

---

**Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead**

Jessie Evans  
Head of Profession for Statistics  
Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy  
(by email)

18 August 2022

Dear Jessie

**Business Population Estimates**

We recently completed our compliance check of your [Business Population Estimates](#) (BPE). These are valuable statistics being the only official source for data on the total UK business population, and the employment and turnover of those businesses.

Together with [Business Demography](#) statistics and [UK business: activity, size and location](#) statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), BPE provide a comprehensive picture of the total UK business population. As we said in our previous [letter](#) to ONS and [assessment report of ONS's business demography statistics](#), we considered that ease of access and insights were restricted because of the current split of responsibilities across BEIS and ONS. We are encouraged that ONS has resumed its work to develop a new Statistical Business Register (SBR) to replace the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), a key data source for statistics about registered business in BPE. An aspiration for the SBR is to encompass all UK businesses and we look forward to the opportunities that development offers to provide wider insights into the whole business population.

Regarding BPE, we found that they comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics and should continue to be designated as National Statistics. We found a range of positive features showing the trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics:

- [BEIS's methods and quality document](#) is comprehensive and helpful providing guidance for users on interpreting the data, describing the methods used and the quality of the publication. BEIS also publishes a very useful [Guide to Business Statistics](#) which describes how BPE differs from other data published by the government on the UK business population.
- BEIS improved the method to identify self-employed numbers by making use of additional questions on the ONS Labour Force Survey around who pays the salary or wage of the self-employed and whether they pay their own National Insurance contributions and Income Tax.
- The inclusion of a section on uncertainty is helpful. The current (2021) publication quantifies uncertainty around point estimates of business numbers, using 95% confidence intervals and coefficients of variation, at the country and English region by industry section level, as well as for broad industry sections. Following our assessment of ONS's business demography statistics, ONS is carrying out further

work to understand the quality of the IDBR, and the results of that may be helpful for you to elaborate on the uncertainties you mention about the IDBR data.

- BEIS has enhanced the accessibility of the statistics to ensure they meet the latest UK Government [Accessibility Regulations](#). For example, BPE are now available in HTML format.

We also identified three areas that might help enhance the trustworthiness, quality and value of BPE:

- Ensure users are informed about the differences between BPE, ONS [Business Demography](#) and [UK Business statistics](#) and any changes that have been made to BPE statistics, for example, the inclusion of composite management service companies.
- The team confirmed it has a user-led programme of development for BPE which is reviewed regularly and is meeting the priorities of users. Adding a summary of the development plans to the bulletin may further enhance user engagement and contribute positively to the development of the statistics.
- BEIS is aware of the user need for other information about businesses, such as sociodemographic information about business owners, as mentioned in the methodology note. It may be beneficial to users for BEIS to include links to alternative data sources such as the [Longitudinal Small Business Survey](#) in the BPE bulletin.

I would like to thank your team for the work it has done to improve the quality and value of BPE and the team's positive engagement throughout this review. Our Business, Trade and International Development domain lead will continue to engage with you as the new SBR is introduced to talk through the knock-on impacts on BPE. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further.

I am copying this letter to Frances Pottier, Head of Business Statistics, Data Analytics and Business Statistics.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont  
Assessment Programme Lead