



## About this release

These statistics provide 1st provisional estimates for the breakdown of the flows of goods imported and exported between regions of the UK and partner countries. Supporting tables, visuals and data can be found at [www.uktradeinfo.com](http://www.uktradeinfo.com)

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## Summary

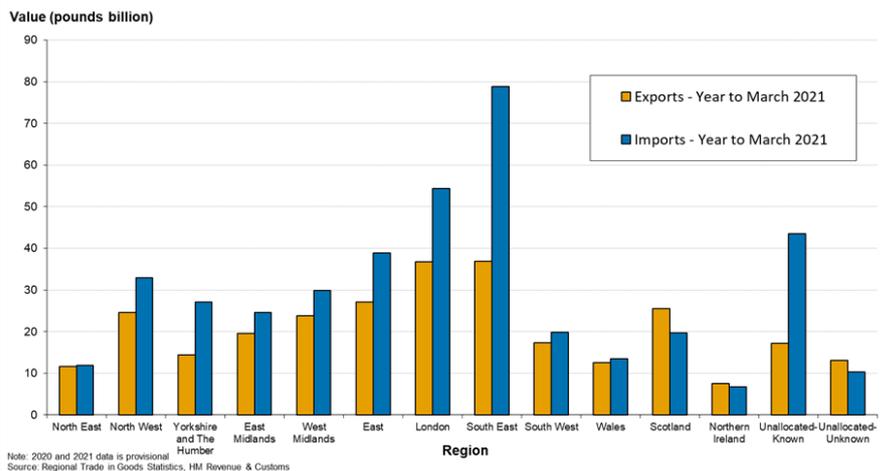
From 31 December 2020, the free movement of people and goods and services between the UK and the EU ended. This changed the way HMRC collects trade in goods statistics. More detail is available on page 2 and in the Notes section on pages 6 and 7.

In the year to March 2021, the overall value of UK trade in goods exports decreased by 15% compared with the same period the previous year. The overall value of imports decreased by 12% over that same period.

On a regional basis:

- All UK countries saw a decrease in value of exports. There was also a decrease in annual export value for all English regions.
- All UK countries saw a decrease in value of imports. There was also a decrease in annual import value for all English regions.

**Figure 1: UK Imports and Exports by Region, year to March 2021**



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 Theme: Business and Energy  
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# Changes in HMRC Regional Trade in Goods Statistics

From 31 December 2020, the free movement of people and goods and services between the UK and the EU ended. This means the way HMRC collects trade in goods statistics has changed, and the statistics published from March 2021 onwards reflect those changes.

## UK to EU exports

Up to 31 December 2020, UK to EU export statistics were collected via the Intrastat statistical survey, which required traders to declare the value and volume of commodities exported to EU Member States within the relevant month of physical goods movement. For goods moving from 1 January 2021, GB to EU export statistics are compiled direct from customs export declarations made according to the requirements of the Taxation (Cross Border Trade) Act. The customs declaration requirements are more complex than the single monthly aggregated Intrastat return, and can result in differences between dates of declaration and actual movement of the goods out of the country.

The OTS compilation methodology relies up-on the acceptance date of the customs export declaration for its inclusion within the relevant month of account, rather than the declared physical movement date used from the Intrastat survey.

Intrastat survey returns continue to be collected for goods exported from Northern Ireland to the EU, under the terms of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Both the GB to EU customs export declaration data and NI Intrastat export (dispatch) data are incorporated into the overall UK to EU export dataset.

## UK imports from EU

For UK imports from the EU, the Intrastat survey continues to operate for all UK (GB and NI) imports (arrivals) from the EU, to mitigate the effects of staging customs controls, and to comply with the Northern Ireland Protocol. However, there are changes to other data sources used for RTS, notably the VAT returns where we now only capture NI trade with the EU where previously this captured all UK trade.

As a result of the change in data sources and collection methods:

- EU and total UK business counts will no longer be available. However, business counts will continue to be available for trade with non-EU countries.
- Customs export declarations to the EU that fall under the statistical value threshold of £873 (in value) or 1,000kg (in net mass), cannot be assigned to a UK region and therefore will be reported under “Unallocated-unknown” category.

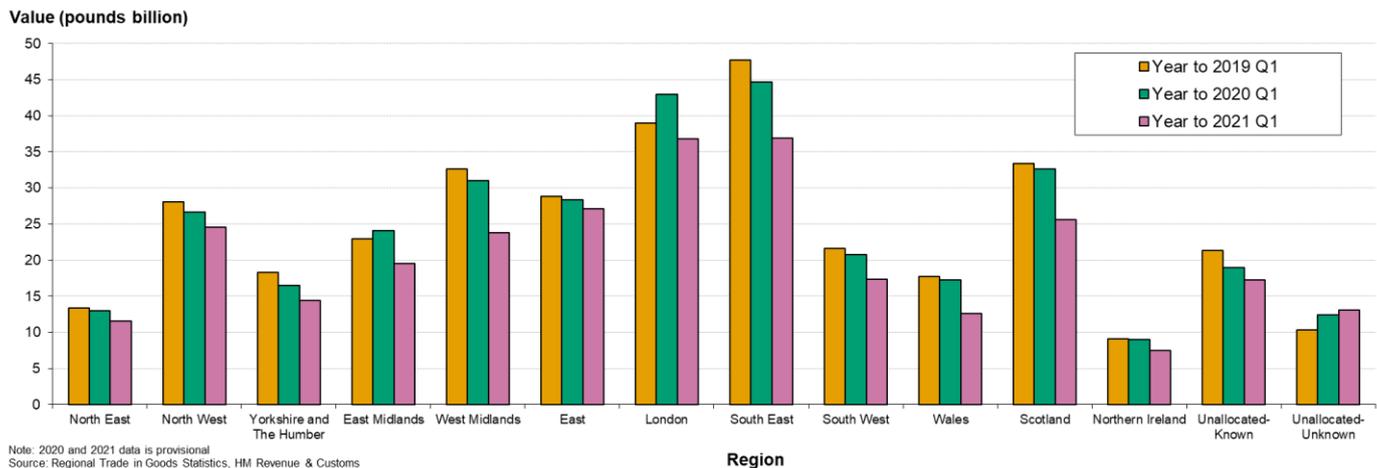
These changes result in a break in time series. More detail is available in the Notes section, and in our fuller reference document where the updated [methodology](#) is explained in detail.

# Overview Exports

The total value of UK exports decreased by £50 billion (15%) to £288 billion in the year ending March 2021 compared with the same period the previous year.

Figure 2 shows the total value of UK exports by region for the 3 annual periods ending March 2019, March 2020, and March 2021.

**Figure 2: UK Exports by Region, 2018 Q2 to 2021 Q1**



When comparing the annual period ending March 2021 with the annual period ending March 2020:

- The value of exports from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland decreased by 15%, 27%, 22%, and 17% respectively.
- All English regions experienced decreases in the value of exports.

When comparing the annual period ending March 2021 with the annual period ending March 2019, there was a decrease in UK exports from £344 billion to £288 billion (16%).

- The value of exports from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland decreased by 16%, 29%, 24%, and 17% respectively.
- All English regions experienced decreases in the value of exports.

This can be seen in more detail in Table 1 of the accompanying tables.

The increase in Unallocated-Unknown in Q1 2021 was largely due to 'low-value trade'. With GB exports to EU now falling under a Customs regime, declarations with commodity line values of less than £873 and where the weight of the goods are less than a tonne (1,000kg), go into 'low value aggregates'. This is explained in more detail in explanatory note 12<sup>b</sup>.

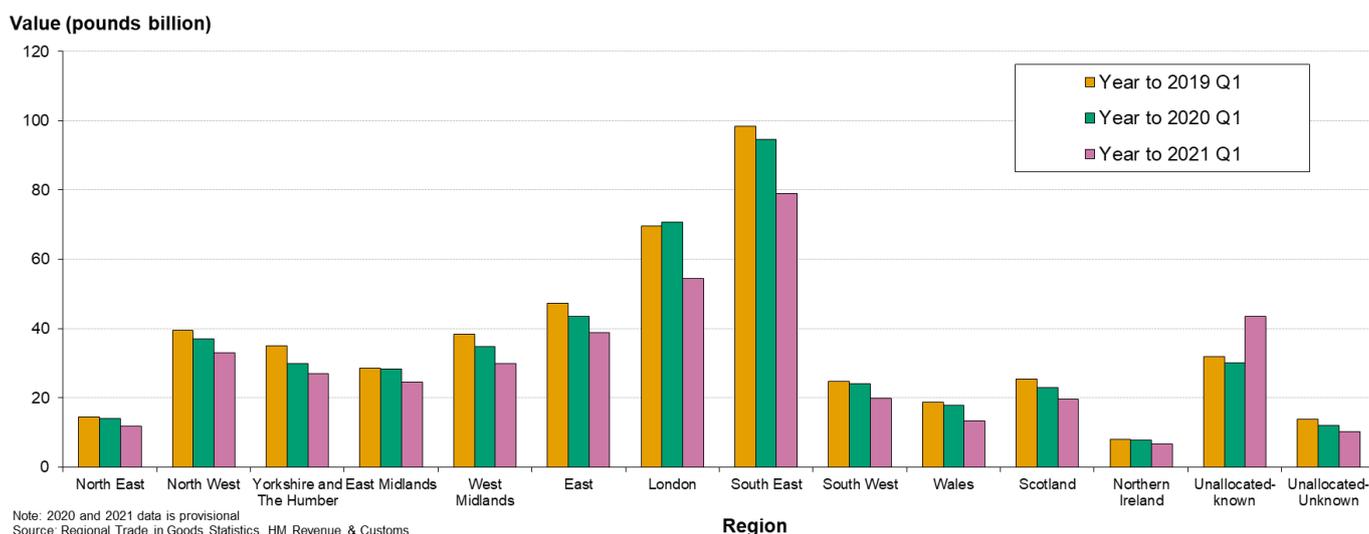
Table 3 in the accompanying tables shows the total number of exporting businesses by region. Comparing Q1 2021 with Q1 2020, the total number of businesses exporting to non-EU countries from the UK decreased by 4.0%. According to both methods used for counting a multi-branch business, the number of businesses exporting to non-EU countries decreased across all UK countries, except for Northern Ireland which saw a small increase according to the proportion method. All English regions experienced a decrease in the number of businesses exporting to non-EU countries.

# Overview Imports

The total annual value of UK imports decreased by £55 billion (12%) to £412 billion in the year ending March 2021 compared with the same period of the previous year.

Figure 3 shows the total value of UK imports by region for the 3 annual periods ending March 2019, March 2020, and March 2021.

**Figure 3: UK Imports by Region, 2018 Q2 to 2021 Q1**



When comparing the annual period ending March 2021 with the annual period ending March 2020:

- The value of imports from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland decreased by 16%, 25%, 14%, and 12% respectively.
- All English regions experienced decreases in the value of imports.

When comparing the annual period ending March 2021 with the annual period ending March 2019, there was a decrease in UK imports from £494 billion to £412 billion (16%).

- The value of imports from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland decreased by 20%, 28%, 23%, and 15% respectively.
- All English regions experienced decreases in the value of imports.

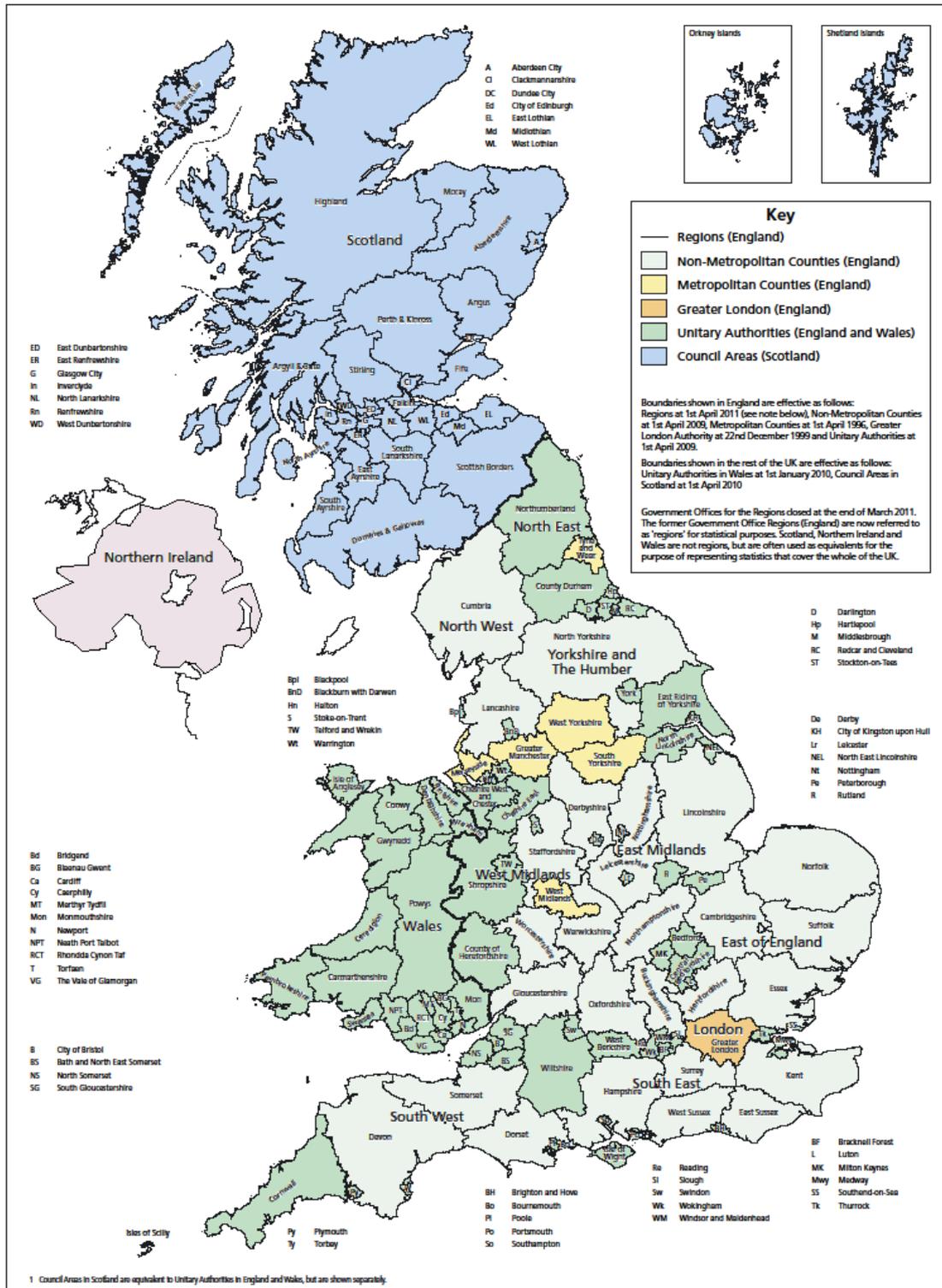
This can be seen in more detail in Table 2 of the accompanying tables.

The increase in imports for Unallocated-Known in the year to March 2021 was due to a rise in trade carried out by the UK Government. Specifically, this was largely due to an increase in imports of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from China.

Table 4 in the accompanying tables shows the total number of importing businesses by region. Comparing Q1 2021 with Q1 2020, the total number of businesses importing from non-EU countries to the UK increased by 7.6%. According to both methods used for counting a multi-branch business, the number of businesses importing from non-EU countries increased across all UK countries. All English regions also experienced increases in the number of businesses importing from non-EU countries.

# Map of UK Regions

United Kingdom: Regions, Counties and Unitary Authorities,<sup>1</sup> 2011



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2015  
 Source of boundary for Northern Ireland: UNEP (2014):  
 UNEP Environmental Data Explorer, United Nations  
 Environment Programme. <http://geodata.grid.unep.ch>.

# Explanatory Notes

## Introduction

1. HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is responsible for collecting the UK's international trade in goods data, which are published as two National Statistics series - the 'Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics (OTS)' and the 'Regional Trade in Goods Statistics (RTS)'. The RTS is published quarterly showing trade at summary product and country level, split by UK regions and devolved administrations.
2. The latest statistics on Regional Trade in Goods were released on 7 July 2021 by HMRC under arrangements set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). This release includes the first provisional estimates of trade in goods for Q1 2021. At the same time revisions for previously published regional data from 2020 Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 are being released.
3. Aggregated tables are produced to allow time series analysis; these tables are provided in a separate document released in conjunction with this release.
4. The following tables can be found in the 'Accompanying Tables' document.

Table 1 Value (£ millions) of Exports (EU / Non-EU) by Region

Table 2 Value (£ millions) of Imports (EU / Non-EU) by Region

Table 3 Count of Exporters (EU / Non-EU) by Region for both Whole Number method and Proportion method

Table 4 Count of Importers (EU / Non-EU) by Region for both Whole Number method and Proportion method

Table 5 Value (£ millions) of Trade by SITC Section and Country Group (separate tables for each region)

Please note, the count of EU exporters and EU importers are unavailable from Q1 2021 onwards. See explanatory note 12<sup>a</sup> for more details.

## Changes to data sources

### UK to EU exports

5. Up to 31 December 2020, UK to EU export statistics were collected via the Intrastat statistical survey, which required traders to declare the value and volume of commodities exported to EU Member States within the relevant month of physical goods movement.
6. For goods moving from 1 January 2021, GB to EU export statistics are compiled direct from customs export declarations made according to the requirements of the Taxation (Cross Border Trade) Act. The customs declaration requirements are more complex than the single monthly aggregated Intrastat return, and can result in differences between dates of declaration and actual movement of the goods out of the country.
7. The OTS compilation methodology relies upon the acceptance date of the customs export declaration for its inclusion within the relevant month of account, rather than the declared physical movement date used from the Intrastat survey.
8. Intrastat survey returns continue to be collected for goods exported from Northern Ireland to the EU, under the terms of the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#).
9. Both the GB to EU customs export declaration data and NI Intrastat export (dispatch) data are incorporated into the overall UK to EU export dataset.

## Explanatory Notes

10. As a result of the changes and differences outlined above, there is a break in the timeseries for published UK to EU export statistics from January 2021. Users are advised to note this change when making comparisons to previous quarters/years.

### UK imports from EU

11. For UK imports from the EU, the Intrastat survey continues to operate for all UK (GB and NI) imports (arrivals) from the EU, to mitigate the effects of staged customs controls, and to comply with the Northern Ireland Protocol. However, there are changes to other data sources used for RTS, notably the VAT returns now only capture NI trade with the EU where previously this captured all UK trade.

### Subsequent changes to the RTS

12. From the 2021 Q1 2021 publication, there are 2 consequences of the changes in data sources:

- a. EU and total UK business counts will no longer be available. However, business counts will continue to be available for trade with non-EU countries.

With moving to the custom declarations for GB exports from the EU, we no longer receive detailed business level information for low-value trade. This is already the case for UK imports and exports with non-EU countries. However, for EU exports, the number/proportion of businesses carrying out these smaller trade transactions is much larger and therefore has a much greater impact on the accuracy of the count for EU exporters. We are also unable to produce any data prior to 2021, meaning the figure in isolation has no comparator/baseline, and would not be comparable on any level with previous figures.

For EU imports, it is the change in the VAT collection that impacts here. Without this data, we are unable to identify the businesses (and therefore allocate to the regions) solely trading under the Intrastat threshold, which equates to around 90% of businesses. Therefore, not a true representation of the number of businesses undertaking EU imports.

- b. Customs export declarations to the EU that fall under the statistical value threshold of £873 (in value) or 1,000kg (in net mass), cannot be assigned to a UK region and therefore will be reported under “Unallocated-unknown” category.

Declarations with commodity line values of less than £873 and where the weight of the goods are less than a tonne (1,000kg), go into ‘low value aggregates’. We do not receive business information on these traders as part of the UK trade in goods processing. As a result, we cannot assign this trade to a UK region, therefore the value is assigned to the Unallocated-unknown ‘region’.

This is in line with the RTS methods used for trade with non-EU countries, which are also sourced from Customs declarations.

13. These changes result in a break in time series. For further information on the RTS changes taking place, please refer to the updated [RTS methodology](#).

# Explanatory Notes

## Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics

14. Data is taken primarily from Customs systems (for non-EU trade and GB exports to EU countries) and the Intrastat survey (for EU imports trade and Northern Ireland exports to EU countries). HMRC does not receive information in respect of goods that move wholly within the UK, nor in intangibles and services such as banking or tourism.
15. The Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics (OTS) were published on a Special Trade basis from May 2016 account onwards. This change has been reflected in the RTS from 2016 Q2 release onwards. All data in this release has been compiled on a Special Trade basis to allow comparisons across periods to be made. More information on general and special trade systems can be found in the [OTS and RTS methodologies](#).
16. Trade in non-monetary gold (NMG) is now included in OTS data, however this trade will continue to be excluded from RTS data. This is because the majority of NMG trade would be assigned to the London region and this would distort the RTS figures. The following reconciliation table shows the differences at total trade level between OTS and RTS by quantifying the elements of OTS that are excluded from RTS.

**Table A: RTS/OTS Reconciliation Table Quarter 1, 2021**

	EU Exports £ millions	Non-EU Exports £ millions	EU Imports £ millions	Non-EU Imports £ millions
<b>OTS total value</b>	34,371.6	48,659.3	51,208.3	60,563.7
<b>RTS total value</b>	33,845.4	38,880.4	49,111.5	52,325.6
Allocated to a region	31,073.7	34,412.3	45,237.9	44,010.5
Unallocated region	2,771.7	4,468.2	3,873.6	8,315.2
<b>Late response estimates</b>	53.0	-	1,684.1	
<b>Non-monetary gold</b>	473.2	9,778.90	412.6	8,238.0
<b>RTS total plus exclusions</b>	<b>34,371.6</b>	<b>48,659.3</b>	<b>51,208.3</b>	<b>60,563.7</b>

Note 1: There may be rounding differences between the total shown and the sum of its components.

Note 2: Late Response estimates are for UK imports from the EU, and Northern Ireland exports to the EU. This will reduce over time. They are excluded from RTS trade

Note 3: Non-Monetary Gold is excluded from RTS trade

Note 4: 2020 and 2021 data are provisional and subject to update.

Source: Regional Trade in Goods Statistics and Overseas Trade in Goods Statistics, HM Revenue & Customs

## Balance of Payments

17. The Balance of Payments (BoP) figures published by the ONS are calculated on a different basis to the OTS. Therefore, adjustments are made when producing BoP which means that the RTS and BoP are not comparable. The ONS website provides an overview of [BoP](#), and is where you can find their detailed monthly UK Trade Releases.

## Methodology

18. Following an informal public consultation on Regional Trade in Goods Statistics (RTS), releases from the 2016 Q3 release incorporates changes to the methodology and presentation that resulted from this consultation. The main changes were:
- Allocating a business' trade to a region based on their proportion of employees in that region rather than where the location of the Head Office of the business is.
  - Dividing trade that cannot be allocated to a region into 'Known' and 'Unknown'.

## Explanatory Notes

- For specific energy goods using data received by HMRC direct from interconnector and rig operators rather than the business doing the trade.
  - The number of businesses now includes all VAT Registered traders rather than just those who are required to make full declarations to HMRC for their EU trade. Please see explanatory note 7 above for changes to business counts in Q1 2021.
19. RTS data is compiled by merging trade data collected by HMRC with employment data from the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR). A business' trade is allocated to a region based on the proportion of its employees employed in that region. Where a trader is not matched with the IDBR, its trade is matched with Office for National Statistics postcode data to obtain the region in which the Head Office of the VAT registered business (importer or exporter) is based.
20. Not all trade can be assigned to one of the 9 English Regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Where appropriate, this is referred to in the tables as the 'Unallocated Trade'. Unallocated Trade is split into:
- i. 'Unallocated – Known': where we have virtually full details of the trade but it is not appropriate to allocate it to a region. This covers:
    - Trade going into or out of the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man;
    - Trade carried out by overseas based traders who have a VAT presence in the UK;
    - Trade carried out by the UK Government; and
    - Parcel post trade that is dealt with centrally (trade with non-EU countries and GB exports to EU).
  - ii. 'Unallocated – Unknown': This includes:
    - Trade where business details submitted are invalid
    - Un-registered businesses (trade with non-EU countries and GB exports to EU)
    - Private Individuals (trade with non-EU countries and GB exports to EU); and
    - Low Value Trade (trade with non-EU countries and GB exports to EU).
21. For specific energy goods only, trade is allocated to the region where the goods enter or leave the UK rather than the location / employment of the business doing the trade. This is because HMRC receives details of the trade in these goods directly from grid operators rather than the business. The goods concerned are Electrical energy, Natural Gas in a gaseous state and Crude Oil exported directly from offshore oil rigs. Crude Oil imported to the UK and exported from terminals is still allocated to the region of the business.
22. The business count is derived from trade declarations and is a count of all VAT Registered businesses importing and exporting. Please see explanatory note 7 above for changes to business counts in Q1 2021.

Where businesses have branches in multiple regions, there are two ways of deriving the count:

## Explanatory Notes

- **Whole Number Method:** A business will be counted as one in every region they have employees. This represents the actual count of businesses in any region. However, it will mean the sum of the trader count for each region will be greater than that for the UK.
- **Proportion Method:** A business will be counted as a fraction in each region they trade based on the proportion of their employees in each region. An individual business counts as one business in the UK. The sum of businesses (whole and fractions) gives the total business count for a region.

We show results from both methods in the table 3 of the accompanying data tables

23. RTS data is categorised by partner country and [Standard International Trade Classification, Rev.4](#). (SITC) at division level (2-digit). The SITC is a relatively broad classification of goods and is not as detailed as the commodity classification available in the OTS. In this release RTS data is analysed at partner country and SITC section (1-digit) level, with references to SITC divisions where appropriate.
24. More information can be found in the [RTS methodology document](#).
25. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publish the Broad Economic Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES). These are an experimental measure, based on an annual survey of local businesses' sales to markets outside Northern Ireland. Due to methodological differences, the BESES and the RTS are not directly comparable.

### Governance

26. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:
  - meet identified user needs;
  - are well explained and readily accessible;
  - are produced according to sound methods, and
  - are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

27. The Regional Trade in Goods figures undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs. These reviews are published as a Government Statistical Service Quality report.
28. The RTS has been reviewed as part of an [assessment](#) made of the OTS by the [UK Statistics Authority](#).
29. There is a limited service to provide RTS outputs directly from HMRC Trade Statistics where the data cannot be obtained from other sources. This service is subject to HMRC standard disclosure rules applied to previously un-published data.

## Explanatory Notes

30. Now that the UK has left the EU, it is important that our statistics continue to be of high quality and are internationally comparable. All releases continue to be produced in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics as well as internationally agreed statistical guidance and standards.

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The OTS and RTS data series are published in HMRC's trade data website [www.uktradeinfo.com](http://www.uktradeinfo.com). Detailed data is available within an [interactive database](#).

Next release: 16 September 2021 at 9:30am

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