What Economists do – ONS

About the Office for National Statistics

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the UK’s largest independent producer of official statistics and the recognised national statistical institute of the UK. It is the largest employer of analytical professions in Government and regularly recruits across the GSR, GSG, GES and GORs professions. ONS employs over 200 Government Social Researchers alone at our Headquarters in Newport, South Wales and in Titchfield, Hampshire. Posts are occasionally available at our smaller London office in Pimlico.

The main responsibilities of ONS are to collect, analyse and disseminate official statistics about the UK’s economy, society and population to support better decision making – see ONS’ strategy – Better Statistics Better Decisions. ONS exists to help Britain make better decisions. ONS statistics provide the public with a window on society and of the work and performance of government; they assess the impact of policy and government actions; they inform Parliaments and Assemblies on the state of the nation and they provide businesses and the rest of the public sector with information and insight to run effectively and efficiently. Many of our outputs are comparable across the European Union and the world so people can compare between countries.

Key statistical outputs produced by ONS include the monthly employment/unemployment figures, measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), population estimates and projections, the Retail and Consumer Prices Indices (RPI/CPI), experiences of crime and cyber-crime and long term migration figures.

What do our Economists do?

ONS employs a significant number of Economists doing challenging and rewarding work. Economists work closely with analysts in other government departments, such as HM Treasury, the Office for Budget Responsibility, Bank of England, Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

As an Economist working at ONS, you will gain a good understanding of UK Statistics and how these can be applied to analytical and empirical economics in a rigorous and relevant way. Understanding the construction of statistics, their strengths and their limitations provides an invaluable training experience for anyone wishing to develop a career as a professional economist.

ONS has an increasingly important role in analysing and reporting on the UK’s changing economy, with a duty to provide impartial, comprehensive and high quality statistics on all aspects of life in the UK, as a body that is independent of government.

ONS is an exciting place for an Economist to work, you will have the opportunity to work on key economic indicators that play a central part in UK economic policymaking and public debate. These indicators and economic statistics are important than ever before, with an increasing demand for information. These roles offer the opportunity both to become an expert in an area of UK economic data and to develop a range of analytical skills which have wide application.
Economists are involved in producing analysis and explaining concepts such as monetary flows through the economy real disposable income, cost benefit appraisal, productivity, human capital, well being, environmental accounts and the gender pay gap.

Working in ONS not only provides an in-depth understanding of how individual sectors of the economy work, but also how these and other influences interact together to affect the macroeconomy.

Economists will be involved in stimulating and rewarding research and analysis that ensures our statistics are world class. As we are often at the forefront of producing and developing high quality statistics, economists may have the opportunity to represent the UK internationally.

ONS Economists make a major contribution across a diverse range of areas and disciplines, working in a number of ONS business areas such as:

**Office of the Chief Economic Adviser**

Economists in this area provide up-to-the-minute analysis of the latest trends in the economy, and help to ensure the high quality of economic data that feed directly into macroeconomic policy-making. On the back of this, they regularly meet with ONS customers in HM Treasury, the Bank of England, BIS and other government departments that make use of ONS data, to explain the latest economic developments, revisions and methodological changes. We are also prominent in the external presentation of ONS’ economic statistics, representing the public face of ONS in this area.

**National Accounts Coordination**

Economists’ responsibilities here are both varied and demanding. They are involved in the production of key economic statistics, including GDP, the index of services, production and construction output, household consumption, private sector output etc. Production of these data draws heavily on economic skills, whether checking data consistency or providing advice and briefing to National Accountants on the economic story underpinning GDP data.

**Measuring National Well-being**

Economists are helping to develop measures that provide a more holistic view of ‘how society is doing’ than is given just by measuring economic indicators such as GDP.

**Public Policy Analysis**

Economists within the Public Policy Analysis division cover a wide range of analytical areas, releasing several key statistics and publications which inform government, industry and the public. These include estimates of productivity of public services, as well as analysis of households’ income and expenditure patterns, and individual services such as healthcare and education. Most of the analysis tends to be conducted on micro-data, where a range of statistical techniques is used to analyse and report on the impact of policy reforms, such as those which affect changes to state pension age or the likely impact of regional public sector pay. Economists also explore the effectiveness of the tax and benefit system at redistributing income, and reducing inequality, and also how wealth is shared among households.
Reaching your full potential

ONS is committed to developing the economic and statistical skills of its economists, and has tailored a learning and development programme to meet economists’ needs. The programme is recognised as ‘best in class’ by the Government Economic Service (GES), and supports the continuous professional development of Assistant Economists and Economic Advisors. It includes:

- Weekly economic briefing and presentation
- Monthly economic round-ups
- Quarterly policy debates
- Quarterly research seminars
- Economist mentoring scheme
- Supporting part-time study for MSc or PHD qualifications
- Attendance at courses and seminars, including those held at University of the West of England, Cardiff University, University College London and the London School of Economics
- Training in the National Accounts and other areas of economic statistics
- Economic discussions

ONS promotes attendance on a wide range of courses aimed at broader professional development. These can cover topics such as policy making, management, communication, project management and strategy. Recognising the importance of career progression, the office provides practical support for Economists applying for promotion.

Where it all begins

Economists are usually based at the ONS’ Newport office in South Wales, although there are also opportunities for Economists in the Titchfield office working on Census related and regional economic analysis. We are also in the middle of growing our London presence.

The Newport office is located south-west of the city, close to the M4 and in easy reach of Wales’ easygoing capital city of Cardiff. It is also close to the scenic Usk Valley, the Brecon Beacons and the vibrant city of Bristol, with the added benefit of being more affordable than London, not least in terms of housing and transport costs. Living in Wales or the South West provides opportunities to visit some of the most beautiful natural areas of the UK, whilst also having access to a wide range of cultural, sporting and current affairs events.