

# Office for National Statistics (ONS)



# Survey recovery work at the ONS

**Jen Farnall**

Divisional Director

Social Surveys Research and Production



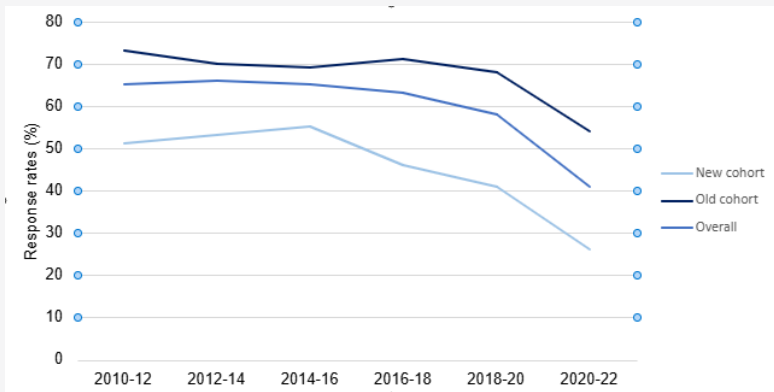
# Challenges facing ONS

★ AI Overview  
Check important info. [Learn more](#)

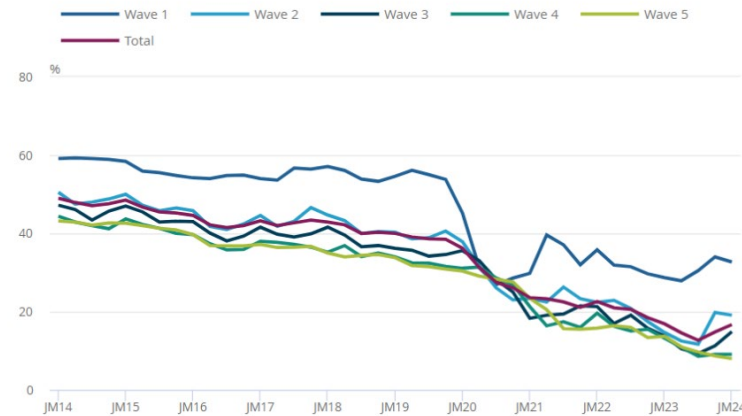
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Declining survey response rates are a growing concern for researchers and statisticians, impacting the quality and reliability of data collected through surveys. Several factors contribute to this trend, including survey fatigue, increased competition for respondents' time, and evolving social norms regarding data privacy and participation. [🔗](#)

Wealth and Assets Survey response rates, 2010-2022



Great Britain, excluding imputed households, January to March 2014, to January to March 2024



Source: [Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics \(figure 3\)](#)



## Head of ONS quits job over 'health issues' amid criticism from politicians

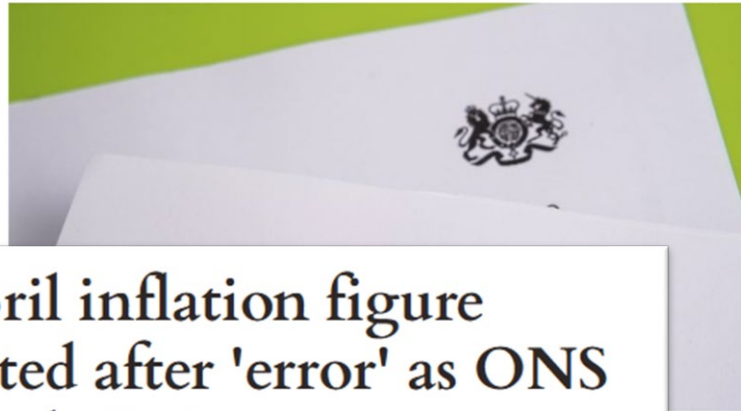
Sir Ian Diamond is Britain's most senior statistician

Henry Saker-Clark • Friday 09 May 2025 14:16 BST



## Sir Robert Devereux appointed to lead review of ONS performance and culture

Independent review, led by former DWP and DfT perm sec, to report back in early summer



## UK April inflation figure overstated after 'error' as ONS makes admission

The Office for National Statistics has released a statement explaining what went wrong.

# A rapidly evolving strategic environment

- Devereux report and new Economic Statistics Strategy
- Focus on recovering quality and user confidence – doing less better
- Social surveys already in this space with existing plans and investment

# Where are we?



**ONS prioritising social surveys during significant wider change** – we made the difficult decision earlier this year to stop SLC, recognising this would impact needs of users, but needing to prioritise core official statistics



**£27m investment** with increased scrutiny on outcomes

# TLFS

**New TLFS Programme**  
With increased accountability



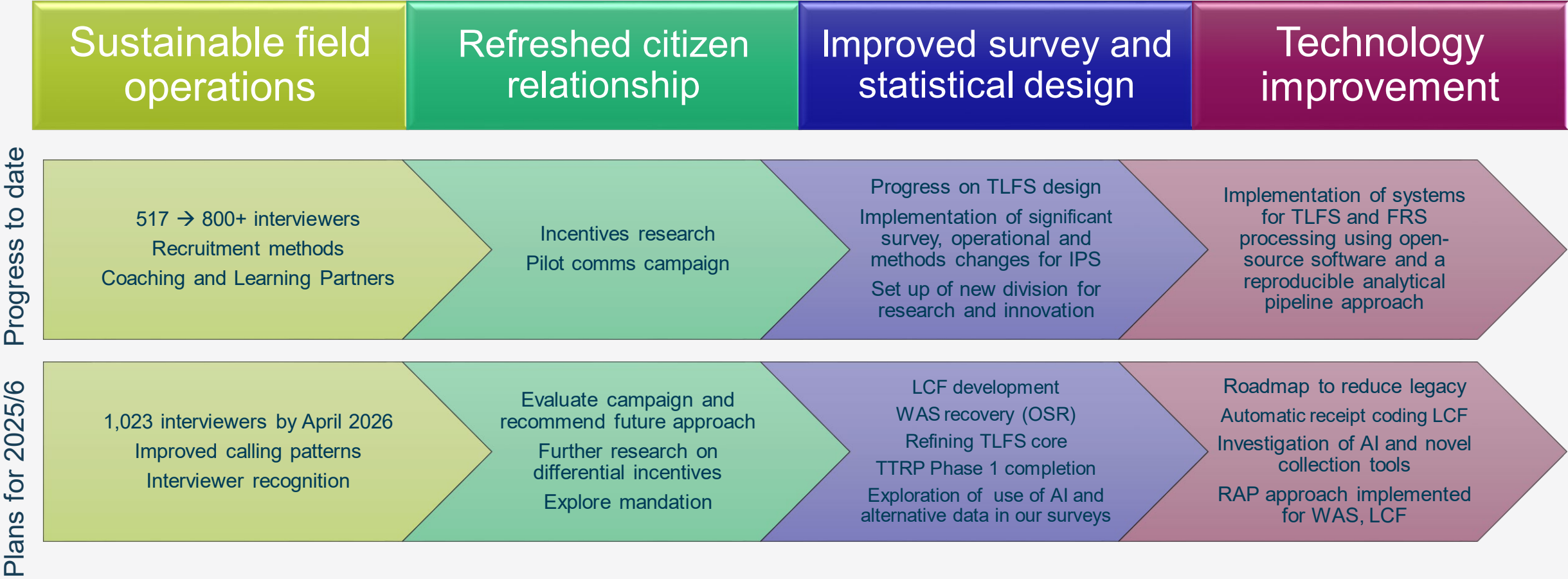
**The Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan**

We know exactly what we need to do – but not a walk in the park

# Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan

Sustainable field operations	Refreshed citizen relationship	Improved survey and statistical design	Technology improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• improve capacity and capability across our interviewer community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• improve trust, brand recognition and understanding of the importance of our surveys</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• redesign our surveys to be more streamlined, reduce respondent burden, and improve accessibility for the population</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• improve our systems and processes, taking opportunities to improve efficiency and agility of our technology</li></ul>

# What does this mean in practice





Using targeted communications to help increase survey engagement by addressing trust barriers


‘I am worried that the survey could be a scam’

‘I am unsure if my data will remain confidential and if my anonymity will be protected’


‘It is not clear why my contribution is important and will make a difference’

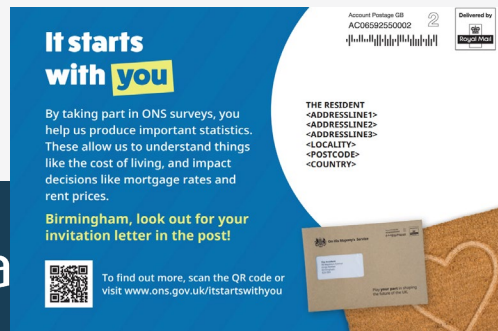
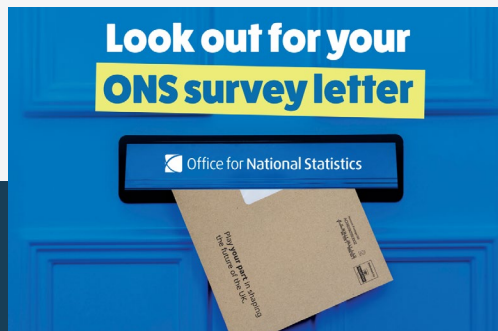
‘I don’t know who ONS is/ that ONS runs surveys’

Campaign was run in the Birmingham Local Authority (LA)

 A total of 762 were included in the sample, which comprised of those invited to the TLFS, LFS, and other surveys

Campaign Materials

 **Prime:** A5 postcard delivered to all targeted households two weeks before invitation letter arrived, priming them the letter was on its way



**Prompt:** Broadcast video on demand (BVOD) (targeted to households in postcode areas only) to encourage households to open letter and participate



**Remind :** Digital out of home billboards (DOOH), for example on bus stops, was displayed to remind households to take part. This covers a large part of Birmingham.

**Evidence collected:**

Product Participation Metrics & OMIGOV Results  
Survey Return Rate Data  
Focus Groups with Field Interviewers  
Respondent Evaluation Survey

**Evaluation** – Process, Contribution Analysis and Value for Money

Early findings indicate some positive results, dissemination and recommendations for further research in progress.



Post-hoc incentive analysis	Evaluating operational changes	Optimum incentive amount
Discretionary incentives	Targeted incentives	Early-bird incentives
Unconditional incentives		



**Non-monetary incentives**

An A6 unconditional notepad sent with the invite letter has been found to be effective on ONS online surveys – each has their own design

To save resource, a generic notepad cover was designed

Work underway to plan a pilot to evaluate the impact of sending a notepad with the advance letter on the LCF later this year.



**Exploring optimum incentive amount**

- Randomised control trial on an online survey testing £10 vs £20
- £20 significantly increased response rates and reduced refusals
- £20 performed better for those aged under 45



**Targeted incentives trial on Opinions and Lifestyle Survey**

- Offering £10 to younger age and ethnic minority groups to increase response in under-represented groups - rest get A6 unconditional notepad, as the control
- Early findings indicate positive increase in response for targeted group
- Trial ends in July 2025, results for dissemination approx. September



**Moving away from “one-size-fits-all” to differential incentives**

**Differential incentives:** survey participants incentivised differently based on:

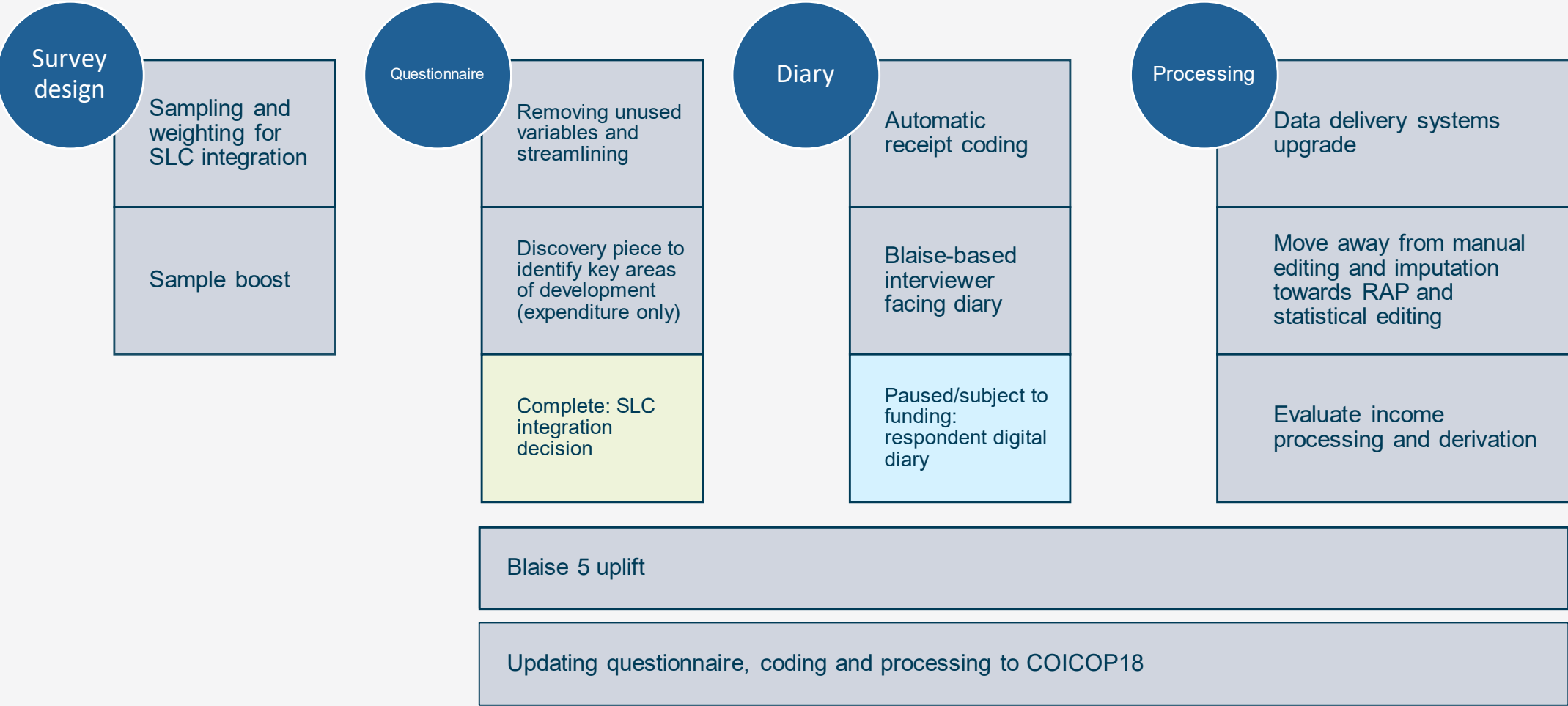
- a. characteristics that are either available on the sampling frame or collected during fieldwork, e.g. targeted incentives, or
- b. their behaviour (for example reluctance/refusal to take part).

**June 2025:** Exploration of ethical and operational

considerations, plus qualitative research with interviewers to gather thoughts on differential incentives to inform future incentive strategies



# Overview of development workstreams



# Other quality work

OSR  
recommendations  
for WAS

Blaise 5 uplift

Reproducible  
Analytical  
Pipelines

# Objectives of pipeline work

Re-building Social Surveys' legacy data processing systems,

using opensource tools, facilitating the Blaise 5 uplift and future move to DAP

applying the principles of Reproducible Analysis and Best Programming practices

Establishing the function of maintenance, support and continues improvement of the data processing pipelines

Upskilling the Survey teams in the use, maintenance and continues improvement of the data processing pipelines

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**The Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan**

We know exactly what we need to do – but not a walk in the park

# Any questions?



# Household finances statistics at ONS: statistics for the public good

**Rebecca Briggs**

Divisional Director

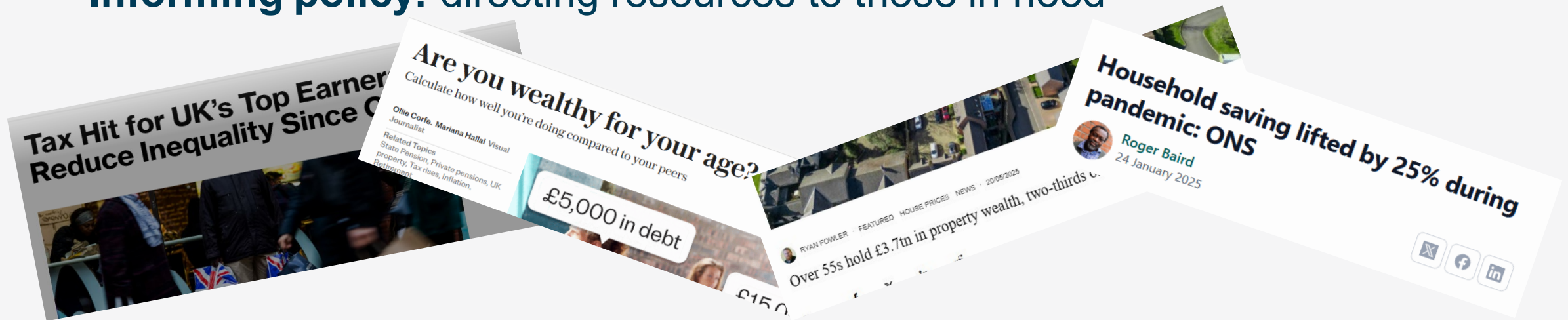
Household Resilience Division

Public Policy Analysis Directorate

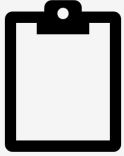


# Key for informing policy and public debate

- **Understanding people's finances:** income, expenditure, wealth, poverty
- **Exploring inequalities:** geographical regions, population groups, characteristics
- **Responsive and relevant:** cost of living
- **Informing policy:** directing resources to those in need

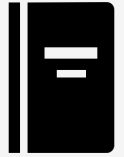


# Recently at ONS...



## Survey developments

- Cessation of the SLC
- Redesign of the pensions section on WAS
- WAS OSR review



## Statistical publications

- Household Disposable Income and Income Inequality FYE 2024
- Household total wealth in Great Britain: April 2020 to March 2022



## Processes and methods

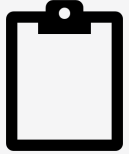
- Improved production pipelines
- Streamlining QA processes
- Reviewing DB pension wealth methodology
- Expenditure weighting methodology aligning with Income methodology



## Stakeholder engagement

- Working across the GSS to improve coherence

# Looking ahead..



## Survey developments

- Publishing an update on recent changes to WAS
- Developing a plan to increase quality of household finance statistics, intend to publish in the Autumn



## Statistical publications

- Late summer – Family Spending
- Early Autumn – Effects of Taxes and Benefits



## Processes

- Continuing to improve production pipelines
- Improving cross-cutting insights for household income and expenditure



## Stakeholder engagement

- New expert group for Wealth and Assets formed
- Effect of Taxes and Benefits published table review

# Household Income and Expenditure analysis

**Lee Colvin**

Grade 7

Household Income & Expenditure Analysis

Public Policy Analysis Directorate



# Overview

## Highlights from Average Household Income & Inequality publication FYE 2024:

- Median disposable income did not significantly change year on year
- Disposable income for poorest households is similar to FYE 2022 levels
- Disposable income inequality did not significantly change year on year

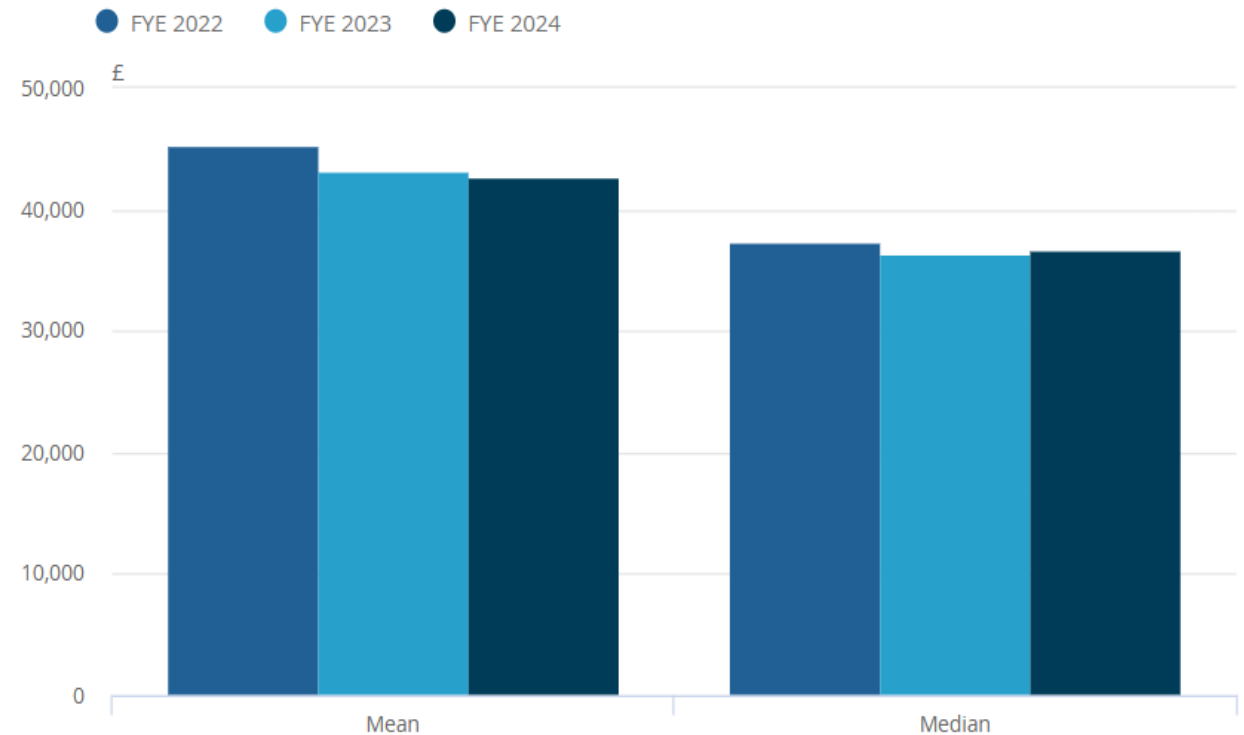
**The analysis in this presentation is based on a disposable income measure and presented in real terms at FYE 2024 prices unless otherwise stated.**



# Annual median household income did not change significantly between FYE 2023 and FYE 2024

- For FYE 2024 Median income had a non-significant increase by 0.8% (£280) to £36,700
- This followed a non-significant decrease of 1.2% between FYE 2022 and FYE 2023
- For FYE 2024 mean income decreased by 1.2% (£510) to £42,700
- This followed a non-significant decrease of 4.7% between FYE 2022 and FYE 2023

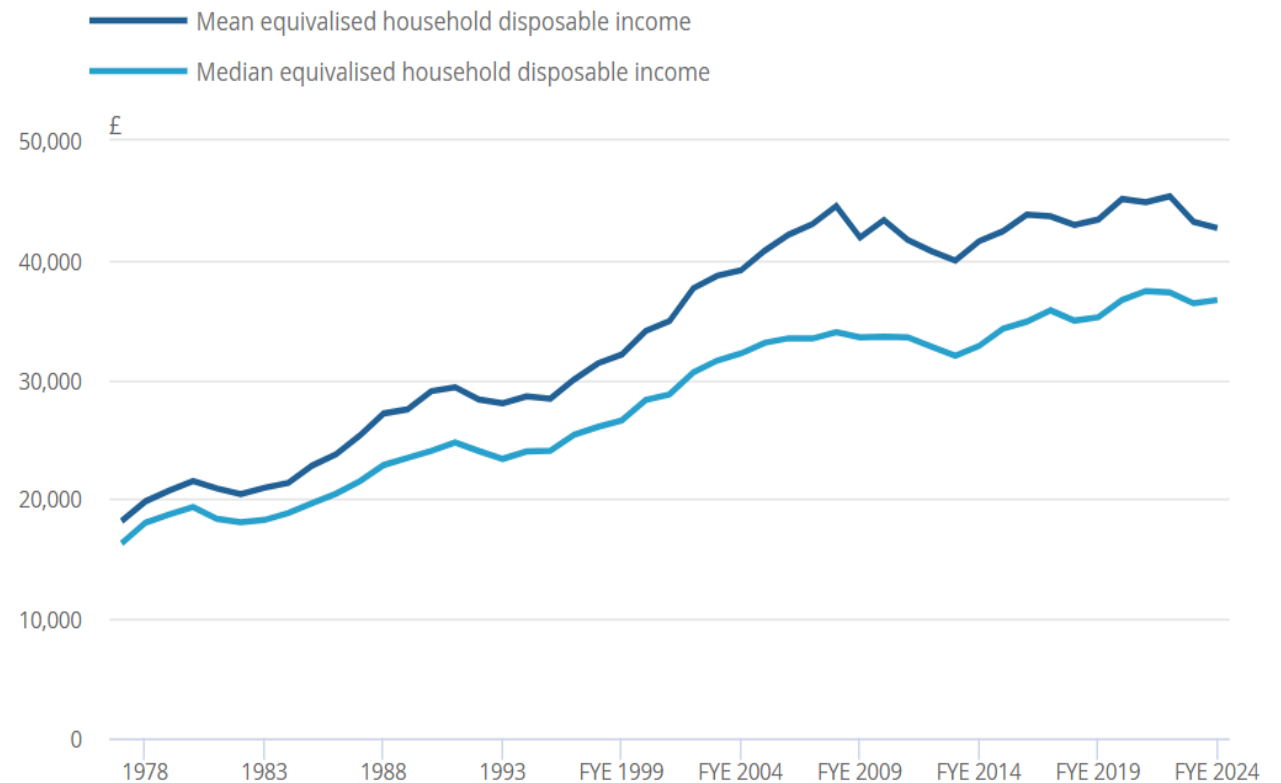
Mean and median equivalised household disposable income of individuals, UK, financial year ending (FYE) 2022 to FYE 2024



# Median income for all UK households grew by 7.0% in the 10 Years leading to FYE 2024

- Median income increased from £34,255 in FYE 2015 by £2,408 to £36,700 in FYE 2024
- Median income grew at an average rate of 0.8% in the 10 years leading to FYE 2024
- Mean income grew by 0.6% (£270) in the 10 years leading to FYE 2024

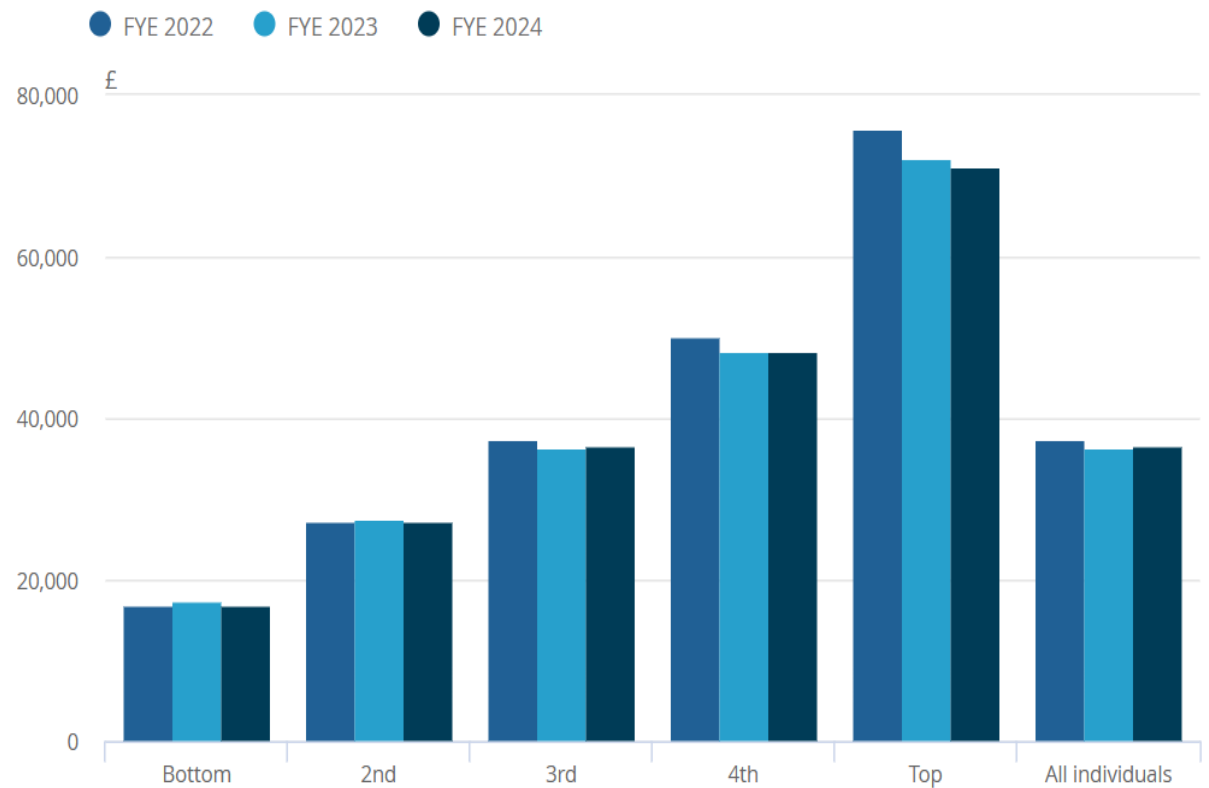
Median and mean equivalised household disposable income of individuals, UK, 1977 to financial year ending (FYE) 2024



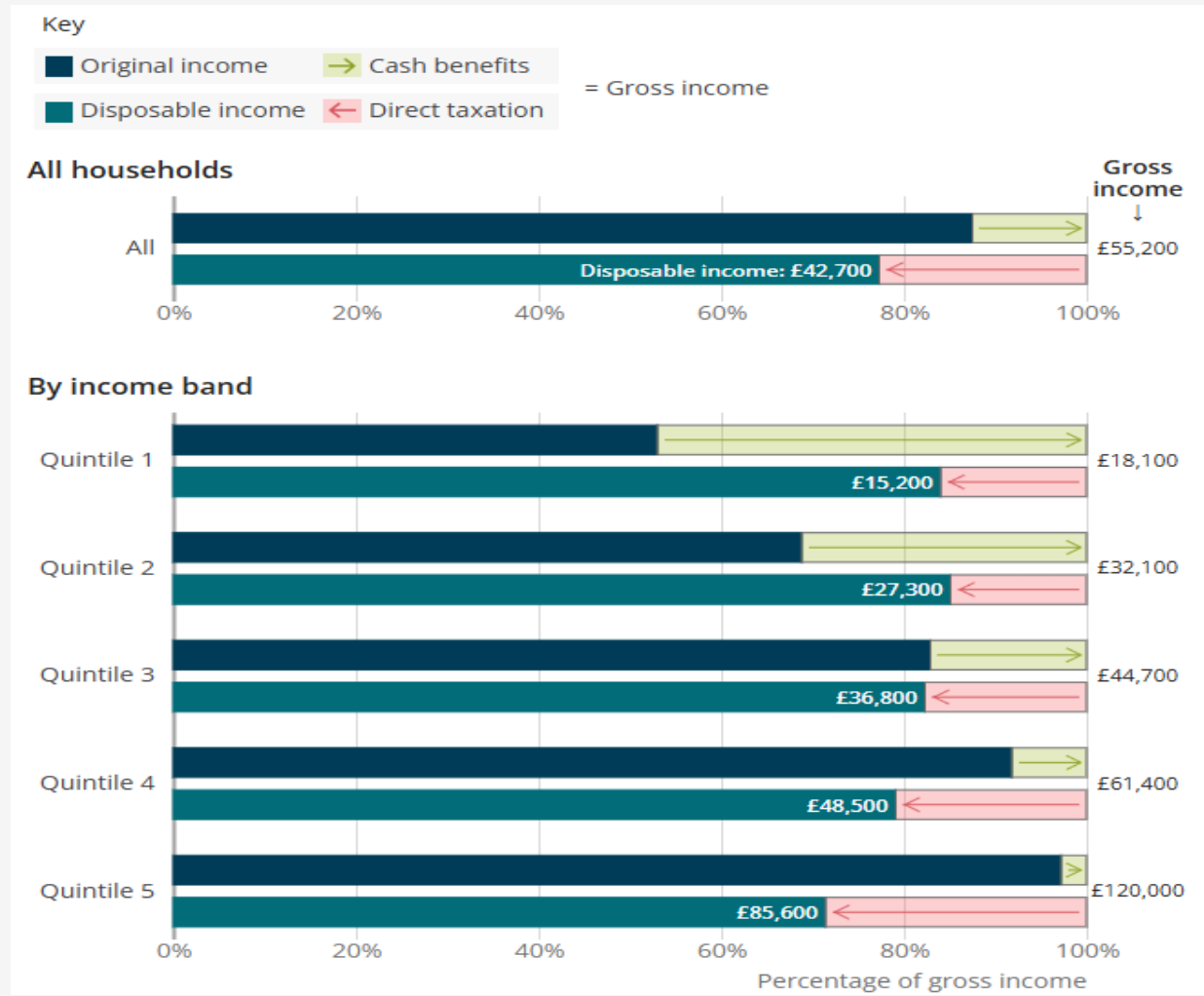
# Disposable income for poorest households is similar to FYE 2022 levels

- For FYE 2024 median income for the poorest fifth of people decreased by 2.6% (£440) to £16,800
- This followed a 2.3% increase between FYE2022 and FYE2023
- For FYE 2024 median income for the richest fifth of people decreased by 1.6% (£1,140) to £71,100
- This followed a 4.9% decrease between FYE2022 and FYE2023

Median equivalised household disposable income of individuals by quintile group, UK, financial year ending (FYE) 2022, FYE 2023 and FYE 2024



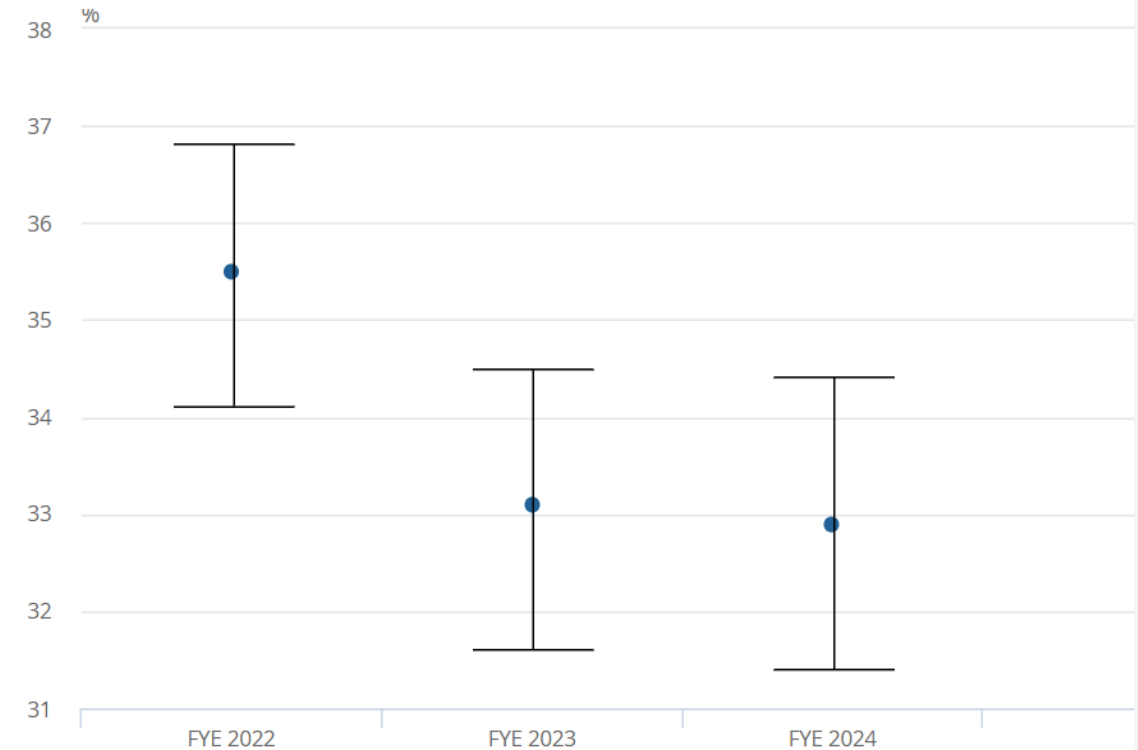
# Disposable income composition: updated data visualisation FYE 2024



# Household Disposable income inequality did not significantly change in FYE 2024

- Disposable income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient had a non-significant decrease of 0.2 percentage points to 32.9% in FYE 2024
- This follows a larger decrease of 2.4 percentage points between FYE 2022 and FYE 2023
- Disposable income inequality is now lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic (FYE 2020) and 10 years ago (FYE 2015)

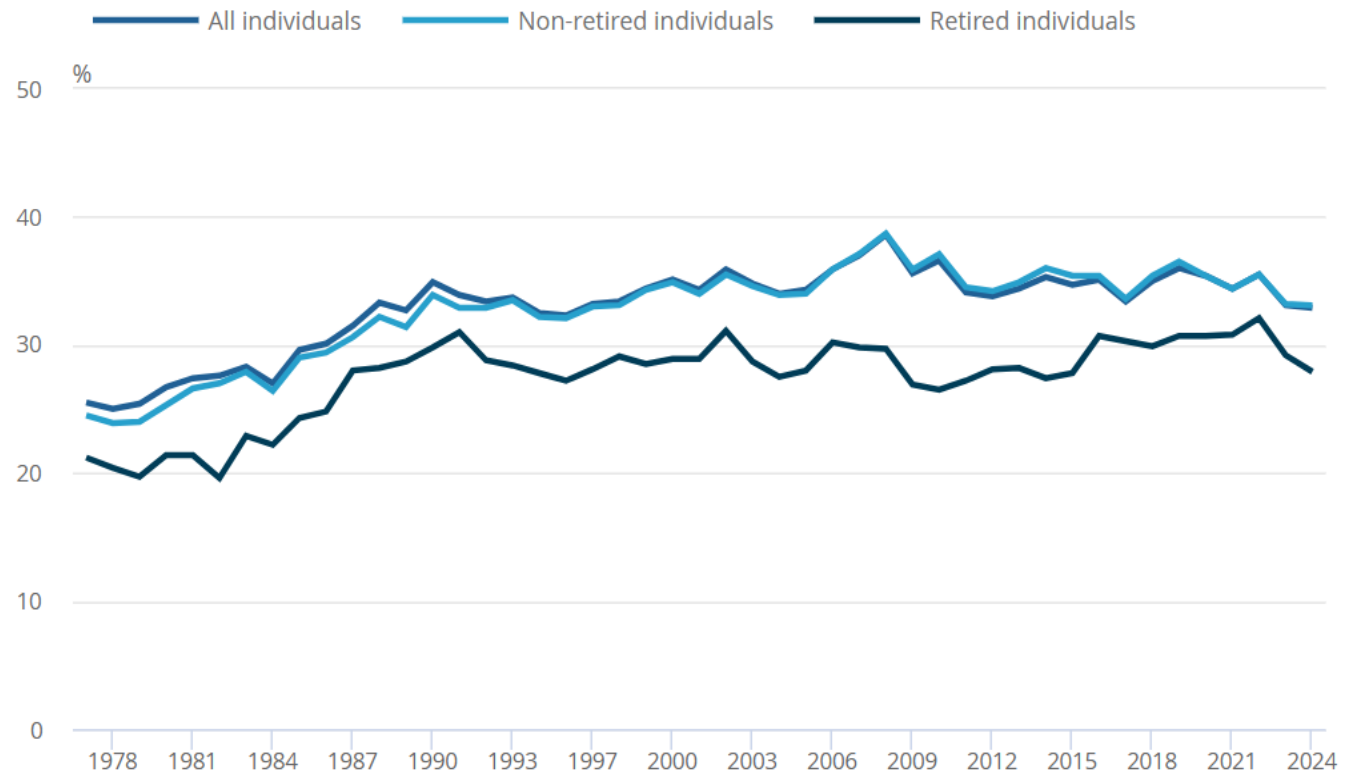
Gini coefficient for disposable income and 95% confidence intervals around the central estimate, UK, financial year ending (FYE) 2022 to FYE 2024



# The Gini coefficient is 27.9% for retired households and is 33.1% for non-retired households in FYE 2024

- Disposable income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient for retired households, is now 0.1 percentage points above FYE 2015 levels
- Disposable income inequality for non-retired households is 2.3 percentage points lower than FYE 2015 levels

Gini coefficients for disposable income by household type, UK, 1977 to financial year ending (FYE) 2024





# Upcoming work

- Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Income statistics
  - Redistribution effects on individuals and households on direct & indirect taxation and benefits FYE 2024
  - Early Autumn
- Family Spending in the UK
  - Average weekly household expenditure on goods and services in the UK FYE 2024
  - Late Summer
- Methods development
  - Improved combination of income and expenditure data
  - Coherency
  - Improving cross-cutting insights for household income and expenditure

# Thank you for your time.

Contact details if you have any questions or queries:

- Household Disposable Income and Inequality
  - [hie@ons.gov.uk](mailto:hie@ons.gov.uk)
- Family spending
  - [Family.spending@ons.gov.uk](mailto:Family.spending@ons.gov.uk)

# Wealth and Assets analysis

**Peter Dangerfield & Nicole Hastings**

Wealth & Assets analysis

Public Policy Analysis Directorate

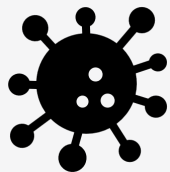


# Background

- The Wealth and Assets Survey (**WAS**) is a bi-annual longitudinal survey that aims to gather an accurate picture of the economic position of the nation's households. The questionnaire covers areas including:
  - Financial Wealth: Savings and Investments
  - Pensions Wealth: Saving for Retirement
  - Property Wealth
  - Household Debt
  - Value of personal possessions (Physical wealth)
  - Attitudes/Behaviours

# Quality and Methods

# Data collection during COVID-19



- Round 8 WAS covered the period April 2020 to March 2022 (pandemic period)



- Interviewing took place over the phone for the whole of Round 8



- Achieved interviews dropped from a total of 17,500 households for Round 7 to 15,100 households in Round 8



- Data more uncertain
  - Behaviour change during COVID-19
  - Mode change from F2F to telephone
  - Biases sample coverage and additional non-response for renters



# Adjustments to weighting scheme

- Survey weights used to adjust results to reflect population
- Calibrated using the latest census data for England, Wales and Scotland
- Addition of **tenure** as a calibration control
  - Accounts for the under-representation of renters and an over-representation of owner occupiers



For further detail please see our Quality and Methodology Information:  
[Wealth and Assets Survey QMI - Office for National Statistics](#)

# Pension methodology change

- Changing economic landscape and user feedback prompted a **review of methodology** used to calculate defined benefit and pensions in payment pensions wealth
- ONS commissioned the Government Actuary's Department to review financial assumptions underlying defined benefit pension wealth with a key objective of **stability** for our pension wealth measures
- This constitutes a reduction of 9 ppts for median total defined benefit (DB) pensions wealth and 35ppts for mean DB pensions wealth overall and currently introduces a **break in the time series**

# Review from the OSR

OSR recently reviewed our wealth statistics as part of wider review of ONS economic statistics. Accreditation for the statistics is **suspended** until the following are met:

1. Publish **comparability** with other data sources
2. Review decisions not to **publish historic back-series** using new pensions methodology
3. Widen **user engagement**, including a user engagement plan
4. Improve how we **communicate quality of the data quality** (QMI improvements (incl. links between documents, publication of standard errors/confidence intervals
5. **Review end-to-end resource** for production of wealth stats.

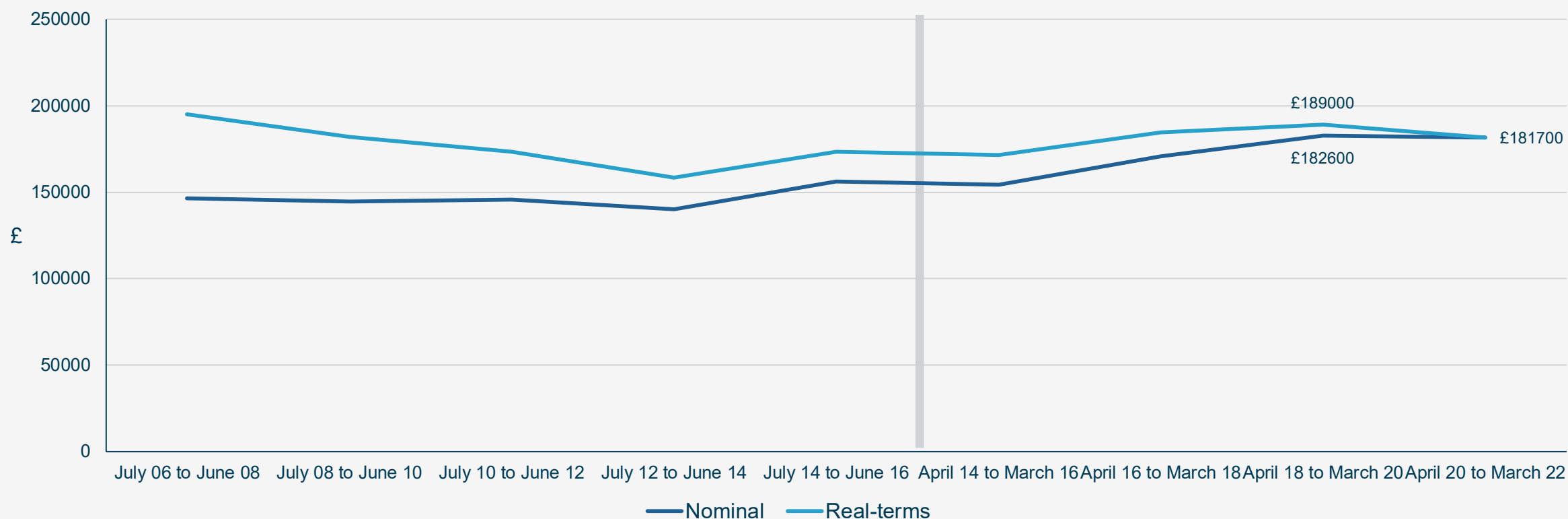
# Recent/upcoming improvements for the user

- Release of the SCAPE-based annuity factors ([link](#))
- Launch of a Wealth and Asset Survey Expert Group
- Updates to quality information and quality outputs
- **Plan for the collection and processing work** (intend to publish in the Autumn)

# Findings from the Wealth and Assets Survey Round 8 April 2020 to March 2022

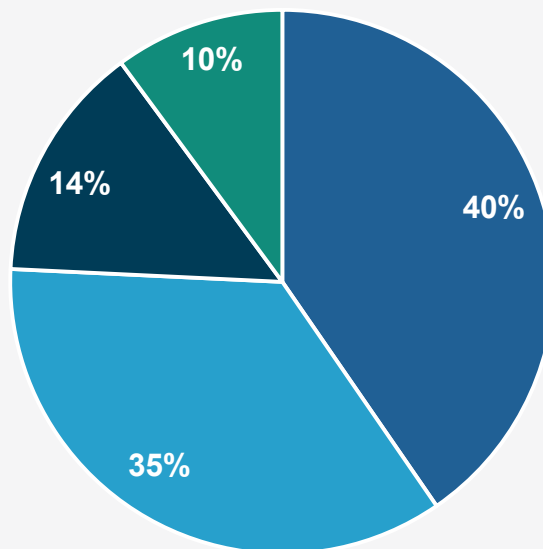
# Median Household Wealth, excluding private pension wealth, was £181,700 for Round 8

Median household wealth **excluding private pension wealth**, in nominal and real terms, Great Britain, July 2006 to March 2022



# The majority of Household Wealth is held as Property and Pension Wealth

Percentage of aggregate household total wealth by component, Great Britain, April 2020 to March 2022



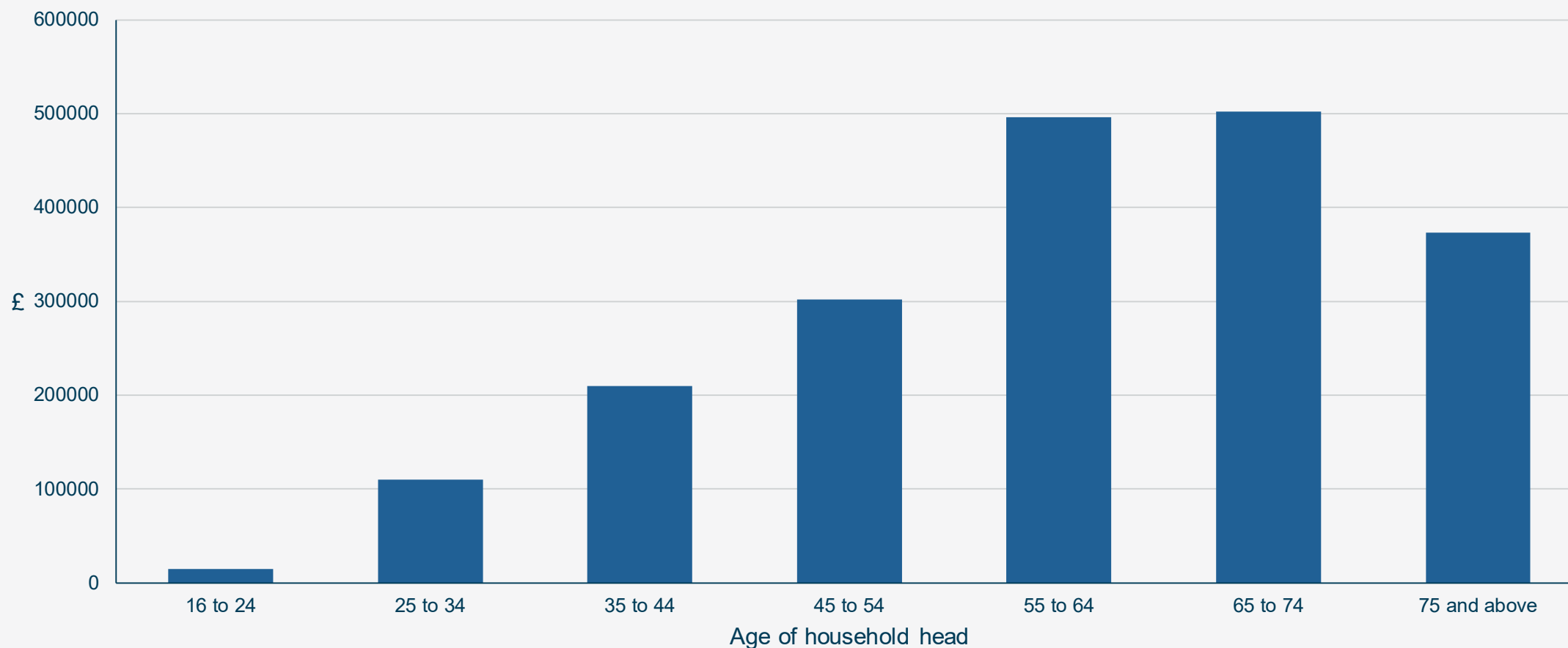
- Net property wealth
- Net financial wealth

- Private pension wealth
- Physical wealth

Note these percentages don't sum to 100% due to rounding

# Wealth accumulates up to retirement age

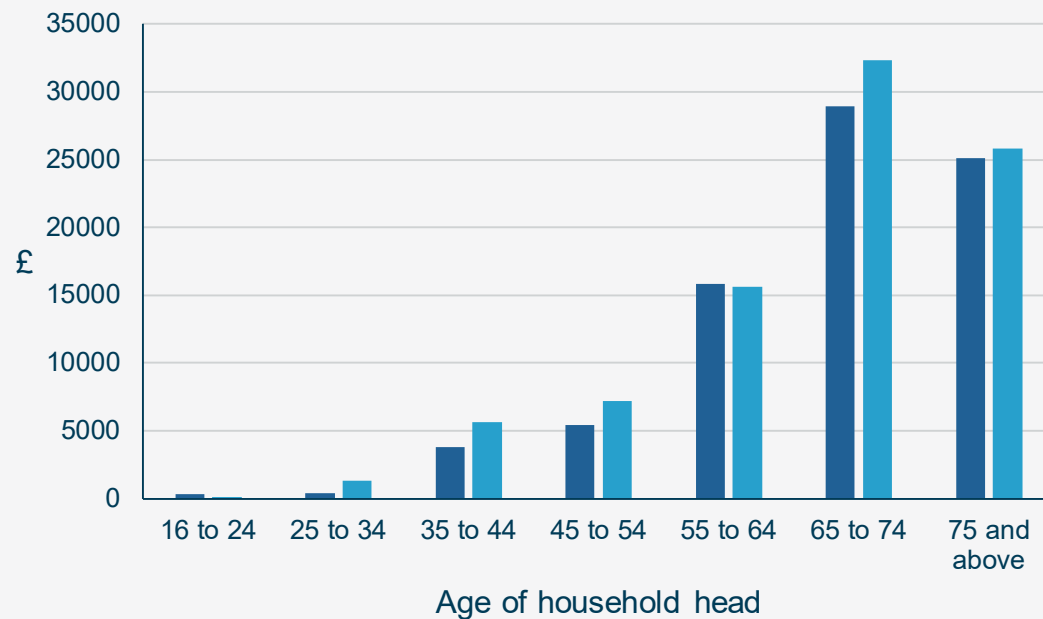
Median value of household wealth by age of household head, Great Britain, April 2020 to March 2022





# Median household financial wealth has increased

Median household financial wealth by Age of household head, Great Britain, April 2018 to March 2020, April 2020 to March 2022



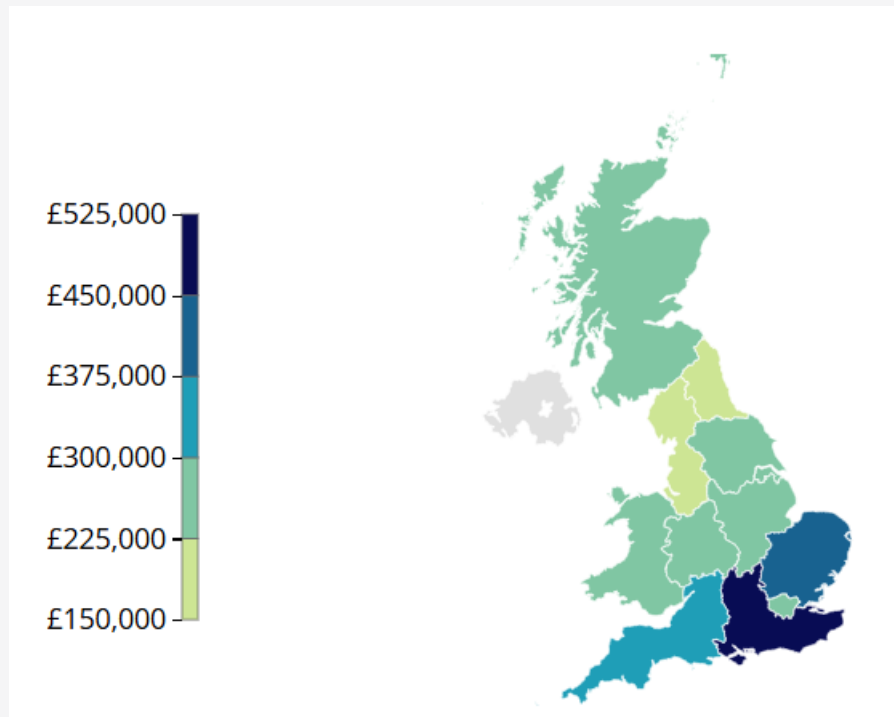
Median household financial wealth by Economic activity of household head, Great Britain, April 2018 to March 2020, April 2020 to March 2022



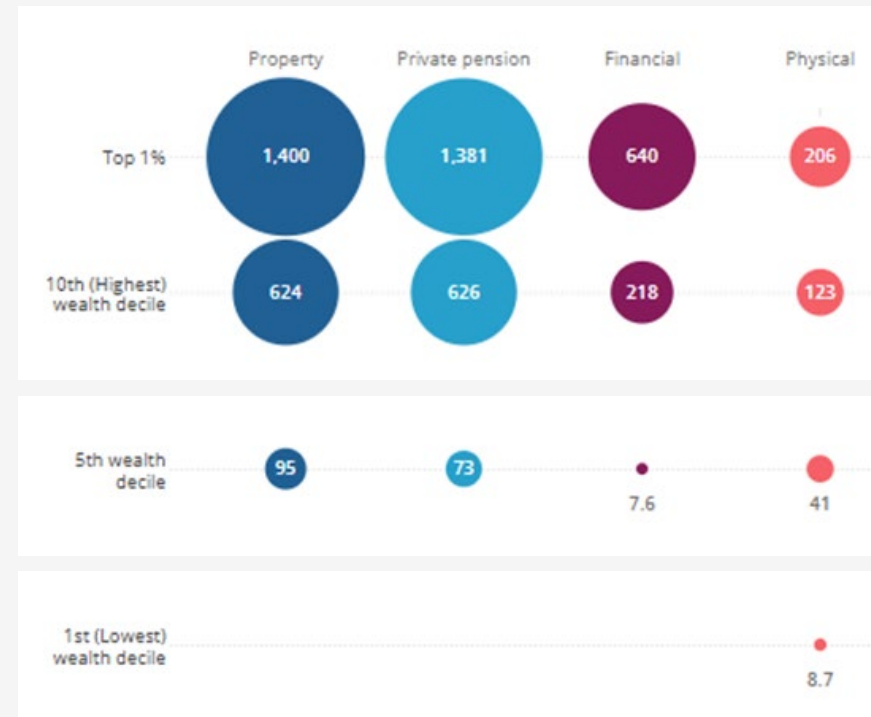
■ April 2018 to March 2020 Estimate  
■ April 2020 to March 2022 Estimate

# Wealth is unequally distributed across the population

Median household wealth by region, Great Britain, April 2020 to March 2022



Median value of household wealth components by household wealth decile and top 1%, Great Britain, April 2020 to March 2022, £ thousands



# Thank you for your time.

Contact details if you have any questions or queries:

- Wealth and pensions analysis
  - [Wealth.and.assets.survey@ons.gov.uk](mailto:Wealth.and.assets.survey@ons.gov.uk)

# Q&A discussion



9 July 2025