The UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics specifies the need to report annually on the burden placed on respondents to businesses and household surveys. Whereas information on the time taken for a household to respond to a questionnaire can be measured at the point of collection, it is more challenging to measure the time taken and hence the cost to businesses of responding to surveys. A traditional approach to such measurement for paper-based business surveys is to send a short review questionnaire to a sub-sample of businesses to gather information on both the time taken to respond to the main survey and who in the business provides this information; this information can then be used to estimate the financial costs to the business.

Such review questionnaires were regularly used within ONS until 2012, but since then respondent burden has been estimated by survey managers from previous reviews and knowledge of survey changes. This has, however, proved difficult and therefore, motivated by the aim to improve the measurement of the financial costs to businesses of responding to surveys, a shortened review process has been piloted. In an effort to balance the burden placed on respondents by the review process and to make it as efficient as possible, we have tested the use of statistical modelling to estimate respondent burden for surveys with similar characteristics. If successful, such an approach would reduce the number of review surveys that need to take place whilst still maintaining accurate measurements of respondent burden.

In this presentation, we report on the pilot exercise carried out, including the methodology, results and conclusions of this work. We also consider the implications for the future measurement of respondent burden placed on businesses.