

their business, illustrates the difficulties facing the ONS and other organisations using self-completion online data collection nowadays. Moreover, voluntary surveys of this kind often suffer from a response bias in favour of an interest in the topic and, in this instance, it is evident that the majority of the 50 respondents were keen to have the opportunity to provide the ONS with their opinions! As a result this report contains insights which are well worth reviewing by the ONS and others, even though they are unlikely to be representative of the views of UK business as a whole, or even a majority. Meanwhile, it needs to be emphasised that the regular business surveys operated by the ONS are not subject to this same bias because completion of those regular surveys is mandatory for those businesses sampled. Also the surveys are less concerned with opinions and more concerned with details of business performance.

In terms of the profile of the businesses, the majority of respondents represented small businesses with 24 of the 35 persons answering Q.16 having less than 11 employees, 8 of whom were self-employed sole traders (Q.14), nevertheless the majority (25) had been in business for more than 10 years. Bearing in mind that the respondents are all characterised by a desire to be listened to, it is important to note two important issues identified from the profiling questions: -

- Despite the fact that the survey was conducted online, responses to Q.25 indicated a strong regional bias towards London (18 respondents) and the South East (10 respondents). It is not known whether this reflects a bias within the membership of the various organisations.
- Responses to Q.12 revealed a high incidence of involvement with more than one business - 15 of the 37 persons answering the question claimed to represent 2 or more businesses with one person claiming involvement with 9 different businesses.

With regard to the respondents' engagement with the ONS, as covered by question Q.1 only 5 of the 50 respondents claimed to complete ONS's business surveys, with 2 others having colleagues that completed questionnaires on behalf of their business. However, ideally, the answer should have been zero because they had been asked to complete the alternative ONS survey, available on Citizen Space (see below section 3. Technical Note). That survey was run concurrently with the BCS survey and is reported elsewhere. Encouragingly, answers to the follow up question indicated that 5 of these respondents believed that ONS surveys are reasonably straightforward to complete. On the other hand, 5 also believed that they are not adequately informed of the purpose and importance of the surveys they complete. This endorses the importance of providing appropriate feedback to survey respondents, as was also identified at the seminar,

More than half (23) of the remaining 43 respondents claimed not to be familiar with the ONS - 6 of whom claimed not to have heard of the organisation, prior to receiving the invitation to complete the survey and the other 17 claiming to have only heard the name. BSC contend that the lack of widespread awareness of the functions of the ONS is supported

by other evidence and that it is a primary barrier to its ability to successfully fulfil its function to collect data from citizens and UK business.

On the other hand 18 of the respondents claim to use ONS data, half of them as part of the work they do for their clients, with business planning and other internal purposes forming the remaining usage. Altogether, these 18 respondents consult many different ONS reports, with the Census and Population data receiving most mentions, closely followed by GDP and other economic information. This is encouraging evidence of the importance of ONS data to a significant number of businesses.

All the responses received to the questions are tabulated in the next section of this report which also lists the replies received to the questions probing for the respondents' opinions on various aspects of the engagement of the ONS with businesses in the UK.

Although those 'open ended' replies include many individual insights worth reading, those respondents who use ONS data provided few ideas as to how the ONS might improve their services to business beyond a plea for easier access to the data, including the use of API's.

In some cases they evidenced a lack of understanding of the role of the ONS – e.g. *"marketing and communications on new initiatives and innovation"*.

Meanwhile the more general question of what actions the ONS might take to improve relations with UK business, evoked statements of the need to improve their communications directed at business, particularly smaller business – *"More explanation of what the ONS data is used for..."*. This emphasises the potential importance of the new Business Register, which development provides a opportunity to re-set relations between the ONS and the majority of UK business people, including the self-employed. Possibly the most comprehensive advice was provided by the respondent who said *"The ONS could improve relations with UK businesses by keeping surveys proportionate to business size, reducing repetition across different surveys, and being clearer about how submitted data is actually used and benefits businesses"*. This latter point was also emphasised in the open forum at the Seminar on the 1st May, which had suggested there should be more targeted feedback to respondents to ONS surveys.

On the other hand it is difficult to identify any valuable specifics from the question asking respondents to suggest ideas to make ONS more useful to **their** business. Possibly one that might prove more widely popular was *"we would suggest there is more purposive sampling towards fast growing businesses or ones developing new products and services, this would ensure that coverage of key economic indicators captures economic dynamics"*. Although, possibly, the ONS might find it difficult to specify eligibility for such a report!

The series of 'open' questions was completed by asking respondents their opinions of the trend towards the ONS having more access to administrative data, such as tax returns, visas and welfare payments. Overwhelmingly the responses were to welcome these

developments, with only a very few persons expressing any concerns. It is important, however, to recognise the potential bias that these respondents may only represent more *'interested'* members of the business community and their opinions should not be accepted as representative of business persons as a whole.

The above summarises the results of the core survey; we also asked respondents if they were willing to answer further questions on some of the issues facing UK Business at this time, so 17 respondents went on to provide their views on Artificial Intelligence, attitudes to growing their business and a few other topics.

The possibility that the respondents to the survey are not representative of the majority of businesses, particularly small business is highlighted by the fact that all but one of these 17 respondents claim to be either involved with or interested in a programme to improve productivity and are keen to grow their business. Moreover that respondent is the only one not to consider AI as having potential value to their business with 10 of the remainder already using AI in their business and a further 5 actively considering its use.

2. The Results

We present below the analysis of all the responses received to the survey in the form of the counts of the pre-coded responses and the full listing of the text responses received to the *'open-ended'* questions. The results are provided in the order of the survey questions and the format includes re-printing each question and then the corresponding responses. Instructions concerning the survey questionnaire are provided in **bold**.

2.1 Awareness and use of the ONS:

This first section asks about your awareness of the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Q1 Which of these statements best applies to your knowledge of the ONS? (please tick all that apply)

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
	I use ONS data in my work	18
	I use ONS data for my hobbies or other non-work activities	4
	I complete surveys on behalf of the ONS	5
	A colleague completes surveys on behalf of the ONS	2
	I am familiar with the ONS	23
	I have only heard of the organisation	17
	I hadn't heard of the ONS until I was invited for this survey	6
	Total Respondents	50

Q2 If a) or b) at Q1 (Others go to Q6): Which of the following statistics do you use for your work or for other purposes? (please check all that apply)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
GDP and National Accounts	9
Balance of Payments	2
Labour Force Data	7
Inflation Measures	5
Monthly Business Surveys	3
Business Insights and Conditions Survey	7
International Trade data	4
Retail Sales Index	4
Other Business or Economic Data	7
Census 2021 Data (Nomis etc)	13
Other Population data	7
Other ONS data	5

Q3. What other ONS data do you use?

Responses:

Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)

Population breakdowns

weather and climate change related

Output Areas

Not stated

Q4. If any **work usage** checked at Q2 (others go to Q6): What do you use ONS data for? (Please check all that apply)

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Count</u>
Informing others I work with	6
Used to help monitor our business performance	2
Contributes to our business planning	6
Used as part of the work we do for clients	9
Other – Please Specify	3
Articles	1
public commentary and informing contributions to policy debate	1
To help track the impact of government policy on the self-employed	1

Q5. Please tell us how you consider the ONS could improve their data services to you and your business:

Responses:

API

Easier discovery and API accessibility

I work with many founders, which means they are inevitably small/micro/early stage businesses which means the business issues they face and the analysis and metrics about them are often not captured.

improve IT and website

Integration with other data analysis platforms

It should focus on producing accurate estimates for all parts of the labour market and not solely on employment.

Marketing and communication on new initiatives and innovation. Alignment between ONS and other government data initiatives such as the National Data Library and Smart Data

More routine and timely release of microdata into trusted research environments that we use for our client work

Regular updates on inflationary pressures and commentary on government

The Census analysis tool is a bit limited. Spreadsheets come out in ways which are difficult to look at or handle. I wasn't in the Census.

The data is really hard to extract. Simplified data sets with fewer postcodes/areas (or amalgamated) would be helpful for businesses.

Q6. If c) or d) checked at Q1 (others go to Q9): Which of these ONS surveys have you or a colleague completed during the past 12 months?

Ticked responses only listed:

	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Count</u>
Annual Survey of International Trade in Services (AITIS)		1
Monthly Business Surveys (MBS, RSI, Construction)		2
Monthly Survey for Index Numbers of Producer Prices (PPI)		1
Vacancies		1
None of the above		3
Not sure		1

Q7. With regard to completing ONS surveys would you say that:

	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Count</u>
You are adequately informed as to their purpose and importance?	Yes	1
	No	5
They are reasonably straightforward to complete?	Yes	5
	No	1

Q8. If No to either a) or b): How do you think the surveys might be improved?

Responses:

Keep them short. People don't have time to fill in long surveys and also, there are a lot of scams, so knowing the request comes from a reputable source helps.

fewer options in the answers, showing a timeline along the top so you can see how much has been completed and how many more questions to go, providing a report once the analysis has been completed.

Q9. What do you think the ONS could do to improve relations with UK Businesses?

Responses:

*More explanation of what the ONS data is used for
advertise yourselves more. Make your data more relatable for people to use, so
consider use cases.
make it's relevance more obvious
Talk to and work with small and micro businesses more.
work with industry bodies - especially ones with survey capabilities or analysts - to
message the needs of official statisticians
Represent small and micro-businesses.
Perhaps a scaled down version for micro-businesses, as many of the ONS surveys seem
to be tailored towards large corporations who can deal with surveys more efficiently
than smaller enterprises.
they could actively reach out to talk
I have no idea why the ONS would be involved. I thought you were just an analysis
firm
Reach out to Small business to make them aware of your services
ONS has no understanding whatever of SME's even though they are a crucial part of
the economy. ONS totally fails to engage with small businesses
The ONS could improve relations with UK businesses by keeping surveys proportionate
to business size, reducing repetition across different surveys, and being clearer about
how submitted data is actually used and benefits businesses. More flexible deadlines,
clearer guidance, and simpler language, particularly for smaller firms without
dedicated admin teams, would also help improve engagement and response quality.
Greater Flexibility
Provide solutions to issues or state who is responsible for filling any gaps in services.
(EG funding.)
Make itself better known / available
More awareness
Be more visible and engage with real membership organisations as opposed to the
'establishment' of FSB, CBI, IOD and Chambers
No idea
Deeper engagement
More case studies of change affecting SMEs
Host regular stakeholder engagement sessions
Find out more information about the self-employed and how much we contribute to
the UK economy*

Q10. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions about how ONS data might be made more useful for your Business?

Responses:

*API
Easier to access calendar of release data all in one place.
Micro business analysis, especially in the tech space, would be very interesting!*

we work with innovation and productivity measurement, and would suggest there is more purposive sampling towards fast growing businesses or ones developing new products and services. this would ensure that coverage of key economic indicators captures economic dynamics

Not off the top of my head.

I can source data from other firms. I have no idea why I would need data from ONS directly.

Provide information relevant to small businesses and one-man bands

The current tool shows where registered businesses are. It doesn't show where the concentration of self-employment is. Your insights tool is built for established SMEs.

To help micro-businesses, you should integrate Census data on self-employment with the Business Demography data. I need to see heatmaps of where 'one-person businesses' are most active, not just where VAT-registered companies are located. Showing me 'Registered Consultancies' doesn't help me find 'Unregistered Sole Traders' who actually need my services.

The Insights Tool needs a specific 'Zero-Employee' filter. Currently, 'Micro' (0-9) is useless for me because it groups a local shop with 8 staff together with a freelance consultant. If I could filter specifically for 'Non-Employer Active Enterprises,' I could at least see the 'Top Tier' of my target market (those who have just registered for VAT/PAYE) and including the HMRC data or Census data on the locations and types of 0 employee who are not ltd or registered for VAT/PAYE could help me better advertise my business to those who need it. One of my goals is to get all of my clients VAT registered as it is a badge of honour on their success!

I would value data on the 'threshold journey.' Statistics on how long a one-person business typically operates before registering for VAT or hiring their first employee would be invaluable. As a consultant, this would help me identify the 'danger zones' or 'growth windows' for my clients, allowing me to provide better strategic advice based on national trends.

I should be able to enter my industry code and region and receive a simple report: 'In your area, 40% of consultancies like yours survive 5 years; the average time to hire a first employee is Year 3.' Providing this kind of 'Success Roadmap' would make ONS data an essential part of every business plan

Perhaps contact organisations as YBC (Your Business Community)

More practical, accessible summaries that translate data into real-world insights for SMEs would be valuable.

In particular, insights around early warning signs in areas like cashflow pressure, sector stress, or business relationship breakdowns would help businesses act earlier rather than react later.

Do some research how into how many small business are active are engage with them.

ONS must understand and engage with small businesses - possibly through organisations such as Your Business Community

ONS data would be more useful if it were easier to access in practical, business focused summaries and broken down by business size and sector. Clearer, more timely insights on payment behaviour, insolvency trends, and SME confidence would be particularly valuable for decision making and planning. Providing short explanations of how businesses can practically apply the data would also increase its usefulness.

*industry trends and benchmarks by size of business
asking a question about the specific support businesses need in different sectors, to
enable me to better target potential clients.
yes share local data re business growth regional even
not yet
Better use of SME Business Organisations to share ONS surveys
I am retired - I closed my business 6 years ago.
Made more available
Highlight trends being affected by AI
Offer greater incentives to households so the response rate for the Labour Force
Survey improves.*

Q11. The ONS is steadily gaining access to more administrative data such as tax returns, visas, welfare payments. etc. This is to improve the quality of our National Statistics whilst saving businesses time and money completing surveys. All data is anonymised to ensure privacy is maintained at all times. What is your reaction to these changes?

*It's a good thing
love it.
As long as it's a good commercial model...great. Let us know the timelines
I'm comfortable
It is valuable and important to use this data, and these should have been integrated
earlier. I think the anonymisation assurance is a mistake, as it may limit what you can
do such as linking data under proper controls. I think the assurance should be tailored
to that offered by the administrative process collecting the dataset. If you have to
assure anonymity and that constrains its usefulness, I can see significant benefit
reduction down the line.
so long as it is anonymous it's ok...but I don't trust the state (of which the ONS is part).
i think it is beneficial for planning
Sounds intrusive unless it's for prevention of fraud
I am okay with this provided it's used in the way you state.
I welcome these changes because they will finally shine a light on the 'invisible' micro-
economy. Currently, business demography data misses millions of sole traders who fall
below the VAT threshold. By using tax returns (Self-Assessment data), the ONS can
finally provide a true picture of the UK's business landscape. This is a positive step
toward ensuring that government policy is based on the whole economy, not just the
'registered' half.
While I support the use of administrative data to reduce the survey burden, there must
be a 'value exchange.' If the ONS has access to more granular tax data, that data
should be used to create better benchmarking tools for small businesses. For example,
I should be able to see average turnover trends or survival rates for unregistered sole
traders in a specific town or area, data that is currently unavailable but would be
possible with access to tax returns. I hope these new data sources will improve your
'Insights' tools. Currently, these tools are limited by industry and size categories that
are too broad (like 0-9 employees). Access to welfare and tax data should allow the
ONS to provide much more specific mapping of the self-employed workforce, helping
consultants like me identify the real 'hotspots' of business activity for providing
services to, or advertising in.*

*If it is going to improve the quality of decision making, I think is broadly positive
In principle, this makes sense and reducing the burden on businesses is welcome.
The key will be maintaining transparency around how data is used and ensuring
businesses feel confident that privacy is protected. Clear communication and trust will
be essential to making this work in practice.*

I'm opposed to them

Good idea.

as long as it is truly anonymous then fine

*Overall, this is a positive development. Making greater use of anonymised
administrative data should improve the quality and consistency of national statistics
while reducing the time and administrative burden on businesses. Provided privacy
safeguards remain robust and transparent, this approach feels sensible and
proportionate, particularly for small businesses with limited resources to complete
repeated surveys.*

Positive

I don't think welfare should be included in business surveys.

more paperwork

Blg Brother

Long overdue

Positive

*Good idea - as long as anonymity of individuals is preserved and results aggregated
for statistical uses only.*

Sounds sensible

Welcome

Positive.

Thank you for those answers.

2,2 Profile of respondents and their business:

***Of course, business comes in all types and sizes so to understand a little more about you
and your business please answer these additional questions. Firstly, please tell us:***

Q12. Are you involved in more than one business?

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
	Yes	15
	No	22

Q13. If Yes at Q12 (others go to Q14) How many businesses are you involved with?

Average Number 3.8

Please answer these other questions for the main business you are involved with

Q14. Are you / your business (Please tick one answer as appropriate):

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
	a) A self-employed sole trader	8
	b) Self-employed in a partnership	0
	c) Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)	1

d) Private Limited Company (Ltd)	19
e) Public Limited Company (Plc)	1
f) All others (includes arm's length organisations, charities, clubs, etc)	7

Q15. If a) or b) at Q14: Is your business registered at Companies House?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Yes	1
No	5
Not stated	2

Q16. How many people work in the business - including yourself and any part time workers?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
One	10
Two	4
3 to 5	0
6 -10	10
11-20	0
21-50	6
51-100	1
101-250	2
251-500	0
501-1000	0
1001 +	0
Not Stated	2

Q17. How long has the business been operating?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
less than a year	2
1 or 2 years	0
3 to 5 years	4
6 to 10 years	5
11 to 25 years	15
more than 25 years.	10

Q18. Is your business engaged in any overseas trading?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Yes	6
No	28

Q19. If involved in Overseas Trading, do you... Export only / Import only / Both import and Export

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Export Only	4
Import Only	0
Both Export and Import	2

Q20. Do you trade worldwide or just within specific areas? Please check as applicable:

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Worldwide	3
European Union	3
Other Eastern Europe	4
Africa	1
Caribbean	0
Central America	0
Australia / New Zealand	1
India	1
Pakistan	1
Japan	1
South America	1
Canada /USA	2
China	0
Other Asia	1
Other country	1

Q21. Are you able to accept orders or commissions online?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Yes	24
No	12

Q22. *If yes:* Is that by orders through your own website, special trading websites or simply by email? (code all that apply)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Own website	20
Amazon	2
Ebay	1
Etsy	0
Other Trading Website(s)	0
Facebook Marketplace	6
Other social media trading	7
Email trading	0
Other (please state)	0

Q23. Approximately what proportion of the turnover of your business is sold online?

Range up to 100% with average 35%

Q24. Approximately what is the annual turnover of the business?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Less than £25,000	4
£25,001 to £50,000	3
£50,001 to £100,000	2
£100,001 to £250,000	5
£250,001 to £500,000	4

£500,001 to £1million	2
£1 to £5 million	3
£5 million to £50 million	1
over £50 million	0
Don't know/Not Stated	11

Q25. In which region of the UK are you located?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
East Midlands	0
East of England	3
London	18
North East	0
North West	0
Northern Ireland	0
Scotland	1
South East	10
South West	1
Wales	0
West Midlands	0
Yorkshire and The Humber	0
Not Stated	17

Q26. Which of the following organisations do you or your business belong to?

BSC consider the results of this question to be of no value./

Q27 Which of these activities best describes your business? (Please check one only):

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Count</u>
Administrative and support service activities	3
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1
Financial and insurance activities	3
Information and communication	6
Manufacturing	1
Other service activities	1
Professional, scientific and technical activities	7
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1

Q28. Which of these best describes your role in the business?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Owner / Manager	22
Partner	0
Chairman	1
Director	1
Manager	4
Other (please state) ,,,,,,,	3

Q29. What age group are you?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Up to 24 years old	0
25 to 34 years old	2
35 to 44 years old	7
45 to 54 years old	15
55 to 64 years old	8
65 or older	0
Not Stated	3

Q30 And what is your gender?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Male	23
Female	6
Other / Not stated	

Q31. Which of these social media do you engage with? (please tick all that apply)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Facebook	17
Instagram	14
Linked In	27
Tik Tok	7
X (formerly Twitter)	11
You Tube	10
Other (state)	1

Q32 Which of these other sources of information do you use? (please tick all that apply)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
Internet Search Engine	29
Local Newspaper	6
National Newspapers	12
Trade Magazines	9
TV and Radio	12
Other (state)	1

Thank you, that completes our core survey.

If you'd like to share your opinions concerning the use of Artificial Intelligence and other issues please continue to the next short section:

Yes, continue - 17 respondents

QA1. Firstly, the Government is very concerned to see growth in the UK economy, in respect of your business, which of these statements would you say best represents the situation? (please select one only)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
We are already growing the business and expect to recruit to do so	2

We are planning to grow the business and expect to recruit to do so	5
I am keen to grow the business but cannot do so at present	9
I would not employ anyone to help grow the business	1
I have no real interest in growing the business	0
Don't know / no opinion	0

If e) or f) skip to FINAL

QA2. With regard to your present or future activities, which of these statements best applies to your business?

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
We are presently engaged in programme to improve our productivity		9
We are planning to take steps to improve our productivity		4
We are looking at the issue but have no plans presently		3
We are not considering any steps to improve our productivity		1

QA3. And with regard to Artificial Intelligence, which statement applies to your involvement?

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>
We are already using AI.		10
We have specific plans to use AI.		1
We are looking at what's available.		5
We are not considering the use of AI as yet		0
We don't consider AI to be appropriate for our business		1

QA4. If 1 through 3 at QA3: Please can you tell us which specific tools you are using or considering for use?

Responses:

Claude, Gemini, Perplexity

Otter.ai Gemini Claude Claude Code Deepseek Qwen

OpenAI Codex and Claude Code

We have tested using AI to code verbatim comments in surveys. It's fairly good, which is not good enough. If we use AI to do a first pass and then check it we will save time on larger projects (300+ comments).

Claude

Chatgpt, Copilot, Claude

I operate as a highly AI-integrated business consultant. Having completed the Google AI Professional Certificate, I have moved parts of my workflow into the Google AI ecosystem, that i can use with my Human Virtual Assistant. My business operates at the intersection of strategic consulting and AI implementation for other sole traders.

The specific tools I currently use or am implementing include:

Google Gemini (Advanced & Studio): I use these for bespoke prompt engineering to help clients generate high-quality social media content and blogs. I also use Gemini for high-level brainstorming of new services and complex business solutions within my own business. Other uses include: software overviews comparisons and tutorials to speed up problem solving; creating SEO and AI GEO strategies to improve visibility for myself and clients online.

Google AI Studio: I have built a custom Business Terminology Glossary app to streamline

communication for my clients, ensuring they understand the language of business as they grow.

Notebook LM & Google Deep Research: These are my primary tools for market analysis. I use them to synthesise massive amounts of information to cut down research time. I don't often use the ONS data as a source as it is not relevant to my business at present.

Custom AI Agents: I have developed AI agents to manage my cognitive load. As a professional with ADHD, I use agents built on expert clinical data and validated practical strategies to help me navigate business and life challenges and manage my thoughts and actions in real-time.

Creative & Visual AI: I use Google's Nano-tier models (such as Gemini Nano) and to create professional brand imagery. I also use AI to draft presentation layouts from bullet points to save time on 'blank page syndrome'.

Secure Offline Modelling: I use brain dumping techniques to educate secure 'offline' models for my sensitive business assets and marketing strategies, ensuring my intellectual property remains secure.

If your data were relevant to my business and my clients' businesses, I would be using it as a source.

As a consultant, I am deeply concerned by the 'rise of the AI expert' and the proliferation of unvalidated, AI-generated content. I make it a core part of my service to educate my clients on AI Hallucinations and the risks of relying on models trained on unregulated, unvalidated internet sources.

Chat GPT and Canva

not aware of as so many on the market

they keep changing

ChatGPT and Claude

ChatGPT

QA5. *If 1 to 3 at QA3: What is your opinion of the possible value of AI to improve Productivity in your business?*

Responses

<i>it's the best thing since sliced bread</i>
<i>it's a good tool</i>
<i>Very high, in that we would plan to automate tasks and oversee with AI</i>
<i>It's a maybe.</i>
<i>Immensely valuable</i>
<i>Producing robust, professional documents and letters</i> <i>As a sole trader, my productivity is capped by the fact that I am the CEO, the researcher, the marketer, and the administrator. AI has fundamentally shifted my business from 'time-limited' to 'capability-led.'</i> <i>For me, AI is an essential accessibility tool. By building custom agents that leverage clinical expert advice, I can partially manage the cognitive load and executive function challenges associated with ADHD. This allows me to stay productive on high-value strategic work rather than getting bogged down in the 'friction' of daily task management. Custom Gems enable me to delegate some of my work to a Human Virtual Assistant - I am confident that she has the source data direct from me and can use it to do the work I find hard, like social media marketing. This is a form of productivity that isn't captured in traditional economic stats, but it is the difference between my business succeeding or failing.</i> <i>Using tools like Notebook LM and Google Deep Research, I can process and synthesise complex market data (like ONS spreadsheets) in minutes rather than days. This allows me to</i>

<p><i>get deeper levels of insight to my micro-business clients at a price point clients can afford. AI has effectively removed the 'research bottleneck' in my consultancy.</i></p> <p><i>Productivity is useless if it produces poor quality. My productivity gain comes from using AI to 'braindump' and draft, but my professional value comes from my role as the validator. I ensure that hallucinations are filtered out and that all outputs are based on validated sources. My productivity is high because I am now an editor of AI outputs rather than a manual creator of raw data</i></p>
<p><i>AI allows me to 'fail fast' and prototype quickly. Whether I am using bullet points to generate assets or building apps in Google Studio, I am skipping the manual labour of 'formatting' and moving straight to 'refining.' This 80% reduction in production time allows me to serve more clients without increasing my hours. It also reduces my spend - to create an app five years ago would have cost me the best part of £10k and taken 6-8weeks - all before I knew whether it would be successful! My glossary app effectively cost me 2 hours of my time and a licence for Googles Ai expanded access £12.60/month.</i></p>
<p><i>AI has significant potential to improve productivity in our business, particularly by automating repetitive administrative tasks, supporting document drafting, improving information retrieval, and assisting with workflow management. Used appropriately, AI can help small businesses operate more efficiently and free up time for higher value work, while remaining subject to human oversight and compliance requirements.</i></p>
<p><i>Unsure - it's a double edged sword as potential clients are using it in place of my services.</i></p>
<p><i>can only improve matters if used correctly</i></p>
<p><i>it will help somewhat</i></p>
<p><i>Huge</i></p>
<p><i>Massive</i></p>

QA6. What would you say are barriers to growing your business?

No Barriers

QA7. The ONS have been working on “Beyond GDP”, a programme to extend the measure of our Gross Domestic Product to include the value of voluntary work and activities that are not presently measured by financial exchange, such as care for an elderly relative. What are your opinions of this initiative?

Responses

Nice idea fraught with practical difficulties...so a non-starter.

I have no opinion as I don't know how thos affects me

I do not have an opinion

I support this. In my consultancy, I work mainly with women in the 'sandwich generation', limited in business by unpaid care for elderly relatives and children. Currently, GDP sees that care as 'zero value' but there is a personal and financial cost. Furthermore, from the perspective of neurodiversity and disability, there is an element of levelling the playing field, the lost productivity and additional 'hidden work' due to inequality should be measured.

If the ONS only measures financial exchange, government support is naturally biased toward larger, VAT-registered firms. By measuring voluntary and care work, the ONS can help policymakers understand the pressures on the self-employed. This could lead to better social safety nets that recognise the dual role many of us play as both economic drivers and primary caregivers.

Never heard of it

Good. This is very important. Informal carers save the NHS millions of pounds and they should be

*included in measurements.
this is unpaid so should not be included
It is a huge industry that goes unnoticed
I think that's a good idea.
Excellent*

QA8. Similarly, the ONS have worked on a series of measures of wellbeing to provide an alternative to GDP as a means of monitoring the success our society. Such measures were originally developed in Nepal and are in use in a number of countries. What is your opinion of this initiative? <free text>:

Responses

*love it
mediocre value
Again, on balance, I think this is a low priority and there are problems with ONS viewing it as an alternative to GDO, when that is the core output of the economic statistician
Personal wellbeing is more important than GDP but it's my business not the state's.
Could be interesting
If it leads to improvement in living standards for the majority, bring it on.
My opinion of the 'Wellbeing' initiative is mixed. While it is important to acknowledge that a successful society is about more than just financial turnover, there is a real risk that these measures become a new way of 'holding back' the self-employed.
How I measure success: For a sole trader, success is defined by autonomy, flexibility, and the ability to overcome personal barriers (like ADHD) to deliver value. Success is the freedom to work in a way that suits my neurodiversity and my family's needs.
My concerns with the initiative:
The Administrative Burden: I worry that 'monitoring the success of society' through wellbeing metrics will eventually lead to more surveys and 'compliance' for micro-businesses. For us, every hour spent reporting on our wellbeing is an hour taken away from the work that actually generates it.
Standardisation: There is a danger that 'wellbeing' becomes a standardised metric that doesn't account for the non-linear paths of the self-employed. What looks like 'instability' to a statistician might be 'flexibility' to a sole trader.
The Role of Data: If you want to improve my wellbeing, use the data you already have to remove the barriers we face. Use tax and census data to show us where the gaps in the market are, so we can be more successful with less effort.
In summary, I support measuring wellbeing only if it leads to less interference and more targeted support for those of us facing inequalities. If it just becomes another layer of government monitoring, it will be a hindrance, not a help.
Never heard of it
I would like to know more about this before commenting.
Fine
What success ?
Also a good idea.
Good*

Final: As mentioned above, we are planning a special seminar on the 1st May, discussing the results of this survey, and the relationship between UK Business and the ONS.

Please provide any further comments you have on that relationship. In particular, please tell us of your experience with the ONS. We are especially looking for interactions that can be used to indicate how engagement might be improved in future

Responses

I use your data, along with other global datasets, to help small businesses create their climate map to help them understand their position now and help them work out how to get to their goals and targets. What could climate change mean for their business, their suppliers, and their customers and how could what impacts each of them impacts the other? Weather impacts, new rules, and shifting customer demand provides risks and opportunities for their revenue, customers, products and services range. If you would like to know more about this please contact me on helpfulperson@smallbusinessclimatemap.com

I think you need more technical, topic-focused interactions with businesses. I have always thought that a "how should we measure you" type engagement would be valuable with high productive sectors, such as legal services, finance, etc. Routing through industry bodies might help but focusing on sectors that export especially (as they are the businesses that are hardest to measure because their products are consumed abroad).

There seem to be limits to how much they will listen and act.

We just want to know if you can help. If you can't, people really don't care what the ONS does

To be blunt: I do not have a relationship with the ONS because I am invisible to you. As a non-VAT/non-PAYE sole trader working with similar clients, we do not exist in your primary datasets. Consequently, ONS data is largely irrelevant to my daily operations.. While I am building AI agents for real-time strategy, the ONS feels stuck in a retrospective, manual cycle. It's too late for me

My experience has been relatively limited and largely transactional, completing surveys rather than any ongoing engagement.

There can sometimes be a sense that information is requested from businesses without a clear understanding of how it feeds back into something practical or beneficial for them.

From a business perspective, more two-way engagement would be valuable. This could include clearer communication on how insights are being used, and more accessible summaries that translate data into real-world trends and early warning signs.

In particular, highlighting emerging pressures within sectors, whether financial, operational or relationship-based, could help businesses act earlier and make better decisions.

Overall, anything that makes the interaction feel less like a one-off request and more like an ongoing, useful exchange would help strengthen that relationship.

There needs to be greater coordination between ONS & small businesses to grow them. Mr Marks started with a single barrow stand. If he had been squashed by taxation & employment laws like today there would be no Marks & Spencer's. We are losing major retailers every day & small ones continuously

It seems to me that the best kept ONS secret is from where do they obtain their stats.

Frequently referred to but source(s) never divulged. Perhaps better use of all the business organisations for surveys going forward.

I have never had any dealings with the ONS and I suspect I'm not alone.

Please note all answers in the last section related to my last and now liquidated business.

3. Technical Note

The survey was conducted using the **nQuire** questionnaire system provided by nSpire Software Ltd. The questionnaire was programmed to allow respondents to not answer any question they preferred not to, hence the variable numbers in the results section.

The invitation sent to the membership of the various organisations was based upon the following draft:

Dear <member>

The <organisation> are helping the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by asking members to complete a short survey about your awareness and use of the ONS.

Our membership helps provides both the goods and services that sustain our economy as well as the data that measures how successful the economy is. To achieve that the ONS conducts 74 different business surveys each year, despatched to approximately 345,000 enterprises; moreover, every enterprise may occasionally need statistics on such subjects as employment, wages, inflation, trade or even GDP, to help with their planning and decisions.

The ONS are actively working to refine their business surveys and to understand the information needs of UK business; we therefore request that you should give them your opinions as to how they can succeed with that endeavour by completing either of these two surveys:

- ***[ONS Business Engagement Survey](#) – for those members who have completed an ONS Business Survey during the past year.***
- ***[BSC Business Engagement Survey](#) – for all other members whether aware of ONS services or not.***

Be assured that your answers are always retained in confidence and analysed along with other responses for statistical use only.

Thank you,