



English Business Survey – May 2013

This release presents the key messages from the English Business Survey (EBS) for May 2013. The EBS interviews 3,000 workplaces each month and provides timely intelligence on business conditions in England. The Survey provides an assessment of past, current and future conditions. The data refers to business conditions in May 2013, which is the reference month for the survey.

Terminology

What these statistics mean:

- The EBS is a survey of workplaces. A workplace can be a single business, or a workplace that is part of a larger enterprise, for example the local store of a large supermarket chain. Ninety-seven per cent of enterprises consist of a single workplace.¹ The term business will be used throughout this release.
- In order to reflect the relative importance or contribution of different sized workplaces to the local economy, the survey uses the number of people employed at each workplace as the measure of its contribution to the economy. Where the size of business is reported in the release, this refers to the number of people employed at each workplace.
- Where 'Balances' are presented, they are the difference between the 'higher' responses and the 'lower' responses. Balances provide a summary of the scores for businesses that report, or expect a variable to change. More detailed information on the terminology used is included in the Background Notes to the release.

¹ Source: UK Business: Activity, Size and Location, 2012

Key Points

- In May 2013, output performance was positive, recording a balance score of +32% for England. This was unchanged from April's results, which were the highest since when the survey began in October 2011. This was an improvement on the same period last year, when a balance of +25% was reported.
- Similarly, the employment balance (+9%) in May was also unchanged from April, which was one of strongest since the survey began. This was similar to the employment balance recorded in the same period last year (+8%).
- All regions recorded positive results for output and employment. For output, the South East recorded the strongest balance (+37%) whereas the East Midlands was the weakest (+23%). For employment, the East Midlands, East of England and the South West recorded the strongest balance scores (+13%) whereas the North East and the West Midlands were the weakest (+2%)
- More businesses (34%) are anticipating output to increase in August, than decline (23%), resulting in a balance of +11%. This is a drop from April's output expectations balance (+25%) and is a slight decline from the balance from the same period in 2012 (+11%)
- Expectations for employment in May indicate that 12% of businesses are expecting lower employment and 19% are anticipating an increase in August. This produced a balance of +7%; the same as this period last year. Businesses were particularly optimistic in the South East, where the anticipated balance was +14%.

Economic Context

This section provides contextual information on the economic performance over the survey period (May 2013) and in the preceding months to help the user to interpret the statistics.

Official statistics showed the value of the UK economy – Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – was estimated to have expanded in Quarter 1 2013 by 0.3% when compared with Quarter 4 2012.² According to Eurostat, GDP declined by 0.2% in the Euro area and by 0.1% in the EU27 in Quarter 1 2013 compared to Quarter 4 2012. Compared with the same quarter of the previous year GDP in the Euro area contracted by 1%, and the EU27 by 0.7% while the UK expanded by 0.6%.³

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa2/second-estimate-of-gdp/q1-2013/index.html>

³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/2-15052013-AP/EN/2-15052013-AP-EN.PDF

Official business statistics paint a mixed picture of the economy: in comparison to April 2013, retail sales increased⁴ and construction output stayed the same in May.⁵ In comparison to May 2012, production output fell as did manufacturing output⁶. Annual inflation was estimated to have grown to 2.9% in the year to June down from 2.7% in the year to May.⁷ This remains above the Bank of England target rate of 2.0%.

The labour market was relatively benign: comparing March to May with February to April, employment rate was down by 0.1 percentage points to 71.4%;, with the number employed decreasing by 50,000 to 29.71 million. The unemployment rate stayed the same at 7.8%, with 2.51 million unemployed.⁸

Latest EBS Results

Output

Output⁹ results were positive in May with the balance unchanged from April 2013, which were the highest results since the survey began in October 2011. Regional results were unanimously positive.

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rsi/retail-sales/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/construction/output-in-the-construction-industry/may-2013/index.html>

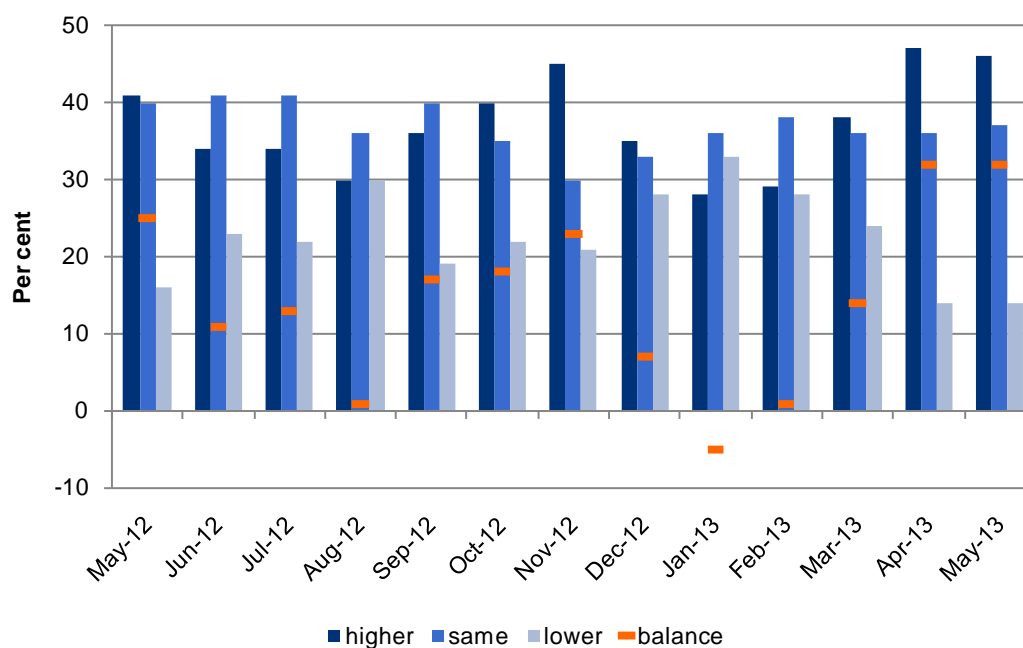
⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/iop/index-of-production/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/cpi/consumer-price-indices/index.html>

⁸ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/july-2013/index.html>

⁹ Output can be thought of as the quantity of goods or services produced by a business

Chart 1: Level of output in England, May 2012 to May 2013



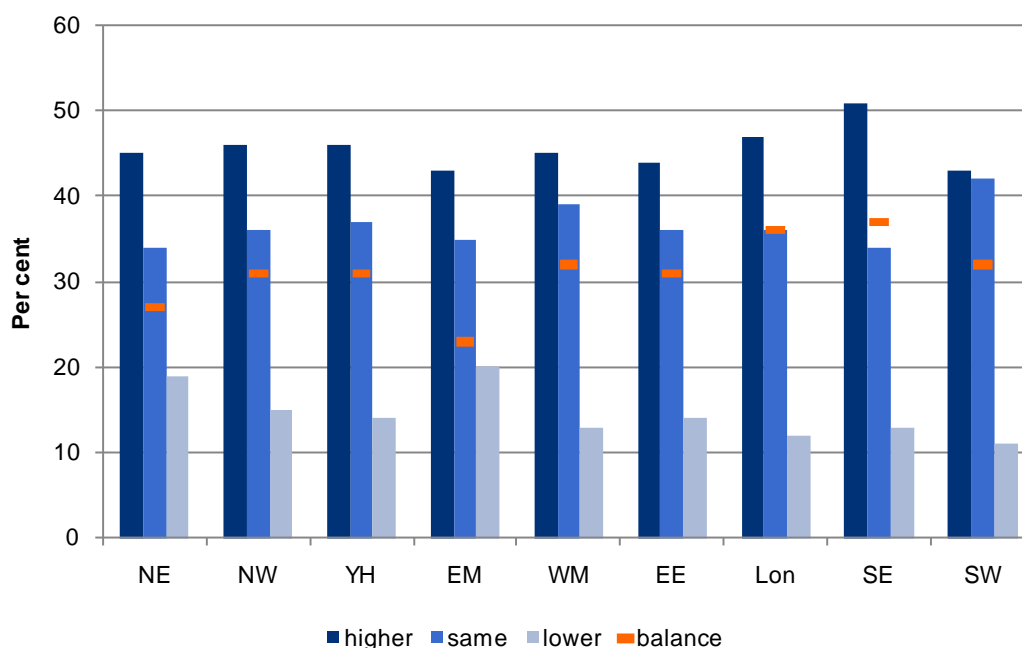
Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked about the level of output in a month three months earlier when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with February 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.
3. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

In May 2013, output performance was positive with a balance score of +32%. Results were much improved from the same period last year, when 41% of businesses recorded higher output in May compared to February, and the balance was +25%.

Chart 2: Level of output in England, by region, May 2013



Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked about the level of output in a month three months earlier when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with February 2013.
2. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

All regions reported positive output balance scores. However, in contrast to last month's survey, when the East Midlands recorded the strongest performance; output performance in the East Midlands was relatively weak between February and May compared to other regions. The South East recorded the strongest balance (+37%).

When examining the survey results by the size of the business,¹⁰ micros (1-9 employees) had the lowest balance score of +14%, with only 39% of businesses reporting an output increase. Output performance of other workplace sizes were broadly similar: with small (10-49 employees), medium (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) having balance scores which were broadly similar at +36%, +38% and +39% respectively.

Expected output performance

Although output expectation balances were positive for England and its regions, the May results continues a downward trend that began in January 2013. There was some divergence between regions, with a clustering of high, low and medium expected output performances.

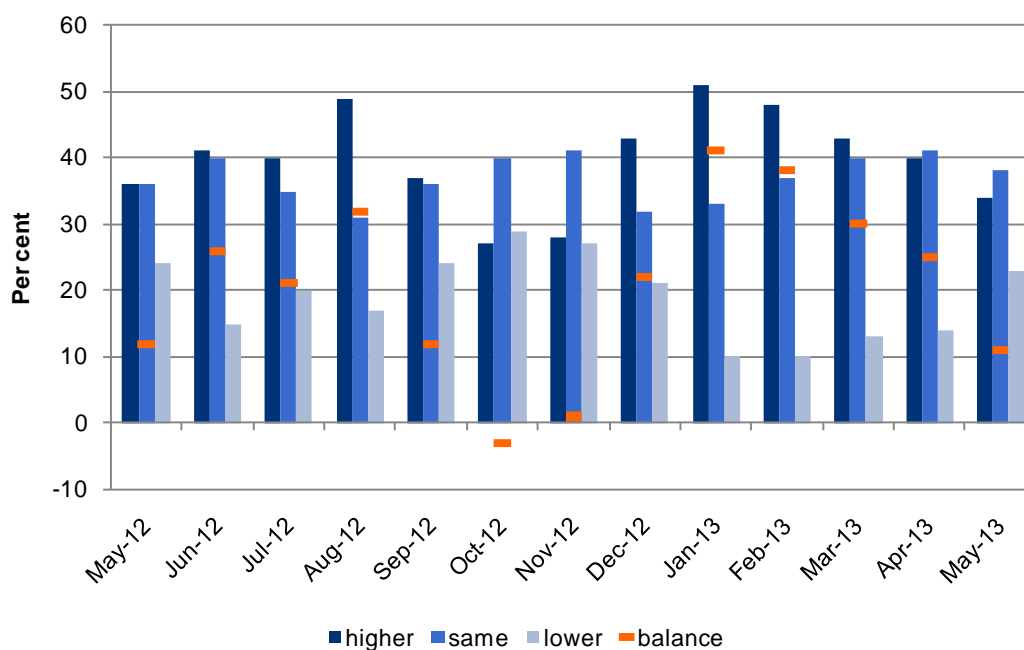
Nationally, 34% of businesses are expecting output to be higher in August, whilst 23% are expecting lower output: leading to a positive balance of +11%;

¹⁰ Business size is measured in terms of the number of employees at the workplace.

a slight fall from the same period last year, when a balance of +12% was reported. However, this was a drop compared to the output expectations balance recorded in April's EBS (+25%) and this continues the downward trend that began in January 2013. This is a similar trend to the same period last year, and is likely to be a seasonal variation.¹¹

At the regional level, the North East (+1%) and North West (+4%) had, by far, the weakest balance scores; while Yorkshire and The Humber (20%) and the South East (19%) had the highest scores.

Chart 3: Expected level of output in England, May 2012 to May 2013



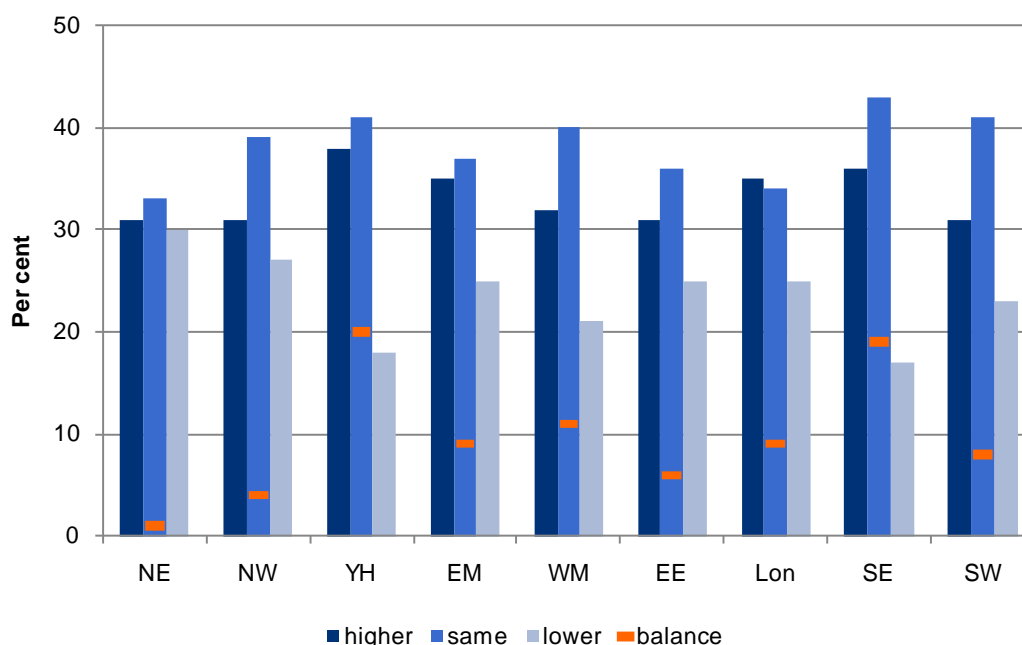
Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked about their expectations for the level of output in a month three months into the future, when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with August 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.
3. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

¹¹ Seasonal variation is a component of a time series which is defined as the repetitive and predictable movement around the trend line in one year or less.

Chart 4: Expected level of output in England, by region, May 2013



Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked about their expectations for the level of output in a month three months into the future, when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with August 2013.
2. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

Looking at the results for workplace sizes, small businesses had the most positive balance scores of +16%, driven by 37% of businesses expecting output to improve in August. In contrast, large businesses were the least optimistic, posting a balance of +4%, with only 28% of businesses expecting higher output, significantly lower than all other business sizes.

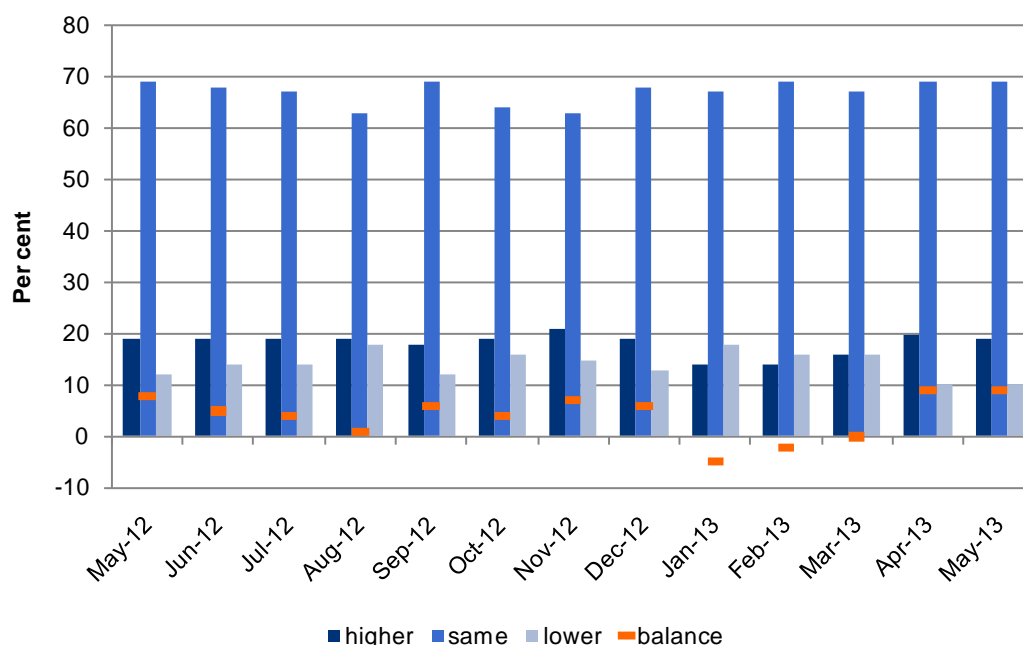
Employment

For England, the employment balance stayed unchanged in May compared to April, which were the strongest balance scores since the survey began in October 2011. All regions reported positive balances.¹²

When comparing the employment level in May to February 2013, more businesses (19%) reported an increase in employment than those reporting a decrease (10%). A balance of +9% was reported, similar to the same period last year which found a balance of +8% .

¹² Employment level is used to describe the average number of people working at a workplace.

Chart 5: Level of employment in England, May 2012 to May 2013



Notes:

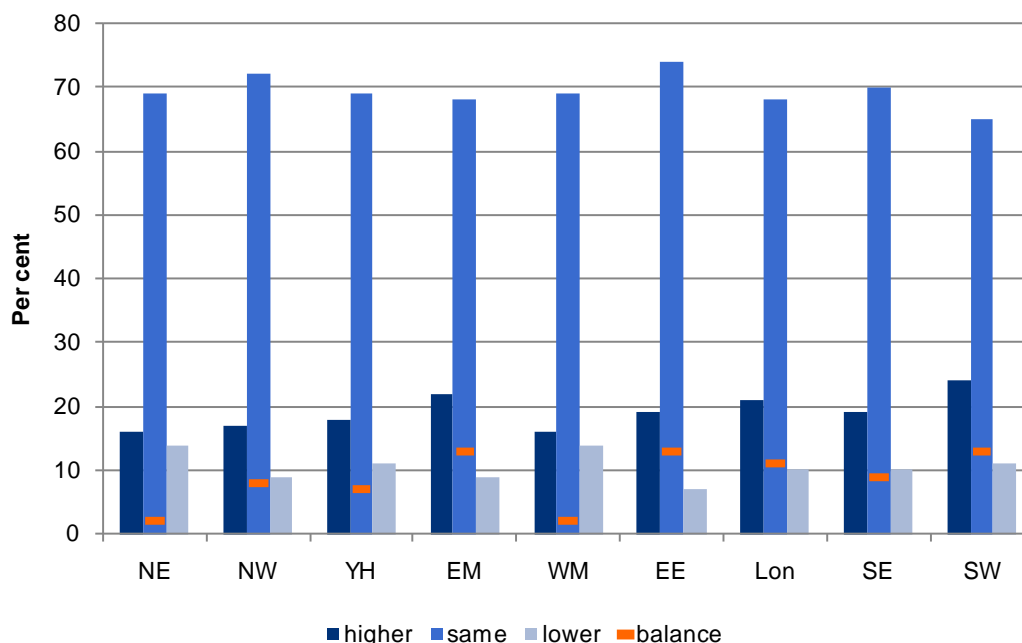
1. Workplaces were asked about the level of employment in a month three months earlier when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with February 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.
3. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

All regions reported positive balance scores as more businesses reported higher employment than lower. The East Midlands, East of England and the South West all recorded a balance score of +13%, the highest of all regions. The North East and the West Midlands recorded the lowest balance scores; both +2%.

Medium sized businesses continued to report the most positive employment balance, with the highest proportion (27%) of businesses reporting employment to be higher in May compared to February; producing a balance of +16%. This compares to micro, small and large businesses, which had balances of +4%, +8% and +7% respectively.

Chart 6: Level of employment in England, by region, May 2013



Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked about the level of employment in a month three months earlier when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May 2013 with February 2013.
2. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

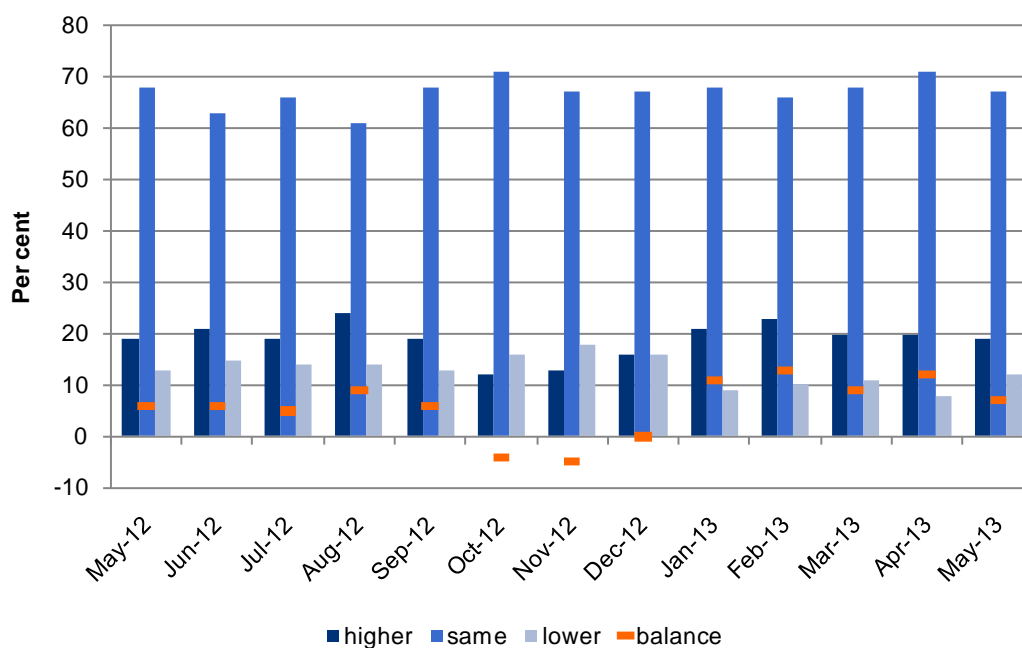
Expected employment performance

Expectations of future employment were less positive than the backward looking indicator in England and its regions.

A positive balance score of +7% was recorded as more businesses (19%) expected higher employment than lower (12%). This month's balance score was lower than April's forward looking balance (+12%). Although the results were similar to the same period last year, when a balance of +6% was reported.

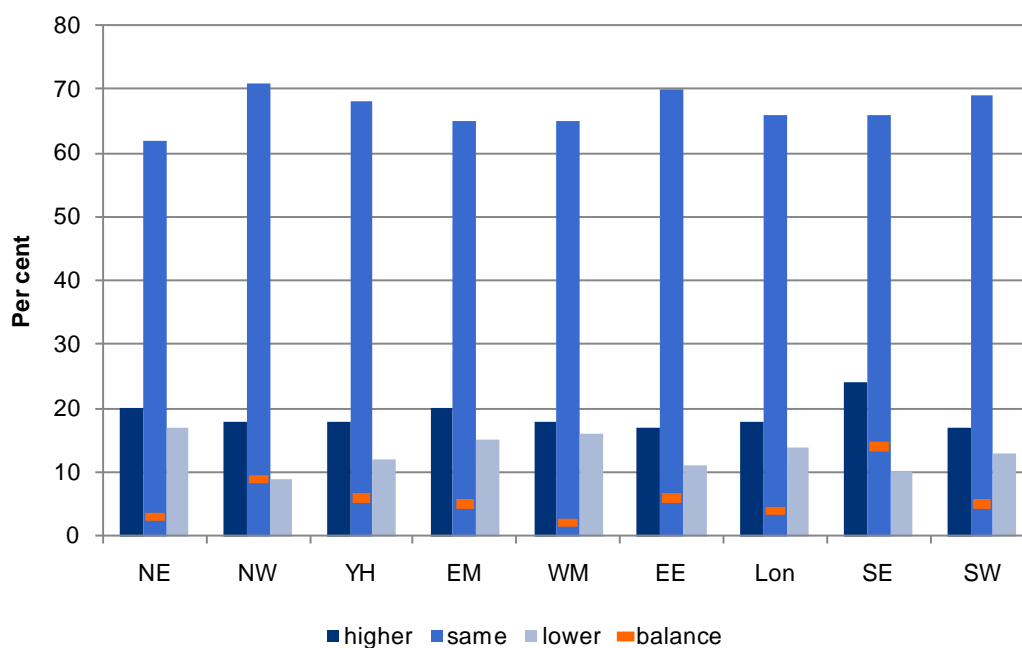
Positive balances were reported for all regions for expected employment levels. However, there were some regional variations with the North East and the West Midlands being the least optimistic, recording balances of +3% and +2% respectively, mirroring their weak performances for the backward looking employment indicator. Businesses in the South East were the most optimistic with a balance of +14%.

Chart 7: Expected level of employment in England, May 2012 to May 2013



Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

Chart 8: Expected level of employment in England, by region, May 2012



Notes for charts 7 and 8:

1. Workplaces were asked about their expectations for the level of employment in a month three months into the future, when compared to the reporting month, for example May 2013 results compare May with August 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted
3. Survey results sum to 100%=(% Higher)+(% The same)+(% Lower)+(% Don't know). Estimates for 'Don't know' have been excluded from this chart, but are available in the tables that accompany the release.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

Capital Investment

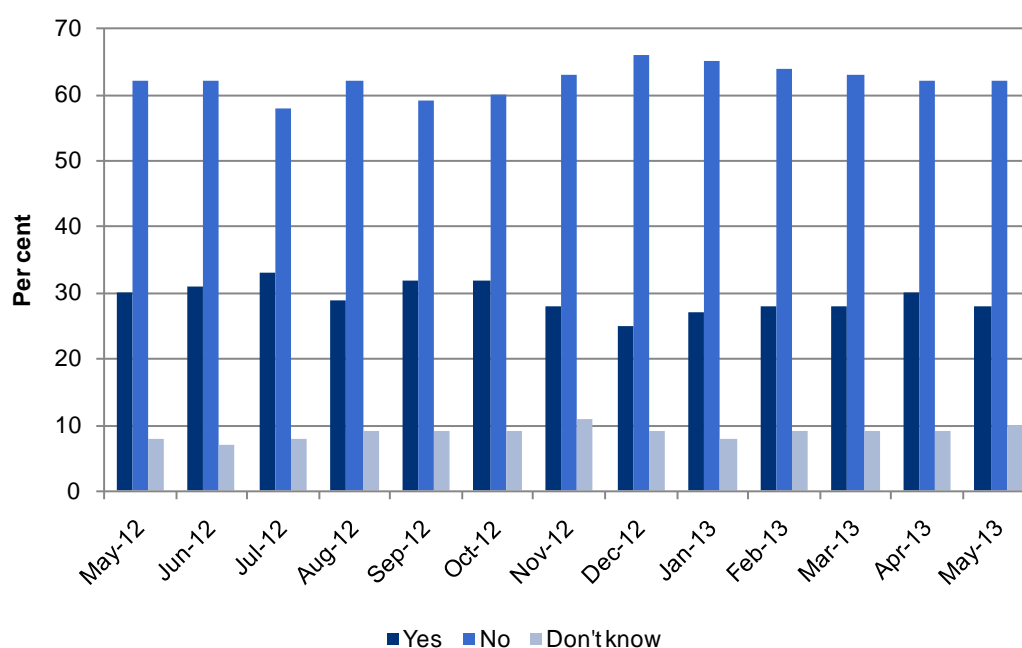
In England, the proportion of businesses making capital investments¹³ has remained fairly stable since January 2013.

In England 28% of businesses reported they had undertaken capital investment in the three months to May. This was slightly down from the result in April's survey (30%) which was the highest in 2013.

The East of England continued to demonstrate the strongest performance, with the highest proportion of businesses (33%) making capital investments, this was a significantly higher proportion than other regions in England. The North East reported the smallest proportion (22%) of businesses investing in capital.

Large sized businesses were the most likely to invest in capital with 36% stating they made new investments in the three months to May. In contrast, micros continue to be the least likely to invest with only 20% of businesses stating they had invested.

Chart 9: Capital investment in England, May 2012 to May 2013



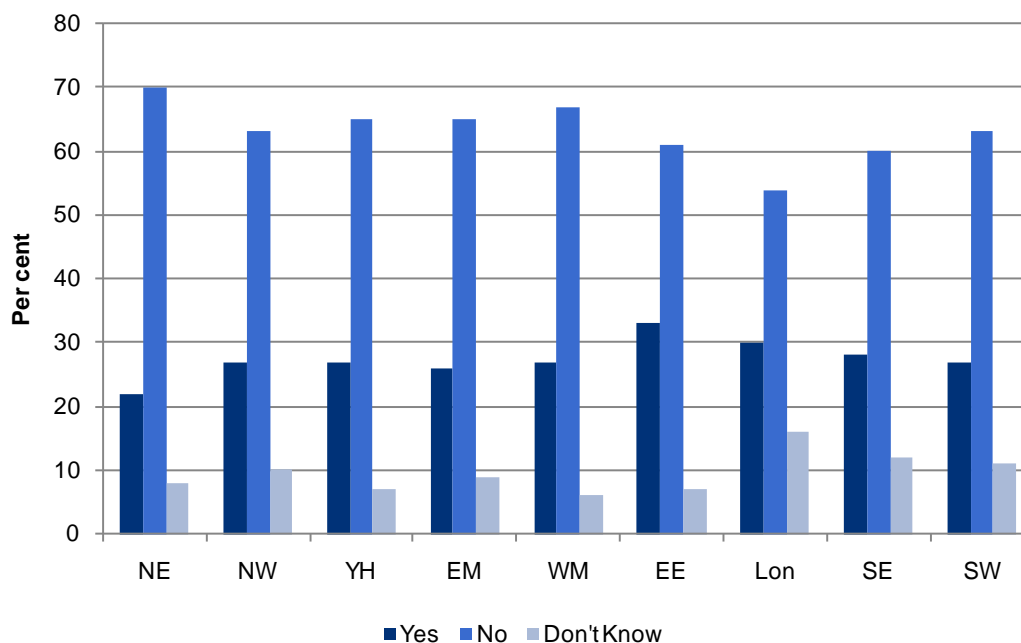
Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked whether they made any new capital investment in the previous three months, for example May 2013 results ask about the period March to May 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

¹³ Capital Investment is used to describe buildings, plant and machinery, equipment, vehicles and computer hardware and software that has taken ownership of, or has started to use – these investments can be bought or leased; it does not include items that have been ordered but have not been used.

Chart 10: Capital investment in England, by region, May 2013



Notes:

1. Workplaces were asked whether they made any new capital investment in the previous three months, for example May 2013 results ask about the period March to May 2013.
2. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

Source: BIS - English Business Survey, May 2013

Expected capital investment

The proportion of businesses expecting to make capital investment over the next three months has remained fairly stable since January 2013 for both England and the regions.

Thirty per cent of businesses in England are planning to make capital investment between June and August 2013. These are the strongest expectations reported since July 2012.

Regionally there were some variations with the South East being the most optimistic as 34% of businesses are expecting new investments. In contrast to a strong performance last month, the North West had the lowest proportion of businesses (26%) anticipating new investments.

As was the case with the backward looking indicator, micro businesses continue to be the least likely to make capital investments (17%) in the next three months. The proportion of businesses expecting to invest increases with size, with 39% of large businesses stating that they intend to invest in the next three months.

Coherence with similar data

Other business surveys, conducted by both trade bodies and private companies, collect information across a range of variables. Although some of this information overlaps with that collected through the EBS, the EBS has the

advantages that it: brings the data together in a single place; allows sub-regional analysis each quarter; and, covers all sectors of the economy, including the public/not-for-profit sectors.

Along with many other business surveys, data from the EBS is difficult to reconcile with official statistics, particularly output. The Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) *Industrial trend survey*¹⁴ reported an expansion in output volumes in the three months to April, with the strongest performance in the South West and West Midlands. Expectations were much more positive with the North West anticipating the best performance. The positive outlook is in line with the EBS results, however, the regional variations are different.

The monthly *Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI)*¹⁵ reports continuous expansion in business activity in the three months to May. This is similar to the positive EBS results for May. The PMI found Yorkshire and The Humber and London to have recorded the strongest result in three months to May while the South East had the strongest result in the EBS. The British Chamber of Commerce (BCC)'s *Quarterly Economic Survey*¹⁶ also found an increase in domestic sales over Quarter 1 2013.

The *Quarterly Economic Survey* indicated that employment increased in Quarter 1 2013 and predicts that employment will continue to increase in Quarter 2 2013. Similarly, the EBS results also indicate improvements in employment when comparing February to May. The *Industrial trends survey* similarly recorded a positive balance of +10% for employment for the three months to April. Official ONS statistics also seem to support the latest EBS results finding an increase in employment levels between March and May compared to December to February.¹⁷

¹⁴ <http://www.cbi.org.uk/business-issues/economy/business-surveys/industrial-trends-survey/>

¹⁵ <http://www.markiteconomics.com/Survey/Page.mvc/AboutPMIData>

¹⁶ <http://www.britishchambers.org.uk/policy-maker/policy-reports-and-publications/quarterly-economic-survey-q4-2012.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/july-2013/index.html>

Background Notes

Product Development

The survey has undergone extensive development and testing, including pilot testing of the survey and cognitive testing of the survey questions. The Report on the EBS Questionnaire¹⁸ contains details of the development and testing of the questionnaire; the Technical Annex details the methods which underpin the survey. Both documents are available on the EBS webpage.¹⁹

EBS methods and questionnaire continue to be reviewed and analysed to ensure they remain the best possible. Should you have any comments on the statistics – including on the methods used and dissemination of the statistics – or would like to inform us how you use the statistics, please contact ebssurvey@bis.gsi.gov.uk.

Quality and use

The English Business Survey provides timely and robust information on a regular and geographically detailed basis, the survey enhances understanding of business perceptions and economic conditions throughout England and ultimately improves policy making through this understanding. The statistics are also useful to businesses, providing intelligence about local economic and business conditions.

These estimates are currently classified as experimental statistics as they are undergoing development and have not yet been assessed against the standards required for National Statistics. It is recommended that users exercise caution when interpreting time series data, as the data are likely to include seasonal patterns, which have not been removed through seasonal adjustment²⁰. It is expected that seasonal patterns will differ by industry, for example, all else being equal, some industries would expect output to be much lower in February compared to November due to seasonal patterns. It is recommended that until the statistics are assessed for seasonality that time series results are interpreted with caution.

Methodology

The English Business Survey is a monthly telephone survey that asks managers at sampled workplaces about their expectations and experiences on a range of measures such as output or sales. The data are weighted so that the weighted sample matches the population with respect to sub-region and employment²¹. This is designed to capture the importance of the

¹⁸ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/statistics/docs/e/12-601-english-business-survey-report-questionnaire-development.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/analysis/statistics/sub-national-statistics/ebssurvey>

²⁰ The recommended approach for removing seasonality in UK Official Statistics requires three years of monthly data or 5 years of quarterly data.

²¹ The characteristics used for weighting include: location (NUTS2 Region) and employment size (0-49, 50-249 and 250+).

workplace to the economy; employment is used as a proxy for economic importance as a robust measure of turnover is not available for all workplaces. The use of employment means that the results effectively estimate: the proportion of employees whose manager believes a particular measure is positive/negative/the same.

To aid understanding and assist in the interpretation of the survey findings there are two documents aimed at different types of user: a non-technical User Guide²², which provides information about how to interpret results, and a Technical Annex²³, which contains detailed information about the methodology.

Strengths and Limitations

The EBS has a number of strengths:

- a relatively large monthly sample with the potential to provide timely sub-national statistics;
- a workplace focus, which will enable data on local conditions to be collected;
- an ‘economic influence’-type weighting approach to try to better represent what is happening for sub-national economies;
- coverage of all sectors of the economy, including the public/not-for-profit sectors; and
- timely statistics, allowing policy makers and businesses to react promptly to issues as they arise in the current macroeconomic climate.

However, it also has some limitations:

- the nature of data collection being at workplace level mean that statistics about region, employment size and industry all relate to that of the workplace, rather than for the enterprise. Accordingly, inferences about the enterprise-level business population are more limited; and
- due to the coverage of the sampling frame – the Inter-Departmental Business Register – the EBS does not cover non-registered²⁴ businesses. This is potentially important as such businesses make up a significant proportion of the overall business population (55% of businesses) although

²² <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/statistics/docs/e/12-598-english-business-survey-user-guide.pdf>

²³ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/statistics/docs/e/12-602x-english-business-survey-technical-annex.pdf>

²⁴ Non-registered businesses are not registered for either PAYE or VAT, which means they are generally, the very smallest non-employing businesses.

they account for a smaller share of employment (12%) and turnover (3%)²⁵.

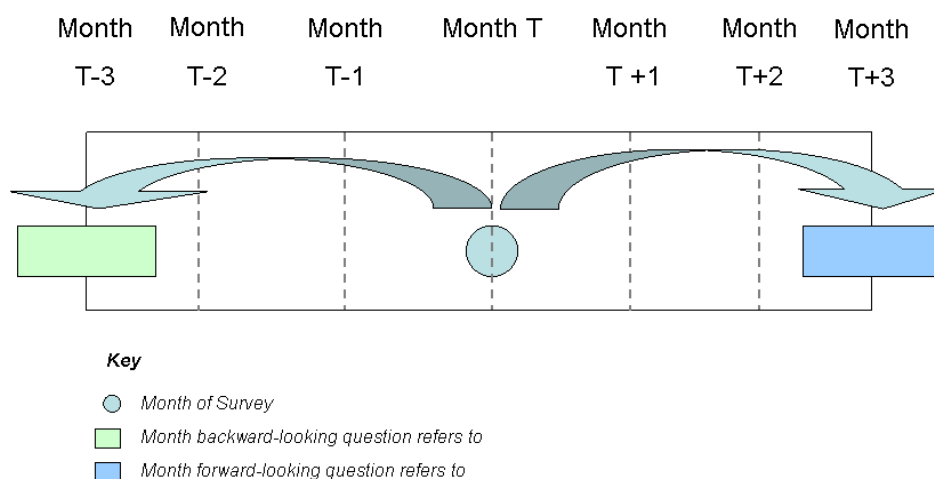
Interpreting the results

Workplace based survey

1. The main purpose of the EBS is to provide sub-national information. For this reason the EBS is a survey of workplaces and the region, employment size and industry all relate to that of the workplace.

Period covered

2. EBS Releases are labelled by the period which workplaces are asked about (the reference month). In most questions workplaces are asked to compare the reference month (month T) with the month three months previous and three months forward. For example, for the May 2013 EBS, most backward-looking questions compare May 2013 with February 2013 and forward-looking questions compare May 2013 with August 2013.



3. However, care should be taken, as for questions on capital investment, capacity constraints and annual output the question refers to a reference period of several months, not a single month. Periods being compared are clearly labelled on the tables. This is also explained in the EBS User Guide.

Balance Statistics

4. A balance can be achieved through a number of different scenarios in the underlying results, for example a balance of zero can be achieved from Higher and Lower both being 0% or both being 50%. It is therefore important to consider the underlying figures. All figures in this document and the underlying data can also be found in the supporting tables.
5. It is important to remember that these questions only ask workplaces whether output was higher or lower and this does not take into account the size of any

²⁵ Statistics on the non-registered businesses are taken from Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions 2012

changes. Therefore a balance of 50% does not necessarily mean output growth will be higher than if the balance was 20%, as the growth rate seen by those contributing to the 20% positive balance may, in aggregate, outweigh the growth rates seen or expected by those contributing to the positive 50% balance. The difference in size between two higher percentages simply means that businesses accounting for a larger proportion of the economy, reported that output was higher.

Time Series Comparisons

6. Data from the EBS is still in its infancy and therefore it is not yet possible to seasonally adjust the data. The results presented in this release are not seasonally adjusted and users should be aware of this when interpreting the results, as it is likely that comparisons over time will show large changes for certain groups; these changes could be true changes, but they could be a result of seasonal patterns.

Accuracy

7. All estimates based on a sample of the population rather than a census are subject to sampling error. Calculation of these errors for the EBS is still being developed and will be released when available, however, provisional information on the likely size of these sampling errors is provided in the *Technical Annex*.
8. Like all statistics, the estimates in the EBS are subject to potential non-sampling errors – for example biases; measurement errors; and calculation errors. However, attempts have been made to minimise these by, for example, rigorous testing of the questionnaires, monitoring the work of interviewers and response rates to the survey.
9. Provisional testing has been carried out to test for statistically significant differences between the England total results and the results from each sub-group. For example whether the higher percentage in the North East is significantly different to that in England. The results of these tests are marked on the accompanying tables. Due to additional complexities testing has not yet been done on the balances. A worked example of what this testing means and how it should be interpreted is in the *User Guide*.

Presentation

10. In the tables accompanying this release, the following conventions have been used:
 - 0 nil (none recorded in sample)
 - * Suppressed due to small cell sample size
 - - Suppressed due to small column sample size
 - ... Balance score not available due to small sample counts
11. All figures and percentages in this release, including the accompanying tables, have been rounded. Unweighted counts have been rounded to the nearest 5 and percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer. Balances are calculated based on unrounded figures and rounded independently therefore

differences in the components may not equal the difference between the rounded figures.

Timeliness

12. Statistics from the EBS are published within two months of the period to which they refer. The date of publication will be announced at least four weeks in advance. We are working towards a regular publication cycle, however due to the experimental nature of the data; the publication date for each month may initially vary. Future publication dates will be added to the National Statistics Publication Hub²⁶.

Revisions

13. While every care has been taken to produce reliable statistics, EBS is still being developed and has been designated an Experimental Official Statistic. As the EBS develops statistics may be subject to revision if improvements in methodology are identified. All revisions will be pre-announced where practicable and all known users notified.

User Consultation

14. The Survey's statistics are published as Experimental Official Statistics by BIS and are undergoing evaluation to ensure they meet Users' needs. The Survey has been running for almost 3 years and BIS is in the process of reviewing the Survey to determine options for its future direction. To gather the Users' views on the Survey BIS has launched a User consultation to help gather views on:

- who uses the current survey publications and why, and how we can make them more useful
- users' future needs for the survey .

15. The Consultation closes on the 30 August 2013 and more information on the consultation and how to respond can be found on the GOV.UK consultation page - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-business-survey-user-review>. We encourage all Users of the statistics to contribute their views.

Additional information

Sub-regional data

16. The English Business Survey Reporting Tool²⁷ allows users to access detailed EBS statistics for individual periods (months and quarters) as well as cumulative periods, starting in November 2011 for monthly statistics and Quarter 4 2011 for Quarterly statistics. The reporting tool includes a more extensive range of statistics than presented in the Statistical Release and the supporting tables.

²⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

²⁷ <http://dservuk.tns-global.com/English-Business-Survey-Reporting-Tool/>

17. The English Business Survey Interactive Map²⁸ allows users to determine how NUTS 2 areas are performing, relative to England, over time for a Output, Employment and levels of Stock.

Micro data

18. EBS Micro data are available to 'approved researchers' via ONS' Virtual Micro Laboratory²⁹ and an aggregated version of the dataset is available to academics from the UK Data Archive³⁰.

Contact details

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If you require this publication in an alternative format, email enquiries@bis.gsi.gov.uk, or call 020 7215 5000.

²⁸ <http://aalookup.bis.gov.uk/ebss/map/>

²⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/vml/index.html>

³⁰ <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>