

## Manchester Chamber Of Commerce



### Response to The Allsopp Review Of Statistical Sources

## Consultation Response 097

### Introduction

Manchester Chamber of Commerce welcomed the opportunity to consult members on the Treasury's review of the statistical requirements for monetary and wider economic policy making, particularly the quality and content of statistics available for the English regions. The chamber is in a sense both a user and supplier of statistics and hence is in a rather unique position to respond. The consultation was carried out via e-mail to members of the Economy, Finance and Taxation Committee of the Chamber, as well as consultation with partner organisations.

### Comments from Chamber Members

The general feeling amongst Chamber members was that successful compliance to the information requests by Office of National Statistics was currently unrealistic, especially when time constraints were a factor ie. at the end of the year. One member reported that it was impossible to answer the questions concisely as they were time-consuming, often bewildering, and nearly always complicated. The inconvenience placed on members far outweighed any perceived advantage gained for having these statistics accessible. Another member questioned the reliability and usefulness of the ONS reports as the information she gave them were merely "guesstimates". Consequently how could the statistics possibly be a true reflection of the region's economy if they were inaccurate?

Furthermore, one Chamber member recalled how they were required to inform the ONS of the fibre content of various products made on their site. Understandably the member failed to see how this information could be relevant and hence beneficial to anyone other than possibly the ONS themselves. There were no qualms about producing statistics that would help small and medium enterprises, but often the information required was seen as a burden and an unnecessary increase to their workload.

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The general feeling therefore was that these requests were a hindrance and as a result were given low priority by many.

With regards to the standard of information available to businesses one member reported that they could not find any forecast information on small and medium enterprise growth, only dated statistics which were of no use to his purpose. He concluded that the ONS were clearly unaware of what many businesses wanted from them. Response to this query was generally quite low which perhaps suggests that satisfaction levels were reasonable. Members would be more inclined to raise their concerns as opposed to report their successes.

One Chamber member believed that a way to improve the standard of information available would be, with the accessibility of the Chamber, to formulate a larger database that would give a fuller and more accurate spread of results via the various SME's. Another reported that the classifications of industry sectors were too vague and in some instances dated. Consequently they were not really representative, eg with creative and digital industries. Therefore some company information was hard to come by, not due to it's non-existence but rather due to it's misplacement/inaccurate coding classification.

All consulted Chamber members welcomed any initiative that would reduce the workload placed on SME's, and agreed that there needs to be an assessment of the relevance also. The current arrangements hinder the very people that the information is supposed to assist, ie SME's. This is because the requests for this information slow down the company due to their inability to deal with said requests efficiently, whether it be due to time constraints or costs. In some instances the information required could only feasibly be attained through the use of software packages that are un-affordable to these chamber members.

### **Value of Regional Statistics**

The Chamber has highlighted above member concerns on the burden and problems faced by businesses, especially SMEs, in responding to requests for information. The Chamber does also however, recognise the value and importance of having sound and comprehensive regional and sub-regional statistics based on robust business samples. It is clear that efforts could be made to rationalise and simplify data collection especially across statistical measures so that this burden on businesses can be reduced. The updating and making more business friendly/orientated of Standard Industrial and Occupational Classifications would also assist this process.

With regards to current gaps in data provision the Chamber would point to the following at a detailed sub-regional level eg NUTS level 3:

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- Export figures
- Expenditure on R and D.
- Redundancy data
- Destination of graduates
- Business start-up and survival rates
- Boosted labour force survey data to improve reliability
- Greater access to Job Centre and Benefits Agency data
- GDP/GVA figures for smaller geographical areas, include two "per head " rates, one for residents and one for employees (as commuting patterns greatly affect the figures)
- Improved statistics on "value added" and productivity at a regional/sub-regional level and in certain sectors.

In addition, Manchester Chamber is aware of detailed submissions that have been made to the review by the Association of Regional Observatories and by the Regional Development Agencies in identifying "gaps" in available research information. In conclusion, while we would support the availability of such statistical measures, we could not support any additional burden on business in completing returns and questionnaires. Therefore, all additions would need to be matched by rationalisation from ONS and any other organisations collecting the statistics. Indeed, even without additions there is a need to do this from a business/supplier perspective.

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