

Action plan for improving the quality of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales

Action plan to address Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) recommendations for improving the quality of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales.

Contact:
ONS Centre for Crime and
Justice
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 2075 928695

Release date:
3 February 2025

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Overview of our action plan](#)
2. [Recommendations and actions](#)
3. [Future developments](#)
4. [Related links](#)
5. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Overview of our action plan

We at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) aim to improve understanding of the extent and nature of crime in society by developing our statistics about the latest trends using all available sources. We publish figures on the levels and trends of crime in England and Wales primarily based on two sets of crime statistics:

- the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)
- police recorded crime data

Each source has different strengths and limitations. When used together, they provide a more comprehensive picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone.

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) published a report on the [quality of police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales](#) in May 2024. While the report recognised the considerable progress that has been made in improving crime recording, it also outlined recommendations for the Home Office, ONS and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to support further improvements to data quality.

The OSR provided 10 recommendations as part of their framework for quality improvements and requested that the Home Office and the ONS publish an action plan in early 2025. The three main areas for improvement included:

- strengthening oversight of police force data quality
- better communication of the quality of the statistics and data quality improvement initiatives
- greater collaboration and knowledge sharing between the organisations involved in collecting and processing police recorded crime data, to strengthen oversight and better communicate quality

2 . Recommendations and actions

This section outlines our work plan in collaboration with the Home Office and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to address the recommendations from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). As we progress through this action plan and publish our findings, we will continue to update and provide evidence to users. We have prioritised those actions that can deliver improvements by summer 2025, as well as identifying those that will take a longer time to implement.

Recommendation 1

Recommendation

To promote more-consistent and more-efficient use of crime recording IT systems, police forces should work more collaboratively and improve knowledge sharing about systems.

Response

The Home Office and HMICFRS work closely with all 43 territorial police forces to ensure consistency in crime recording. There is ongoing stakeholder engagement through various channels, including:

- the Home Office-led National Crime Recording Strategic Steering Group
- the national Force Crime Registrar (FCR) Technical Working Group and associated network of regional meetings
- the HMICFRS Policing Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

The Home Office has established a task and finish group to explore how the main information technology (IT) systems can better capture information on crimes reported at the same time and nested under the principal crime recorded on force record management systems. The attendees cover the majority of diverse IT systems currently in use.

Recommendation 2

Recommendation

To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office should work with police forces to gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems, and how variation in systems impacts data quality.

Response

To strengthen its oversight of police force data quality, the Home Office has carried out a survey with forces to document the crime recording IT systems and processes that are used by each police force. The Home Office will select a group of forces to represent the full spectrum of systems and processes in place, and carry out an in-depth follow-up to identify and document the main strengths and limitations of each IT system and the implications for data quality. Relevant information related to the various IT systems in use will be published in the ONS User Guide to crime statistics in July 2025. This information will then be updated on an annual basis.

Recommendation 3

Recommendation

To promote best practice around quality assurance of recorded crime data, police forces should improve knowledge sharing on the checking and validation of crime records.

Response

The Home Office already has a Data Quality Assurance Manual, which is used by police FCRs to support local audits of compliance with national crime recording standards. This is a best-practice guide which is currently being reviewed and will be updated by summer 2025. The updated manual will be shared with police forces and the Home Office will facilitate discussions on best practice around the quality assurance of recorded crime data, and the checking and validating of crime records.

Recommendation 4

Recommendation

As a first step to greater assurance of the quality of police recorded crime data, the Home Office should gain a better understanding of police forces' quality assurance arrangements.

Response

In the longer term, the Home Office will collate information from individual police forces to ensure they comply with the minimum standards for quality assurance outlined in the Data Quality Assurance Manual. The Home Office will develop an approach for recording this information on an annual basis.

Recommendation 5

Recommendation

The Home Office should then develop a detailed plan on how it will support greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. The Home Office should use our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework to guide this work and ensure that all the relevant quality areas are covered. Stakeholders, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), should be consulted as part of this work.

Response

The Home Office understands the importance of ensuring greater consistency of quality assurance across police forces. After the processes have been completed for Recommendations 3 and 4, the Home Office plans to develop a detailed work plan for supporting quality improvements across police forces in collaboration with the NPCC and other relevant stakeholders. The QAAD framework will be used for standardizing approaches to data quality across police forces and implementing quality improvement plans where they are necessary.

Recommendation 6

Recommendation

To develop the most comprehensive and up-to-date picture of crime data integrity in police forces, the Home Office, HMICFRS and ONS should work together and use all available data, including HMICFRS inspection findings, HMICFRS management information and Home Office intelligence.

Response

We have set up a police recorded crime quality working group with the Home Office and HMICFRS and will meet on a regular basis. Work is underway to improve the presentation of crime data integrity in police forces for ONS website users. This will be updated in our next User guide to crime statistics in England and Wales, which is scheduled for release in July 2025. The user guide will be reviewed on a regular basis, as changes are made to inspections and new data become available.

Recommendation 7

Recommendation

To inform users about the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) programme and its impact on the quality of the statistics, ONS should publish and regularly update information about developments and methods, including the strengths and limitations of the tools.

Response

A new cross-police-force methodology for counting the number of recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments using the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS) tool was introduced in 2020. The tool automatically flags offences as involving a knife or sharp instrument rather than relying solely on a manually added marker. The tool was introduced to improve the accuracy of these data and increase the consistency and comparability of data across forces. Information on the methodology, including its strengths and limitations is available in our [Police recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments: methodology changes article](#).

NDQIS is now in use for four police recorded crime collections, including:

- offences involving knives or sharp instruments
- domestic abuse-related offences
- child sexual abuse-related offences
- offences that have an online element

We provide regular updates on these developments in our [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#) and our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#). As the NDQIS tool is now being used more widely, we plan to publish a new methodology article providing updated information in autumn 2025.

Recommendation 8

Recommendation

To communicate, and assure users about, all aspects of the quality of police recorded crime data, ONS should expand its published information on quality to cover: police forces' quality assurance arrangements; the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems used by police forces; the nature of crime recording improvements made by police forces since 2014.

Response

We plan to review how we communicate and present all aspects of the quality of police recorded crime in our published information. Many of the changes that we plan to implement before summer 2025 will be reflected in updates to our [User guide to crime statistics in England and Wales](#) in July 2025. These updates will include:

- expanding the information we publish on police force IT systems
- Information about the strengths and limitations of the different crime recording IT systems used by police forces
- details of crime recording improvements since 2014

We will continue to update our published information as and when it becomes available, including information on police forces' quality assurance arrangements.

Recommendation 9

Recommendation

To enhance the value of quality information, ONS should explain the data quality framework it uses to assess the reliability of police recorded crime statistics for different offence types.

Response

We provided further information on the data quality framework in our [User guide to crime statistics in England and Wales: year ending March 2024](#). Ratings for crime types measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) are mainly assessed by the level of uncertainty around estimates over time, which is dependent on sample size and relative volume. For police recorded crime, ratings for crime types are assessed based on known changes to recording practices and variation in police activity, where available. The ONS will review the data quality framework on an annual basis and provide further information, if the criteria to assess reliability are updated.

Recommendation 10

Recommendation

ONS should work closely with HMICFRS, the Home Office and, where necessary, police forces, to establish the drivers of the divergence between the police recorded crime statistics and Crime Survey for England and Wales statistics.

Response

The ONS has worked closely with HMICFRS and the Home Office to understand explanatory factors for the divergence between police recorded crime and CSEW estimates. Our recent analysis can be found in our [Exploring diverging trends between the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime methodology](#). We will continue to update users annually on the comparability of these two data sources in our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

3 . Future developments

We expect some of these actions to be implemented for our Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2025 bulletin and updated user guide, which are scheduled to be published in July 2025. We will provide an update on progress at this stage.

4 . Related links

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 30 January 2025

Crime against households and people aged 16 years and over, using data from police recorded crime and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2024](#)

Methodology | Released 24 July 2024

Quarterly statistics on crime levels and trends in England and Wales, including detailed information on datasets used to compile our crime statistics.

5 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 3 February 2025, ONS website, article, [Action plan for improving the quality of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales: February 2025](#)