

Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Organization: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor. “The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor is the principal Federal agency responsible for measuring labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the economy.”¹

Purpose and Uses: The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program provides a quarterly tabulation of employment and wage information from workers covered by state unemployment insurance (UI) laws and federal workers covered by the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) program. It houses the most comprehensive employment database in the nation. QCEW users include businesses, public and nonprofit researchers, transportation agencies, educational organizations, workforce development planners, and local economic development agencies.

The QCEW also serves as the BLS business register, the basis for the BLS longitudinal establishment data base (producing Business Employment Dynamics statistics), and the sampling frame for BLS’s Current Employment Statistics and Occupational Employment Statistics surveys. QCEW data are used by the Bureau of Economic Analysis to estimate the wage and salary portion of Gross Domestic Product and by the Census Bureau to improve the accuracy of its business register.²

Data Elements Relevant to Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development:

- Employment (monthly)
- Number of establishments (quarterly)
- Total wages (quarterly)
- Average weekly wage (quarterly)
- Average annual pay (annual)

QCEW data are provided by NAICS industry, geography (down to the county level), establishment size, and ownership sector (private, government).

History and Status: The QCEW is a BLS-state cooperative statistics program. The State Workforce Agencies (SWAs), with federal funding, are responsible for data collection and initial quality review. BLS establishes and enforces uniform methods and processes to yield a consistent level of data quality.

Historically, the QCEW program was known as the ES-202 program. From the start of the national unemployment insurance (UI) system in 1938 (when the Federal Unemployment Tax Act became effective) until 1972, the Department of Labor’s Manpower Administration or its predecessor agencies were responsible for ES-202 data collection and publication. BLS assumed responsibility in 1972. For decades, BLS published an annual edition of *Employment and Wages* that laid out detailed ES-202 data tables. With the Internet’s advent, BLS updates QCEW data quarterly on its website.

¹ <http://www.bls.gov/bls/infohome.htm>

² OMB Supporting Statement A http://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAViewICR?ref_nbr=201109-1220-004

The collection of QCEW data is authorized by 29 USC 1, 2 and Section 15 of the Wagner-Peyser Act.³ QCEW data collection has clearance from OMB through October 2014.

Methodology: QCEW data are drawn from the Quarterly Contribution Reports filed with SWAs by every employer subject to state unemployment law in the U.S., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as federal employers. These organizations represent 99.7% of all wage and salary civilian employment in the country. In June 2010, the total number of covered establishments was 9.01 million and total covered employment was 129.4 million.

Each quarter, each SWA codes and summarizes the raw data, checks for missing information and errors, prepares imputations of data for delinquent reports, processes the data, then sends the data to BLS, which does several additional data edits and, as necessary, requests the SWA to review questionable entries and provide explanations. BLS publishes the QCEW data seven to nine months after the reference quarter.

Data Products and Tools: QCEW databases are available from BLS online [here](#) in multiple formats (tables, ftp download, .csv, maps, and charts).

Annual Cost: In FY2011, the QCEW cost \$58 million, of which \$35 million was in the form of grants to SWAs. For FY2015, the President has requested \$60 million.

³ Ibid.