
Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

The Lord Taylor of Warwick
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

20 February 2024

Dear Lord Taylor,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am responding to your Parliamentary Question asking, following reports of concern from analysts regarding the reliability of figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), what steps they are taking to ensure that the ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS) is reliable and accurate **(HL2453)**.

Following the suspension of publishing LFS estimates and micro-data in October 2023 because of quality concerns, the ONS put a comprehensive plan¹ in place to address these concerns and reintroduce LFS estimates and micro-data. The plan covers both data collection measures and methods used to make the survey estimates more representative of the UK population.

The planned improvements to data collection procedures were implemented in October/November 2023. These included the prioritisation of interviewer resource allocated to the LFS, the reintroduction of in-home interviewing, recontacting households that did not respond, and increasing the monetary incentive to participate. Furthermore, at the start of January we have increased the number of households we initially contact on the survey by 8,000 up to 25,800 for the quarter of January to March 2024. The combination of measures has already resulted in an increase in the achieved sample and we plan to maintain these measures for the foreseeable future.

As part of the improvements to our methods used to make the survey estimates more representative², the ONS have produced UK population projections specifically for the purpose of the LFS. This used 2022-based population projections for England and Wales combined with population estimates for Scotland and Northern Ireland. Additionally, we have reviewed and where appropriate adjusted the estimation method for the LFS to account for the challenges of low response levels in certain areas.

Both the improvements to data collection operations and methods to improve representativeness had a positive impact on the quality and reliability of the LFS data and enabled the ONS to reintroduce the publication of LFS-based estimates and micro-data from 13 February 2024.

¹Labour Force Survey: planned improvements and its reintroduction, ONS article, 2 November 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyplannedimprovementsanditsreintroduction>

²Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: 2024, ONS article, 5 February 2024, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/impactofreweightingonlabourforcesurveykeyindicators/2024>

As we expect to continue to see higher volatility in LFS data in the short term than might historically have been the case, we continue to advise users to apply caution when observing short-term changes in the survey-based estimates. As well as this, the commentary we publish alongside our statistics bulletins should also be considered.

While we are working hard to improve our LFS-based data, it remains our plan to make the transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) our main measure for the UK labour market. The TLFS is an online-first survey that asks many more people about their employment status. While early returns from this survey look positive, we need a longer consistent time series to aid interpretation before we share these data with users. We expect the TLFS to become the primary source for the labour market release in September 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Diamond', written in a cursive style.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond