

A BRIEF GUIDE TO SOURCES OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

This note is a brief guide to the different sources of information available regarding public sector employment, the strengths and weaknesses of each source and some guidance on how to make use of the information.

Summary

- The ONS Public Sector Employment Statistical Bulletin provides the UK's headline official estimates of public sector employment. As well as estimates of total public sector employment and private sector employment, breakdowns are published by government sector, broad industry and region of workplace, together with Civil Service employment by government department.
- ABI/BRES provides workplace based public sector employee job estimates available down to local authority level.
- APS provides residence based public sector employment estimates available down to local authority level and other local area geographies. Individuals are self classified which tends to result in an overestimate of public sector employment.

Public Sector Employment (PSE/QPSES)

Public Sector Employment (PSE) statistics are derived from a range of sources. PSE estimates are based on a complete census of Local Government and Civil Service and cover all public bodies with twenty or more employees. The primary source is the Quarterly Public Sector Employment Surveys (QPSES). The QPSES comprise three separate data collections; the home Civil Service, Local Governments in England and Wales and Great Britain public corporations and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's). The survey(s) aims to achieve a complete census of the relevant sectors. So that estimates of total PSE can be made it is necessary for further information to be gathered from external sources such as Ministry of Defence, Home Office and devolved administrations. The time lag between publication and the reference period is 11-12 weeks.

PSE follows UK National Accounts concepts and definitions. These are included in the background notes of the quarterly PSE Statistical Bulletin. PSE estimates count every individual with an employment contract who are being paid in the public sector, including those where public sector employment would be their second job.

Consistent time-series are available from the ONS website back to 1999 on a seasonally adjusted basis and back to 1991 on a non-seasonally adjusted basis.

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=13615>

Annual Business Inquiry/Business Register Employment Survey (ABI/BRES)

BRES and its predecessor ABI collects comprehensive information from businesses representing the majority of the economy. Estimates are produced on an annual basis and published toward the end of the year following the reference period, e.g. 2009 estimates published in December 2010. BRES is a sampled survey and uses the returns from those selected to estimate the employment for the other business in the survey universe.

BRES produces estimates of employee, rather than workforce jobs. Self-employed jobs, HM Forces and Government Supported trainees are therefore excluded.

Individuals are classified to the public sector dependent on the legal status of the organisation that they work for, as classified on the Inter Departmental Business Register, and follows UK National Accounts concepts and definitions.

Analysis from ABI/BRES have been produced for a split between public and private sector employee jobs at local authority level and above. Since BRES is a business survey jobs are classified on a workplace basis, i.e. a public sector job is counted within the local authority where the organisation is located.

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6365>

Annual Population Survey (APS)

The APS is derived from the Labour Force Survey, a household survey looking at individuals' interaction with the labour market. APS estimates are produced on a quarterly basis for a rolling twelve monthly period, six months following the end of the reference period, e.g. July 2009 – June 2010 estimates published in December 2010.

Individual respondents to APS classify themselves as working within the public or private sector. Estimates to the number of people working in the public sector from the APS are generally much higher than ONS's official quarterly estimates of Public Sector Employment. This is partially because many people who work within public sector premises, whilst being employed by private sector organisations, will classify themselves as working in the public sector, e.g. cleaners or security guards employed by a contractor to work at public sector premises.

APS estimates for public and private sector employment are available on the Nomis website for a range of local areas. Since APS is a household survey, employment is counted in the area where the employee lives.

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

Comparison of results

The table below gives the levels and proportions of public and private sector employment or jobs from three sources.

Survey	Period	Private Sector million (%)	Public Sector million (%)
PSE	2010 Q3	23.1 (79.4)	6.0 (20.6)
ABI/BRES	2009	21.0 (78.1)	5.9 (21.9)
APS	July 2009 – June 2010	21.4 (74.8)	7.2 (25.2)

As can be seen from above figures, PSE and ABI/BRES are reasonably comparable, whereas APS estimates show a much higher proportion of people employed in the public sector. However, since misclassification is likely to be fairly evenly distributed, it may be appropriate to scale individual area estimates from APS based on quarterly Public Sector Employment total estimates.