

Article

UK trade development plan update: October 2026

An update on our improvements to UK trade statistics since the UK Trade Development Plan was published in 2022, as well as ongoing and future development work.

Contact:
Global Trade and Investment
team
Global.Trade.&.Investment@ons.
gov.uk
+44 1633 456221

Release date:
9 October 2026

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Overview](#)
2. [How we have improved UK trade statistics](#)
3. [Future developments](#)
4. [Related links](#)
5. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Overview

We have continued to improve the quality and transparency of UK trade statistics. Recent developments have:

- improved the information available to users on revisions and uncertainty in trade in services estimates
- strengthened understanding of trade asymmetries
- enhanced quality and methodology information
- improved the systems, processes and resourcing used to produce the statistics

Together, these changes help users understand how estimates evolve, why differences can arise between countries, and the strengths and limitations of the statistics.

We are delivering this work alongside the longer-term redevelopment of the systems used to produce trade in goods and International Trade in Services statistics. While we are developing these new systems, we are improving our existing processes and controls to help mitigate the risk of error and strengthen the resilience of production.

Further work is under way to publish additional analysis on trade in services revisions, improve supporting information and modernise production processes.

2 . How we have improved UK trade statistics

Development activity has focused on four connected areas:

- helping users understand revisions and uncertainty in trade in services estimates
- improving analysis and communication of trade asymmetries
- making quality and methodology information (QMI) clearer and easier to access
- modernising production processes and strengthening operational resilience

These developments form part of the ongoing programme of improvements following our [UK Trade Development Plan](#), published in 2022. Priorities have also been informed by engagement with users through established trade forums and cross-government groups, and by the [Office for Statistics Regulation's \(OSR\) review of UK trade statistics](#), published in May 2025.

Strengthening understanding of revisions and uncertainty

Trade in services estimates are revised as more complete survey and administrative data become available, in line with our [National Accounts Revisions Policy](#). Clear information about these changes helps users understand the uncertainty around early estimates and decide how best to use them.

Since 16 April 2026, [our UK trade bulletin](#) has included an ongoing revisions section explaining where revisions are being seen, their impact on published estimates and the reasons for them. The analysis highlights the periods, commodities and service types contributing most to revisions. It explains how revisions arise from updated survey responses, balancing adjustments, methodological improvements and other changes in source data.

Our UK trade bulletin also presents monthly and rolling three-month trade in services estimates, allowing users to consider both measures. The rolling three-month view can provide additional context and a clearer indication of underlying movements where monthly estimates are volatile or based on less complete information.

We introduced separate revisions triangles for trade in services imports and exports in March 2026. These are available within our:

- [UK trade: imports revisions dataset](#)
- [UK trade: export revisions dataset](#)

The trade in services series extend back to 2018 and show how estimates for the same period change across successive publications. This increases transparency by making the lifecycle of the estimates more visible and helps users assess their stability over time.

Additional commentary and visualisations are included where they help users interpret changes in the estimates, including focused commentary on trade with the United States and waterfall charts showing contributions to recent movements. This approach will continue to evolve in response to the changing economic context and user needs.

This work delivers [important elements of OSR Requirement 1](#) by improving information on uncertainty, providing greater context around revisions and publishing separate revisions triangles for trade in services.

Enhancing insight into trade asymmetries

Trade asymmetries occur when the UK and a partner country report different estimates for the same trade flow. They can arise because countries use different data sources, methods, classifications and recording practices, or record transactions at different times. Explaining these differences helps users make appropriate comparisons and understand the strengths and limitations of bilateral trade estimates.

On 10 April 2026, we published [A user guide to international trade statistics and trade asymmetries](#). The guide brings together information on why estimates can differ and how those differences affect the interpretation and use of trade statistics.

On 10 August 2026, [we published our Trade in Services asymmetries by partner country and service types dataset](#) and [accompanying bulletin](#) setting out the extent of observed asymmetries and the reasons identified for them.

Together, the guide and analysis make existing evidence easier to find and apply when interpreting country-level comparisons. They also complement earlier bilateral and international work, and support continuing international engagement.

This work meets OSR Requirement 2 by bringing together existing work on trade asymmetries and publishing updated evidence to help users understand and interpret differences between UK and partner-country estimates.

Improving quality and methodology information

Users need clear information about data sources, methods, strengths and limitations to judge whether statistics are suitable for a particular use.

Our [UK trade quality and methods guide](#) was revised on 16 January 2026, bringing information previously spread across separate documents into one principal source. It explains the data sources and methods used, identifies important quality considerations and improves signposting from related statistical outputs.

This helps users understand how UK trade statistics are produced, where uncertainty arises and what they should consider when interpreting the estimates, while supporting consistent maintenance as data sources, methods and production processes change.

Further information will clarify the data included at different stages of the trade in services estimation process, helping users distinguish between early and more mature estimates.

This work meets OSR Requirement 3 by updating and consolidating quality and methodology information and establishing an approach for keeping that information current.

Modernising systems and strengthening resilience

Reliable statistics depend on resilient systems, effective quality assurance and sustainable production arrangements. We are redeveloping the systems we use to produce trade in goods and International Trade in Services statistics. In parallel, improvements to current processes are helping to manage production risks while the replacement systems are designed, built and tested.

We regularly review resources and dependencies. We established a flexible resourcing team to enable experienced staff to support priority work, knowledge transfer and upskilling, while business-as-usual production continues.

We have also created a specialist trade expert role to strengthen analytical and subject-matter knowledge, and support relationships with data suppliers. These arrangements broaden access to expertise, support business continuity and reduce reliance on individual members of staff.

End-to-end process maps and quality assurance documentation have been completed for the trade in goods and trade in services systems. These provide an understanding of the full production process, including manual interventions and dependencies. They support continuity during staff changes, identify where controls can be strengthened and provide evidence for prioritising automation and planned development.

A Continuous Improvement team was established in 2024 and expanded in 2025 following additional investment through the Economic Statistics Plan. The team coordinates development activity across the Global Trade and Investment (GTI) division, the area of the ONS responsible for trade statistics. It improves automation and quality assurance and supports the modernisation of legacy production systems. A central backlog provides a structured route for production teams to raise, assess and prioritise automation and process improvements. The team works on the highest-priority improvements, taking account of risk, impact and available capacity. This approach helps reduce manual processing and strengthens the resilience and sustainability of UK trade statistics production.

We have also continued to work closely with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) following its [review of recent statistical errors affecting trade data](#). Following joint workshops between the ONS and HMRC, opportunities to strengthen quality assurance were identified.

These included:

- enhanced aggregate-level quality checks
- greater use of time series analysis
- stronger governance around Customs Procedure Code changes
- improved visibility of upstream system changes

These were recommendations that HMRC had set out in its review. The recommendations have informed improvements to controls, quality assurance processes and risk management across the production of UK trade statistics.

We continue to work with HMRC to implement further improvements and address the remaining recommendations, helping to reduce the risk of future errors and strengthen confidence in the estimates.

We manage residual risks in the existing systems through quality assurance controls, reviews of errors and near-misses, governance and escalation arrangements, and prioritised automation or process improvements. These measures support proportionate action to reduce the likelihood of errors while longer-term system redevelopment continues.

Together, this work addresses the elements of OSR Requirement 4 by:

- reviewing resources and single points of failure
- strengthening knowledge transfer and business continuity
- improving production efficiency
- managing risks within existing systems
- supporting the development of more effective and efficient processing systems

3 . Future developments

Improving information on revisions and uncertainty

We will publish a fuller analysis of revisions to early trade in services estimates, including work investigating potential bias that has already been shared with the Office for Statistics Regulation.

The findings will explain any implications for the interpretation of early, quarterly and annual estimates and identify further action where needed. We will also strengthen signposting between our [UK trade bulletin](#) and supporting quality guidance.

Maintaining quality and methodology information

We will review and update our [UK trade quality and methods guide](#) when changes to data sources, methods or production practices require it. Further work will improve links from published estimates to relevant quality and methodology information and provide clearer information about the data available at each stage of the trade in services estimation process.

Continuing production improvements

Future work will deliver prioritised automation and quality assurance improvements for trade in services systems. We will update the backlog as new risks, dependencies and opportunities emerge, with priorities incorporated into future delivery plans.

We will continue to monitor system redevelopment plans and milestones through established delivery and governance arrangements.

In the interim, we will maintain active oversight of risks within existing production systems and take appropriate action where additional controls or improvements are required. User feedback and emerging evidence will continue to inform development priorities, including whether further explanation or signposting is needed to help users interpret the statistics.

4 . Related links

[UK trade](#)

Bulletin | Released monthly

Total value of UK exports and imports of goods and services in current prices, chained volume measures and implied deflators.

[UK trade quality and methods guide](#)

Methodology | Last revised 16 January 2026

What the UK trade statistics cover, how we produce them, and their quality and comparability. Includes definitions and latest, past and upcoming changes.

[A user guide to international trade statistics and trade asymmetries](#)

Guidance | Released 10 April 2026

Explains international trade statistics and the causes and impact of trade asymmetries.

[UK trade with the United States: 2024](#)

Article | Released 25 April 2025

A closer look at the goods and services the UK trades with the United States.

[UK trade in services: service type by partner country, non-seasonally adjusted](#)

Dataset | Released 24 July 2026

Provides quarterly estimates of trade in services by service type and partner country, on a non-seasonally adjusted basis.

5 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 9 October 2026, ONS website, article, [UK trade development plan update: October 2026](#)