

## Background

The Office for National Statistics is the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and its recognised national statistical institute. It is responsible for collecting and publishing statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels. It also conducts the census in England and Wales every 10 years.

As these statistics affect government decisions and the economic climate of the country, any failure or delay in publishing is subject to intense scrutiny from the UK Statistics Authority and National Statistician.

## The Challenge

ONS has been releasing statistics as large files containing all the available data. User feedback has suggested that users are often looking for subsets of that data, but often, the subset they want is unique to that user.

The ONS publishing team needed support to design and build a system which could provide this flexibility to users clearly, without causing any risk to the existing publishing system.

Methods had previously worked with the publishing team at ONS to rebuild the website; a project widely hailed as a success.

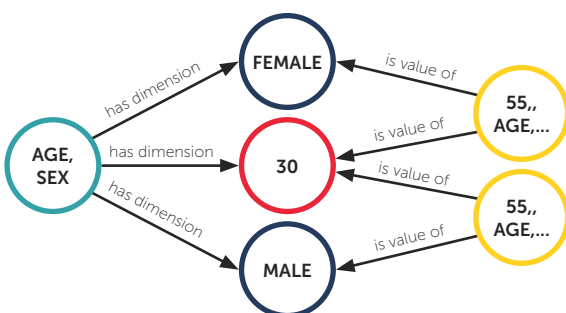
The approach a Methods' team brings to a project – **user-focussed, open, and collaborative** – keenly matched how ONS are keen to work.

## Approach

Giving users a completely custom view on national statistics starts with data. We worked with ONS to define a standard format for CSV files which all statistics would be produced to meet, so that ingestion of this data could be automated.

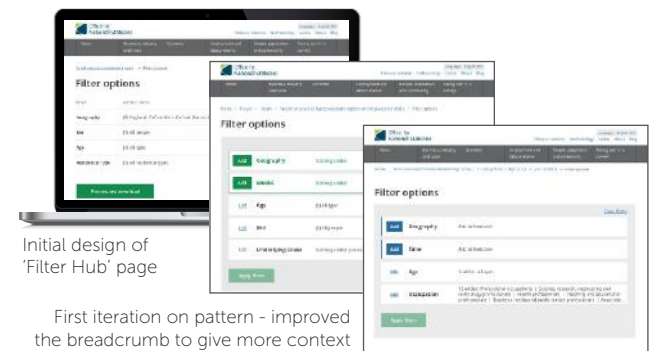
Using a Graph database, each file is broken down to its' dimensions and observations, and relationships are built so that every observation relates to a unique combination of dimensions.

Graph databases excel at retrieving information based on relationships, and through comparing with other database types we proved that this was the most efficient way to meet the users' need for flexibility.



The process of breaking down these CSVs also pulls out some metadata, saving the publishing team from manually entering it all, and still generates the full download that currently exists on the website – so no existing functionality is lost.

We achieved this through a blended approach – bringing in 11 team members with skills across delivery, back and front-end development and UX. ONS have excellent momentum behind their user research, and we were able to work together to thoroughly user test the extensions to the web journey – ensuring every opportunity to make this clear and simple for users was taken.



Initial design of 'Filter Hub' page

First iteration on pattern - improved the breadcrumb to give more context to the user and removed the grey metadata footer which was cluttering the page

Most recent iteration - change default text and button styling to make clearer what actions user needs to take

## Results

After 6 months and several rounds of user testing, we put the systems into public Beta. User feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and the majority of issues being raised are requests for features that had already been highlighted through testing.

## User feedback has been overwhelmingly positive

Although the initial aim was to be in public Beta sooner, a more evolved user experience was developed and time was taken to ensure full confidence in the systems.

The changes to data ingest will improve efficiency across ONS, leading toward data prepared for publishing through system to system interaction, rather than large files being emailed around. This allows the publishing team to focus on their editorial role, rather than doing the manual work of getting files into the right place.

## Next steps?

Methods continues to help ONS build the systems to securely handle market sensitive data, and take the new journey live. We have also been heavily involved in designing new ways users may interact with geographic data, and in future may work to bring these new journeys to life.

## What are the learnings?

Analysis paves the way for smoother planning and prioritization. On such a data-centric project, a technical analyst would have perhaps provided more benefit than a more business oriented analyst.

## What was Methods' added value?

While at ONS Methods has participated in Communities of Practice, to help encourage and guide the organization as a whole. We have also ensured proper time has been spent testing and documenting the systems, allowing greater confidence in the teams ability to maintain the products.



### Office locations:

London | Birmingham | Bristol | Cardiff | Chelmsford | Edinburgh | Manchester | Sheffield

