Employment data shake-up could see Britons obliged to take part in survey

The shake-up of official employment data, used to help set interest rates and other crucial public policy, could see members of the public obliged to complete the survey to help bolster accuracy.

The country's top number cruncher, Sir Ian Diamond, told a committee of MPs that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) was still exploring ways of improving the quality of the data within the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS).

The ONS national statistician said he was "super hopeful" that an improved survey would be available from early 2026, rather than in 2027, as the body had feared last year.

Its accuracy has been called into question since the COVID-19 pandemic when participation rates fell sharply.

Trade war latest: China hits back at Trump

People are selected at random to take part in the survey, which is used to calculate key measures such as the UK's unemployment rate and wage growth.

This data is crucial for government and bodies such as the **Bank of England**, which needs the information to determine inflationary pressures in the **UK economy**.

More on Uk Economy



UK growth outlook downgraded by leading economic forecasters in latest blow to Chancellor Rachel Reeves



Can Love Island help Rachel Reeves?



The big points in the chancellor’s speech that won’t get the headlines

Related Topics:

- UK Economy

The Bank has been among decisionmakers to have expressed frustration with the quality of the LFS data, which deteriorated just as the world was forced to deal with a series of economic shocks.

It has been a tough few years for the Bank to navigate, with interest rates rising sharply from December 2021 to cover off

price increases in the economy linked to the end of the pandemic.

The subsequent energy-led cost of living crisis, mostly a consequence of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, has evolved since.

The data problem has forced economists to look towards private sector studies instead to help better inform policy.

The Resolution Foundation thinktank has previously claimed that almost one million more people are in work than the LFS has shown.

Currently, participants must be aged 16 or over and are randomly selected from a private households and other accommodation including student halls to be interviewed.

The ONS is hoping the improvements will offer bigger sample sizes, shorter questionnaires and less bias towards particular types of respondents.

Be the first to get Breaking News

Install the Sky News app for free





Read more from Sky News:
Why China has not retaliated more in US trade spat
Millions face bumper council tax rise

Sir Ian told the Treasury Select Committee he was “encouraged” by the progress being made in transforming the survey but said that a lack of resources and £34m of recent cuts were hampering its work more generally.

On the possibility of the survey being compulsory for those selected, as happens in Australia, he said the question was “a fine balance but one that could help potentially with some surveys”.

“We’re finding very, very, very high levels of flat refusal,” he explained, adding that it was currently taking his colleagues twice the level of effort to get interviews for the monthly LFS compared with before the pandemic.

When asked if the ONS needed more cash and better data linkage with government departments to improve its overall work, Sir Ian simply said: “Yes.”