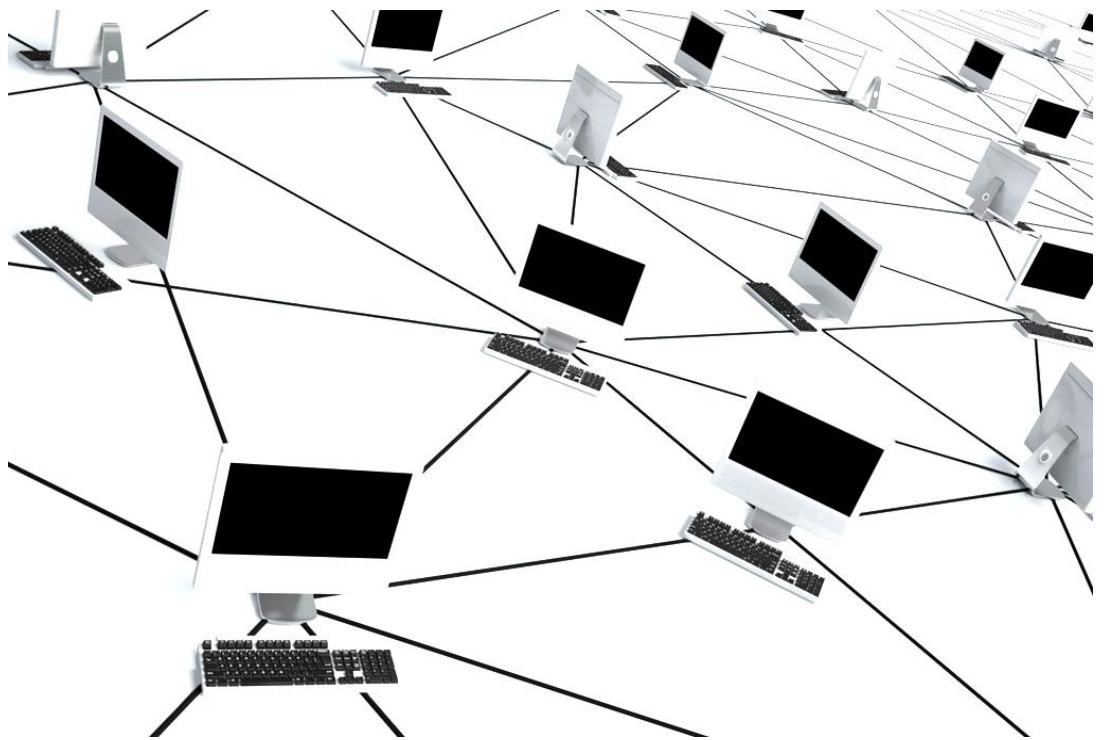


# An Assessment of Open to Export

Report to UK Trade & Investment



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## Executive summary

### Open to Export: a new approach to delivering export support services

Open to Export (<http://opentoexport.com/>) is a website supported by UK Trade & Investment that functions as an **electronic intermediary**, connecting businesses with other businesses, organisations and official sources of information and assistance, including UK Trade & Investment. Open to Export allows users to exchange information (bi-lateral and multi-lateral) and facilitates economic exchange (buying and selling of goods and services). Open to Export has been developed:

- to complement other UKTI service offerings; and
- to try a new model of working, specifically exploiting the synergies between UK Trade & Investment and knowledge that exists within businesses and networks.

Making better use of pre-existing private sector expertise, including connections between business, and market and industry knowledge, enhances the efficiency and the quality of the overall support network available to UK businesses.

As such, Open to Export represents a departure from standard UK Trade & Investment practice. Specifically, Open to Export:

1. is provided jointly with other organisations; while UK Trade & Investment is a major contributor of content, the site has a distinct identity.
2. is low-threshold, allowing business at all levels of experience and levels commitment to access a wide range of support and information.
3. is self-service, with a high degree of user autonomy allowing for different levels of engagement, from browsing for information to contributing content and providing tailored advice.

OtE is an example of a **two-sided market**, in which two sets of agents interact through an intermediary or **platform**. A two-sided market exhibits **network effects**, since the value of the marketplace is dependent on the number of users. Buyers (suppliers) will derive greater value when there is a larger network of suppliers (buyers) associated with the platform.

### Research questions

The report addresses **four research questions**:

1. the rationale for UK Trade & Investment's engagement in Open to Export;
2. the user profile;
3. the impact of Open to Export; and
4. the need for monitoring to ensure impact and value for money in line with UKTI's strategic objectives.

## Evidence base

The evidence base consists of **three elements**:

- An **exploratory review of recent research literature** on content platforms and community question-and-answer sites.
- **Interviews with six selected “service providers”**. The interviewees were identified by UK Trade & Investment as key partners in the delivery of services through Open to Export since its launch and included a freelance expert, a training professional, a senior representative of a major bank as well as three representatives of different business organisations. Interviews were conducted over the phone in December 2013.
- A **structured telephone survey (CATI) of 292 registered users** of Open to Export. Interviewees were sampled from the population of registered users who had a) provided contact details and b) consented to being contacted for research purposes. Fieldwork was undertaken during January and February 2014.

## Key findings

### Rationale for UKTI support

- Government sponsored business support service can have efficiency advantages over private provision and create external benefits.
- There is strong empirical evidence that **services provided by UK Trade & Investment deliver a range of benefits to business**. These benefits range from pure financial benefits to qualitative benefits including improved know-how and innovation.
- Increasing exports is a high priority for government and a part of a sustainable economic recovery.
- 22% of SME decision makers say that their business needs more advice and guidance on the risks, exposures and liabilities of exporting<sup>1</sup>. Only 12% of SME employers report the use of government-funded services (such as UK Trade & Investment) in 2012-2013<sup>2</sup>. UKTI's internationalisation strategies, barriers and awareness survey 2014 finds that 54% of internationalising firms are aware of UKTI's role<sup>3</sup>.
- Business networks are an important source of information for businesses.
- Open to Export, as an electronic intermediary, can play a powerful role in activating the business community, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency of the support eco-system for UK businesses in the exporting arena.

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<sup>1</sup> Zurich quarterly SME Risk Index (November 2013), summary at: <http://bit.ly/1AfXjOJ> [accessed 05 January 2014].

<sup>2</sup> Reform (2013). “Delivering the UK export ambition”, Table 2, p. 15, available at: <http://bit.ly/17dbs39> [accessed 05 January 2014].

<sup>3</sup> UK Trade & Investment (2014). “Internationalisation Strategies, Barriers & Awareness Survey 2014”. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1Ap55TY> [accessed 05 January 2014].

## User profile

- Information used for this study relates to **registered users**. Users of Open to Export (firms and individuals) can elect whether to register for the site, or whether to use it unregistered. Registered users are likely to be the most engaged segment of the user population, even though the overall user base is considerably greater (unique monthly visitor numbers are multiple times greater than total registered users).
- The user survey carried out for this study suggests that the Open to Export **user population is skewed towards smaller companies**. Only 36 (out of 292 respondents) have more than 50 employees. In addition, the minority of survey respondents that report turnover (all of them with <10 employees) have an annual turnover of less than £2 million.
- The largest single group of survey respondents (40%) is active in the professional services sector (SIC M - "Professional, scientific & technical activities").
- New exporters, companies that intend to grow and companies that have a written business plan tend to use OtE more frequently and post questions.
- Companies with 50-249 employees are most likely to use OtE at least once a week and be Super users; larger firms are least likely to be super users.
- Companies with 50-249 employees tend to use OtE most frequently and are the most engaged users (38% use OtE at least once a week) and are most likely to respond to questions.
- **Users who use Open to Export at least once a week ('super users'), as a group, are potentially a decisive resource for Open to Export, due to their role in generating content and creating activity on the site.**
- Super users tend to use all functions of OtE more frequently than the average user – the difference is particularly large with regard to responding to business contract opportunities, browsing for information, and responding to questions.

## Usage, quality and impact

- **Open to Export combines characteristics of a news site with those of a content platform and a community Q&A platform.**
- Stakeholders give an overall positive assessment of OtE: **"You can't make it any easier for firms to export."**
- Some stakeholders take issue with certain aspects of the site (no centralised quality control, few 'peers' giving advice) that reflect its hybrid setup.
- The number of users is seen as 'unacceptably small'. Increasing the number of users and promoting the site are seen as high priorities.
- Some stakeholders voiced doubts about UK Trade & Investment's commitment to OtE.
- The most important role for users of Open to Export is as a **source of factual information**. Individuals registered as service providers consider finding potential customer and promoting their business as more important.

- A small number of users is responsible for a lot of the information provided on the site. Setting **incentives for high quality and continued engagement of the core of 'super users'** has to be part of the strategy for OtE.
- Currently, the incentives for content providers are unclear. This risks alienating important segments of the user population and endangers the success of OtE.
- Greater satisfaction with the OtE websites is related to greater usage of the platform. However, a significant proportion of companies that use the OtE platform at least once a month (44.4%) are very dissatisfied with the quality of responses to their questions.
- Super users' primary source when looking for information on exporting or selling services to exporters is Open to Export, while it is the fifth most used source by infrequent users. In general, super users appear to have a stronger connection with UKTI (their second most popular source of information) and their first point of contact with OtE.
- Web search is significantly more important as a first point of contact with OtE for super users than infrequent users. Infrequent users are more likely to have heard of OtE through colleagues, other websites and other organisations than super users.
- **Users of Open to Export expect a wide range of business benefits from using the site,** although mostly the benefits are not ascribed to the use of the site exclusively. Super users are more likely to experience or expect to experience benefits from OtE, across all impact measures. Moreover, they are more likely to attribute the benefit to OtE.

### Monitoring

- **'PIMS-like' questions on service quality and impact using CATI were successfully implemented in this study.**
- Consequently, a survey-based monitoring system using the PIMS framework (focus on quality, improved business performance net of non-additionality) appears feasible for Open to Export.
- However, only registered users that provide contact details can be surveyed in this way, which may give rise to **selection bias**.
- A robust monitoring system requires an opt-in mechanism that ensures the availability of a representative sample.

### Recommendations

Recommendations were derived based on the combined analysis of the different sources of evidence, including the consultation with selected service providers, the survey of Open to Export users, the review of relevant research literature, as well as extensive discussions with UKTI personnel involved with Open to Export.

- **Recommendation 1:** OtE's efforts to identify, develop and retain experts should be supported. Non-financial rewards linked to expert status have been shown to be effective in other online communities.
- **Recommendation 2:** UK Trade & Investment should consider if more can be done to working with the Open to Export team to grow the user base.



- **Recommendation 3:** Steps should be taken to enhance the usefulness of OtE through a) continuing provision of high-quality content to OtE; b) considering more effective vetting and filtering mechanisms for content (including questions and answers); c) review of the architecture/routing on the site to cater to the specific needs of different users (e.g. new to exporting, sector-specific, etc.); and d) introducing standards for factual content on the site.
- **Recommendation 4:** Open to Export has tangible benefits for users, but UKTI's ongoing involvement is required for the site to flourish. UKTI has to commit to supporting the site over the longer term in order for it to fulfil its potential in terms of business benefits.
- **Recommendation 5:** Monitoring is essential for justifying UKTI's ongoing support for OtE. A light-touch version of PIMS, focusing on impact and administered online appears appropriate.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Open to Export<sup>4</sup> was launched in 2012 as a new, privately owned, online service to provide small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with information, advice and guidance on exporting and doing business overseas. The platform was originally developed by UKTI in cooperation with hibu plc<sup>5</sup> and was transferred into a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC) in early 2014.

Open to Export is currently supported by the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Export and hibu as its founding members. Part of the Government's SME export strategy, Open to Export continues to work in close collaboration with UK Trade & Investment.

The Open to Export service is envisaged as a free *online community* that provides SMEs wishing to expand their business abroad with relevant information. Companies can receive bespoke answers in response to questions posted on the site, access practical information on export topics, connect and engage with a range of exporters and explore international business opportunities. In addition to accessing advice provided by UK Trade & Investment (and other government bodies, e.g. HM Revenue and Customs), companies can also receive support from other users of OtE, for example existing and prospective exporters, lawyers, accountants and independent trade advisors.

The strategy for Open to Export is to create an export support capability that complements the suite of UK Trade & Investment services on the one hand, and on the other hand taps into valuable information that is latent within the UK business community, including both exporting businesses and independent organisations or other providers of services to exporters.

## 1.2 Aims of the study

This study was carried out as part of UK Trade & Investment's commitments to regular independent assessment of all its services, both to help drive continuous improvement in service quality, as well as to ensure that its effort are focused where they can be of greatest benefit. This research will feed into the future development of the Open to Export services and help inform UKTI's future practices. In particular, the study aims to:

- assess the theoretical and empirical rationale for government support in supporting the Open to Export (OtE) platform;
- assess which aspects of the OtE platform work best and why;
- estimate the benefit derived from the site both by businesses (exporting or seeking to export) and service providers; and
- consider whether a robust but proportionate monitoring mechanism could be defined for Open to Export services, either using PIMS or some other means.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://opentoexport.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://corporate.hibu.com/en/>

### 1.3 Approach

Two features above all distinguish Open to Export from other programmes undertaken by UKTI in support of UK businesses: its innovative nature and the changes that continue to amend and improve the service provided by Open to Export from the user's perspective.

Open to Export is a work in progress and has continued to undergo substantial changes over the lifetime of the study. The most profound change on the organisational level has been the transfer in early 2014 from a joint venture between UK Trade & Investment and hibu into a CIC, in which UK Trade & Investment, while remaining crucial for the site's strategy in terms of content provision, takes a backseat when it comes to operational management. In addition to this, Open to Export is experiencing more subtle changes in layout and functionality on an ongoing basis, not to mention the steady growth in traffic, accompanied by a wider network of engaged users and a higher volume of information accessible through the site.

At the same time, with thousands of registered users, continuous operation for more than a year and increasing activity levels, initial insights into the effect of the service are possible. The approach taken to answer UK Trade & Investment's research questions therefore combines elements of process evaluation and impact assessment, and uses a mix of theoretical, qualitative and quantitative analysis. In the absence of a robust monitoring framework (such as is provided by PIMS for UK Trade & Investment's core services), a central element of the work undertaken was the collection of primary data on the performance and impact of Open to Export.

The process evaluation aspect of the chosen approach complements Open to Export's ongoing monitoring of its performance through web analytics and anecdotal evidence from delivery partners and selected service providers (individuals or organisations with whom UK Trade & Investment has pre-existing relationships and who have been involved informally in the development of Open to Export). Based on theoretical considerations, in-depth discussions with selected stakeholders and with the Open to Export team at UK Trade & Investment, and a survey of users of Open to Export, we formulate a number of actionable insights and recommendations for Open to Export's strategy and functional elements.

The impact assessment aspect aims to provide UK Trade & Investment with a preliminary, qualitative estimate of the benefit of (the early-2014 incarnation of) Open to Export, the perceived quality of the service and its relationship with other parts of UK Trade & Investment's offering. A distinct research objective is to explore how the impact of a light-touch intervention like Open to Export can be assessed.

Further, because Open to Export represents a new way of delivering support to exporters, the approach to the assessment is exploratory in many respects. On the theoretical side in particular, the lack of services sufficiently similar to Open to Export means that our analysis often uses analogies to other online services (not necessarily related to business support) that are similar *in some respect* and are thus deemed to offer pertinent insights, even though the pertinence cannot be proved a priori.

The evidence base consists of three elements:

- An exploratory review of recent research literature on content platforms and community question-and-answer sites.

- Interviews with six selected “service providers”. The interviewees were identified by UK Trade & Investment as key partners in the delivery of services through Open to Export since its launch and included a freelance expert, a training professional, a senior representative of a major bank as well as three representatives of different business organisations. Interviews were conducted over the phone in December 2013.
- A structured telephone survey (CATI) of 292 registered users<sup>6</sup> of Open to Export. Interviewees were sampled from the population of registered users who had a) provided contact details and b) consented to being contacted for research purposes. Fieldwork was undertaken during January and February 2014.

## 1.4 The report

The report addresses the four research questions defined by UK Trade & Investment in turn: the rationale for UK Trade & Investment’s engagement in Open to Export, the user profile, the impact and the question of monitoring. Evidence from the sources listed above is adduced in each case as appropriate. Key insights are summarised at the start of each section and condensed into practical recommendations for UK Trade & Investment.

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<sup>6</sup> The total number of registered users passed the 10,000 mark in 2014.

## 2 Rationale for UKTI's support for Open to Export

### Box 1: Rationale for UKTI's support for Open to Export – key insights not sure these insights relate to the title

- 22% of SME decision makers say that their business needs more advice and guidance on the risks, exposures and liabilities of exporting<sup>7</sup>. Only 12% of SME employers report the use of government-funded services (such as UK Trade & Investment) in 2012-2013<sup>8</sup>. UKTI's internationalisation strategies, barriers and awareness survey 2014 finds that 54% of internationalising firms are aware of UKTI's role<sup>9</sup>.
- Information failures form an important part of the economic rationale for subsidising information provision for exporters<sup>10</sup>. Business networks are an important source of information for businesses.
- Open to Export, as an electronic intermediary, can play a powerful role in activating the business community, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency of the support eco-system for UK businesses in the exporting arena.

### 2.1 The case for government support

Government has a track record of success in providing export support services to businesses through UKTI. The rationale for UKTI's work rests on strong theoretical and empirical foundations. The evidence base has been built up over a period of years through UKTI's internal monitoring as well as external evaluations of individual programmes and academic studies examining the details of UKTI's service portfolio and its impact from different angles.<sup>11</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Theory

The theoretical case for government support for businesses with a view to increasing exports is examined in detail in the 2011 paper "International Trade and Investment - the Economic Rationale for Government Support"<sup>12</sup>. The economic rationale is founded upon the presence of a number of market failures, including intermediation and information failures.

It is also recognised that services that help to increase exports or increase exporters capabilities have **external benefits**, that is, benefits that do not accrue just to the companies using the services, but also to the economy as a whole via channels such as increased exploitation of comparative advantage, realisation of economies of scale and scope through internationalisation,

<sup>7</sup> Zurich quarterly SME Risk Index (November 2013), summary at: <http://bit.ly/1AfXjOJ> [accessed 05 January 2014].

<sup>8</sup> Reform (2013). "Delivering the UK export ambition", Table 2, p. 15, available at: <http://bit.ly/17dbs39> [accessed 05 January 2014].

<sup>9</sup> UK Trade & Investment (2014). "Internationalisation Strategies, Barriers & Awareness Survey 2014". Available at: <http://bit.ly/1Ap55TY> [accessed 05 January 2014].

<sup>10</sup> "Businesses may underestimate the potential benefits of external advice, or may feel unable to assess the potential costs and benefits adequately, or to manage the risks that consultants may not provide good value for money." BIS Economics Paper 13, p. 95. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1fMVkTT> [accessed 29 April 2014].

<sup>11</sup> Details on: PIMS Quarterly Reports: <http://bit.ly/Rr57ZR>; UKTI evaluation studies: <http://bit.ly/1hwWCmu>; academic research on the benefits of internationalisation: <http://bit.ly/1mBMikT> [accessed 01 May 2014].

<sup>12</sup> BIS Economics Paper 13. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1fMVkTT> [accessed 29 April 2014].

greater competitiveness, knowledge transfer and innovation, etc. Since the benefits that accrue to individual businesses are smaller than the overall benefits to the UK economy, a purely market-based system would lead to under-provision, as companies would not be willing to pay for benefits they cannot themselves appropriate.

Regarding the **efficiency** of government provision, certain attributes of a government-branded service are likely to lower the cost of government provision relative to private provision. Importantly for Open to Export, a visible government involvement may act as a quality signal and attract users to the site.

## 2.2 The role of Open to Export

### 2.2.1 Activating the business community

Export support services provided by UK Trade & Investment have been shown consistently to benefit the companies that use them. However, SMEs in particular still lack an awareness of where and how to break into overseas markets, and report that they have difficulties in obtaining the support, advice, skills and capabilities, and financing needed<sup>13</sup>. According to a 2013 survey, 22% of SME decision makers say that their business needs more advice and guidance on the risks, exposures and liabilities of exporting<sup>14</sup>. Only 12% of businesses cite the use of government-funded services (such as UK Trade & Investment) in the last 12 months<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, UKTI's internationalisation strategies, barriers and awareness survey 2014<sup>16</sup> finds that only 54% of exporters or firms planning to export in the next 12 months are aware of UKTI's role.

Against this background, tapping into existing business networks can be an effective way to enhance the quality of support offered to SMEs. Survey evidence shows (Table 1) that SMEs regard business contacts and industry associations as more important sources of advice than government bodies.

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<sup>13</sup> BIS Economics Paper 13, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Zurich quarterly SME Risk Index (November 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Survey conducted by Barclays Business Banking in July and August 2013, cited in Reform (2013). "Delivering the UK export ambition", p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> <http://bit.ly/1sH5q2f> [accessed 29 September 2014].

**Table 1: Where SMEs sought information and advice in the last 12 months**

Source of information/advice	SME employers (%)
Accountant	50
Customers, suppliers and other business people	30
Bank	30
Family and friends	25
Business networks (like Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations, CBI, FSB, etc)	17
Government-funded services (like UKTI, Business Link, HMRC, other government departments and web-sites, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Business Coaching for Growth, etc)	12
Media	13
Other business advisors	11
Don't know	1
None/I have not sought advice in the last 12 months	28

Note: BDRC SME Omnibus Survey, research conducted for Barclays Business Banking, Jul-Aug 2013

Source: Reform (2013). "Delivering the UK export ambition", Table 2, p. 15.

The role of industry associations may be particularly important. According to recent research by the Reform think tank, "the potential role for business networks in promoting exports is significant. Membership bodies and business networks are able to strongly support exports and highlight successful experiences of other members. Such organisations can also leverage their international networks to set out potential markets and partner opportunities overseas. At the start of 2012, 40,000 were members of the Institute of Directors, 104,000 of the British Chambers of Commerce and 200,000 of the FSB."<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3 Open to Export: collaboration & efficiency

The Open to Export service is a free online community that gives small businesses the guidance and in-depth information they need to expand their business abroad. Companies receive bespoke answers to meet their business needs into new markets, access practical information on export topics, connect and engage with a range of exporters and explore the latest international opportunities for their business. In addition to accessing government advice, through international trade advisors based in the English regions as well as British embassies and high commissions, companies can also receive support from existing and prospective exporters, lawyers, accountants and independent trade advisors.

Open to Export represents an extension of the outsourcing model to incorporate firms (including individual independent consultants) engaging in knowledge transfer (and potentially commercial exchange), without any contractual relationship with UK Trade & Investment as a requirement for participation.

Open to Export has been developed to complement other UKTI service offerings and also to try a new model of working, specifically exploiting the synergies between UK Trade & Investment and knowledge that exists within businesses and networks. Making better use of pre-existing private sector expertise, including connections between business, and market and industry knowledge, enhances the efficiency and the quality of the overall support network available to UK businesses.

<sup>17</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (2013), Roads to Success: SME Exports, cited in Reform (2013). "Delivering the UK export ambition", p. 16.



As such, Open to Export represents a departure from standard UK Trade & Investment practice. Specifically, Open to Export is:

- provided jointly with other organisations; while UK Trade & Investment is a major contributor of content, the site has a distinct identity;
- low-threshold, allowing business at all levels of experience and commitment to access a wide range of support and information; and.
- self-service, with a high degree of user autonomy allowing for different levels of engagement, from browsing for information to contributing content and providing tailored advice.

On a more abstract level, Open to Export is part of a wider strategy to change UK Trade & Investment's remit from that of a 'provider' to a 'facilitator' of internationalisation services.

Originally, Open to Export was envisaged as a **supply side** capability, i.e., increasing the pool of potential advisors for companies interested in exporting and offering a platform for direct commercial exchange between distinct separate populations of "service providers" and "exporters". However, the network aspect of Open to Export has increasingly become the focus of the site's strategy.

We conceptualise Open to Export as an **electronic intermediary**, connecting businesses with other businesses, organisations and official sources of information and assistance, including UK Trade & Investment. Open to Export allows users to exchange information (bi-lateral and multi-lateral) and facilitates economic exchange (buying and selling of goods and services).



Open to Export's role as an intermediary includes:

- **Market creation:** the offline market for many of the services traded on OtE is disjointed (many small-scale, local providers) and opaque (export-related services often represent a small part of the services offered by OtE service providers); OtE lowers the cost of providing services and matches buyers and sellers, thereby both facilitating the exchange of export-related information and creating a new market for services.
- **Aggregation of buyer demand and seller products:** allows companies to achieve efficient scale.
- **Engendering trust** in the exchange between buyers and sellers;

OtE is an example of a **two-sided market**. In general, a two-sided market involves an intermediary or **platform through which two sets of agents interact** and **the choices of each set of agents influences the outcomes of the other set of agents**. This has two important implications:

- A two-sided market exhibits **network effects**, since the value of the marketplace is dependent on the number of users.

- **Buyers (suppliers) observe greater value when there is a larger network of suppliers (buyers) associated with the intermediary.**

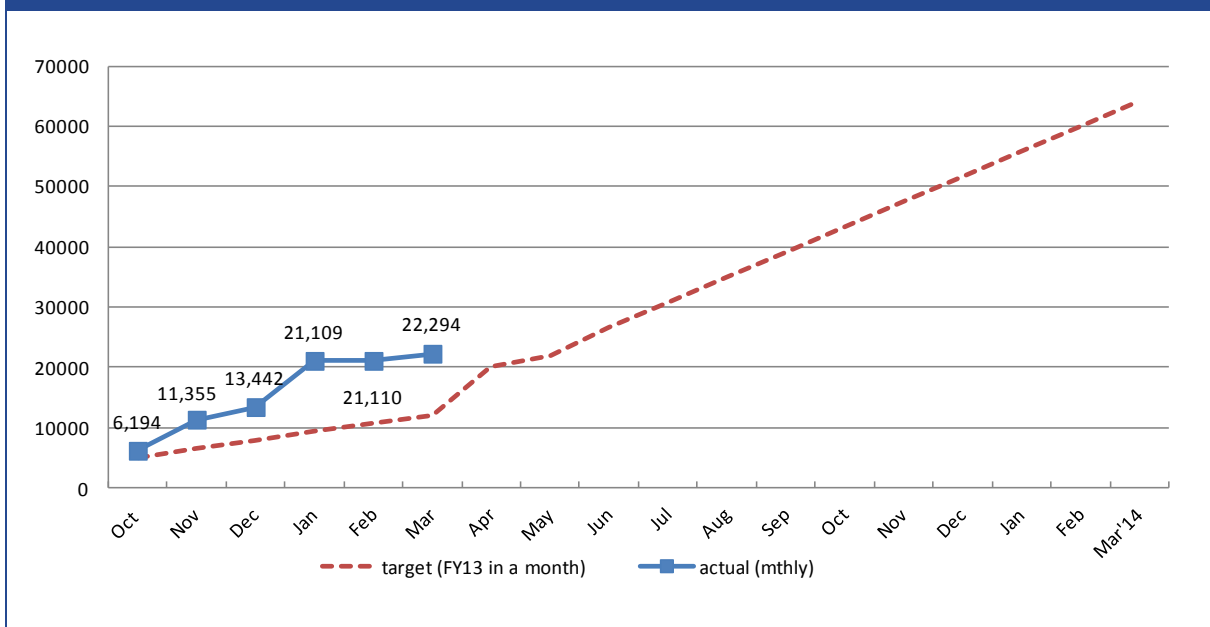
In addition, it provides SMEs with a single point of contact through which to access information and thereby **reduces search costs**. With a large number of participants in one marketplace, SMEs have **more choice** and hence, are more likely to find **lower prices**.

Finally, export specialists or export support service suppliers are able to identify the right consumers for their goods and/or services, which ensures the **efficient allocation of resources**. As a one-stop shop, Open to Export allows users to expand their markets, and hence, achieve **economies of scale or scope**, as well as reducing bargaining asymmetry

### 3 Who uses Open to Export?

The analysis in the following sections focuses on **registered users**. Users of the site can register, but can also use the site without registering. By registering, users can create a public profile, respond to questions, post content and also subscribe to newsletters and alerts about forthcoming webinars & special features. Registered users are a subset of all users of the site. How many users there are in total cannot be measured accurately with available data. The number of unique monthly visitors, a common measure of a website's popularity, is 10 times higher than the total number of registered users, although the operators expect the ratio to drop over time (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below).

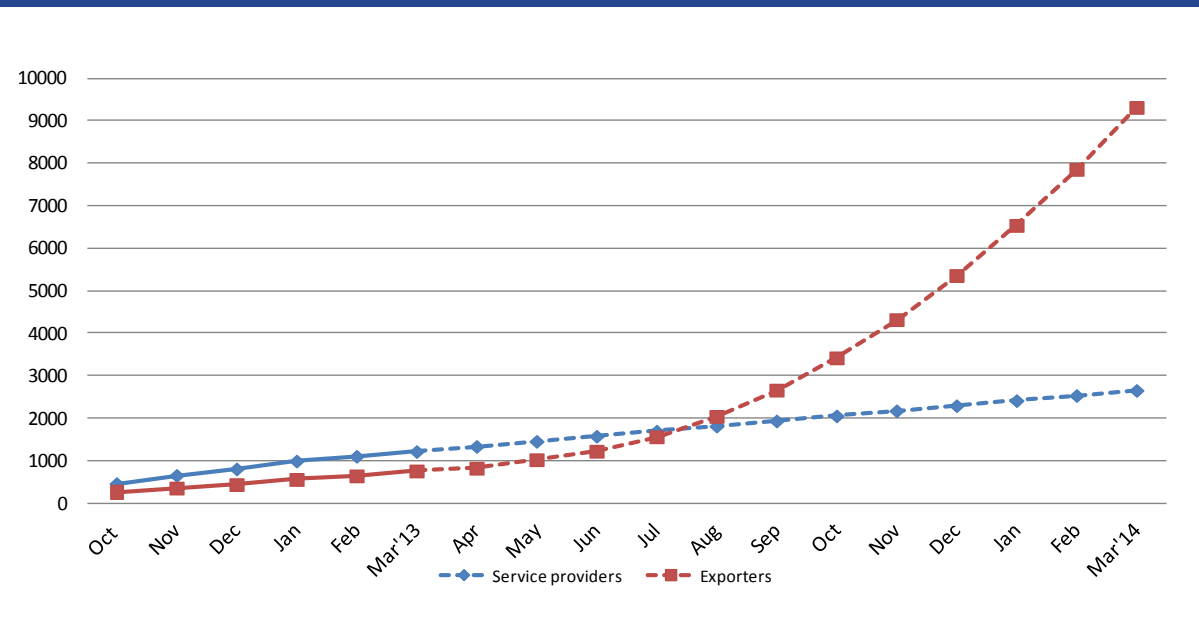
**Figure 1: Unique monthly visitors to Open to Export (2012-2014)**



Source: Open to Export

However, unique visitors is a flawed measure (tracking cookies often get deleted and individuals access the site through multiple devices (home, work, mobile etc.) so individuals are likely to be counted multiple times.

Figure 2: Registered users of Open to Export (2012-2014)



Source: Open to Export

Looking only at users registered on the site provides a particular perspective on user behaviour. Specifically, we expect the more engaged or serious users to register, as this allows them to use the full functionality of the site, and notably its social features. As such, registered users are appropriate as a focus for this assessment of Open to Export Registered, as any impact can be expected to be greatest among the most intensive users.

**Box 2: Who uses Open to Export – key insights**

- The user survey carried out for this study suggests that the Open to Export user population is skewed towards smaller companies. Only 36 (out of 292 respondents) have more than 50 employees. In addition, the minority of survey respondents that report turnover (all of them with <10 employees) have an annual turnover of less than £2 million.
- The largest single group of survey respondents (40%) is active in the professional services sector (SIC M - “Professional, scientific & technical activities”).
- New exporters, companies that intend to grow and companies that have a written business plan tend to use OtE more frequently and post questions.
- Super users (who use OtE at least once a week) are most common among companies with 50-249 employees (43%) and least common among larger firms (8%).
- companies with 50-249 employees tend to use OtE most frequently and are the most engaged users (most likely to be heavy users (38% use OtE at least once a week) and most likely to respond to questions.
- Users who use Open to Export at least once a week (‘super users’) are a potential decisive resource for Open to Export, due to their role in generating content and creating activity on the site.
- Super users tend to use all functions of OtE more frequently than the average user – the difference is particularly large with regard to responding to business contract opportunities, browsing for information, and responding to questions.

**3.1 User profile, usage pattern and satisfaction**

This section presents stylised facts about the Open to Export user population and their usage patterns as reflected in the user survey. The distribution of companies by turnover shows that Open to Export disproportionately attracts smaller businesses. The evidence on registered users’ turnover is extremely limited: only companies employing less than 10 staff report annual turnover. The following figures is therefore not representative of the business population, but gives insight into small employers (<10 employees) only.

. While some larger businesses probably use Open to Export on occasion and the survey sample may not be representative of the Open to Export user population, the prevalence of very small businesses in the sample suggest a client population skewed towards the smaller companies compared with clients of core UK Trade & Investment services.

**Table 2: Turnover (companies with <10 employees<sup>#</sup>) and frequency of use**

Annual turnover	Every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less often	Number of observations
£100,000 or less	7.4	22.6	17.7	52.9	68
£100,001 - £500,000	0.0	17.7	17.7	64.7	34
£500,001 - £10million <sup>†</sup>	0.0	54.6	7.7	38.5	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>115</b>

<sup>#</sup> only companies with <10 employees reported turnover figures <sup>†</sup>only 2 companies in this bracket reported annual turnover

Source: London Economics

In terms of sectors of activity, the user sample contains 40% of professional service businesses. Otherwise, a wide variety of businesses is represented from both manufacturing and service sectors.

**Table 3: Sector and frequency of use**

Sector	Every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Less often	Number of observations
C – Manufacturing	0.0	23.3	32.6	44.2	43
G – Wholesale & retail trade	4.7	23.3	30.2	41.9	43
H – Transport & storage	7.1	35.7	7.1	50.0	28
J – Information & communication	0.0	20.0	25.0	55.0	20
K – Financial & insurance activities	0.0	22.2	22.2	55.6	9
M – Professional, scientific & technical activities	2.6	17.5	21.1	58.8	114
N – Administrative & support service activities	0.0	18.8	50.0	31.3	16
P – Education	0.0	11.1	11.1	77.8	9
S – Other service activities	0.0	25.0	0.0	75.0	4
Total	2.5	21.3	24.1	52.1	292

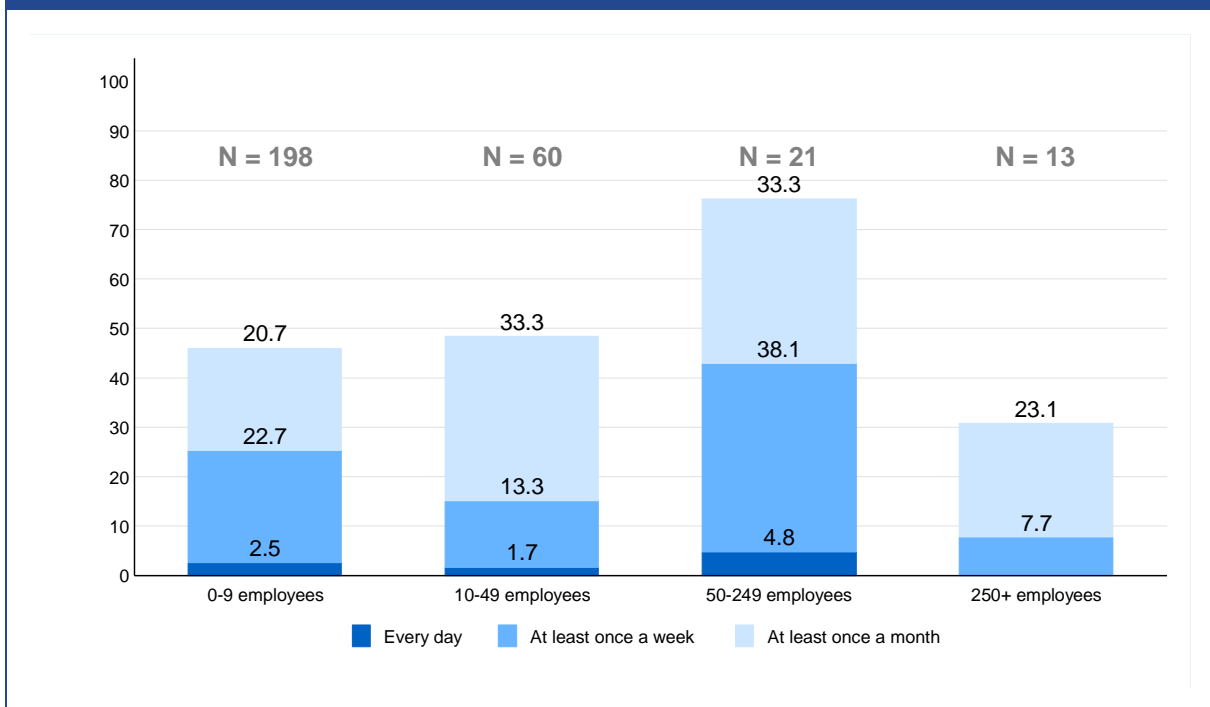
Note: Sectors A (Agriculture, forestry & fishing), F (Construction), I (Accommodation & food service activities), L (Real estate activities) and O (Public administration & defence) are excluded because interview numbers were not sufficient to provide information for these sectors.

**Source:** *London Economics*

A look at the relationship between company size (measured by the number of employees) and usage frequency reveals companies with 50-249 employees tend to use Open to Export most frequently<sup>18</sup>. Export experience (number of years exporting) does not affect usage frequency.

<sup>18</sup> The difference relative to micro, small and large enterprises is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

Figure 3: Size and frequency of use of Open to Export

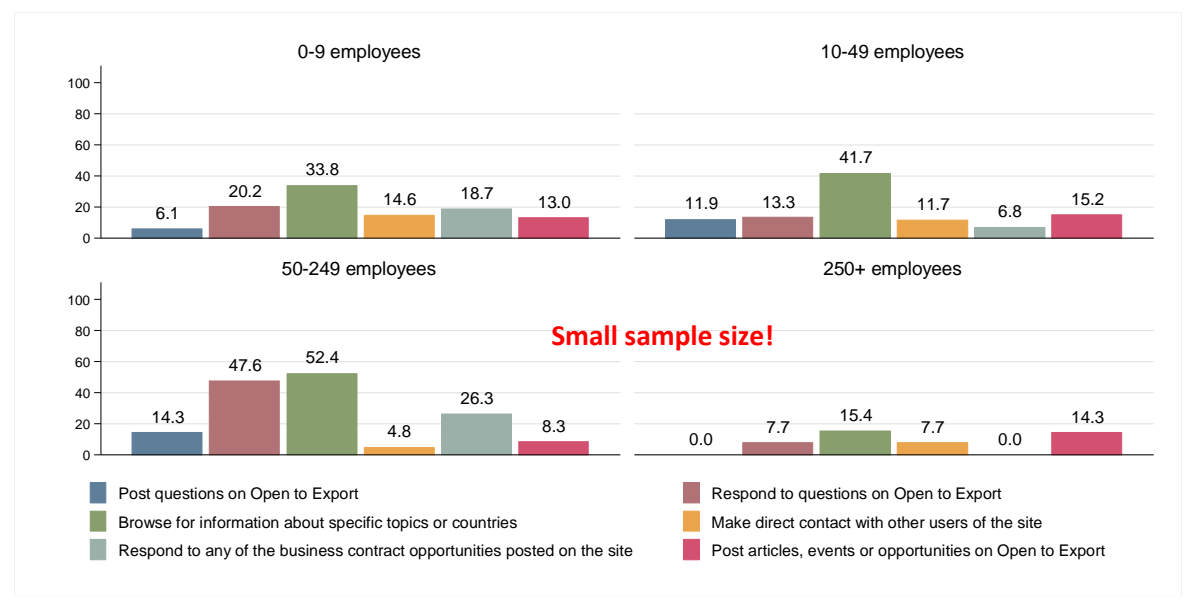


Note: Bases for medium (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) enterprises are very small (21 and 13 observations, respectively), so findings on these groupings must be interpreted with caution. However, difference in frequency of use of medium-sized enterprises relative to all other enterprises is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

Source: London Economics

While smaller companies tend to use Open to Export for a variety of purposes with a relatively even frequency, apparently companies with 50-249 employees use the site more to browse for information, respond to questions or respond to any business opportunities. However, only in the case of responding to questions are the differences statistically significant (at the 1% level).

Figure 4: Size and usage pattern



Note: Numbers in tiles reflect percentages on vertical axis only. Bases for medium (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) enterprises are very small (21 and 13 observations, respectively), so findings on these groupings must be interpreted with caution.

Source: London Economics

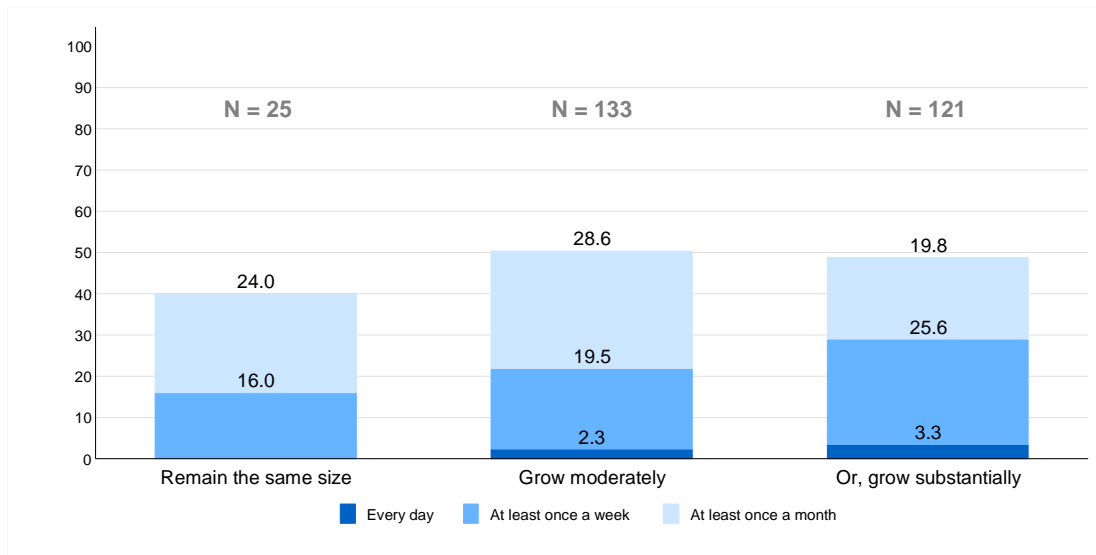
Companies that intend to grow tend to use Open to Export somewhat more frequently than companies planning to stay the same size, particularly to browse for information about specific topics or countries<sup>19</sup>. Only companies with growth objectives appear to post questions. Companies with a written business plan and planning to grow are more likely to post questions<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Though these differences are not statistically significant at the 10% confidence level

<sup>20</sup> This difference is statistically significant at the 10% confidence level for companies with a written business plan and companies that intend to grow significantly (relative to companies that intend to stay the same or have no business plan).



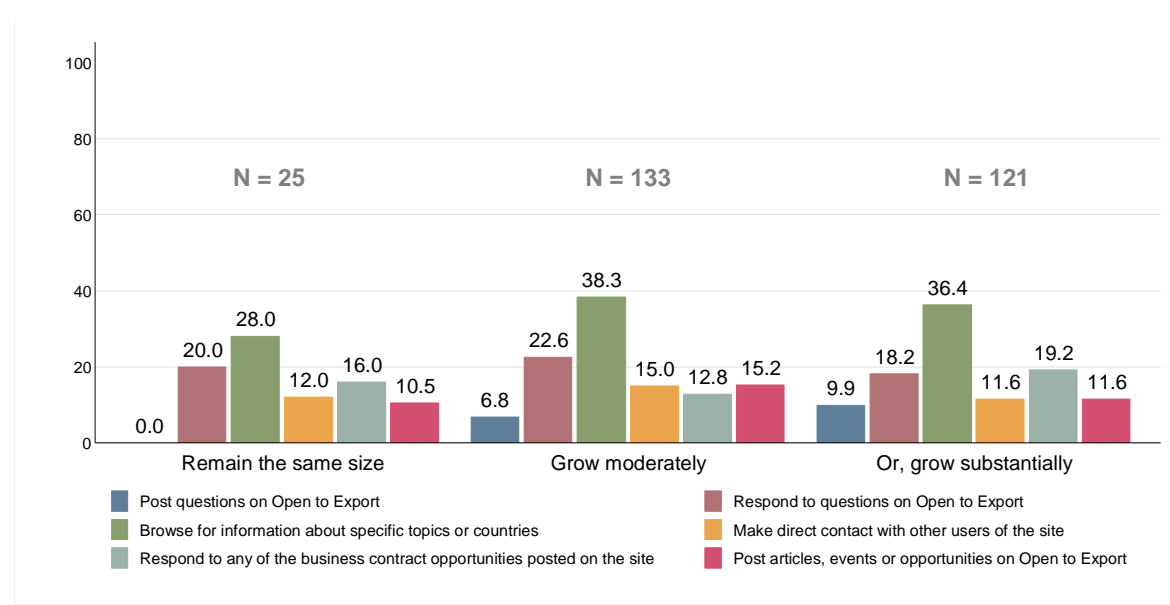
**Figure 5: Growth objectives and frequency of use**



Differences are not statistically significant.

Source: London Economics

**Figure 6: Growth objectives and usage pattern**



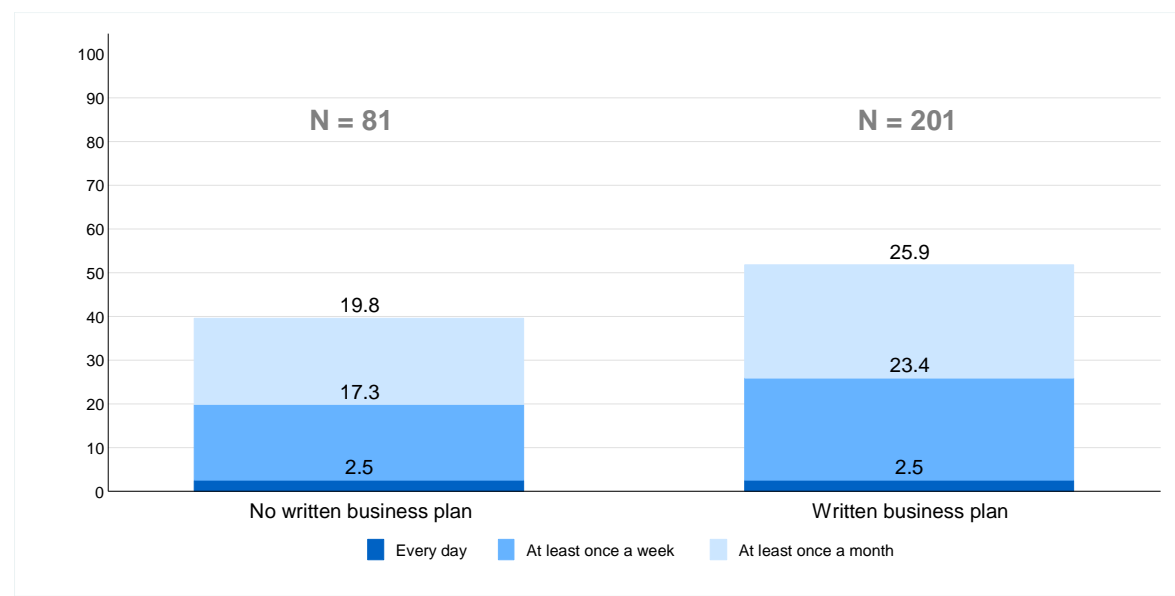
Note: companies that intend to grow substantially are significantly more likely to post questions than companies that intend to remain the same (10% significance level).

Source: London Economics

Companies that have a written business plan also use Open to Export more intensively in relation to all the different functions of the site<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> The difference relative to companies without a business plan is statistically significant only in relation to posting questions (10% level) and responding to business opportunities posted on the site (5% level).

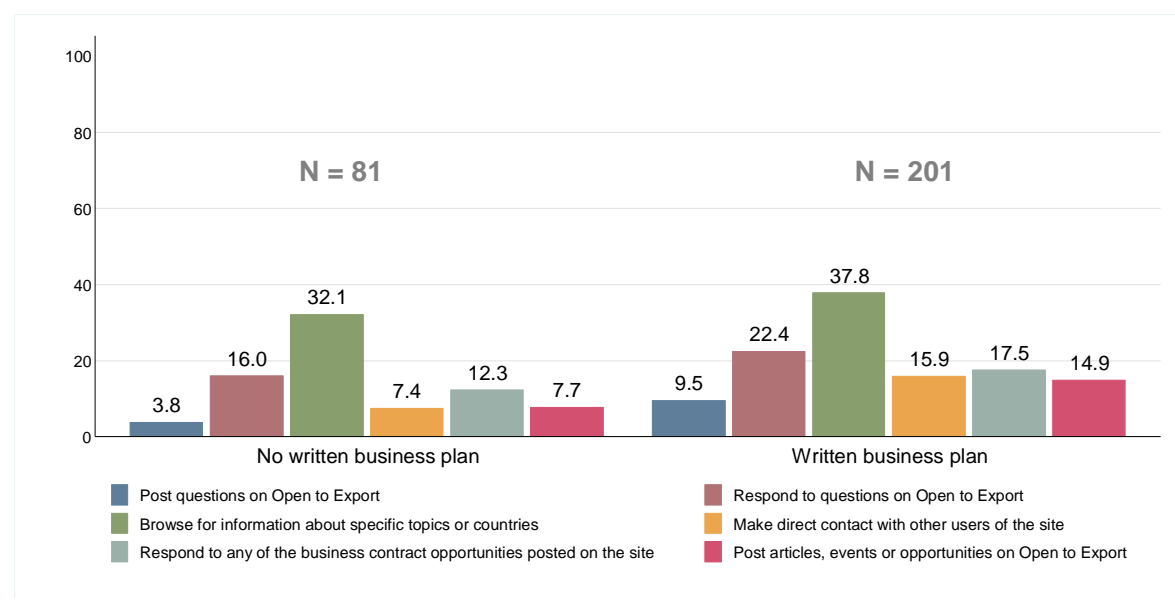
Figure 7: Written business plan and frequency of use



Note: companies with a written business plan are significantly more likely to use OtE at least once a month (1% level).

Source: London Economics

Figure 8: Written business plan and usage pattern



Note: companies with a written business plan are significantly more likely to post questions on OtE (10% level) and respond to business contract opportunities (5% level).

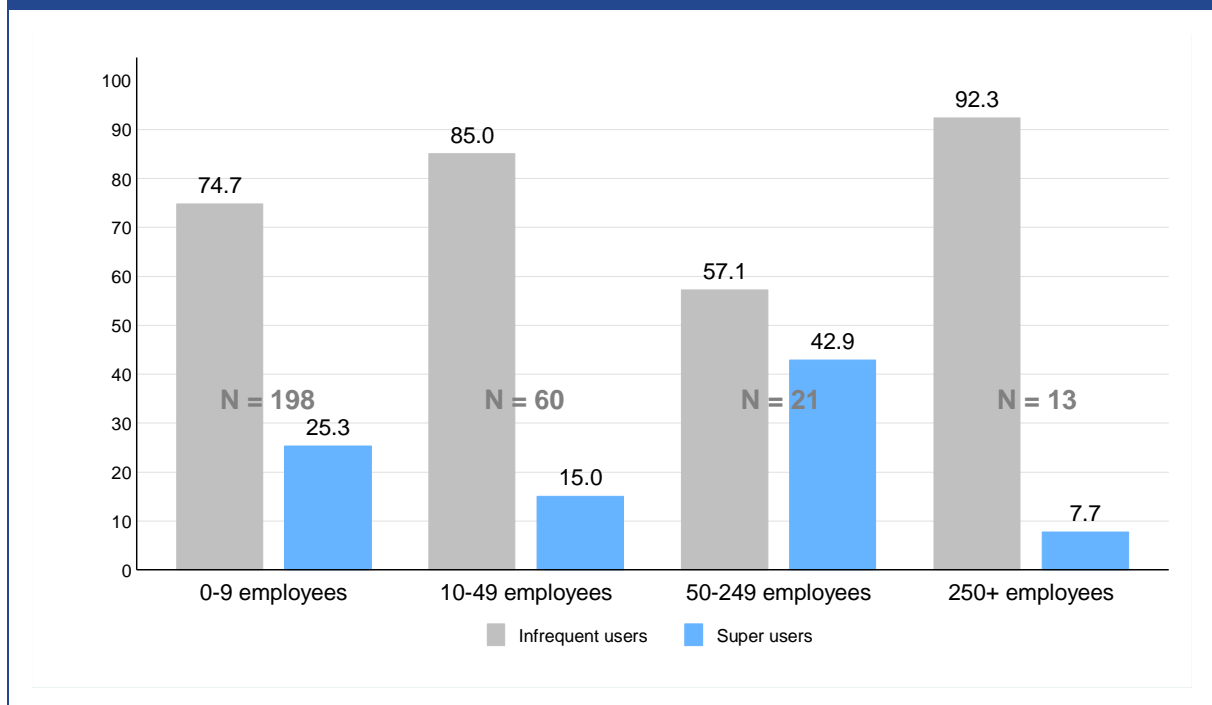
Source: London Economics

### 3.2 'Super users'

Users who use Open to Export at least once a week ('super users') as a group are potentially a decisive resource for Open to Export, due to their role in generating content and creating activity

on the site<sup>22</sup>. Medium-sized enterprises include a significantly larger proportion of super users than infrequent users (who use the site less often than once a week)<sup>23</sup>. However, the reasons given for registering with Open to Export do not vary significantly with the above defined frequency of use.

**Figure 9: Size of super users**



Note: Bases for medium (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) enterprises are very small (21 and 13 observations, respectively), so findings on these groupings must be interpreted with caution. However, medium-sized enterprises are significantly more likely to be super users than other sized companies (10% confidence level).

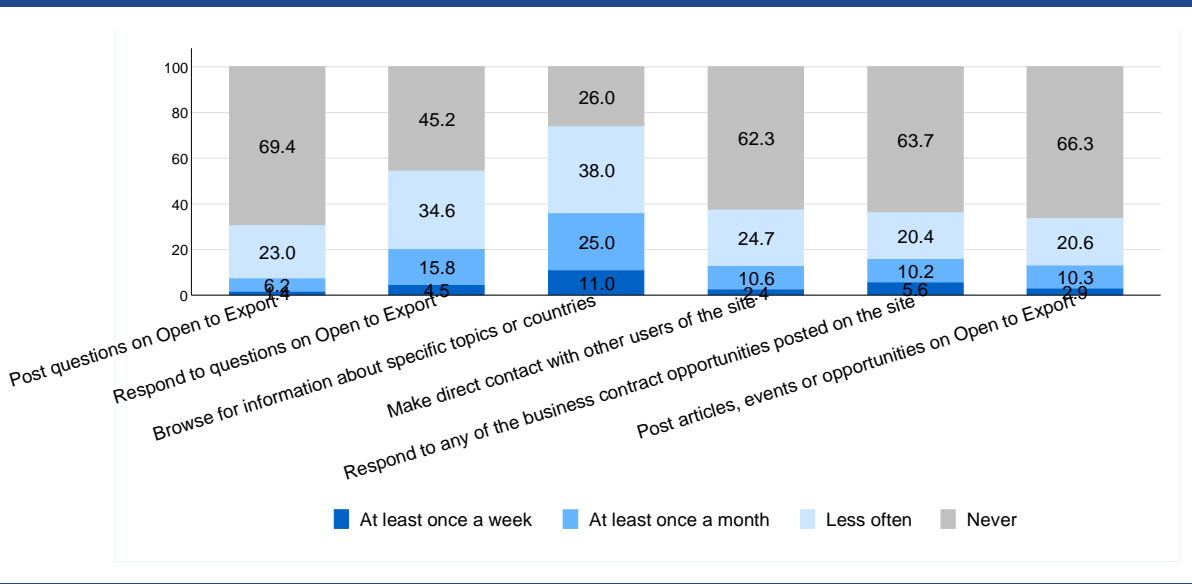
**Source: London Economics**

Super users tend to use all functions of OtE more frequently than the average user – the difference is particularly large (and statistically significant at the 1% level) with regard to responding to business contract opportunities, browsing for information, and responding to questions. This underlines the importance of this user group for the overall level of activity on OtE.

<sup>22</sup> That “a small number of very active users make most of the contributions” is a recurring feature in online peer-to-peer networks. See for example Wilkinson, D. M. (2008). ‘Strong regularities in online peer production’. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1rXPUAL> [accessed 13 November 2014].

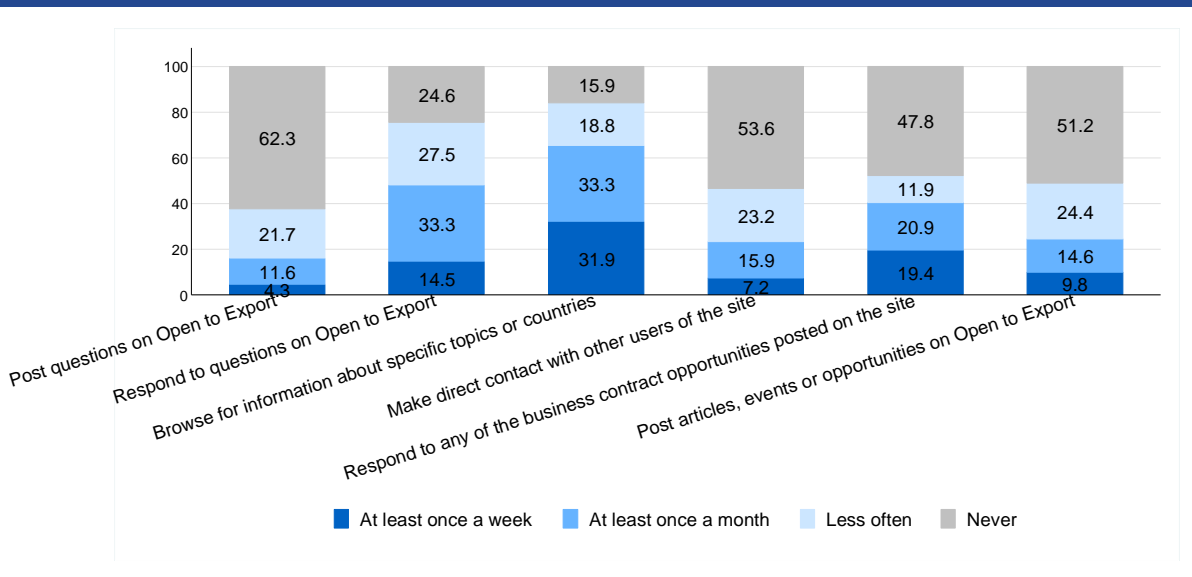
<sup>23</sup> Significant at the 10% confidence level

Figure 10: Usage pattern of all users



Source: London Economics

Figure 11: Usage pattern of super users



Note: Super users are significantly more likely to post question (1% level); respond to questions (0.1% level); browse for information (0.1% level); make direct contact with other users (1% level); respond to business contract opportunities (0.1% level); and post articles (5% level), at least once a month.

Source: London Economics

## 4 Function, user satisfaction and impact of Open to Export

### Box 3: Impact of Open to Export – key insights

- Open to Export combines characteristics of a news site with those of a content platform and a community Q&A platform.
- Stakeholders give an overall positive assessment of OtE: “You can’t make it any easier for firms to export.”
- Some stakeholders take issue with certain aspects of the site (no centralised quality control, few 'peers' giving advice) that reflect its hybrid setup.
- The number of users is seen as 'unacceptably small'. Increasing the number of users and promoting the site are seen as high priorities.
- Some stakeholders voiced doubts about UK Trade & Investment's commitment to OtE.
- The most important role for users of Open to Export is as a source of factual information. Individuals registered as service providers consider finding potential customer and promoting their business as more important.
- A small number of users are responsible for a lot of the information provided on the site. Setting incentives for high quality and continued engagement of the core of 'super users' has to be part of the strategy for OtE.
- Currently, the incentives for content providers are unclear. This risks alienating important segments of the user population and endangers the success of OtE.
- Greater satisfaction with the OtE websites is related to greater usage of the platform. However, a significant proportion of companies that use the OtE platform at least once a month (44.4%) are very dissatisfied with the quality of responses to their questions.
- Super users' primary source when looking for information on exporting or selling services to exporters is Open to Export, while it is the fifth most used source by infrequent users. In general, super users appear to have a stronger connection with UKTI (their second most popular source of information) and their first point of contact with OtE.
- Web search is significantly more important as a first point of contact with OtE for super users than infrequent users. Infrequent users are more likely to have heard of OtE through colleagues, other websites and other organisations than super users.
- Users of Open to Export expect a wide range of business benefits from using the site, although mostly the benefits are not ascribed to the use of the site exclusively. Super users are more likely to experience or expect to experience benefits from OtE, across all impact measures. Moreover, they are more likely to attribute the benefit to OtE.

This section looks at the overall benefits attributed to OtE by users and how the sites impacts on business performance. The first insight emerging from conversations with stakeholders (service providers) is that different types of impacts are emphasised by different users. This indeterminacy has to be seen as a feature of the site: Open to Export allows variety of modes of interaction, with

some users treating it as a reference tool to locate factual information on export related topics or news about events and services offered outside the site, while others perceive it as a social network or a channel to promote their own (commercial or free/subsidised) services. Different expectations and different engagement levels determine the perception of benefits from using the site.

Finally, the impact of the site depends in subtle ways on minute decisions by the OtE operators regarding the site's functionality, layout and communication strategy. Emphasising certain features (e.g. the networking aspect of the site) potentially shapes user behaviour and impacts in a way that does not completely coincide with the sites functions in the abstract. The potential tension between what the site is and what it is intended to be is likely to be of ongoing interest as OtE develops.

This section therefore pursues three different angles to illuminate the impact of Open to Export, both potential and realised:

1. the impact as seen by selected service providers (based on the stakeholder consultation);
2. the impact as implied by the observed characteristics of the site; and
3. the impact as seen by users (based on the user survey).

### 4.1 Benefits reported by stakeholders

#### 4.1.1 Types of benefits

The first thing to note is that the individuals that were interviewed as part of the stakeholder consultation, who are heavily involved on OtE as service providers, do not consider the site in terms of the wider economic rationale outlined in Section 0 above. Instead, benefits were framed in terms of OtE addressing specific business needs and in terms of successes of OtE as a platform (as opposed to the wider benefits users may gain from it).

In terms of addressing business needs, interviewees highlighted the general desirability of OtE, without connecting the direct benefits experienced by users with efficiency or market failure considerations. The rationale for Open to Export was thus defined more narrowly: many businesses don't know where to get information on exporting. OtE addresses this problem by providing advice from experts that is unbiased, impartial, good quality and free.

A second benefit of OtE is that it provides a platform that allows service providers to build their reputation. This line of reasoning presupposes that viable business models for independent export consultants exist. Again, the desirability of this in terms of efficient use of public funds was not considered.

An efficiency-based argument was made in terms of the role of OtE within the wider support infrastructure that is available to UK businesses. OtE was seen as complementing other sources of information (examples included banks as well as other websites – “no one source on its own is sufficient”.) In this regard, one interviewee also pointed out that OtE functioned as a substitute for Business Link, which was discontinued in 2012. Various other ‘benefits’ of the site mentioned by

interviewees are quality features<sup>24</sup>, such as the availability of authoritative speakers in webinars offered on the site, and the function as a signpost for available funding opportunities.

From a broader perspective, OtE was seen as successful in lowering the bar for prospective exporters: “You can’t make it any easier for firms to export”. However, the main theme of respondents when asked about metrics of success of Open to Export was the success of the site as a platform, i.e. success on its own terms, irrespective of impact on users.

When asked how the success of OtE should be measured, interviewees mentioned the following factors:

- activity on the site;
- number of users;
- success stories;
- feed back/quality rating for content/responses (however, one interviewee pointed out that often firms don’t know what they don’t know/what would be the right question to ask and can’t judge the quality of answers).

#### 4.1.2 Assessment

The interviews overall gave a positive assessment of Open to Export. In part, this may reflect the role of the interviewees, who see themselves as service delivery partners, in some cases having commercial interest in the success of the site.

The factor that contributes to the positive view of OtE above all is that it is seen as filling a gap in the market: there is nothing like OtE, and other websites are no substitute. More precisely, OtE is seen as a powerful tool for fostering interaction between companies. While UKTI’s visible involvement is seen as important for the credibility of the site, the fact that it gets people to interact directly in an export-related forum is seen as the key innovation of OtE.

However, the assessment by stakeholders was varied and contained some elements of substantial criticism. Several observations pointed to question marks that still hang over the concept of Open to Export as a means of harnessing the collective expertise of the UK’s export sector in order to overcome barriers to exporting, in particular for SMEs. Several interviewees highlighted structural problems with the site. For example, while it is easy to find the site through search, this tends to attract users with specific questions, often after having received an order from overseas, who now need help with executing the order. The way users find the site may thus militate against a sustained engagement, which is needed to create the network of exporting expertise that is seen as the greatest promise of the site.

In the same vein, the site is perceived as user-friendly, but requires a high level of engagement in order to get the maximum benefit out of it.

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<sup>24</sup> While these are not economic benefits as such, much less net benefits, there is evidence (see PIMS secondary analysis) that quality perceptions are a useful predictor of impact.

Several interviewees also highlighted the tension that arises from the ‘community-based’ model for information dissemination adopted by Open to Export. In particular, the quality of questions and answers was raised as a concern by several interviewees. The social situation created by the site (where users may form opinions about each other that could spill over into business interactions outside OtE) may lead to companies not asking the right questions, including “for fear that they look stupid”.

Concerns were also raised by some about the commercial motivation for some of the interactions on the site. As one interviewee put it, a lot of ‘so-called experts’ (often forwarding agents) use the site to promote themselves when they are not really qualified to answer questions.

Conversely, questions posted on OtE are often vague, not least, according to one of the interviews, because “companies don’t know what they don’t know”.

In terms of content, interviewees agreed that factual information was generally of high quality, although a lot of content seems to be duplicated and would be available from other sources (such as the main UK Trade & Investment website and GOV.UK).

On a technical point, one respondent saw the classification of information and the search function as problematic (one interviewee claimed she couldn’t find her own articles on the site).

In comparison, experience with questions was mixed, both because of quality concerns (commercial self-interest leading to people answering questions even where they are not qualified to do so; ‘lazy’ responses referring to official documentation rather than addressing questions individually) and because of a limited number of knowledgeable peer companies on the site. In particular, one interviewee remarked that certain types of questions may best be answered by a peer company rather than a ‘specialist’. For example, questions about exporting the same product to many different countries should ideally be answered by a company with experience in the same industry as it would be better placed to provide a good answer than UK Trade & Investment personnel (e.g. through an OMIS) or general ‘export specialists’.

This last point about the underrepresentation of peer companies on OtE is related to what was seen as the biggest problem with Open to Export at this stage: the **“unacceptably small” number of users**. According to the service providers that were interviewed, only about half a dozen people will give good, frequent advice. Overall, interviewees reckoned that around 100 ‘true experts’ are active participants on Open to Export (including UK Trade & Investment staff).

The limited number of users was seen as all the more lamentable because of the large potential user base. In the eyes of the interviewees, “every small business should know about it” and all that was needed was better marketing. One interviewee estimated that the user base could be quadrupled without diluting quality, noting network effects (more users would also attract more service providers, especially freight forwarders). Given that “all we need is a marketing drive”, there was some concern about the **uncertainty about future commitment** to OtE from its initial backers, including UK Trade & Investment, and this was seen as limiting the site’s appeal to service providers.

As a result, the verdict of the service providers that were interviewed in December 2013 is that OtE is **not** self-sustaining in its current form. Further, suppliers and support organisations use it more than exporters; few actual ‘peers’ active on the site answering questions. Instead, a small number of advisors are responsible for a large proportion of responses posted on the site



The implication, for one interviewee, was that OtE may be overemphasising its community aspect: it may not be realistic to expect experienced exporters to answer questions on the site. The purpose of Open to Export as implied by the site's functionality is an interesting question, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

A related problem for the service providers that were interviewed was that Open to Export so far had limited success as a source of enquiries for service providers. Given that the site relies on service providers in the broadest sense (companies and individuals providing information, in the first instance for free), the fragility of Open to Export as a business proposition may be a case for concern for the site's operators.

## 4.2 The functions of Open to Export

The success of Open to Export needs to be assessed in relation to what it sets out to achieve. This section looks at the functionality of Open to Export and how well it is adapted to the functions it is ostensibly designed for.

Looking at the Open to Export homepage, one can easily distinguish features that suggest certain type of use (see Table 4). In particular, OtE in its current incarnation<sup>25</sup> combines characteristics of three kinds of website:

- a **news site** providing short updates and news on upcoming events;
- a **community Q&A platform** where individual users can post and answer questions and engage in discussions;
- a **content platform** that acts as an indexed repository of factual information from different sources.

Table 4: Typology of features on Open to Export

The screenshot shows the Open to Export homepage with several key features highlighted by arrows pointing to labels on the right:

- News site:** Points to the 'Global Jump-start Competition' banner and the 'Winners Announced!' graphic.
- Community Q&A platform:** Points to the 'Recent questions' and 'Latest activity' sections.
- Content platform:** Points to the 'Browse topics' section, which lists various categories like E-commerce, Finance, and Operations.

To the right of the screenshot is a diagram of three interlocking blue gears. The top gear is labeled 'News site', the bottom-left gear is 'Content platform', and the bottom-right gear is 'Community Q&A platform'. Arrows indicate a clockwise flow between the gears.

Source: LE/Open to Export

<sup>25</sup> Initially, OtE also contained an online market place allowing suppliers to showcase their services directly on the site. This feature was dropped before the start of this study in 2012.

Comparison with other websites serving a similar niche<sup>26</sup> show that OtE is unique in its exclusive focus on export topics and the combination of features (although there are other export-focused websites and individual features are shared by many websites). For example, compared with [globaltrade.net](#) and [Enterprise Europe Network](#), OtE placed greater emphasis on peer-to-peer communication as opposed to top-down information provision. While the peer-to-peer element is also central, [bizcrowd.com](#) is focused on business in the broadest sense, with no specific offer for exporters. Other elements, like newsfeeds, personalisation (e.g. profile pictures of users), endorsements by third parties (e.g. companies, industry or government bodies), embedded social media (Twitter feeds) are shared by other sites to varying degree. The comparison of different websites identified no linkages between Open to Export and other business platforms.

The user survey carried out for this study confirms that the most important role for users of Open to Export is as a source of factual information. Individuals registered as service providers consider finding potential customer and promoting their business as more important.

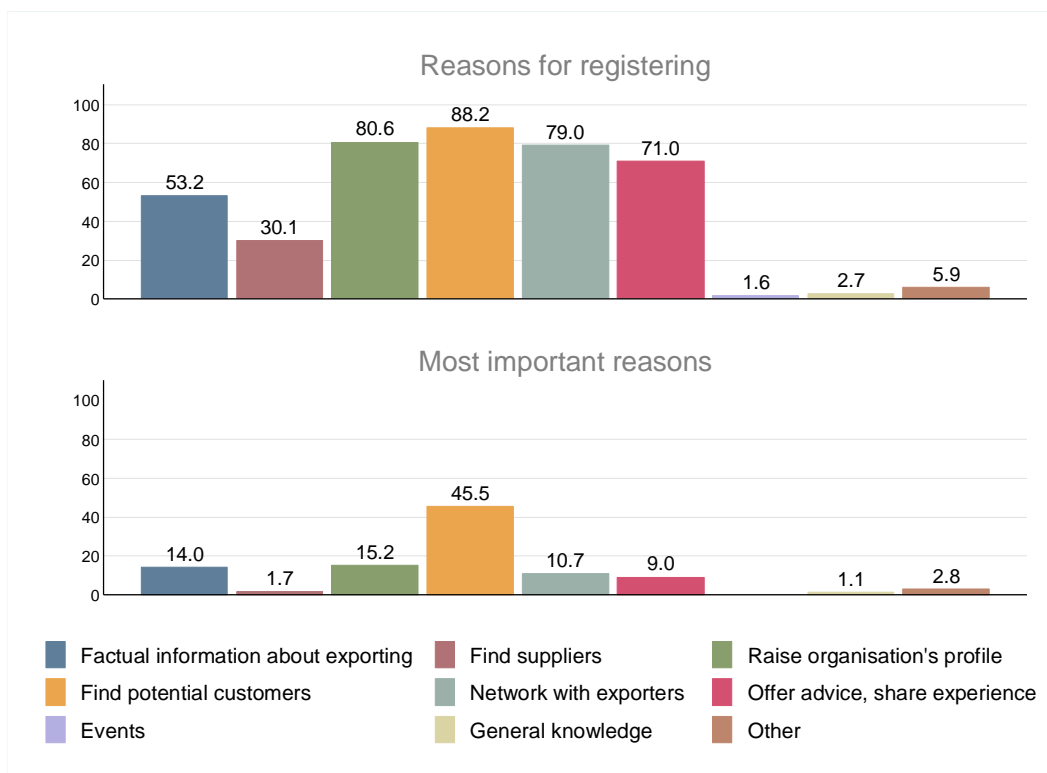
Figure 12: Reasons for registering with OtE – EXPORTERS (N = 123)



Source: London Economics

<sup>26</sup> Such as bizcrowd.com, globaltrade.net, Enterprise Europe Network (<http://een.ec.europa.eu/>) and the erstwhile BusinessLink.

Figure 13: Reasons for registering with OtE – SERVICE PROVIDERS (N = 186)



Source: London Economics

### 4.3 Implications of the function mix

The combination of different functions seen on Open to Export is unusual. Moreover, different functions place different demands on Open to Export. For example, pure news sites typically limit user interaction, content platforms apply strict filters and often standardise content, Q&A platforms rely heavily on user quality ratings etc. Each of the functions has a different logic, with implications for UKTI's strategy.

#### 4.3.1 Open to Export as a news site

OtE provides **time-sensitive information** on events, UKTI programmes, etc. This function of OtE as a news site is in many ways the most straightforward: OtE serves as an aggregator for existing content (that would otherwise be publicised elsewhere). Providing this information in one place in an easily accessible manner OtE adds value to the site at little additional cost to UKTI.

#### 4.3.2 OtE as a content platform

OtE provides access to factual information, how-to guides, etc. and thus acts as a content platform for export related content. As such, OtE provides value to the less engaged part of the OtE user population, many of whom don't engage with the interactive functions of the site.

The function of online content platforms (of which there are many, with Wikipedia probably the best known example) is to overcome the information overload that often mars the search for relevant information online.

Successful content platforms share two crucial features:

- They **maximise accessibility** through search (e.g., Google serves de facto as the search bar for Wikipedia).
  - The requirements of OtE as a news site provide another justification for UKTI's contribution of content, mainly as it contributes to the volume of new information available on the site (including time sensitive information like notifications of upcoming events).
- They restrict content to a specific format that may make it harder to add content (but not necessarily), but it makes it much **easier to digest**.
  - For OtE, standardisation of content is currently lacking. Improving the usefulness of content, for example by creating style-sheets/standard formats for content submissions, may be worthwhile (based on the example of successful online platforms for (both official and user-generated) content).

### 4.3.3 Open to Export as a Q&A platform

Regarding the function of OtE as a Q&A platform, our research identified a number of indicative lessons from the economic literature. Wu and He (2013)<sup>27</sup> suggest that different types of Q&A platforms are not equally suited to all types of questions:

*“Community-based Q&A (cQA) sites are better at enumerative questions and definition questions, but questions requiring more professional and factual knowledge generated fewer responses (such as factual questions) or less accurate answers (such as explorative questions). Therefore, cQA sites are probably better suited for answering questions about everyday life or questions with simple answers.”*

For sites where responses are provided by experts, *“the number of answers (...) [is] relatively low and their time delays are often higher in comparison to that of cQA sites. This is compensated for by the expertise (...), by the authority and extensive information sources under their control, so that the sites in the end can produce higher quality answers”*.

Both weaknesses can create user dissatisfaction. It appears that at this stage, OtE is geared towards an expert model. This has implications for the site's strategy. There is a tension between attracting experts who are able to provide high-quality answers and a broader outreach strategy built around accessibility and low-threshold interactions. Moreover, experts still require engagement and motivation.

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<sup>27</sup> Wu, D. And He, D. (2013). 'A Study on Q&A Services Between Community-based Question Answering and Collaborative Digital Reference in Two Languages'. Paper presented at iConference 2013 February 12-15, 2013 Fort Worth, TX, USA. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1x7tmgh> [accessed 03 June 2014].

According to Pal et al. (2011)<sup>28</sup>, “question answering communities (QA) are sustained by a handful of experts who provide a large number of high quality answers.” These individuals are characterised by *motivation* and *ability* to help others. This suggests that OtE managers should identify and take steps to develop and retain these potential experts.

In order to keep experts motivated, the literature mentions the idea of ‘**gamification**’, e.g. the awarding of points, badges or other visible status upgrade for true/certified experts. Li et al. (2012)<sup>29</sup> state that: “Since users participate in these communities voluntarily, it is [of] utmost important to incentivize users to maintain consistent engagement. Gamification seems to be a solution to alleviate the incentive problem.” Li et al. (2012) find that “badges seem to motivate users to contribute more in all types of activities”. A similar result is reported by Choi et al. (2013)<sup>30</sup> for ‘user reward points’ on Yahoo! Answers.

The question of gamification appears to be important for OtE, given its reliance on experts who do not currently obtain substantial financial benefits from participating in OtE. Over the period we investigated, this was clearly an area for improvement.

A further issue in relation to specialists providing advice on Open to Exports is the nature of their expertise: A study by Gazan (2006)<sup>31</sup> finds that “**Specialists** (...) claim expertise in a given topic and answer questions without referencing other sources, and **synthesists** as those who include one or more references to external sources in their answers. The results of the study suggest that (...) the answers of synthesists tended to be rated more highly than those of specialists, though answers provided by specialists were rated more highly within certain categories.”

**Table 5: Preference for answers by ‘specialists’ and ‘synthesists’**

Number of categories with both specialist and synthesist answers	45
Categories in which specialist answers were most strongly preferred (% rating difference)	Parenting (+9.9%), divorce law (+9.1%), criminal law (+9.1%), taxes (+9.0%), Mormon religion (+7.8%), relationships (+7.5%)
Categories in which synthesist answers were most strongly preferred (% rating difference)	Drugs & medicine (+8.5%), science (+8.1%), travel (+7.2%), home remedies (+7.2%), fashion (+6.8%)

Source: Gazan (2006).

This poses the question in which category export knowledge falls. Further insights into the nature of export specialism and the relationship between the type of specialist knowledge and user satisfaction are potentially very important when assessing quality ratings as a tool for incentivising specialists, for example. Based on Gazan (2006), assuming that legal questions are important in the context of exporting would suggest that ‘specialists’ will attract higher quality ratings than ‘synthesists’, possibly regardless of the quality of the synthesist answer provided.

<sup>28</sup> Pal, A., Farzan, R., Konstan, J. A. and Kraut, R. E. (2011). 'Early detection of potential experts in question answering communities'. In K, J. A. et al. (eds.) UMAP 2011, LNCS 6787, pp. 231-242. Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg.

<sup>29</sup> Li, Z., Huang, K. and Cavusoglu, H. (2012) 'Quantifying the Impact of Badges on User Engagement in Online Q&A Communities'. Paper presented at ICIS2012. Available at: <http://bit.ly/UbJE98> [accessed 02 February 2014].

<sup>30</sup> Choi, E., Kitzie, V. and Shah, C. (2013). “10 points for the best answer!” – Baiting for explicating knowledge contributions within online Q&A’. ASIST 2013, November 1-6, 2013, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1ISLPER> [accessed 15 April 2014].

<sup>31</sup> Gazan, R. (2006). 'Specialists and Synthesists in a Question Answering Community'. . In 69th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST), Austin (US), 3-8 November 2006. Available at: <http://eprints.rclis.org/8793/> [accessed 12 December 2013].

Another important determinant of quality of the Q&A component of OtE is the speed with which questions are answered<sup>32</sup>. This suggests that an 'answering speed' metric could be part of a potential incentive structure for specialists.

However, the functioning of a Q&A platform depends not only on the individuals answering questions, but also on those seeking answers. An interesting insight is supplied by Gazan (2007): "*members were able to distinguish between homework questions submitted by "seekers" operationalized in the study as those who interact with the community and engage in conversation about their questions, and "sloths," those who post their homework questions apparently verbatim from the assignment and interact no further.*"<sup>33</sup>

**A prevalence of 'sloths' would be a poor outcome for OtE:** "*Although SQA may lend itself to "drive-by" visitors who enter the site to seek a single piece of information then never return, several studies have found that it is the long term participants who create value in SQA sites, personify site norms, earn social capital, and have a strong influence on answer quality assessment.*"<sup>34</sup> OtE's strategy should therefore encourage/facilitate long-term participation. Doubts about long-term commitment to the site by UK Trade & Investment (as mentioned by stakeholders, see above) are counterproductive.

### 4.4 Survey evidence on user satisfaction

Satisfaction with the service offered is potentially a very important indicator of impact. Analysis of UK Trade & Investment's PIMS data has consistently demonstrated a link between (perceived) service quality and impact<sup>35</sup>. This section summarises the insights about user satisfaction based on the survey carried out for this study.

Satisfaction with the website is unrelated to company size (Figure 15), while companies that intend to grow are somewhat less satisfied with answers to questions (Figure 16). In addition, companies with a written business plan are more likely to have been satisfied with their experience of Open to Export (Figure 17)<sup>36</sup>. Since previous research<sup>37</sup> found a significant relationship between a company having a written business plan and a positive effect from using support services, these findings suggest that the overall experience of the site is slightly better for companies with better prospects. Satisfaction scores are higher for exporters than for service providers (Figure 15).

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<sup>32</sup> See Gazan, R. (2011): "the speed with which answers are received is an important component of the popularity of SQA sites and user satisfaction." Gazan, R. (2011). 'Social Q&A'. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, 62(12), 2301-2312.

<sup>33</sup> Gazan, R. (2007). 'Seekers, Sloths and Social Reference: Homework Questions Submitted to a Question Answering Community'. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, 13(2), 239-248.

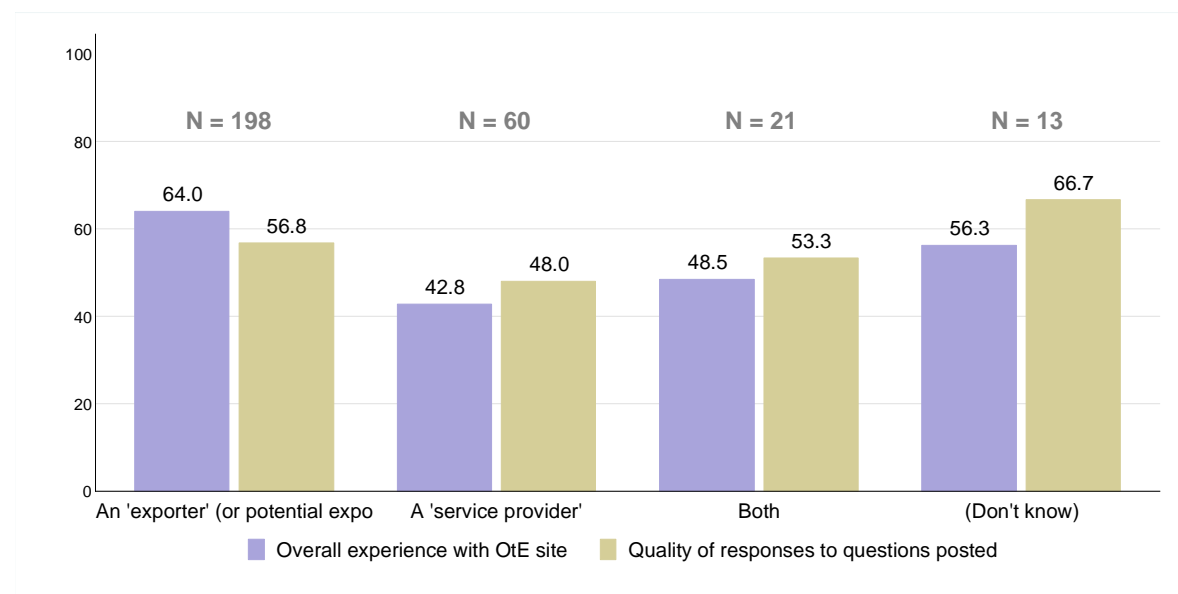
<sup>34</sup> Gazan (2011).

<sup>35</sup> See London Economics (2013). 'Secondary analysis of data from UKTI Performance and Impact Monitoring Survey (PIMS)'. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1kQ2QOB> [accessed 30 May 2014].

<sup>36</sup> In the current survey, the difference is not statistically significant.

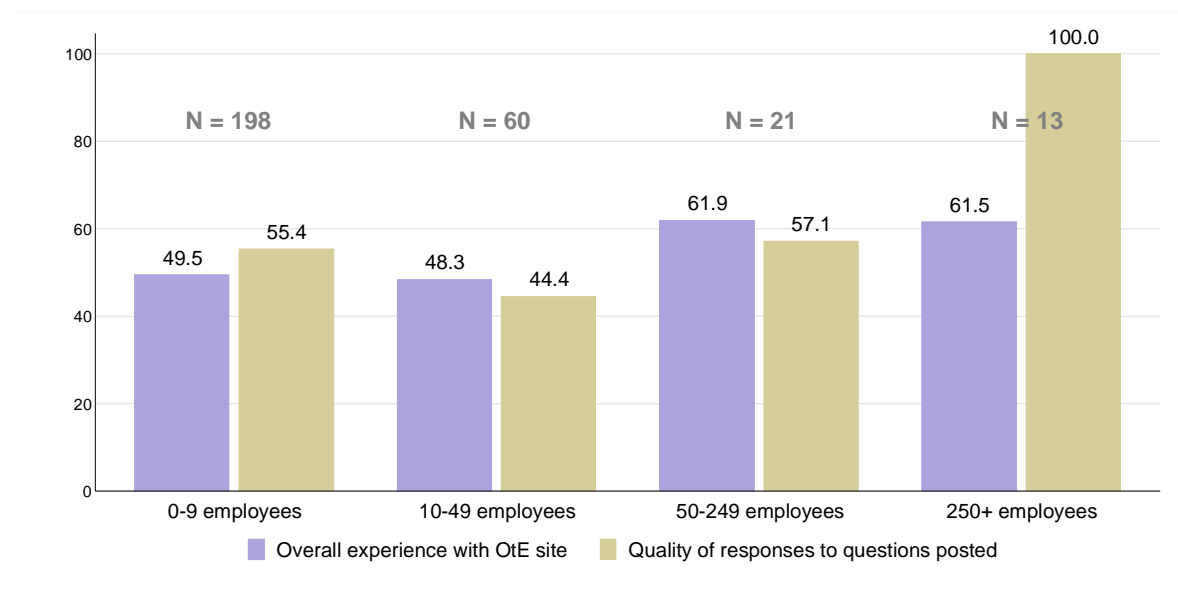
<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 14: Open to Export satisfaction by client type**



Source: London Economics

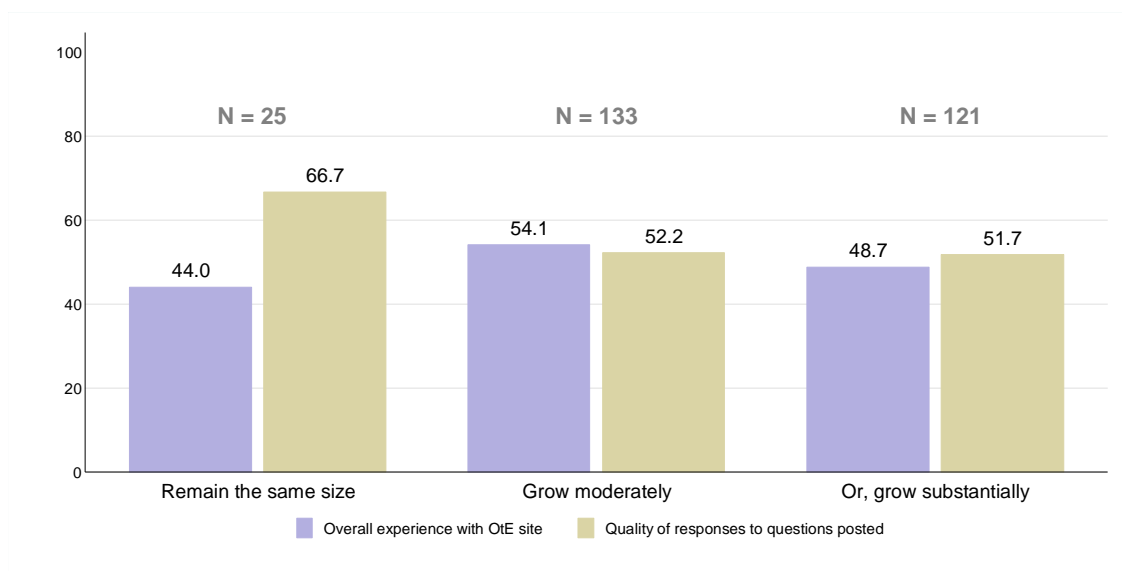
**Figure 15: Open to Export satisfaction ratings by firm size**



Note: Bases for medium (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) enterprises are very small (21 and 13 observations, respectively), so findings on these groupings must be interpreted with caution. Differences across size groups are not statistically significant.

Source: London Economics

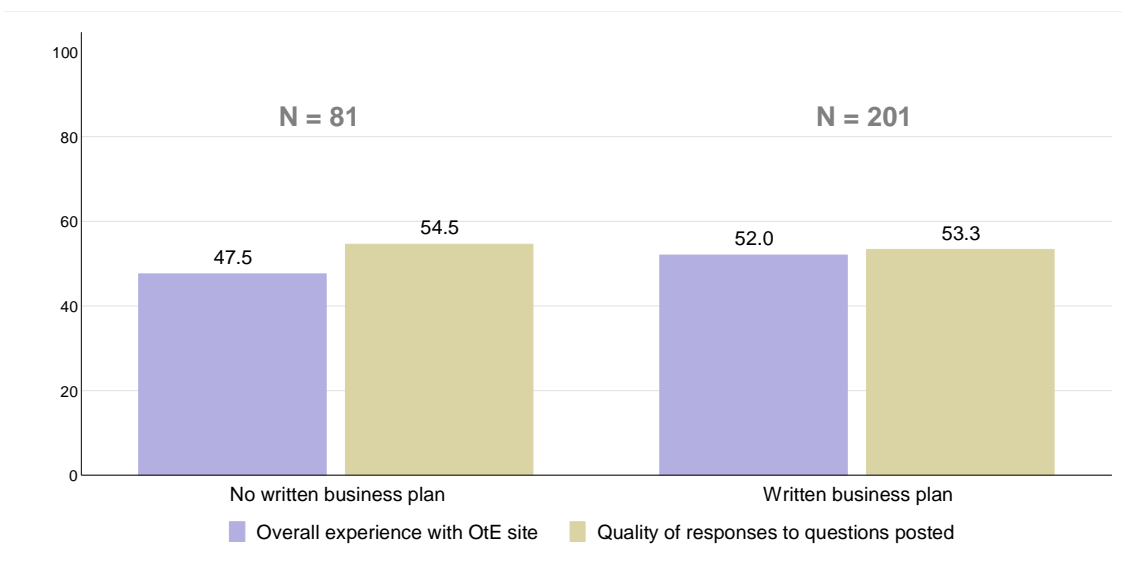
**Figure 16: Open to Export satisfaction ratings by growth objectives**



Note: Satisfaction ratings are not significantly different for companies with differing growth objectives.

Source: London Economics

**Figure 17: Open to Export satisfaction ratings by written business plan**



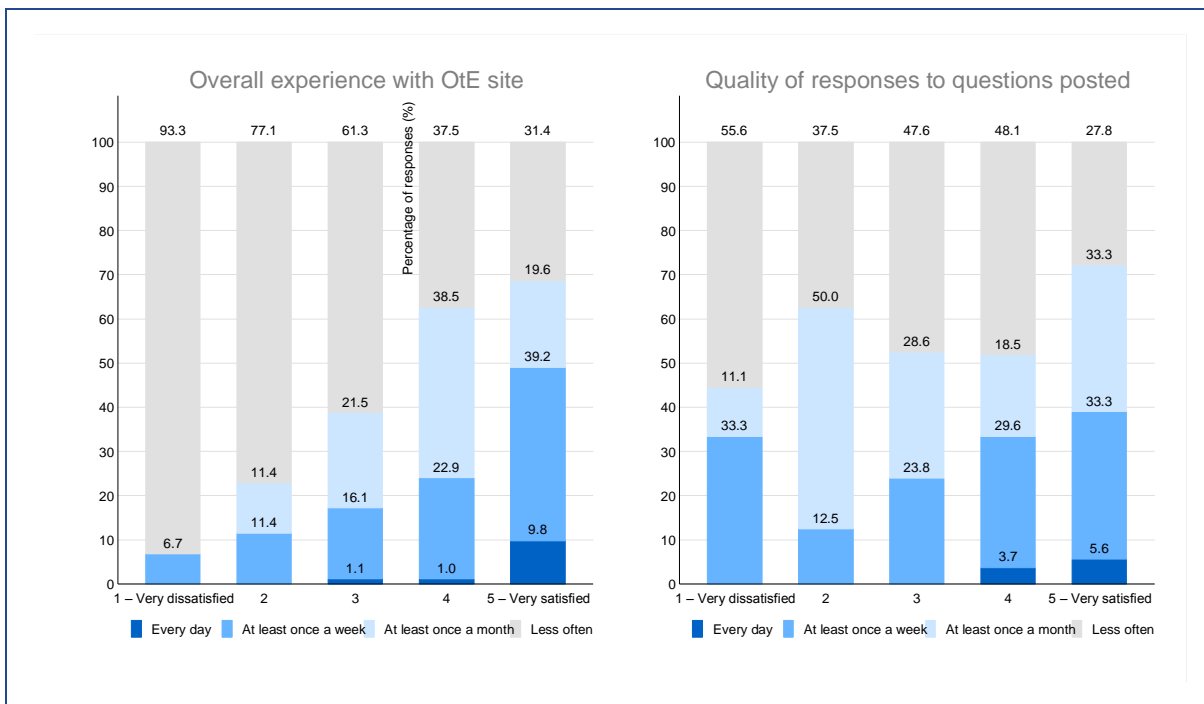
Note: Differences are not statistically significant.

Source: London Economics

Greater satisfaction with the OtE websites is related to greater usage of the platform. However, a significant proportion of companies that use the OtE platform at least once a month (44.4%) are very dissatisfied with the quality of responses to their questions.

**Figure 18: Frequency of use and satisfaction**





Source: London Economics

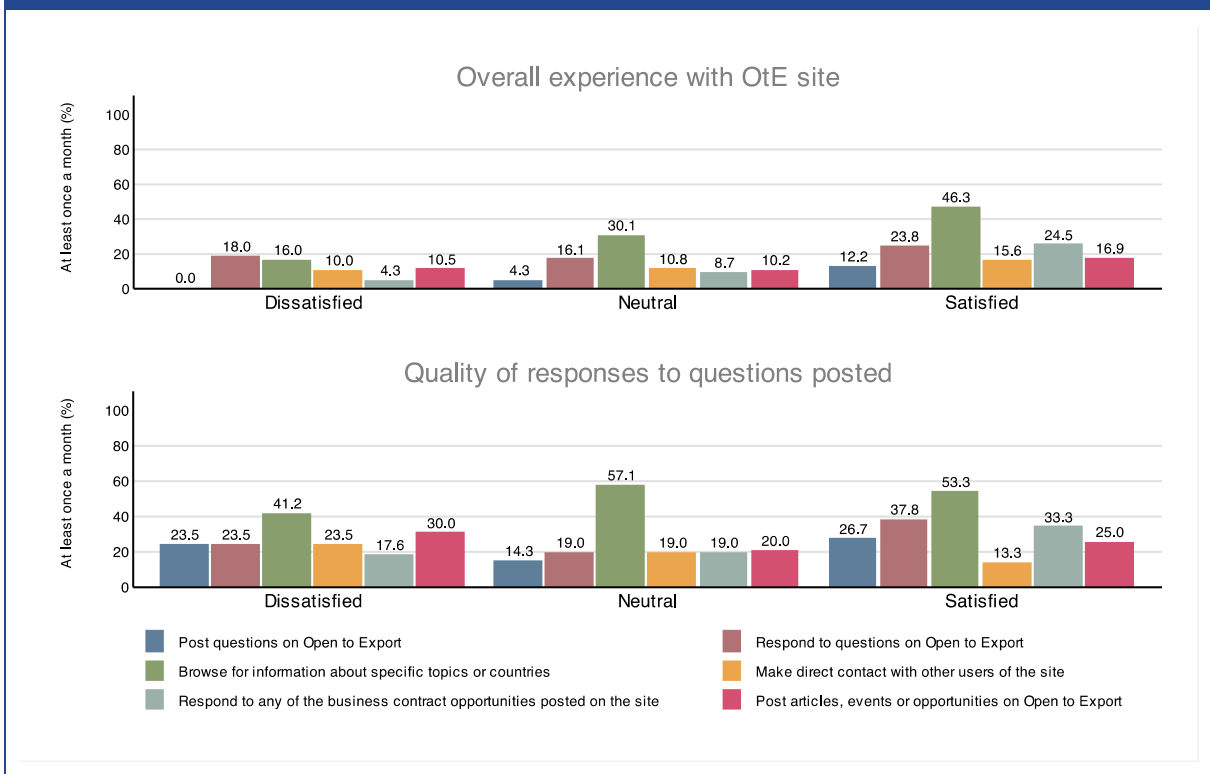
**Table 6: Proportion of dissatisfied, neutral and satisfied users**

Feature of OtE	Dissatisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Satisfied (%)	Observations
Experience with OtE site	17.2	32.1	50.7	290
Responses to questions posted	20.5	25.3	54.2	83

Source: London Economics

Users that are satisfied and use OtE frequently are significantly more likely to respond to business opportunities posted on the site.

Figure 19: Usage pattern and satisfaction



Note: satisfied users are significantly more likely to respond to business contract opportunities posted on the site (0.1% confidence level)

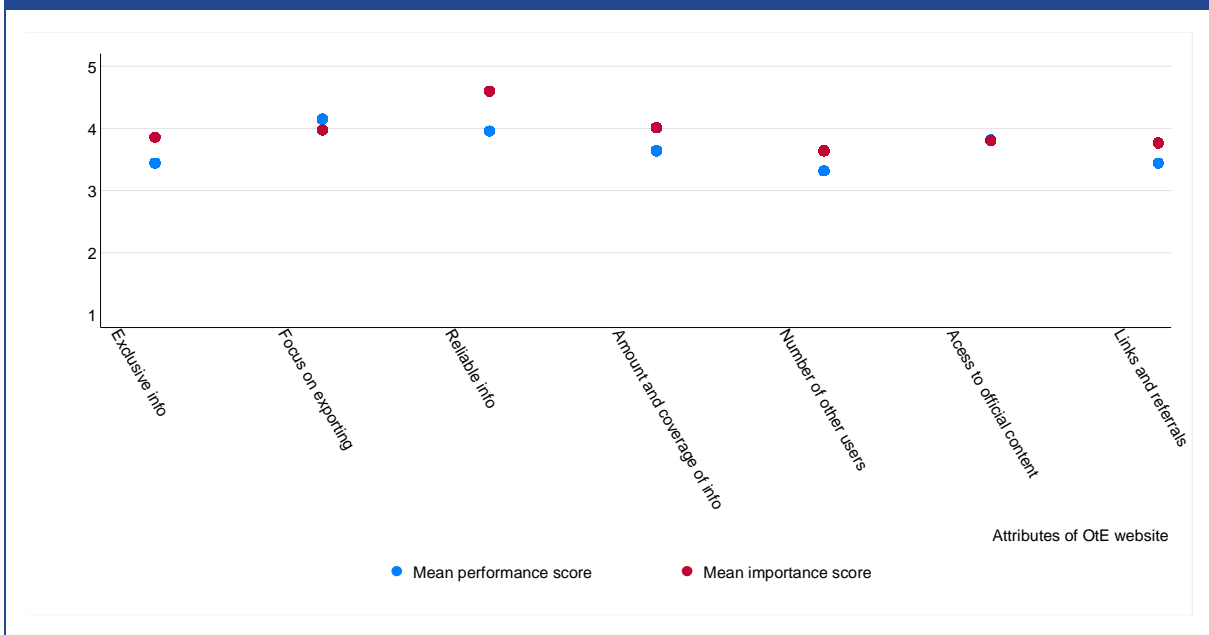
Source: London Economics

#### 4.4.1 Impact of expectations shortfall on satisfaction

On average, scores given to performance of OtE on various attributes are lower than the perceived importance of the attribute<sup>38</sup>. This is particularly evident in relation to reliability of information, exclusivity of information, number of other users and quality of links and referrals.

<sup>38</sup> The difference is statistically significant at the 10% confidence level.

Figure 20: Perceived importance of OtE attributes vs reported performance

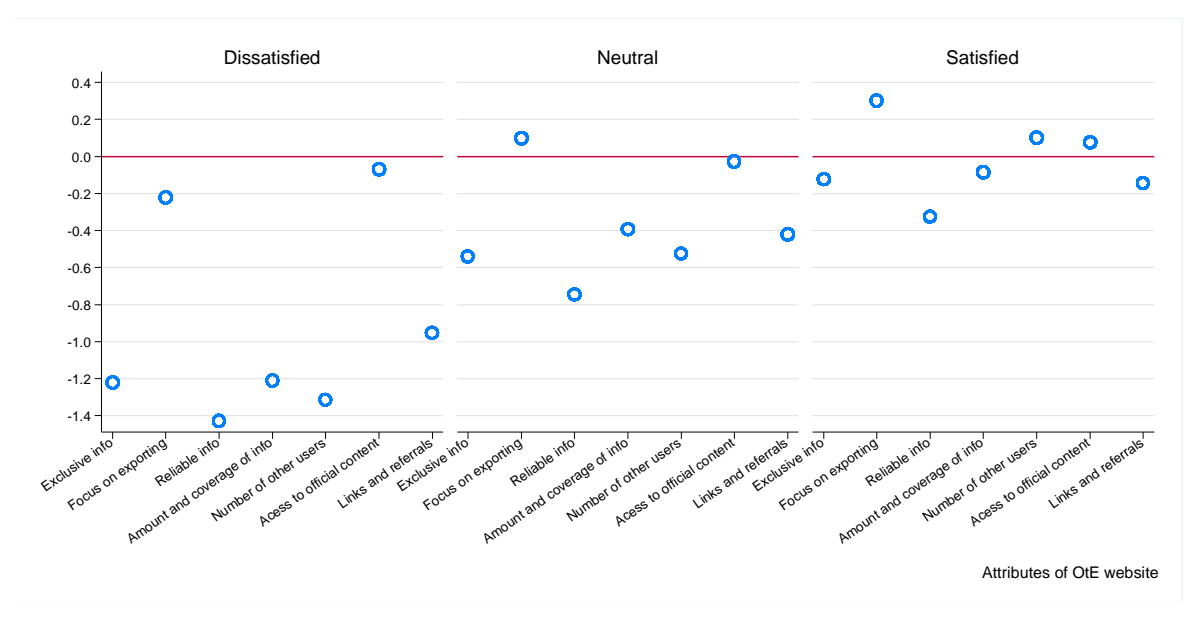


Note: Mean is always above 3. On average, reported performance is significantly lower than perceived importance (10% confidence level).

Source: London Economics

In Figure 21, each circle in the negative region (below the red line at 0) indicates a shortfall in performance relative to perceived importance for different features of the site (the score for performance given by respondents is lower than the score for importance, on average). It appears that the shortfall in performance relative to perceived importance is associated with greater dissatisfaction (more negative items in the left-hand panel). In other words, users who are dissatisfied experience a mismatch between how important a feature is for them and how it is executed on Open to Export.

Figure 21: Shortfall in performance relative to perceived importance, and user satisfaction

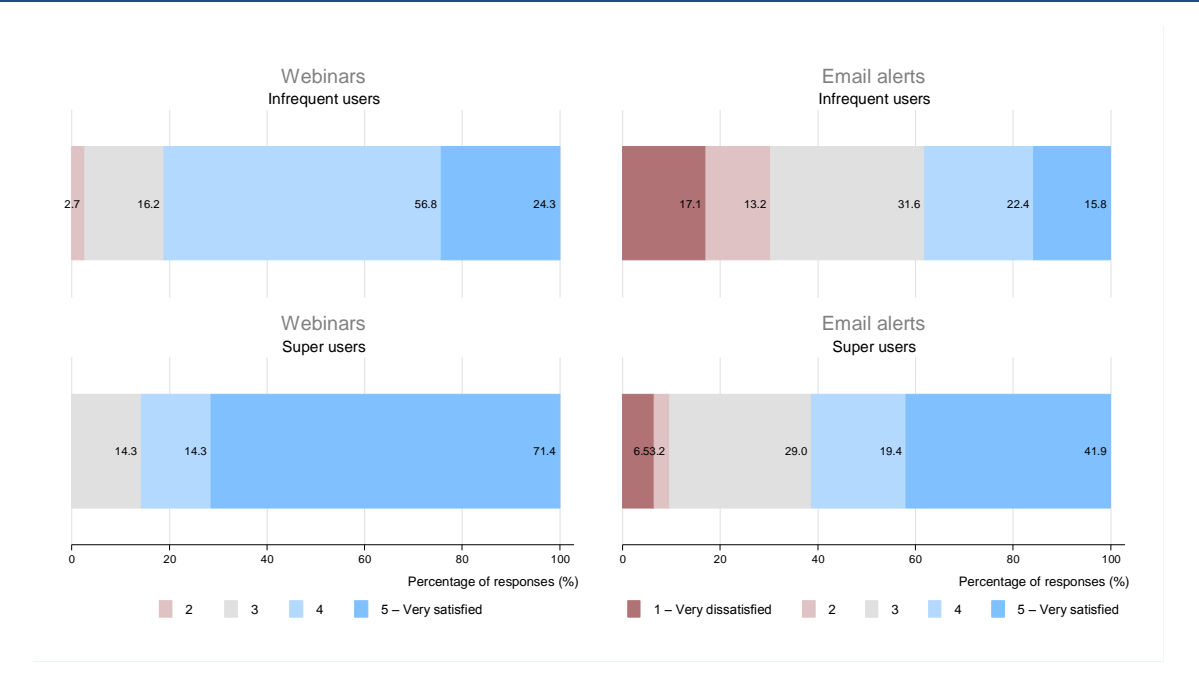


Note: users who perceive a larger gap between performance and importance are significantly more dissatisfied with the OTE website (0.1% level).

Source: London Economics

Figure 22 shows that infrequent users tend to be more dissatisfied with the email alerts that are optionally provided by OTE<sup>39</sup>.

Figure 22: Rating of webinars and email alerts – infrequent and super users

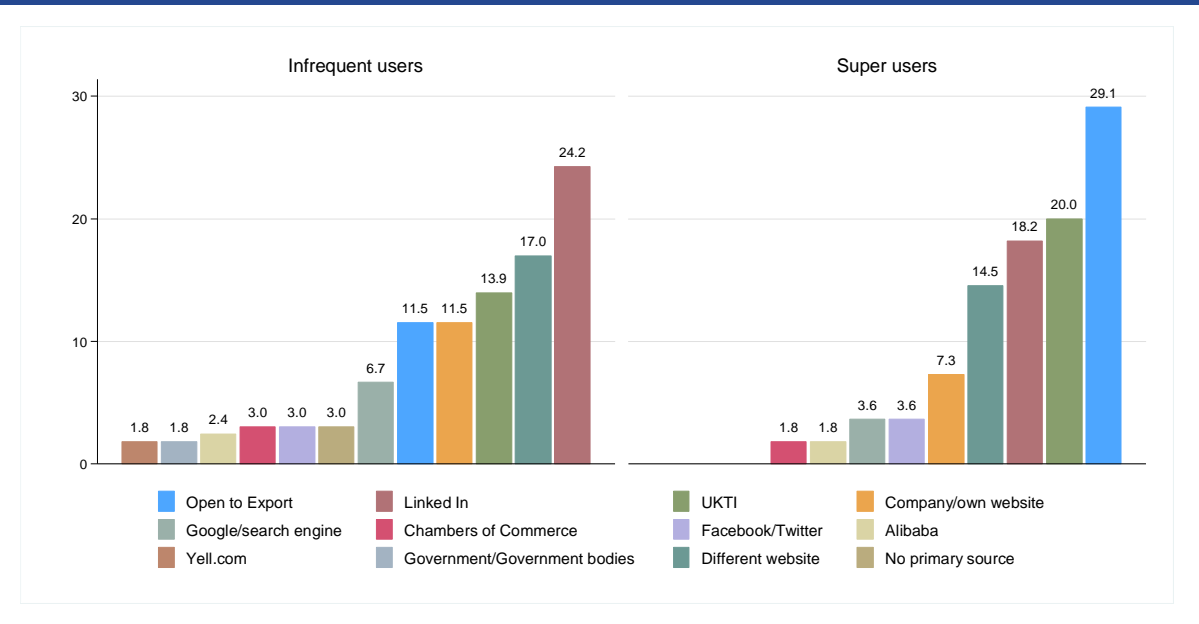


<sup>39</sup> Though the difference is not statistically significant (only 3 out of 31 super users are dissatisfied).

Source: London Economics

Super users' primary source when looking for information on exporting or selling services to exporters is Open to Export, while it is the fifth most used source by infrequent users. In general, super users appear to have a stronger connection with UKTI, their second most popular source of information, and their first point of contact with OtE<sup>40</sup>.

Figure 23: Primary source of information for infrequent and super users



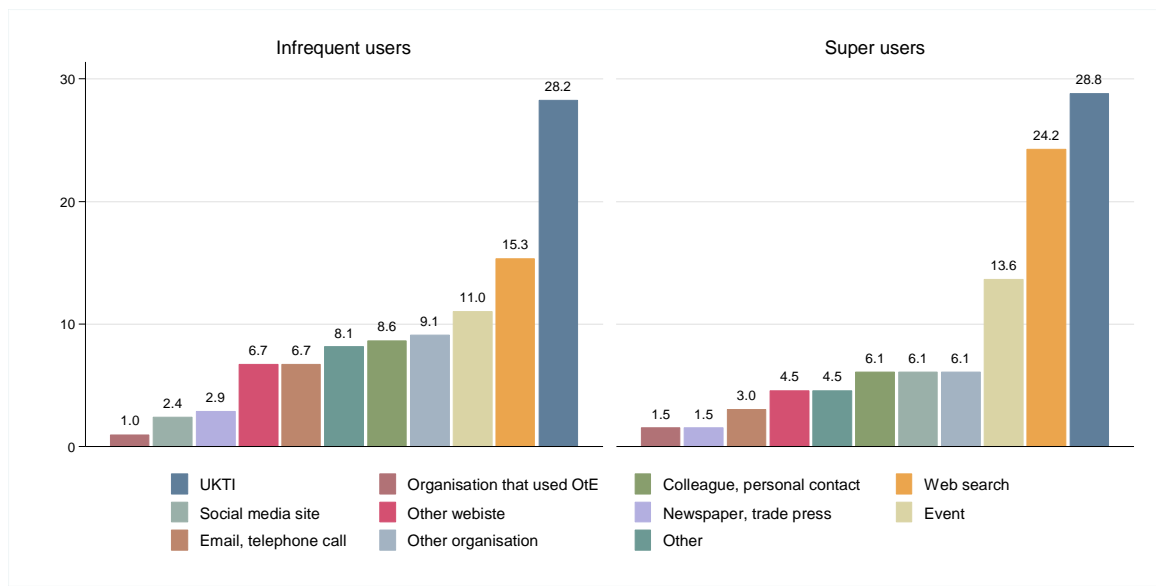
Note: Super users are significantly more likely to use OtE and UKTI as their primary source of information (0.1% confidence level).

Source: London Economics

Web search is significantly more important as a first point of contact with OtE for super users than infrequent users. Infrequent users are more likely to have heard of OtE through colleagues, other websites and other organisations than super users.

<sup>40</sup> UKTI and OtE are significantly more important as a source of information for super users than infrequent users (0.1% confidence level), while UKTI's importance as a first point of contact is not statistically different for super users.

Figure 24: First contact with OtE – infrequent and super users



Note: web search is significantly more important as a first point of contact with OtE for super users than infrequent users (10% confidence level).

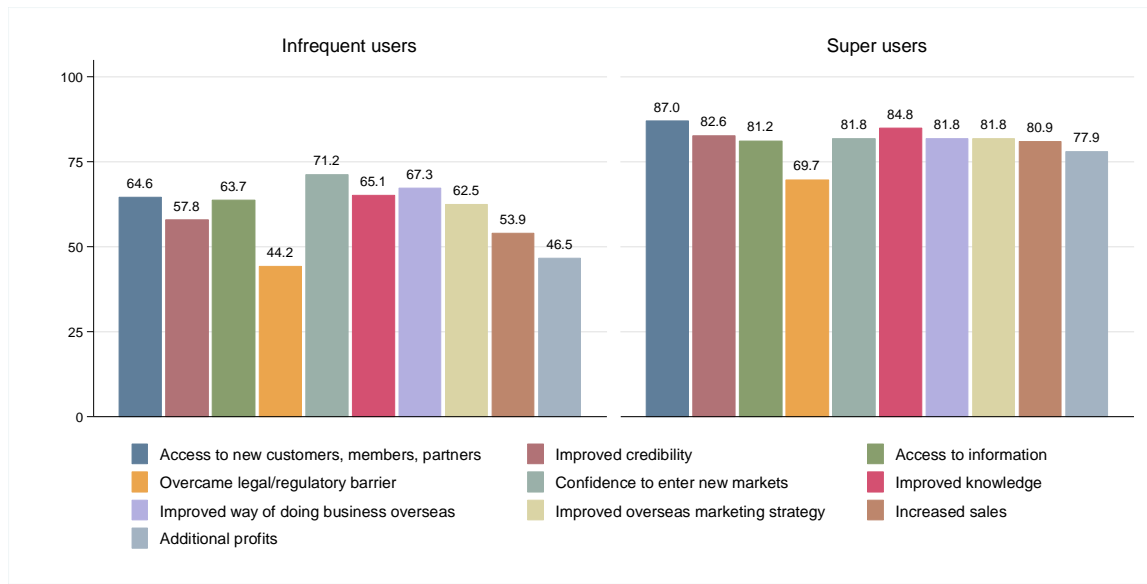
Source: London Economics

#### 4.5 Survey evidence on benefits of Open to Export

Users of Open to Export expect a wide range of business benefits from using the site, although mostly the benefits are not ascribed to the use of the site exclusively. Super users are more likely to experience or expect to experience benefits from OtE, across all impact measures<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, they are more likely to attribute the benefit to OtE.

<sup>41</sup> The difference is statistically significant for most impact measures (see Figure 25)

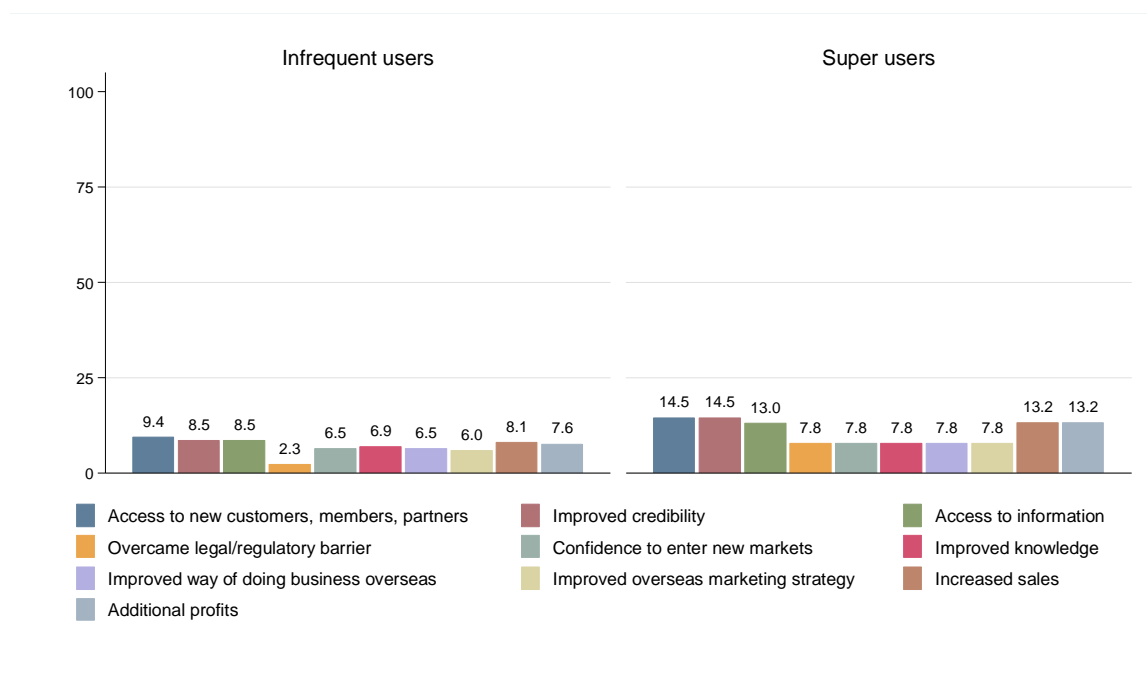
Figure 25: Experienced/ expects to experience benefit within 12 months



Note: Differences across super users and infrequent users are statistically significant for: access to new customers (0.1% level); improved credibility (0.1% level); access to information (1% level); overcoming legal barriers (1% level); improved knowledge (5% level); improved overseas marketing strategy (5% level) increased sales (0.1% level); and, additional profits (0.1% level).

Source: London Economics

Figure 26: Experienced/ expects to experience benefit within 12 months AND would probably not have achieved benefit without OTE



Note: Differences across super users and infrequent users are statistically significant only for overcoming legal barriers (5% level)

Source: London Economics

## 5 Monitoring

### Box 4: Monitoring – key insights

- ‘PIMS-like’ questions on service quality and impact using CATI were successfully implemented in this study.
- Consequently, a survey-based monitoring system using the PIMS framework (focus on quality, improved business performance net of non-additionality) appears feasible for Open to Export.
- However, only registered users that provide contact details can be surveyed in this way, which may give rise to selection bias.
- A robust monitoring system requires an opt-in mechanism that ensures the availability of a representative sample.

UKTI’s core services are monitored extensively. The quarterly Performance and Impact Monitoring Survey (PIMS) has been collecting detailed data on client satisfaction, service characteristics and impacts since 2006. However, the PIMS-type monitoring places a considerable burden on firms in terms of time commitment. Given that OtE is – for most users – a low-intensity form of support, proportionality suggests that including OtE in PIMS might be problematic.

However, the survey of registered OtE users conducted for this study successfully used a CATI format with interviews of around 15 minutes’ length to elicit a variety of views and responses. Parts of the questionnaire used PIMS concepts and questions verbatim, in particular to elicit impact net of non-additionality (see Annex Section C). This line of questioning did yield valuable insights (shown in Figure 25 and Figure 26, p. 37 above). This suggests that in principle, relatively extensive survey-based monitoring can be done with OtE users.

However, sample selection is a problem: contact details are only available for users registered on the site, which might introduce bias as registration is not compulsory: companies that register voluntarily may be different in relevant (but unobservable) dimensions. Moreover, ‘service providers’ may be more inclined to register than ‘exporters’, and casual users more than frequent users, thus skewing the picture.

Since compulsory registration of users is undesirable for reasons of accessibility (OtE should make it as easy as possible for users to benefit from the site), this suggests that users survey based on registered users only are unlikely to yield insights that are fully robust and representative.

However, given the proven link between service quality and business impact seen with other UKTI services<sup>42</sup> and the fact that a ‘PIMS-light’ approach has been successfully applied in this project, regular monitoring is clearly an option for the operators of OtE. Lowering the participation threshold, e.g. by using pop-up online surveys appears plausible. In this format, people could also be asked to provide contact details for in-depth interviews and the information provided through the online survey used to address the issue of selection bias.

<sup>42</sup> See London Economics (2013).



## 6 Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the combined analysis of the different sources of evidence, including the consultation with selected service providers, the survey of Open to Export users, the review of relevant research literature, as well as extensive discussions with UKTI personnel involved with Open to Export.

### 6.1 Incentivising experts

There is widespread agreement that the community aspects of OtE (the Q&A platform) needs to be strengthened. In part this is a matter of getting more users involved.

However, a platform strategy that relies on investments by independent parties ('experts' providing content and answering questions on the site) has to have an incentive mechanism. In the case of OtE, this may be the prospect of financial compensation from business won through OtE (although transacted outside the site).

There is an assumption that the network will grow and that some service providers will either make commercial gains outside the site or are satisfied with non-monetary compensation.

However, given that the viability of OtE as a tool for experts to win business on a self-sustaining scale is unproven, non-financial (or deferred) compensation mechanisms should be strengthened. 'Gamification', e.g. through visible status upgrades for the most active specialists, is a proven way to incentivise voluntary contributors in online community Q&A platforms.

**Recommendation 1: OtE's efforts to identify, develop and retain experts should be supported. Non-financial rewards linked to expert status have been shown to be effective in other online communities.**

### 6.2 Growing the user base

A platform like OtE benefits from network effects: the more users are active on the site, the more valuable it becomes for all users. The current user base of OtE is seen as too small by many stakeholders and it is likely that more could be done to grow the user base.

While business endorsements are indispensable for the promotion of OtE, UK Trade & Investment, given its central role in the business support eco-system, may be in a powerful position to contribute to such efforts. Potential measures include

- case studies of success;
- dissemination of relevant success metrics;
- ongoing promotion through UKTI events; and
- media campaigns<sup>[1]</sup>.

**Recommendation 2: UK Trade & Investment should consider if more can be done to working with the Open to Export team to grow the user base.**

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<sup>[1]</sup> A stakeholder suggested that [bizcrowd.com](https://www.bizcrowd.com) tripled user numbers after a TV ad campaign.

### 6.3 Ensuring useful content

Providing factual content is the most important function of OtE for users and serves the least engaged part of the user population. It therefore complements UK Trade & Investment's service portfolio and helps to maximise outreach. Moreover, UK Trade & Investment produces a substantial proportion of the content shared on OtE anyway (often, it is also available elsewhere), so that re-publication on OtE creates little extra cost.

Quality and accessibility are key to making OtE a successful content platform. Improvement in this area is necessary. Website analytics are crucial for driving content and making OtE responsive to user interest. It is very important that questions are answered quickly, as this is a crucial component of perceived quality.

While individual stakeholders see vetting/filtering of answers provided on the site as desirable, this would seem to undermine the community aspect of the platform and would consume significant resources. Instead, more direct involvement of UK Trade & Investment staff, including trade advisors (not just OtE team) may be a more efficient means of setting quality standards on the site.

There is also a case for filtering irrelevant/nuisance enquiries from foreign companies (potentially through an automated mechanism).

Better design/ routing could improve the functionality and usefulness of OtE. A special area for people completely new to exporting is an option that should be explored. Another idea that could be considered is the introduction of a sector-centric architecture.

A striking feature of successful content platform is standardisation of content (Wikipedia being the best-known example.) The Open to Export team should consider enforcing standards for content contributed by third parties, including style, layout, tagging, etc.

**Recommendation 3: Steps should be taken to enhance the usefulness of OtE through a) continuing provision of high-quality content to OtE; b) considering more effective vetting and filtering mechanisms for content (including questions and answers); c) review of the architecture/routing on the site to cater to the specific needs of different users (e.g. new to exporting, sector-specific, etc.); and d) introducing standards for factual content on the site.**

### 6.4 Continued engagement by UKTI

There is strong evidence that UK Trade & Investment services in general are beneficial to the businesses that use them. Moreover, government provision of support for (prospective) exporters is efficient, as often the government can provide such services at lower cost than private sector alternatives. Reasons for the efficiency advantage include factors like access to information, geographic and expertise built over time. OtE benefits from many of the same advantages as the core UKTI services, which makes UKTI involvement efficient.

Adopting a low-threshold, universally accessible online platform to widen access to UKTI expertise increases the overall effectiveness of UKTI. To the extent that network effects are presents, including other service providers, by operating OtE as an open platform can improve the effectiveness further.

Evidence collected in this study shows a need for factual information about exporting. Especially companies for whom the use of core UKTI services may represent too big an investment can benefit from quality information that is accessible with minimal effort. Open to Export can therefore act as an efficient means of providing such information, freeing UK Trade & Investment resources to focus on higher value assistance.

UKTI's engagement increases the usefulness of the site considerably. As the survey of users we conducted suggests, OtE appears to have a positive impact on businesses, so ongoing support from UKTI will increase net business benefits. A strong and credible commitment to the site by UKTI increases its attractiveness to service providers and is therefore key to strengthening network effects and overall benefits.

**Recommendation 4: Open to Export has tangible benefits for users, but UKTI's ongoing involvement is required for the site to flourish. UKTI has to commit to supporting the site over the longer term in order for it to fulfil its potential in terms of business benefits.**

## 6.5 Improve monitoring

Monitoring is desirable because of quality control (due diligence for the use of public funds) and the proven link between service quality and business impact. This study has shown that PIMS-type questions on satisfaction and (additional) impact work with OtE users. However, CATI interviews are onerous and can only be done with samples of registered users

A light-touch monitoring approach using an online format seems better suited to Open to Export, but would need to be trialled carefully in order to ensure that it addresses the concerns about sample selection while maintaining the integrity of a PIMS-type question format.

**Recommendation 5: Monitoring is essential for justifying UKTI's ongoing support for OtE. A light-touch version of PIMS, focusing on impact and administered online appears appropriate.**

## Annex: Survey instrument

### UKTI Open to Export Evaluation - Questionnaire

January-February 2014

OMB Research & London Economics

#### Sample Groups

- EX – Exporters (200 interviews)
- SP – Service Providers (200 interviews)
- *This will be identified on sample but we will also capture this in the questionnaire and all routings etc will run from questionnaire data.*

#### INTRODUCTION & SCREENERS

Ask for <CONTACT NAME>.

#### ASK ALL

Good morning/afternoon, my name is ... and I am calling on behalf of OMB Research, an independent market research agency. We have been commissioned by UK Trade & Investment to conduct an evaluation of the 'Open to Export' website.

As part of this, we are carrying out a survey of organisations that have registered on the site. We want to understand how you use Open to Export, what you think of it and how beneficial it is to your organisation. <IF SENT PRE-CONTACT EMAIL You should have recently received an email explaining that we were conducting this research.>

The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Is it convenient to speak to you now or would you prefer to make an appointment for another time?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Referrals can be taken to someone else in the company as long as they also use Open to Export

EXPLAIN IF NECESSARY:

- **Open to Export is a community driven service for small and medium sized businesses looking for help exporting. You can register on the website as an 'exporter' to get advice and information about doing business overseas, or as a 'service provider' to provide services or support to other firms.**

## ADD IF NECESSARY

- The research is being conducted under the Code of Practice of the Market Research Society, which means that all of the answers you give are strictly confidential and anonymous. Participation in this survey is voluntary.
- The responses of all organisations taking part will be combined into a statistical report
- Your organisation was selected at random from a list of Open to Export users supplied by UK Trade & Investment
- If you wish to check that OMB Research is a bona fide market research agency, you can contact the Market Research Society on 0500 396999, or call James Murray at OMB Research on 01732 220582 or contact Maria del Castillo at UK Trade & Investment on maria.delcastillo@ukti.gsi.gov.uk or 020 7215 8390.

ASK ALL

**S1 - Can I just confirm that you are one of the people best qualified to talk about your organisation's experiences of Open to Export, including any benefits you may have derived from it?**

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If you have already established that you are speaking to the correct person then code yes automatically

- Yes .....1  
 No – take referral and being transferred .....2 - RETURN TO INTRO  
 No – take referral and arrange call back .....3 - RETURN TO INTRO  
 No – refused referral .....4 - CLOSE

ASK ALL

**S2 – And is your organisation...? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

- A business .....1  
 A trade association .....2  
 Or a government or public sector organisation.3 - CLOSE  
 Other (SPECIFY) .....4  
 (Don't know) .....5

ASK ALL

**S3 – When did you last visit the Open To Export website? Was it...? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

In the last week.....	1
In the last month .....	2
In the last 3 months .....	3
In the last 6 months .....	4
More than 6 months ago.....	5 – CLOSE IF EX2, EX4, SP2 OR SP4
(Don't know) .....	6

**SECTION A – USE OF OPEN TO EXPORT**

ASK ALL

**A1 – Thinking back, how did you first come across Open to Export? DO NOT READ OUT BUT PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE**

Recommended/mentioned by someone at UKTI (e.g. your International trade advisor, an email, etc) .....	1
Mentioned/advertised at an event you attended.....	10
Recommended/mentioned by an organisation already using Open to Export	2
Recommended/mentioned by a colleague, business associate or personal contact .....	3
Did a web search (e.g. on Google) .....	4
Mentioned/advertised on a social media site (SPECIFY SITE) .....	5
Mentioned/advertised on another website (SPECIFY SITE) .....	6
Advertised somewhere else (e.g. newspaper, trade press).....	7
Other (SPECIFY) .....	95
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....	97

ASK ALL

**A3 – You can register on Open to Export as an exporter, a service provider or both. Are you registered as...? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

Interviewer Note: Offer to read out the detailed descriptions of what these mean

AS NECESSARY:

- **Firms that are selling overseas or considering doing so can register as ‘exporters’. This allows them to get advice by posting questions on the site, and enables them to contact experts, service providers and other exporters directly.**
- **Organisations that wish to offer their services to exporters, or simply give advice and support, can register as ‘service providers’. They can then create a profile on the site, answer questions from exporters and post articles.**

An ‘exporter’ (or potential exporter).....	1
A ‘service provider’ .....	2

Both.....	3
(Don't know) .....	4

**ASK ALL**

**A4 – And how often do you visit the Open to Export site? Would you say this is normally...? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

Every day .....	1
At least once a week.....	2
At least once a month .....	3
Less often.....	4
(Don't know) .....	5

**ASK ALL**

**A5a – Did you register on Open to Export for any of the following reasons? READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY. ROTATE ORDER.**

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Record any 'other' reasons as accurately as possible as the response here will be used in the next question.

To get factual information about exporting to overseas markets .....	1
To find suppliers of products or services in relation to exporting .....	2
To raise the profile of your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 business / IF S2=2 organisation> .....	3
To find potential <IF S2=2 members, > customers or clients.....	4
To make contact or network with <IF A3=1, 3 or 4 other> exporters ..	5
To offer advice or share your experiences with other firms .....	6
Any other reason? (SPECIFY) .....	95
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....	97

**ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON SELECTED AT A5a**

**A5b – And which one of these was the most important reason for registering on Open to Export? READ OUT AS NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE. CATI ONLY TO DISPLAY CODES SELECTED AT A5a (PLUS DON'T KNOW) & SHOW IN SAME ORDER AS AT A5a.**

To get factual information about exporting to overseas markets .....	1
To find suppliers of products or services in relation to exporting .....	2
To raise the profile of your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 business / IF S2=2 organisation> .....	3
To find potential <IF S2=2 members, > customers or clients.....	4
To make contact or network with <IF A3=1, 3 or 4 other> exporters ..	5
To offer advice or share your experiences with other firms .....	6

Other reason (<INSERT TEXT FROM A5a CODE 7>) .....95  
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....97

ASK ALL

**A6 – Now thinking about how you use Open to Export, how often do you do each of the following? READ OUT. DO NOT RANDOMISE ORDER.**

**FOR EACH STATEMENT: Do you typically do this every week, every month, less often or never?**

**a) Post questions on Open to Export**

**b) Respond to questions on Open to Export**

**c) Browse for information about specific topics or countries**

**g) IF A3=2-3: Post articles, events or opportunities on Open to Export**

**d) Make direct contact with other users of the site**

**e) IF S2 = 1, 4 OR 5: Respond to any of the business contract opportunities posted on the site**

At least once a week.....1  
At least once a month .....2  
Less often.....3  
Never.....4  
(Don't know) .....5

ASK ALL

**A7a –Have you taken part in a ‘webinar’ through Open to Export?**

**AS NECESSARY: Webinars are online events that allow you to listen and view presentations in real time on your computer.**

Yes .....1  
No.....2  
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....3

ASK IF ATTENDED WEBINAR (CODE 1 AT A7a)

**A7b – And how satisfied were you with this webinar? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means ‘very dissatisfied’ and 5 means ‘very satisfied’.**

**AS NECESSARY: If you’ve attended more than one webinar through Open to Export please just answer based on your overall impression from all of these.**



1 – Very dissatisfied.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – Very satisfied .....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

**ASK ALL****A7c – And have you attended any other events or courses advertised on Open to Export?**AS NECESSARY: **By this I mean face-to-face events rather than webinars.**

Yes .....	1
No.....	2
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....	3

**ASK IF SERVICE PROVIDER (CODES 2-3 AT A3)****A7d – Have you signed up to receive email alerts to let you know when people have posted relevant questions that you may wish to respond to?**

Yes .....	1
No.....	2
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....	3

**ASK IF RECEIVE EMAIL ALERTS (CODE 1 AT A7d)****A7e – And how satisfied are you with these email alerts? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'very dissatisfied' and 5 means 'very satisfied'.**

1 – Very dissatisfied.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – Very satisfied .....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

**SECTION B – USE OF OTHER ONLINE PLATFORMS**

ASK IF 'EXPORTER' (CODES 1, 3 OR 4 AT A3)

**B1 – Aside from Open to Export, which other websites or social networking sites do you use to find information about exporting or identify suppliers that may be helpful with your overseas business?** PROMPT Any others? DO NOT READ OUT BUT PROMPT AS NECESSARY. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: We only want to know the online sources they use such as other websites or social networking sites.

- Linked In.....1
- Facebook.....2
- Bizcrowd.....3
- Twitter.....4
- Chambers of Commerce website.....5
- UKTI website .....6
- Trade Association website .....9
- Another social networking site (SPECIFY SITE) .....7
- Another official government site (SPECIFY SITE) .....8
- Another website (SPECIFY SITE).....95
- (Do not use other sites to find export info or suppliers) .....96
- (Don't know/Can't remember) .....97

ASK IF SERVICE PROVIDER (CODES 2-3 AT A3)

**B2 – And which other websites or social networking sites do you use to advertise, market or sell your products and services to exporters?** PROMPT Any others? DO NOT READ OUT BUT PROMPT AS NECESSARY. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: We only want to know the online sources they use such as other websites or social networking sites.

- Linked In.....1
- Facebook.....2
- Bizcrowd.....3
- Twitter.....4
- Chambers of Commerce website.....5
- Another social networking site (SPECIFY SITE) .....6
- Another website (SPECIFY SITE).....95
- (Do not use other sites to advertise/market/sell) .....96
- (Don't know/Can't remember) .....97

ASK ALL UNLESS DONT USE OTHER WEBSITES - SKIP IF (A3=1 OR 4 & B1=10) OR (A3=2 & B2=8) OR (A3=3 & B1=10 & B2=8)

**B5 – Of all the websites which you use, which would you say is your primary source when <IF EXPORTER (CODE 1 OR 4 AT A3) looking for information about exporting or identifying suppliers that may be helpful with your overseas business / IF SERVICE PROVIDER (CODE 2 AT A3) advertising, marketing or selling your products and services to exporters / IF BOTH (CODE 3 AT A3) looking for information about exporting, identifying suppliers or marketing your products and services to exporters>? Is it Open to Export or a different website? SINGLE CODE**

- Open to Export .....1  
 Different website (SPECIFY) .....2  
 (Don't know) .....3

ASK ALL

**B3 – I'd now like to think about what is important to you when using <IF B1=10 or B2=8 a website such as Open to Export / OTHERS websites> to <IF EXPORTER (CODE 1 OR 4 AT A3) find information about exporting or identify suppliers that may be helpful with your overseas business / IF SERVICE PROVIDER (CODE 2 AT A3) advertise, market or sell your products and services to exporters / IF BOTH (CODE 3 AT A3) find information about exporting, identify suppliers or market your products and services to exporters>.**

**Please can you tell me how important each of the following factors are to you when using this sort of website, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'not at all important' and 5 means it is 'extremely important'? So firstly... READ OUT. RANDOMISE ORDER.**

- a) Exclusive information that you would not be able to access elsewhere
- b) A specialised focus on exporting (rather than on general business)
- c) The reliability of the information available on the site
- d) The amount and coverage of the information available on the site
- e) The number of other businesses and service providers using the site
- f) Access to content that is provided by the UK government such as UKTI, HM Revenue & Customs, UK Export Finance, Intellectual Property Office, etc
- g) Links and referrals to other useful or relevant websites

SHOW UNDER EACH STATEMENT

**AS NECESSARY: How important is this to you when using websites to <IF EXPORTER (CODE 1 OR 4 AT A3) find information about exporting or identify suppliers that may be helpful with your overseas business / IF SERVICE PROVIDER (CODE 2 AT A3) advertise, market or sell your products and services to exporters / IF BOTH (CODE 3 AT A3) find information about exporting, identify suppliers or market your products and services to exporters>?**

- 1 – Not at all important.....1

2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – Extremely important.....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

ASK ALL

**B4 – I'm going to read out the list again, and this time I'd like you tell me how you think that Open to Export performs on each of these factors.**

**For each one, please can you give me a score of 1 to 5, where 1 means Open to Export is 'very poor' and 5 means it is 'very good'? So firstly... READ OUT. SHOW IN SAME ORDER AS ASKED AT B3.**

- a) Exclusive information that you would not be able to access elsewhere**
- b) A specialised focus on exporting (rather than on general business)**
- c) The reliability of the information available on Open to Export**
- d) The amount and coverage of the information available on Open to Export**
- e) The number of other businesses and service providers using Open to Export**
- f) Access to content that is provided by the UK government such as UKTI, HM Revenue & Customs, UK Export Finance, Intellectual Property Office, etc**
- g) Links and referrals to other useful or relevant websites**

SHOW UNDER EACH STATEMENT

**AS NECESSARY: How would you rate Open to Export in this respect?**

1 – Very poor .....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – Very good .....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

ASK ALL

**B7 – Now thinking about your total experience of using the Open to Export site to date, how would you rate your satisfaction overall? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'very dissatisfied' and 5 means 'very satisfied'.**

1 – Very dissatisfied.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3

4 .....	4
5 – Very satisfied .....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

ASK IF POSTED QUESTIONS (CODES 1-3 AT A6a)

**B8 – You indicated earlier that you had posted questions on Open to Export. How satisfied are you with the quality of the responses you've received to these questions? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means 'very dissatisfied' and 5 means 'very satisfied'.**

**AS NECESSARY: Please answer based on an overview of all the different response that you've received.**

1 – Very dissatisfied.....	1
2 .....	2
3 .....	3
4 .....	4
5 – Very satisfied .....	5
(Don't know) .....	6

## SECTION C – IMPACT OF OPEN TO EXPORT

ASK ALL

**C1 - I'm now going to read out a list of possible ways in which your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 business / IF S2=2 organisation> may benefit from using Open to Export over the next 12 months. For each one, please tell me whether this has already happened, you expect it to happen in the next 12 months or you do not expect it to happen.**

**So, as a direct result of using Open to Export...? READ OUT. RANDOMISE STATEMENTS BUT ALWAYS ASK I & J LAST**

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If respondent answers "don't know" then probe whether this is because it is too early to tell if this will be a benefit or because it is too difficult to separate the impact of Open to Export from other activities undertaken by their business.

**a) Have you, or will you, gain access to prospective <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 customers / IF S2=2 members>, business partners or other people that you would otherwise have been unable to meet (as a result of Open to Export)?**

**b) Have you, or will you, improve your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 company's / IF S2=2 organisation's> profile or credibility (as a result of Open to Export)?**

c) Have you, or will you, gain access to information that you would otherwise have been unable to come by *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

d) IF (A3=1, 3 or 4) & (S2 = 1, 4 OR 5): Have you, or will you, overcome a particular problem or difficulty with a legal issue, regulations or quality standards *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

e) IF (A3=1, 3 or 4) & (S2 = 1, 4 OR 5): Have you, or will you, gain the confidence to either explore a new market or expand in an existing market *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

f) IF A3=1, 3 or 4: Have you, or will you, improve your knowledge of the competitive environment in an overseas market *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

g) IF (A3=1, 3 or 4) & (S2 = 1, 4 OR 5): Have you, or will you, improve the way you do business in overseas markets *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

h) IF (A3=1, 3 or 4) & (S2 = 1, 4 OR 5): Have you, or will you, improve your overseas marketing strategy *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

i) IF S2 = 1, 4 OR 5: Have you, or will you, increase your sales *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

j) IF S2 = 1, 4 OR 5: Have you, or will you, generate additional profits *(as a result of Open to Export)*?

Yes – already happened.....	1
Yes – expect to happen in next 12 months .....	2
No.....	3
(Don't know – hope so / too early to tell) .....	4
(Don't know – too difficult to separate impact of Open to Export from other activities) .....	5

ASK IF ADDITIONAL PROFIT (CODES 1-2 AT C1J)

**C2 – How much additional profit do you expect to see as a result of Open to Export over the next 12 months? Please include any additional profit you've already made as well as any you expect to make over the next year.**

Up to £1,000 .....	1
£1,000 - £10,000 .....	2
£10,000 - £100,000 .....	3
£100,000 - £500,000.....	4
£500,000 - £2million .....	5

Over £2million.....	6
(Don't know) .....	7
(Refused).....	8

ASK ALL

**C3 - <IF CODES 1-2 AT ANY OF C1a-j Thinking about all of the benefits you've just mentioned,> which of the following best describes your view on the contribution that using Open to Export is expected to make to your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 firm / IF S2=2 organisation>? READ OUT EVERY CODE BEFORE ACCEPTING AN ANSWER. SINGLE CODE**

You would achieve similar results anyway, without Open to Export .....	1
You would achieve similar results, but not as quickly.....	2
You would achieve some but not all of the results .....	3
You probably would not achieve similar results.....	4
You definitely would not achieve similar results .....	5
(None of these).....	6

## SECTION D – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

READ OUT TO ALL

**I'd just like to finish by asking a few questions about your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 business / IF S2=2 organisation>. These are just to classify your answers for analysis purposes. Please be assured your responses are confidential and UKTI can never identify individual companies.**

ASK ALL

**D1 – Firstly, what <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 is the main activity of your business? / IF S2=2 sector does your organisation represent?>**

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Record the respondent's answer verbatim, and probe to get enough detail so that responses can be coded accurately.

.....

.....

CODING NOTE: RESPONSES TO BE CODED INTO SIC 2007 CODES AS FOLLOWS

A – Agriculture, forestry & fishing .....	1
B – Mining & quarrying.....	2
C – Manufacturing.....	3
D – Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply.....	4
E – Water supply, sewerage, waste management & remediation activities .....	5
F – Construction.....	6
G – Wholesale & retail trade; Repair of motor vehicles & motorcycles .....	7
H – Transport & storage.....	8
I – Accommodation & food service activities .....	9
J – Information & communication .....	10
K – Financial & insurance activities.....	11
L – Real estate activities .....	12
M – Professional, scientific & technical activities .....	13
N – Administrative & support service activities .....	14
O – Public administration & defence; Compulsory social security .....	15
P – Education .....	16
Q – Human health & social work activities.....	17
R – Arts, entertainment & recreation .....	18
S – Other service activities.....	19
T – Activities of households as employers.....	20
U – Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies .....	21

ASK ALL

**D2 – How many people are currently employed by your <IF S2=1, 4 OR 5 business / IF S2=2 organisation> within the UK? READ OUT AS NECESSARY**

AS NECESSARY: **Please include both full and part-time staff**

INTERVIEWER NOTE: If the respondent owns the company and does not employ anyone else, please code as zero employees.

No employees.....	1
1 .....	2



2-9 .....	3
10-49 .....	4
50-249 .....	5
250-499 .....	6
500-999 .....	7
1,000-4,999 .....	8
5,000 or more .....	9
(Don't know) .....	10

ASK IF SERVICE PROVIDER WITH <10 EMPLOYEES (A3=2-3 & D2=1-3) BUT DO NOT ASK TRADE ASSOCIATIONS (SKIP IF S2=2)

**D3 - And what is the current annual turnover of your business? READ OUT AS NECESSARY**

**AS NECESSARY: If easier you can give me turnover for your last completed financial year**

£0 .....	1
£100,000 or less .....	2
£100,001 - £500,000.....	3
£500,001 - £2million .....	4
£2million - £10million .....	5
Over £10million.....	6
(Don't know) .....	10
(Refused).....	11

ASK ALL EXCEPT TRADE ASSOCIATIONS (SKIP IF S2=2)

**D4 – How long ago did your company start conducting business overseas? READ OUT AS NECESSARY.**

**AS NECESSARY: By this I mean selling goods or services to either businesses or individuals based abroad**

Do not export (yet) .....	1
Within the last year .....	2
Over 1, up to 2 years ago .....	3
Over 2, up to 3 years ago .....	4
Over 3, up to 4 years ago .....	5
Over 4, up to 5 years ago .....	6
Over 5, up to 10 years ago .....	7
Over 10, up to 20 years ago .....	8
Over 20 years ago .....	9

(Don't know) .....10

ASK IF EXPORT (CODES 2-10 AT D4)

**D5 – Which of the following overseas regions have you done business in over the last year? READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY.**

Europe (including Russia) .....1  
Asia Pacific (including Australia) .....2  
Africa .....3  
The Middle East.....4  
North America.....5  
Latin America or the Caribbean .....6  
(Don't know) .....7

ASK ALL EXCEPT TRADE ASSOCIATIONS (SKIP IF S2=2)

**D6 – What growth objectives do you have for the business over the next five years? Do you plan to...? READ OUT**

**AS NECESSARY This is your growth aspirations for the business as a whole, taking account of factors like number of employees and turnover**

Remain the same size .....1  
Become smaller .....2  
Grow moderately .....3  
Or, grow substantially .....4  
(Don't know) .....5

ASK ALL EXCEPT TRADE ASSOCIATIONS (SKIP IF S2=2)

**D7 – Do you have a current, written business plan? READ OUT**

Yes .....1  
No.....2  
(Don't know) .....3

ASK ALL EXCEPT TRADE ASSOCIATIONS (SKIP IF S2=2)

**D8 – Thinking about your company's use of other UKTI services, have you done any of the following in the last 3 years? READ OUT. CODE ALL THAT APPLY**

Attended a seminar or other UKTI event in the UK .....	3
Attended an overseas mission or visit organised by UKTI.....	4
Received support with attending a tradeshow or exhibition overseas	5
Obtained help from a UKTI international trade advisor in the UK .....	7
Obtained help from staff at a British embassy or consulate overseas	8
Received any other UKTI support (SPECIFY).....	95
(None of these/no UKTI support) .....	96
(Don't know/Can't remember) .....	97

## SECTION E – WRAP UP

### ASK ALL

**E1 – That's the end of the interview, thank you very much for taking part. Before you go, can I check whether you'd be willing to take part in any future UK Trade & Investment research on this topic?**

**AS NECESSARY: If you say yes you are not obliged to take part and can always decline if it's not convenient at the time**

Yes .....	1
No.....	2
(Don't know) .....	3

### ASK ALL

**E4 – Are there any other comments you'd like to make about Open to Export, or any improvements you'd like to suggest?**

Yes (SPECIFY).....	1
No.....	2
(Don't know) .....	3

### ASK ALL

**E2 – And as proof of this interview please could I just confirm your business postcode?** CATI TO DISPLAY POSTCODE FROM SAMPLE IF AVAILABLE – AMEND IF MISSING OR INCORRECT

.....

ASK ALL

**E3 – And may I confirm your name?** CATI TO DISPLAY CONTACT NAME FROM SAMPLE – AMEND IF INCORRECT

.....

**STANDARD THANK & CLOSE**



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