# S&P Global UK Services PMI®

# Business activity expands again in March, but speed of recovery eases to four-month low

53.1 UK SERVICES BUSINESS ACTIVITY INDEX

MAR '24

Services Business Activity Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth 55



Slowest rises in activity and new work since November 2023

Marginal increase in employment

Prices charged inflation slips to a six-month low

March data pointed to a solid increase in business activity across the service economy, which extended the current period of expansion to five months. That said, the latest survey indicated a loss of momentum since February, largely due to a weaker rise in new work. Survey respondents noted that improving underlying economic conditions had helped to support service sector growth, although squeezed disposable household incomes and elevated interest rates again weighed on demand.

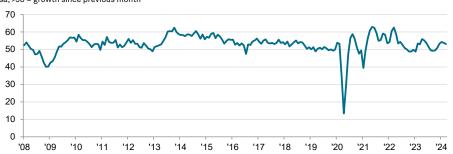
Strong wage pressures and rising transport costs pushed up input costs in March. The rate of prices charged inflation at service sector firms nonetheless eased to its lowest for six months amid some reports of constrained pricing power.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global UK Services PMI<sup>®</sup> Business Activity Index registered 53.1 in March, down from 53.8 in February. The latest reading was comfortably above the neutral 50.0 threshold, but signalled the slowest rate of business activity expansion since November 2023.

Total new work increased moderately in March, although the rate of growth slipped to a four-month low and remained softer than the long-run survey average. Service providers typically commented on resilient business and consumer spending, despite headwinds from elevated borrowing costs and squeezed client budgets. Mirroring the trend for total sales, latest data also signalled a slower upturn in export order books. Where growth was reported, this was often linked to rising demand in the US and major European markets.

Staffing numbers increased only marginally in March and the rate of job creation was the slowest seen so far in 2024. Those reporting a rise in employment mostly noted rising business requirements and confidence regarding the demand outlook. However, other service sector firms suggested that cost pressures and efforts to achieve efficiency gains had led to hiring freezes and the non-replacement

S&P Global UK Services Business Activity Index sa, >50 = growth since previous month



**PMI**<sup>°</sup> by S&P Global

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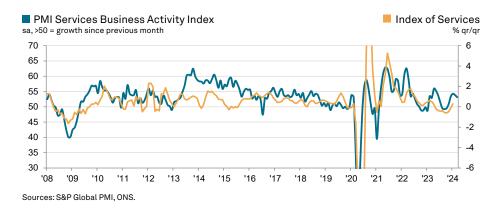
of voluntary leavers.

The latest survey indicated that service providers had sufficient capacity to meet both new and existing workloads. This was signalled by a reduction in backlogs of work for the tenth consecutive month in March. That said, the rate of decline was only marginal and the joint-slowest since June 2023.

Strong input price inflation continued in March. Around 29% of the survey panel reported an increase in their average cost burdens, while only 2% signalled a reduction. The rate of input cost inflation has broadly held steady over the past six months and remained well above its pre-pandemic trend. Higher input prices were mostly linked to rising salary payments in March, alongside increased fuel and transportation costs.

Higher input costs were passed on to clients at a robust pace in March, although the latest round of prices charged inflation was the least marked since September 2023. Around 21% of service sector firms reported a rise in their output prices in March, while 5% noted a reduction. There were some reports suggesting that competitive pressures and the need to stimulate demand had weighed on prices charged inflation.

Latest survey data highlighted a strong degree of positive sentiment regarding the year ahead outlook for business activity. Just over half of the survey panel forecast a rise in their output levels over this period, while only onein-ten predict a decline. The degree of business optimism eased slightly since the previous month, but was higher than at any other time since February 2022. Anecdotal evidence cited stronger sales pipelines and improving economic conditions, but some firms noted concerns about political uncertainty and greater hesitancy among clients.



# Comment

### Tim Moore, Economics Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, which compiles the survey:

"The recovery in service sector output lost a little bit of momentum during March, and more so than suggested by the flash PMI results, but the overall picture remains reasonably positive.

"Business activity has now expanded for five consecutive months, supported by sustained improvements in new order intakes. The solid growth rate achieved in March reinforces the view that a rebound in service sector performance is helping the UK economy to pull out of last year's shallow recession.

"Survey respondents once again commented on a turnaround in business and consumer spending, despite constraints on clients' budgets from strong inflation and elevated borrowing costs.

"Input prices continued to rise sharply across the service economy in March, with the rate of inflation only factionally below its average over the past six months. Higher salary payments were the main reason cited as driving up input costs, as well as greater transportation bills.

"Prices charged by service providers increased at the slowest pace since September 2023. However, this index has only edged downwards since last summer and it remains well above the long-run trend, therefore adding to signs of sticky inflationary pressures in the domestic economy so far this year." Business Activity Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth 55 50 45

New Business Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth 55 50 45



# Activity and demand

### **Business activity**

The seasonally adjusted Business Activity Index posted in positive territory for the fifth successive month and signalled a solid expansion of service sector output. That said, the rate of growth eased slightly and was the least marked since November 2023.

Service providers typically commented on resilient business and consumer spending. Some firms noted constraints on growth from higher interest rates, squeezed household incomes and subdued confidence among clients.

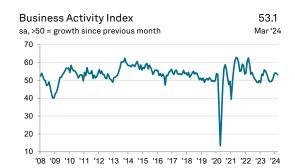
### **New business**

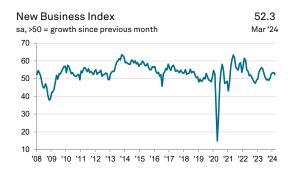
March data indicated a moderate increase in new work received by service sector companies, which panel members often linked to improving economic conditions.

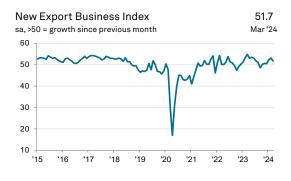
The seasonally adjusted New Business Index indicated that the rate of expansion slipped to its lowest for four months. Some firms suggested that ongoing pressure on disposable incomes had led to softer consumer demand.

### New export business

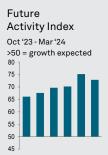
Service sector companies indicated a sustained increase in new work from abroad, although the pace of expansion slowed from February's eight-month high. Greater export sales were attributed to stronger demand in major developed economies, especially clients based in the Europe and the US. There were also reports citing successful efforts to enter new international markets.





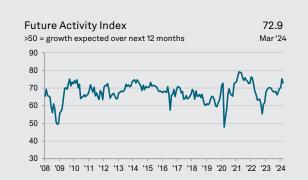


# **Business expectations**



Business activity expectations remained relatively upbeat in March. The respective index was down in comparison to the previous month, but nonetheless at its second-highest level since February 2022. More than half of the survey panel (56%) forecast a rise in output during the year ahead, while only 10% predict a reduction.

Lower inflation, recovering economic conditions, positive sales pipelines and new marketing initiatives were all reported by panel members. Heightened political uncertainty was cited as the main growth headwind in the coming 12 months.



Employment

Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth

Outstanding

Oct '23 - Mar '24

sa, >50 = growth

Supplier

45

Oct '23 - Mar '24

Performance Index

sa, >50 = improvement

**Business Index** 

Index

50

45

# **Employment and capacity**

### Employment

Cautious hiring strategies persisted in March, as signalled by the seasonally adjusted Employment Index posting only slightly above the neutral 50.0 threshold. Moreover, the rate of job creation was the slowest for three months.

Survey respondents widely noted that strong cost pressures had limited staff recruitment in March. Some firms also noted that shortages of candidates to fill vacancies had dampened overall employment growth in recent months.

### **Outstanding business**

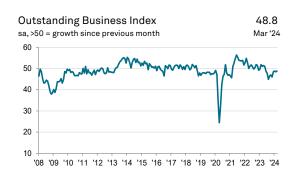
The seasonally adjusted Outstanding Business Index registered below the neutral 50.0 threshold for the tenth successive month in March and signalled another marginal decline in backlogs of work. Service providers commented on efficiency gains and subdued demand as factors helping to reduce unfinished work.

### Supplier performance

March data indicated another marginal decline in supplier performance. The respective index dipped to its lowest since November 2023. That said, the vast majority of survey respondents (90%) reported no-change in supplier performance.

Those experiencing worsening supplier performance (8% of the survey panel) often noted supply chain delays and international transport disruptions. Lower service quality among suppliers was also attributed to staff absences and cost cutting.









**PMI**<sup>°</sup> by S&P Global Input Prices Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = inflation 70 65 60 55 50 45

Prices Charged Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = inflation

# Prices

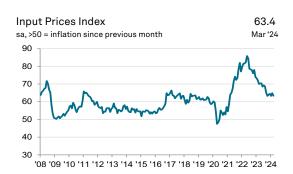
### Input prices

A steep rate of input cost inflation continued across the service economy in March. The seasonally adjusted Input Prices Index nonetheless eased slightly from February's fivemonth high.

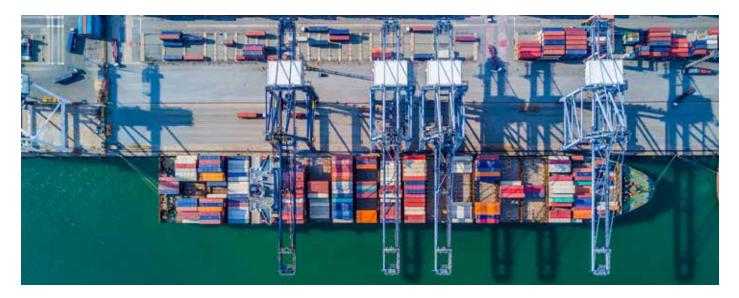
Rising operating expenses were mostly linked to higher staff wages, freight costs and fuel prices. This was partly offset by lower prices paid for some manufactured goods, according to survey respondents.

### **Prices charged**

March data indicated a robust rate of output charge inflation at service sector companies, which was overwhelmingly attributed to rising input costs (especially staff salaries). However, the seasonally adjusted Prices Charged Index edged down to the lowest for six months and remained much weaker than seen on average in 2023. Anecdotal evidence suggested that competitive pressures and the need to stimulate sales had constrained pricing power at some service providers during the latest survey period.







# Purchased goods and services

The following lists show bought-in goods and services reported as being up in price, down in price or in short supply during the latest survey period. Items may be listed as having both risen and fallen in price. This may reflect alternative supply sources (e.g. domestic versus imported), or differences in unit prices due to differing volumes ordered. The lists also show the reporting sector for each item, according to Standard Industry Classification codes (SIC) codes.

#### SIC codes

62 Air Transport

61

- 55 Hotels & Restaurants
- 60 Land Transport and Pipelines Water Transport

63 Supporting Transport Activities

64 Post and Telecommunications

- 66 Insurance and Pensions

65 Banking

- 67 Other Financial Services
- 70 Real Estate
- 71 Renting of Goods
- 72 Computer Services
- 73 Research and Development 74 Other Business Activities
- 93 Other Service Activities
- 80 Education
- 85 Health Care
- 91 Membership Organisations

92 Recreational, Cultural and Sporting Activities

### Up in price

•		
Metals		SIC
Aluminium Brass Copper Metals Stainless Steel		74 74 74 74 74 74
Metal Ma	nufactures	SIC
Carbide C Carbide Ir	utting Tools serts	71 71
Electrical	/Electronic	SIC
Computer Computer Electronic Informatic Software Technolog	Hardware Componer on Technolo	i3, 72 65 hts 71 gy 74 74 74
Chemical	6	SIC
Abrasives Additives Adhesive Beer Lubricants Oils Polypheny		71 74 74 55 71 60 71,85
Plastics		SIC
BOPP PET Plastic Polymer Polystyrer RPET	ne	74 74 74 74 63 74
Paper/Tin	nber	SIC
Cardboard Cup Paper Paper Stationery Timber Pro Toilet Pap	/ 6 oducts	63 71 74 3, 74 74 55
Packaging	g	SIC
Bubble Wi Tape	ар	63 63
Rubber		SIC
Truck Tyre Tyres	s	64 60
Textiles/F	abrics	SIC
Carpets Cotton (Ra	aw Material)	63 ) 74
Food		SIC
Animal Fe Beverage Chicken Coffee Food	55,7	92 4,92 55 55,71 5,92

Liquor Meat Products	55 55
Soft Drinks	55
Spirits	55
Tea 55	, 71
Wine	55
Energy	SIC
Electricity	55
Energy 65,66	, 74
Fuel	
63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 74, 80 Hydrotreated Vegetable	o ∩il
60	e Oit
Motor Vehicle Fuel	60
Miscellaneous	SIC
Building Materials70, 74	4.92
Capital Equipment	63
Components	74
Computer Services	72
Consultancy	92
Consumables	92
Contract Labour 60, 64	, 74
Contracted services Direct Marketing	70 74
Engineering Parts	74
Exchange Rates 72	
Facilities Maintenance	74
Far East Imports	60
Finished Products	74
Freight Cost	63
Furniture	63
General Expenses General Labour	74 74
Glass	60
Heaters	74
Imported Spare Parts	74
Imports from Turkey	74
Insurance 64, 80,	85
Issuance Costs	65
IT Equipment 72, 74,	
	, 74
IT Support	74 74
Job Boards Light	74
Linen	55
Marketing	74
Non-consumables	55
Outdoor Activity Equipr	nent
92	
Parts	74
Processing Costs Products (From the UK	65
Professional Services	92
Raw Materials	74
Rent	74
Retail Stock	55
Salaries 63,	66
Sea Freight	60
Services 66,70	
Shipping Surcharges60	
Software as a Service Software Costs	74 74
Software Licences	74 65
Spare Parts	71
01-01	71

Staff

74

Staff Co	sts	70, 74
Subscrip	otion Servic	es 80
Subscrip	otions for So	oftware
Renewa	ls	74
Supplier	s	74
Support	Services	74
Telecom	munication	is 74
Tempora	ary Staff	92
Toner Ca	artridge	74
Transpor	rt	66
Travel		74,80
Utilities		72,74
Vehicle B	Body Comp	onents
60		
Wages	55, 63, 66	6, 71, 74

### Down in price

SIC 74 74 72 SIC 92 74
74 72 SIC 92
92
SIC
60 63
SIC
74
SIC
55 55 55
SIC
), 74 2, 74 1, 74 1, 74 55
SIC
74 74 63 74 65 85 70 92 72 72 74 74 74 74 70

### Short supply

Metal Manufactures	SIC
High Carbon Steel High Quality Steel	74 74
Metal Manufactures	SIC
Flameproof Motors Machined Components Steel Products	74 s 71 74
Electrical/Electronic	SIC
Battery Electrical Products Electronics Requiring Programmable Chips Printed Circuit Boards Two-way Radios	64 72 60 74 64
Plastics	SIC
Plastic Plastic Containers	74 55
Packaging	SIC
Таре	63
Food	SIC
Alcohol-free Beers Chicken Fruit Potatoes Spirits Vegetables	55 55 92 55 55 92
Miscellaneous	SIC
Air Freight from Asia Audit Skills Brick Building Materials Carbon Fibre Catering Supplies Comstruction Products Construction Services Contract Labour 64 Digital Design Services HGV parts Imported Goods Imported Goods Imported Goods Imported Goods Imports from Russia IT Equipment IT Equipment IT Services IT Support Mortar Nail Products Nurses PCV Drivers Qualified Candidates Raw Materials Skilled Labour Social Workers Spare Parts Staff Staff Costs Vans	63 74 74 92 74 74 63 62 92 92

# Services sub-sectors

All data shown are smoothed as a three-month moving average (3mma)



Transport & Communication Business Activity Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth

## Hotels, Restaurants & Catering

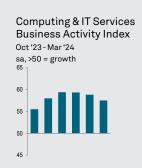
A strong rate of business activity growth was maintained in the Hotels, Restaurants & Catering category during the three months to March. The pace of expansion exceeded that seen in all other sectors except for Computing & IT services.

Latest data indicated another steep increase in operating expenses, largely due to higher wages. The rate of input price inflation remained the fastest of all sectors monitored by the survey.

### Transport & Communication

Transport & Communication registered only a marginal increase in business activity during the first quarter of 2024. Moreover, the rate of growth lost momentum during the latest survey period, reflected a renewed decline in new work.

Staffing numbers continued to decline in the three months to March, with the pace of job shedding exceeding that seen in all other parts of the service economy.



# Computing & IT Services

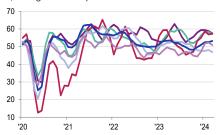
Business activity in the Computing & IT services sector increased at a strong pace in the three months to March. However, the latest upturn was the least marked since the three months to October 2023.

Employment growth also eased to the weakest since last autumn. Computing & IT services nonetheless remained the best-performing part of the service sector for job creation in the first quarter of the year.

Hotels, Restaurants & Catering
 Transport & Communication

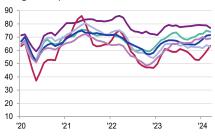
### Output Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



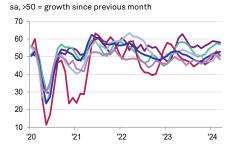
#### **Future Activity Index**

>50 = growth expected over next 12 months



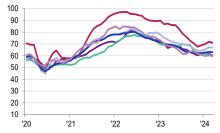
Computing & IT servicesFinancial Intermediation

#### New Business Index



### Input Prices Index

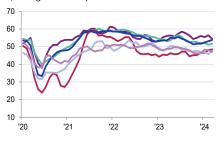
sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



- Business-to-Business Services
- Other Personal & Community Services

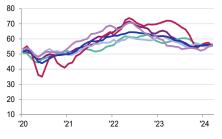
#### Employment Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



#### **Prices Charged Index**

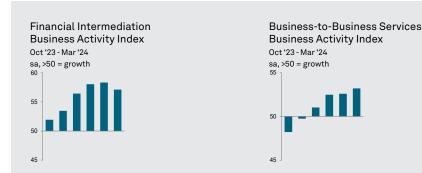
sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



PMI

# Services sub-sectors

All data shown are smoothed as a three-month moving average (3mma)

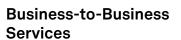


Other Personal & Community Services Business Activity Index Oct '23 - Mar '24 sa, >50 = growth

## **Financial Intermediation**

The Financial Intermediation sector recorded another robust rise in business activity during the three months to March, although the pace of expansion eased slightly since the prior survey period. This was supported by a robust increase in new work during the first quarter of 2024.

Staffing numbers expanded again in the Financial Intermediation category, as has been seen in each month since early-2021.



Activity growth gained momentum in the Business Services sector during the three months to March. The latest upturn in business activity was the fastest since the three months to April 2023.

Latest data also signalled stronger rises in new orders and employment in the Business Services sector.

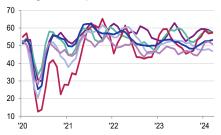
# Other Personal & Community Services

Other Personal & Community Services was the weakest-performing category in the latest survey period and the only sector to register an overall decline in business activity. The rate of contraction accelerated to its steepest since the three months to November 2022. However, new order intakes were stable on average in the first quarter of the year.

Hotels, Restaurants & Catering
 Transport & Communication

#### Output Index

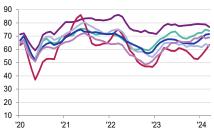
sa, >50 = growth since previous month



#### **Future Activity Index**

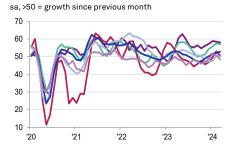
PMI

>50 = growth expected over next 12 months



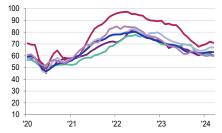
Computing & IT servicesFinancial Intermediation

#### New Business Index



### Input Prices Index

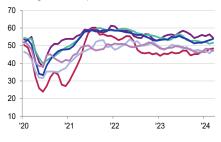
sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



- Business-to-Business Services
- Other Personal & Community Services

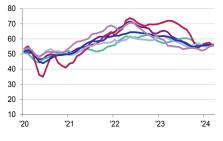
#### Employment Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



#### **Prices Charged Index**

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



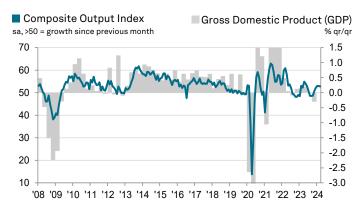
# S&P Global UK Composite PMI®

## Broad-based increase in UK private sector output

At 52.8 in March, the seasonally adjusted S&P Global UK PMI Composite Output Index\* eased slightly from February's nine-month high of 53.0 but remained indicative of a solid upturn in private sector business activity. Moreover, output growth broadened out from the service economy to the manufacturing sector in March. The rise in manufacturing production was the first since February 2023.

March data also pointed to a broad-based rise in new business volumes, albeit with service providers recording a much faster rate of expansion than good producers. Private sector employment continued to hold steady, with marginal job creation in the service economy offset by sustained cutbacks in manufacturing payroll numbers.

Strong input cost pressures persisted in March, especially in the service sector, largely due to higher wages. However, the overall rate of input cost inflation eased from February's sixmonth high. Latest data also signalled a softer rate of prices charged inflation, led by a slowdown in the service economy.

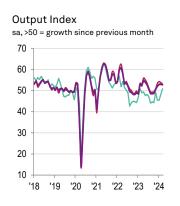


Sources: S&P Global PMI, ONS.

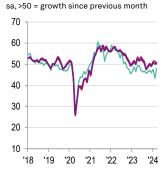
\*Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

### Composite

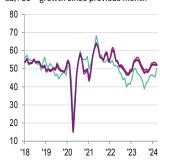
- Manufacturing
- Services



**Employment Index** 



New Business Index sa. >50 = growth since previous month



Outstanding Business Index sa, >50 = growth since previous month



### New Export Business Index

sa, >50 = growth since previous month



Future Output Index
>50 = growth expected over next 12 months



Input Prices Index

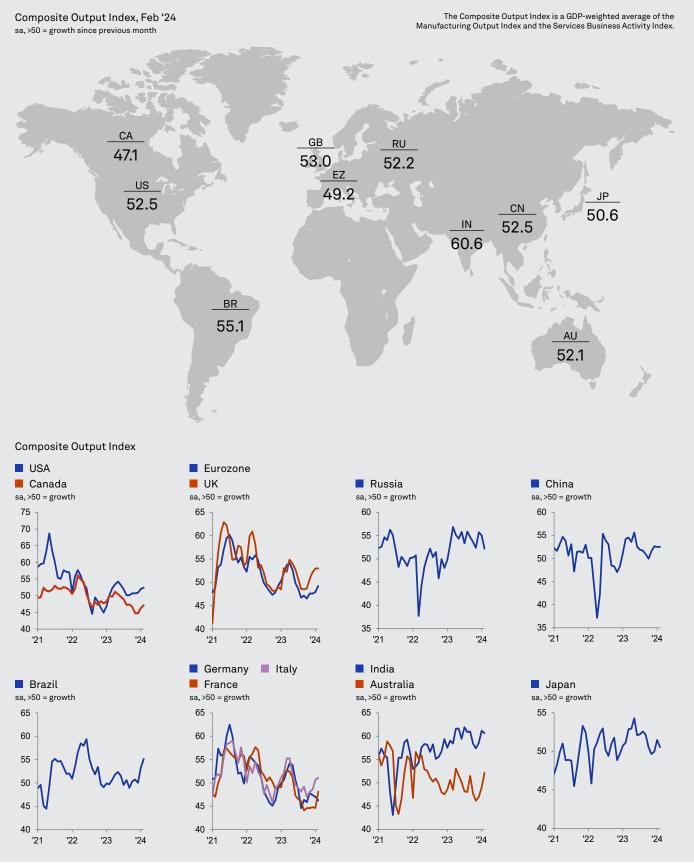


Prices Charged Index

sa, >50 = inflation since previous month



# International PMI



PMI<sup>°</sup> by S&P Global

# Survey methodology

The S&P Global UK Services PMI<sup>®</sup> is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 650 service sector companies. The sectors covered include consumer (excluding retail), transport, information, communication, finance, insurance, real estate and business services. The panel is stratified by detailed sector and company workforce size, based on contributions to GDP. Data collection began in July 1996.

Survey responses are collected in the second half of each month and indicate the direction of change compared to the previous month. A diffusion index is calculated for each survey variable. The index is the sum of the percentage of 'higher' responses and half the percentage of 'unchanged' responses. The indices vary between 0 and 100, with a reading above 50 indicating an overall increase compared to the previous month, and below 50 an overall decrease. The indices are then seasonally adjusted.

The headline figure is the Services Business Activity Index. This is a diffusion index calculated from a question that asks for changes in the volume of business activity compared with one month previously. The Services Business Activity Index is comparable to the Manufacturing Output Index. It may be referred to as the 'Services PMI' but is not comparable with the headline manufacturing PMI figure.

The Composite Output Index is a weighted average of the Manufacturing Output Index and the Services Business Activity Index. The weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data. The Composite Output Index may be referred to as the 'Composite PMI' but is not comparable with the headline manufacturing PMI figure.

Underlying survey data are not revised after publication, but seasonal adjustment factors may be revised from time to time as appropriate which will affect the seasonally adjusted data series.

For further information on the PMI survey methodology, please contact <u>economics@spglobal.com</u>.

### **Survey dates**

Data were collected 12-26 March 2024.

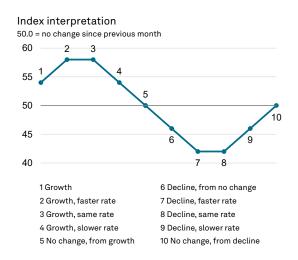
### Survey questions

Business Activity	Emplo
New Business	Outsta
New Export Business	Input F
Future Activity	Prices

Employment Outstanding Business Input Prices Prices Charged

Index calculation

## % "Higher" + (% "No change")/2



#### Sector coverage

Services PMI data include responses from companies operating in sectors classified according to the following ISIC Rev.3 codes:

- 55 Hotels & Restaurants
- 60 Land Transport and Pipelines
- 61 Water Transport
- 62 Air Transport
- 63 Supporting Transport Activities
- 64 Post and Telecommunications
- 65 Banking

- 66 Insurance and Pensions67 Other Financial Services
- 70 Real Estate
- 71 Renting of Goods
- 72 Computer Services
- 73 Research and Development
- 74 Other Business Activities
- 74 Other Business Activities

- 80 Education
- 85 Health Care
- 91 Membership Organisations
- 92 Recreational, Cultural and Sporting Activities
- 93 Other Service Activities

# Index summary

### Services

sa, 50 = no change over previous month. \*50 = no change over next 12 months.

	Business Activity	New Business	New Export Business	Future Activity*	Employment	Outstanding Business	Input Prices	Prices Charged
23-10	49.5	49.1	50.2	66.1	49.2	47.0	63.3	57.6
23-11	50.9	50.3	50.6	67.6	50.3	46.0	64.0	58.2
23-12	53.4	52.8	50.5	69.7	49.7	48.5	64.5	58.6
24-01	54.3	53.3	52.2	70.2	51.3	48.8	63.3	57.2
24-02	53.8	53.5	53.1	75.2	51.5	48.4	64.9	58.4
24-03	53.1	52.3	51.7	72.9	50.7	48.8	63.4	57.1

### Composite (manufacturing and services)

sa, 50 = no change over previous month. \*50 = no change over next 12 months.

	Output	New Business	New Export Business	Future Output*	Employment	Outstanding Business	Input Prices	Prices Charged
23-10	48.7	48.1	46.8	66.9	48.8	45.5	60.3	56.3
23-11	50.7	49.6	48.6	68.2	49.8	44.9	61.2	56.9
23-12	52.1	51.8	48.7	69.7	49.1	47.0	61.8	57.3
24-01	52.9	52.2	49.9	70.6	50.8	47.5	61.6	56.3
24-02	53.0	52.3	48.6	75.0	50.2	47.2	63.0	57.3
24-03	52.8	52.0	49.7	73.4	50.3	48.3	61.8	56.4

#### Services sub-sectors

sa, 50 = no change over previous month. \*50 = no change over next 12 months.

	Business Activity	New Business	Future Activity	Employment	Outstanding Business	Input Prices	Prices Charged
Hotels, Restaurants & Catering	57.4	50.5	63.4	48.5	44.9	71.1	55.5
Transport & Communication	50.9	48.5	69.0	46.9	43.8	60.1	56.0
Computing & IT Services	57.5	58.0	77.0	54.4	49.8	60.2	56.3
Financial Intermediation	57.1	57.1	74.1	51.7	50.6	59.6	55.3
Business-to-Business Services	53.2	52.8	71.6	53.8	50.1	63.1	55.9
Other Personal & Community Services	46.9	50.1	62.7	47.6	44.7	67.0	55.6



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