Progress with transformation of the Labour Force Survey

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at the UKDS LFS/APS User Conference

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Objectives of transforming the survey

Taking an online-first approach with an adaptive and responsive design to target resources where they are most efficient to maximise response rates, quality and representativeness with:

- Larger overall sample size

- More robust processing systems

- Modular design to integrate more question blocks

- More flexible and able to respond faster to change

- Updated and upgraded questions and responses

Future aims include further integration with administrative data, increasing timeliness and better handling of survey content

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Decision to continue development

- Undertook detailed review of current design, content and quality of TLFS in late 2024/early 2025 including proposals for change/improvement

- Conducted an assessment of value for money related to the costs, feasibility and expected outcomes of available options

- Prepared recommendation papers (Strategic & Technical) for the TLFS Steering Group, ONS Executive Committee, and UKSA Board
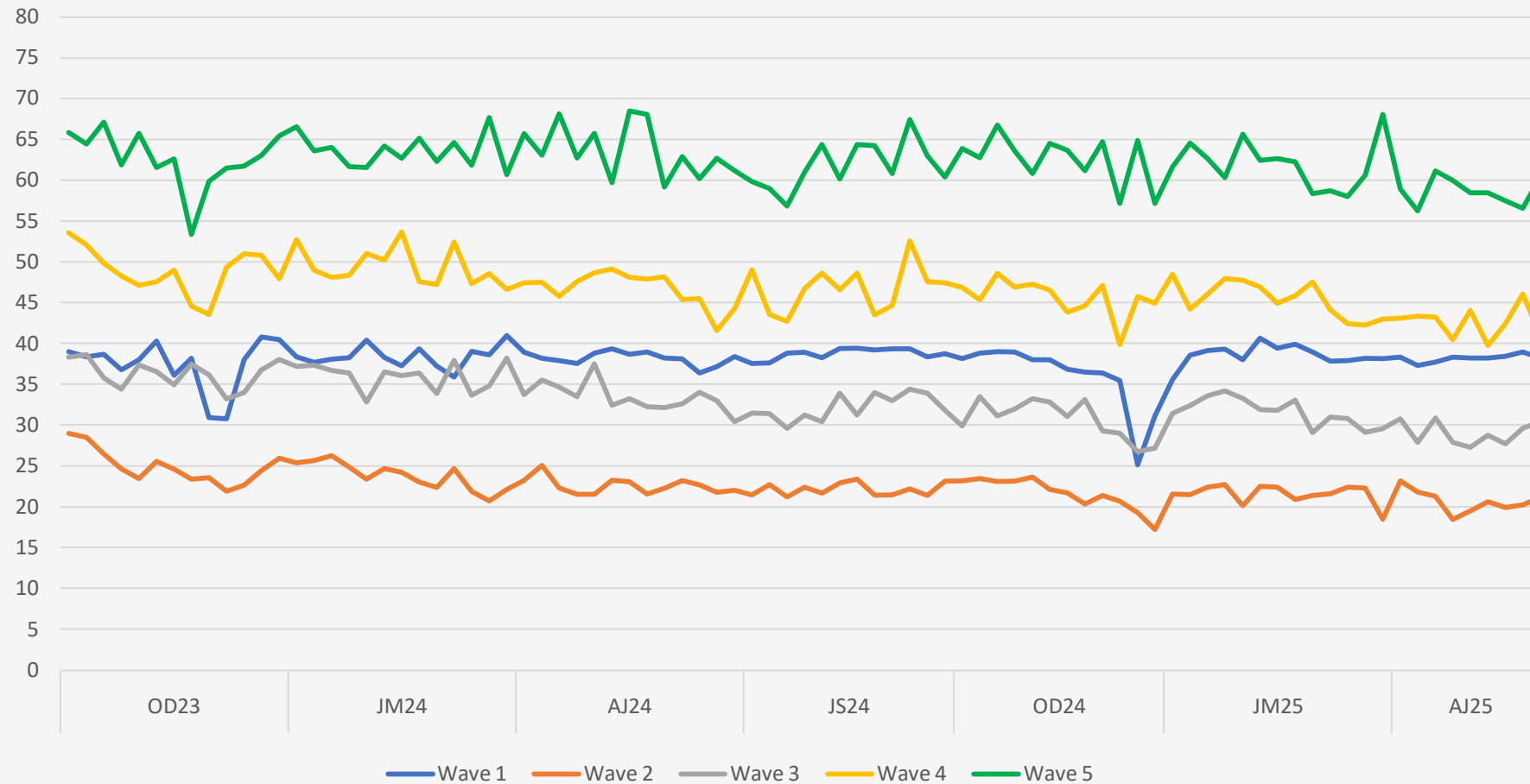
~~**Stop the TLFS** with no further work to improve the LFS~~

~~**Stop the TLFS** but fully invest in a programme of work to improve the quality of the LFS~~

Continue running LFS and TLFS, make recommended changes to TLFS, then decommission LFS

~~**Transition to the TLFS** and decommission the LFS as soon as practically possible~~

TLFS time series of % return rates, GB, by wave

Response:

w1	27% full
	11% partial
	38% overall
by phone	6%

Quality targets:

by region	1.3 (≤2)
by IMD	1.7 (≤2)
by OAC	1.6 (≤1.5)

Legend: Wave 1, Wave 2, Wave 3, Wave 4, Wave 5

X-axis labels: OD23, JM24, AJ24, JS24, OD24, JM25, AJ25

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Transformation timeline

2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D	J F M A M J J A S O N D

TS2 introduced telephone mode

TS3 reached target sample size

Fieldwork mode expanded to w2

Peer reviewing formally started

UK Data Service annual LFS conference

TS8 changes to content based upon feedback

UK Data Service annual LFS conference

TS9 implement shorter core Qs

Key project review

Possible transition of headline measures

TS4 key labour market content

TS6 changes to survey content

LMX testing

TS10 larger sample & assisted completion

TS5 introduced fieldwork mode

TS7 changes to survey content

Decision to extend project

TS11 implement data rotation

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Labour Market eXperimental (LMX) testing

Shorter core questionnaire focused on key headline questions

Test effects of changing questions on income, inactivity and place of work

10,000 households sampled for each of three treatments = **30,000** in total

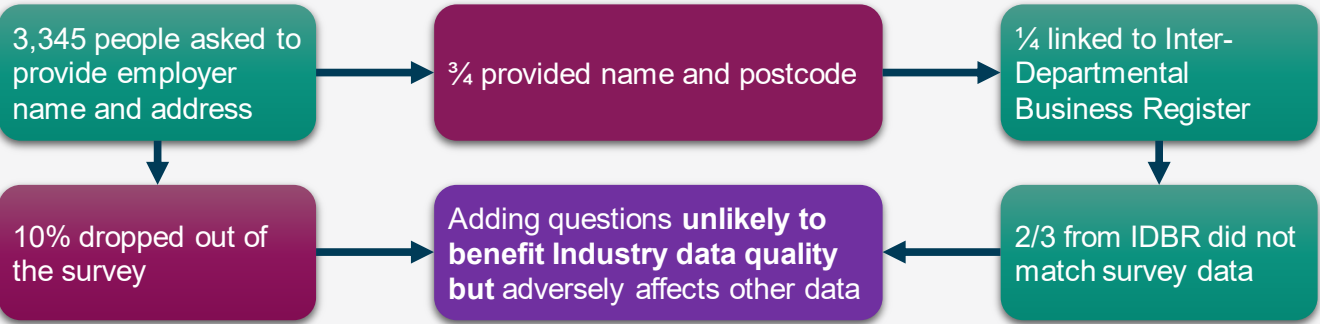Online only – no telephone mode, no knock-to-nudge (fieldwork) follow up

England only – no Scottish or Welsh addresses in the sample

Results of LMX testing

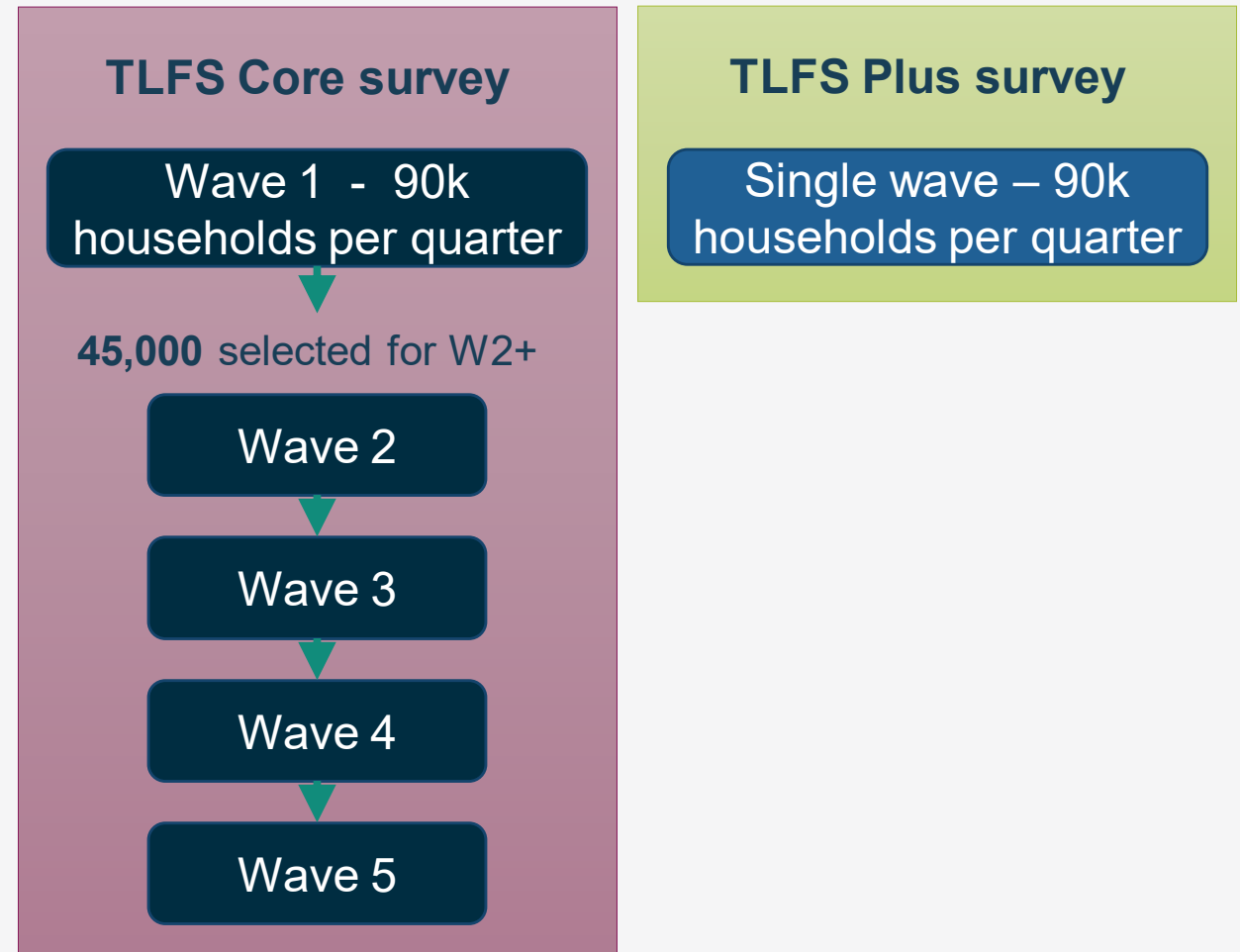|	Comparable TLFS	Whole LMX	Treatment 1	Treatment 2	Treatment 3
	England-only, online-only, one month only, regular TLFS core questionnaire	Combination of Treatments 1 + 2 + 3	Shorter core base content + earnings questions	Shorter core base content + earnings questions + employer details + changes to inactivity	Shorter core base content + employer details + changes to inactivity
Number of responses	10,720	14,462	4,806	4,876	4,780
% respondents who dropped out	9%	8%	8%	10%	7%
Overall return rate	25%	31%			
Percentage of full returns	18%	23%			
of returns, % that are partial	30%	24%			

- Survey completion time improved significantly LFS 45 min ➔ TLFS core 28 min ➔ LMX 19 min

- Improved age breakdown (more younger people)

- Households were more likely to take part in the survey

- Proportion of larger households (3+) in the achieved sample increased to more expected levels

- Proportion of individuals dropping out of the survey reduced

- Inclusion of questions about employer details and earnings does worsen respondent drop-off

- Changing inactivity response options did not improve results

Impact of adding employer questions

3,345 people asked to provide employer name and address ➔ ¾ provided name and postcode ➔ ¼ linked to Inter-Departmental Business Register

3,345 people asked to provide employer name and address ➔ 10% dropped out of the survey

¼ linked to Inter-Departmental Business Register ➔ 2/3 from IDBR did not match survey data

2/3 from IDBR did not match survey data ➔ Adding questions **unlikely to benefit Industry data quality but** adversely affects other data

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Implementing new survey design

- Separating out survey designs

- Increasing sample from 70k+70k to 90k+90k

- Increase in longitudinal sample from 40k to 45k

- Addition of "assisted completion" mode

- Implementing data rotation between waves

- Much shorter core survey content to generate headline labour market outputs

- TLFS Plus survey designed to meet household, socio-economic and local requirements not part of core labour market outputs

TLFS Core survey

Wave 1 - 90k households per quarter

45,000 selected for W2+

Wave 2

Wave 3

Wave 4

Wave 5

TLFS Plus survey
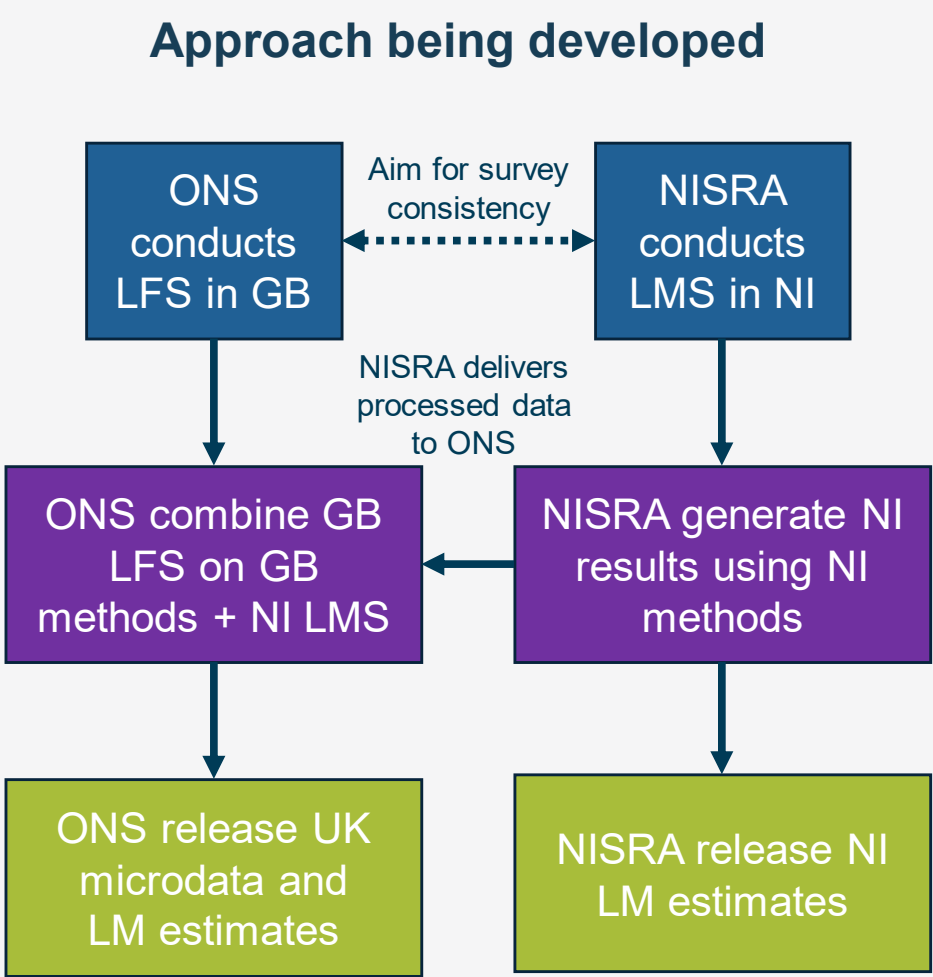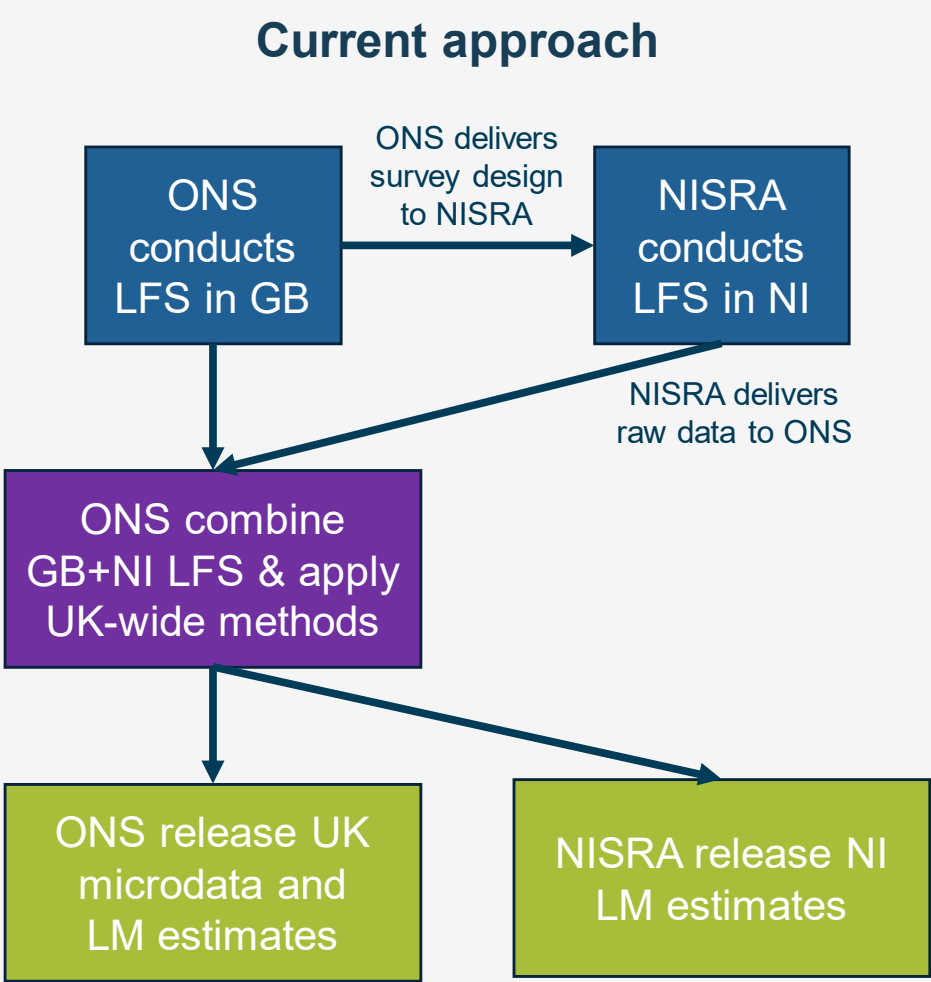
Single wave – 90k households per quarter

Transforming the LFS in Northern Ireland

NISRA developing LMS for NI while ONS develops TLFS

Aligning key LM concepts, design and methodology where possible

NISRA plan to transition in 2025, likely before ONS

NI design means some data will become GB only

Current approach

ONS conducts LFS in GB

ONS delivers survey design to NISRA →

NISRA conducts LFS in NI

NISRA delivers raw data to ONS

ONS combine GB+NI LFS & apply UK-wide methods

ONS release UK microdata and LM estimates

NISRA release NI LM estimates

Approach being developed

ONS conducts LFS in GB

Aim for survey consistency

NISRA conducts LMS in NI

NISRA delivers processed data to ONS

ONS combine GB LFS on GB methods + NI LMS

NISRA generate NI results using NI methods

ONS release UK microdata and LM estimates

NISRA release NI LM estimates

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Next steps

- Developing TLFS into a programme
- Implementing TS9 in Jul, TS10 in Oct and TS11 in Jan
- Ongoing development of methodology and output datasets
- Working toward integration of GB + NI data
- Ongoing analysis and review leading to decisions in July 2026
- Aiming toward decommissioning the current LFS for TLFS to become primary source of Labour Market (and other) statistics
- Follow the journey through our updates on progress & plans

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For questions, information or updates about the transformation, contact labour.market.transformation@ons.gov.uk

Any questions?