

CKGSB BCI

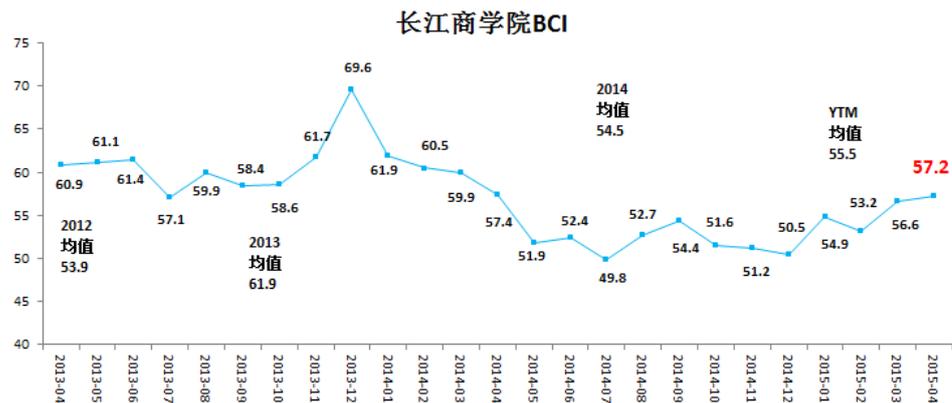
April 2015

23 April 2015

CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

In April 2015, the CKGSB Business Conditions Index (BCI) registered 57.2, up slightly on March's index of 56.6, and above the confidence threshold of 50. This shows that the majority of relatively successful firms sampled have a positive outlook on business prospects in the next six months. Although the index has seen a small improvement in the past two months, looking at the overall situation gives us reason to believe risks of an economic downturn still exist. Price deflation, falling labor investment and inventory backlogs are key concerns. Firms should stay alert to the potential impact of these risks on their operations.

Figure 1 CKGSB BCI



Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

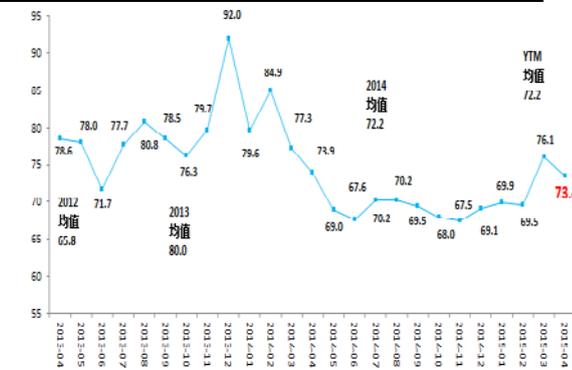
The BCI is generated wholly on the basis of statistics gathered from leading enterprises whose executives have studied or are studying at Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business. In the questionnaire we ask respondents to indicate whether their firm is more, the same, or less, competitive than the industry average (50), and from this we derive a sample competitiveness index (Figure 2). Consequently, as our sample firms are in a relatively strong competitive position in their respective industries, the CKGSB BCI indices are higher than government and industry PMI indices. Users of the CKGSB BCI index may therefore focus on data changes over time to forecast trends in the Chinese economy.

Figure 2 Industry Competitiveness

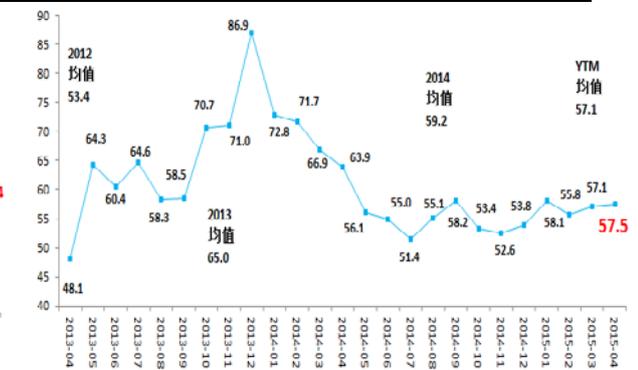


Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

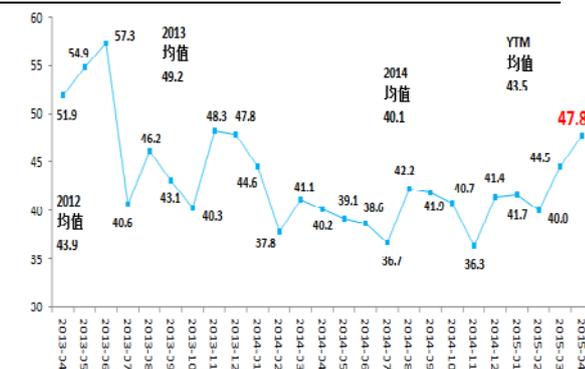
The CKGSB BCI comprises four sub-indices that are forwarding-looking indicators for corporate sales, corporate profits, corporate financing environment, and inventory levels.

Figure 3. Sales


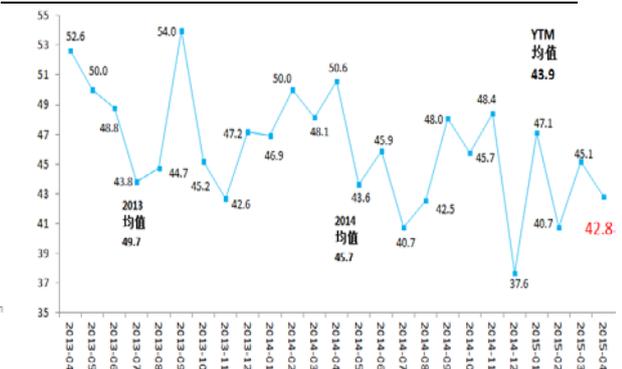
Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Figure 4. Profit


Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Figure 5. Financing


Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Figure 6. Inventory


Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

The corporate sales index registered 73.4 in April, slightly lower than last month. The profit index registered 57.5 (Figure 4), up on last month and higher than the confidence threshold of 50. These indices show that most companies have a positive outlook on sales and profit in the forthcoming 6 months.

The corporate financing environment index grew from 44.5 in March to 47.8 in April (Figure 5). However, with the confidence level still below 50, this indicates that financing is still a struggle, compared with last year. Since our sample is mostly private firms, this data specifically points to challenging financial pressures in the private sector.

The index measuring inventory levels registered 42.8 in April, a fall on last month's index of 45.1 and still under the confidence threshold of 50 (Figure 6). Inventory pressures will remain serious in the upcoming period.

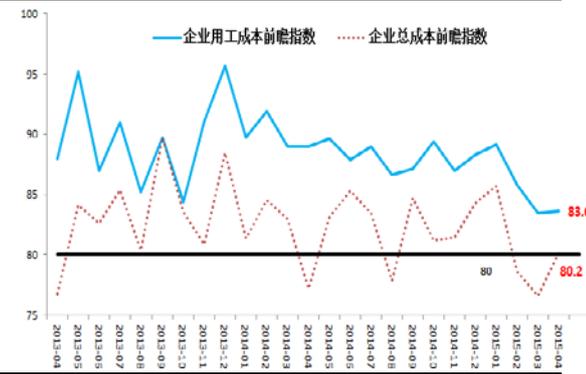
Besides the main indices, we also surveyed respondents on forecasted costs, prices, investment plans and employment conditions, to form a supplementary set of indices.

In April, labor costs and overall costs registered indices of 83.6 and 80.2 respectively (Figure 7),

both at a high level. These two indices are predictions of changes to costs in the upcoming six months, and show that sampled firms expect costs to increase compared with this time last year.

The consumer prices index registered 48.8 (Figure 8), down on March's index of 52.7. Existing deflationary pressures need continued attention. The producer price index has increased over the past three months, but remains very low at 39.7, under the confidence threshold. Conditions for the industrial sector remain depressed.

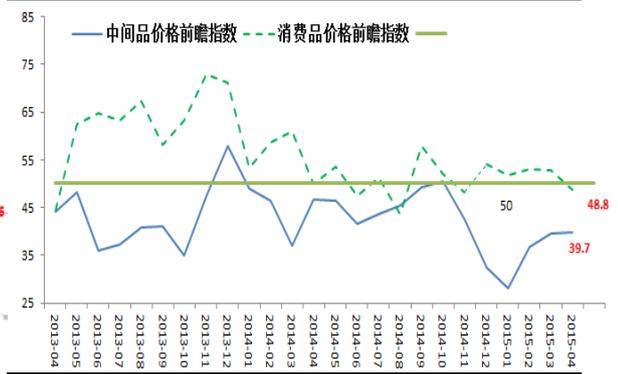
Figure 7. Costs



Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Blue: Labor; Dotted: Overall

Figure 8. Prices



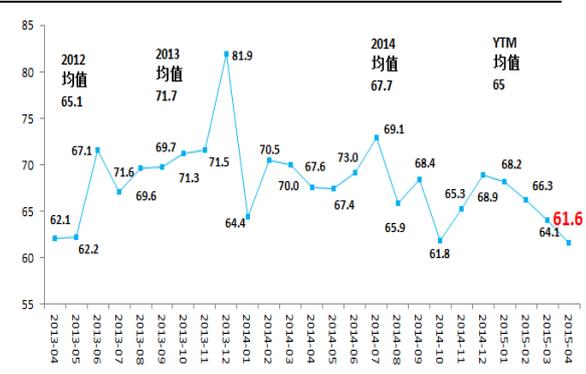
Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Blue: Producer; Dotted: Consumer

The corporate investment demand index fell slightly from 64.1 in March to 61.6 in April (Figure 9), well above the confidence threshold of 50. This index shows that the majority of sampled firms intend to invest in fixed assets in the next six months.

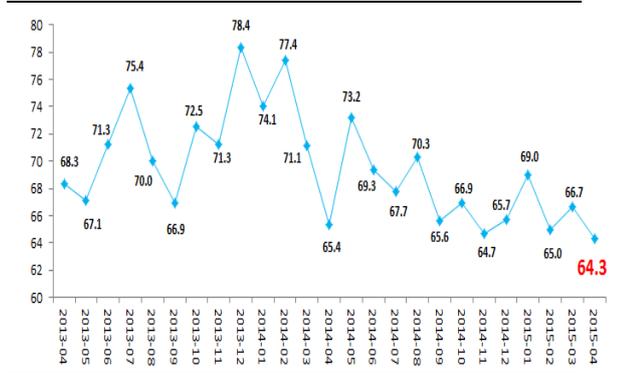
In terms of labor demand, the April index is 64.3 (Figure 10), lower than March's index of 66.7 and above the confidence threshold. This shows that the CKGSB BCI sample expects to expand their workforces. As corporate investment and labor demand are critical to output, the fact that companies plan to invest and hire new staff demonstrates continued confidence in future production expansion. However, looking at the trends for these two indices, there is a clear downward turn.

Figure 9. Corporate Investment



Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Figure 10. Labor Demand



Source: CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research

Overall, the April CKGSB BCI shows a positive outlook for business in China. However, given the run of low indices that began in 2014, macroeconomic risks clearly still remain. For private companies and SMEs, financing, inventory and costs remain the three big challenges. The central bank's relaxation of interest rates can partly relieve financing pressures and deflationary risk. This will have a positive impact on the real economy. At the company level however, the situation should be leveraged to bring into play greater efficiencies in production and consumer service transformation. Investments should be considered very carefully, and timely responses to the government's economic reforms should be planned for.

CKGSB BCI Introduction

In June 2011, CKGSB Case Center and Center for Economic Research initiated a project to gauge the business sentiment of executives about the macro-economic environment in China – called an index of business conditions.

Under the direction of Professor Li Wei, in July 2011, the two research centers designed and tested the BCI survey. In September 2011, the first surveys were distributed and results computed. Since May 2012, the research team has published monthly BCI survey reports.

Explanation of the Index

The CKGSB Business Conditions Index (CKBCI) is a set of forward-looking, diffusion indices. The index takes 50 as its threshold, so an index value above 50 means that the variable that the index measures is expected to increase, while an index value below 50 means that the variable is expected to fall. The CKGSB BCI thus uses the same methodology as the PMI index.

The survey asks senior executives of companies whether their main products are for consumers or non-consumers, and then asks how they think product prices will change in the next six months. Based on survey responses, we have been able to report expectant changes in consumer and producer prices.

We ask companies for information pertaining to their relative competitive positions in their respective industries. Based on survey responses, we compute a competitiveness index for our sample. The higher the competitiveness index, the more competitive our sample firms are in their respective industries.

Method of Calculation

During each survey, respondents are asked to indicate whether certain aspects of their business (e.g., sales) are expected to increase, remain unchanged, or decrease over the forthcoming six months as compared to the same time period last year. The diffusion index is calculated by summing the percentage of "increase" responses and half of the "remain unchanged" responses.

Of all the indices measured for the CKGSB BCI, the overall business conditions index is an aggregate index, which has been calculated, since December 2012, by averaging its four constituent indices of sales, profit, financing environment and inventory. The aggregate BCI index before December 2012 uses a different composition of constituent indices, and is therefore not directly comparable to the current BCI index.

About Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business

Education for a New Era of Global Business

Established in Beijing in November, 2002 with generous support from the Li Ka Shing Foundation, CKGSB is a private, non-profit, independent educational institution and the only business school in China with faculty governance. The school offers innovative MBA, Finance MBA, Executive MBA and Executive Education programs. In addition to its main campus in the center of Beijing, it has campuses in Shanghai and Shenzhen and offices in Hong Kong, London and New York.

Thought Leaders on Business in China

CKGSB faculty, through their on-the-ground research and close relationships with leading domestic executives, provide global thought leadership on both the theory and the practical reality of real-life business in China. They consistently generate important insights into areas that are poorly understood outside of China, such as the globalization strategies of Chinese companies and competition and collaboration among state-owned enterprises, private businesses and multinationals.

World-Class Faculty with a Global Perspective

CKGSB is the only business school in China with the reputation and resources to attract faculty from top business schools such as Wharton, Stanford, NYU, and INSEAD. The majority of CKGSB faculty members were born and raised in China before leaving to study and teach abroad. Their bicultural backgrounds have endowed them with a valuable capacity to interpret global business in the context of both China and the West.

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