Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 16 December 2021

Early data and analysis for UK economy and society. Includes activity and change in business, spending, travel and jobs using rapid-response surveys, novel data sources and experimental methods.

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Next release:
23 December 2021

Notice

16 December 2021

Please note that the UK government’s Plan B restrictions came into effect on Monday 13 December 2021 and as such there will be limited effects to these new restrictions seen in this week’s data.

Table of contents

1 . Main points

- The seven-day average estimate of UK seated diners in the week to 13 December 2021 was 102% of the level in the equivalent week of 2019; this is down 3 percentage points from the previous week and is the lowest level compared with the equivalent week of 2019 since shortly after the reopening of indoor dining in England, Wales and Scotland (17 May 2021) (OpenTable).

- The system average price (SAP) of gas increased by 7% in the week to 12 December 2021, it is now 46% higher than a month ago (week to 7 November 2021) and the highest recorded average price in the series so far (National Grid). See the accompanying dataset.

- Shelf availability of items between 10 and 13 December 2021 was lowest for "paracetamol" and "frozen turkey" with 20% and 17%, respectively, of these items marked as “none” or “low”; shelf availability was highest for the “beer” category with 75% of this item recorded as “high” (Kantar Public). Section 3.

- Overall retail footfall in the UK fell slightly by 1 percentage point in the week to 11 December 2021 and was 82% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019 (Springboard). Section 4.

- Transactions at Pret A Manger stores in London airports decreased by 5 percentage points in the week to 9 December 2021 when compared with the January 2020 average, to 71%, the lowest level since the week ending 26 August 2021 (Pret A Manger). Section 5.

- Of the 96% of adults in Great Britain who reported leaving home in the past seven days, the proportion that reported wearing a face covering increased by 10 percentage points from the previous period to 94% (Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, 1 to 12 December 2021). Section 6.

- In the week to 9 December 2021, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases decreased by 6 percentage points from the previous week, to 115% of its February 2020 average (Bank of England CHAPS data). Section 7.

- The total volume of online job adverts on 10 December 2021 was at 137% of its February 2020 average level; the highest level of job adverts relative to February 2020 continues to be in the “transport, logistics and warehouse” category, at 325% (Adzuna). Section 8.

- The volume of motor vehicle traffic on Monday 13 December 2021 was at 96% of its level in the first week of February 2020 (Department for Transport). Section 9.

- In the week ending 12 December 2021, the seasonally adjusted average count of traffic camera activity for cars in London and the North East England remained broadly unchanged from the previous week (Transport for London, North East traffic cameras). See the accompanying dataset.

- There was an average of 277 daily ship visits in the week to 12 December 2021, a 2% increase from the previous week (271), while the average number of daily cargo and tanker ship visits decreased by 8% to 89 in the same period (exactEarth). Section 10.

- The seven-day average number of UK daily flights was 3,301 in the week ending 12 December 2021; this was 65% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019 (EUROCONTROL). Section 11.

- Of all not permanently stopped trading businesses, 9% reported wages were higher for existing employees over the last month compared with normal expectations for this time of year; in contrast, 8% of all businesses reported wages were higher for new employees. Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 16 December 2021.

- There were 13,757 company incorporations in the week to 10 December 2021, broadly unchanged from the previous week and 25% higher than the equivalent week of 2019 (10,988) (Companies House). See the accompanying dataset.

Results presented in this bulletin are experimental and may be subject to revision.

2 . Latest indicators at a glance

Notes:

1. Users should note that the break in the available shipping data (from 14 to 19 June 2021) is when the data collection system changed.

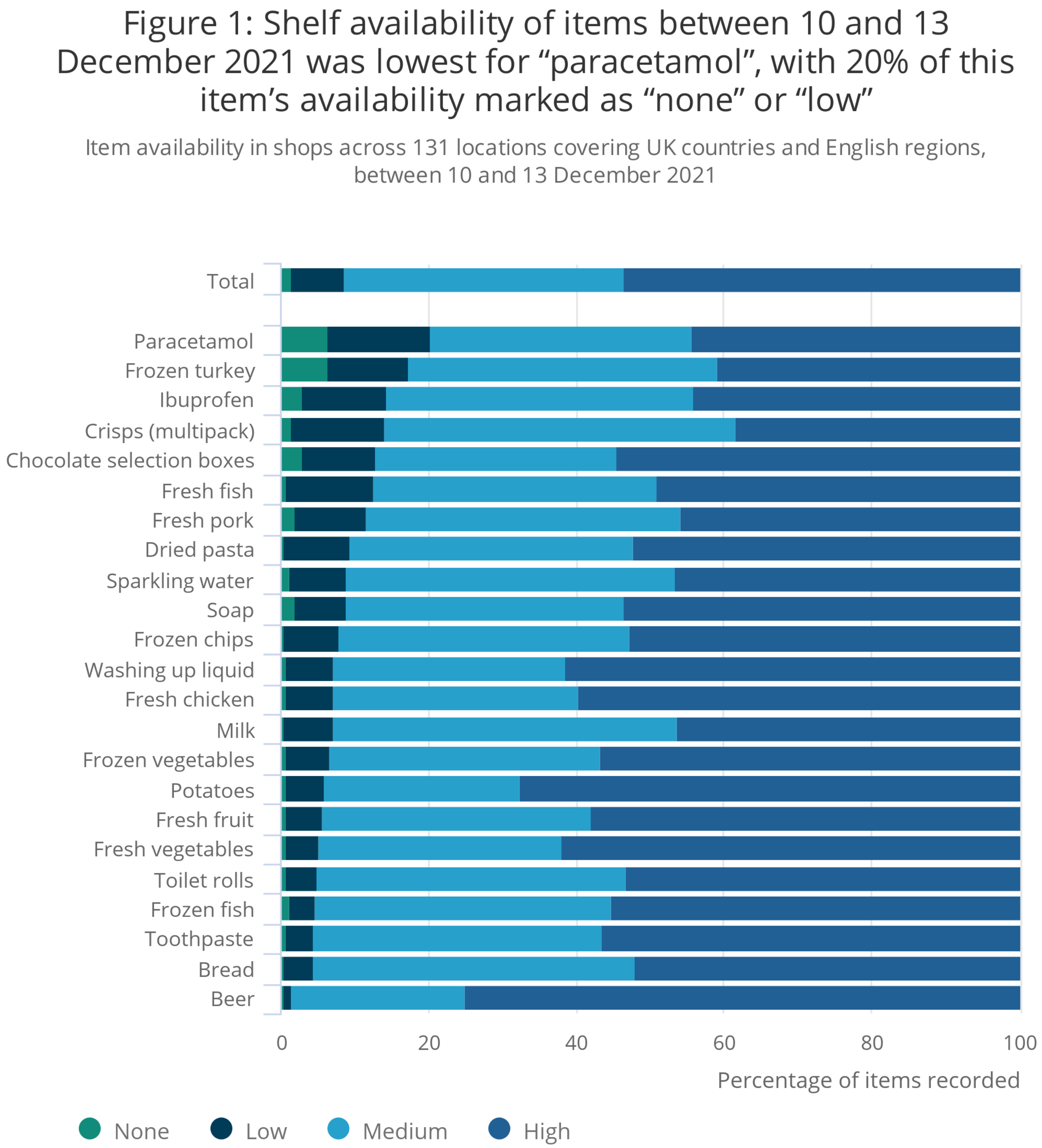
2. Job adverts data for 3 December 2021 were unavailable so have been imputed through linear interpolation. Given the imputation of last week's data, fortnightly comparisons are made in this week's bulletin rather than weekly to ensure meaningful analysis.

3 . Shelf availability of items from UK shops

Shelf availability research for shops across the UK has been undertaken by Kantar Public. Collectors gathered information on a range of items from up to three different shops across multiple locations, recording availability across four categories: "none", "low", "medium", or "high". It is important to note these categories are subjective as they are recorded by individual collectors. The data were collected between 10 and 13 December 2021. This series will be paused until the new year after which it will be published on a fortnightly basis.

Figure 1: Shelf availability of items between 10 and 13 December 2021 was lowest for “paracetamol”, with 20% of this item’s availability marked as “none” or “low”

Item availability in shops across 131 locations covering UK countries and English regions, between 10 and 13 December 2021



Source: Kantar Public

Notes:

1. Shelf availability does not imply stock availability in warehouses or storage units and is simply the level of available products in a selected sample of shops at the time of data collection.

2. In this period, 280 shops were visited and 6,077 observations were made.

3. Categories in this chart have been rounded for illustrative purposes and may not sum to category total or 100.

In the current period (10 to 13 December 2021), the overall proportion of observations for all items recorded as "high" was 53%, unchanged from the previous four-day period (3 to 6 December 2021, also 53%). Observations for all items recorded as "none" or "low" was at 9%, unchanged from the previous period.

Across the four availability categories, the largest proportion of observations recorded as "high" was "beer" at 75%, followed by “potatoes" and "fresh vegetables", at 68% and 62%, respectively. The highest proportion of items with availability recorded as either "none" or "low" was "paracetamol" and "frozen turkey" at 20% and 17% respectively, followed by “ibuprofen” and “crisps (multipack)”, both at 14%. Availability of “crisps (multipack)” has increased since this item was first introduced to the survey (12 to 15 November 2021) when 29% of this item’s availability was recorded as “none” or “low”.

Data for all categories are available in the accompanying dataset.

4 . Retail footfall

National retail footfall

National retail footfall figures are supplied by Springboard, a provider of data on customer activity. They measure the following for overall UK retail footfall, as well as by high street, retail park, and shopping centre categories:

- daily retail footfall as a percentage of its level on the same day of the equivalent week of 2019; for example, Saturday 11 December 2021 is compared with Saturday 7 December 2019

- total weekly retail footfall as a percentage of its level in the equivalent week of 2019

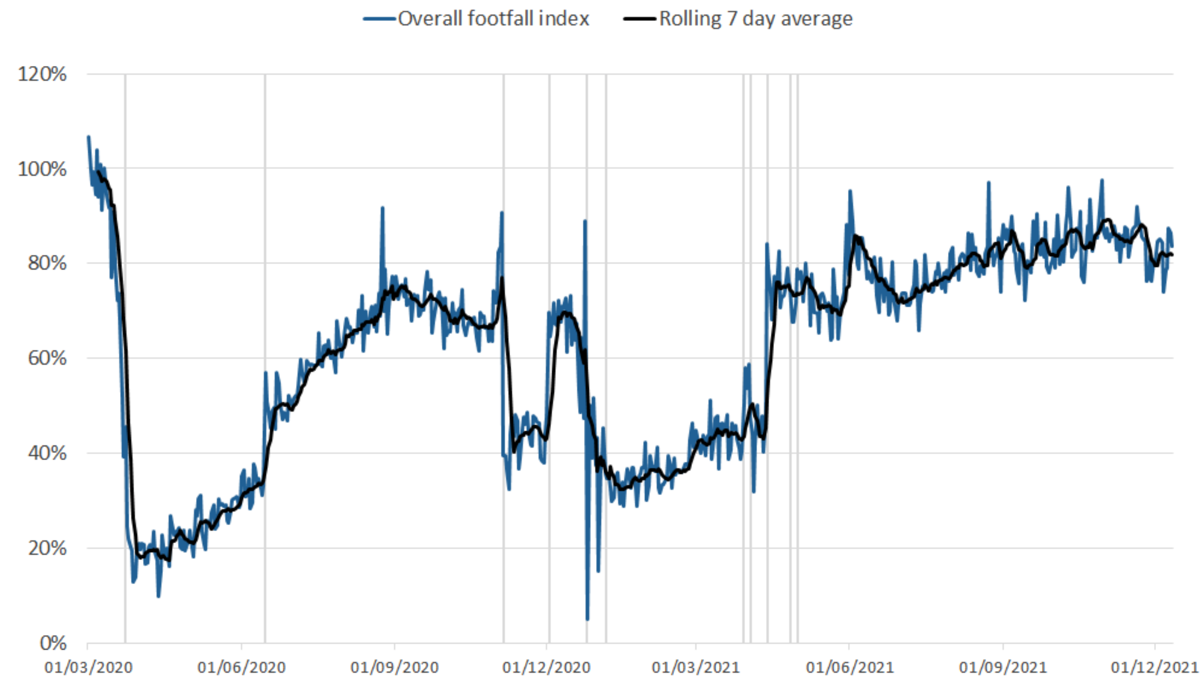
- the percentage change in weekly footfall compared with the previous week for example, Week 49 of 2021 is compared with Week 48 of 2021

Springboard's weekly data are defined over a seven-day period running from Sunday to Saturday. Week 49 of 2021 therefore refers to the period Sunday 5 December to Saturday 11 December 2021.

Users should note that all quoted figures have been rounded to the nearest integer.

Figure 2: In the week to 11 December overall retail footfall decreased slightly by 1 percentage point from the previous week, to 82% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019

Volume of overall daily retail footfall, percentage compared with the equivalent day of the equivalent week of 2019, 1 March 2020 to 11 December 2021, UK



Source: Springboard, The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Notes:

1. The vertical lines indicate notable events and coronavirus (COVID-19) restriction changes.

2. Users should note that week-on-week changes in retail footfall volumes are outlined as percentages, rather than as percentage point changes. Percentage change figures quoted in the commentary will therefore not necessarily match the percentage point changes observed in the chart.

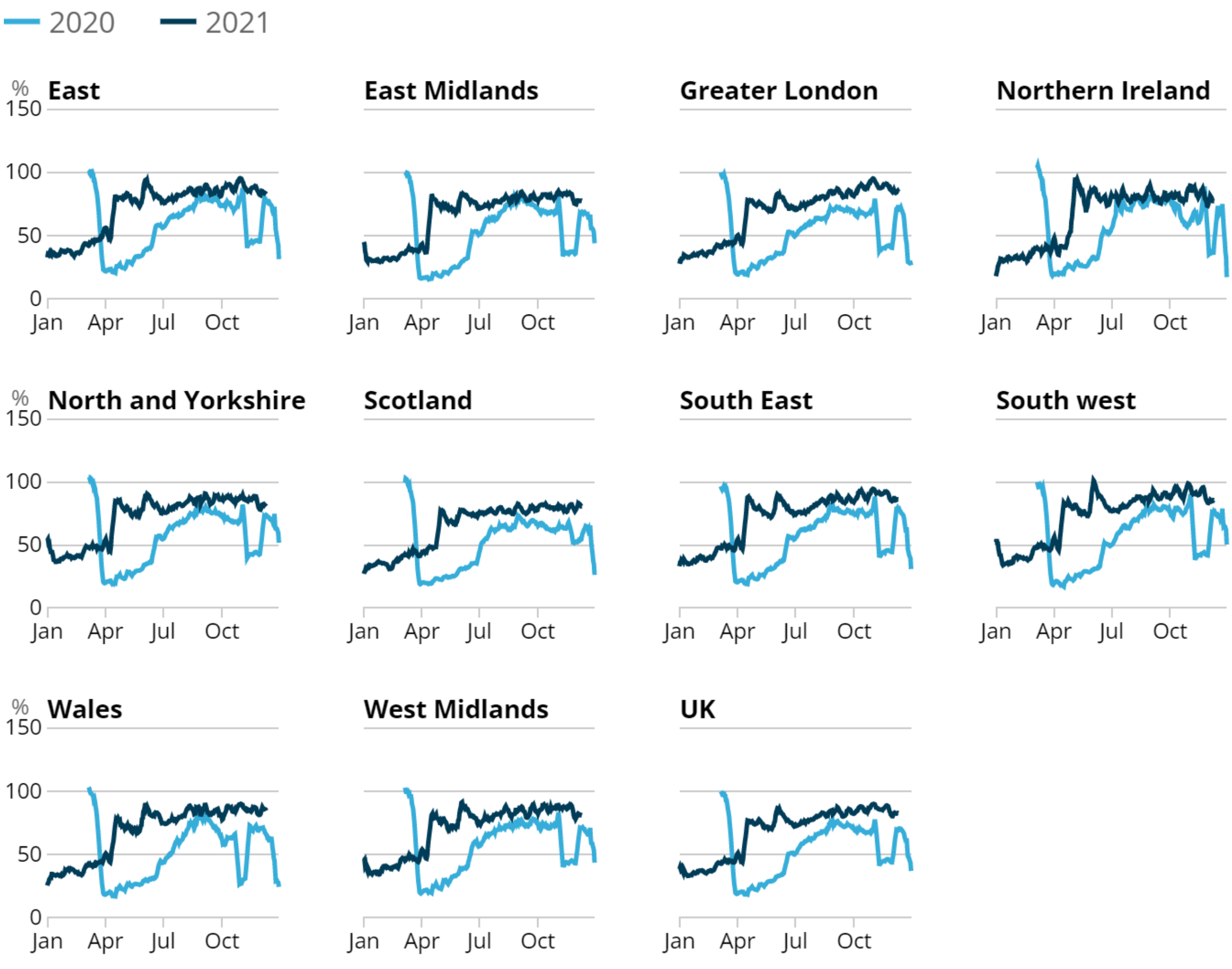
According to Springboard, in the UK in the week to 11 December 2021, the volume of overall retail footfall:

- for high streets decreased by 3% from the previous week and was 79% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019
- for retail parks was unchanged from the previous week and was 95% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019
- for shopping centres broadly unchanged from the previous week and was 77% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019

Regional retail footfall

Figure 3: In the week to 11 December 2021 the South West and South East of England had the highest retail footfall compared with the equivalent week of 2019 with both at 86%

Volume of daily retail footfall, percentage of the level recorded on the same day of the equivalent week of 2019, seven-day rolling average, UK countries and English regions, 1 March 2020 to 11 December 2021



Source: Springboard, The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

In the week to 11 December 2021, retail footfall saw week-on-week decreases in 6 of the 10 UK countries and English regions. The largest falls were in in the East of England, Greater London and the South West, all decreasing by 3% from the previous week. Retail footfall was unchanged in the East Midlands and Scotland when compared with the previous week.

Meanwhile in Northern Ireland it increased by 2%. Despite this weekly increase, retail footfall in Northern Ireland remains the weakest of all 10 UK countries and English regions, at 75% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019.

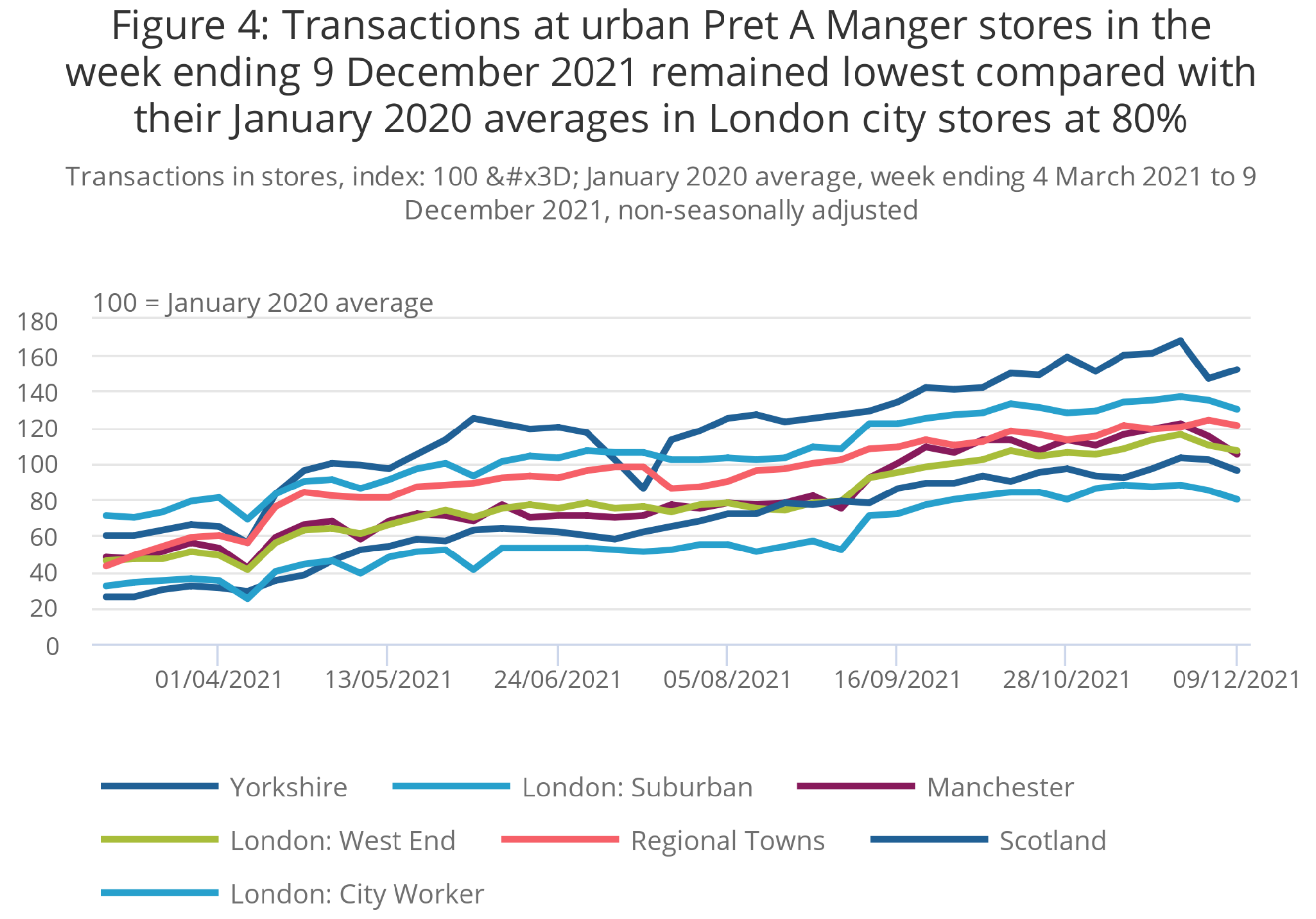
5 . Transactions at Pret A Manger

Pret A Manger is a sandwich and coffee shop franchise chain, operating around 400 stores across the UK. Its transactional data are presented as an index and show total weekly till transactions at Pret A Manger shops as a proportion of the average weekly level in the first four weeks of 2020 (between Friday 3 January and Thursday 30 January 2020). Because of this comparison across the data time series, users should expect an element of seasonality in the data.

More information on the areas featured is available in the [Measuring the data section](). These data are also made available every Tuesday via [Bloomberg]().

Figure 4: Transactions at urban Pret A Manger stores in the week ending 9 December 2021 remained lowest compared with their January 2020 averages in London city stores at 80%

Transactions in stores, index: 100 = January 2020 average, week ending 4 March 2021 to 9 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted



Source: Pret A Manger

Notes:

1. Dine-in services in England were suspended during the third national lockdown, which remained in place until Step 3 (17 May 2021) of England's roadmap out of lockdown.

2. Users should note not all store locations reopened as coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions were eased.

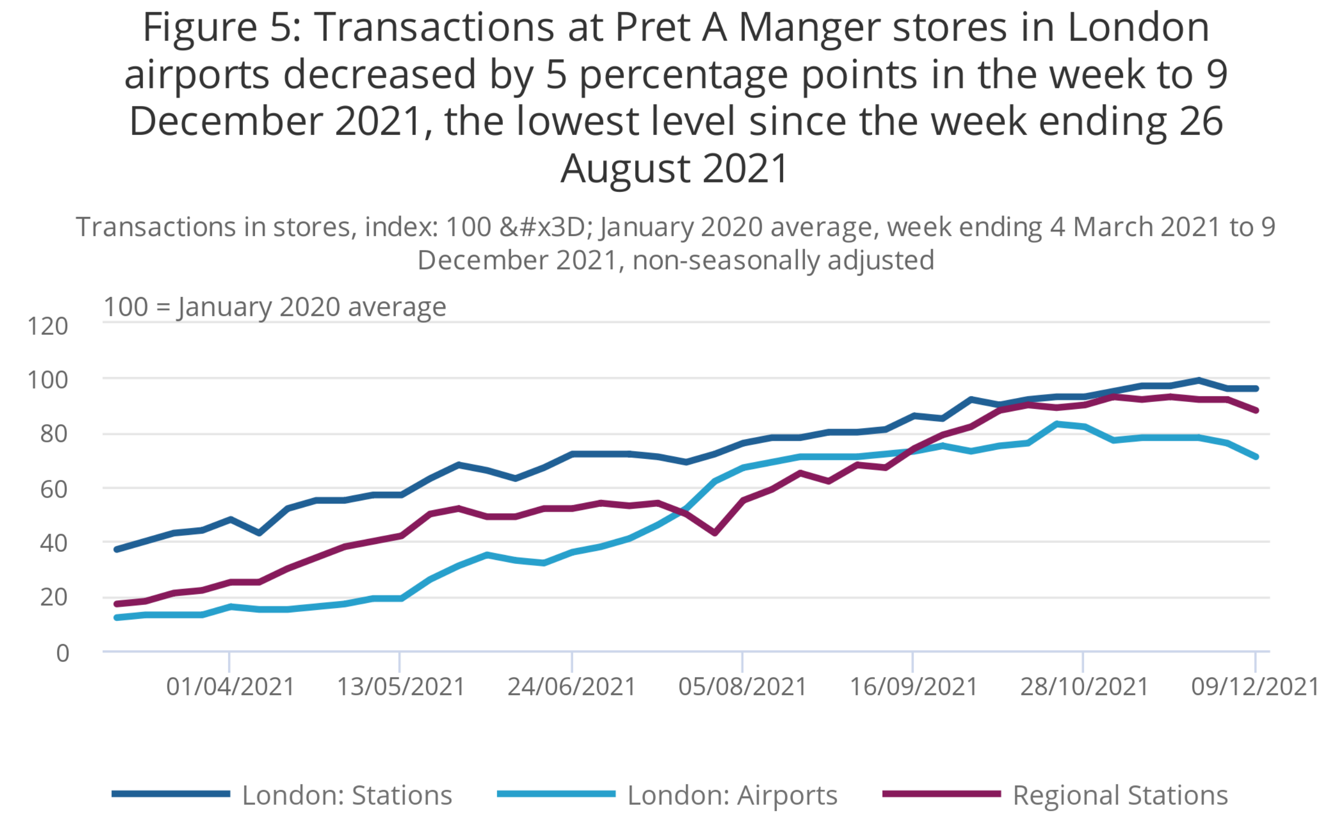
3. The index begins on 4 March 2021 as most stores were closed before this therefore the corresponding indices were mostly zero.

In the week ending 9 December 2021, transactions at urban Pret A Manger stores decreased when compared with their January 2020 averages in all regions, apart from in Yorkshire, which increased by 4 percentage points following a notable decrease in the previous week. The largest fall was in Manchester, which decreased by 10 percentage points compared with the previous week. This takes its index to its lowest level since the week ending 16 September 2021.

In the latest week, the level of transactions at Pret A Manger stores remained the highest when compared with their January 2020 averages in Yorkshire and London suburban stores, at 152% and 130%, respectively. In contrast, Scotland and London city stores were the only urban locations where transactions remain below their January 2020 average levels at 96% and 80%, respectively.

Figure 5: Transactions at Pret A Manger stores in London airports decreased by 5 percentage points in the week to 9 December 2021, the lowest level since the week ending 26 August 2021

Transactions in stores, index: 100 = January 2020 average, week ending 4 March 2021 to 9 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted



Source: Pret A Manger

Transactions in all transport-related stores continue to remain below their January 2020 average levels.

6 . Social impact of coronavirus

This section includes some provisional results from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) covering the period 1 to 12 December 2021. The survey went out to 4,496 adults in Great Britain and had a response rate of 72.9% (3,276 responses). Further information to help understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain is available in Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain.

Travelling to work

In the period 1 to 12 December 2021, the proportion of working adults in Great Britain who in the past seven days:

- travelled to work (both exclusively and in combination with working from home) was broadly similar to the previous period (18 to 28 November 2021) at 72%
- worked exclusively from home was unchanged from the previous period at 14%
- neither travelled to work nor worked from home was broadly similar to the previous period at 14%

Shopping

Of the 96% of adults in Great Britain who reported leaving home in the past seven days, the proportion that did so to shop for food and medicine increased by 3 percentage points from the previous period to 84%.

The proportion of these adults who shopped for things other than food and medicine in the past seven days increased by 3 percentage points from the previous period to 48%.

Face coverings

Of the 96% of adults in Great Britain who reported leaving home in the past seven days, the proportion that did so and reported wearing a face covering increased by 10 percentage points from the previous period to 94%. Further breakdowns, such as the situation when a face covering was worn (for example, while shopping), and by country, is available in Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain.

7 . UK spending on debit and credit cards

Daily CHAPS-based indicator

These data series are experimental faster indicators for estimating UK spending on credit and debit cards. They track the daily CHAPS payments made by credit and debit card payment processors to around 100 major UK retail corporates. These payments are the proceeds of recent credit and debit card transactions made by customers at their stores, both through physical and online platforms.More information on the indicator is provided in the accompanyingmethodology article.

Companies are allocated to one of four categories based on their primary business:

- "staples" refers to companies that sell essential goods that households need to purchase, such as food and utilities

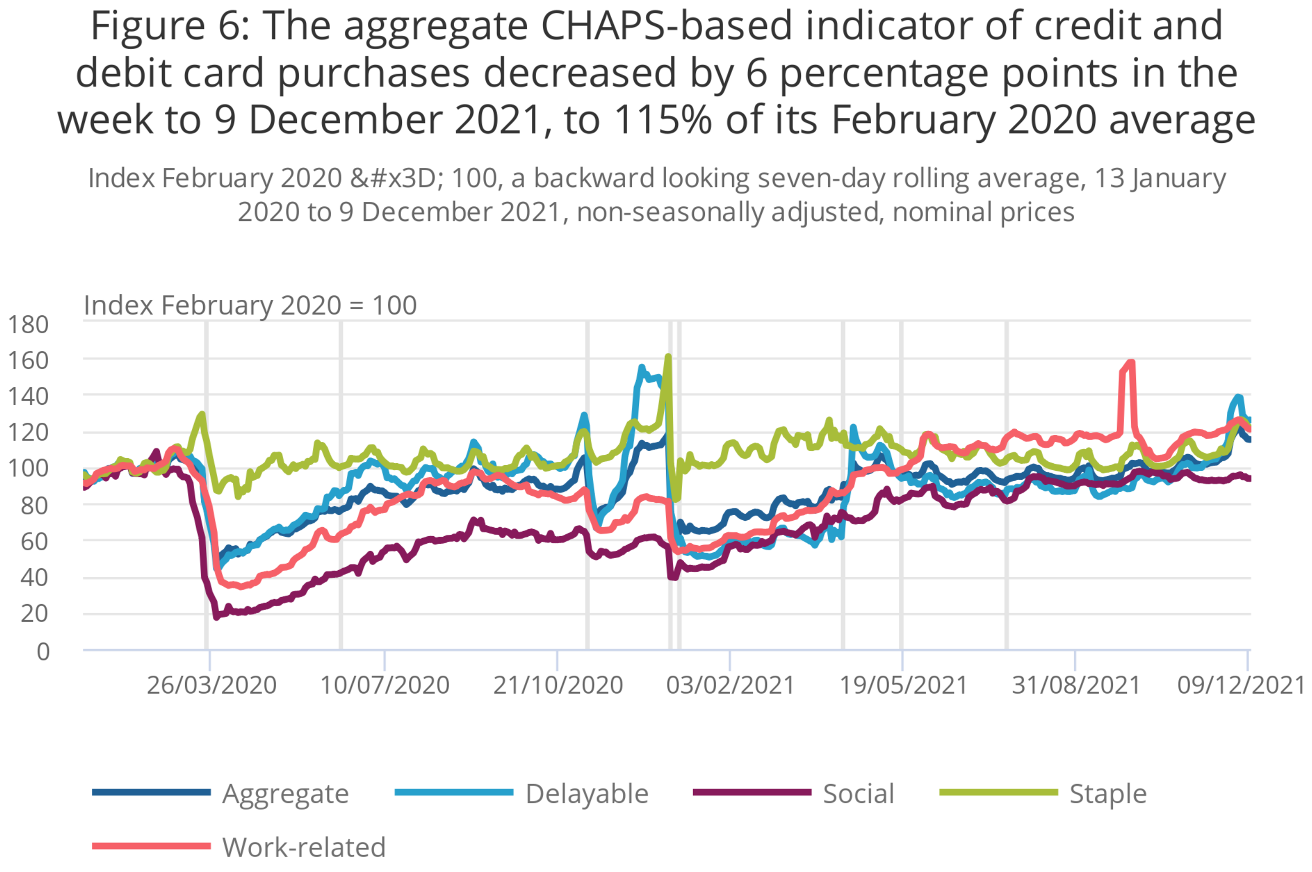
- "work-related" refers to companies providing public transport or selling petrol

- "delayable" refers to companies selling goods whose purchase could be delayed, such as clothing or furnishings

- "social" refers to spending on travel and eating out

Figure 6: The aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases decreased by 6 percentage points in the week to 9 December 2021, to 115% of its February 2020 average

Index February 2020 = 100, a backward looking seven-day rolling average, 13 January 2020 to 9 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices



Source: Office for National Statistics and Bank of England calculations

Notes:

1. Users should note the daily payment data is the sum of card transactions processed up to the previous working day, so there is a slight time lag when compared with real-life events on the chart.

2. The vertical lines indicate notable events and coronavirus (COVID-19) restriction changes.

3. Percentage point difference is derived from current week and previous week index before rounding.

Figure 6 shows changes in the value of CHAPS payments received by large UK corporates from their credit and debit card processors, "merchant acquirers".

In the week to 9 December 2021, the CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases in aggregate decreased by 6 percentage points from the previous week, to 115% of its February 2020 average level.

All spending categories, excluding “social” – which was broadly unchanged – decreased in this latest week:

- “delayable” by 13 percentage points
- “work-related” by 5 percentage points
- “staple” by 3 percentage points

These falls follow notable increases in both "delayable" and "staple" spending in the previous week, which included the Black Friday weekend.

In the latest week, “social” spending was below its February 2020 average level at 94%. “Delayable”, “staple” and “work-related” spending were above their February 2020 average levels at 126%, 122% and 121%, respectively.

8 . Online job adverts

Job adverts by category

These figures are experimental estimates of online job adverts provided by Adzuna, an online job search engine, by category and by UK country and English region. The number of job adverts over time is an indicator of the demand for labour. The Adzuna categories used do not correspond to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) categories, so these values are not directly comparable with the Office for National Statistics’ (ONS) Vacancy Survey.

Data for 3 December 2021 were unavailable in last week's release (9 December 2021) so have been imputed using linear interpolation. The latest data for 10 December 2021 are unaffected by this. Given the imputation of last week's data, fortnightly comparisons are made in this week's bulletin rather than weekly to ensure meaningful analysis.

Figure 7: The total volume of online job adverts on 10 December 2021 was 137% of its February 2020 pre-pandemic average level

Volume of online job adverts by category, index: 100 = February 2020 average, 4 January 2019 to 10 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted

Notes:

1. Further category breakdowns are included in the online job advert estimates dataset and more details on the methodology can be found in Using Adzuna data to derive an indicator of weekly vacancies.

2. Users should note that week-on-week changes in online job advert volumes are outlined as percentages, rather than as percentage point changes. Percentage change figures quoted in the commentary will therefore not necessarily match the percentage point changes observed in the charts and accompanying dataset.

Download the data

.xlsx

The total number of online job adverts decreased over the fortnight by 6% but remains 137% above its pre-coronavirus level. This nationwide decline is consistent with the seasonal hiring decline which would be expected at this time of year, however the large falls in some categories may be in part driven by the emergence of the Omicron variant affecting hiring confidence in these categories.

Of the 28 categories, 23 saw a decrease in the number of online job adverts, while three increased and two were unchanged when compared with two weeks ago. The largest fortnightly increase was in “legal”, which rose by 14%. Meanwhile, the largest fortnightly decrease was in “catering and hospitality”, which fell by 32%. Of the 28 categories, only “legal” and “energy, oil and gas” are below their pre-coronavirus February 2020 average level.

Job adverts by region

Figure 8: The volume of online job adverts decreased in all 12 UK countries and English regions when compared with two weeks ago

Volume of online job adverts by UK countries and English regions index: 100 = February 2020 average, 4 January 2019 to 10 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted

Download the data

.xlsx

The volume of online job adverts decreased for all 12 UK countries and English regions on 10 December 2021 when compared with two weeks ago. The largest fortnightly decreases were in Northern Ireland and the North East, which fell by 11% and 10%, respectively. Northern Ireland showed the largest fortnightly decrease, though it should be noted that this series displays a high volatility caused by a lower sample size. The volumes of online job adverts in all 12 UK countries and English regions were above their February 2020 levels.

9 . Road traffic in Great Britain

According to Department for Transport (DfT) non-seasonally adjusted road traffic data, the volume of all motor vehicle traffic on Monday 13 December 2021 was unchanged from the previous week at 96% of the level seen on the Monday of the first week in February 2020.

Compared with the previous week (Monday 6 December 2021), traffic volumes for cars and heavy goods vehicles were broadly unchanged at 91% and 111% of the level seen in the first week of February 2020, respectively. Light commercial vehicles decreased by 2 percentage points to 110%.

Figure 9: The volume of motor vehicle traffic on Monday 13 December 2021 was at 96% of its level in the first week of February 2020

Daily road traffic index: 100 = same traffic as the equivalent day of the week in the first week of February 2020, 1 March 2020 to 13 December 2021, non-seasonally adjusted, Great Britain

Notes:

1. The blue shaded areas refer to periods when restrictions across the UK were in effect.

Download the data

.xlsx

The daily DfT estimates are indexed to the first week of February 2020 and the comparison is with the same day of the week. The data provided are useful as an indication of traffic change rather than actual traffic volumes. More information on the methods, quality and economic analysis for these indicators can be found in the DfT methodology article.

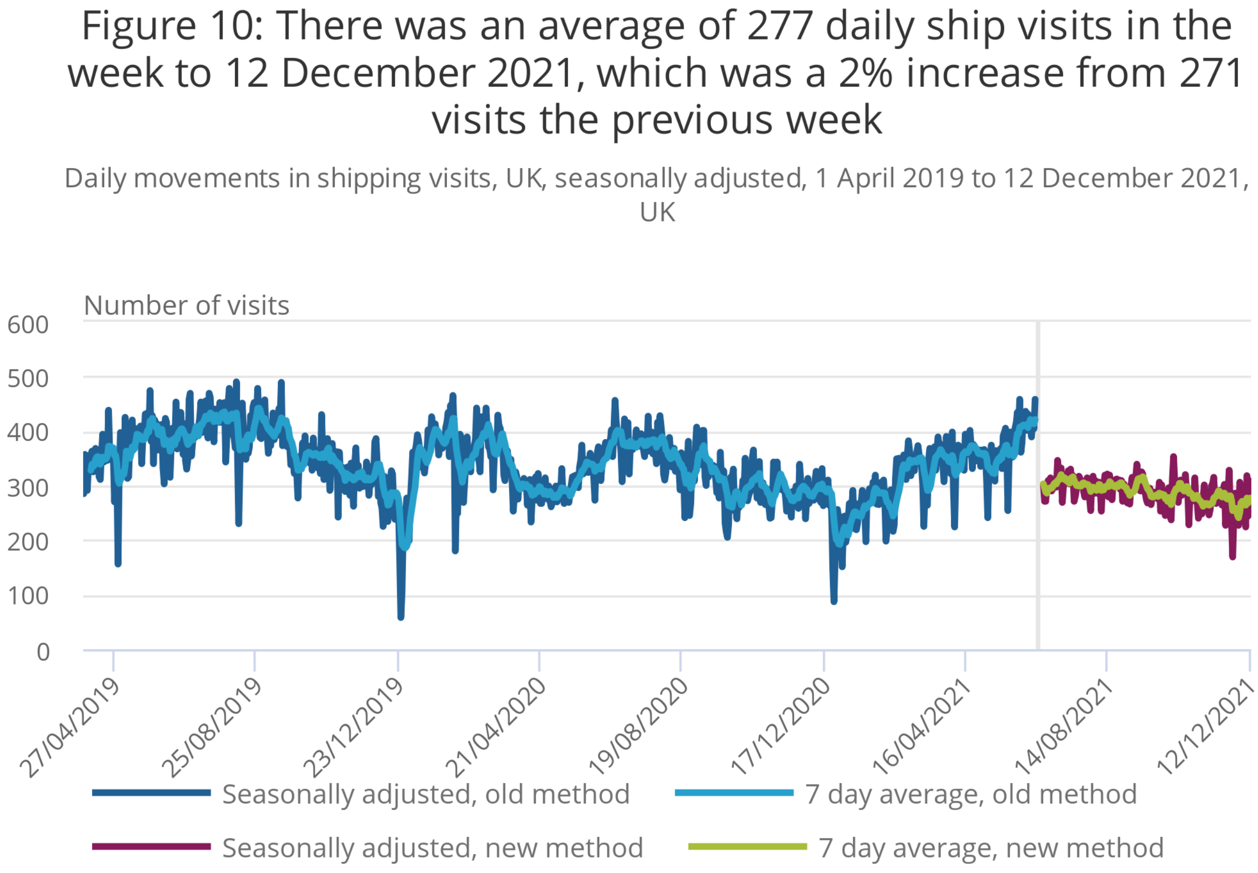
10 . Shipping

A changeover in the systems used to collect these data has introduced a level shift in the data time series from 14 June 2021 onwards. Users should not make comparisons between data before and after this date. The data produced prior to the change, for 1 April 2019 to 13 June 2021, can still be compared within that period.

A full methodological review of our current method of data collection is under way and data may be subject to revision once this is complete. We will continue to update the accompanying dataset using the current method until the review is complete.

Figure 10: There was an average of 277 daily ship visits in the week to 12 December 2021, which was a 2% increase from 271 visits the previous week

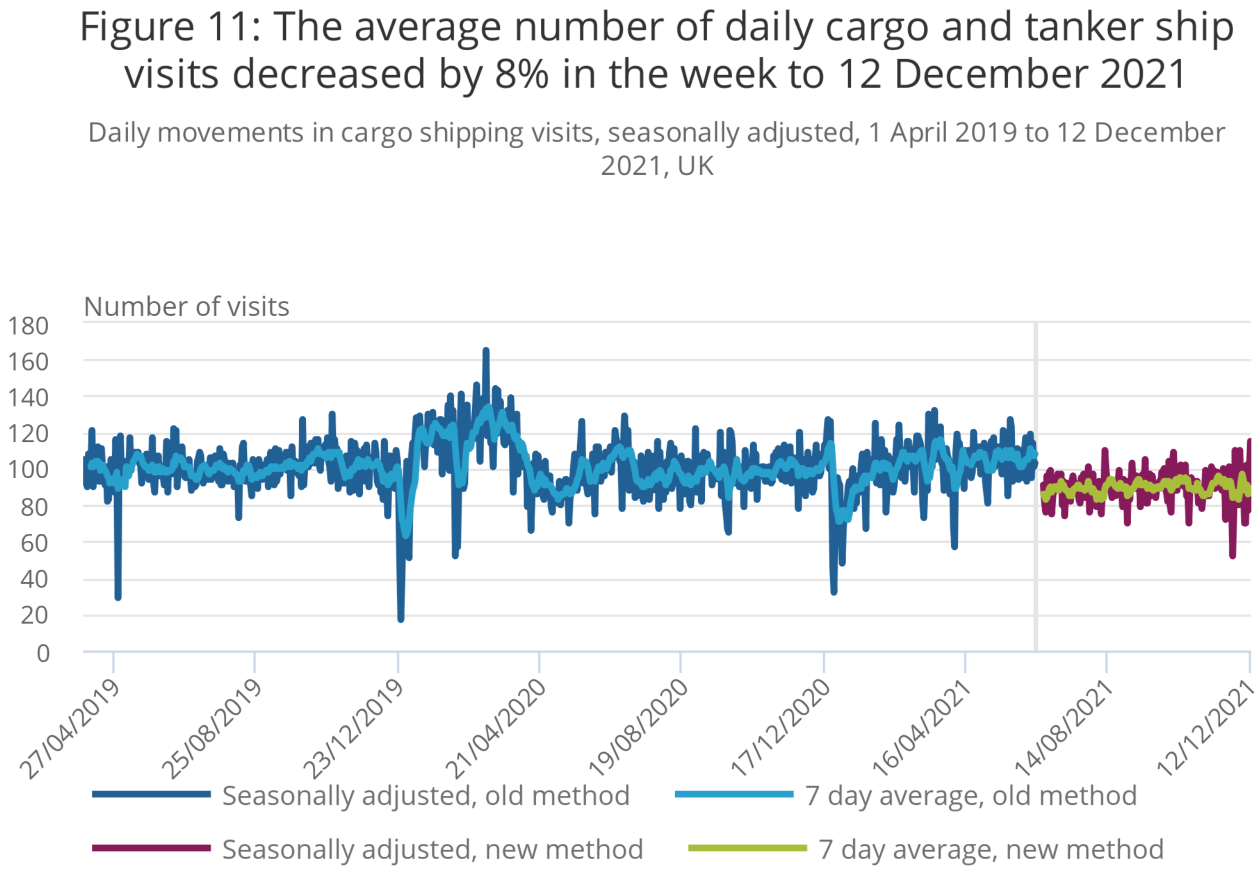
Daily movements in shipping visits, UK, seasonally adjusted, 1 April 2019 to 12 December 2021, UK



Source: exactEarth

Figure 11: The average number of daily cargo and tanker ship visits decreased by 8% in the week to 12 December 2021

Daily movements in cargo shipping visits, seasonally adjusted, 1 April 2019 to 12 December 2021, UK



Source: exactEarth

Notes:

1. The vertical line indicates the date when the data collection system changed. Users should not compare data before and after this date.

2. See the [accompanying dataset](#) for notable dates and weather events.

3. In the coming weeks, we will continue to review the seasonally adjusted estimates of shipping indicators data following its reintroduction with the discontinuity.

11 . UK flight data

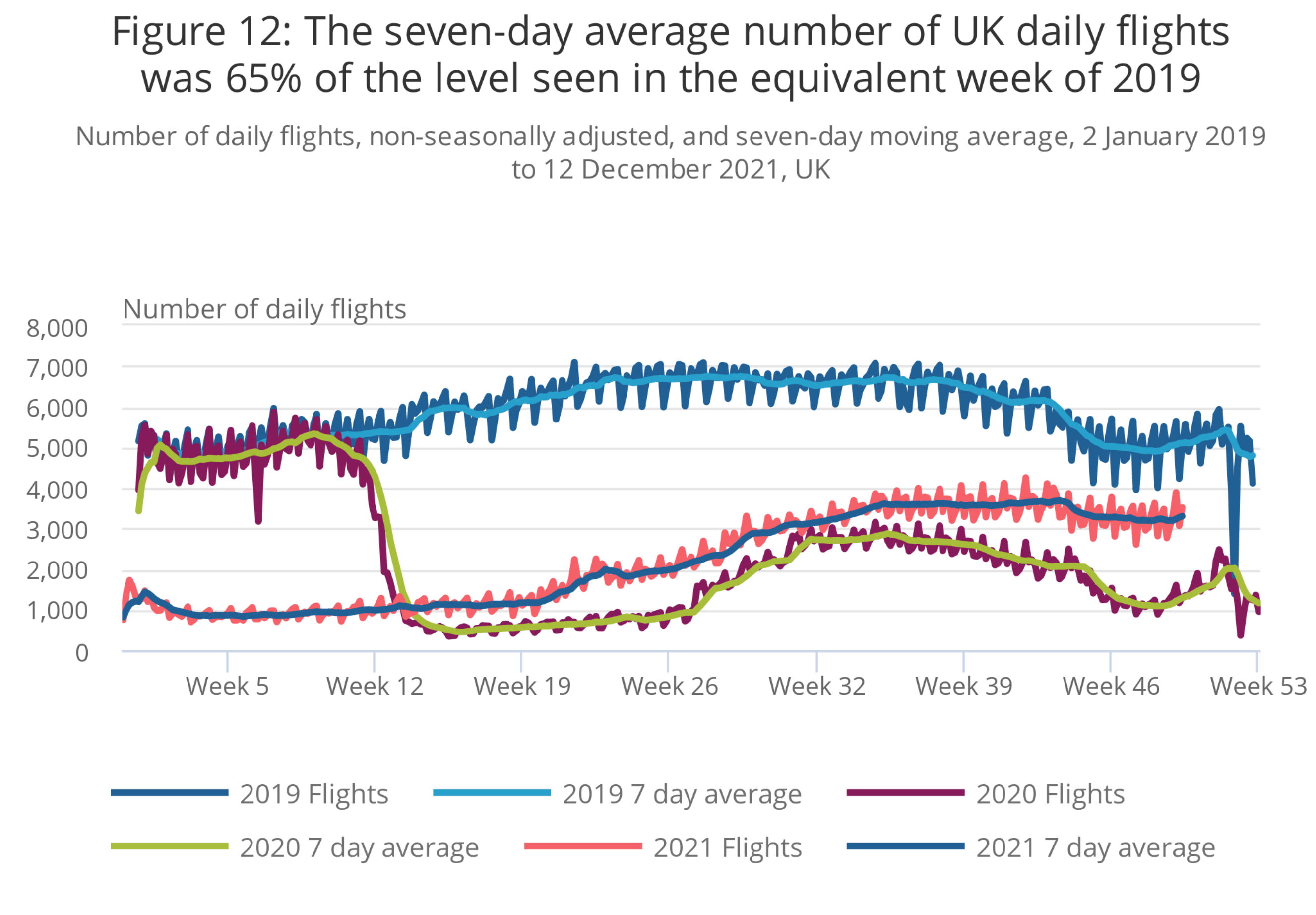
These data are daily flight figures from the [European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation](#) (EUROCONTROL). Daily flight numbers for the UK alongside other countries are available in [EUROCONTROL's dashboard](#). EUROCONTROL is a pan-European, civil-military organisation dedicated to supporting European aviation. Its Aviation Intelligence and Performance Review Unit provides independent collection and validation of air navigation services performance-related data and intelligence gathering.

The flights data include international arrivals and departures to and from the UK (including crown dependencies) and domestic UK flights, but exclude overflights (flights that pass over UK territory). They capture all flight movements that operate under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR), where the pilot uses instruments in the flight deck to control, guide and adjust the plane. This includes commercial flights carrying passengers and cargo as well as non-commercial flights such as private and military flights.

Data from EUROCONTROL do not include information on the volume of passengers or cargo carried on UK flights. Especially in the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, flights might not be operating at full capacity and therefore trends in passengers and cargo will differ from trends in flights presented here.

Figure 12: The seven-day average number of UK daily flights was 65% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019

Number of daily flights, non-seasonally adjusted, and seven-day moving average, 2 January 2019 to 12 December 2021, UK



Source: European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL)

Notes:

1. The fall in February 2020 coincides with Storm Ciara.

2. The falls in December and January coincide with Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day.

In the latest week, the seven-day average number of UK daily flights was 3,301. This is almost triple that of the level on 17 May 2021, when international travel was allowed to resume, and the UK government implemented the travel traffic light system.

You can find the full data time series available for UK flights in the accompanying dataset, which contains daily flight numbers and the rolling seven-day averages.

12 . Data

Daily vehicle flows around ports
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Daily data showing vehicle flows around major ports in England. Contains average 15-minute sensor counts by size of vehicle, and average speeds.

Vehicle flows around ports
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Monthly data showing vehicle flows around major ports in England. Contains average 15-minute sensor counts by size of vehicle, and average speeds.

Traffic camera activity
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Experimental daily traffic camera counts data for busyness indices covering the UK.

Company incorporations, voluntary dissolutions and compulsory dissolutions
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Weekly dataset showing the number of Companies House incorporations and voluntary dissolutions accepted, and companies placed into compulsory dissolution.

System Average Price (SAP) of gas
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Daily and rolling average System Average Price (SAP) of gas traded in the UK.

Shelf availability of items from UK shops
Dataset | Released 16 December 2021
Data provided by Kantar Public, recording item availability of 23 popular products across the UK and English regions.

Users should note that this section lists a selection of the data available with this publication. For the full list of available datasets please see the accompanying dataset page.

13 . Glossary

Faster indicator

A faster indicator provides insights into economic activity using close-to-real-time big data, administrative data sources, rapid response surveys or Experimental Statistics, which represent useful economic and social concepts.

Company incorporations

Incorporations are when a company is added to the Companies House register of limited companies. This can also include where an existing business applies to become a limited company, where it was not one before.

Voluntary dissolution applications

A voluntary dissolution application is when a company applies to begin dissolution proceedings. As such, they effectively choose to be removed from the Companies House register. For a company to be eligible to voluntarily dissolve, it should not have completed any trading activity for a period of three months.

Compulsory dissolutions

When a company fails to file the required financial accounts and/or confirmation statements, if no contact is received by Companies House following a series of letters to the company and its officers, a first gazette notice is published in the Gazette, a notice of the Registrar's intention to dissolve the company.

14 . Measuring the data

UK coronavirus restrictions

A full overview of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions for each of the four UK constituent countries can be found here:

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

These restrictions should be considered when interpreting the data featured throughout this bulletin.

15 . Strengths and limitations

Information on the strengths and limitations of the indicators in this bulletin is Message available in the Coronavirus and the latest indicators of the UK economy and society methodology.

16 . Related links

Coronavirus (COVID-19) latest data and analysis
Webpage | Updated as and when data become available
Latest data on the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK and its effect on the economy and society.

Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain
Bulletin | Released 3 December 2021
Latest indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional
Bulletin | Released 14 December 2021
Provisional counts of deaths registered in England and Wales, including deaths involving COVID-19, in the latest weeks for which data are available.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey, UK
Bulletin | Released 10 December 2021
Initial data from the COVID-19 Infection Survey (delivered in partnership with IQVIA, the University of Oxford and Lighthouse laboratories).