

ANZ New Zealand Business Outlook

30 March 2023



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Contact

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See page 9.

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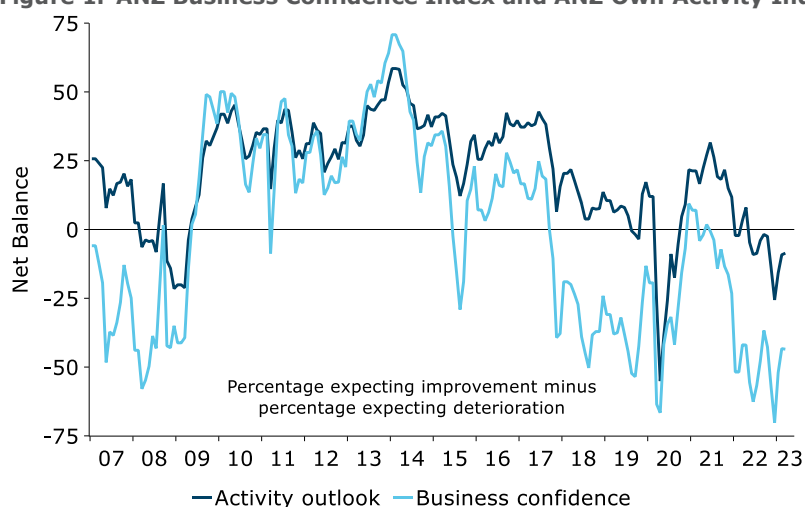
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RBNZ gaining traction

Key points

- Business confidence was unchanged in March at -43, and expected own activity was flat at -9.
- Inflation indicators continue to inch lower – going in the right direction, albeit painfully slowly.

Figure 1. ANZ Business Confidence Index and ANZ Own Activity Index



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Table 1: Results versus last month

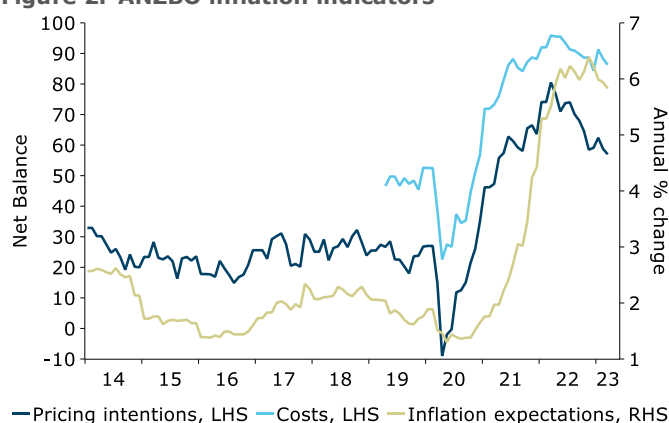
Net Balance	Mar	Feb	Comment
Business Confidence	-43.4	-43.3	Low and steady.
Own Activity Outlook	-8.5	-9.2	Little changed – still wary.
Export Intentions	-8.9	-5.2	Second-lowest read since lockdown.
Investment Intentions	-6.8	-4.9	Slightly lower; still very subdued.
Cost Expectations	86.4	88.3	Still sky-high but well off its highs now.
Capacity Utilisation	-0.9	-3.2	Almost back in the black.
Residential Construction	-63.0	-79.2	A decent bounce. Highest since October.
Commercial Construction	-27.3	-17.2	Hasn't really recovered this year.
Employment Intentions	-4.6	-3.4	Well up on January but still in the red.
Profit Expectations	-33.9	-37.7	A little brighter.
Pricing Intentions	56.8	58.8	Inching lower – lowest since April 2021.
Ease of Credit	-49.2	-49.8	Steady at low levels.
Inflation Expectations	5.82%	5.94%	Easing ever so slowly.
Activity – vs. same month one year ago	-10.5	-2.8	A sharp drop – weather impacts or something more?
Employment – vs. same month one year ago	-7.5	1.0	Weakest read since late-2020. The labour market is turning.

March saw a mix of small rises and falls across activity indicators. Most indicators remain at very subdued levels compared to historical averages.

The key themes of the March survey:

- Retail, construction and agriculture respondents were generally more upbeat, while manufacturing and services firms became more pessimistic.
- The headline inflation and pricing indicators eased a smidgen (figure 2). Pricing intentions have turned downwards the most convincingly (while still being problematically high), but inflation expectations are finally starting to look as though they may have turned lower too. The net proportion of firms experiencing higher costs remains extremely high.

Figure 2. ANZBO inflation indicators

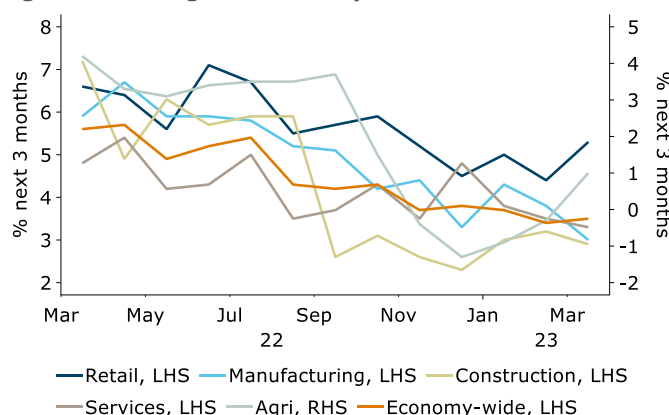


Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

A net 83% of firms in the retail sector expect to raise their prices in the next three months – that’s up 12 points on February’s read, but is still well down from a peak of 96% nine months ago. Pricing intentions also rose for construction (cyclone impacts?) and agriculture, but fell for manufacturing and services.

As regards a specific numerical estimate of where firms’ own selling prices will be in three months’ time (figure 3), retail and agriculture rose, while the rest fell. The economy-wide measure was unchanged at 3.4%.¹

Figure 3. Pricing intentions by sector

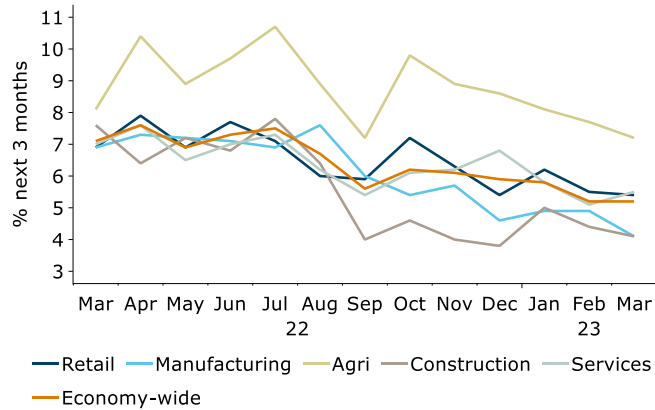


Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

¹ Note these are (anticipated) quarterly percent changes, not annual. We don’t have enough data to judge how well these series match up with official inflation statistics.

We also survey firms' expected costs in three months' time relative to today (figure 4). A general downtrend remains evident here too. The economy-wide measure was steady at 5.2%. The highest expected cost growth is in agriculture (7.1%), and the weakest in construction and manufacturing (4.1%). The data imply that on average, firms continue to expect margin compression, given costs are expected to lift more than prices.

Figure 4. Cost expectations by sector

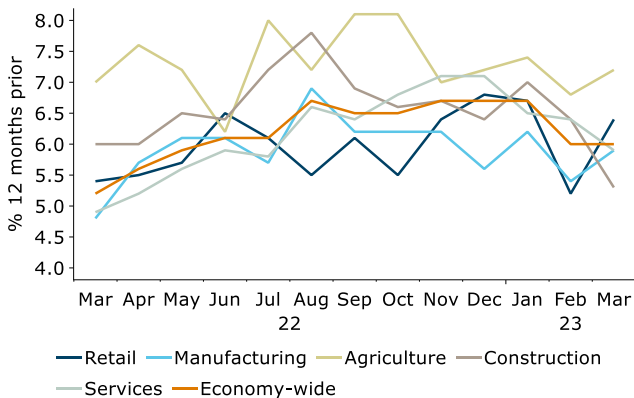


Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Wage growth is a key driver of non-tradables inflation. Reported past wage settlements were little changed at 5.9% (figure 5), with increases for retail and manufacturing offset by falls for construction and services. Expectations for wage settlements for the next 12 months inched up to 4.8% (figure 6).

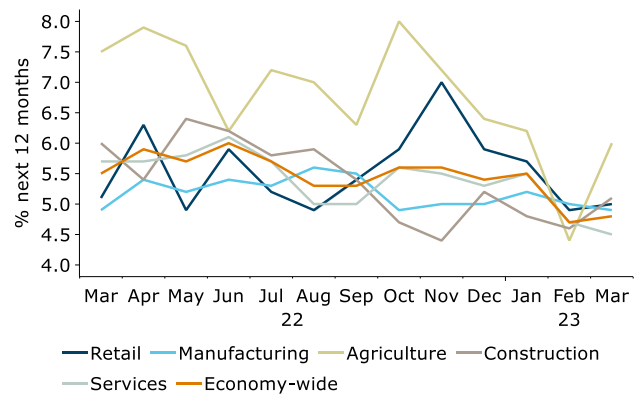
Overall, firms are anticipating to raise wages by considerably less in the next 12 months than they did in the last (figure 7, over). Note there could be some seasonality at play here that we can't identify. But expected future wage growth at 4.8% is lower than it was a year ago (5.5%).

Figure 5. Wage growth by sector: last 12 months



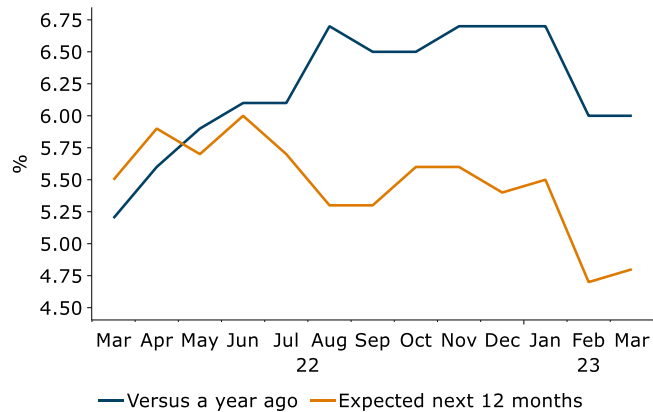
Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 6. Wage growth by sector: next 12 months



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 7. Past and expected wage settlements (economy-wide)



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Overall, a net 84% of respondents reported expecting to raise wages over the next 12 months, up from 81% last month (and a peak of 94% in June 2022).

Our heatmap of indicators by sector continues to highlight still-weak levels, but the monthly moves showed a clear sectoral theme.

Points of interest:

- Construction and agriculture sentiment improved in March, while manufacturing and services were weaker. Retail was a mixed bag, with higher activity expectations and employment intentions, but weaker across other measures. In levels terms, the whole economy’s got the blues, though the relative strength in retail employment intentions is interesting and a little surprising given the softening in retail sales.
- Pricing intentions continue to be the data most dramatically above historical average, with costs in second place. At the other end of the scale, profitability is under an unusual degree of pressure across the economy.

Table 2. Heatmap

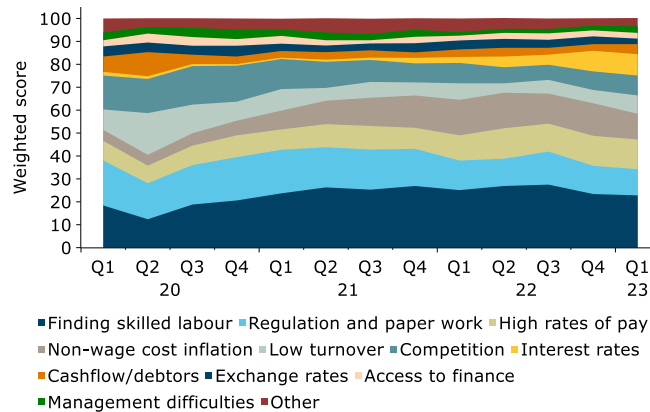
	Levels					Monthly changes				
	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv
Business Confidence	-37.7	-49.1	-93.8	-44.7	-37.3	0.3	-17.2	0.9	13.4	1.4
Own activity outlook	-5.6	-11.3	-6.2	-28.9	-3.8	14.4	-13.4	25.4	13.0	-5.2
Activity vs. same month one year ago	-15.1	-9.4	-18.8	-22.2	-5.1	0.9	-3.0	2.3	-15.7	-12.2
Exports	-10.8	4.3	-6.2	-21.7	-11.9	-2.2	-10.7	10.5	28.3	-9.5
Investment	-1.9	-1.9	-31.2	-18.4	-5.8	-8.3	0.3	10.9	1.0	-4.4
Capacity Utilisation	1.9	-13.7	0.0	-10.5	4.6	8.3	-11.5	10.5	2.8	3.9
Residential Construction	...	...	...	-61.5	...	...	...	...	17.7	...
Commercial Construction	...	...	...	-28.1	...	...	...	...	-10.9	...
Employment	7.4	-3.8	-6.2	-13.2	-5.7	9.4	-8.1	20.1	6.2	-6.4
Employment vs. same month one year ago	13.5	-11.3	-6.2	-10.8	-11.5	11.5	-15.6	9.6	-10.8	-13.6
Profits	-22.2	-37.7	-75.0	-39.5	-29.7	10.5	-1.5	9.2	21.8	-2.4
Ease of Credit	-50.0	-50.9	-62.5	-28.9	-52.5	-7.1	6.5	11.2	9.8	-4.6
Costs	92.3	69.2	100.0	89.2	87.5	6.6	-13.8	0.0	5.9	-4.5
Pricing Intentions	82.7	49.1	6.2	67.6	53.0	11.3	-19.0	18.0	14.3	-8.9

Note: Shades of orange indicate high, and shades of blue, low, becoming more intense at the extremes. The colour coding is based on standardised values that take into account the historical average and variation in each series. For example, a series may be low compared to others but if that’s not unusual, it may not be in blue. The history of the activity and employment versus a year ago is unfortunately too short for historical comparisons to be particularly meaningful but the data is included for completeness.

What's your problem?

Every three months we ask firms to rate their biggest problems. Finding skilled labour has become marginally easier, but is still the largest issue, providing plenty of incentive to try to poach staff from the firm next door. Problems related to inflation – wage and non-wage costs – continue to rate highly. Low turnover remains well down the list, though it's growing, and interest rates have understandably increased as a concern.

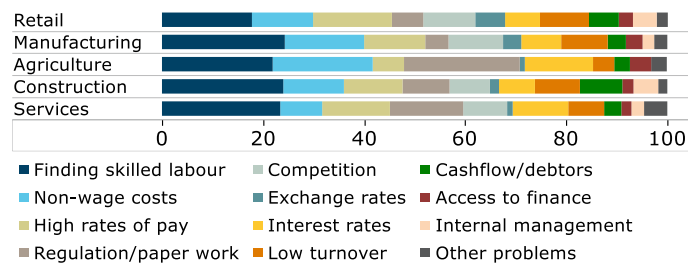
Figure 8. Firms biggest problems, weighted



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

We can also look at firms' largest problems by sector (figure 9).

Figure 9. Biggest problems by sector



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

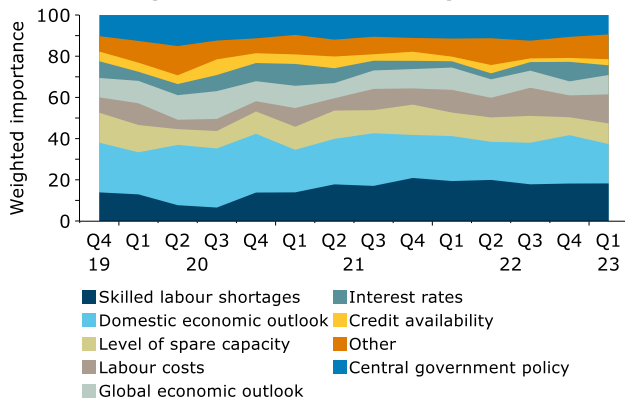
- Finding skilled staff is every sector's biggest problem, with the exception of agriculture, for which it is just pipped by regulation/paperwork.
- The agriculture sector is least concerned about wage costs relative to other concerns; retail the most.
- The services sector is the least concerned about non-wage costs relative to other concerns; agriculture the most.
- The agriculture sector is the most concerned about interest rates.
- The construction sector is most concerned about cashflow and debtors.

Investment drivers

Every three months we also ask firms about what's driving their investment intentions.

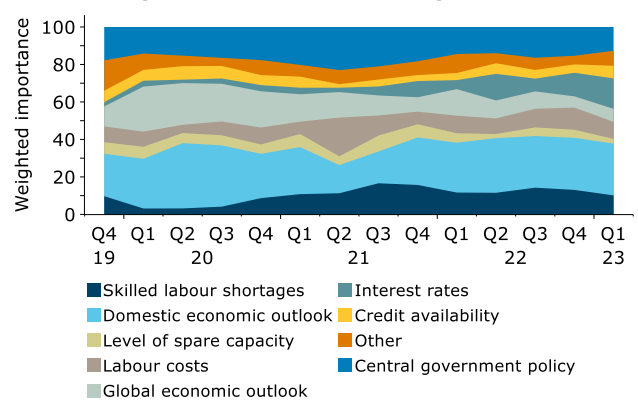
Amongst firms intending to invest more, skilled labour shortages and the domestic economic outlook remain the key drivers, but it's notable that labour costs have become more important, with capacity reducing as a factor (figure 10). Amongst firms intending to cut their investment (figure 11), the biggest factor is the domestic economic outlook, but interest rates are increasing in importance.

Figure 10. Weighted drivers for firms intending to invest more (15% of selected drivers)



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

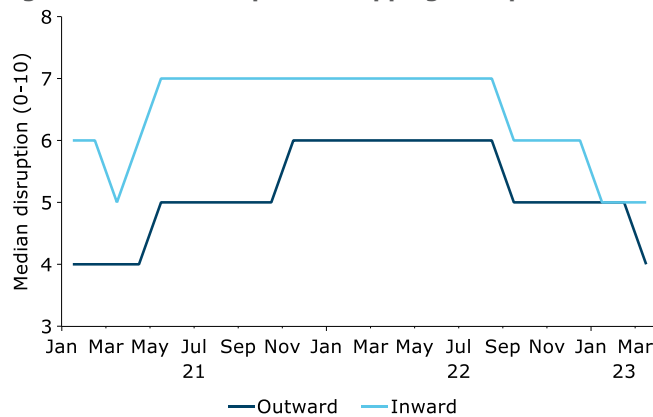
Figure 11. Weighted drivers for firms intending to invest less (36% of selected drivers)



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Finally, shipping disruptions continue to ease.

Figure 12. Median reported shipping disruption



Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Our take

Firms are wary but hanging in there. So far, though it's early days, you'd have to say things do look like a soft landing – activity indicators are subdued but off the floor, labour market tightness is starting to shift, and inflation and cost indicators are very gradually easing. That's not to say it's an easy environment – expected profitability is under pressure as firms navigate still-high cost inflation and uncertain future demand. The winter could expose a few more rocks as the wave of tourists depart. But for now, the slowdown is looking broadly in line with the Reserve Bank's intentions.

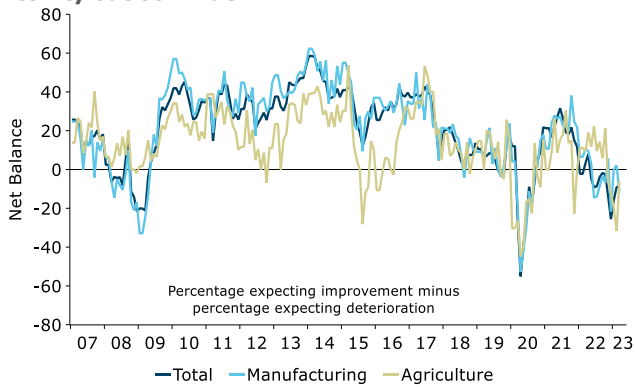
Survey Results March 2023

Net Balance	March	Previous (February)	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Services
Business Confidence	-43.4	-43.3	-37.7	-49.1	-94.1	-46.2	-36.5
Own Activity Outlook	-8.5	-9.2	-5.6	-11.3	-5.9	-28.2	-3.8
Export Intentions	-8.9	-5.2	-10.8	4.3	-6.2	-21.7	-11.8
Investment Intentions	-6.8	-4.9	-1.9	-1.9	-35.3	-15.4	-5.7
Cost Expectations	86.4	88.3	92.3	69.2	100.0	89.5	87.6
Capacity Utilisation	-0.9	-3.2	1.9	-13.7	0.0	-10.3	4.5
Residential Construction	-63.0	-79.2	...	...	...	-63.0	...
Commercial Construction	-27.3	-17.2	...	...	...	-27.3	...
Employment Intentions	-4.6	-3.4	7.4	-3.8	-11.8	-12.8	-5.7
Profit Expectations	-33.9	-37.7	-22.2	-37.7	-76.5	-38.5	-29.6
Pricing Intentions	56.8	58.8	82.7	49.1	5.9	68.4	52.6
Ease of Credit Expectations	-49.2	-49.8	-50.0	-50.9	-64.7	-28.2	-51.6
Inflation Expectations (%)	5.82	5.94	6.08	5.76	6.54	5.43	5.78
Activity – same month one year ago	-10.5	-2.8	-15.1	-9.4	-17.6	-21.6	-5.7
Employment – same month one year ago	-7.5	1.0	13.5	-11.3	-11.8	-10.5	-11.5
Price Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	3.4	3.4	5.3	3.0	0.9	2.9	3.3
Cost Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	5.2	5.2	5.4	4.1	7.1	4.1	5.5
Wages/Salaries – next 12 months (%)	4.8	4.7	5.0	4.9	5.6	5.1	4.5
Wages/Salaries – same month a year ago (%)	5.9	6.0	6.4	5.9	6.8	5.3	5.8

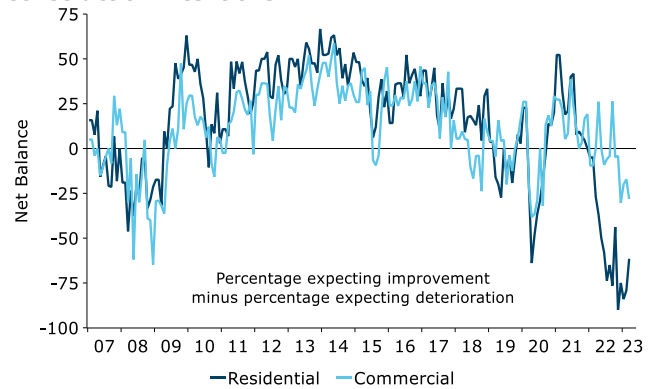


Charts

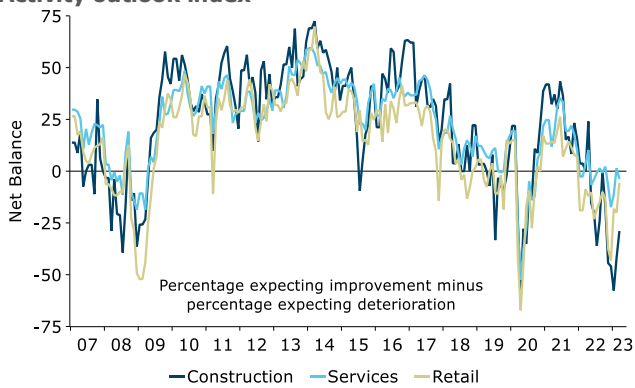
Activity outlook index



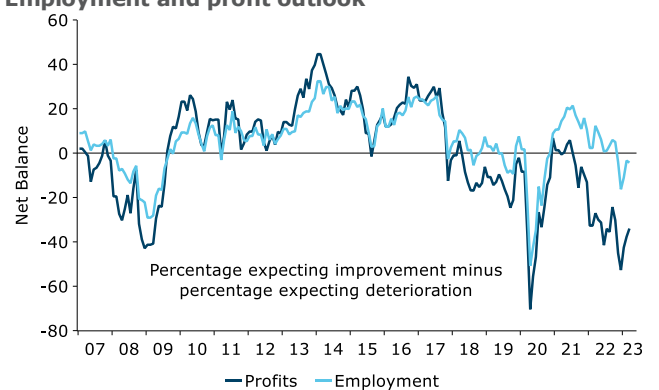
Construction intentions



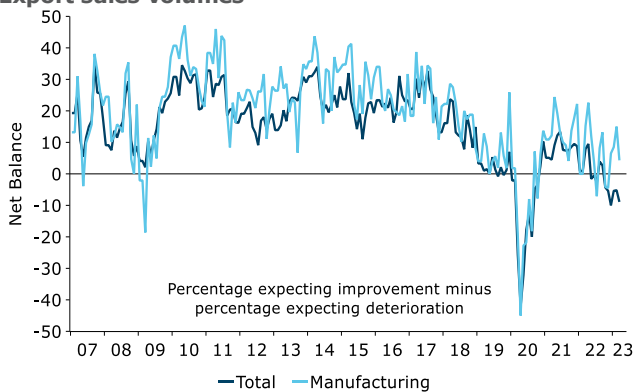
Activity outlook index



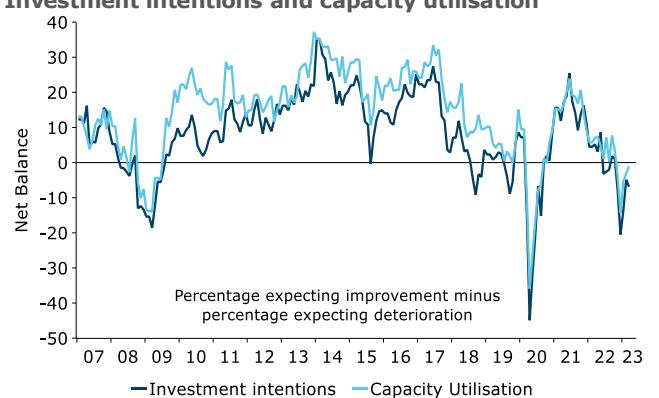
Employment and profit outlook



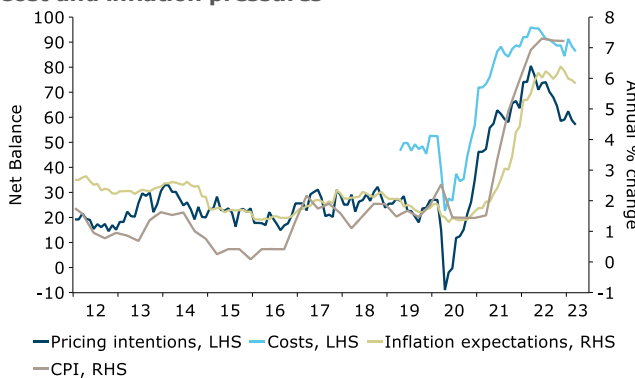
Export sales volumes



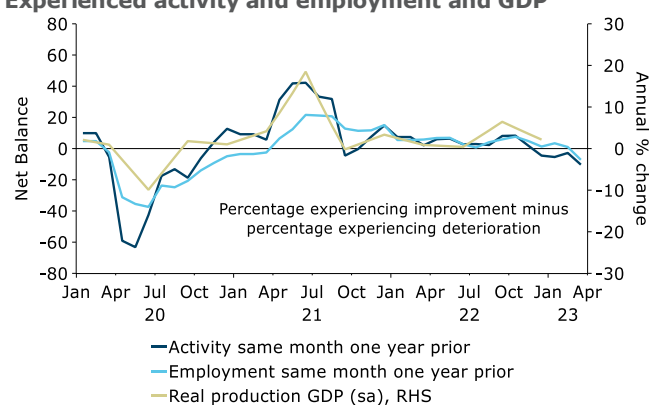
Investment intentions and capacity utilisation



Cost and inflation pressures



Experienced activity and employment and GDP



Source: ANZ, Statistics NZ, Macrobond



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