

Statistical bulletin

UK business; activity, size and location: 2024

UK businesses broken down by legal status, industry, region, employment and turnover size bands.

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1 . Main points

- The number of businesses in the UK registered for Value Added Tax (VAT) and/or Pay as You Earn (PAYE), as of March 2024, was 2.72 million, a decrease of 0.1% from March 2023.
- The number of companies continued to rise and they now represent 75.6% of total UK businesses, while the proportion of sole proprietors has decreased to 14.6% and that of partnerships has decreased to 6.1%.
- The number of transport and storage businesses grew strongly in 2020 and 2021 but has decreased since, down 9.1% in 2024.
- The largest industry group is professional, scientific, and technical, making up 15.3% of all registered businesses in the UK; this is up 0.1 percentage points from March last year.

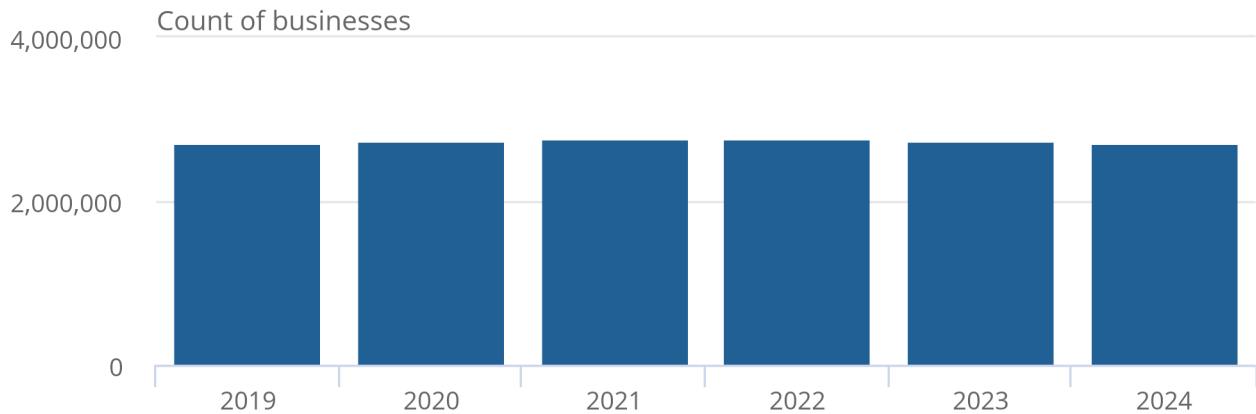
2 . Small decrease in the number of businesses

Figure 1: Number of VAT and/or PAYE businesses

UK, 2019 to 2024

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UK, 2019 to 2024



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

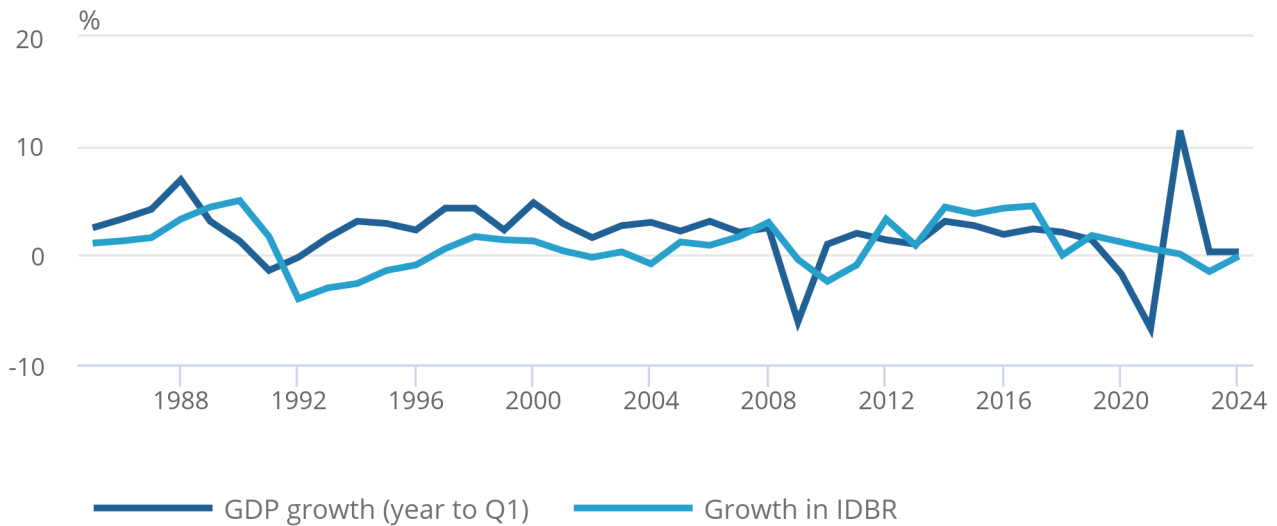
The number of VAT and/or PAYE businesses in the UK as of March 2024 was 2.725 million, a decrease of 0.1% from March 2023. Through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the business population remained fairly steady, and this has broadly continued. By contrast, gross domestic product (GDP) decreased sharply, year-on-year, into the first quarter of 2021, then rose sharply into the first quarter of 2022. GDP is showing a small increase year-on-year in the first quarters of both 2023 and 2024, resulting in movements in GDP and the number of businesses on IDBR getting closer to one another again. GDP has shown two small rises while IDBR has shown two small falls. Overall, the growth in the business population has slowed since 2018 compared with the 2012 to 2018 time period.

Figure 2: Business growth and economic growth were similar following divergence through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

UK, 1985 to 2024

Figure 2: Business growth and economic growth were similar following divergence through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

UK, 1985 to 2024



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. For background information, please see [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).

3 . Sole proprietors and partnerships continue to decrease

Between March 2023 and March 2024, the number of companies increased by 0.9%. Sole proprietors decreased by 4.0%, with the largest decrease coming from the transport and storage industry where unlicensed carriers decreased by 12.6% when compared with 2023.

The large increase in central government has been caused by the reclassification into central government of Further Education Corporations (FECs) in England from non-profit bodies. See our [UK business: activity, size and location Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#) report for more information.

Table 1: Count of businesses by status and percentage change on previous year
UK, 2022 to 2024

	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%
1 - Company (incl. Building Society)	2,058,885	0.2	2,039,920	-0.9	2,059,120	0.9
2 - Sole Proprietor	427,710	0.3	413,160	-3.4	396,740	-4.0
3 - Partnership	181,010	-2.3	172,890	-4.5	167,465	-3.1
4 - Public Corporation/ Nationalised Body	180	-2.7	175	-2.8	175	0.0
5 - Central Government	3,420	-3.7	3,280	-4.1	3,470	5.8
6 - Local Authority	8,850	0.8	9,030	2.0	9,060	0.3
7 - Non-profit Body or Mutual Association	87,645	0.8	88,375	0.8	88,740	0.4
Total	2,767,700	0.1	2,726,830	-1.5	2,724,770	-0.1

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. Please note that figures may not sum because of rounding.

Table 2 shows the share of the total number of businesses by legal status. The proportion of companies has continued to rise and represents 75.6% of total UK businesses.

Table 2: Percentage of businesses by status
UK, 2022 to 2024

	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%
1 - Company (incl. Building Society)	2,058,885	74.4	2,039,920	74.8	2,059,120	75.6
2 - Sole Proprietor	427,710	15.5	413,160	15.2	396,740	14.6
3 - Partnership	181,010	6.5	172,890	6.3	167,465	6.1
4 - Public Corporation/ Nationalised Body	180	0.0	175	0.0	175	0.0
5 - Central Government	3,420	0.1	3,280	0.1	3,470	0.1
6 - Local Authority	8,850	0.3	9,030	0.3	9,060	0.3
7 - Non-profit Body or Mutual Association	87,645	3.2	88,375	3.2	88,740	3.3
Total	2,767,700	100	2,726,830	100	2,724,770	100

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. Please note that figures may not sum because of rounding.

Of the 2.06 million companies, 44.0% are single-employee limited companies. The largest number of these businesses is in the professional, scientific, and technical industry, which carry out management consultancy activities.

The biggest drop in this category was in transport and storage where over a third of businesses are single-employee limited companies. This was mainly seen in freight transport by road, where the number of single-employee limited companies in that industry decreased by 14% compared with 2023.

4 . Professional, scientific, and technical industry accounts for the largest share of businesses

The professional, scientific, and technical industry accounted for the largest number of businesses, with 15.3% of all registered businesses in the UK. The number of businesses in this industry has increased for the first time since 2020. It has been the largest broad industry group since 2013.

Table 3: Number of VAT and/or PAYE businesses by broad industry group
UK, 2022 to 2024

	Count given to the nearest thousand					
	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	143	5.1	141	5.2	141	5.2
Production	155	5.6	152	5.6	148	5.4
Mining, quarrying and utilities	16	0.6	16	0.6	16	0.6
Manufacturing	138	5.0	136	5.0	132	4.9
Construction	375	13.5	378	13.8	380	14.0
Wholesale and retail; repair of motor vehicles	414	15.0	402	14.7	398	14.6
Motor trades	81	2.9	81	3.0	82	3.0
Wholesale	108	3.9	104	3.8	102	3.7
Retail	224	8.1	217	8.0	215	7.9
Transport and storage (inc. postal)	138	5.0	129	4.7	117	4.3
Accommodation and food services	175	6.3	175	6.4	174	6.4
Information and communication	196	7.1	187	6.9	188	6.9
Finance and insurance	60	2.2	59	2.2	59	2.2
Property	111	4.0	114	4.2	118	4.3
Professional, scientific and technical	431	15.6	415	15.2	418	15.3
Business administration and support services	229	8.3	226	8.3	227	8.3
Public administration and defence	8	0.3	8	0.3	8	0.3
Education	47	1.7	47	1.7	48	1.8
Health	106	3.8	109	4.0	114	4.2
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	181	6.5	184	6.8	188	6.9
TOTAL	2,768	100	2,727	100	2,725	100

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

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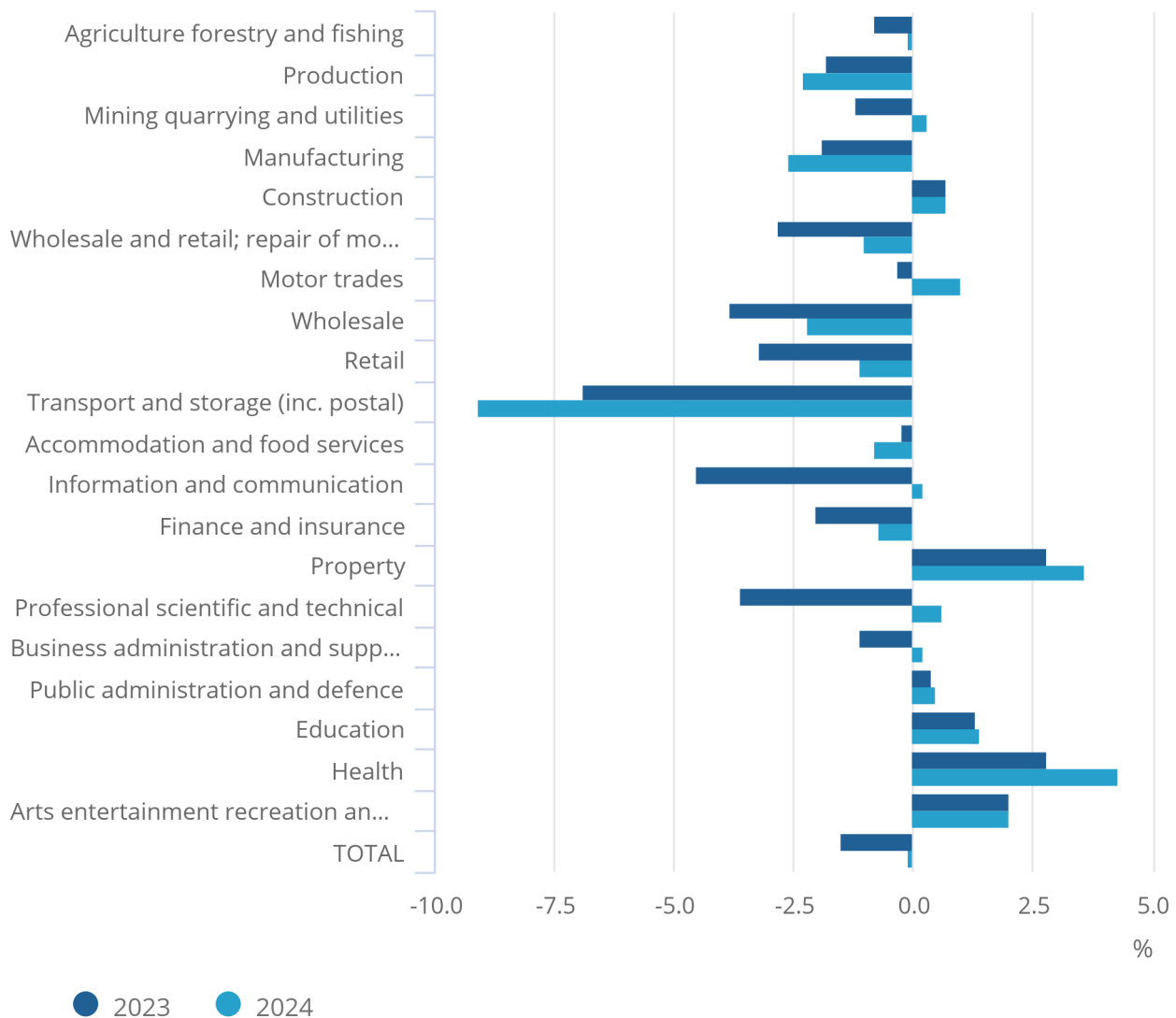
The strong growth in the transport and storage industry in 2021 has been replaced by decreases since 2022 with a further decrease in the number of businesses in 2024 of 9.1%. Within transport and storage, freight transport by road (down 15.5%), and unlicensed carriers (down 10.4%) showed the biggest decrease. In 2024, the health industry exhibited the highest percentage growth rate at 4.3%. Other human health activities contributed the most to this increase, with a growth of 8.5%, which accounted for 2,000 businesses.

Figure 3: Transport and storage industry showed the largest percentage decrease in businesses

UK, 2023 to 2024

Figure 3: Transport and storage industry showed the largest percentage decrease in businesses

UK, 2023 to 2024



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

5 . Most regions in the UK saw decreases in the number of businesses

Despite most regions showing a decrease in the number of businesses, four out of the twelve regions in the UK showed an increase in the number of businesses between 2023 and 2024.

Table 4: Number of VAT and/or PAYE businesses by region
UK, 2022 to 2024

	Count given to the nearest thousand					
	2022	%	2023	%	2024	%
North East	73	2.6	73	2.7	72	2.6
North West	271	9.8	267	9.8	266	9.8
Yorkshire and The Humber	193	7.0	192	7.1	190	7.0
East Midlands	189	6.8	184	6.7	182	6.7
West Midlands	222	8.0	218	8.0	216	7.9
East	273	9.9	270	9.9	270	9.9
London	536	19.4	526	19.3	531	19.5
South East	413	14.9	405	14.8	404	14.8
South West	238	8.6	237	8.7	236	8.7
Wales	108	3.9	107	3.9	105	3.9
Scotland	174	6.3	171	6.3	172	6.3
Northern Ireland	78	2.8	78	2.9	79	2.9
TOTAL	2,768	100	2,727	100	2,725	100

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

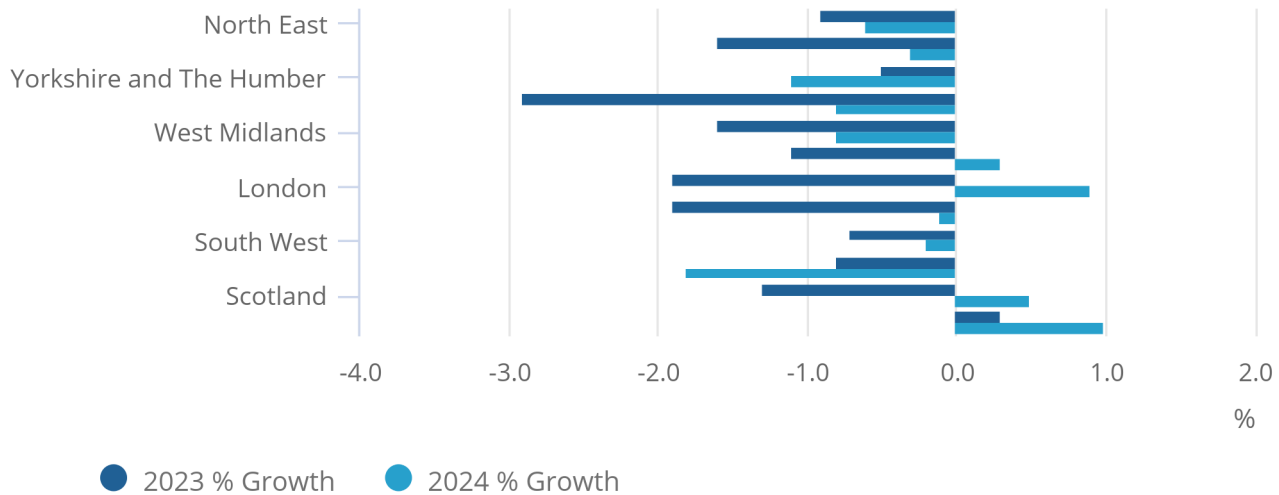
1. Please note that figures may not sum because of rounding.

Figure 4: Four out of the twelve regions in the UK showed an increase in the number of businesses

UK, 2023 to 2024

Figure 4: Four out of the twelve regions in the UK showed an increase in the number of businesses

UK, 2023 to 2024



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

The biggest percentage increase in the number of businesses between 2023 and 2024 was in Northern Ireland, which increased by 1.0% (760 businesses). Over a third of these businesses were in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry.

Wales saw the biggest percentage decrease, of 1.8% (1,945 businesses). The largest contributor to the decrease in Wales was the transport and storage industry, which was down by 21%. The number of businesses in this industry has been volatile in most regions. Most of the businesses that have come and gone over recent years have been either sole proprietors or one-person limited companies.

Please note that, for various reasons, multiple business registrations can be recorded at a single address, and this can distort data for smaller geographical areas. See our [Multiple business registrations at a single postcode methodology](#) for more information.

6 . Decrease in the number of sites

For three consecutive years, the number of sites has decreased (down by 0.1% in 2024). Out of the 2.725 million Value Added Tax (VAT) and/or Pay As You Earn (PAYE) businesses, only 58,050 operate from more than one site. Out of these businesses, the industry with the biggest decrease in sites is the retail sector with a drop of 1,355 sites. This decrease mainly came from businesses with 20 or more sites.

Table 5: Number of VAT and/or PAYE businesses and their associated local units
UK, 2024

	Number of local units					Total
	1	2 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 19	20 or more	
Business	2,666,720	45,460	6,990	2,850	2,750	2,724,770
Local units	2,666,720	108,420	44,395	37,840	316,280	3,173,655

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. Please note that figures may not sum because of rounding.

7 . Data on UK business

[UK business: activity, size, and location](#)

Dataset | Released 25 September 2024

Numbers of enterprises and local units produced from a snapshot of the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) taken on 8 March 2024.

8 . Glossary

Business

For this release, the term "business" is used to represent an enterprise.

Company

Companies are businesses that are legally separate entities from the owners. These owners have limited liability, meaning they are not wholly responsible for losses and debts.

Enterprise

An enterprise is an organisational unit producing goods or services which has a certain degree of autonomy in decision-making.

IDBR

The Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) is a comprehensive list of UK businesses used by government for statistical purposes. The IDBR provides the main sampling frame for surveys of businesses carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other government departments. It is also an important data source for analyses of business activities.

The two main sources of input are Value Added Tax (VAT) and Pay as You Earn (PAYE) records from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Additional information comes from Companies House, Dun and Bradstreet, and ONS business surveys.

Local Unit

A local unit is an individual site (for example a factory or shop) within an enterprise.

Partnerships

A business run by two or more self-employed people.

Public corporations

A public corporation is a market body which is controlled by central government, local government, or other public corporations and which has substantial day-to-day operating independence so that it is seen as an institutional unit separate from its parent departments.

Sole proprietors

A business run by one self-employed person.

9 . Data sources and quality

Measuring the data

Our UK business: activity, size and location Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- quality characteristics
- users and uses of the data
- how the output was created
- accessibility and characteristics

Strengths and limitations

The figures for this release are produced from an extract taken from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), recording the position of businesses on 8 March 2024, in line with the same timing of all previous releases of this publication.

This publication represents the businesses registered with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for Value Added Tax (VAT) and/or Pay As You Earn (PAYE). The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) produces [Business population estimates](#) which seek to provide full coverage of all types of businesses in the UK, including an estimate of the unregistered business population.

Since IDBR snapshots for this release are taken in March, the appropriate gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate for Figure 2 is the year to Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar). However, the trends are similar with calendar year growth rates for GDP too.

Numerous breaks in the methodology of the IDBR exist over time. It is not possible to calculate a growth rate in the IDBR for 1996 because the IDBR was created in 1995.

Please note the figures in the statistical bulletin tables use disclosure methods and are rounded individually. Therefore, the sum of component items may be slightly different to the totals shown.

10 . Related links

[Business population estimates](#)

Collection | Released 5 October 2023

Annual business population estimates for the UK and regions in 2023.

[Business demography UK: 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 22 November 2023

Annual change in the number of UK businesses broken down by sector of the economy.

[Business demography, quarterly, UK: April to June 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 25 July 2024

Business births and deaths from the Inter-Departmental Business Register, with high-level breakdowns by industry and region. Quarterly official statistics in development.

[Multiple business registrations at a single postcode: 2022](#)

Methodology | Released 22 November 2023

Business demography explainer covering additional information on the impact of multiple registrations at a single postcode.

11 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 25 September 2024, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [UK business: activity, size and location: 2024](#)