



Project showcase:

FEEDING CRITICAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS WITH OUR NATIONAL STATISTICS

The service industries make up a substantial proportion of the UK economy, representing around 80% of total output.

Looking to have a clear picture of the breakdown of turnover by different categories, the ONS commissioned us to conduct the Annual Survey of Goods and Services in 2017, and we've been delivering it annually ever since. This large-scale survey collects insight from thousands of businesses, feeding into major economic measures and GDP calculations, providing essential insights for government research and policy-making.

ABOUT THE CLIENT

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) are the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and the recognised national statistical institute. They are responsible for statistics relating to the economy, population and society (including the census).



THE CHALLENGE

As the world has rapidly developed and changed, so has what drives its financial systems. The service industries make up a substantial proportion of the UK economy, with the latest figures showing they represent around 80% of total output. It's crucial that any measurements capture the full picture accurately, so that government and policy-makers can make informed decisions.



Back in 2015, Professor Sir Charles Bean's independent review recommended providing more detailed statistics on the UK's service industries, which existing surveys did not cover.

In response to the review, the ONS wanted to update their own paper-based services survey so they could gather more detailed and complex information. However, they needed external expertise to support the development of their survey into an online format.

IFF was commissioned by the ONS to undertake this development and have run the resulting Annual Survey of Goods and Services every year since its launch in 2017.



THE APPROACH

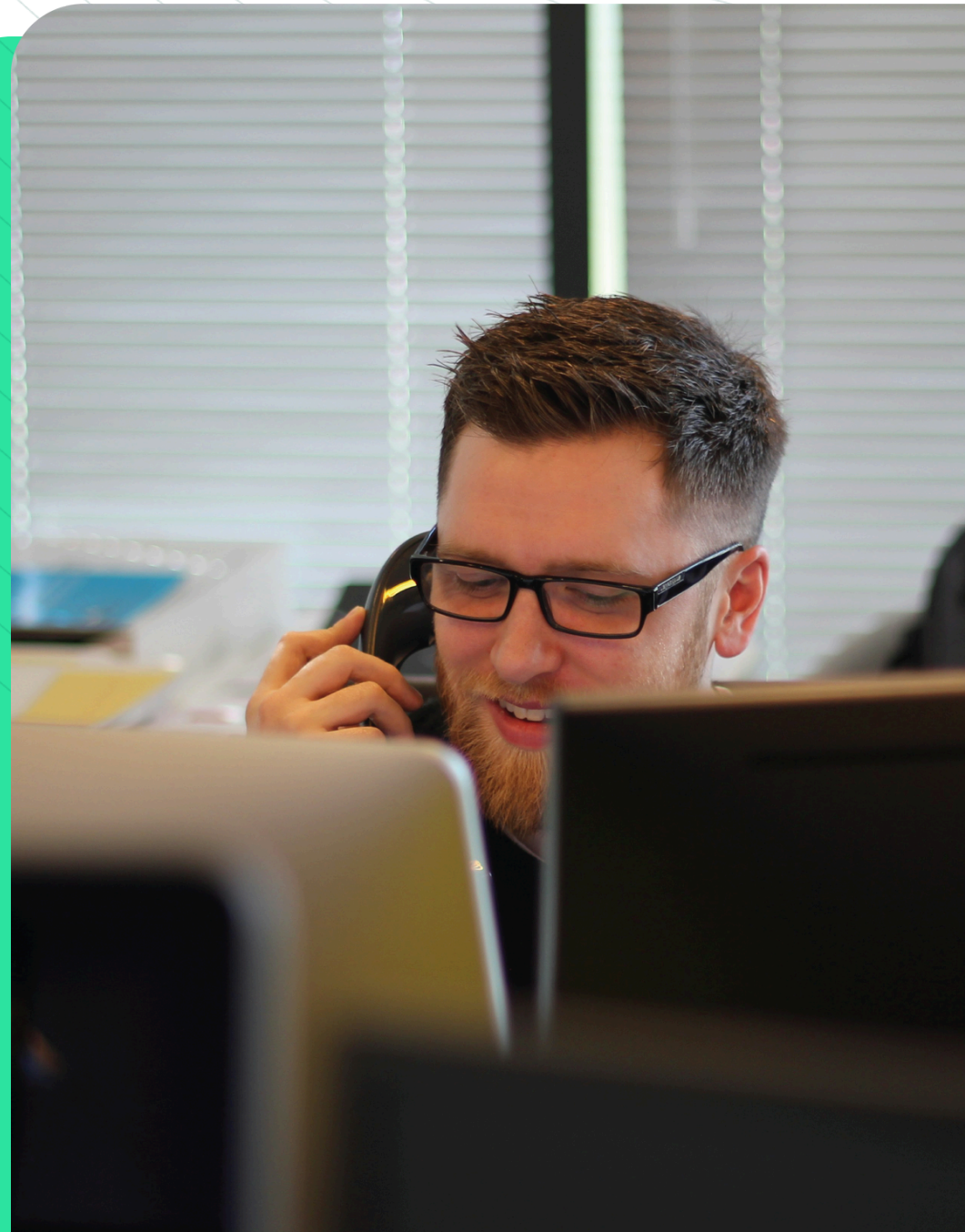
Detailed turnover information is gathered from a sample of 40,000 businesses to ensure robust data across each of the 54 sectors within the services industry.

We work with the ONS by providing support through email, telephone calls (including the creation of a brand-new inbound service handling 8,000 contacts from businesses each year), and webchat. We also deliver telephone response chasing and validation services, re-contacting businesses to verify their responses. We've recruited and trained dedicated teams for each of these functions.

Extensive data management is a necessity. Due to the large-scale and complex nature of the ASGS project, we send large weekly data submissions and built a live dashboard for tracking progress, offering real-time insights and updates for the ONS.

And there's been a concentrated effort to efficiently align our own processes with the way the ONS operate. We've developed solutions to use across our team, from creating a 160-page guide to support the inbound help centre team to adjusting the way our interviewing software is used, as well as ensuring transparent and detailed communications to minimise room for error.

Timely and accurate delivery of both progress and survey data is critical to the ONS, and all files need to be in a suitable format to feed directly into their internal systems.



2015:

Sir Charles Bean independent review recommends more complex, detailed and thorough data on the UK services industry

2017:

The ONS start their partnership with IFF to launch their new survey, the Annual Survey of Goods and Services, as an electronic questionnaire

2022:

Marks 5 years of IFF and the ONS running the survey together

2016:

The ONS want to update their Service Turnover Survey to reflect these recommendations

2021:

Despite difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, IFF and the ONS manage to continue vital data collection unimpeded, with the inbound call centre operating throughout on a remote working basis

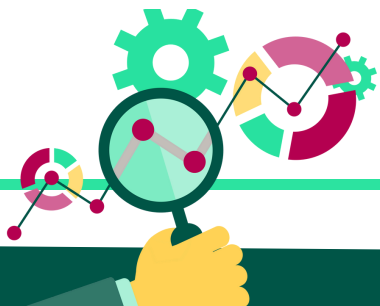
2025:

Dialogue has started on further automating delivery processes, including the use of an LLM (large language model) to help boost efficiency

LATEST STATS FROM THE SURVEY DATA IN 2023



The Wholesale industry is the largest in the UK, worth **£960 billion (bn)**

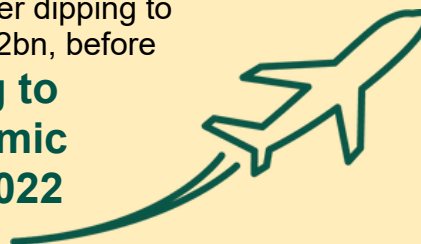


Turnover from scientific R&D doubled

between 2019 and 2022 from £18bn to £36bn

A recovery story:

The airline industry was particularly impacted by Covid-19, with the turnover dipping to £21bn from £52bn, before **recovering to pre-pandemic levels in 2022**



UK Film and TV production has doubled its worth since 2016,

with the industry reporting over £40bn turnover in 2022



THE IMPACT

The data-sets from the ASGS contribute to the calculation of key economic indicators, such as the Services Producer Price Index by the Bank of England and annual GDP by the National Accounts. But as well as broader economic measures, the ASGS is also essential in examining how businesses continue to diversify, capturing both their secondary activities outside their main industrial classification, and their primary activities within it.

The quality and consistency of the data has been useful for tracking the health of highlighted UK industries during specified periods of interest too. Response rates have reached up to 78% over the 8 years of the survey.

It's regularly used by a number of UK government organisations including ONS themselves, Welsh Government, Scottish Government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE ASGS?



Looking ahead, we've recently been exploring how we can use new technology to make sure our tried and tested method stays the same, whilst enabling us to be more efficient and provide better customer service.

Plans for the addition of an AI chat bot assistant are underway, which could help our team quickly gather key information on the project, such as details of the 1000+ product codes, specific project terminology or any other material relevant to the ASGS.



The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have been working in partnership with IFF research LTD to run the Annual Survey of Goods and Services (ASGS) for almost 10 years. In that time we have built up an excellent working relationship and understanding of each other's needs which has been key to us improving the quality of data collected and ultimately the end outputs. IFF Research have always strived to meet and to exceed ONS expectations and are always willing to consider how best they can meet any emerging needs, this emphasises just how well both organisations work together, we really do operate as one team!

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