Department for Business & Trade

DBT Export Client Quality Survey: Technical report for Businesses supported April 2024 to March 2025

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Research contractor: Ipsos UK Public Affairs, London UK
Research Authors: Allan Simpson, Tom Bristow, Grace Clarke, Balaji Savatherajan, Eilidh Roberts

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Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This technical report summarises the key technical aspects of the DBT Export Client Quality Survey, for businesses supported April 2024 to March 2025.

The main aims of the Export Client Survey (ECS) are:

- Track client perceptions of the quality of support and advice provided by DBT
- Provide a measure of reported impact on businesses from using a DBT service
- Understand what drives performance and how services can be improved over time

The ECS comprises two linked surveys: a Quality Survey (QS) and a Reported Impact Survey (RIS). Interviewing for the Quality Survey generally begins three months after the specific interaction with DBT. The Reported Impact Survey involves interviewing Quality Survey respondents who agreed to be recontacted for research purposes 12 months after the specified interaction with DBT.

Following a review of the ECS methodology, from 2025/26, the Quality Survey will be merged into a refreshed version of the Reported Impact Survey (RIS). The refreshed RIS will retain a 12-month gap between the specified interaction with DBT and the date of interview. However, many of the sampling processes described in this report will transfer to RIS in 2025/26 with fieldwork due to start in April 2026. This revised approach will consolidate the data collection process, combining the quality and satisfaction measures previously captured in the QS with the longer-term impact assessment of the RIS into a single, more comprehensive survey. This change is intended to streamline the survey process for participating businesses while continuing to provide robust evidence on the quality of DBT services and their reported impact on UK exporters.

This technical report summarises the technical aspects of the Quality Survey. This is a mixed mode (telephone and online) survey reporting on the number of unique businesses supported by DBT, the perceived quality of the advice and support, and businesses' satisfaction with the service received. The findings in the main survey report are based on interviewing businesses that used DBT services between April 2024 and March 2025 (2024/25). Throughout the main report, findings from businesses that used DBT services in 2024/25 are compared to findings from 2023/24, with trend analysis from year-to-year based only on those findings that are statistically significant (see section 6.2).

1.2 Overview of survey method

1.2.1 Sampling

The Quality Survey is based on a monthly sample of businesses which have used a DBT export promotion service. The sample is designed to be representative of businesses supported by DBT, permitting analysis of each service. The sample design and selection take into account the longitudinal aspect of each business's interactions with DBT products and services, i.e. the varying combinations of historic

service deliveries received by a business. Survey questions and analysis of the survey data focus on a single specific interaction with DBT and aims not to consider previous interactions with DBT. However, it is not always possible to fully control what wider experiences the business may draw on when responding.

The sample was drawn from monthly records of service deliveries provided by DBT. These records do not include a unique business identifier. Therefore, each month, core business level information – business names, email domains, postcodes and telephone numbers – were used to identify where multiple records referred to the same business. A monthly sample of businesses is then selected from these records, giving higher probabilities of selection to businesses receiving less common services. In this way, the approach aims to maximise the number of interviews achieved regarding smaller services to facilitate more detailed analysis at the individual service level.

Certain records were not eligible to be sampled each month:

- Records not pertaining to the services covered by the ECS
- Records which were not intended for use (for example, those marked 'DUPLICATE' or 'DO NOT USE')
- Public sector businesses (identified from the business name and email domain)
- Businesses with non-UK telephone numbers (unless there was also a UK telephone number recorded for that business)
- Businesses which had already been sampled for a previous month of the ECS. In order to reduce the burden of participating in research, a business is only included within the Quality Survey once in any 12-month period.

Where a sampled business had received more than one service in the previous month, they were allocated a single main service to recall their experiences on for the purposes of the survey. Businesses were given a higher probability of being allocated to less frequently used services than more frequently used services to increase the number of responses related to the less frequently used services.

There is a three-month break period between when a business interacts with DBT and when the interview is conducted. Interactions in April 2024 are included within the July 2024 sample, interactions in May 2024 are included within the August 2024 sample etc. This is part of the survey design to ensure the interaction was recent enough to be memorable but providing sufficient time for businesses to take action following using the service.

1.2.2 Fieldwork dates

Fieldwork for this report began in July 2024 and ended in June 2025 (interviewing businesses that received support from DBT in March 2024). This means that the report covers DBT export support activity during the 2024-25 Financial Year.

1.2.3 Fieldwork

All eligible respondents with a useable email address were sent an email inviting them either to take part online, or that an Ipsos interviewer would be in touch shortly

over the phone to give them the opportunity to take part by that method. This email also informed them of the purpose of the research and provided an opportunity to contact Ipsos to ask any questions or to opt out of the research. It included a link to the participant privacy notice, which contained more details on how anonymity and confidentiality are maintained in the ECS, and how participant data is handled.

Interviews were conducted using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method or online (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing; "CAWI"). As such, the questionnaire was programmed in specialist interviewing software (Dimensions, an IBM application), ensuring that any question filtering was applied accurately during the interview.

Around four in five (4,079) of the of 5,126 interviews conducted for the Quality Survey 2024-25 were conducted by CATI. The remaining 1,047 interviews were conducted by CAWI. Online interviewing was introduced in prior years of the survey at the request of DBT, as a measure to improve the questionnaire's accessibility to a wider range of respondents (such as those with a disability precluding participation by phone). However, in 2024/25, it was agreed to expand the online component of the survey (and therefore maximise overall participation rates) by including a unique link in the initial advance email, as detailed above. Following assessment= of the data, no evidence of significant differences by mode for key metrics covered in this report were identified.

A response rate of 29%[1] was achieved for interviews conducted during the fieldwork period. The average (mean) interview length was 21 minutes and 52 seconds between July 2024 and June 2025.

1.2.4 Questionnaire content

The questionnaire collects information on the business's export activity, possible barriers facing exporters and the result of using the service. It also covers aspects of the customer experience using scales of one to ten, where ten is the most positive response and zero is the least positive response. Respondents could also say 'Don't know' or 'Not applicable'. The questionnaire also collects firmographics which includes annual turnover, number of employees, sector, and length of time trading. At the end of the questionnaire there is a question asking for permission to contact the business again for research purposes. Businesses that agreed to recontact formed the sample for the Reported Impact Survey.

A full copy of the Quality Survey questionnaire is available on the ECS webpage[2].

[1] Completed interviews as a proportion of all sample records issued – i.e. unadjusted rather than adjusted to allow for 'deadwood' sample and unknown eligibility. With all 2024/25 sample emailed and invited to participate in the survey online, it is impossible to truly know how much sample is 'deadwood' compared to when sample was only contacted by telephone to participate (as in previous years).
[2] Link to questionnaire here

2 Questionnaire

2.1 Questionnaire changes

A number of changes were introduced to the survey questionnaire from the version used in the previous year (2023/24). Some questions were amended to improve respondent understanding. Other questions were rotated out of the survey in 2024/25 for reasons of space, having been included in 2023/24.

Table 2.1.1 details the changes made to the questionnaire. A full copy of the questionnaire is available on the ECS webpage.

Table 2.1.1: Questionnaire changes in 2024/25

Question	Changes made
QJOBTITLE	New question added to start for quality assurance purposes
Q070 – Qyearsell Number of years business has been selling goods/services overseas	Question rotated out of 2024/25 survey
Q074_QONEXP Was the business selling goods/services overseas at the time they used the DBT service	Question removed from survey
Q076 – Qcontact Whether the business has been in contact with other organisations, as well as DBT.	Question rotated out of 2024/25 survey
Q078b_Qoutcome2 What activities (e.g. meetings, events) happened as a consequence of using the service.	Question rotated into 2024/25 survey
Q082 – Qresult_conts Contacts made as a result of using service.	Question rotated out of 2024/25 survey
QfirstDIT When did business first start using a DBT/DIT service.	Question rotated out of 2024/25 survey
QContDBT	Question rotated into 2024/25 survey

How did business hear about DBT/DIT.	
QcontDBToth Where did business first hear about DBT/DIT.	Question rotated into 2024/25 survey
QDBTadaware Whether business has seen any advertising encouraging businesses to think about exporting.	Question rotated into 2024/25 survey
Q120_QACTIVITIES_2 Professional activities business involved in.	Question removed from survey
Q064_QTRADETIME How long business has been trading for.	Question removed from survey
Q002_QDATALINK Permission to link data.	Minor change to codes, removal of Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
Q134 – QPERCEPTION Whether businesses see service provider (DBT) as one large body/several fragmented services.	Question introduced into 2024/25 survey

2.2 Questionnaire content

The average (mean) length of telephone interview was 21 minutes and 52 seconds, which was broadly in line with the previous year (22 minutes and 23 seconds) and the target average length of 20 minutes (as agreed in the project Statement of Work between DBT and Ipsos)[3]. A summary of the overall structure is below in Table 2.2.1. Businesses were eligible to answer most questions. However, there were some sections that were routed by the DBT exporting service that the business had been sampled to interview about.

Table 2.2.1: Questionnaire sections

Questionnaire sections	Routing
Screening questions	All respondents
Export status	All respondents for initial questions, then mainly asked of exporters only
Results of Service: Activities and outcomes	All respondents
Other Services: Quality and relevance of handover / Comparison against other organisations	Routing dependent on outcomes from specified interaction with DBT.
Customer Experience: Harmonised measures of quality / Barriers	Mixture of ask all, questions only asked of certain service types and dependent on previous survey answers.
Firmographics	All respondents
Recontact and Data linkage	All respondents

[3] Average length of online interviews is not reported, due to interruptions when answering online surveys or completion of the survey over two or more discrete sessions meaning there are issues with data measurement and reliability.

3 Sampling

3.1 Development

The sampling process for the ECS remained largely unchanged from the previous year, except for one new DBT service – a relevant subset of deliveries provided by the Export Digital Enquiry Service (EDES) – being added to the survey in 2024/25. Ten eligible DBT export services were therefore included in 2024/25.

3.2 Sample sources

The ECS sample is drawn from records of business interactions with DBT services, collated by teams within DBT.

Each month, DBT supplied Ipsos with Excel or .csv files containing these records. There were eight source files in total covering the various services in scope for the ECS, with records for a number of services provided in a single extract from DBT's Data Hub system, a database and reporting system designed to consistently record information across DBT teams.

Typically, the Data Hub extract covers records for: International Trade Advisers (ITAs), Export and Investment Teams (E&I Teams), Posts, and Missions).[4] Records for the remaining services in scope for the ECS were provided separately each month, in line with previous years where appropriate.

With four of the ten sampled services recorded through Data Hub, it was necessary to develop rules for identifying which records referred to each service (see Eligibility, below).

3.3 Eligibility

The following services were eligible for the ECS from April 2024 to March 2025:

- Business Profiles
- Missions
- Export and Investment Teams
- Export Opportunities
- Posts
- International Trade Advisers (ITAs)
- Digital Exporting Programme Webinars (Webinars)
- Export Academy
- International Markets (IM)
- Export Digital Enquiry Service (EDES)

[4] For various reasons, additional separate extracts were provided for Export Academy, Webinars and Business Profiles. The records in these files were then checked, and where necessary deduped against, the equivalent records included for these services in the Data Hub extract.

Table 3.3.1 shows the year in which each service that was eligible in 2024/25 was first introduced into the ECS.

Table 3.3.1 Year in which DBT services were first introduced into the ECS

Service	Year
Business Profiles	2018/19
Missions	2018/19
Export and Investment Teams	2018/19
Export Opportunities	2018/19
Posts	2018/19
International Trade Advisers (ITAs)	2018/19
Webinars	2018/19
Export Academy	2021/22
International Markets	2021/22
Export Digital Enquiry Service (EDES)	2024/25

For the records included in the Data Hub extract, the specific service was identified from a combination of variables: the 'DBT team', 'DBT team role', 'service delivery' and 'subject' fields. As such, some records in the Data Hub extract cannot be mapped to a service in scope for the ECS. Further, only certain delivery activities for each service were included in the sample for ECS, based on criteria shared by DBT with Ipsos.

Of the records mapped to an in-scope service, additional eligibility criteria applied for the ECS:

- The ECS only covers UK businesses. Businesses without a UK telephone number were excluded.
- Public businesses were excluded.
- Some records were duplicates or included in the source files in error and were excluded.
- Businesses which had already been invited to the survey in the previous 12 months were excluded.

3.4 Building the sample frame

It is common for a business to receive more than one of DBT's exporting services over a period of time. However, the ECS was designed to survey any single business no more than twice in a 12-month period: once for the QS and once for the RIS. The reason for this restriction was to limit the data collection burden on businesses.

To administer the ECS, it was therefore necessary to combine the records from the source files into a single sample frame. As there was no common business-level

identifier in the source files, it was also necessary to create such an identifier to make it possible to recognise where different records in the source files referred to the same business.

Table 3.4.1 shows the number of records shared by DBT each month. These figures include duplicate and ineligible records, that were removed from the sample before fieldwork.

Table 3.4.1 Number of records shared by DBT per month

Month	Number of records shared by DBT
April 2024	7,096
May 2024	7,717
June 2024	5,859
July 2024	7,100
August 2024	6,391
September 2024	9,025
October 2024	11,626
November 2024	12,657
December 2024	6,773
January 2025	8,152
February 2025	9,068
March 2025	9,703
Total	**101,167**

Step 1. Combining the source files into a single sample frame
There was some variation in the information available in each file due to differences in the information collected by each service and the recording practices of different teams. The first step each month was therefore to extract the key information from each file necessary for administering the ECS, primarily:

- Business name
- Business address
- Contact name
- Contact telephone number
- Contact email address
- Any fields necessary for identifying which service (if any) was received

This information was then combined into a long file covering all the records received that month.

While other relevant information was recorded for some services – for example, Companies House number, turnover, number of employees, and so on – this was

not consistently recorded and was missing for many records. These other fields were therefore not used in the sampling process.

Step 2. Tele-matching
Not all records in the original source files had a valid telephone number recorded. Where possible, information from other ECS records or external business databases, including those maintained by a third-party contractor, Sample Solutions, were used to fill these gaps:

- First, recorded telephone numbers were checked to see if they were in a valid UK telephone number format. Each record was classified as having (i) a valid UK telephone number, (ii) a non-UK telephone number, (iii) an invalid telephone number/no recorded telephone number.
- Where the telephone number was missing or not in a valid format, Ipsos first checked records from previous months of the ECS. If there was another record with the same business name and postcode, the telephone number from that record was used.
- Where there was still no valid telephone number, Ipsos conducted external tele-matching. This is where information about businesses (business name, address, URL and email address) are checked against third-party business databases to try to find matching telephone numbers.

Step 3. Cleaning of key business information
The following business information was used to derive a business-level identifier:

- Business name
- Business postcode
- Telephone number(s)
- Email domain

These fields were cleaned and standardised to make the information as consistent as possible for deriving a business-level identifier. Specifically, for **business name**:

- All entries were made lower case
- Contact names were used in the very small number of cases where business was missing
- URL tokens (such as ‘www.’,’.com’), email addresses and punctuation were removed
- Common tokens (such as ‘Ltd’, ‘plc’, ‘the) were removed
- Any text before ‘trading as’ or ‘t/a’ was removed

For postcodes, any white space was removed, and all postcodes were checked to be a valid UK postcode format. If a record did not have a valid UK postcode, the postcode was left blank for the purposes of deriving the business-level identifier.

Email domains were taken from recorded email addresses (that is, the text after the ‘@’ sign). Additionally, a list of common domains such as ‘gmail.com’ and ‘hotmail.com’ were excluded. If a record had any of these common domains, the email domain was left blank for the purposes of deriving the business-level identifier.

Step 4. 'Fuzzy' matching
It was clear from preparatory sampling work, and from previous fieldwork, that there would be inconsistencies (including data entry errors) in how information about businesses was recorded due to information being entered by different people in different teams and different systems. To try to account for some of this, Ipsos conducted 'fuzzy matching' for all records received that month. This matching compared the business name, postcode and email domain of each record to that of every other record. If two (or more) records had 'similar'[5] information in these fields (below a given threshold), these records were assumed to refer to the same business.

Inevitably, this process involves errors: false positives (where records are incorrectly assumed to refer to the same business) and false negatives (where records are incorrectly assumed to refer to different businesses). The chosen threshold aimed to reach a reasonable balance between these different kinds of error and the occurrence of false positives and false negatives were both well below one percent of the total records matched.

The fuzzy matching was conducted in two stages:

- First, each record from the most recent month was compared to each other record from that month
- Second, the records from the most recent month were appended to the records from all previous months. Then all records (from any month) were compared against all other records.

The reason for conducting the fuzzy matching in two stages – one within the most recent month and one across all months – was to use different thresholds for similarity in the two steps. For the first step (*within*-month matching), Ipsos used a less strict threshold and then visually inspected the records which had been assigned to the same business. Where there were errors (false positives) these could then be corrected). However, given the large number of records, it would not be practical to conduct equivalent checks for the second step (*between*-month matching). In this case, a stricter threshold of similarity was used to limit the risks of false positives.

Step 5. Exact matching
As well as the fuzzy matching described above (Step 4), Ipsos looked for records where key information matched exactly. This matching was applied for all records across all months.

The key information used was:

- Business name
- Email domain
- Postcode

[5] 'Similarity' is defined here using Levenshtein distances. In brief, the Levenshtein distance is the number of character changes necessary to convert one string (such as a business name) into another. A small distance indicates that the information for the two records is very similar.

- Telephone number(s)

Where at least two of these fields were identical, the assumption was made that the records referred to the same business. From analysis of historic data, it was decided that it would not be enough for only one field to match exactly, even if this was the business name. This was because there were enough errors associated – due to common business names, data entry errors and so on – that such an approach would not be reliable. However, should any two of these fields match exactly then it was considered very likely that the records do indeed refer to the same business.

While there will again be errors – primarily due to data entry errors – the exact matching step is likely to have very low false positive rates as it is generally unlikely that equivalent errors will be made on two or more of these fields simultaneously.

Sample process

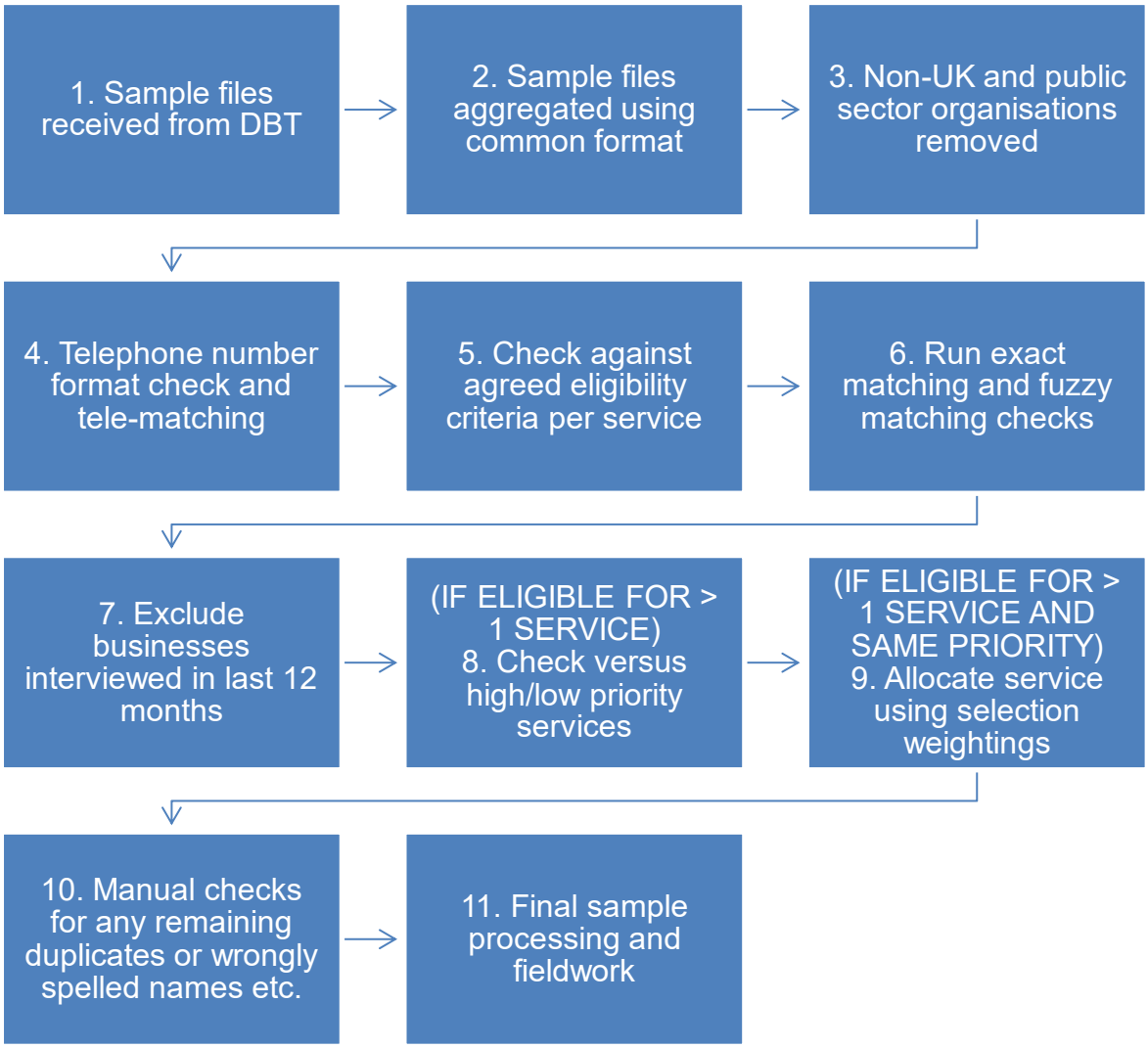
Figure 3.4.1 below shows a summary of the process of the stages undertaken each month to produce the sampling frame for the Quality Survey. The process is designed to take the raw data files from various DBT sample sources and produce a single, cleaned, and deduplicated file from which to select businesses for the survey (note that the 'selection' process outlined in stages 8 and 9 of Figure 3.4.1 is covered in more detail in the next section, 3.5 Sample design).

The process begins with initial data preparation in stages 2 and 3, where month-specific variables are created and basic cleaning, such as converting text to lower case and removing non-UK or public sector records, is applied. Following this, key business information fields — specifically company name, postcode, telephone number, and email address — are cleaned and standardised in a series of parallel steps. This ensures the information is as consistent as possible for the subsequent matching. For records where a valid telephone number is not present, an external telephone-matching exercise is conducted (stage 4) to append a valid number from third-party business databases where possible.

Once the individual data elements are cleaned, they are merged into a single file and eligibility against the detailed service-specific mapping criteria provided by DBT is established (stage 5). The next stage in the process (stage 6) is to identify and group records that refer to the same business. This is done using two different methods. First, a 'fuzzy matching' technique is used to account for minor differences in how business information is recorded, such as data entry errors. This matching is conducted in two stages: a less strict match is performed on the current month's data which is then manually reviewed, followed by a stricter match against data from the previous 12 months to derive a single identifier for each business over time.

In addition to fuzzy matching, an 'exact matching' process is also applied across all months at this stage. Records are considered to refer to the same business if at least two key fields (business name, email domain, postcode, or telephone number) are identical. This requirement for two matching fields ensures a high degree of accuracy. The final steps involve applying eligibility rules, removing businesses that have been interviewed in the last 12 months, and conducting final quality checks before the file is used for sample selection.

Figure 3.4.1: Sample process flow diagram



Description: Flow diagram showing the 11-step process for preparing sample files. Arrows indicate the process flow from step 1 to step 11. Step 1: Sample files received from DBT. Step 2: Sample files aggregated using a common format. Step 3: Non-UK and public-sector organisations removed. Step 4: Telephone number format check and tele-matching. Step 5: Check against agreed eligibility criteria per service. Step 6: Run exact-matching and fuzzy-matching checks. Step 7: Exclude businesses interviewed in the last 12 months. Step 8: If eligible for more than one service, check against high- and low-priority services. Step 9: If eligible for more than one service with the same priority, allocate service using selection weightings. Step 10: Manual checks for duplicates or spelling errors. Step 11: Final sample processing and fieldwork.

3.5 Sample design

Some services covered by the ECS had relatively few interactions. The QS sample was designed to target additional interviews for these smaller services to increase the sample size available for analysis. There were two ways in which smaller services were disproportionately targeted:

- **The probability of a business being selected.** Initially, businesses that had received less frequently used services were given a higher probability of selection. This was to increase the sample size available for analysis for smaller services.
- **The allocation of services for the questionnaire**. Where a sampled business had received more than one service, they were more likely to be asked about the less frequently used service in the survey.

In practice, however, for all months of the 2024/25 survey fieldwork, all of the businesses that were eligible were invited to participate, so no sampling of businesses was required.

To increase the sample size for generally less frequently used, and so higher priority, services (Business Profiles, Export Opportunities and EDES), businesses were sampled separately (and in preference) to the remaining services. For those higher priority services, if a business had used more than one service in the wave, then those services were all given the same probability of being sampled, equal to one divided by the total number of services received. This stage of selection is covered in stage 8 of Figure 3.4.1 above.

For the remaining services, a weighted sampling approach was employed to increase the sample sizes for the services that were used less (stage 9 of Figure 3.4.1). This involved allocating a loading to each service and then using that loading to generate the adjusted probability of selection for that service (see Table 3.5.1). So, for example, if a business had used both Export Academy (loading = 1) and Missions (loading = 2) in April 2024, the business was twice as likely to be selected to be asked about Missions in the interview, as:

- *Export Academy chance for selection = 1 out of (1+2) = 1/3*
- *Missions chance for selection = 2 out of (1+2) = 2/3*

These probabilities were adjusted during the fieldwork year, in order to react to the changing volumes of eligible businesses per service over the course of the year.

Table 3.5.1 Probability of selection weights by service[6]

Service	April-September 2024	October 2024- March 2025
Missions	2	2
Export and Investment Teams	1.5	2
Posts	1.5	1.5
ITAs	1.25	1.25
Webinars	2	2
Export Academy	1	1
IM	1.5	1

Note that once a business had participated in the survey, it could not be sampled again for another year and so was removed from the sampling frame (stage 7 of Figure 3.4.1 above). It was however still included in the population counts that were used for the weighting. The final stages 10 and 11 of the end-to-end sampling process documented in Figure 3.4.1 see standard checks applied by statisticians, researchers and the survey scripter within the Ipsos team so that the resulting sample output is quality checked before final processing and fieldwork commences.

Further details on the numbers of service deliveries recorded and the number of businesses eligible for the survey by service type between April 2024 and March 2025 can be found in the main Quality Survey report (section 3.1).

[6] Business Profiles, Export Opportunities and EDES excluded from this table due to being ‘high priority’ (i.e. less frequently used) services and prioritised as such.

4 Data collection

4.1 Fieldwork outcomes

Respondents selected during the sampling process were sent an invitation email notifying them about the study before telephone fieldwork began. The invitation emails offered more information about the business's interaction with DBT and the survey itself – such as date of interaction, which DBT service was used, and the purpose of the research. They also provided businesses with a unique link to take the survey online, plus an opportunity to contact Ipsos to ask any questions or opt out of taking part the research prior to being contacted by telephone. Following the invitation email, respondents were sent up to two further reminder emails, at around two weeks and one month after initial contact from Ipsos.

The telephone survey interviews were administered by Ipsos's team of specialist business interviewers. Interviewers received a detailed briefing from the research team prior to fieldwork, with a view to ensuring that they understood the policy background to the study and were fully appraised of how to deal with any queries which respondents were likely to raise during the course of the interview.

The findings report covers DBT services delivered between April 2024 and March 2025.

4.2 Response rates

Table 4.2.1 below shows response rates achieved for the QS for April 2024 to March 2025 sample. An unadjusted response rate of 29% was achieved for interviews conducted during this period[7].

Table 4.2.1 Fieldwork outcomes April 2024 to March 2025 sample

Fieldwork outcomes	
	Number of cases *(N)*
Number of cases issued	17,535
Deadwood (uncontactable by telephone) or no outcome	8,487
Refusal	2,649
Ineligible	1,273
Completed interviews	5,126
Response rate	29%

[7] Response rate = (complete interviews / (complete interviews + partial interviews + refusal and break off + non-contact + other + (estimated proportion of cases of unknown eligibility that are eligible) x (unknown eligibility non-interview))

Table 4.2.2 Response rates April 2024 to March 2025 sample for each DBT service

Table 4.2.2 below breaks down the response rates by each product or service.

	ITAs	Posts	IM	Missions	E&I Teams	Export Academy	Webinars	Export Opportu-nities	EDES	Business Profiles	Total
Number of cases issued	3,708	2,242	746	657	627	8,512	413	377	223	30	**17,535**
Complete	1,103	475	204	150	133	2,738	121	121	74	7	**5,126**
Complete – CATI	916	323	136	100	111	2,237	89	98	63	6	**4,079**
Complete - Online	187	152	68	50	22	501	32	23	11	1	**1,047**
Response rate	**30%**	**21%**	**27%**	**23%**	**21%**	**32%**	**29%**	**32%**	**33%**	**23%**	**29%**

5 Weights

5.1 Overview of weights

Two sets of weights were produced for the sample dataset: a **business-level weight** for any analyses of the businesses that are not dependent on the actual service received; and a **service-level weight** for analyses of the services received. Applying the business-level weights makes the sample of businesses representative of all the businesses that received the eligible DBT services in the survey period (April 2024 to March 2025). The service-level weights adjust the sample of businesses based on the services that they were asked about in the questionnaire so that those services are representative of all the eligible DBT services that were delivered in the survey period.

Business-level weights
The business level weights were generated using a single stage of calibration weighting. The calibration weighting produced weights that adjust the sample so that the weighted sample matches the profiles of all the businesses that had used an eligible DBT service in the survey period for a range of measures.

The measures that were included in the calibration weighting (Tables 5.4.1, 5.4.2, 5.4.3 and 5.4.4) were:

- Counts of the number of businesses receiving each service in the survey period
- Counts of the number of businesses receiving a DBT service each month
- The number of interactions that each business had a DBT service in the survey period
- The number of different services that the business received in the survey period.

The first two measures were counts of the total number of services received (n = 44,241); whereas the last two measures were counts for the total number of businesses (n = 25,913). One of the advantages of using calibration weighting was that it was possible to adjust to these profiles which were at two different levels: counts of the businesses, as well as all the services that had been received.

The final weights from the calibration weighing were scaled so that the sum of the weights equalled the sample size (i.e. to have mean 1) and these scaled weights were used as the business-level weights.

Service-level weights
The service-level weights were also generated using calibration weights, but with initial selection (design) weights. These selection weights were required because, for each business, the service that was asked about in the questionnaire was sampled from all the services that it had received over the survey period. The calculation for the selection weight also included the loadings (W_{ij}) that had been used when selecting the service. These were the loadings that had been employed to increase the sample sizes for the less common services.

The selection weight for a business for which service k was selected was calculated as:

$wt\_sel = \Sigma_i \Sigma_j (W_{ij} Z_{ij}) / \Sigma_j (W_{kj} Z_{kj})$

where i is the service and j is the month. Z_{ij} = 1 is the business had received service i in month j; and Z_{ij} = 0 otherwise. The selection weights were trimmed at 8 (the 97.5th percentile) to reduce the impact of large weights on the statistical efficiency.

The measures that were included in the calibration weighting (Tables 5.4.5 and 5.4.6) were:

- The number of services received by month, quarter or in total.
- Whether a business had received a DBT service in just a single month or more than one month.

Whether a service was calibrated by month, quarter or in total was dependent on the size, and distribution by month, of the service in the sample. The least common services (Business Profiles, Export Opportunities, EDES, Export and Investment Teams, Missions and Webinars) were all included with annual counts. The most common, Export Academy and ITAs, were included with monthly counts. Posts and IM were included with quarterly counts. As an approximately rule of thumb, the allocation of the services to the time period (month, quarter and in total) was set to avoid counts of less than 30 in any of the sampling cells.

The final weights from the calibration weighing were scaled so that the sum of the weights equalled the sample size (i.e. to have mean 1) and these scaled weights were used as the service-level weights.

5.2 Levels of weights

The reason for producing two levels of weights – a business-level weight and a service-level weight – is that many businesses received more than one service from DBT over the time covered by the QS. As a result, there was more than one service for which that business could have been sampled. In short, the business-level weight is intended to account for differences in the probability of a business taking part in the ECS for *any* service. The service-level weight is intended to account for differences in the probability of a business taking part in the ECS for a *particular* service.

Much of the ECS questionnaire is focused on a business' experience of a particular DBT service. For these questions, the responses depend on which service the business was asked about. The service-level weight is used for these questions to provide estimates which are representative of the businesses receiving each service.

However, there are some questions where it is reasonable to assume that the responses do not depend on which service the business was sampled for. Examples include the number of employees a business has, turnover, and prior exporting activities. Effectively, the business-level weight assumes that the answer to these questions would have been the same had the business been sampled for a different service. The advantage of using the business-level weight for these questions is that the survey estimates will tend to be more precise than when using the service-level weight. This is because the service-level weight will include some cases where the probability of being selected for that particular service is very low. These will produce more extreme values for the service-level weight, reducing the effective sample size for analysis. Annex B has a map of which weight is used for each survey question.

5.3 QS Design weights

The design weights are derived as 1 divided by the probability of selection:

$$DW_{company} = \frac{1}{\sum_{service} P(S_{service})}; \qquad DW_{service} = \frac{1}{P(S_{service})}$$

Where $DW_{company}$ and $DW_{service}$ are the business- and service-level *design weights* respectively, $\sum_{service} P(S_{service})$ is the probability of a business being selected for *any* service, and $P(S_{service})$ is the probability of being selected for a *particular* service.

Businesses with high probabilities of selection are given less weight (as they will be relatively over-represented in the dataset), while businesses with low probabilities of selection are given more weight (as they will be relatively under-represented).

However, the selection probabilities are not known exactly because of the complexity of the sample structure. Primarily, this complexity is due to the exclusion criteria applied: once a business was selected for the ECS, it was excluded from selection for the next 11 months (so that it would only be selected once in a twelve-month period). In effect, this means that the probability of a business being selected in a given month depended on the selections made in all previous months.

Other factors of the sample structure affecting the probability of selection were:

- The number of businesses selected that month;
- The number of interactions/service deliveries recorded for each service;
- Which service(s) a given business had received that month.

The generated weights appear as variables in the SPSS file, and applying the relevant weight should replicate the weighted %s shown in the charts.

As a basic example, using the satisfaction question in SPSS:

- Filter on the relevant DBTService value, e.g. code 12 for Export Academy.
- Weight Cases on QSweight_service
- Run frequencies on the relevant question, e.g. Q093_Qsatis, which should match the equivalent weighted tables provided by Ipsos – the 'Missing' -1 cases are Not applicable responses (code 97 on the questionnaire).

Slight rounding differences may be experienced depending on the exact software used – e.g. Ipsos uses Quantum for data processing.

5.4 Design effects

The weighting impacts on the efficiency of the sample when carrying out analyses. In general, the more variable the weights, the greater the loss of efficiency in the sample. Tables 5.4.7 and 5.4.8 show estimates of the impact of the weighting on the precision for analyses of the businesses, and for each separate service, as both effective sample sizes and design effects. The effective sample size is the size that a hypothetical sample with no weighting would have to be to give the same level of precision. The design effective is the relative loss in the effective sample size and is calculated as the actual sample size divided by the effective sample size.

Table 5.4.1 Business-level weights: population totals and sample profile - Number of services received

Service	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
Business Profiles	73	0.2%	10	0.1%
Missions	1,767	4.0%	334	3.3%
Export & Investment Teams	1,517	3.4%	228	2.3%
IM	2,748	6.2%	262	2.6%
EDES	308	0.7%	91	0.9%
Export Opportunities	822	1.9%	213	2.1%
Export Academy	19,096	43.2%	5,142	51.3%
Posts	7,662	17.3%	1,332	13.3%
Webinars	749	1.7%	186	1.9%
ITAs	9,499	21.5%	2,233	22.3%
Total	**44,241**	**100%**	**10,031**	**100%**

Table 5.4.2 Business-level weights: population totals and sample profile: Number of services received each month

Month	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
April 2024	3,268	7.4%	665	6.6%
May 2024	3,695	8.4%	743	7.4%
June 2024	2,355	5.3%	391	3.9%
July 2024	3,116	7.0%	697	6.9%
August 2024	2,887	6.5%	602	6.0%
September 2024	3,771	8.5%	792	7.9%
October 2024	4,729	10.7%	1,110	11.1%
November 2024	5,501	12.4%	1,186	11.8%
December 2024	3,860	8.7%	1,122	11.2%
January 2025	4,063	9.2%	1,070	10.7%
February 2025	3,173	7.2%	782	7.8%
March 2025	3,823	8.6%	871	8.7%
Total	**44,241**	**100%**	**10,031**	**100%**

Table 5.4.3 Business-level weights: population totals and sample profile: Number of business-level interactions with DBT

Number of business-level interactions with DBT	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
1	17,463	67.4%	3,017	58.9%
2	4,442	17.1%	1,034	20.2%
3	1,774	6.8%	445	8.7%
4 or more	2,234	8.6%	630	12.3%
Total	**25,913**	**100%**	**5,126**	**100%**

Table 5.4.4 Business-level weights: population totals and sample profile: Number of services used by each business

Number of services used by each business	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
Single service	21,932	84.6%	4,205	82.0%
2 or more services	3,981	15.4%	921	18.0%
Total	**25,913**	**100%**	**5,126**	**100%**

Table 5.4.5 Service-level weights: population totals and sample profile: Number of services received (by time period)

Service	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
Business Profiles	73	0.2%	7	0.1%
Export Opportunities	822	1.9%	121	2.4%
EDES	308	0.7%	74	1.4%
Missions	1,767	4.0%	150	2.9%
Export & Investment Teams	1,517	3.4%	133	2.6%
IM: Q1	774	1.7%	71	1.4%
IM: Q2	686	1.6%	44	0.9%
IM: Q3	728	1.6%	49	1.0%
IM: Q4	560	1.3%	40	0.8%
Export Academy: Apr	1,073	2.4%	207	4.0%
Export Academy: May	1,176	2.7%	197	3.8%
Export Academy: June	5	0.0%	1	0.0%
Export Academy: July	1,189	2.7%	199	3.9%
Export Academy: Aug	1,375	3.1%	145	2.8%
Export Academy: Sep	1,709	3.9%	173	3.4%
Export Academy: Oct	2,502	5.7%	351	6.8%
Export Academy: Nov	2,867	6.5%	405	7.9%
Export Academy: Dec	2,410	5.4%	493	9.6%
Export Academy: Jan	1,899	4.3%	254	5.0%
Export Academy: Feb	1,255	2.8%	144	2.8%
Export Academy: March	1,636	3.7%	169	3.3%
Posts: Q1	1,933	4.4%	139	2.7%
Posts: Q2	1,614	3.6%	85	1.7%
Posts: Q3	2,003	4.5%	121	2.4%
Posts: Q4	2,112	4.8%	130	2.5%
Webinars	749	1.7%	121	2.4%
ITAs: Apr	727	1.6%	89	1.7%
ITAs: May	1,009	2.3%	110	2.1%
ITAs: June	946	2.1%	118	2.3%
ITAs: July	729	1.6%	102	2.0%
ITAs: Aug	706	1.6%	83	1.6%
ITAs: Sept	684	1.5%	85	1.7%
ITAs: Oct	683	1.5%	88	1.7%
ITAs: Nov	1,013	2.3%	101	2.0%
ITAs: Dec	602	1.4%	74	1.4%
ITAs: Jan	818	1.8%	84	1.6%
ITAs: Feb	772	1.7%	88	1.7%
ITAs: March	810	1.8%	81	1.6%
Total	**44,241**	**100%**	**5,126**	**100%**

Table 5.4.6 Service-level weights: population totals and sample profile: Number of months that services were received

Number of months that services were received	Pop (n)	Pop (%)	Sample (n)	Sample (%)
Used DBT service in single month	17,463	39.5%	3,017	58.9%
Used DBT service in more than one month	26,778	60.5%	2,109	41.1%
Total	**44,241**	**100%**	**5,126**	**100%**

Table 5.4.7 Estimated design effects and effective sample sizes: Company-level weights

Weight	Sample size	Design effect	Effective sample size
Company-level weight	5,126	1.13	4,552

Table 5.4.8 Estimated design effects and effective sample sizes: Service-level weights

Service	Sample size	Design effect	Effective sample size
Business Profiles	7	1.55	5
Export Opportunities	121	1.33	91
EDES	74	1.37	54
Missions	150	1.48	101
Export and Investment Teams	133	1.43	93
IM	204	1.13	180
Export Academy	2,738	1.44	1,897
Posts	475	1.46	325
Webinars	121	1.44	84
ITAs	1,103	1.44	766
All	5,126	1.59	3,235

6 Data and analysis

6.1 Confidence intervals

Charts and tables in the report display the confidence interval for each survey estimate. When a survey is carried out, the respondents who take part are only a subset of those in the population and as such may not give an exact representation of the 'true' average in the population. The reporting uses 'Confidence Intervals' to account for the fact that we have interviewed a subset of the population. A 95% Confidence Interval is a margin of error around an estimate, 95% of confidence intervals will contain the true mean. When two 95% confidence intervals for the same statistic do not overlap it is likely that sample means are statistically different at a 95% confidence level.

For instance, if 1,000 people are interviewed, and 500 (50%) of them say that they agree with a statement, then you can be 95% confident that true proportion of people who agree with the statement is between 50% +/- 3% (47%, 53%).

When a smaller number of people of interviewed, it means that there is a larger margin of error around the estimate. The size of the margin of error also varies depending on the estimate itself. As an example, Table 6.1.1 below provides several different confidence intervals for different estimates with different sample sizes.

Table 6.1.1 Confidence intervals by different sample sizes: 95% Confidence intervals around various estimates with different sample sizes

Estimates (%)	**100 interviews**	**500 interviews**	**1000 interviews**
10% or 90%	+/-6%	+/- 3%	+/- 2%
30% or 70%	+/- 9%	+/- 4%	+/- 3%
50%	+/- 10%	+/- 4%	+/- 3%

The ECS has a complex sample design. One of the effects of using this complex design (and weighting) is that standard errors for survey estimates are generally higher than the standard errors that would be derived from an unweighted simple random sample of the same size. To obtain an accurate measure of a confidence interval one needs to take into account more than just the unweighted sample size and survey estimate into consideration as this does not adjust for the true 'standard error' around any estimate. The ECS is weighted to correct for variation in sampling probability and variation in response probability.

The true standard errors of the complex design are calculated by multiplying the standard error (of an estimate from a simple random sample) by the design factor (deft).

The ratio of the standard error of the complex sample to that of a simple random sample of the same size is known as the design factor.

The 95% confidence interval of a complex survey design is equal to:

p +/- (1.96 x true standard error)

where true standard error = design factor x standard error of a simple random sample; and

p = the point estimate, which is the percentage or proportion estimated from our sample (or sample mean)

The analysis of Confidence Intervals uses the Complex Samples Module within the analytical software package, Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) to correct for these effects. This provides a more precise estimate of the confidence intervals.

6.2 Significance testing

Where the results for one group of respondents, or between survey years, are compared with the results for another group, any differences discussed in the text of this report were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated. This means that there is a 5% chance that we have reported a significant difference where in fact there was none. Similarly, any changes between years discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Two methods of significance testing were used: two-tailed t-tests for single-code variables, and Z-tests for multi-code variables.

6.3 Data quality and processing

Interviews were conducted using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method. As such, the questionnaire was programmed in specialist interviewing software, ensuring that any question filtering was applied accurately during the interview. A number of logic and consistency checks were built into the CATI script. These were of two types: hard checks and soft checks. Hard checks are ones where the interviewer is unable to move to the next question until the discrepancy or inconsistency has been resolved. Soft checks are ones where the interviewer is asked to confirm that the information entered at a specific question is correct but is able to pass on to the next question.

A small number of interviews were conducted online using Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). These interviews were also manually reviewed for quality assurance before their data was combined into the overall dataset. No interviews that were completed online were removed from the final dataset as a result of quality assurance checks.

Ipsos produced datasets using SPSS. The dataset was checked and cleaned by researchers within the Ipsos team. This included:

- Routing checks on questionnaire variables
- Checks on all sample variables included in the data and weighting scheme
- Cleaning of variable names, variable labels and value labels
- Comparison checks with previous datasets
- Sense checks on key variables.

Derived variables were also created for analytical purposes.

With the exception of the coding of responses to open-ended questions, or option to provide an ‘other’ response within a pre-coded list question, no data entry phase was required for this CATI survey. The programmed script ensured that all question routing was performed automatically, and no post-editing of the data was required in the way that might be necessary for surveys administered using a ‘Pencil and Paper’ method. Data in the report is based on estimates and responses provided by the respondents. While steps

are taken during interviewing to ensure that data is accurate caution should be taken as there is the potential for respondents to 'guess' at some answers where they do not know the precise figure.

Responses from fully open-ended questions and 'other' responses were collated and code frames created to reflect all key themes in the responses. Responses from questions with an 'other – specify' option were analysed and, if appropriate, back-coded into one of the pre-coded categories. If the response could not be assigned to an existing code but gained a sufficient number of mentions, a new code was created which all relevant responses were assigned to. Coding was carried out by a specialist team. All coders who worked on the study were briefed and a written set of instructions was made available. Code frames were created by the coding team in the first instance and approved by the research team.

6.4 Derived variables

Several questions in the survey asked respondents to give a rating using a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 was the most positive response and 0 was the least positive response. Responses have mostly been grouped into positive (a score of seven or higher), neutral (a score of four to six), and negative (a score of three or below). Respondents could also say 'Don't know' or 'Not applicable'. The exception to this was responses to the question 'Qlikrec' which was used to calculate the Net Promoter Score (NPS) for each export product or service. NPS is a summary of how likely it is that businesses would recommend using the service or product. Businesses were asked to provide a score between zero and ten, with ten being the most positive response. Scores of nine and ten were banded together as 'promoters' and scores of zero to six as 'detractors'. NPS is calculated as the difference between the percentage of 'promoters' and 'detractors'. A positive NPS means more people would recommend the service than would not.

Respondents who said the question did not apply ('Not applicable') to them were excluded from the analysis. Those who answered 'Don't know' or 'Refused' are usually included in the charts unless no respondents gave this answer for that particular question. However, 'Don't know' and 'Refused' answers were excluded from the business turnover breakdowns in the Quality Survey report for maximum comparability so that significant differences between years are genuine and not due to varying levels of these responses. Levels of 'Don't know' and 'Refused' responses for other questions and measures used for analysis are comparable between years.

6.5 Reporting

Where percentages shown in charts or tables do not total to exactly 100% (or where they do not exactly total to a summary statistic given, such as agree/disagree) this is due to a combination of rounding to the nearest whole number and because some questions allowed participants to choose more than one response option. All figures shown in the main report are weighted. The exceptions are base figures and instances where base sizes are too low to report percentage findings ($n < 30$), in which case the figures reported are unweighted.

Where the results for one group of respondents are compared with the results for another group, any differences discussed in the text of this report were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated. This means that there is a 5% chance that we have reported a significant difference between the subgroups where in fact there was none.

Base sizes, displaying the number of people who gave a response to any question (excluding those who said that the question did not apply to them), are shown on each chart. Throughout the report percentages corresponding to a base size of fewer than 10 responses have been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Data in this report is based on estimates provided by the respondents. While steps are taken during interviewing to ensure that data is accurate (interviewers reading back responses on questions with numeric responses, respondents being offered the chance to provide a banded response rather than an exact numeric answer if they are unsure), caution should be taken as there is the potential for respondents to 'guess' at some answers where they do not know the precise figure.

6.6 Data handling and security

This section describes the data handling and security processes that Ipsos and DBT have in place to ensure that personal information is kept safe, and all relevant corporate, legal, statutory and regulatory requirements are met including:

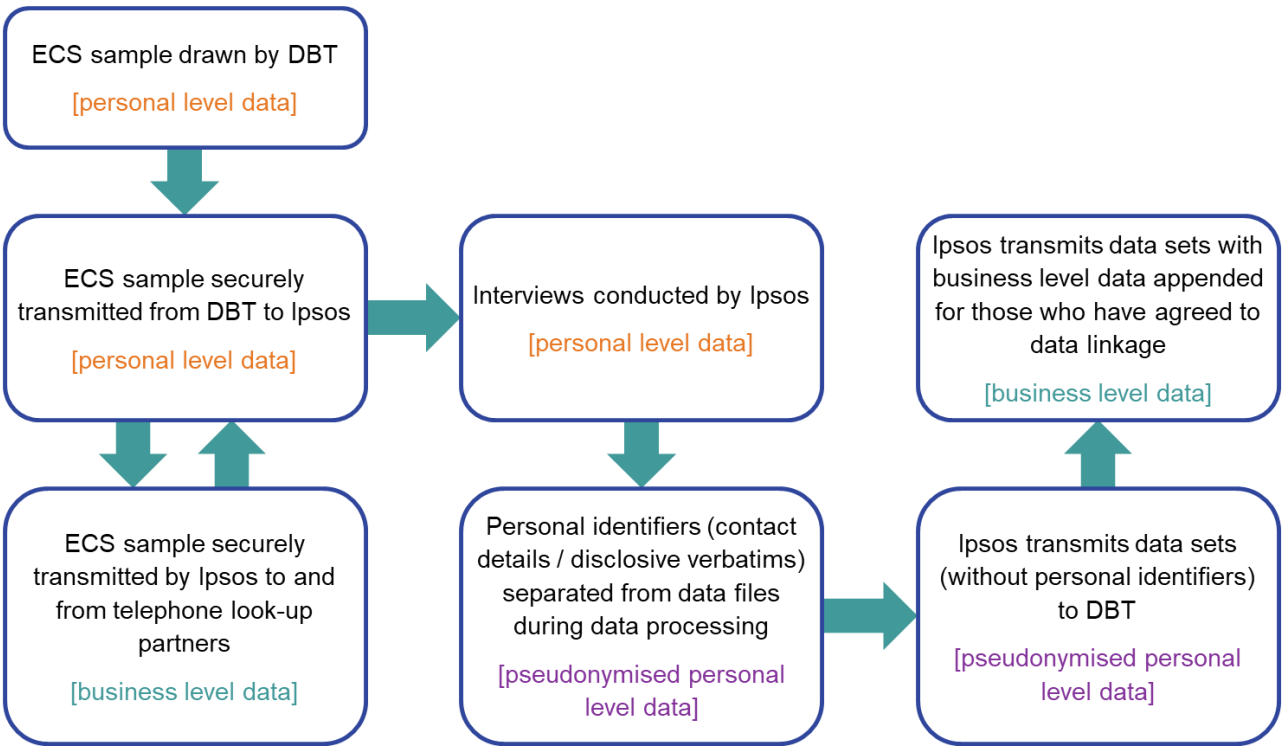
- MRS and ESOMAR professional code of conduct and frameworks published by the SRA, ESRC, GSR and UK Statistics Authority
- ISO 20252: international market research quality standard
- ISO 9001: international standard for quality management systems
- ISO 27001: international standard for data security
- 2018 Data Protection Act
- Cyber Essentials
- Fair Data

Each month, the ECS sample is drawn by DBT and then securely transferred to Ipsos and stored in line with the requirements of the 2018 Data Protection Act and GDPR. The data security procedures in place minimise the risk of data loss and ensure that respondents' confidentiality is protected at all times. Ipsos ensure that their processes are updated with the most recent regulations by conduction regular cycles of internal security audits, which feed into their continuous improvement process.

Once received, Ipsos process the sample and securely transmit a portion of the sample without telephone numbers to an approved supplier to obtain telephone details of the businesses. Once the telephone interviews are complete personal identifiers (contact details/disclosive verbatims) are separated from data files during data processing. All personally identifiable information is removed from DBT ECS datasets before they are transmitted outside Ipsos (to DBT). All reporting is non-disclosive, including any presentations of findings, toplines and reports.

The data is stored and deleted according to the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Network personal data files are deleted within 12 months of project closure. For an overview of the data processes detailed above, please refer to Figure 6.6.1.

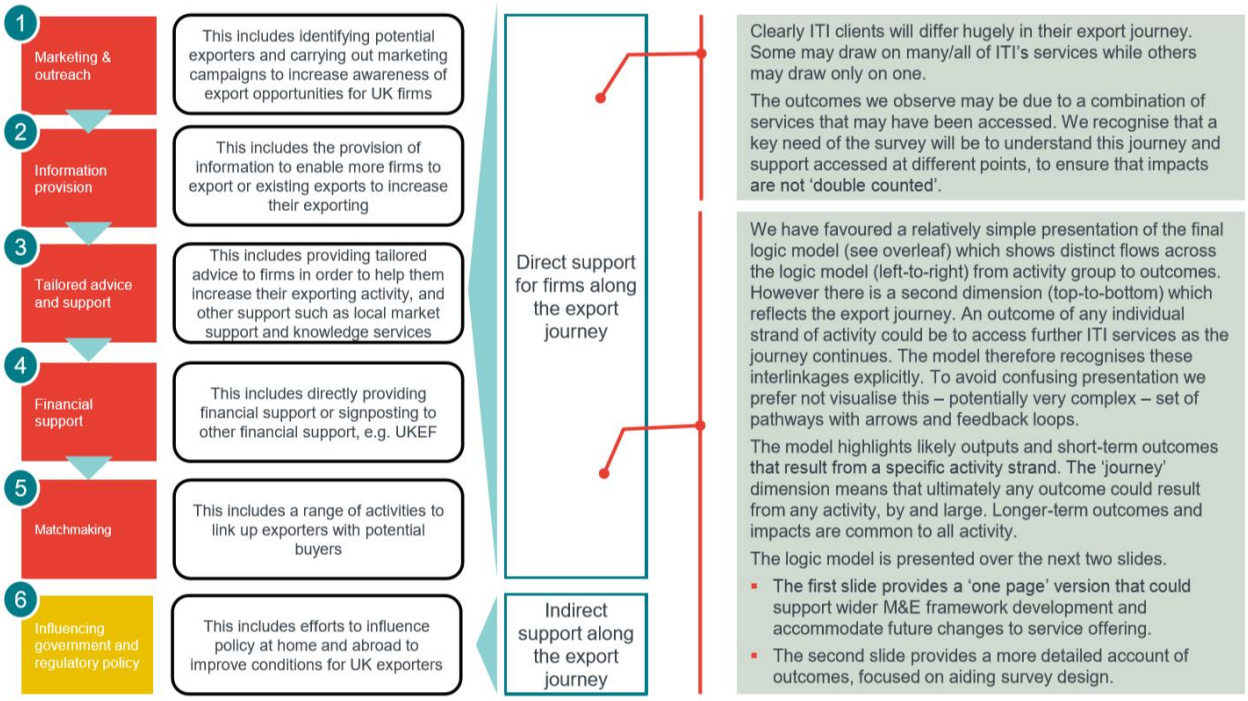
Figure 6.6.1: Data flow diagram



Description: Flow diagram showing the movement and handling of ECS sample data between DBT and Ipsos. Arrows show the direction of data flow between each stage. ECS sample drawn by DBT (personal level data). ECS sample securely transmitted from DBT to Ipsos (personal level data). ECS sample securely transmitted by Ipsos to and from telephone look-up partners (business level data). Interviews conducted by Ipsos (personal level data). Personal identifiers (contact details/disclosive verbatims) separated from data files during data processing (pseudonymised personal level data). Ipsos transmits data sets (without personal identifiers) to DBT (pseudonymised personal level data). Ipsos transmits data sets with business level data appended for those who have agreed to data linkage (business level data).

Annex A – International Trade and Investment (ITI) logic model for ECS

Frontier Economics created the logic model used to help develop the ECS questionnaires. It focussed on services provided by the International Trade and Investment Group within DBT. The International Trade and Investment (ITI) Group is the most substantial element of the three DBT business areas which make up the Department's expenditure. Before the foundation of the then Department for International Trade, ITI was known as UK Trade and Investment (UKTI), a non-ministerial government department.



Description: Diagram showing logic model which was used to develop the ECS questionnaire. The model shows of the activities/services which the International Trade and Investment Group do. It starts with 1) marketing and outreach; 2) Information provision; 3) Tailored advice and support; 4) Financial support; 5) Matchmaking; 6) Influencing government and regulatory policy.

Annex B — Quality survey weight map

Variable	Weight
Qexportstatus	weight_business
Qexportstatus2	weight_business
Qexportfuture	weight_business
Qyearsell	weight_business
Qcurexp	weight_business
Qcurexpeur	weight_business
Qcurexpna	weight_business
Qcurexpla	weight_business
Qcurexpas	weight_business
Qtypexp	weight_business
Qonexp	weight_business
Qresult	weight_service
Qcontact	weight_business
Qreadiness	weight_business
Qbarrier	weight_business
Qoutcome	weight_service
Qoutcome2	weight_service
Qrelserv	weight_service
Qrelorg	weight_service
Qsathand	weight_service
Qreg	weight_service
Qevent	weight_service
Qfindinfo	weight_service
Qupdate	weight_service
Qknowstaff	weight_service
Qcomp	weight_service
Qclarity	weight_service
Qtimetaken	weight_service
Qqualinfo	weight_service
Qresult_1	weight_service
Qresult_2	weight_service
Qresult_invest	weight_service
Qresult_opps	weight_service
Qexoppcontract	weight_service
Qresult_conts	weight_service
Qsatis	weight_service
Qwhydis	weight_service
Qlikrec	weight_service
Qimprove	weight_service
Qknowchange Qperception	weight_service weight_service
QfirstDBT	weight_business

QContDBT	weight_business
QcontDBTOth	weight_business
QDBTadaware	weight_business
Qturnover	weight_business
Qturnexp	weight_business
Qturnexpest	weight_business
Qturnprop	weight_business
Qnumemp	weight_business
Qactivities	weight_business
Qactivities_2	weight_business
Qtradetime	weight_business
Qboardprofile	weight_business
Qboardfemale	weight_business
Qboardethnicity	weight_business

Department for Business and Trade

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