

---

**Director General for Regulation**

Jonathan Athow  
Director General for Economic Statistics  
Office for National Statistics  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
SW1V 2QQ

20 February 2019

Dear Jonathan

**STATISTICS ON INCOME AND EARNINGS**

Many thanks for providing your most recent update (December 2018) against the recommendations of OSR's February 2015 [review](#) into the Coherence and Accessibility of Statistics on Income and Earnings.

Our overall conclusion is that, while some progress has been made in addressing the three outstanding areas for improvement outlined in our [March 2018 letter](#), progress has been slow. We are concerned that the importance of implementing the recommendations of our review has been lost, particularly of those linked to improving the accessibility and navigation of statistics and analysis, and of gaining access to new data sources.

The aim should be to help users understand the dynamics of the labour market. ONS and other producers should help illuminate issues that are the subject of debate, such as the trajectory for living standards; the quality of work; and the experiences of different types of households and individuals, and help users interpret changes not just at the median but across all parts of the distribution. I am concerned that this aim has not had sufficiently high priority.

On the positive side, we are encouraged that the timetable of income and earnings releases has been published, and that answers have been produced for several of the key user questions. It is good that the existing Income and Earnings Working Group has been reconfigured, with greater collaboration between ONS, DWP and HMRC to generate evidence and insight. And, we hope your engagement with the GSS Harmonisation team, who will be able to provide help coordinating and implementing improvements to the statistics, can lead to greater coherence.

Building on these positives, we would like to see a more comprehensive action plan, outlining what steps you will be taking to make income and earnings statistics more coherent and accessible for users.

I am copying this letter to: Steve Ellerd-Elliott, DWP Head of Profession for Statistics; Sean Whellams, HMRC Head of Profession for Statistics; David Freeman, ONS Deputy Director of Labour Market and Households Division; Joanna Littlechild, DWP Head of Surveys; Peter Lumb, HMRC Head of Data Production Team, KAI Personal Taxes; and John Pullinger, the National Statistician.

Your sincerely

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

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation