

# Annual Business Survey (ABS)

Background information to the Annual Business Survey (ABS), formerly known as the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI).

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# 1 . Introduction

The Annual Business Survey (ABS) is the main structural business survey conducted by Office for National Statistics (ONS). Prior to 2009, the ABS was known as the Annual Business Inquiry – part 2 (ABI/2) with data going back to 1995.

The ABS publishes financial information from businesses representing the UK non-financial business economy (about two-thirds of the UK economy). The financial variables covered include turnover, purchases, employment costs, capital expenditure and stocks. We are then able to calculate approximate gross value added (aGVA), which is a measure of the income generated by the surveyed businesses (and the industry or sector they represent) less their intermediate consumption of goods and services used up in order to produce their output. This is an input into the measurement of the UK's gross domestic product (GDP).

The ABS publishes variable data down to four-digit class level of Standard Industrial Classification 2007: SIC 2007 at the national level and two-digit Division at the NUTS1 region level. For a fuller description of SIC, see the summary of structure section (from page 27) in the [SIC 2007: structure and explanatory notes](#).

The latest figures from ABS are available on the ABS national release page and ABS regional release page. Publication of the ABS results follows the following cycle:

- November – Provisional national results (for previous calendar year)
- April or May – Revised national results (including revision of the previous survey year)
- April or May – Revised regional results (including revision of the previous survey year)

In addition to the published data, we also provide on request (free of charge) standard extracts. At the UK level, the extract covers a wider range of variables, down to five-digit sub-class level of the SIC; the regional extract covers five main variables down to three-digit group level.

To request the standard extracts, please contact us by email on [abs@ons.gov.uk](mailto:abs@ons.gov.uk) or by telephone on +44 (0) 1633 456592.

## Special analysis

Data not available from the standard extract option previously mentioned may be available as a user specified "special analysis". There is a charge for producing these analyses, which are available for data going back to 1998. Free quotations are provided on request.

Analyses at the following geographical levels are available, four of which follow the European standard of Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS):

- UKGBNI – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- NUTS1 – Countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and English Regions (former GORs)
- NUTS2 – Groups of local authorities
- NUTS3 – Groups of local authorities and counties (in England)
- NUTS4 – Unitary authorities and District Councils (in England)

We can also derive values in terms of foreign ownership and can size-band by registered employment, turnover and by other variables; a [list of available variables is available](#).

Users should bear in mind that the ABS is a sample survey, so more detailed breakdowns of the data will result in reduced statistical quality. In addition, suppression of data values in order to protect the confidentiality of data providers is likely to increase.

Therefore, for a typical special analysis request, we are generally unable to provide data of sufficient quality for breakdowns lower than NUTS3 geography by two-digit industry or three-digit industry by employment size band. To request a special analysis, please contact us by email at [abs@ons.gov.uk](mailto:abs@ons.gov.uk), or by telephone on +44 (0)1633 456606. We will send you a detailed quotation as soon as possible.

Once produced, all ad hoc data requests will be published onto the [ONS website](#) to adhere to the open data policy. For further information please see the [ONS approach to open data](#).

## Special analysis pricing guidance

Quotes for commissioned tables are available on application. An example pricing structure is shown in Table 1. The cost of the commissioned output reflects the amount of time taken to scope and produce the table(s) together with mandatory statistical disclosure checks and quality assurance.

**Table 1: Analysis pricing guidance**

	Small	Medium	Large	Other
Total	£250	£500	£750	Price on request

All charges are subject to Value Added Tax (VAT) at the standard rate.

We will deliver the commissioned tables within 40 working days of receiving written acceptance of the quote, except in exceptional circumstances. In most cases, where requests are not complex, tables are delivered within five working days.

## 2 . Annual Business Survey (ABS) user engagement and survey management

### User engagement

The Annual Business Survey (ABS) team would like to improve the way that we engage with you, the users of our data. We want to:

- make it easier for you to comment, question and offer feedback on ABS and its planned developments, so that improvements to our outputs and services can be prioritised in response to user suggestions
- create a forum for users to share information and experience with each other
- keep you up to date with planned developments
- showcase the wide range of uses for ABS data by publishing a series of regular analyses

With this in mind, we have set up a Business and Trade Statistics Community on the StatsUserNet forum. [StatsUserNet](#) is the Royal Statistical Society's interactive site for users of official statistics. It enables you to join online communities for your areas of interest and even create your own. You can:

- keep up to date, and update others, with developments in your areas of interest
- ask questions – other members may be able to help
- participate in and start discussions
- share resources such as useful documents and presentations
- connect with other members who share your interests
- comment on important official statistics publications
- provide feedback on plans for official statistics

Joining only takes a couple of minutes. Register by clicking "Log in or sign up" at [StatsUserNet](#), locate the Business and Trade Statistics Community through the "Communities" menu, and click join.

We look forward to engaging in discussion with you.

## **Annual Business Survey (ABS) and UK Manufactures' Sales by Product (ProdCom) Government User Group**

The primary role of the ABS and ProdCom Government User Group is to liaise with its government users so that the ABS can, where possible, meet their requirements. The User Group will report to the ABS and ProdCom Management Board.

The role of the ABS and ProdCom Government User Group is to:

- keep government users fully aware of the progress of the ABS and ProdCom surveys
- give government users the opportunity to list their requirements and voice any concerns; communicate their views to the ABS and ProdCom Management Board
- provide feedback in terms of any issues concerning the quality of the ABS and ProdCom data with a view to informing the development and implementation of the surveys
- communicate and provide feedback to government users on the introduction of proposed changes to the ABS and ProdCom surveys, such as coverage and methodology
- give data users the opportunity to provide information on how ABS and ProdCom data are being used and the decisions they are informing

Minutes of the meetings are available on request by emailing [abs@ons.gov.uk](mailto:abs@ons.gov.uk).

## **Business Statistics Micro-data User Group (BSMUG)**

Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey micro-data are used extensively by researchers in a wide variety of institutes. The primary role of the BSMUG is to liaise with its micro-data users and where possible, meet their requirements. The User Group will report to the ABS and ProdCom Management Board.

The role of the BSMUG is to:

- give micro-data users the opportunity to provide information on how the micro data are being used and the decisions they are informing
- give micro-data users the opportunity to list their requirements and voice any concerns or difficulties using the datasets with a view to informing developments
- update micro-data users on development of the Secure Research Service (SRS) and feedback on decisions taken by survey Management Boards
- communicate and provide feedback to micro-data users on the introduction of proposed changes to the business surveys, such as coverage and methodology, which will impact the datasets, and seek user feedback Minutes of the meetings are available on request by emailing [abs@ons.gov.uk](mailto:abs@ons.gov.uk).

## **Annual Business Survey (ABS) and UK Manufactures' Sales by Product (ProdCom) Management Board**

The primary roles of the ABS and ProdCom Management Board are to communicate to its members any high-level developments affecting both ABS and PRODCOM surveys and associated areas and to make strategic decisions on ABS and PRODCOM matters.

The role of the Management Board is to:

- decide on strategic issues or planned major changes before they are communicated more widely, to the ABS and ProdCom Government User Group and Business Statistics Micro-data User Group (BSMUG)
- be the main forum for communication of ABS and ProdCom high-level issues; whether concerning ABS and ProdCom directly or in Board member's areas, the main focus is on the ABS and ProdCom inter-relationship with areas of the ONS: National Accounts (NA), Business Data Division (BDD), Digital Services Technology and Methodology (DTM) and with Eurostat
- exchange information between Board members, particularly with a view to alerting each other to future developments that might have an impact on their specific area

Minutes of the meetings are available on request by emailing [abs@ons.gov.uk](mailto:abs@ons.gov.uk).

## 3 . Example questionnaires

### Description

Production sector questionnaires sent to businesses who, for example, manufacture food products, machinery, pharmaceutical products, motor vehicles, or electrical equipment.

- [Standard Production \(long\)](#)
- [Standard Production \(short\)](#)

Services sector questionnaires sent to businesses who, for example, provide legal and accounting services, head office activities, architecture and engineering activities, advertising and market research, or employment activities.

- [Standard Services \(long\)](#)
- [Standard Services \(short\)](#)

To minimise burden on businesses, the Annual Business Survey (ABS) uses a “short” and “long” questionnaire. On the “long” questionnaire, there is a more detailed breakdown of variables such as turnover, purchases and employment costs, while the “short” questionnaire only requires totals. For example, the “short” questionnaire asks for “total employment costs”, whereas the “long” questionnaire breaks this down into gross wages and salaries, employers’ National Insurance contributions, contributions to pension funds and amounts payable through redundancy and severance. The “long” questionnaires are sent to nearly all businesses with an employment of 250 or more and also to a proportion of selected businesses with lower employment. The “short” questionnaires are sent to the remaining selected businesses.

## 4 . Quality and methodology

Detailed Annual Business Survey (ABS) methodology, technical reports, future developments and reviews are available. These include:

- [ABS Quality and Methodology Information report](#)
- [ABS technical report](#)
- [Quality and Methods – archive page](#)

## 5 . Annual Business Survey history and background

A review of the [history and background](#) of the Annual Business Survey (ABS), formally known from 1997 to 2008 as the Annual Business Inquiry – part 2 (ABI/2), is available.