



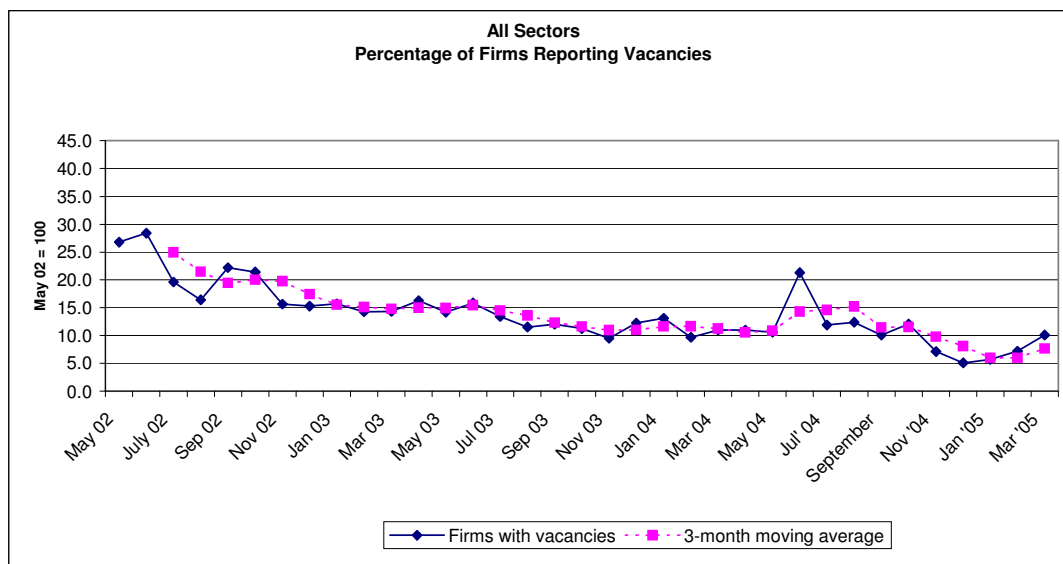
Employment and Vacancies Survey: January, February and March 2005

Percentage of Firms Reporting Vacancies Increases in First Quarter of 2005

All Sectors

The percentage of firms reporting vacancies for all sectors combined increased steadily throughout the months of January, February and March 2005. The percentage of firms actively trying to fill vacancies reached 10 per cent in March 2005 compared to 5 per cent in December 2004. The increase during the first quarter of 2005 marks a return to the level the vacancies measure was at during most of 2004 when there was strong growth in the number of people in employment.

The increase in the all sectors indicator in the first three months of 2005 reflects a significant increase in the percentage of firms in the services sector reporting vacancies, relative constancy in the percentage of firms in the retail and industry sectors having vacancies and a decline in the percentage of firms having vacancies in the construction sector.



The most notable features of the all sectors vacancies indicator in previous periods were:

- a downward trend from 27 per cent in May 2002 to 12 per cent in December 2003
- a fairly stable trend around 13 per cent from January 2004 to May 2004

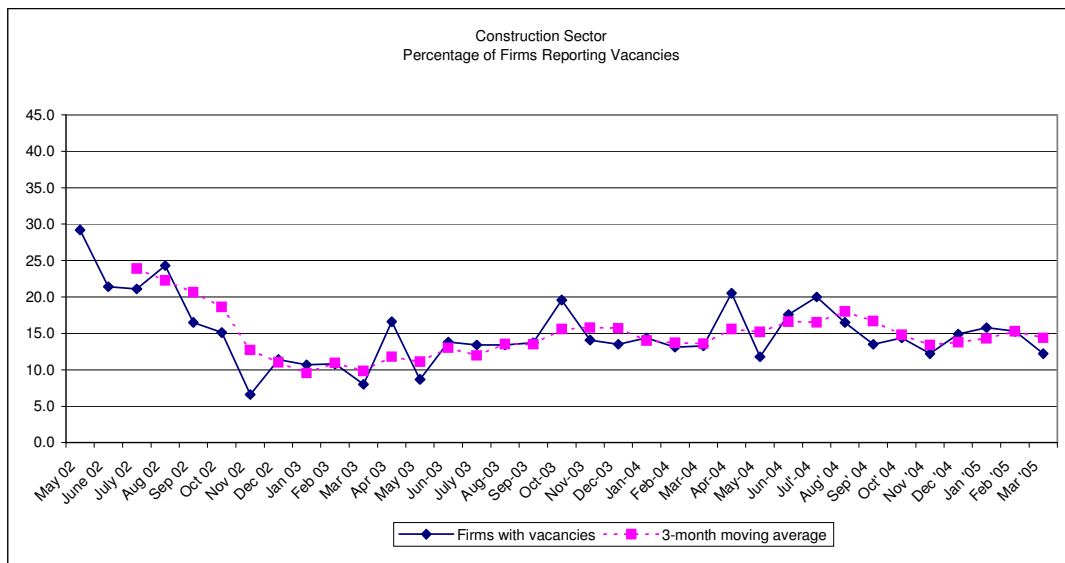
- a big increase to 21 per cent in June 2004, mainly attributable to a surge in the percentage of firms reporting vacancies in the services sector in that month

Construction Sector

The percentage of firms in the construction sector actively trying to fill vacancies fell from 15 per cent in December 2004 to 12 per cent in March 2005. A downturn in activity due to seasonal factors may have influenced this decline.

The most notable features of the construction sector vacancies indicator in previous periods were:

- monthly fluctuations around 15 per cent throughout 2004
- a big decline in the percentage of firms with vacancies from 29 per cent in May 2002 to 7 per cent in November 2002.

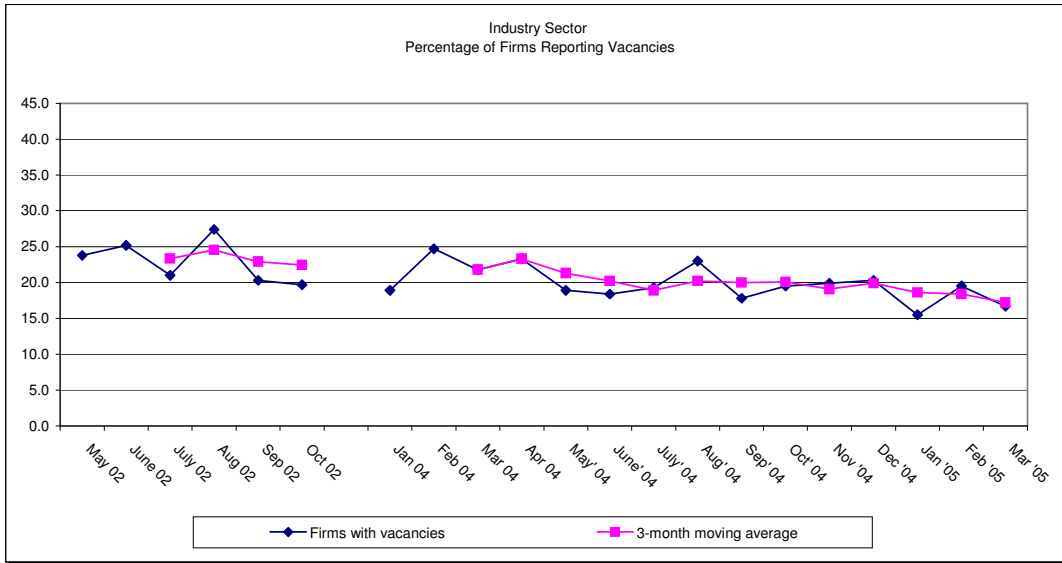


Industry Sector

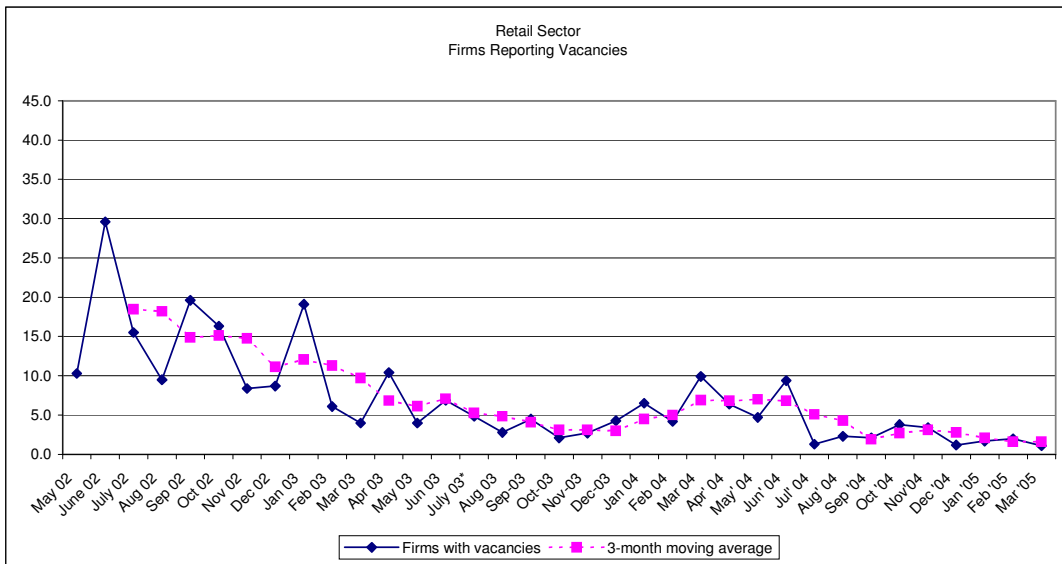
Data in relation to the percentage of firms reporting vacancies in the industry sector is available for the period from May 2002 to October 2002 and the period from January 2004 to March 2005 but not for the period from November 2002 to December 2003. Taking into account the gap in the data, the industry sector has generally had the highest percentage of firms reporting vacancies. In the first three months of 2005 the percentage of industry sector firms reporting vacancies fell from 20 per cent in December 2004 to around 15 per cent in January 2005 and it increased to about 17 per cent in March 2005.

The most notable features of the industry sector vacancies indicator in previous periods were:

- relative stability around 22 per cent in the period May 2002 to October 2002.
- a shift to a lower level of around 20 per cent between January 2004 and December 2004



Retail Sector



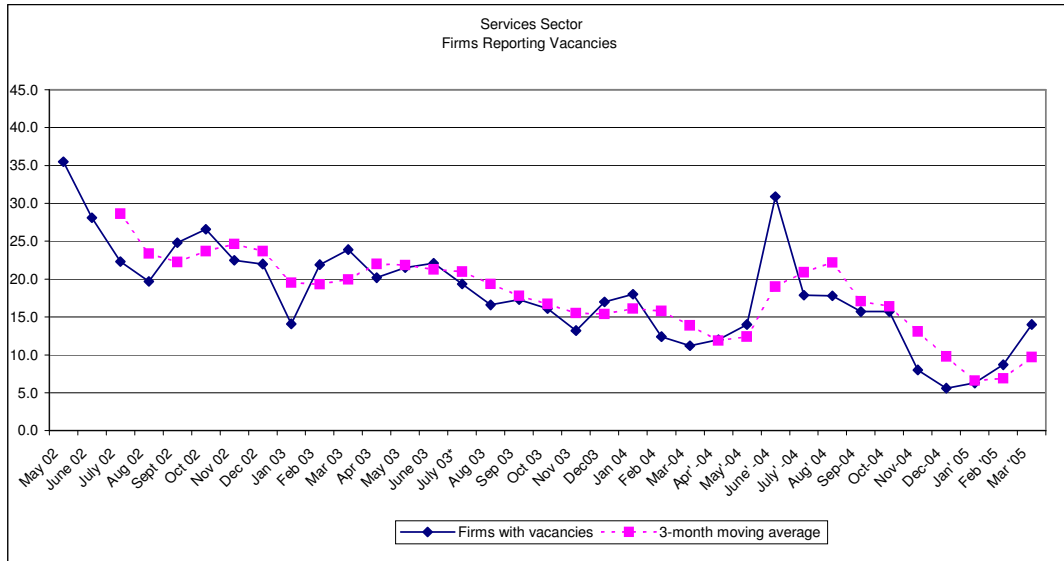
The percentage of retail sector firms with vacancies continued to remain at a fairly low level in January February and March 2005. In the last quarter of 2004 the vacancies indicator averaged about 3 per cent but, following increased activity around the Christmas and New Year period, it fell back to about 2 per cent in January 2005 and to 1 per cent in March 2005.

The most notable features of the retail sector vacancies indicator in previous periods were:

- a downward trend from May 2002 to December 2002
- a stable trend around the 5 per cent mark throughout 2004

Services Sector

The percentage of service sector firms reporting vacancies rose steadily throughout the first three months of 2005, increasing from 6 per cent in December 2004 to 14 per cent in March 2005.



The most notable features of the services sector vacancies indicator in previous periods were:

- a long-term downward trend from 36 per cent in May 2002 to 11 per cent in March 2004
- a jump to 31 per cent in June 2004
- a downward trend to 6 per cent from June 2004 to December 2004

Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies

Firms are asked if they are experiencing difficulty in filling the vacancies they have and what these vacancies are. This provides an indication of the jobs which employers are finding most difficult-to-fill. In the sectors surveyed employers in construction have consistently reported a higher percentage of difficult-to-fill vacancies than employers in the other sectors.

The most difficult-to-fill vacancies in March 2005 reported for the various sectors were:

- quantity surveyors and site managers in the construction sector
- sales representatives and engineers in the industry sector
- sales agents and shop assistants in the retail sector
- drivers and catering staff in the services sector.