Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 21 September 2023

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.

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1 . Main points

- More than a quarter (27%) of trading businesses reported turnover had decreased in August 2023 compared with the previous calendar month, this is up 2 percentage points from July 2023; in comparison 15% reported their turnover was higher, down from 17% over the same period.
- More than one in six (18%) trading businesses expect their turnover to increase in October 2023, the same proportion that had these expectations for September 2023; meanwhile 54% reported that they expect their turnover to stay the same.
- More than a quarter (26%) of trading businesses reported an increase in the prices of goods or services bought in August 2023 compared with July 2023, down 4 percentage points when comparing July 2023 with June 2023.
- Less than one in six (14%) trading businesses expect to raise the prices of goods or services they sell in October 2023, down 2 percentage points from expectations for September 2023.
- Almost one in five (19%) trading businesses reported that their performance had decreased in August 2023 compared with August 2022; this was broadly consistent with July 2023.
- In early September 2023, nearly a quarter (23%) of trading businesses reported that they expect their overall performance to increase over the next 12 months; this is broadly consistent with early August 2023.

2 . Headline figures

The data presented in this bulletin are the final results from Wave 91 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS), which was live from 4 September to 17 September 2023.

The data reported within BICS bulletins and datasets are estimates that are subject to uncertainty, for example, sampling variability and non-sampling error. Further information on quality is available in our Business Insights and Conditions Survey Quality and Methodology Information (QMI), and we regularly update confidence intervals associated with the survey questions.

Experimental single-site weighted regional estimates up to Wave 74 are available in our Business insights and impact on the UK subnational single-site economy: February 2023 article.

More about economy, business and jobs

- All Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis is 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. For presentational purposes, some response options have been combined, excluded or both.
2. For presentational purposes, “Prices” data show an increase to prices bought and sold compared with the previous calendar month.
3. Data are plotted in the middle of each wave.

Download the data

.xlsx

The percentage of businesses that reported they were trading in early September 2023 was 95%, with 86% fully trading and 9% partially trading (for example, trading with reduced hours or staff numbers). Meanwhile, 3% of businesses reported "temporarily paused trading" and 2% reported "permanently ceased trading" as their business's trading status.

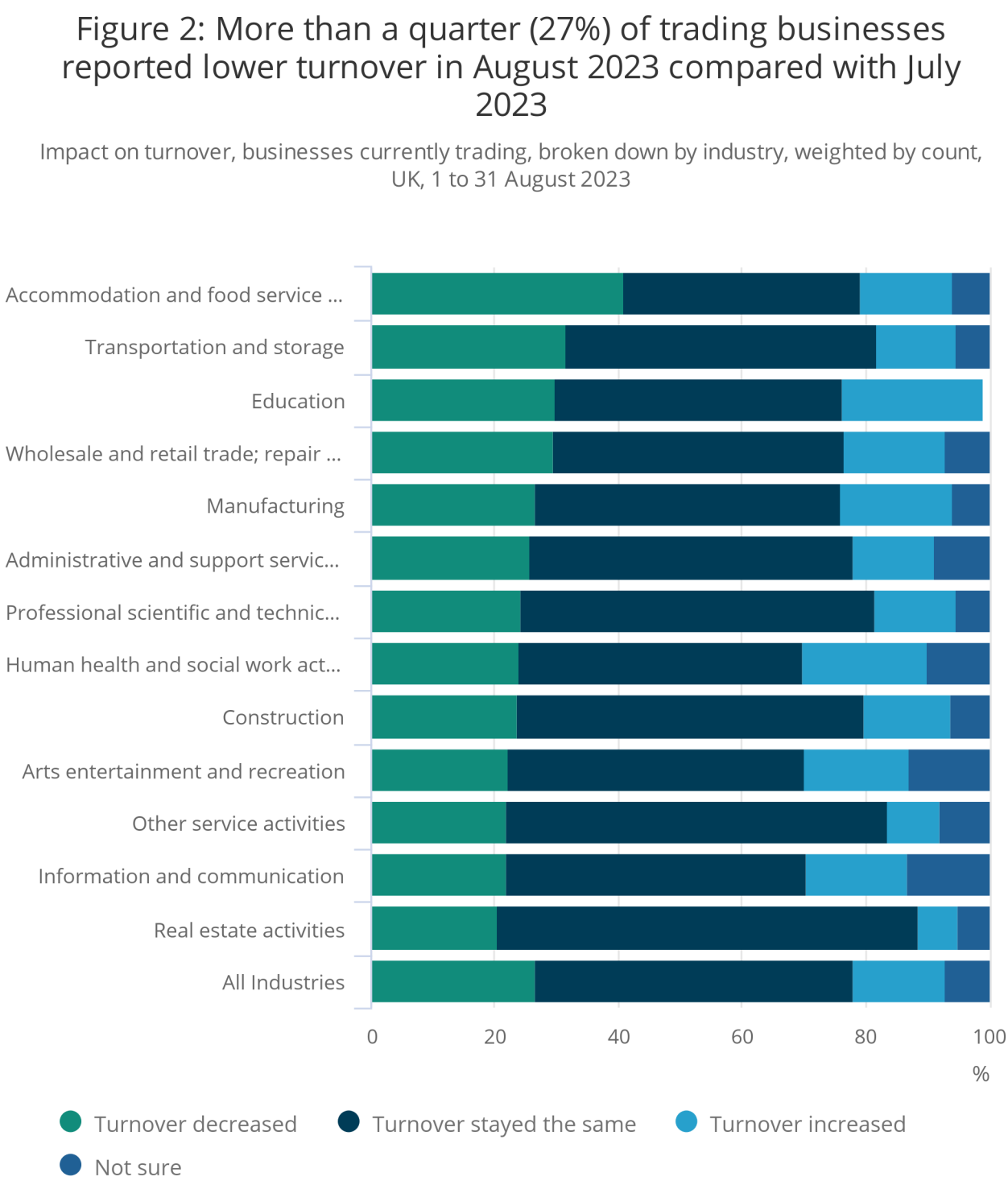
3 . Financial performance

Turnover

Trading businesses were asked how their turnover in August 2023 compared with July 2023, excluding any seasonality trading.

Figure 2: More than a quarter (27%) of trading businesses reported lower turnover in August 2023 compared with July 2023

Impact on turnover, businesses currently trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 August 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding, and percentages less than 1% have been removed for disclosure purposes.

2. “Mining and quarrying” and “Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” have been removed for disclosure purposes, but their totals are included in “All industries”.

The percentage of businesses currently trading, who reported that their turnover had decreased in August 2023 compared with the previous calendar month, is up 2 percentage points from the 25% reported in July 2023.

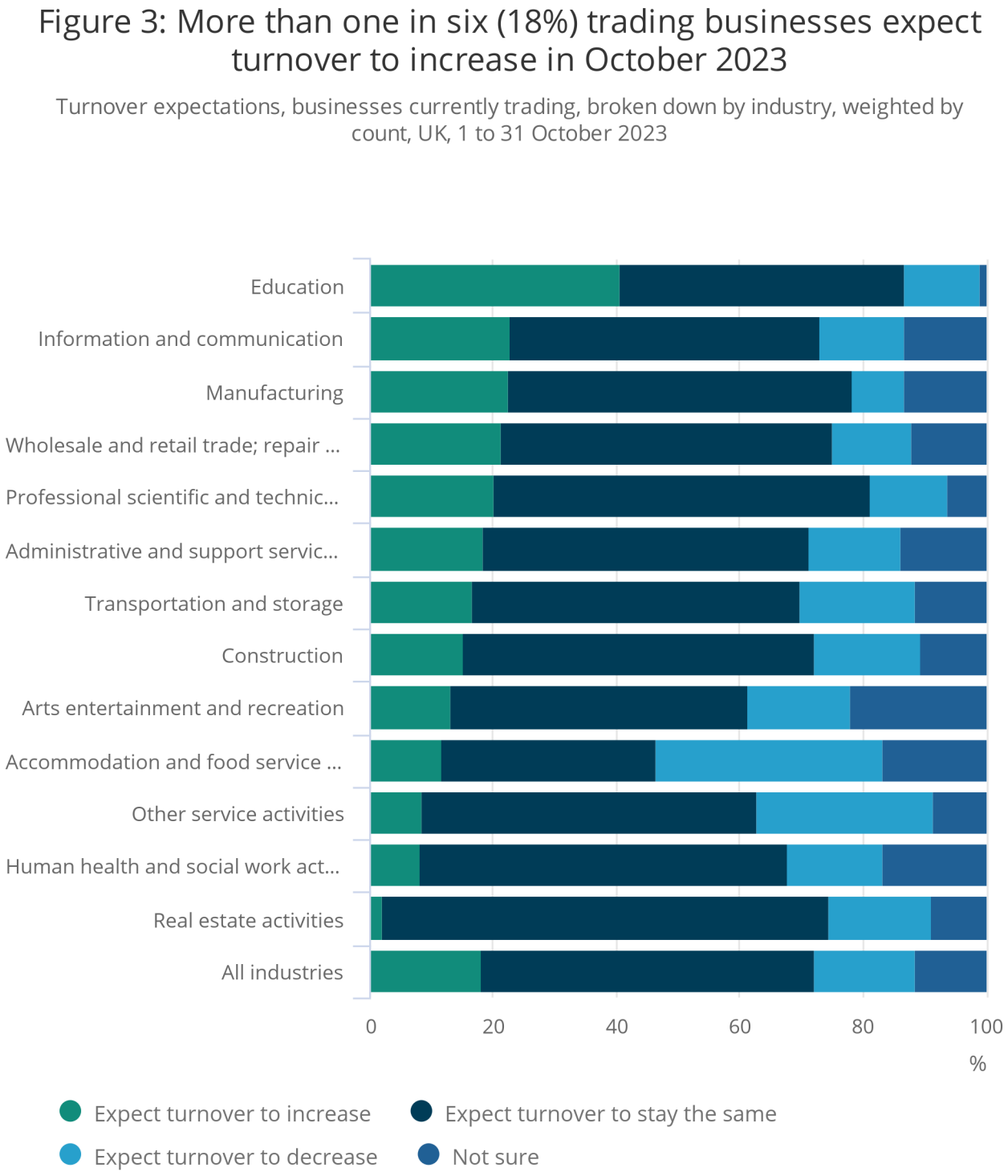
The percentage of businesses that reported their turnover had increased in August 2023 compared with the previous calendar month was 15%. This is down 2 percentage points from July 2023. Businesses who reported their turnover had stayed the same was up 2 percentage points over the same period, to 52%.

Turnover expectations

Trading businesses were asked about their turnover expectations for October 2023, excluding any seasonality trading.

Figure 3: More than one in six (18%) trading businesses expect turnover to increase in October 2023

Turnover expectations, businesses currently trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 October 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding, and percentages less than 1% have been removed for disclosure purposes.

2. “Mining and quarrying” and “Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” have been removed for disclosure purposes, but their totals are included in “All industries”.

3. Caution should be taken when interpreting expectations questions as the employees responding on behalf of businesses may not have full oversight of all of their business’s future expectations.

More than one in six (18%) businesses expect their turnover to increase in October 2023; this is broadly consistent with September 2023.

In comparison, 16% of businesses expect their turnover to decrease in October 2023, while more than half (54%) expect their turnover to stay the same. This is broadly consistent with expectations from the previous month.

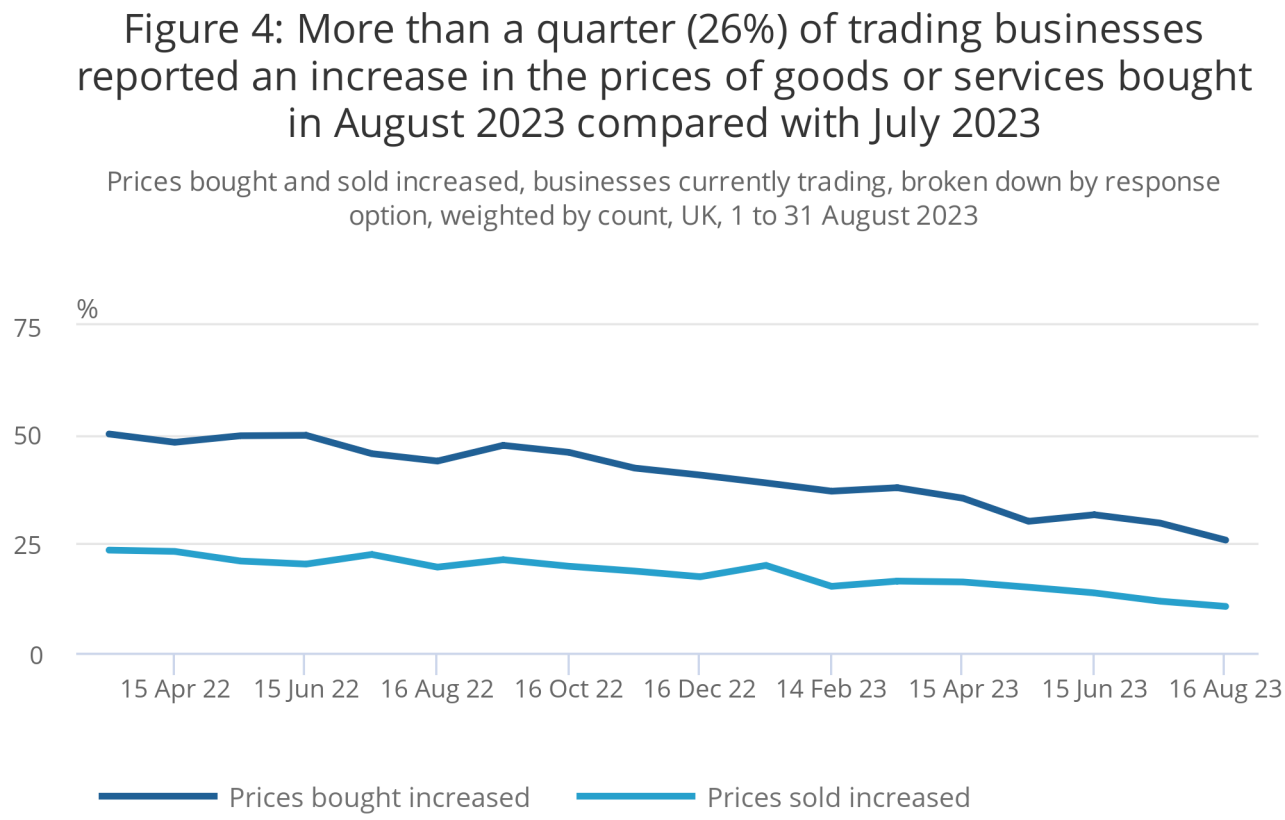
4 . Prices

Prices bought and prices sold

Businesses not permanently stopped trading were asked how the prices of goods or services were either bought or sold, or both, by their business in August 2023 compared with the previous calendar month.

Figure 4: More than a quarter (26%) of trading businesses reported an increase in the prices of goods or services bought in August 2023 compared with July 2023

Prices bought and sold increased, businesses currently trading, broken down by response option, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 August 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. For presentational purposes, response options have been removed.

2. Data are plotted in the middle of each wave.

Latest estimates suggest that a lower proportion of trading businesses are reporting an increase each month in the prices of goods or services bought and sold.

More than a quarter (26%) of trading businesses reported an increase in prices of goods or services bought in August 2023, down 4 percentage points from July 2023. In contrast, 11% reported an increase in the prices of goods or services sold in August 2023; this is broadly consistent with July 2023. These percentages are the lowest proportions reported since these response options were introduced to this question in March 2022.

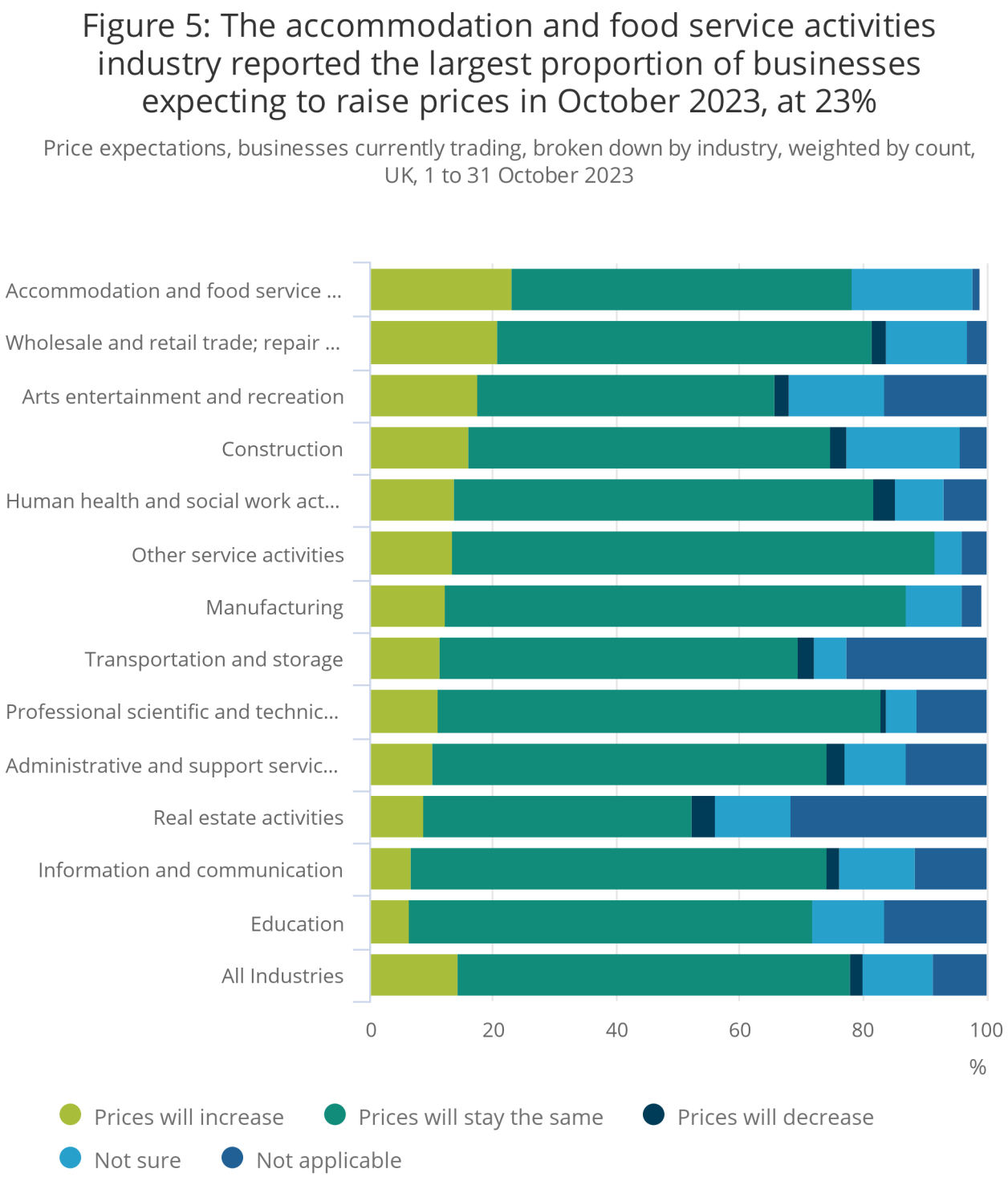
Further response options broken down by industry and size bands can be found in the accompanying dataset.

Price expectations

Businesses that had not permanently stopped trading were asked what their expectations were for the prices of goods or services they sell in October 2023.

Figure 5: The accommodation and food service activities industry reported the largest proportion of businesses expecting to raise prices in October 2023, at 23%

Price expectations, businesses currently trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 October 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding, and percentages less than 1% being removed for disclosure purposes.

2. “Mining and quarrying” and “Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” have been removed for disclosure purposes, but their totals are included in “All industries”.

3. Caution should be taken when interpreting expectations questions as the employees responding on behalf of businesses may not have full oversight of all of their business’s future expectations.

Less than one in six (14%) trading businesses expect to raise the prices of goods or services they sell in October 2023; this is down from the 16% reported for September 2023. The proportion of businesses who reported they expect prices to stay the same rose by 3 percentage points to 64% over the same period, while 2% of businesses expected prices to decrease.

Price rise reasons

In early September 2023, businesses that had not permanently stopped trading were asked what, if anything, was causing them to consider raising their prices in October 2023.

Almost half (48%) of trading businesses reported that they were not considering raising prices. This is the largest proportion of businesses to report this since the question was introduced to the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) in April 2022.

Across all industries, the most reported reasons for businesses considering raising prices included:

- energy prices (22%), down 2 percentage points from September 2023
- raw material prices (20%), down 1 percentage point from September 2023
- labour costs (18%), down 3 percentage points from September 2023

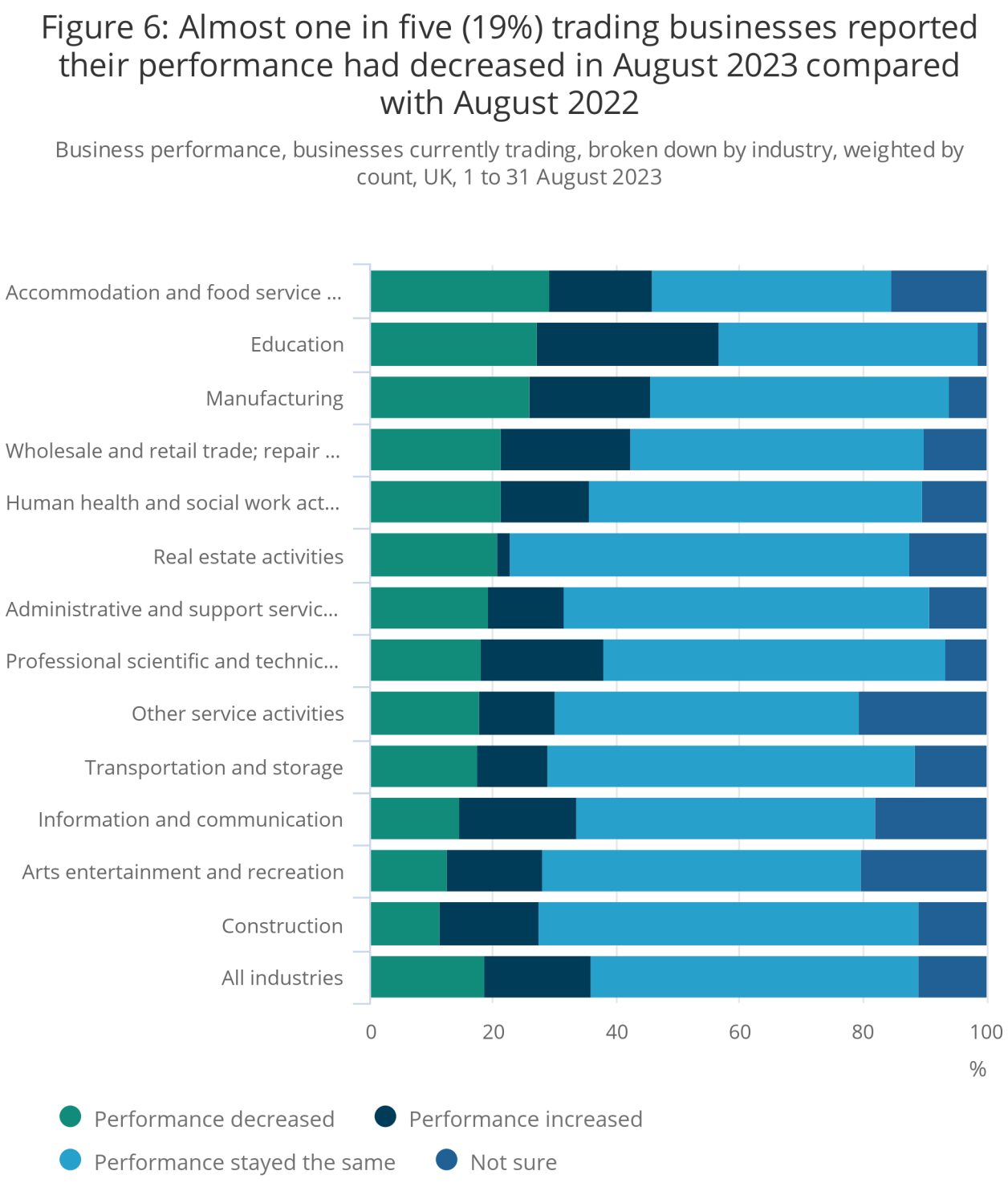
5 . Business confidence

Business performance

Businesses not permanently stopped trading were asked how they would describe their overall performance in August 2023 compared with August 2022.

Figure 6: Almost one in five (19%) trading businesses reported their performance had decreased in August 2023compared with August 2022

Business performance, businesses currently trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 August 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding, and percentages less than 1% have been removed for disclosure purposes.

2. “Mining and quarrying” and “Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” have been removed for disclosure purposes, but their totals are included in “All industries”.

3. Caution should be taken when interpreting expectations questions as the employees responding on behalf of businesses may not have full oversight of all of their business’s overall performance.

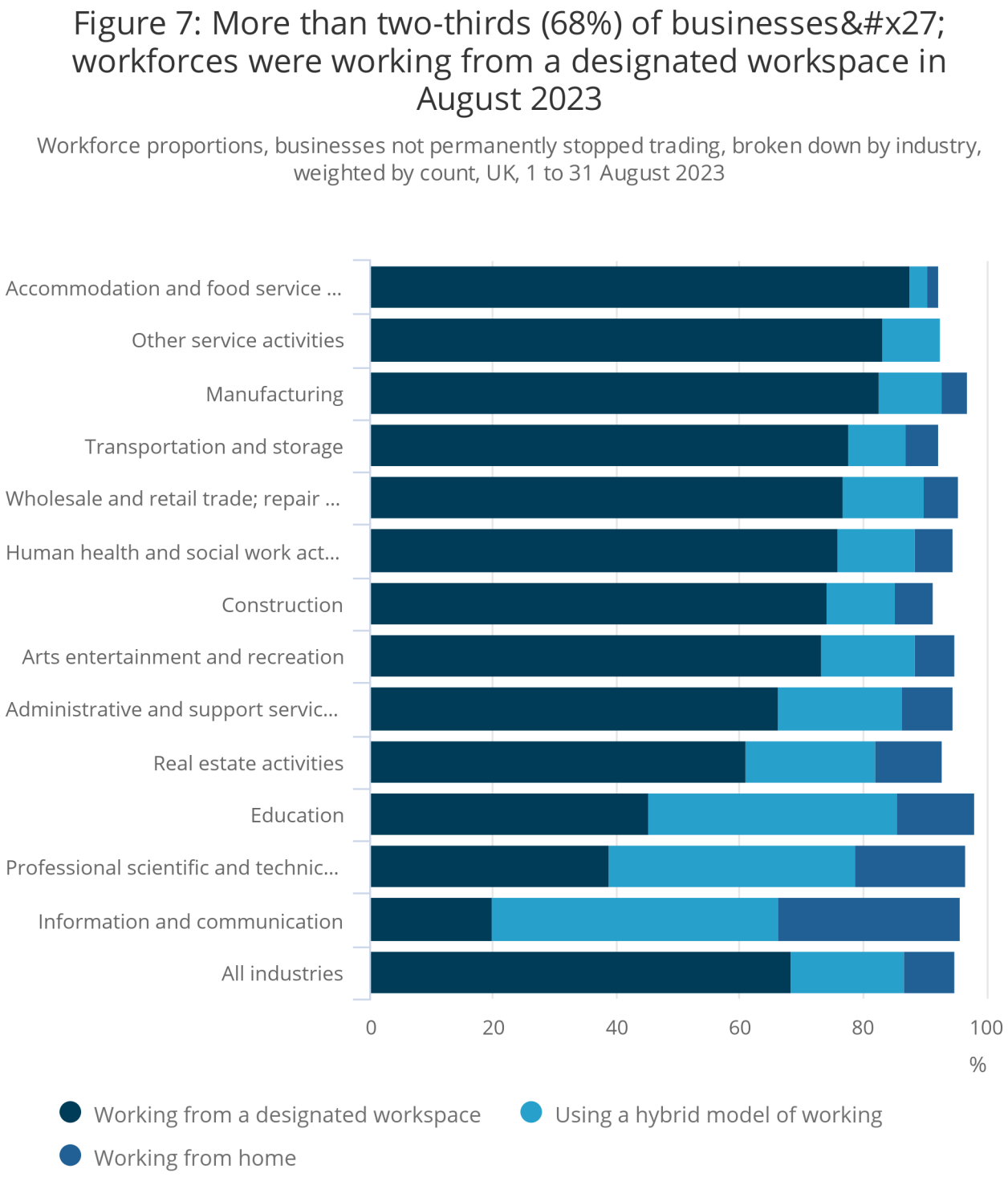
Almost one in five (19%) trading businesses reported that their overall performance for August 2023 decreased compared with August 2022; this was slightly higher (22%) for businesses with 10 or more employees.

In comparison, when asked in early September 2023, 23% of trading businesses reported that they expect their overall performance to increase over the next 12 months; this is broadly consistent with early August 2023.

6 . Workforce

Figure 7: More than two-thirds (68%) of businesses' workforces were working from a designated workspace in August 2023

Workforce proportions, businesses not permanently stopped trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK, 1 to 31 August 2023



Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding, and percentages less than 1% have been removed for disclosure purposes.

2. For presentation purposes, some response options have been removed.

3. “Mining and quarrying” and “Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities” have been removed for disclosure purposes, but their totals are included in “All industries”.

Based on the responses of businesses not permanently stopped trading, the proportion of the workforce that were working from a designated workspace in August 2023 was 68%; this is an increase of 4 percentage points from August 2022.

The remaining proportion of the workforce:

- were using a hybrid model of working; this was 18%, down 3 percentage points from August 2022
- were working from home; this was 8%, unchanged from August 2022
- were not working because of sickness; less than 1%
- were made permanently redundant; less than 1%
- selected "other"; this was 4%, broadly consistent with August 2022

7 . Business Insights and Conditions Survey data

Business insights and impact on the UK economy
Dataset | Released 21 September 2023
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.

Business insights and impact on the UK economy confidence intervals
Dataset | Released 21 September 2023
Confidence intervals for weighted estimates from the voluntary fortnightly Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) about financial performance, workforce, prices, trade and business resilience. These data are not official statistics but have been developed to deliver timely indicators to help understand the issues impacting UK businesses and the economy.

Access to microdata

You can access the microdata for Waves 1 to 90 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) 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, as explained on the UK Statistics Authority website 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), as explained on the UK Statistics Authority website. To access the SRS, you must also work for an organisation with an Assured Organisational Connectivity agreement in place.

8 . Glossary

Reporting unit

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

9 . Measuring the data

More quality and methodology information (QMI) on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in our Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) QMI, updated on 24 January 2022.

The BICS is voluntary, and the results are experimental. More information is available in our Guide to experimental statistics.

Table 1: Sample and response rates for Wave 89, 90 and 91 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey

Wave	24 August 2023 Publication Wave 89	7 September 2023 Publication Wave 90	21 September 2023 Publication Wave 91
Sample	38,856	38,850	38,842
Response	11,036	10,559	10,781
Rate	28.4%	27.2%	27.8%

Source: Business Insights and Conditions Survey from the Office for National Statistics

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 91 survey was live for the period 4 September to 17 September 2023. For full details of the survey questions used, see our Business Insights and Conditions Survey questions: 4 September 2023 to 17 September 2023 article.

Coverage

The BICS sampling frame is based on the same industries as our Monthly Business Survey (MBS). The MBS covers the UK for production industries only, and Great Britain for construction, retail and services industries. The MBS is an important input to the output measure of gross domestic product (GDP) which includes monthly GDP.

For detailed information on the industries covered by the MBS and BICS, see our GDP(o) data sources catalogue. The following are some industries that are excluded from MBS and BICS:

- agriculture
- oil and gas extraction
- energy generation and supply
- public administration and defence
- public provision of education and health
- finance and insurance

For more information on the methodology of producing the BICS, such as weighting, please see our BICS QMI report.

10 . Strengths and limitation

More quality and methodology information (QMI) on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in our Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) QMI.

11 . Related links

Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators
Bulletin | Updated frequently
Early experimental data and analysis on economic activity and social change in the UK. These real-time indicators are created using rapid response surveys, novel data sources and experimental methods.

Cost of living latest insights
Web page | Updated frequently
The latest data and trends about the cost of living. Explore changes in the cost of everyday items and how this is affecting people.

COVID-19 question bank
Web page | Updated frequently
This web page provides 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.

Business insights and impact on the UK subnational single-site economy: February 2023
Article | Released 16 February 2023
Experimental estimates from the voluntary fortnightly business survey (BICS) on topics such as prices, worker shortages and workforce status. Geographical breakdowns include country, regional and local authority levels.

Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023
Article | Released 13 February 2023
Analysis of homeworkers, including prevalence of hybrid working, and breakdowns by personal characteristics. Data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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