



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

ENGLISH BUSINESS SURVEY

Consultation response

OCTOBER 2013

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1. English Business Survey Consultation Response

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) currently releases English Business Survey (the Survey) statistics for each Month and Quarter. The Survey commenced in November 2011 and was designed to collect monthly information on business sentiment. The Survey's statistics are published as Experimental Official Statistics by BIS and are undergoing evaluation to ensure they meet Users' needs. BIS is in the process of reviewing the Survey to determine options for its future direction. This consultation forms part of the review.

The English Business Survey consultation was issued on the 26 July 2013 and closed on the 30 August 2013. The consultation sought views from the Survey's Users to help BIS better understand their diverse needs. A total of 20 responses were received; this document summarises the responses and explains BIS' response to the consultation. We thank all interested parties for taking the time to respond.

2. Executive Summary

The consultation received a total of 20 responses with 19 of sufficient quality for analysis. Responses to the EBS consultation were received from a range of organisations from both the public and private sectors.

The majority of respondents felt that the data met their needs and were content with the Survey's current release schedule, design and presentation. A number of suggestions for improvement were offered which related to the frequency of publication; coverage of the survey; and seasonal adjustment of the statistics.

A summary of the main findings from the consultations can be found in the 'Analysis of Responses' section. BIS are continuing to review the longer term future of the Survey and the responses to the consultation will inform this review. BIS' immediate response to the consultation is:

1. The release schedule of the Survey will remain unchanged, with monthly and quarterly statistics published. However, commentary on the monthly release will be reduced, whilst commentary accompanying the quarterly statistics will remain unchanged.
2. BIS will review the publication schedule to determine whether it is feasible to bring forward the publication of Quarterly statistics in order to make statistics more timely.
3. The majority of respondents requested seasonal adjustment of the statistics. BIS is unable to seasonally adjust the statistics due to the short time series, but will look to review this once sufficient data becomes available, dependant on the conclusions from the review of the Survey.
4. Some respondents to the consultation indicated that they would like the geographical coverage of the survey to be more granular. After careful consideration, BIS has decided not to extend the geographical coverage of the survey.
5. BIS has improved the Technical Guide¹ and User Guide² to improve the information provided about the Survey. These publications provide a range of information on the methods, questions and use of the statistics and answer many of the questions asked by respondents.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-business-survey-technical-annex>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-business-survey-users-guide-to-reading-the-tables>

3. Analysis of responses

This section provides a summary of the main findings from the consultation. For a full set of responses see Section 5.

3.1 Users of the statistics

The consultation received a total of 20 responses. Of these, 19 were of sufficient quality to be used in the analysis. Responses to the EBS consultation were received from a range of organisations from both the public and private sectors, including Councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Government Departments and individuals. The majority of responses were from analysts or researchers.

3.2 Use of the statistics

The majority of respondents use two or more of the tables contained within the published statistics. The reasons given for use of the data was varied, but could be grouped into three categories: *benchmarking and monitoring*, *research* and *general background information*. The majority of respondents (over two-thirds) felt the Survey was relevant to their needs and found the Survey easy to access. By contrast, only a quarter of respondents reported being satisfied with the comparability over time and between sources. Respondents also commented that seasonally adjusting the time series would be beneficial and allow accurate comparisons to be made with past data (see Section 5 Question 6 for a full set of responses).

3.3 Alternative sources of information

Almost all respondents said they had access to alternative sources of information on business and economic sentiment. Responses to this question were varied, and a single alternative source did not dominate. See Section 5 Question 3 for a full set of responses. However, the majority were not aware of another data source which provided information at sub-national level. This was seen as a key benefit of the Survey.

3.3 Geographical coverage of the Survey

The majority of respondents use data at the England level; with lower reported use of sub-national geographies. There was relatively little variation in the use of different sub-national geographies, but Local Enterprise Partnerships were most commonly used. Some respondents commented that they would like statistics for Local Authority areas.

3.4 Data collection and Dissemination:

Two thirds of respondents stated that a quarterly model for data collection best suited their needs. In terms of the release schedule: over half of respondents reported that a quarterly release schedule was appropriate and around a quarter of respondents felt that the current publication schedule and method of disseminating results suited their needs. The reasoning behind these choices varied considerably, see Section 5 Question 9 for a full set of responses. Analysis of respondents' comments suggests that whilst a quarterly release meets the needs of the majority of users, some users place value in the monthly release of statistics and would like to retain this frequency of release.

3.5 Overall value of the Survey

When asked about the impact of the survey ceasing, over 80 per cent of respondents commented that closing the Survey would impact them negatively. The reasoning behind responses varied, but could be summarised as: losing unique information which is not accessible elsewhere, thereby creating an information gap; the financial cost of collecting the equivalent information – especially for LEPs; greater reliance on other data sources. One respondent commented that it would *significantly* affect their activities. BIS are currently reviewing options for future of the Survey and these responses will form a valuable part of this review process.

4. BIS' response to the consultation

1. The release schedule of the Survey will remain unchanged, with monthly and quarterly statistics published. However, commentary on the monthly release will be reduced, whilst commentary accompanying the quarterly statistics will remain unchanged. It is hoped that these changes will enable users to continue to obtain timely information on business sentiment.
2. BIS will review the publication schedule to determine whether it is feasible to bring forward the publication of Quarterly statistics in order to make statistics more timely.
3. The majority of respondents requested seasonal adjustment of the statistics. BIS is unable to seasonally adjust the statistics due to the short time series (this typically requires three years of monthly data or five years of quarterly data), but will look to review this once sufficient data becomes available, dependant on the conclusions from the review of the Survey.
4. Some respondents to the consultation indicated that they would like the geographical coverage of the survey to be more granular; specifically, to provide data for Local Authority districts. After careful consideration, BIS has decided not to extend the geographical coverage of the survey.
5. BIS has improved the Technical Guide³ and User Guide⁴ to improve the information provided about the Survey. These publications provide a range of information on the methods, questions and use of the statistics and answer many of the questions asked by respondents.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-business-survey-technical-annex>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-business-survey-users-guide-to-reading-the-tables>

5. Summary of responses

The number of responses to a question may not equal the total number of responses to the consultation as: responses were received via an online questionnaire and by email with responses by email mapped to the appropriate questions, where possible; and, not all respondents answered all questions.

Q1. Which statistics from the publication are you interested in and/or do you regularly use? (please provide the table number from the release or the chart numbers)

Total number of responses: 18

Narrative response only

All respondents said that they used at least one of the EBS tables. Output employment and utilization were among the common ones used. However, almost 50 per cent of respondents (8 of 18) said they used all or most of the EBS tables.

Q2. What do you use the statistics for?

Total number of responses: 18

Answer Options	Per cent
Benchmarking Monitoring	22
General background information	22
Research	22
Inclusion in reports	11
Other*	11
Do not use	6
Writing briefs	6
Decision making	0
Modelling and/or forecasting	0

*Other category included textual responses such as background information, and information on sectors.

Q3. What alternative sources of information on Business and Economic sentiment in England do you have?

Total number of responses: 14

Narrative response only

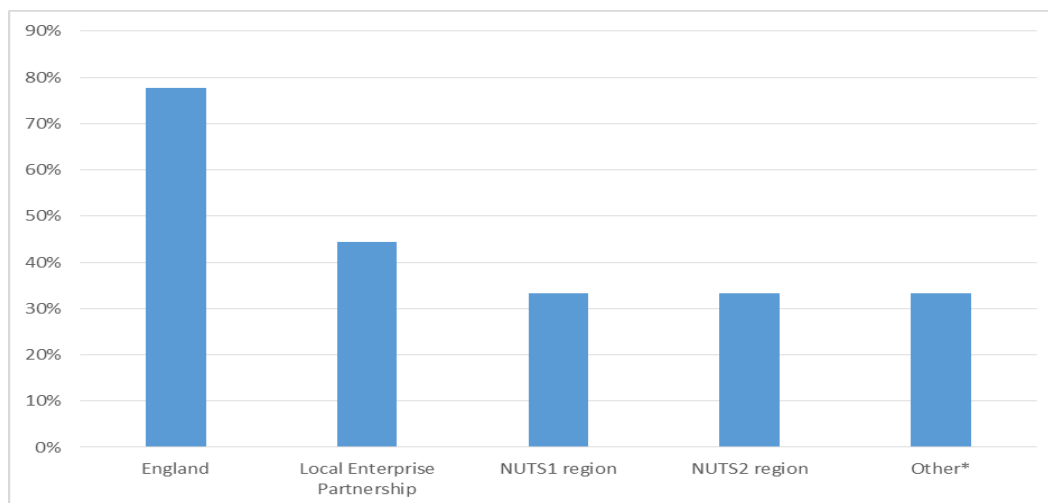
The majority of respondents said that they had other sources of information on business sentiment however, not at sub-regional level, particularly the LEP geography.

Alternative sources of information on business and economic sentiment included:

- Monthly Markit PMIs
- Quarterly Manpower Employment Outlook Survey.
- Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)
- CBI survey
- House of Lords, PCG
- GfK
- Nationwide Consumer Confidence
- BBA report
- SME finance
- British Chamber of Commerce reports e.g. Quarterly Economic Survey
- CBI
- ONS data Labour force statistics
- MAS Barometer
- Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
- Wrap
- ICAEW reports
- Accountancy firms reports.
- Lloyds Regional PMI

Q4. What level of geography are you interested in and/or do you regularly use? Please select all that apply

Total number of responses: 18



*Other category included textual responses such as Local Authority, NUTS3 area and EU.

Q5. In relation to the Survey's Estimates how satisfied are you with:

Total number of responses: 18

Answer Options	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Timeliness of the publication	6%	17%	22%	22%	33%
Ease of access	6%	17%	11%	33%	33%
Clarity (charts and accompanying advice)	6%	0%	33%	39%	22%
Relevance to your needs	17%	6%	11%	56%	11%
Accuracy of the estimates	11%	6%	39%	28%	17%
Comparability over time and between sources	6%	17%	50%	22%	6%
Coherence with other statistical sources	11%	11%	39%	33%	6%
Metadata (additional information about the data items, for example the User guide)	11%	0%	28%	44%	17%
Adherence to planned publication dates	6%	0%	33%	33%	28%
Your experience of the web pages from which the statistics are released	11%	0%	28%	39%	22%
Other (please specify)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Q6. What statistical information can you NOT find in the current statistics that you would like to?

Total number of responses: 15

Narrative response only

Responses to this question were varied. However, responses could broadly be grouped into: a) seasonally adjusted data for comparability over time, b) information at Local Authority level, c) additional information on exports and capital, particularly at LEP level and comparisons with other geographies such as Wales, UK and EU.

Q7. How could the current statistics be changed to better meet your needs?

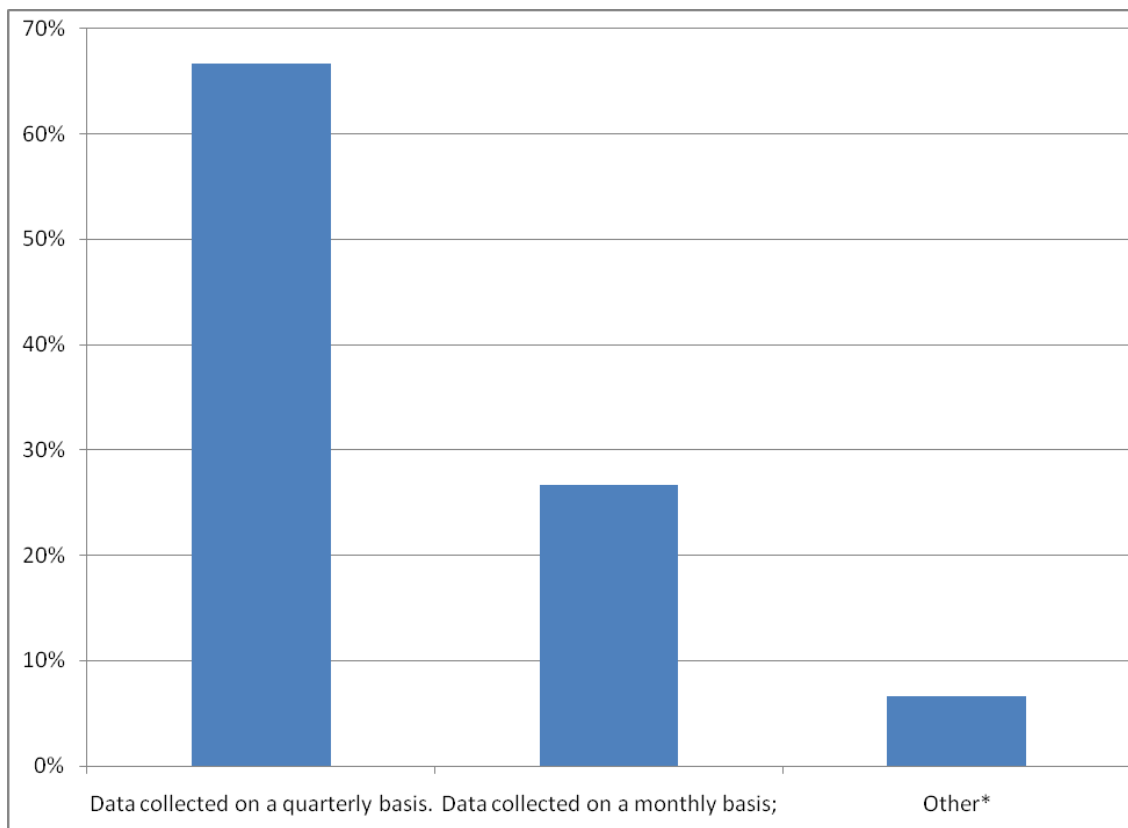
Total number of responses: 15

Narrative response only

Responses to this question were very similar to question 6 above. Responses could broadly be grouped into: a) seasonally adjusted data for comparability over time, b) information at Local Authority level, c) additional information on exports and growth, and d) additional information on social enterprise

Q8. Which of the models for collecting data best suits your needs?

Total number of responses: 15



* *Other category* included some form of quarterly release but monthly data tables.

Q9. Please provide the reasoning behind your response to question 8

Total number of responses: 16

Narrative response only

Responses to this question centred on provision of timely data. For some respondents a quarterly release and schedule was adequate. However, for others, monthly data provided more timely information. Some responders commented that quarterly data on business sentiment was readily accessible through other channels.

Q10. What would be the impact on you if the survey design changed to collecting data on a quarterly basis rather than monthly?

Total number of responses: 13

Narrative response only

Almost all respondents said that they would not be impacted significantly by this change.

Q11. Which of the models for releasing statistics best suits your needs?

Total number of responses: 13

Answer Options	Per cent
Publication of a Quarterly Statistical release and Quarterly supplementary data tables, only, each quarter;	56.3
Publication of Monthly and Quarterly Statistical releases and supplementary data using the current publication schedule	25.0
Publication of a Quarterly Statistical release focusing on the Quarterly data and supplementary Monthly (data for each month within the Quarter) and Quarterly data tables, each quarter	12.5
Other*	6.3

*Other category, no alternative suggested.

Q12. Please provide the reasoning behind your response to question 11.

Total number of responses: 15

Narrative response only

Responses to this question were split. Some respondents preferred a monthly data release and others felt that a quarterly release was adequate for their needs. Some respondents commented that they would prefer monthly data tables but were happy with a quarterly release.

Q13. What would be the impact on you if the Survey ceased?

Total number of responses: 16

Narrative response only

The majority of respondents commented that end the survey would impact them negatively. The reasoning behind responses varied, but could be summarised as: losing unique information which is not accessible elsewhere, which would create an information gap; the financial cost of collecting the same information – especially for LEPs; greater reliance on other data sources.

Q14. Are you aware of an alternative source for data from the Survey?

Total number of responses: 16

Narrative response only

Half of the respondents were unaware of alternative sources for data from the Survey. In particular respondents highlighted that there was an information gap in data at Local Enterprise Partnership level.

Q15. Do you have any additional comments?

Total number of responses: 11

Narrative response only

Responses to this question were varied. Some responders commented on ways of improving the survey such as reducing the number of questions and expanding the coverage of the survey. Other comments on evaluating the validity of the survey.

Q16. Do you have any other comments that might aid the consultation process as a whole? Please use this space for any general comments that you may have, comments on the layout of this consultation would also be welcomed

Total number of responses: 5

Narrative response only

Some respondents commented that they experienced difficulties in using the consultation document, specifically the pdf version and that alternatives should be provided. Some responders commented that they experienced difficulties using the online survey.

Other respondents reported that the Survey was key to their delivery outputs and that since no other sources of LEP information was available changes to the EBS would cause significant problems in meeting their deliverables. In addition some respondents commented that the EBS is underutilised and the information was not accessible.

6. Help with queries

If you need any further information on this consultation please contact:

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Email: Gary.Wainman@bis.gsi.gov.uk

Annex A: List of Organisations that responded

- 1. Capital Economics**
- 2. Cumbria County Council**
- 3. Forum of Private Business**
- 4. Groundwork London**
- 5. Hampshire County Council**
- 6. HMRC**
- 7. KIM Ltd**
- 8. Manchester City Council**
- 9. New Economy**
- 10. Office for National Statistics**
- 11. Tees Valley Unlimited**
- 12. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC)**

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