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## **Successes and challenges of moving from a paper, to an online, based data collection mode for business surveys.**

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### *Abstract*

The Office for National Statistics (ONS, UK) runs 77 different business surveys, despatching 2.5 million questionnaires to UK businesses each year. Historically, the vast majority of these were on paper; with printing, posting, and scanning a major operation. Not only was this unsustainable, but the office needed to keep pace with the digital world. We also knew that respondents (UK businesses) needed an online service.

ONS developed an in-house bespoke data collection service. Building capability across the portfolio, rather than taking a survey-by-survey approach, led to the most effective progress.

We have had resounding success. 2.1 million (85%) of the 2.5 million questionnaires despatched each year are now online. Only the most complex surveys remain on paper. However, our bespoke system brings some challenges as it does not yet meet the needs of all our businesses, or all our data needs. As a result, and due to, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, the ONS has a mixed mode approach within and across surveys, with editable pdfs, Excel spreadsheets, paper, telephone and electronic questionnaires, all being used to some degree for business data collection. We will outline some of the benefits and challenges with having such a mixed array of modes.