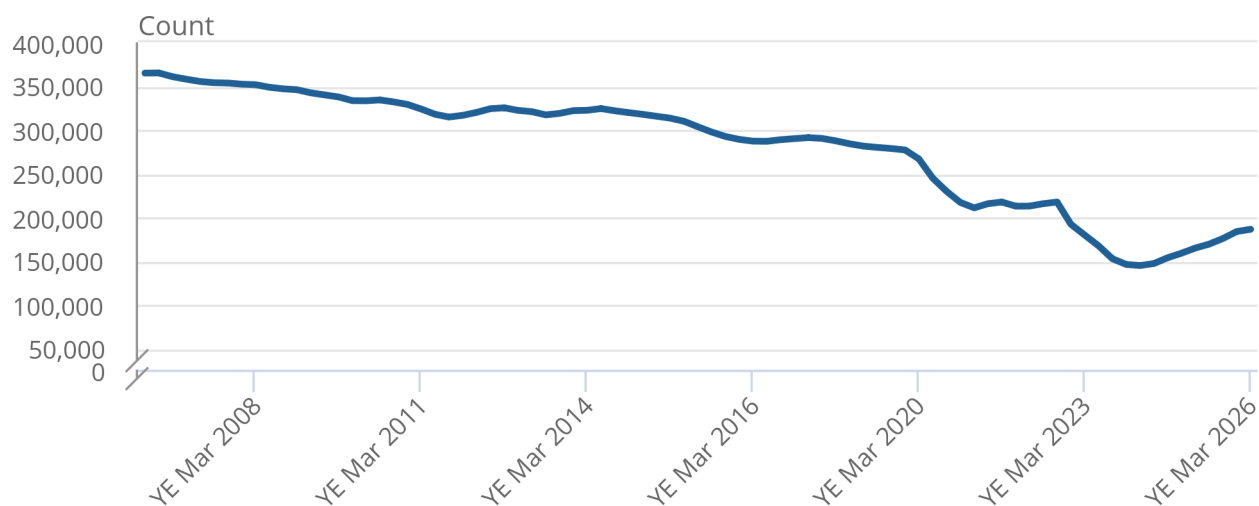
The number of interviews achieved for the Annual Population Survey (APS), and therefore the size of the dataset available for analysis, was slowly decreasing over time as shown in Figure 1. The longer-term reduction, between 2006 and 2020 in particular, reflects the challenge of falling response rates for household surveys. This trend has been experienced by other comparable countries. This was one of the main reasons for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) developing the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) as the sustainable strategic solution to declining participation rates and quality issues affecting traditional social surveys.

Figure 1: The number of interviews achieved for the Annual Population Survey has generally decreased over time

Annual Population Survey total achieved sample of individual people, UK, 2006 to 2025

Figure 1: The number of interviews achieved for the Annual Population Survey has generally decreased over time

Annual Population Survey total achieved sample of individual people, UK, 2006 to 2025



Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Figures shown include households for which response has been imputed.
2. The APS originally started in 2004, but the design, structure and size of the survey was very different at the time. The survey was changed by 2006 and has been broadly consistent since then.
3. Further information about the sample and achieved response to the Labour Force Survey, upon which APS files are built, are available in our published [LFS performance and quality monitoring reports](#).

Between 2020 and 2023, we faced operational challenges as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, where we had to change from face-to-face interviews to telephone-first interviews and made adjustments to the samples and design of the survey. However, recovery measures implemented since October 2023 have worked to improve response.

Overall, the size of the UK dataset almost halved from 358,000 individuals in 2006 to 184,000 individuals in 2025.

The share of response from each country and region of the UK has not changed substantially over time. From 2006 to 2025, the percentage of responses achieved from each region has remained stable, with regions like London and the Midlands being around 7% of responses each year, and the North West and South East around 12% of responses. Responses in Wales have fallen from 11% of responses in 2006 to 9% of responses in 2025, and responses in Scotland fell similarly, from 15% to 11%. However, any such differences are accounted for by the weighting of the survey, where we see an identical distribution of the total population in each country and region over time aligned with the population figures for each area. We expect the percentage of responses from Scotland to decrease further since the withdrawal of the Scottish boost from January 2026.

The age distribution of respondents has changed more substantially. As shown in Table 1, 63% of responses in 2006 were achieved from people aged under 50 years, whereas this reduced over time to 52% in 2025, and affected all age groups aged under 50 years similarly. Meanwhile, the percentage of responses of people aged 50 to 64 years increased from 19% to 21%, and those aged 65 years or over, from 18% to 27%. Overall, this indicates an increasingly older demographic of respondents to the survey but also reflects the ageing population of the UK overall, where there is an increasingly large cohort of older people in the population each year. This is accounted for by the weighting applied to the survey, so results should reflect the current population, although it does present challenges to ensure sufficient representation of the circumstances of younger people in survey results.

Table 1: Percentage of all responses to the Annual Population Survey (APS) from each age group, 2006 to 2025

Age group	% of total response, 2006	% of total response, 2019	% of total response, 2023	% of total response, 2025
0 to 15	21%	20%	15%	17%
16 to 24	10%	8%	6%	7%
25 to 49	33%	29%	24%	28%
50 to 64	19%	21%	22%	21%
65 and older	17%	22%	32%	27%

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) from the Office for National Statistics

Table 2: Percentage of the UK population in each age group according to the Annual Population Survey (APS), 2006 to 2025

Age group	% of UK population, 2006	% of UK population, 2019	% of UK population, 2023	% of UK population, 2025
0 to 15	19%	19%	19%	19%
16 to 24	12%	10%	10%	10%
25 to 49	36%	33%	32%	32%
50 to 64	18%	19%	20%	19%
65 and older	15%	18%	19%	19%

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. These population totals are based upon Population Estimates and Population Projections adjusted to account for the design of the Annual Population Survey (APS) as used in the weighting of currently released APS data. These will differ very slightly from the most recently published Population Estimates.

Although the total level of response has dropped over time, we can see similar distributions for many variables, such as Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (SIC07). For example, although the total number of responses to the survey from people working in the construction industry has fallen from 8,810 in 2019 to 4,066 in 2023, then increased slightly to 5,138 in 2025, the percentage of people working in this industry has remained between 6.2% and 8.0% of all workers. A similar trend is seen for all sectors, excepting an increase in weighted numbers of people working in industries that have a large proportion of people employed in the Public Sector (industries O, P and Q), from 30% to 34%.

We do still observe changes to the characteristics of the labour market, such as levels of qualification, where we have seen an increase in the percentage of workers with at least an undergraduate degree (or equivalent qualification), increasing from 22% to 45% between 2006 and 2025, with reductions in all lower levels of qualification. This change was reflected in both the number of responses to the survey as well as in the weighted outputs of the survey, indicating that the survey is adequately capturing changes over time in the workforce and increasing numbers of student enrolments in higher education. More information about student enrolment can be found on the [Higher Education Student Data website](#).

As the size of the dataset has halved from 358,000 individuals in 2006 to 184,000 individuals in 2025, measures of accuracy for national and regional estimates, such as these from the APS, will have worsened as there are fewer responses in each category and the categories are therefore subject to greater volatility. However, at this level, the distribution of results has remained fairly stable over time:

- in 2006 when the survey was receiving high levels of response
- in 2019 before the challenges of the pandemic
- in 2023 when survey response was at its lowest
- more recently in 2025, including the effects of recovery measures

Not only have the distributions of response remained fairly stable, any potential biases or survey error should have been accounted for through weighting processes.

We have observed real changes to the population over time, and these have been reflected in APS results. It is increasingly difficult to achieve a fully representative sample of population subgroups and, as such, lower-level breakdowns of APS data will inevitably face different challenges. This is also true of the nuances of different variables being analysed or tabulated, where measures of accuracy are always worse for smaller breakdowns of survey data where there are fewer responses. Weighting processes should be sufficiently robust to account for differential levels of response, and we have continued to make adjustments to improve our methodological approach, with further adjustments expected as part of the upcoming reweighting.

We continue to advise users of APS data to use caution when analysing results and ensure they calculate measures of accuracy to determine whether results are sufficiently reliable for their analytical purposes.

6 . What this means for users

The APS remains an important source of local labour market and socioeconomic statistics. The smaller sample means that estimates are generally less precise than they would be with a larger sample, but the effect will vary depending on the geography, population group, and level of detail being analysed.

Estimates for larger populations and broader geographical areas will generally be based on more responses and therefore be less affected by the reduced sample. Users should take greater care when interpreting estimates for small areas, small population groups and detailed breakdowns, where estimates may be more uncertain and more likely to vary between periods, or where results may need to be suppressed to maintain confidentiality.

In particular, users should:

- consider the confidence intervals and other quality information published alongside APS statistics
- avoid assuming that small differences between places, groups or time periods represent meaningful change unless explicit measures of change have been calculated
- take additional care when combining small geographies, population groups, and detailed characteristics in the same analysis
- consider using broader groupings or longer time periods where this is appropriate for their analytical purpose
- consider the implications of confidence intervals provided in APS tables downloaded from [the Nomis website](#)
- communicate any caveats clearly alongside analysis, so that other users are fully aware of the quality considerations and can interpret the analysis appropriately

The ONS will continue to publish quality information alongside APS outputs and will undertake further analysis as data affected by the recent collection changes become available. This will help identify whether particular statistics, population groups, geographies or publications require additional guidance.

Users should continue to assess whether individual estimates are sufficiently reliable for their intended purpose, rather than treating all APS statistics as equally affected. Further information on interpreting statistical quality is available in our [Annual population survey \(APS\) QMI](#) and information published alongside relevant APS outputs.

7 . Future developments

Transformed Labour Force Survey

The strategic and sustainable solution to the challenges affecting survey quality is the transition from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) to the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is continuing to assess the readiness of the TLFS and plans to transition labour market outputs when the evidence demonstrates that the survey is capable of meeting user needs and quality requirements.

In our [August 2026 Labour market transformation - update on progress and plans](#), we reported on the progress of the TLFS Core survey, notably the improvements to the respondent experience, along with the increasing costs and quality implications of continuing the dual run of the LFS and TLFS. We also reported on our timescales for transitioning to the TLFS, which we are aiming to do in 2027, with July 2027 being an important decision point.

To prepare users for transition to the TLFS, we have published our [Transformed Labour Force Survey - user guidance](#), which includes a [mapping document of LFS to TLFS variables](#). This mapping document sets out clearly which variables appear in the LFS, TLFS Core and TLFS Plus surveys, including whether the variables are a:

- Full Match
- Strong Match
- Partial Match
- Weak Match
- No Match

The TLFS will provide the future source for labour market and local and socio-economic statistics currently derived from the APS. By moving to a modernised survey design and reducing the need to operate multiple surveys in parallel, the transition will support improved quality, sustainability and resilience of these statistics over the longer term.

Supporting users through transition

The ONS recognises that users need confidence both in current APS outputs and in the future TLFS-based statistics that will replace them. To support this transition, we are working closely with users to understand their requirements, assess how well emerging TLFS data meet those needs, identify any areas requiring further support, and help users prepare for future TLFS-based outputs. This includes providing evidence on data quality, supporting transition planning, and exploring where additional data sources can help provide context and assurance during the transition period (read more in our [ONS Annual Population Survey QMI](#)).

This work also includes assessing the comparability of APS and TLFS-based outputs, providing evidence on data quality and transition readiness, and identifying where alternative data sources may provide useful context or assurance during the transition period. Where appropriate, these sources may help users understand whether APS estimates remain consistent with wider evidence, although they are not intended to replace APS outputs.

Alongside this work, the ONS will continue to publish evidence on APS and TLFS quality, and use feedback and analysis to inform future development of TLFS-based outputs. This will help ensure that future local and socioeconomic statistics continue to meet the needs of users across government, local authorities, academia and wider society.

The latest Household, Socioeconomic and Local (HSL) engagement exercise was launched on [Citizen Space](#) on 17 August 2026. The exercise is gathering insights on how local government uses the LFS and APS to inform transition planning, including the data and outputs relied on for their statutory requirements. Local government users have until 2 October 2026 to contribute their insights to the exercise.

Feedback

We also welcome feedback from wider range of HSL users and provide regular updates to the HSL Technical Group. Those with an interest in TLFS HSL data who are not yet involved are encouraged to email TLFSPlusTransformation@ons.gov.uk.

8 . Detailed collection changes that could cause discontinuity

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) experience the same difficulties in data collection as most social surveys. Response rates to household surveys have been declining across the UK and internationally for many years. Some of the common difficulties are outlined in our recent report [Understanding and addressing trust barriers in social surveys](#). These and other factors have led to the decline in levels of response over many years.

In this section, we outline in detail some of the known issues that have directly affected the collection of APS data and the quality of APS results in recent years and how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have mitigated the impact.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Levels and quality of response to all waves and samples of the LFS from 2020 were affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We undertook a variety of measures to mitigate the effects, including increasing the size of the issued sample and changing data collection from face-to-face-first to telephone-first, utilising services to find telephone numbers to contact respondents. Methodological adjustments have been made, and analysis conducted, on LFS and APS results following these changes to ensure results are as accurate and consistent as possible. However, there were effects on the levels and type of response during this time that may have affected the quality of LFS and APS results.

2022-based weighting

The LFS collects information on a sample of the population. To enable us to make inferences from this sample to the entire eligible population, we must weight the sample data.

This weighting process assigns each responding or imputed case a weight, which can be thought of as the number of people in the population represented by that case. These weights are calculated so that they sum to a set of known population totals, and the weights of an entire dataset will sum to the eligible population of the UK. Further details on the production of LFS statistics and weighting methodology can be found in [Volume 1 of our Labour Force Survey - user guidance](#).

LFS and APS results are weighted using population statistics. The population statistics used for weighting are periodically revised when newer population estimates or projections are published.

Following the publication of results from the 2021 Census for England and Wales, 2021 Census for Northern Ireland, and 2022 Census for Scotland, the back series of population estimates from 2011 to 2022 were revised to account for any differences between published population estimates and the Census results. These estimates were subsequently used to generate 2022-based national and subnational population projections covering the UK.

Important LFS datasets have undergone more recent changes to their weighting, most recently incorporating adjusted population statistics labelled 2024-based weights, as explained in our [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: February 2024 article](#) and in our [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: December 2024 article](#). However, APS datasets have not been updated since their 2022-based weights. This means that APS results are not fully consistent with LFS results and are not fully consistent with current population statistics.

Now the 2022-based subnational population projections have been released, we have been working to reweight the full suite of LFS and APS datasets from 2011 with the latest weights, which will be labelled 2026-based weights (as this is when they are being implemented into our datasets). We currently expect the first person-based quarterly LFS reweighted data to be released in early 2027, with other LFS and APS datasets being released in following months.

Fieldwork capacity

Since November 2022, sample size reduction and a more restricted number of interviewers in our teams resulted in reduced response to the survey. This in turn led to the temporary withdrawal of LFS outputs in 2023 when levels of response were at their lowest, and later the [suspension of accreditation of all Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) APS-based outputs](#).

Substantial efforts were made in late 2023 and early 2024 as part of [recovery plans for the LFS](#), including the reintroduction of face-to-face interviewing, increasing the incentive offered for response, and increasing the issued sample size. These changes resulted in substantial improvement in levels of response to the LFS through 2024 and into 2025.

However, interviewer numbers remained low until additional interviewer resources could be recruited and trained as part of our [ONS Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics](#). Through 2025, more interviewers were trained with a focus on the LFS, reaching capacity to work the full allocation of LFS cases by November 2025, with the total field interviewer community increasing from 582 in July 2023 to 850 in July 2026. This improved levels of response and quality of outputs, in particular, results derived from Waves 2 to 5 of data collection, which are currently around levels of response the LFS achieved in 2019 before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Dual running large surveys

We have been dual running the LFS and Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) since February 2022, alongside running our other social surveys including the Living Costs and Food Survey and Wealth and Assets Survey. We made the decision to continue running the LFS, the boosts for the APS and the TLFS concurrently (as explained in our [Labour market transformation - update on progress and plans: May 2023 article](#)), at least until the transition to the TLFS takes place. This allowed us to ensure we were undertaking careful and reliable analysis to understand any differences between these surveys to determine whether the performance of the TLFS met operational and statistical standards with a view to transitioning from LFS to TLFS.

In our [Labour market transformation - update on progress and plans: July 2024](#), we announced the decision to extend the dual run of the TLFS and LFS to provide further quarters of data for comparison, including accounting for any seasonal differences, which will help increase user readiness and confidence. This extended dual run was also recommended by an academic review. As of our [August 2026 update on progress and plans](#), the LFS will continue to run in parallel with the TLFS, at least until we complete the transition to the TLFS as the headline measure for Labour Market statistics. The continuing of the dual run places substantial demands on collection teams and requires constant monitoring and prioritisation to ensure effective ongoing collection of our suite of social surveys. Running two of the largest household surveys in the country in parallel also places operational limits on the quality of the LFS, APS and TLFS, and on our ability to progress quality improvement work to broader surveys and economic statistics. Our approach is therefore to get the TLFS data quality to an acceptable level for us and our main users to have confidence in turning off the LFS and APS. This will then allow the quality of the TLFS to improve further after transition, where additional resource will be available.

Boost samples

The APS is constructed using responses to the main LFS sample, with additional LFS sample boosts to improve local-level results. These sample boosts covered local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, with no boost for Northern Ireland. Further information about the boost samples is available in our [Annual Population Survey QMI](#).

The Welsh boost sample is funded by the Welsh Government, and the Scottish boost sample was funded by the Scottish Government, but the Scottish funding was discontinued for the sample from Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025 to explore alternative sources that may better suit users' needs. This decision was explained in detail in the Scottish Government's [Changes to Labour Market Statistics in Scotland: What You Need to Know article](#).

The ONS maintained collection of the Scottish boost sample for Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025 to ensure the sample could be safely decommissioned. The Scottish boost sample was therefore withdrawn from collection from January 2026, meaning Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2026 was the first quarter without the Scottish boost sample. The main sample for Scotland continues to be collected.

Effects of prioritisation

In November 2025, the ONS made a commitment to [prioritise quality over quantity](#). This included consideration of the merits of continuing or pausing the APS in response to user-led concerns for data quality. The ONS actively engaged stakeholders around this prioritisation. Users reported that while APS quality presented challenges, the APS remains an important source of local labour market and socioeconomic statistics and continues to provide useful evidence for many purposes. In response to user feedback, and as announced in a [Letter from the ONS Permanent Secretary to UK Statistics Authority Interim Chair on ONS prioritisation](#) in February 2026, we have continued to run the APS. However, in the short term and given practical limits on our field interview resources, we reduced interviewer capacity allocated to LFS boost cases in England and focused efforts on bolstering the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) given its importance for Gross Domestic Product (GDP), prices and household disposable income statistics.

As the Welsh Government continues to fund the boost sample in Wales, we have continued to allocate interviewer resource to collect the LFS boost in Wales, but capacity available for the English boost as of April 2026 has been reduced. Although interviewer guidance and soft controls were initially implemented in April 2026, this was later formalised in August 2026 with the removal of English LFS boost Waves 3 and 4 from data collection. This formalises the intended reallocation of fieldwork capacity in England from LFS boost samples to the LCF, and the number of achieved interviews for the LFS boost in England is expected to reduce by around one-third. The size of the LFS main sample used to derive headline labour market estimates is not affected by these changes.

May 2026 operational issue

An operational issue occurred in May 2026, which led to temporary underresourcing in LFS telephone collection operations. The direct impact was on response levels between 3 May and 10 June, with some residual effects persisting until 17 June. The issue primarily affected Waves 2 to 5 of the survey. The incident reflects the complexities of running two large survey operations in parallel.

This led to a reduction in the number of LFS cases being worked and therefore a direct reduction in response levels to the LFS. The effect was a reduction of approximately 20% fewer responses than would normally have been expected during this period. This primarily affected Waves 2 to 5 of data collection, affecting both main and boost samples. Although Wave 1 of data collection was largely unaffected, the APS was still affected by lower response to main Wave 5, and boost Waves 2 to 4 in England and Wales.

Much of the effect of this issue would have been masked by a process called "roll-forward imputation", where a person's response from the previous quarter is replicated (rolled forward) for the current quarter where we did not achieve contact with the respondent in the current quarter. The assumption is made that most people's circumstances do not change substantially from one quarter to the next, and this is only done for a single quarter's non-contact; it is not repeated for multiple quarters. With the effect of the operational issue causing a higher than usual level of non-contact with respondents, virtually all these cases in the main sample had received a response in the previous quarter, so would have had their response for the current quarter rolled forward. This process does not apply to boost cases because circumstances are far more likely to change for respondents whose data were collected 12 months earlier.

The quantity of data available in LFS and APS datasets did not change substantially as a result of the issue, although it would have had the effect of making change between the January to March and April to June 2026 quarters appear slightly more stable than usual. Analysis of the effects of this issue (discussed in our [Labour Force Survey quality update: July 2026 article](#)) indicated that the error had a minimal impact on headline Labour Market estimates, although it does suggest there is a small impact on the estimates of average hours, and therefore on total actual hours worked.

The issue was corrected on 11 June 2026 and further information on the mitigations put in place were set out in our [Learning from an operational issue temporarily impacting LFS data blog post](#). It also included the analysis that can be undertaken using the LFS single-month estimates. A "lessons learned" review was carried out to consider what further changes or actions may be necessary to improve data collection. A summary of the review was previously published in our [August 2026 update on progress and plans](#). Further detail on the review's findings and recommendations is available in the [LFS Operational Lessons Learned Review Report](#).

9 . Related links

[Labour Force Survey quality update: July 2026](#)

Article | Released 26 July 2026

Provides an update on the impact of the operational issue affecting quality, describes analysis possible using LFS single-month estimates, and presents RTI age analysis relative to the population.

[ONS surveys and economic statistics improvement plan, quarterly progress update: July 2026](#)

Web page | Updated July 2026

Progress across the ONS against our recovery plans for improving our economic statistics and surveys, between April and June 2026.

[Volume 6: APS user guide \(PDF, 843B\)](#)

Web page | updated July 2026

Annual Population Survey local area database 2026.

[Annual population survey \(APS\) QMI](#)

Methodology | Updated 6 February 2026

Quality and methodology information for the Annual Population Survey. Includes strengths and limitations, methods, and data uses and users.

[Families and Households in the UK: 2025](#)

Bulletin | 17 April 2026

Estimates of families (with and without children) and household types, including people living alone in the UK in 2025.

[Personal well-being in the UK April 2022 to March 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 7 November 2023

Estimates of life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety, by select geographies including local authority level and individual characteristics and circumstances.

[Quality of life in the UK: May 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 12 May 2023

An update on the UK's progress across 10 domains of national well-being: personal well-being, relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, economy, education and skills, governance, and the environment.

[Sexual Orientation, UK: 2024](#)

Bulletin | 9 December 2025

Sexual orientation in the UK in 2024 by age, sex, marital status, and country, using data from the Annual Population Survey (APS). These are official statistics in development.

10 . Cite this page

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 15 September 2026, ONS website, supporting methodology article, [Annual Population Survey quality update: September 2026](#)