

Consultation on Changes to ONS Products 2015

14 December 2015

Overview

The digital and data revolution has arrived, giving us access to more data than ever before; we need to make changes to keep pace with it. We are transforming into a fully data-capable organisation, equipped to meet the UK's future statistical needs.

To enable us to change we must reduce the costs of our current operations. The Government Spending Review 2015 reduces our core funding by 19% by 2019/20, in order to free up resources for transformation. To meet this challenge we are focused on making our core operations and back office functions as efficient as possible, meeting our statutory obligations and producing high quality products and services at a lower cost. It is inevitable given the scale of the challenge that we will have to do some things differently, stop some statistical work or scale back where products are not adding the maximum value for money.

We are proposing a series of changes to free up resources from our stretched budget, and reinvest to develop the skills and technology we need. We will invest in improving our digital and data collection services, including our new website, IT infrastructure, administrative data and big data systems. We are making the changes necessary to enable us to produce high quality statistics suited to the modern world, and help Britain make better decisions.

The proposals

We are asking for your views on 4 proposed changes to our products and services:

1. changing how we publish our statistics, including stopping production of some statistical bulletins (data tables, metadata and headlines will still be published)
2. stopping some surveys and reducing some survey sample sizes
3. publishing some of our statistics less frequently
4. stopping production of some statistics altogether where users tell us this would have a low impact

We need to ask you what you want on a regular basis to know whether our products and services meet your needs. This is your opportunity to tell us what matters to you and help us understand how we can make the changes we need to with as little disruption to your work as possible.

We will only stop producing some statistics altogether as a last resort. We intend to make the majority of savings from efficiencies, changing how we publish our statistics, reducing survey sample sizes and publishing some statistics less frequently. Some changes may be difficult but we must deliver the savings we need to enable our organisation to transform.

You may find some of the questions within this consultation fairly specific and of a technical nature; these are aimed at more expert users. If you do have any questions or require further information please get in touch.

How to respond

You can respond via email or through our [online form](#). The consultation will close on 8 February 2016. We will publish an initial summary of our findings within 12 weeks of the consultation close date. Your response will be treated in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#). If you have any queries, please email ons.communications@ons.gsi.gov.uk.

Changes to our publications

You have told us that you value both the data we provide and the analysis and insight that informs decision making and contributes to the democratic debate. However, some users have highlighted that it is timely data that is most valuable to them and they make relatively limited use of some of our statistical bulletins, especially where they are based on one data source.

To make the savings required to reinvest in new skills and technologies, an option we are considering is to move to an alternative model where we replace some single source statistical bulletins with key bullets or shorter summary bulletins alongside the data tables and metadata. This means that we will provide less analysis around the statistics in some cases, but all of the same data, potentially quicker.

1. ***Would a change in operating model as described above meet your requirements or make things more difficult?***
2. ***Do you use any of the ONS primary, single source, releases listed at [Annex A](#) (which may be subject to this change in model)?***
3. ***What would the impact be if we were to publish source data, metadata and headlines for these outputs rather than a formal statistical bulletin as in the current model? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)***
4. ***Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this section?***

There are a number of recent planning related Bills and Acts in Wales that set out measure that need to be taken into consideration in this consultation. These include the Active Travel Act, Housing (Wales) Act and Environment Bill. In particular the Planning (Wales) Act which brings significant changes to the planning system in Wales.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, now and in the future. The Welsh Government have recently consulted on a set of national well-being indicators for Wales that are intended to measure progress in achieving a prosperous, resilient, more equal and healthier Wales, with cohesive communities, a vibrant culture, thriving welsh language and a globally responsible Wales. The proposal for change in this consultation should take into account the measures set out by the Act to ensure the changes proposed do not adversely impact on the aims and implementation of the Act.

Changes to social surveys

Over recent years, ONS has made significant savings in its data collection operations. This has been possible through a number of efficiency initiatives and technological improvements.

We will continue to reduce data collection costs as we introduce online data collection across a range of surveys and look to move from survey based data collection to further use of administrative data. However, these changes will take time and it is likely that we will need to make additional savings in the shorter term whilst needing to minimise the impact on the quality of our statistics. Some initial options are set out below where we could make some changes and we would be grateful for your views on these.

- 5. Wealth and Assets:** the Wealth and Assets Survey is funded by various government departments and collects data on household and individual wealth for a number of policy needs. We may be able to reduce the costs of this survey, with agreement from contributors.

What would the impact be if we made the following changes to the Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS)? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

- We may reduce the costs of the survey by having a lower or no incentive for respondents to complete the survey and/or reductions in sample size.
- The current sample size of around 20,000 households is large, compared to surveys conducted by other countries, so may cut the sample by up to 20%, including through better targeting the survey. There would be a greater risk to the quality of the results and the level of analysis as the sample size decreases.

- 6. International Passenger Survey:** the International Passenger Survey (IPS) collects data on Travellers, Tourists and Migrants at most UK airports, seaports and the channel tunnel. We are considering how we can reduce the cost of this survey with minimal impact on the important statistics based on this data.

What would the impact be if we made the following changes to the International Passenger Survey (IPS)? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

- We may exclude some ports and airports from our survey sample if it has little or no impact on our migration statistics
- We may change the times when passengers are interviewed at ports and airports so that they are conducted at the times with greatest passenger variations. This will help us to reduce the amount of staff time spent conducting interviews, while maintaining quality at the national level.

- 7. Opinions and Lifestyle Survey:** the Opinions Survey is an omnibus survey which collects data from adults on a variety of subjects. Our proposal would be to stop this face to face survey until the provision of an on-line alternative.

This would remove the only random sample opinions survey available to Government which includes, for example, smoking measurements and internet data access required under EU regulations.

However, the Opinions and Lifestyle survey would be relatively easy to stop operationally beyond contracts which are already in place for part of the next financial year. Compared to

the other household surveys we judge that the impact would be lower, but we need to understand the full impact on users and contributors.

What would the impact be if we stopped the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey offers a regular sample of opinions related to health, gender and personal wellbeing. The spatial dimensions of this data can be of use to the planning profession when planning for health infrastructure and decision-making related to improving wellbeing, including spatial planning for gender equality.

Several of the government-commissioned one-off surveys have also provided useful data on attitudes towards different modes of transport and access to internet. This data can have value to the planning profession and to the policy and research team at the RTPi.

However the results of the Opinions and Lifestyle survey are perhaps of less value to the planning profession than having reliable data on topics such as demographic and household composition, housing, transport and travel-to-work patterns, migration and citizenship, labour market, health and education.

Stopping the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey could have a medium impact on the planning profession if this data is not readily available in other ONS statistical publications or datasets.

We note there is no reference to statistics in relation to the use of the Welsh Language. RTPi Cymru would be concerned if future approaches were to reduce the quality of information on the use of the Welsh language.

8. Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this section?

Changes to business surveys

We currently conduct around 80 business surveys that feed into key economic statistics such as national accounts, labour market and prices. We are required to produce the majority of these statistics by law.

We can't stop producing any of our key economic statistics, but have considered reducing the costs of some of the business surveys that support them. The changes we are proposing would be significant but minimise the impact on the quality of our statistics. The proposals cover:

- stopping some surveys
- reducing sample sizes by making greater use of administrative data
- reductions in validation
- reducing the level of detail required
- reducing response rate targets

These changes may cause some discontinuities in time series, but we need to make some of them to enable us to modernise. We would use some of the savings from these proposals to invest in collecting and analysing more administrative data and big data to produce high quality statistics more quickly.

The potential changes are summarised below.

9. *What would the impact be if we stopped running the following surveys? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)*

- Occupational Pension Schemes Survey (OPSS) - OPSS collects information on all workplace pensions. Estimates for deferred and pensioner membership would cease to be available. The proportion of employees contributing to a pension and banded contribution rate estimates would be available from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, and some information is also available from the Pensions Regulator.
- Quarterly Stocks Survey - we would replace this by aligning the annual benchmark data (from the Annual Business Survey) and model the changes in inventories and holding gains quarterly data

10. We are aiming to use administrative data sources to reduce the level of survey data collection.

What would the impact be if we reduced the sample sizes and response targets for the following surveys? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

- Retail Sales Inquiry (RSI) - this proposal relies on us being able to access and use VAT turnover data to replace the reduced survey data and would retain the completely enumerated sizeband.
- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) - this proposal relies on us making increased use of HMRC data on pay.
- Monthly Business Survey (MBS) - this proposal relies on us increasing use of VAT turnover data and would retain the completely enumerated sizeband.

11. What would the impact be if we reduced the sample sizes and response rates for all or some of the following surveys? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

We could make small potential reductions in sample size and / or response rates for some business surveys. This would have a minimal impact on statistical quality as an acceptable level of response would be achieved. These surveys are listed below with an indication of how far we would look to reduce the sample size and/or response rate target.

- Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) reduce response rate target by 2%
- Business Register Employment Survey (Annual) reduce sample size by 5% and response rate target by 2%
- Business Expenditure on Research and Development Survey reduce response rate target by 7%
- Insurance (Annual) reduce response rate target by 5%
- Pensions (Annual) reduce response rate target by 5%
- Producer Price Index (Monthly) reduce response rate target by 2%
- Quarterly Capital Assets Survey (QCAS) reduce sample size by 10% and response rate target by 2%

12. What would the impact be if we reduced validation rules and selective editing thresholds for the following surveys? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

- Annual Business Survey (ABS)
- PROducts of the European COMmunity (PRODCOM)

13. What would the impact be if we review and rebalance the number of short and long questionnaires for the Annual Business Survey (ABS)? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

14. What would the impact be if we reduce the amount of data collected at the 8-digit product level and move towards the 6-digit level (which meets European requirements) for the Products of the European COMMunity (PRODCOM) survey? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)

15. Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this section?

Producing statistics less frequently

We are looking closely at the products we produce and considering whether we can make any changes to them while still meeting user needs. To avoid stopping products altogether, one option is to publish some of our statistics less often.

16. One proposal we have identified is to conduct the national and sub-national Population Projections once every three years, rather than once every two years as currently. It should be noted that Population Statistics is a devolved issue and ONS carries out the National Population Projections on behalf of the Devolved Administrations. However, this is an ONS proposal rather than one from the Devolved Administrations.

Would a reduction in the frequency of national and sub-national population projections cause a difficulty for your Department or organisation?

In 2012 the government changed planning for housing from a regional-plan approach to a district-by-district approach which relies extensively on the ability of local authorities to calculate their own Objectively Assessed Need (OAN). This in turn depends on the availability of frequent, high-quality projections of national and sub-national population change.

The RTPI commissioned research in 2014 which looked at how ONS Census data and population projections were currently used to understand changes in household formation rates and their implications for planning. This research noted that the biennial projections were a major asset, but that their potential could be further exploited to help local authorities understand and manage the uncertainties of population and demographic change.

So long as the current system of district-led housing planning continues, a reduction in the frequency of the population projections would represent a step backwards in this respect, and could create considerable difficulties for local authorities in determining household formation rates and planning for housing growth.

The research can be viewed [here](#).

In January 2016 RTPI Cymru published research by the School of Planning and Geography Cardiff University into the process for developing robust housing projections for Local Development Plans in Wales. The project makes several recommendations. Some of the recommendations have a wider relevance beyond Wales, and are transferable across other UK nations and planning systems, in particular the recommendation to explore the development of local authority level household projections using longer term trend data to better reflect the character and purposes of the planning system and the skills issue. This recommendation suggests that the practicality of preparing a set of local authority level household projections specifically for the purposes of land use planning that utilise longer-term trend data on which to base the projected figures should be explored. Welsh Government household projections are used for a variety of different purposes and activities, and land-use planning has some distinctive qualities that are not addressed through use of shorter-term trend projections. The 10 year migration trend is one example that has been incorporated into the Welsh Government household projections, and the recommendation of the research requests that an extension of this practice be explored. The published report and details of the key findings are available to [view](#).

- 17. *Based on your understanding of the ONS statistics that you use, what would the impact be if we published some of our statistics less frequently? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)***

With the exception of sub-national population projections, we will consult further before we reduce the frequency for any specific outputs. We are only gauging views at this time.

- 18. *Do you have any suggestions for products that we could publish less frequently without any significant impact on users?***
- 19. *Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this section?***

Stopping products and services

We are required to produce around 80% of our products by law and our non statutory work includes some high profile statistics, such as statistics on population, living standards and public sector productivity. We therefore wish to make the majority of savings from becoming more efficient and changing how we collect and publish statistics, rather than cutting some of them. To help us improve and transform, we wish to regularly review some of our statistics and analyses to ensure that they meet your needs and continue to provide the value we and you would expect.

We are asking for your views on our non-statutory statistics and analysis to help us understand which of these are important to you and/or your organisation and inform your decision making. Your feedback will help us to prioritise our resources on those outputs and services that matter most to you.

You can see a list of some of our non-statutory products below. The majority of these products are funded by ONS but some receive external funding, where this is the case we would only stop the output if external funding is withdrawn.

- 20. Which of the statistics listed at [Annex B](#) are essential to your work or the work of your organisation?**
- 21. What would the impact be if we stopped producing the statistics you use? (Please describe and indicate High, Medium or Low impact)**
- 22. Are there any other sources of funding that could be used for any of these statistics?**
- 23. Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this section?**

About you

To help us better understand your needs, we would like to know a bit about you. We only intend to use this information for analysis purposes.

Are you answering this questionnaire on behalf of an organisation or as an individual?

What is your name?

What is your organisation (if applicable)?

What is your email address?

What is your telephone number?

What sector do you work in? This will assist us in monitoring the range of users the consultation has reached.

- Academia / research
- Business
- International organisation
- Journalists / media
- Local or regional government / public organisation
- National government department / organisation
- Voluntary and charity
- Other (please specify)

Your response

To support transparency in our decision making, responses to this consultation will be made public. This will include the name of your organisation, and with your permission, also your name.

Please let us know if you are content for your name to be published. We will not publish personal contact details. Any information provided in response to this consultation could be made publicly available if requested under a Freedom of Information request. The information you send us may be passed to other parts of Government.

May we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation? This may be to follow up any specific points that we need to clarify.

Are you happy for us to contact you about future ONS consultations and surveys?

Overall, how satisfied were you with our online consultation service today? (Please choose from: very satisfied, satisfied, neither, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied)

Annex A: List of products which could be initially affected by the proposal to change publications

1. Economic Statistics

- 1.1 [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\)](#)
- 1.2 [Business Demography](#)
- 1.3 [Business Enterprise Research and Development \(BERD\)](#)
- 1.4 [Business Register Employment Survey \(BRES\)](#)
- 1.5 [Civil Service Statistics](#)
- 1.6 [E-Commerce and ICT Activity of UK Businesses](#)
- 1.7 [Internet Access – Households and Individuals](#)
- 1.8 [Internet Users](#)
- 1.9 [UK Business: Activity, Size and Location](#)
- 1.10 [UK Non-Financial Business Economy Provisional Results \(ABS\)](#)
- 1.11 [UK Non-Financial Business Economy Regional Results \(ABS\)](#)
- 1.12 [UK Non-Financial Business Economy Revised Results \(ABS\)](#)

2. Life Events and Population Statistics

- 2.1 [Baby Names, England and Wales](#)
- 2.2 [Birth Characteristics in England and Wales](#)
- 2.3 [Births by Parents' Characteristics in England and Wales](#)
- 2.4 [Birth Summary Tables England and Wales](#)
- 2.5 [Civil Partnership Statistics, England and Wales](#)
- 2.6 [Death Registrations Summary Tables, England and Wales](#)
- 2.7 [Divorces in England and Wales](#)
- 2.8 [Electoral Statistics for the UK](#)
- 2.9 [Marriages in England and Wales](#)
- 2.10 [Mortality Statistics: Deaths Registered in England & Wales \(series DR\)](#)

3. Social Surveys

- 3.1 [Family Spending](#)
- 3.2 [Integrated Household Survey](#)
- 3.3 [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Adult Drinking Habits in Great Britain](#)
- 3.4 [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Adult Smoking Habits in Great Britain](#)
- 3.5 [Overseas Travel and Tourism - Monthly Release](#)
- 3.6 [Overseas Travel and Tourism - Quarterly Release](#)
- 3.7 [Travel Trends](#)
- 3.8 [Wealth in Great Britain](#)

Annex B: List of non-statutory products

1. Economy

- 1.1. [Aerospace and Electronics Cost Indices \(MM19\)](#) – Annual
- 1.2. [International Comparisons of Productivity: First Estimates](#) – Annual
- 1.3. [International Comparisons of Productivity](#) – Annual
- 1.4. [Relative Regional Consumer Price Levels in 2010 \(Experimental\)](#) – Every 6 years
- 1.5. [Small Areas Income Estimates](#) - Variable
- 1.6. [UK Business: Activity, Size and Location](#) – Annual
- 1.7. [Volume Index of Capital Services \(Experimental Statistics\)](#) – Annual

2. Health and Social Care

- 2.1. [Alcohol-related Deaths in the United Kingdom](#) – Annual
- 2.2. [Avoidable Mortality in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.3. [Cancer Survival in England](#) – Annual
- 2.4. [Childhood Cancer Survival in England](#) – Experimental
- 2.5. [Childhood, Infant and Perinatal Mortality in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.6. [Conceptions in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.7. [Deaths Related to Drug Poisoning in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.8. [Disability-free Life Expectancy for Upper Tier Local Authorities, England](#) – Annual
- 2.9. [Excess Winter Mortality in England and Wales](#) – Annual release
- 2.10. [Geographic Patterns of Cancer Survival in England](#) – Annual
- 2.11. [Gestation-specific Infant Mortality in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.12. [Health Expectancies at Birth and at Age 65 by NS-SEC and Area Deprivation](#)
- 2.13. [Health Expectancies at Birth and at age 65 in the United Kingdom](#) – Ad hoc

- 2.14. [Healthy Life Expectancy at Birth by Upper Tier Local Authority, England](#) – Annual
- 2.15. [Index of Cancer Survival for Clinical Commissioning Groups in England](#) – Annual
- 2.16. [Inequality in Healthy Life Expectancy at Birth by National Deciles of Area Deprivation](#) – Annual
- 2.17. [Monthly Deaths](#) – Monthly
- 2.18. [Mortality Statistics: Deaths Registered by Area of Usual Residence](#) – Annual
- 2.19. [Mortality Statistics: Deaths Registered in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.20. [Parents' Country of Birth](#) – Annual
- 2.21. [Social Inequalities in Alcohol-related Adult Mortality by National Statistics Socio-economic Classification](#) – Annual
- 2.22. [Social Inequalities in Fatal Childhood Accidents and Assaults: England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.23. [Suicide in the United Kingdom](#) – Annual
- 2.24. [Trends in Life Expectancy by the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification](#) – Every 5 years
- 2.25. [Unexplained Deaths in Infancy, England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 2.26. [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#) - Annual
- 2.27. [Weekly Provisional Figures on Deaths Registered in England and Wales](#) – Weekly

3. Labour Market

- 3.1. [Low Pay Estimates](#) – Annual
- 3.2. [Patterns of Pay](#) – Annual

4. People and Places

- 4.1. [Integrated Household Survey Dataset](#) - Annual
- 4.2. [Wealth in Great Britain](#) – Every 18 months

5. Population

- 5.1. [Ageing in the UK](#) – Ad hoc
- 5.2. [Baby names in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 5.3. [Birth Cohort Tables for Infant Deaths](#) – Annual
- 5.4. [Births by Parents' Characteristics](#) – Annual

- 5.5. [Births by Area of Usual Residence of Mother, UK](#) – Annual
- 5.6. [Childbearing of Women Born in Different Years](#) – Annual
- 5.7. [Civil Partnerships](#) – Annual
- 5.8. [Clinical Commissioning Group Mid-year Population Estimates for England \(Experimental Statistics\)](#) – Annual
- 5.9. [Decennial Life Tables](#)
- 5.10. [Divorces in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 5.11. [Families and Households in the UK](#) – Annual
- 5.12. [Life Expectancy at Birth and at Age 65 by Local Areas in England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 5.13. [Migration Indicators for Local Authorities in England and Wales \(Experimental Statistics\)](#) – Annual
- 5.14. [National Park Mid-year Population Estimates for England and Wales \(Experimental Statistics\)](#) – Annual
- 5.15. [Overseas Travel and Tourism \(Monthly\)](#) – Monthly
- 5.16. [Overseas Travel and Tourism \(Quarterly\)](#) – Quarterly
- 5.17. [Parliamentary Constituency Mid-year Population Estimates for England and Wales \(Experimental Statistics\)](#) – Annual
- 5.18. [Period and Cohort Life Expectancy Tables](#) – Biennial
- 5.19. [Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements – England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 5.20. Short-term Migration Estimates: Local Authorities – Annual (not yet published)
- 5.21. [Super Output Area Mid-year Population Estimates for England and Wales](#) – Annual
- 5.22. [Travel Trends](#) – Annual
- 5.23. [Travelpac](#) – Quarterly
- 5.24. [UK/non-UK Fertility](#)
- 5.25. [Ward Mid-year Population Estimates for England and Wales \(Experimental\) \(also includes Census Area Statistics \(CAS\) wards\)](#) – Annual
- 5.26. [Young Adults Living with Parents](#) – Ad hoc