

ONS Crisis Sparks Calls for Urgent Reform

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The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is facing mounting scrutiny following reports of staff departures, low morale, and growing concerns over the reliability of its data. The turmoil has intensified calls for urgent reform of the UK's statistical infrastructure.

The ONS, established in 1996, plays a central role in providing key figures on inflation, GDP, unemployment, and the census. Its data informs decisions across government, the Bank of England, and local councils. However, experts warn that the agency's credibility is under strain, raising fears that inaccurate statistics could undermine economic policymaking.

Concerns have escalated after several senior officials left the organisation in recent months. Former staff have pointed to underfunding, outdated systems, and a lack of recognition for the significance of their work. Some also highlighted pressures stemming from the politicisation of statistics, with ministers accused of "cherry picking" favourable numbers rather than addressing weaknesses in data collection.

Analysts caution that these problems risk eroding public confidence in official figures. "If statistics lose credibility, policymaking loses credibility," one economist noted, adding that trust in government decisions and wider public debate depends on reliable data.

The UK government has acknowledged challenges facing the ONS but has so far resisted sweeping reforms. Critics argue this reluctance reflects a failure to treat statistical accuracy as a core national priority at a time when Britain is grappling with economic headwinds and demographic shifts. They point to other advanced economies, where national statistics agencies receive greater independence and funding, as possible models for the UK to follow.

Industry leaders and academics are urging ministers to safeguard the ONS's independence and invest in modernising its systems. Supporters of reform argue that treating statistics as essential national infrastructure, on par with energy, transport, and security, is critical to restoring confidence.

The ONS itself remains under pressure to rebuild trust in its output. With confidence in public institutions already fragile, further doubts about the reliability of official statistics could leave government policy adrift at a time of growing uncertainty.