

Article

Labour market transformation – update on progress and plans: April 2025

Labour market transformation overview, building on previous engagement on the transformed Labour Force Survey.

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1 . Main points

- Work to advance a programme of improvements to our labour market statistics continues to be our highest priority given their importance for economic decision making.

Transformed Labour Force Survey

- We have successfully tested an experimental, shortened transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) questionnaire and undertaken quantitative and qualitative research and methodological development, working closely with external experts and in partnership with our main users.
- A new TLFS design will be implemented, including a short longitudinal “Core” labour market-focused survey that takes on average 15 minutes to complete and is delivered online first, supplemented by targeted telephone or face-to-face contact for non-responders; this will be complemented by a separate cross-sectional “Plus” survey to provide wider socioeconomic, household, and local data.
- Citizens are at the centre of the new design, which aims to address the quality issues communicated in previous updates by improving completion rates, representativeness, and data quality.
- Work is already under way to make the new TLFS design operational, with introduction planned across the second half of 2025; we will carry out a readiness assessment in collaboration with main users in July 2026, aiming for transition of our published headline labour market statistics in November 2026, though transition timing will be data-led and could be in 2027 if our assessment or user needs require more data to be collected and assessed.
- The new TLFS design and implementation approach have been endorsed by Professor Ray Chambers, Professor James Brown, the Labour Market Technical Group, and the [Stakeholder Advisory Panel](#).

Labour Force Survey

- The Labour Force Survey (LFS) will continue as the lead measure while further development of the TLFS takes place.
- The initiatives and improvements made to collection, methods, and communication have led to LFS quality improvements, including quarterly person data reweighted back to 2019 using updated population estimates in December 2024; achieved individual responses to the LFS (UK including imputation) have now increased to 63,069 in October to December 2024 from 44,238 in July to September 2023, with further increases expected over the coming months.

2 . Transformed Labour Force Survey

We have successfully tested an experimental, shortened TLFS questionnaire and undertaken quantitative and qualitative research and methodological development. We have been working in partnership with external experts and our main users, who have provided advice and guidance.

The new, improved TLFS design has been judged as being the most effective in responding to the core needs for future labour market statistics.

The new design is expected to:

- reduce respondent burden
- improve completion rates, representativeness, and data quality
- be operationally sustainable
- be future-proofed
- align with international best practice

Improved design

The new TLFS design has a “Core” labour market survey with a sample size of 90,000 households per quarter across Great Britain. Half of the sample is then followed up in a longitudinal component for a further four quarters. The Core survey focuses on collecting the data required to produce priority labour market outputs. This is complemented by a separate “Plus” survey with a separate sample of 90,000 households per quarter, which provides a cross-sectional study for wider socioeconomic, household, and local data requirements.

The TLFS Core design is a short, online-first questionnaire. It takes around 15 minutes per household to complete on average and is supplemented by targeted face-to-face contact for non-responding households in underrepresented areas. Respondents also have the option of completing by telephone. This multiple mode approach is informed by other national statistical institutes (NSIs) and brings together best practice from survey design and user experience design. We are also trialling new ways of helping respondents to provide accurate detail for complex variables – like Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) – including using artificial intelligence (AI) and “search as you type”.

We will be implementing data rotation. This means that respondents are only asked questions where their responses could have changed at Waves 2 to 5, rather than asking the whole Wave 1 questionnaire at every wave. This will reduce survey length and respondent burden beyond the first wave.

The new TLFS design and implementation approach have been assured and endorsed by Professor Ray Chambers and Professor James Brown (further detail is provided in the [Methodological Assurance Review Panel's comments on proposals for the design of the TLFS](#)), the Labour Market Technical Group, and the [Stakeholder Advisory Panel](#). The Stakeholder Advisory Panel includes representatives from the Bank of England, HM Treasury, the Office for Budget Responsibility, and independent experts.

Our accompanying [TLFS technical design review article](#) provides further detail, including:

- findings from the Labour Market eXperimental (LMX) test
- an overview of the content covered by the Core and Plus surveys
- an outline of the quantitative and qualitative evidence used to inform the improved design

Timings

Work has already begun to make the new TLFS design operational, with introduction planned across the second half of 2025. The first quarter of data, with all the major design changes included, will be available for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2026 and will be available for methods and quality assurance from May 2026.

We will carry out a readiness assessment in collaboration with our main users in July 2026. We are aiming for transition of priority labour market statistics in November 2026. However, transition timing will be data-led, and could be in 2027 if our assessment or user needs require more data to be collected and assessed. We will consider a TLFS data update once data from the new design have been assessed. We will produce an impact article a few months before transition, to enable users to prepare.

To inform transition decisions, we have developed a comprehensive set of quality criteria covering different aspects of survey performance in collaboration with users. These criteria include achieved sample size, precision, stability, and timeliness. To inform transition plans for non-labour market data, a quality assessment of data from the existing TLFS is taking place to establish if it meets user need.

We will deliver continuous improvement of both the Core and Plus surveys beyond the point of transition. This will ensure quality is maintained and improved in line with user needs, the changing respondent environment, developments in technology, and availability of alternative data sources.

Northern Ireland

Under current arrangements, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) collects Labour Force Survey data using the same questionnaire as the Office for National Statistics (ONS). NISRA delivers the resulting data to the ONS for processing and weighting. The ONS then provide seasonally adjusted data back to NISRA for simultaneous UK and Northern Ireland (NI) publication.

In the future, labour market information for Northern Ireland will be collected by NISRA's Labour Market Survey (LMS). NISRA's LMS is similar to the new Core TLFS and was developed in collaboration with the ONS. It will be quality assured, processed, and weighted by NISRA, before being delivered to the ONS. The ONS will combine the LMS data with the corresponding data from the GB LFS (and, in time, the TLFS), which will be seasonally adjusted to enable the production of NI and UK results.

Combining the LMS and LFS (and, in time, the LMS and TLFS) data to maintain aggregate UK labour market statistics as far as possible will require the ONS and NISRA to overcome several short-term and longer-term challenges.

Content

NISRA's LMS is shorter than the LFS and similar to the ONS's new Core TLFS. The core labour market content of the LMS aligns well with the LFS and will support the majority of UK labour market statistics. However, some variables will move to be GB-only from the point when NISRA transitions. Some requirements for NI information not included in the LMS will be met by other sources. This is because NISRA are not developing a wider, TLFS Plus-style survey. Further detail on the outputs that will be affected will be provided in our next update article.

Processing

It is likely that NISRA will transition to the LMS before the ONS transitions to the TLFS. This will put pressure on the usual LFS processing and publication timetable, because NISRA's LMS data collection concludes several days after the LFS data collection.

Transition timing

If NISRA transition to the LMS before the ONS transition to the TLFS, substantial methods and systems resource will be needed to amend legacy LFS systems to incorporate data from the new survey.

The ONS and NISRA continue to work through potential solutions to maintaining UK data outputs and publication timelines. We will update users accordingly.

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

Increasing the role of administrative data

We are also progressing our administrative data work. This includes linking HM Revenue and Customs's Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) to TLFS and LFS. This will improve labour market statistics through quality assurance, methods, and some limited survey variable replacement in the longer term (for example, for earnings). This work offers huge potential, including the development of labour accounts, because of the detail that is collected and concepts that are measured. However, a survey will remain a critical part of the labour market evidence base.

3 . Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey

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

The LFS will continue to run in parallel with the TLFS, at least until TLFS design changes are fully embedded. This was requested by our main users and will allow for proper evaluation of the quality and stability of the different headline outputs.

This article focuses on the LFS for simplicity. However, improvements to the LFS also affect the size and quality of our Annual Population Survey (APS), but improvements will take longer.

Recovery

Following the recovery actions implemented into the LFS from late 2023, all major changes to survey operations have worked through all five waves of data collection as of Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2025 and will be in the published data by May 2025. At that point, we will provide an assessment of the resulting improvements in quality of the LFS.

Actions including boosting the sample, increasing incentives, and reintroducing face-to-face interviewing led to increased numbers of achieved responses for all waves. We achieved 63,069 individual responses to the LFS (UK including imputation) in October to December 2024, compared with 44,238 individuals in July to September 2023. This overall increase has seen the Wave 1 level of achieved responses recover to its 2019 position. However, we expect Waves 2 to 5 to take longer to return to this level.

Overall response rates have also improved, from 12.7% in July to September 2023 to 19.6% in October to December 2024. The increase in response rate is more modest than for achieved response levels because of the increase in the issued sample size. The overall response rate for October to December 2024 remained below the 38.5% achieved in October to December 2019, which was the last period before the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

This increase in sample size and changes to methods over the last 18 months, including the implementation of an interim LFS reweighting using 2021-based interim national population projections, have led to improvements in quality and representativeness of the LFS.

Further improvements

We have planned continued improvements to the LFS throughout 2025 into 2026. These include increases in interviewer numbers for Waves 2 to 5 and a full historic reweighting, once new sub-national population projections are available.

There are ongoing challenges in assessing the coherence between labour market statistics, as described in our [Labour market overview bulletins](#) in recent months. With LFS data now reweighted, we are updating our analysis on coherence between the LFS and workforce jobs. An article summarising the results will be published alongside our labour market statistics on 15 April 2025. Initial analysis included in our Labour market overview, UK: March 2025 bulletin suggests that in recent months, we have seen improved coherence for estimates of employees between the LFS, Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (PAYE RTI), and workforce jobs. Further updates are planned for 2025, including to our [Comparison of labour market data sources methodology](#).

Outside of these improvements, priority will be given to the TLFS development as the longer-term strategic solution. This is supported by academic experts Professor Chambers and Professor Brown.

Reweighting

Interim reweighting was undertaken on data published in December 2024. Since then, we have published new national population projections, which have further increased the size of the population. We have carried out an indicative impact assessment of this increase on headline labour market levels and rates. This suggests reweighting to this data will have a negligible effect on rates, and minimal effect on levels and productivity statistics.

Given the design and methodology of the survey, it is necessary to use sub-national population projections to perform a reweighting on LFS data. Main labour market users expressed a preference that we do not conduct another interim reweighting. This is because the sub-national population projections have not yet been published, and there is a negligible effect of the new national projections on headline measures. Instead, we will focus on the TLFS development and the full LFS/APS/TLFS reweighting, which will begin when we publish the sub-national population projections later in 2025.

4 . Innovation and initiatives to increase survey responses

The Labour Force Survey (LFS)-specific improvements sit alongside wider initiatives designed to improve response rates across all Office for National Statistics (ONS) social surveys. For example, we have undertaken a pilot communications campaign designed to address barriers about survey legitimacy, data security, and brand recognition. This has been delivered in Birmingham, a local authority area with historically low response rates, particularly among young people, ethnic minority groups, and economically disadvantaged communities. The pilot draws on insights from the Census 2021 communications campaign and industry best practice. It includes use of broadcast video and local digital billboards to target messages to survey respondents using postcode data. We are now undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the data to look at the impact of the campaign on awareness, trust, and response rates.

From late January to early March 2025, an incentive trial took place on TLFS Wave 1. This involved a proportion of the sample being eligible for a conditional £20 voucher on full completion of the survey by all members of the household. All other households were eligible for the regular £10 conditional voucher. Early analysis has demonstrated an increased overall return rate from households eligible for the higher incentive. Further analysis is now taking place to assess any bias this may have been introduced, and the effect on full household response against partial household response.

We are launching a Survey Strategy, Research, and Innovation Hub to further increase investment, effort, and focus on social survey research and innovation.

We will provide further updates on the effect of these wider initiatives as part of this regular series of labour market transformation articles.

5 . Progress update on internal lessons learnt and the Office for Statistics Regulation recommendations

We continue to deliver actions in response to our [transformed Labour Force Survey \(TLFS\) – A Lessons Learnt Review](#), published in December 2024. Considerable progress has been made in several areas.

External engagement

We have increased engagement with and opportunities for external challenge from academics and through groups like the Labour Market Technical Group, Stakeholder Advisory Panel, and the Household, Socio-economic and Local (HSL) Technical Group. These groups provide challenge and assurance, and help define and agree methodologies and transition plans. The HSL group was recently set up to strengthen our engagement on wider user needs and will inform the ongoing development of the TLFS Plus survey.

Quality criteria development

We have developed a comprehensive set of quality criteria that is now undergoing further refinement with users. This will form part of the TLFS transition readiness assessments, which will determine whether TLFS is satisfactory to use as a source for labour market statistics. They will also determine whether the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and users are ready to transition. Further detail is provided in our [TLFS technical design review article](#).

Office for Statistics Regulation recommendations

We also continue to make progress against the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR's) recommendations for labour market statistics. Their February 2025 [Statistics from the Labour Force Survey report](#) provides an update on the OSR's view of the transformation and consolidates their work and judgements on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and TLFS.

We have made notable improvements since our last update. These include clearly setting out our plans for improvements to the LFS and the transition from the LFS to TLFS, and improving the accessibility of our content for users. We will build on this with further updates for users during 2025 and beyond, as we approach transition readiness assessments in 2026.

We will continue to regularly update users on our progress with the lessons learnt action plan and the OSR's recommendations as part of this series of labour market transformation articles.

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: March 2025](#)

Bulletin | Released 20 March 2025

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

[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

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