OSR's statement on the Labour Force Survey-derived estimates and Annual Population Survey-derived estimates

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This statement provides information about statistics that have recently had their accredited official statistics status removed due to issues with the quality of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and associated Annual Population Survey (APS) produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It identifies the 14 statistical outputs that have had their accreditation temporarily removed.

The quality issues with the LFS due to declining survey response rates have impacted statistical outputs across and beyond ONS. We would like to make users aware of the list of the affected outputs in the wider statistical landscape.

We maintain a public list of all cancelled and suspended accreditations (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/our-regulatory-work/assessment/cancelled-or-suspended-accreditations/) on our website, and you can read about our role in accreditation in our accredited official statistics Policy (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/policies/official-statistics-policies/accredited-official-statistics-policy/).

Labour Force Survey-derived estimates

In November 2023 we removed the accreditation of ONS's LFS-based estimates and datasets (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-alex-lambert-and-darren-morgan-labour-market-statistics-derived-from-the-ons-labour-force-survey-lfs/) given the significant quality issues with the Labour Force Survey. We noted in our letter that when ONS resumes publication of LFS-based estimates and datasets it should not do so as accredited official statistics until we had undertaken a review to assure users that ONS is able to sustainably meet users' needs and the statistics are of sufficient quality for intended use. To date, the following statistical outputs have been impacted by the suspended accreditation of the LFS:

- Statistics about employment in the UK (https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/july2024), produced by the Office for National Statistics
- Wales's monthly Labour Market Overview (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-stephanie-howarth-suspension-of-accredited-official-statistics-status-from-labour-force-survey-based-estimates/), produced by the Welsh Government
- Scottish monthly Labour Market Trends (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-alastair-mcalpine-suspension-of-accredited-official-statistics-status-from-labour-force-survey-based-estimates/), produced by the Scottish Government
- Trade Union Membership statistics (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-jane-naylor-trade-union-membership-statistics-2023/) and Business Population Estimate statistics (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-jane-naylor-business-population-estimates-statistics-2024/), produced by the Department for Business and Trade

Annual Population Survey-derived estimates

In October 2024, we agreed to ONS's request (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-michael-keoghan-suspension-of-the-accredited-official-statistics-status-for-the-estimates-ons-produces-from-the-annual-population-survey/) to suspend the accreditation of ONS outputs using APS data, noting that the proposed approach would help to convey the uncertainty of the data and clearly signal their limitations to users. The accreditation suspension of the APS-derived estimates includes the following ONS outputs:

- Adult smoking habits in the UK
- Health state life expectancies in England, Northern Ireland and Wales
- Labour market in regions of the UK
- Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality

- Personal well-being in the UK (this publication has also been paused (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-grant-fitzner-temporary-pause-of-the-personal-well-being-in-the-uk-release/) due to quality concerns with the APS-derived estimates).
- Regional gross disposable household income

In October 2024, we also agreed to the Welsh Government's request (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-stephanie-howarth-suspension-of-accredited-official-statistics-status-for-wales-estimates-produced-from-the-annual-population-survey/) to suspend the accreditation of the statistics it produces using the APS for Wales.

Next steps

ONS updated its key users of labour market statistics about its work on the APS in a workshop in November and is preparing a technical note clarifying how APS data can currently be used and their limitations. ONS has committed to publishing the technical note by the end of December.

ONS's latest communication on the transformation of the LFS includes an update on the APS (https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarkettransformationupdateonprogrpopulation-survey-developments), with a commitment to continue to inform users about how these developments and changes will support its survey outputs. With the LFS being reweighted from January to March 2019 to use more-recent population estimates, ONS notes that APS population totals will remain inconsistent with those used on the LFS and that the discrepancy between the LFS and APS estimates may also be increasing over time.

When ONS, or any other producer whose statistics have had their accreditation removed, considers that the quality issues with the LFS have been resolved in a way that means that their statistics meet the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value in the Code of Practice for Statistics, they can ask us to re-assess them. We will then determine if they can be accredited official statistics again.

Related Links

Blog – Quality under challenge: Regulating statistics and data from the Labour Force Survey (https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/blog/quality-under-challenge-regulating-statistics-and-data-from-the-labour-force-survey/)

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