

Statistical bulletin

# Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 2 December 2021

The impact of challenges facing the economy and other events on UK businesses. Based on responses from the voluntary fortnightly business survey (BICS) to deliver real-time information to help assess issues affecting UK businesses and economy, including financial performance, workforce, trade, and business resilience.

Contact:  
Emily Hopson  
bics@ons.gov.uk  
+44 1633 455592

Release date:  
2 December 2021

Next release:  
16 December 2021

## Notice

### 2 December 2021

From 2 December 2021 until further notice, this release will have a headline format. It will be accompanied by our full stand-alone dataset.

# Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Headline figures and industry insights](#)
3. [Business Insights and Conditions Survey data](#)
4. [Glossary](#)
5. [Measuring the data](#)
6. [Strengths and limitations](#)
7. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

- The percentage of businesses currently trading remained broadly stable throughout November 2021 at 91%, while the percentage of businesses temporarily paused trading remained at 5% over the same period.
- The transportation and storage industry reported the lowest currently trading percentage at 81%, although this was 7 percentage points higher than in early November 2021; this industry also had the highest proportion (38%) of businesses reporting an increase in demand for goods or services sold over the last month.
- The percentage of businesses currently trading who reported that the prices of materials, goods or services bought in the last month had increased compared with normal expectations for this time of year was 38%, similar to the 37% recorded in October 2021, with the manufacturing industry reporting the highest percentage at 67%.
- The percentage of businesses reporting increases in price of goods or services sold was 16% in November 2021, compared with 15% in October 2021, with the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles industry reporting the highest percentage at 32%.
- The proportion of businesses currently trading who reported a change or disruption to their procurements from within the UK has remained broadly stable from early July 2021 to November 2021; in the last month, 17% of businesses reported they were either not able to get the materials, goods or services they needed from within the UK, or had to change suppliers or find alternative solutions to do so.
- Across all industries, 6% of businesses reported they were stockpiling goods or materials in late November 2021, which is the highest percentage reported since the question was introduced in early February 2021 (3%).
- Of businesses not permanently stopped trading, 14% reported vacancies were more difficult to fill in the last month compared with normal expectations for this time of year, however this rose to 41% for businesses with 10 or more employees, both percentages remained broadly stable compared with October 2021.
- A total of 15% of businesses reported a shortage of workers in late November 2021, the figure being highest (40%) in the accommodation and food service activities industry, an industry for which 65% of businesses reported employees working increased hours because of these worker shortages.
- Across all businesses not permanently stopped trading, the safety measures being used or intended to be used the most in the workplace in late November 2021 were hygienemeasures, at 49%, and social distancing, at 43%, both reduced from 53% and 61% respectively in early January 2021; 32% of all businesses reported they were not intending to use any of the safety measures listed, an increase of 13 percentage points from early January 2021.

Data on full breakdowns are available in the [accompanying dataset](#).

## 2 . Headline figures and industry insights

The data presented in this bulletin are the final results from Wave 44 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS), which was live for the period 15 November to 28 November 2021.

For questions regarding the last month, businesses were asked for their experience for the reference period 1 November to 28 November 2021, however, businesses may respond from the point of completion of the questionnaire (15 November to 28 November 2021).

These dates should be kept in mind in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance as the estimates could be affected by both the location of the business and the date on which the business responded.

For experimental single-site weighted regional estimates up to Wave 34 (28 June to 11 July 2021), please see [Understanding the business impacts of local and national restrictions, UK: July 2021](#).

### More about economy, business and jobs

- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [economy, business and jobs roundup](#).
- Explore the latest trends in employment, prices and trade in our [economic dashboard](#).
- View [all economic data](#).

### Figure 1: Headline figures from the Business Insights and Conditions Survey

#### Notes:

1. Final weighted results, Wave 7 to Wave 44 of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).
2. Trading status: for presentational purposes, currently trading categories and paused trading categories have been combined. From Wave 41, the response options "Currently trading and have been for more than the last two weeks" and "Started trading within the last two weeks after a pause in trading" changed to "Currently fully trading" and "Currently partially trading".
3. Prices: for presentational purposes, the data shows an increase to prices bought and sold compared with normal price fluctuations for this time of year.
4. Intra UK procurement: for presentational purposes, the response options "yes, the business has been able to get the materials, goods or services it needed", "yes, but the business had to change suppliers or find alternative solutions" and "no, the business has not been able to get the materials, goods or services needed" have been condensed.
5. Prices and intra UK procurement: from Wave 42, the question was changed from the "last two weeks" to the "last month". Businesses were asked for their experiences for the reference period; however, businesses may respond from the point of completion of the questionnaire.
6. Data are plotted in the middle of the period of each wave.

#### Download this chart

[.XLSX](#)

## 3 . Business Insights and Conditions Survey data

### [Business insights and impact on the UK economy](#)

Dataset | Released 2 December 2021

Weighted estimates from the voluntary fortnightly Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) about financial performance, workforce, prices, trade, and business resilience.

This dataset includes additional information collected as part of the survey not presented in this publication.

These data are not [official statistics](#) but have been developed to deliver timely indicators to help understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and other events in a timely way.

### Access to microdata

The BICS microdata for Waves 1 to 43 can now be accessed through the [Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#). The BICS microdata for each wave are released on a rolling basis in the week following the publication of each wave.

The microdata are made confidential and do not disclose information on any specific business.

Only researchers accredited under the [Digital Economy Act](#) are able to access data in the SRS. You can apply for accreditation through the [Research Accreditation Service \(RAS\)](#). You need to have relevant academic or work experience and must successfully attend and complete the assessed Safe Researcher Training.

To conduct analysis with microdata from the SRS, a project application must be submitted to the [Research Accreditation Panel \(RAP\)](#). To access the SRS, you must also work for an organisation with an Assured Organisational Connectivity agreement in place.

## 4 . Glossary

### Coronavirus

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause disease in people and animals. They can cause the common cold or more severe diseases, such as COVID-19.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 is the name used to refer to the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is a type of coronavirus. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) takes COVID-19 to mean presence of SARS-CoV-2 with or without symptoms.

### Reporting unit

The business unit to which questionnaires are sent is called the reporting unit. The response from the reporting unit can cover the enterprise as a whole or parts of the enterprise identified by lists of local units.

## 5 . Measuring the data

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\) QMI](#), published on 20 May 2021.

The BICS is voluntary, and the results are [experimental](#).

Table 1: Sample and response rates for Waves 42, 43 and 44 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Wave	4 November 2021 Publication Wave 42	18 November 2021 Publication Wave 43	2 December 2021 Publication Wave 44
Sample	38,226	38,178	38,155
Response	8,616	8,884	8,872
Rate	22.5%	23.3%	23.3%

Notes

1. Response rates for all waves can be found in the accompanying dataset.

The results are based on responses from the voluntary fortnightly BICS, which captures businesses' views on financial performance, workforce, prices, trade, and business resilience. The Wave 44 survey was live for the period 15 November to 28 November 2021. For questions regarding the last two weeks, businesses were asked for their experience for the reference period 1 November to 14 November 2021. The [survey questions](#) are available.

### Coverage

The Monthly Business Survey (MBS) covers the UK for production and only Great Britain for services. The Retail Sales Index (RSI) and Construction are Great Britain-focused. Therefore, the BICS will cover the UK for production-based industries but cover Great Britain for the other elements of the economy covered.

The industries covered are: - non-financial services (includes professional, scientific, communication, administrative, transport, accommodation and food, private health and education, and entertainment services) - distribution (includes retail, wholesale, and motor trades) - production (includes manufacturing, oil and gas extraction, energy generation and supply, and water and waste management) - construction (includes civil engineering, housebuilding, property development and specialised construction trades such as plumbers, electricians, and plasterers)

The following industries are excluded from the survey: - agriculture - public administration and defence - public provision of education and health - finance and insurance

For more information on the methodology of producing the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (such as [weighting](#)), please see the [BICS QMI](#).

## 6 . Strengths and limitations

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey \(BICS\) QMI](#), published on 20 May 2021.

## 7 . Related links

### [Comparison of furloughed jobs data, UK: March 2020 to June 2021](#)

Article | Released 2 September 2021

An overview of the similarities and differences between the fortnightly Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) furlough estimates and HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics, over the period 23 March 2020 to 30 June 2021.

### [The Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) harmonisation guidance](#)

Web page | Updated frequently

This page provides harmonisation guidance on how best to collect data about the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Users can also find a bank of questions from multiple Office for National Statistics (ONS) surveys related to coronavirus (COVID-19) to be used in other surveys to further support harmonisation and questionnaire development. This bank also provides users with an understanding of what data the ONS has in relation to the coronavirus pandemic.

### [Understanding the business impacts of local and national restrictions, UK: July 2021](#)

Article | Released 20 July 2021

Experimental estimates from the voluntary fortnightly Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS), for single-site businesses only, on topics such as trading status, financial performance, workforce, and business resilience. Geographical breakdowns include country, regional and local authority levels.

### [Business and individual attitudes towards the future of homeworking, UK: April to May 2021](#)

Article | Released 14 June 2021

Analysis of the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on office working and of business and individual attitudes to future working practices.

### [Business Impact of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Survey: preliminary weighted results](#)

Article | Released 14 September 2020

Early estimates of weighted responses from the voluntary fortnightly business survey, focusing on businesses' responses on how turnover, workforce and trading status have been affected in two-week reference periods, from Wave 7 (1 to 14 June 2020) to Wave 12 (10 to 23 August 2020).