Ofcom Business Postal Tracker: Annual technical report: Q1 to Q4 2018

General survey description

The Business Postal Tracker Q1-Q4 2018 aimed to achieve 2000 individual interviews, representative of the profile of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) with 0-249 employees across the UK, across a fieldwork period of 12 months. This sample size generated a robust dataset with margins of error of +/- 2-3%. Within the year an additional boost number of interviews were achieved in Q2 2018 to allow for additional questions covering views on second class post. As such the target was increased to 2,390[1] individual interviews, representative of small and medium sized businesses (SME's).

The Business Postal Tracker is carried out using a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) methodology. The interview lasts 15-20 minutes and covers the following topic areas: volume and use of postal service, reported experience with Royal Mail and other providers, overall satisfaction, change in mail as a communication method.

Fieldwork in 2018 was conducted over four quarters, with the sample size for each quarter as follows:

Table 1: Interviews by quarter

Quarter	Number of interviews	
	N	%
Q1/2018	500	21%
Q2/2018	890[2]	37%
Q3/2018	500	21%
Q4/2018	500	21%

[1] The additional interviews were split across the range of employer sizes to ensure the overall sample is representative of the SME population

[2] Additional interviews were achieved within Q2 to allow for Q2 data to be looked at alone for specific questions. Within the annual tables, Q2 has been made equal to the other quarters via weighting.

Survey objectives

The research aims to measure the use of postal services amongst businesses in the UK.

Specific objectives are:

- To provide time-trend data that enables Ofcom to monitor these measures over time
- To provide robust data suitable for publication
- To provide data to inform Ofcom analysis, reports and decisions
- To provide analysis by population sub-groups

Sampling approach and quotas

Considering the profile of businesses in the UK as defined by number of employees (business size), it is clear that this profile is heavily skewed towards smaller businesses. As table 2 indicates, if the final interview numbers were allowed to reflect this population it would not be possible to undertake robust analysis with organisations of 10 employees or more. For this reason, quotas were set in order to achieve a significant number of responses across all business sizes and weighting factors calculated to account for this sample design.

Table 2: Profile of business in the UK

Business Size	N	%	Natural interview distribution	Quotas Set	Implied weight
0-9	4,633,585	96.0	2,294	1,797	1.28
10-49	167,670	3.5	84	396	0.21
50-249	26,905	0.6	14	197	0.07
Total	**4,828,160**	**100**	**2,390**	**2,390**	

Using the quotas indicated above, quarterly targets were calculated, which were also broken down in order to achieve a final dataset which was also representative of UK businesses in terms of location.

Further controls were placed on the sample to ensure that a mixture of businesses from urban and rural locations are included in the final sample. Business postcode addresses selected for potential inclusion in the survey UK cities and towns were classified into urban and rural strata based on the classifications shown in table 3 below. The categories have been devised by the survey sample and statistics provider *UK Geographics*. Population data from UK Census 2001 were overlaid onto the *UK Geographics* categories to provide population distribution estimates by postcode. For the purposes of the Business Postal Tracker, urban regions were considered to be those in categories A-E, while rural locations were defined by categories F-G.

Table 3: ONS urbanity definitions

Category	Description	Population	Incidence (% 16+)
A	Large City	500,000+	14.71
B	Smaller city or large town	100,000 – 500,000	19.81
C	Medium town	15,000 – 100,000	32.12
D	Small town (within 10 miles of A,B or C)	2,000 – 15,000	17.38
E	Small town (more than 10 miles of A,B or C)	2,000 – 15,000	1.85
F	Rural area (within 10 miles of A,B or C)	500 – 2,000	11.70
G	Rural area (more than 10 miles from A, B or C)	500 – 2,000	2.42

Urbanity was taken into account in the selection of the final sample and used to set quotas on location to ensure a spread of urban and rural locations were interviewed[3]. Final yearly targets, defined therefore by business size and location, are described in table 4 below.

In order to achieve the required number of final interviews sample was provided by an approved supplier in a minimum 10-to-1 ratio.

[3] Soft targets were set on urbanity to allow a robust comparison, 75% urban and 25% rural.

Table 4: Yearly quota targets

Region	Business size (number of employees)			Total
	0 to 9	10 - 49	50 - 249	
East of England	119	23	13	155
East Midlands	85	14	5	104
Greater London	228	47	23	298
North East	42	14	5	61
North West	123	24	13	160
South East	215	48	23	286
South West	133	24	13	170
West Midlands	95	24	13	132
Yorkshire & The Humber	95	24	13	132
Scotland	219	53	24	296
Wales	228	48	24	300
Northern Ireland	215	53	28	296
TOTAL:	1,797	396	197	2,390

Selection of respondents and fieldwork procedure

As the content of the questionnaire asks respondents to estimate the volumes of post mailed and the value of contracts with postal service providers, a screening process was undertaken at the start of interviews to ensure that respondents could provide valid responses.

After dialling the telephone number for the business indicated on the sample, interviewers were directed to ask those answering if they were able to answer questions about their organisation's mailing processes, volumes for the postal items sent from the UK from sites for which the business is responsible and spend on mail services. If the initial contact indicated that they were not able to do this, they were asked to pass the call over to someone who was able to answer the questions.

During fieldwork interviews were carried out in strict accordance with the guidelines given to interviewers and according to the Market Research Society (MRS) codes and guidelines. During fieldwork quality control was performed in accordance with MRS guidelines. Monitoring the quality of interviews included the witnessing by a supervisor of at least 15% of each of the interviewers' work.

Profile of achieved sample

At the completion of fieldwork, 2398 individual interviews were achieved. These are broken down by region and business size in table 5.

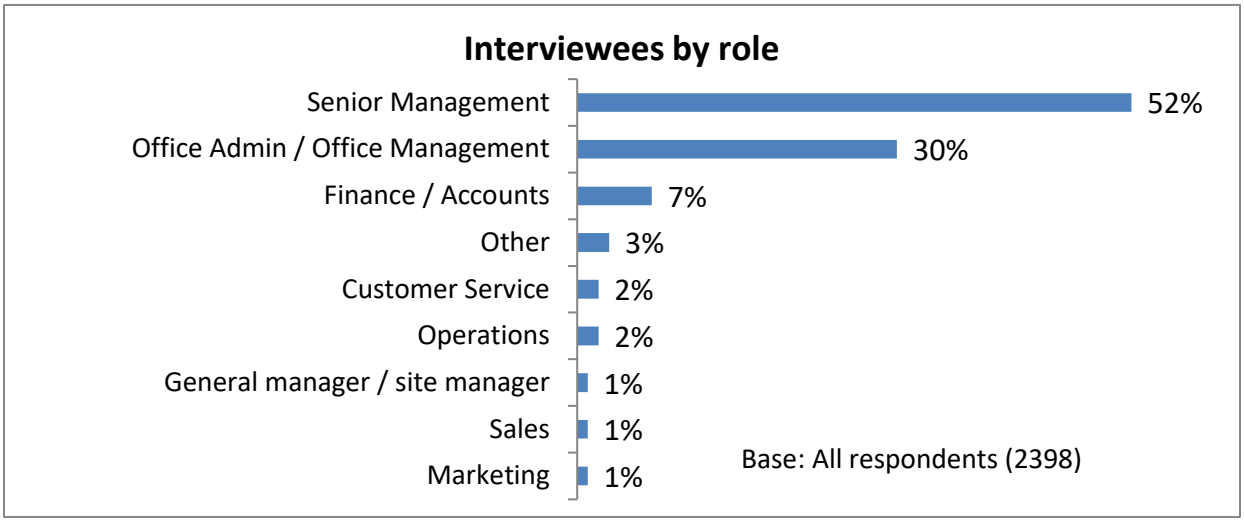
As is evident in table 5, the unweighted sample achieved this year under-represents smaller businesses and over-represents larger businesses. In addition, while quotas were set in line with table 4, some quotas were relaxed to ensure that the overall target number of interviews could be achieved. Weighting factors described below were calculated at the data-processing stage in order to make adjustments to the dataset.

Table 5: Achieved unweighted sample by region and business size

Region	N	Region - aggregated	Business size				Total	
			0-9		10+			
			N	%	N	%	N	%
East of England	139	Midlands	290	12%	101	4%	391	16%
East Midlands	112							
West Midlands	140							
Greater London	276	South	551	23%	212	9%	763	32%
South East	299							
South West	188							
Yorkshire and the Humber	128	North	264	11%	109	5%	373	16%
North East	74							
North West	171							
Scotland	307	Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	592	25%	279	12%	871	36%
Wales	287							
Northern Ireland	277							
Total	**2398**		1,697	71%	701	29%	2398	100%

The questionnaire used during interviews with businesses also contained some profiling information in order to check that the achieved sample contained a spread of different types of businesses and to ensure that no other factors were influencing results unduly. No firm quotas were set on these factors however.

Interviews were achieved across a range of industry (as indicated in the chart below) and in terms of the personnel with whom interviews were undertaken, the majority were divided between those working in senior management/owners and office administration/management. The majority of interviews (87%) were undertaken at head offices and 95% of those interviewed have an internet connection in the office in which they are based.



Sample efficiency and weighting

At the stage of data processing weights were applied to each quarter's data independently in order that final aggregated data is representative of the population of UK businesses, whilst allowing for quarterly analysis. The profile of businesses in the UK against that of the achieved sample and the associated weighting factors are presented in the table below.

Table 6: Profile of businesses for weighting

Sample regions	Population Profile		Achieved Sample		Weighting factor
	N	%	N	%	
0-9 employees					
North	923535	19	264	11	1.73
Midlands	1121665	23	290	12	1.92
South	1970735	41	551	23	1.783
Wales, Scotland, N Ireland	617650	13	592	25	0.52
TOTAL:	**4633585**	**96**	**1697**	**71**	
10+ employees					
North	44005	1	109	5	0.2
Midlands	50700	1	101	4	0.25
South	75220	2	212	9	0.223
Wales, Scotland, N Ireland	30535	1	279	12	0.084
TOTAL:	**200460**	**4**	**701**	**29**	

In the event, the average weight which has been applied to each quarter's data is, as might be expected '1'. The modal weight by quarter (Q1/Q2/Q3/Q4 2018) is 0.492/0.294/0.485/1.814 respectively, and the weights range from 0.046 for larger businesses to 1.95 for those that are smaller. The design effect for these weights is 1.53/0.89/1.51/1.63 respectively, giving an effective base of 328/556/332/308 which provides quarterly results accurate to +/- 6%.

Table 7: Weighting details

Quarter	Modal Weight	Lowest Weight	Highest Weight	Design Effect	Effective Base	Results Accuracy
Q1/2018	0.492	0.098	1.85	1.53	328	+/- 6%
Q2/2018	0.294	0.046	1.065	0.89	556	+/- 4%
Q3/2018	0.485	0.102	1.885	1.51	332	+/- 5%
Q4/2018	1.814	0.071	1.95	1.63	308	+/- 6%