

Analysis of the results of the BIS *Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions* User Survey

Background

This paper has been produced to summarise the views of data users of the *Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions (BPE)* publication, collected in a user survey, available via the link below:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/analysis/statistics/business-population-estimates/bpe-user-engagement>

The survey asks users about how they use the data and their views on a number of questions including the usefulness, level of detail and format of the publication. This is very important, since, as a National Statistic it is vital that the *BPE* publication continues to meet the needs of its users for timely and relevant data on the UK business population. The survey results are being used by BIS to review user feedback and to help decide on future changes to the publication.

Overall the results from the survey were positive in relation to the publication. There was an appreciation by users that the outputs released were useful, comprehensive and accessible. The publication was used by a variety of different users from both the public, private sectors and from students for a number of specific uses. Some users provided suggestions for changes, including the release of more disaggregated data and the development of greater functionality, including cross tabulation tools to enable ad hoc analysis by the data user.

In the section named 'BIS response to feedback', BIS has responded directly to each of the suggestions for changes to the publication, including whether they are feasible or could be implemented.

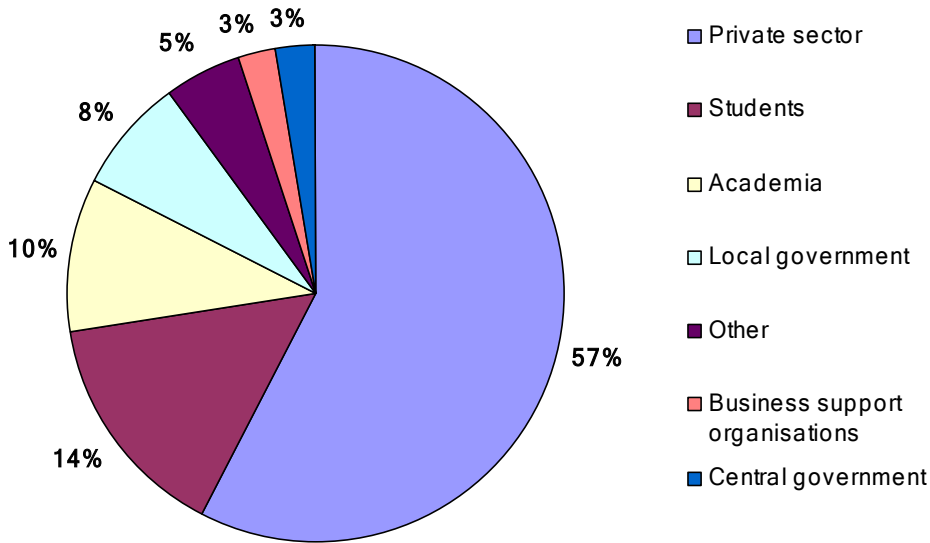
Analysis of results

Overall there were a total of 42 respondents to the survey and these were received between May 2011 and May 2012.

Question 1 - What type of organisation do you work for?

There were 40 people who responded to this question and overall more than half worked in the private sector. See the chart on the following page for further information.

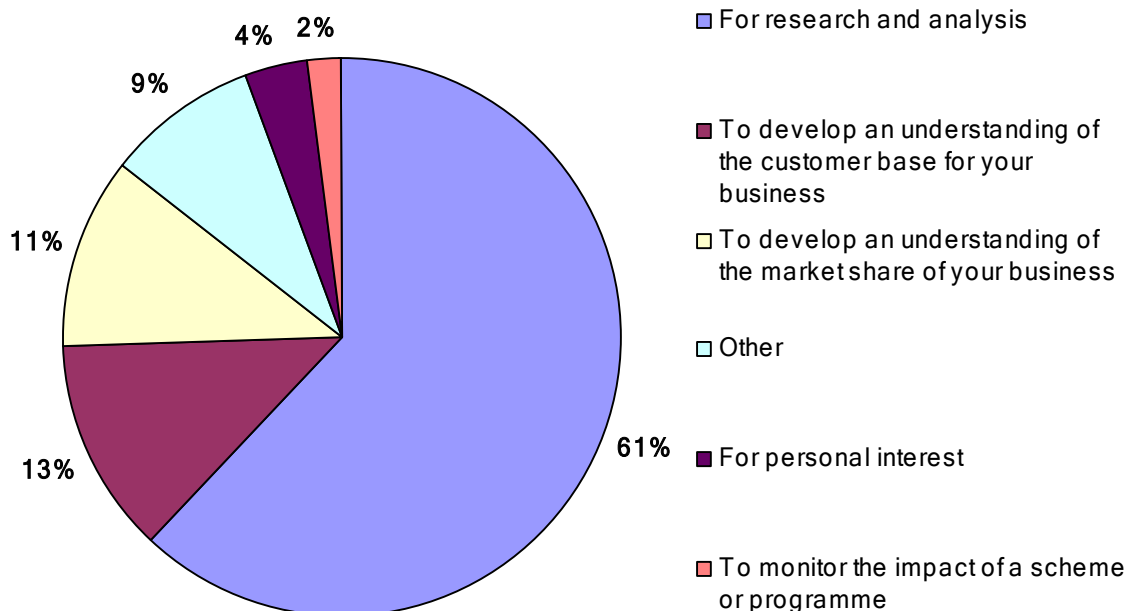
What type of organisation do you work for?



Question 2 - What do you use the *Business Population Estimates* for?

In total there were 35 respondents to this question, though some people provided multiple responses (and there were 55 responses in total). Overall 61 per cent of responses given said the statistics were used for research and analysis and the results are summarised below.

What do you use the *Business Population Estimates* for?



Question 3 - Please briefly describe the research or analysis project that you are using the *Business Population Estimates* for

There were 32 responses to this question, and some of these are summarised below:

- Estimating the number of SMEs by region.
- Assessing the size of the market and its constituents.
- Academic study of the business population.
- Assessing the size, value and performance of the local economy.
- Using the estimates to apply weighting factors to a recent SME survey.
- Looking at the contribution of SMEs to the economy.
- For supporting evidence for impact assessments.

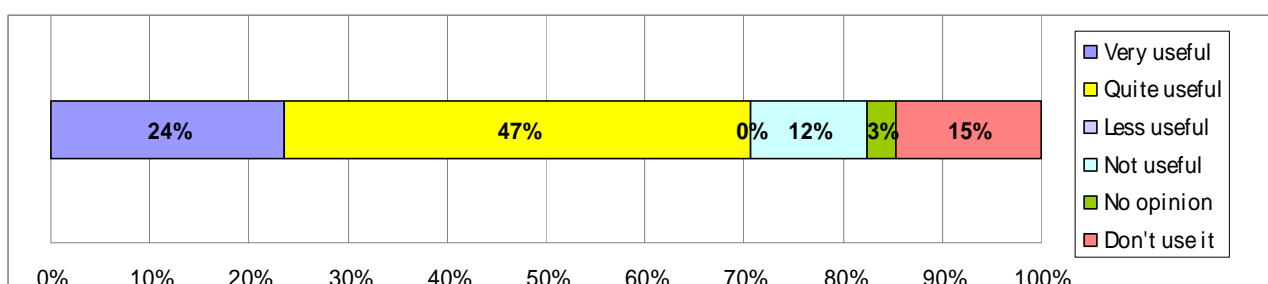
Question 4 – So we can assess the usefulness of the BPE publication, it would be very helpful if you could state how you use our data and particularly what impact it has had on your organisation?

There were 34 responses to this question, who gave the following comments:

- The number of SMEs by legal status.
- To get robust estimates of the number of UK private sector businesses.
- To investigate trends in new business start-ups.
- For PR material and impact assessments.
- For evidence to underpin marketing and financial strategies for the next 5 to 10 years.
- One respondent said that the data was not disaggregated to county level, so was not of use in their work.
- As evidence for economic and business planning.
- Using the data for targeting policy actions.
- For use in research papers.

Question 5 – How do you rate the usefulness of the Statistical Release?

There were 34 responses to this question, which are summarised in the chart below. Overall, 71 per cent of respondents thought the Statistical Release was very or quite useful.

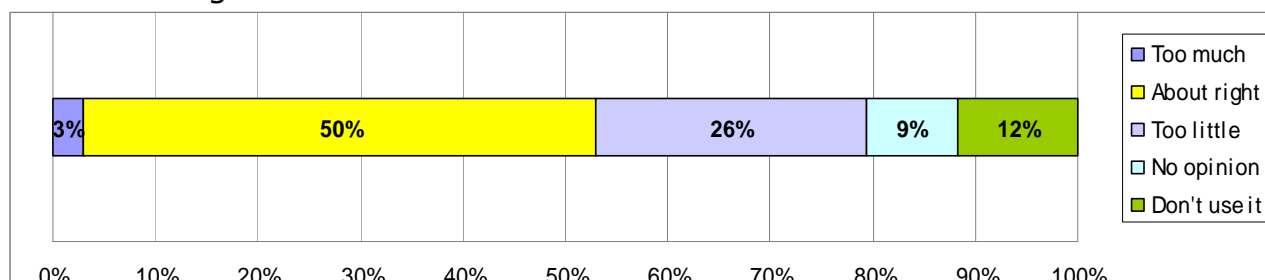


In addition there were 16 respondents who gave the comments below:

- Several respondents liked the document which was easy to download and was clear and concise.
- Some respondents would have preferred greater detail, including information on more detailed geographical areas.
- Two respondents said there were technical problems accessing the file.

Question 6 – What do you think about the level of detail in the Statistical Release?

There were 34 responses to this question, which are summarised in the chart below. Half of the respondents agreed that the level of detail in the release was 'about right'.



Further comments provided included the following:

- Four respondents said that they would like more geographical detail.
- One respondent said they would like more information on micro and small businesses.
- One respondent said they would have liked more information on the underlying calculations were made.

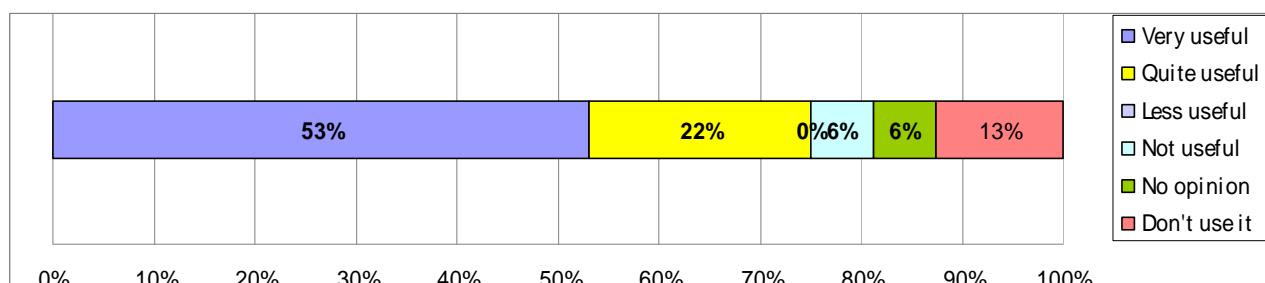
Question 7 – Are there any changes or specific items that you'd like to see added to (or removed from) the Statistical Release?

For this question there were 14 responses, including the following comments:

- Current coverage is sufficient.
- Time series data.
- Business start-ups, bankruptcies and more granular industry codes.
- Being able to create ad-hoc tables.
- Would like additional value-added data.

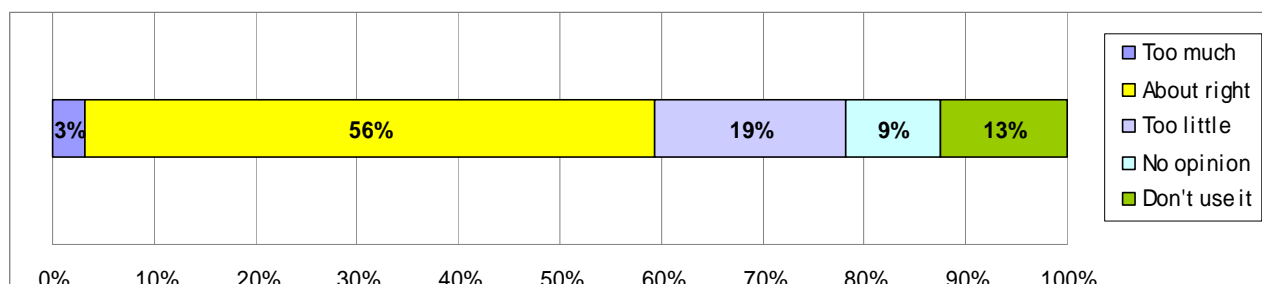
Question 8 – Overall, how do you rate the usefulness of the detailed data tables?

For this question, there were 32 responses, and overall three quarters agreed that the detailed data tables were very or quite useful. See the chart below for more information.



Question 9 – What do think about the level of detail in the detailed data tables?

For this question, there were 32 respondents, and over half of these agreed that the level of detail was about right. Refer to the chart below.



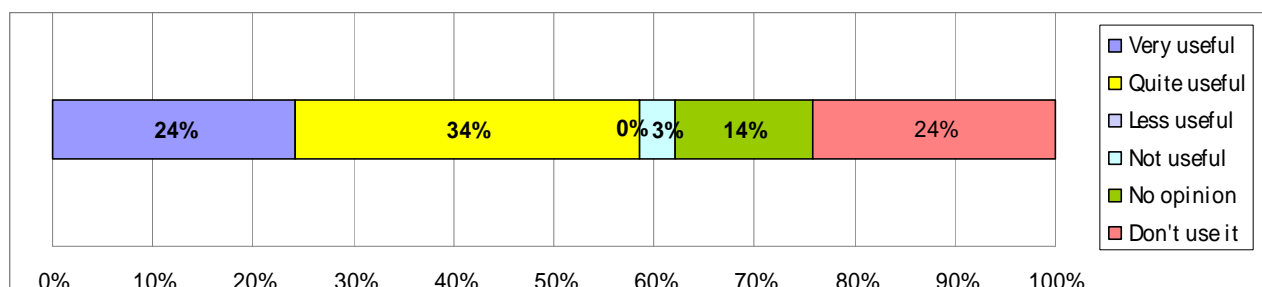
Question 10 – Are there any changes or specific items that you'd like to see added to (or removed from) the data tables?

For this question there were 17 responses, which included the following:

- Three respondents said they were happy with the current level of detail.
- Three respondents wanted greater detail by geography or sector.
- Two respondents wanted more information on time series.
- One respondent was unable to access the tables.
- Other respondents wanted information on value-added or exports.

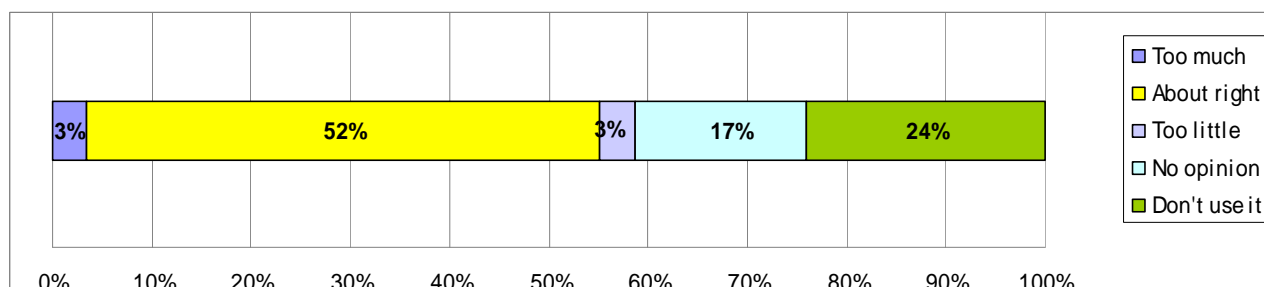
Question 11- Overall, how do you rate the usefulness of the Methodology Note?

There were 29 responses to this question, which are summarised in the chart below. Overall, 58 per cent of respondents agreed that the Methodology Note was either very or quite useful.



Question 12 – What do you think to the level of detail in the Methodology Note?

There were 29 responses to this question, and over half agreed that the level of detail was about right. This is summarised in the chart below:



Question 13 – Are there any changes or specific items that you'd like to see added to (or removed from) the Methodology Note?

There were just five responses to this question:

- Three respondents confirmed they were content with what was currently provided.
- One respondent suggested that comparable figures could also be provided.

Question 14 – Are you able to locate the statistics you need easily on our website?

There were 27 responses to this question, with two thirds of respondents agreeing and a third disagreeing. General comments from the later group included the following:

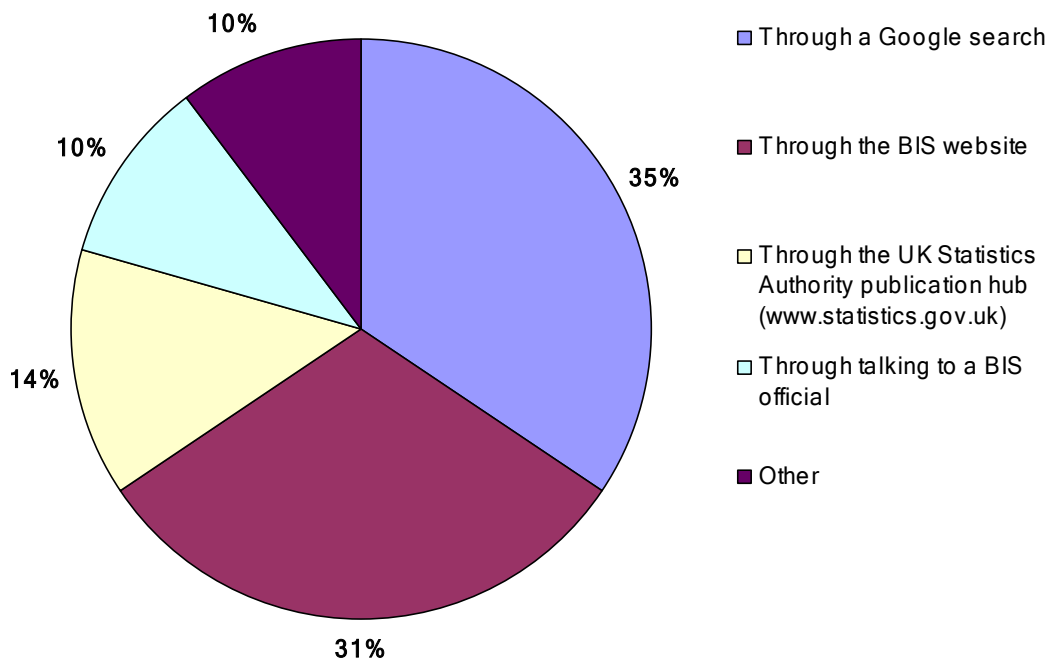
- Would like more information specifically on SMEs.
- Too many variations, not clearly labelled.
- Re-directed to pages where links were not working.
- Found the statistics, but not at the level of detail they we looking for.

Question 15 – How did you find the Business Population Estimates today?

There were 29 responses to this question:

Here two thirds of respondents said they either accessed the publication directly via the BIS website or via a google search. See the pie chart on the following page.

How did you find the Business Population Estimates today?



Question 16 - What would be your preferred format for the publication?

There were 32 responses to this question:

- 63 per cent (20 respondents) preferred the current format used i.e. a pdf file for commentary and separate excel file for detailed tables.
- 25 per cent (8 respondents) preferred a HTML web-page for commentary and links to download data tables in excel.
- 9 per cent (3 respondent) preferred either an alternative approach of on-line data manipulation, including mash-ups and dashboards, or alternatively either a combination of two of the main options above.
- 3 per cent (1 respondent) preferred a pdf file for commentary with links to downloaded data tables in excel.

Question 17 - Do you have any suggestions for ways that could improve the BIS Business Population Estimates publication web-page?

There were eleven responses to this question, which included the following:

- Make it simpler.
- Provide on-line tools for data manipulation.
- Provide a facility for time series data.
- Make the links work.
- Provide local authority data.
- Provide more measures including assets, costs, profitability and exports.
- Maintaining the links better.

BIS response to feedback

This section provides a response to each of the areas identified by users for changes or enhancements to the *BPE* publication.

More detail on micro/small enterprises or SMEs (Questions 4, 6 and 14)...

- It's unclear specifically what further detail was being requested, but we will consider if we can provide more information specifically on SMEs.

Clearer labels on the website (Questions 14 and 15)...

- We will investigate if we can make the labelling in the outputs any clearer, though most users confirmed that they were able to find what information they were looking for. We have already taken action to ensure that all footnotes, titles and links in the output files are as clearly labelled as possible.

Add ability for the user to create their own tabulations of the data (Questions 7,16 and 17)...

- We will consider if we can add greater functionality/flexibility to the data tables, however this is the role of the data.gov web site, so this functionality is already available to the user on this alternative site.

Add more detailed geographic or industrial level data (Questions 4, 5, 6, 10, 14 and 17)...

- Most users were content with what was currently provided. More detailed geographical and industrial breakdowns of the data are not feasible. This is because the data for the businesses that are not registered for either VAT and/or PAYE is based on survey data, and it would not be robust (and would lead to high levels of suppression) to disaggregate to more detailed industrial or geographical levels using the current data sources. For information on more detailed industrial and geographical data on businesses registered for VAT and/or PAYE only, you should refer to *UK Business: Activity, Size and Location* – see link provided below:
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bus-register/uk-business/2011/index.html>

Provide more information on how the underlying calculations were made / comparable figures in the Methodology Note? (Questions 6 and 13)

- BIS will be reviewing the content of the 2012 edition of the 'Methodology and Quality Note' and considering how this can be improved.

Provide a time-series of the numbers of businesses (Questions 10 and 17)....

- The comments of some users requesting that a time series facility be provided has now been addressed by the release of a headline UK level time series for the number of businesses by employee size band between 2000 and 2011. This can be located in Table 24 of the 2011 edition of the publication. Due to methodological reasons, it unfortunately wasn't

possible to include a comparable time series of the associated employment and turnover data in these businesses back to 2000.

Add information on start-ups, bankruptcies, exports, assets, value-added, costs to the publication (Questions 7 and 17) ...

- It is not the purpose of this publication to provide information on business start-ups, value added, exports or financial products, which is captured in other publications. See the links below for further information on these subject areas:

ONS Business Demography – provides data on business start-ups, closures and survival rates:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-21553>

Insolvency Service Insolvency Statistics – provides data on company and individual insolvencies:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/insolvency/About-us/our-performance-statistics/insolvency-statistics>

ONS Annual Business Survey – provides data on GVA and capital investment data:

[http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/surveys/list-of-surveys/survey.html?survey=Annual+Business+Survey+\(ABS\)](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/surveys/list-of-surveys/survey.html?survey=Annual+Business+Survey+(ABS))

Problems with web links not working or accessing *BPE* output files (Questions 5, 14 and 17)....

- There were problems with the links for the *BPE* publication which were caused by major changes to the BIS web site in October 2011. This meant that some links to the older outputs such as the former '*Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Statistics for the UK and Regions*' were placed on an archive area, which broke some web-links. BIS has taken action to address this problem by updating all the links shown on the *BPE* home page. In addition, problems for users accessing the publication via the ONS release calendar have now corrected by the ONS hub team.

Monitoring further feedback from users

- BIS will continue to monitor the responses to this survey to get further feedback from data users. BIS will review responses fully again in Spring 2013 and consider implementing suggestions for enhancements or improvements to future editions of the publication.
- BIS will be updating and monitoring a log of suggestions for improvements or enhancements to the *BPE*, taken from a combination of the *BPE* user survey, feedback from the enterprise statistics mailbox and the Business Population and Demographics Statistics (BPDS) User Group. This will also feed into the process of reviewing the format and content of future editions of the publication.