

Statistical bulletin

UK Trade: March 2015

Latest monthly statistics on trade in goods classified according to Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) as well as monthly estimates for total trade in services.

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1. Main points

- UK Trade shows the extent of import and export activity and is a main contributor to the overall economic growth of the UK
- Seasonally adjusted, the UK's deficit on trade in goods and services was estimated to have been £2.8 billion in March 2015, compared with £3.3 billion in February 2015. This reflects a deficit of £10.1 billion on goods, partially offset by an estimated surplus of £7.3 billion on services
- In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the UK's deficit on trade in goods and services was estimated to have been £7.5 billion; widening by £1.5 billion from the previous quarter
- In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the trade in goods deficit widened by £0.8 billion to £29.9 billion. The widening reflects a £2.7 billion fall in exports and a £1.9 billion fall in imports. At the commodity level, the fall in exports in quarter 1 reflects a £2.2 billion decrease in exports of fuels; specifically, oil exported to EU countries, which fell by £2.1 billion from the previous quarter. Over the same period, imports of fuels fell by £2.2 billion, reflecting a £1.8 billion fall in imports of oil from outside the EU

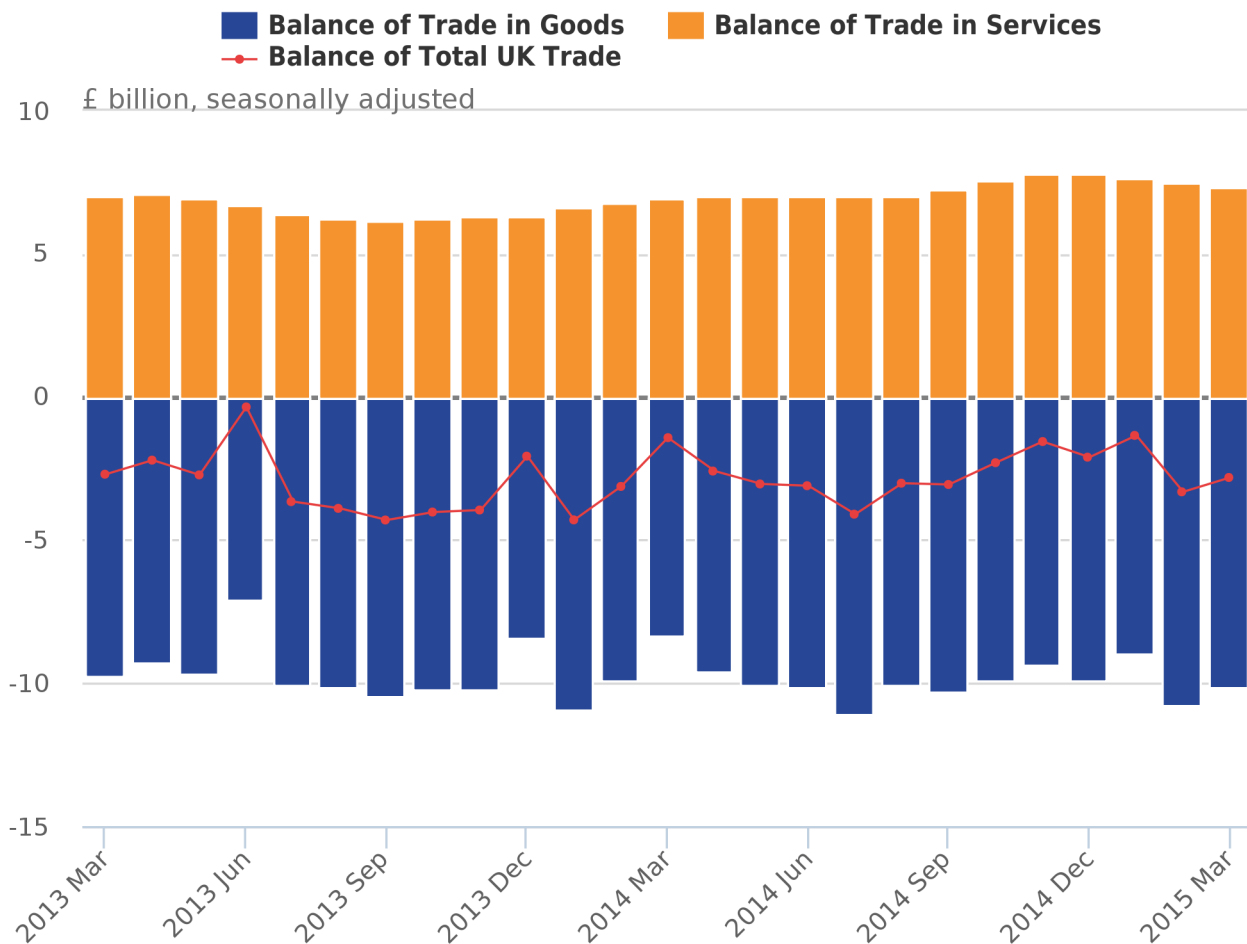
2. Main figures

Table 1: Balance of UK trade in goods and services, March 2015

	Balance of trade in goods			Balance of trade in services	Total trade balance
	EU	Non-EU	Total		
2014 Mar	-5.5	-2.9	-8.3	6.9	-1.4
2015 Jan	-7.0	-2.0	-9.0	7.6	-1.3
Feb	-7.5	-3.3	-10.8	7.5	-3.3
Mar	-7.0	-3.2	-10.1	7.3	-2.8

Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 1: Balance of UK trade, March 2013 to March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

3. Summary

The deficit of trade in goods and services for March 2015 narrowed to £2.8 billion, from £3.3 billion in the previous month. The trade position reflects exports minus imports. Between February 2015 and March 2015, exports increased by £0.3 billion to £41.9 billion and imports decreased by £0.2 billion to £44.7 billion.

The deficit on trade in goods was £10.1 billion in March 2015, narrowing by £0.7 billion from February 2015. Exports rose by £0.3 billion between February 2015 and March 2015, whilst imports decreased by £0.4 billion over the same period.

In detail, exports of goods rose by £0.3 billion to £23.7 billion in March 2015. The increase mainly reflects a £0.4 billion rise in exports of manufactured goods; in particular, material manufactures (up £0.2 billion) and chemicals (up £0.2 billion). With the exception of unspecified goods which fell by £0.1 billion, exports of all main commodities rose in March 2015.

Imports of goods fell by £0.4 billion in March 2015, mainly reflecting a £0.3 billion decrease in imports of manufactured goods; specifically machinery and transport equipment which fell £0.4 billion due mainly to trade in aircraft and ships. The overall decrease in imports was partially offset by an increase in fuels, which rose by £0.2 billion.

In March 2015, exports to countries within the EU decreased by £0.3 billion. The fall was mainly attributed to fuels (specifically oil) and manufactured goods (specifically chemicals). Imports from EU countries fell by £0.9 billion between February 2015 and March 2015. Imports of manufactured goods fell by £0.7 billion; machinery and transport equipment, in particular, fell by £0.3 billion as imports of aircraft decreased. The fall in imports contributed to the narrowing of the UK's deficit with the EU, which at £0.6 billion was the largest narrowing since March 2014.

Outside the EU, exports rose by £0.7 billion. Manufactured goods increased by £0.5 billion, as chemicals (specifically medicinal and pharmaceutical products) rose by £0.3 billion and miscellaneous and material manufactures each rose by £0.2 billion. Oil exports also rose in March 2015, up £0.2 billion from February 2015. The increase in exports was partially offset by a £0.6 billion rise in imports from countries outside of the EU, as imports of miscellaneous manufactures rose by £0.5 billion and fuel imports rose by £0.1 billion. These increases were partially offset by lesser falls elsewhere.

Trade statistics for any one month can be erratic. For that reason, it is recommended to compare the latest quarter against the preceding quarter and the same quarter of the preceding year.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the trade in goods deficit widened by £0.8 billion to £29.9 billion. The widening reflects a £2.7 billion fall in exports and a £1.9 billion fall in imports. At the commodity level, the fall in exports in quarter 1 reflects a £2.2 billion decrease in exports of fuels; specifically oil exported to EU countries, which fell by £2.1 billion from the previous quarter. Over the same period, imports of fuels fell by £2.2 billion as imports of oil from outside the EU fell by £1.8 billion. By area, the UK's deficit with the EU widened by £1.6 billion to a record £21.5 billion, while the UK's deficit with non-EU countries narrowed by £0.8 billion. These movements are representative of the UK's trade in oil as exports to the EU and imports from outside the EU both decreased over the quarter.

Geographically, in quarter 1 January to March 2015, the UK's deficit with the Netherlands widened by £1.1 billion, as exports fell by £1.2 billion; anecdotal evidence suggests the fall is mainly attributed to trade in oil. Elsewhere in the EU, the UK's deficits with France and Belgium and Luxembourg (combined) widened as exports outperformed imports. Outside the EU, exports to the USA reached a record high £11.5 billion. Imports from the USA also increased, although less significantly, resulting in the UK's quarterly surplus with the US rising by £1.9 billion. The UK's deficit with Canada also improved over the quarter (narrowing by £1.6 billion) as exports increased and imports decreased.

This bulletin also reports on trade in services. However, the information on trade in services is mainly obtained from quarterly surveys, in some cases underpinned by larger annual surveys. That means that the data for the latest months are inevitably uncertain.

The surplus on trade in services was estimated to be £7.3 billion in March 2015; falling by £0.2 billion from the previous month. The fall in surplus reflects a slight decrease in exports and a £0.2 billion increase in imports.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the estimated surplus on trade in services was £22.4 billion. This represents a reduction of £0.8 billion in the surplus from the record high of £23.2 billion in the previous quarter. Exports of services decreased by £0.3 billion to £54.5 billion in quarter 1 January to March 2015 and imports increased by £0.4 billion to £32.1 billion.

4. Longer-term perspective

The value of trade in goods grew steadily from the beginning of 2007 to mid-2008. The onset of the global economic downturn in mid-2008 affected the economic performance of the UK's major trading partners and the value of both UK exports and imports fell sharply until quarter 2 April to June 2009. Growth in the value of trade in goods resumed from mid-2009 with improving global economic conditions. However, the value of both UK exports and imports has remained largely flat since mid-2011 with the continuing difficulties in many economies.

5. Value of UK trade in goods

In March 2015, the UK's deficit on trade in goods was £10.1 billion, narrowing by £0.7 billion from February 2015.

Total exports increased by £0.3 billion (1.4%) to £23.7 billion and total imports decreased by £0.4 billion (1.0%) to £33.9 billion.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Change in UK main commodity value, March 2015 compared with February 2015

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on "trade in oil")	+52	+266
Cars	+9	+251
Consumer goods other than cars	+173	+436
Intermediate goods	-127	-317
Capital goods	-122	-117
Chemicals	+150	-66
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	+178	-161

Source: Office for National Statistics

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the deficit on trade in goods was £29.9 billion, widening by £0.8 billion from quarter 4 October to December 2014.

Total exports decreased by £2.7 billion (3.6%) to £71.6 billion and total imports decreased by £1.9 billion (1.9%) to £101.5 billion.

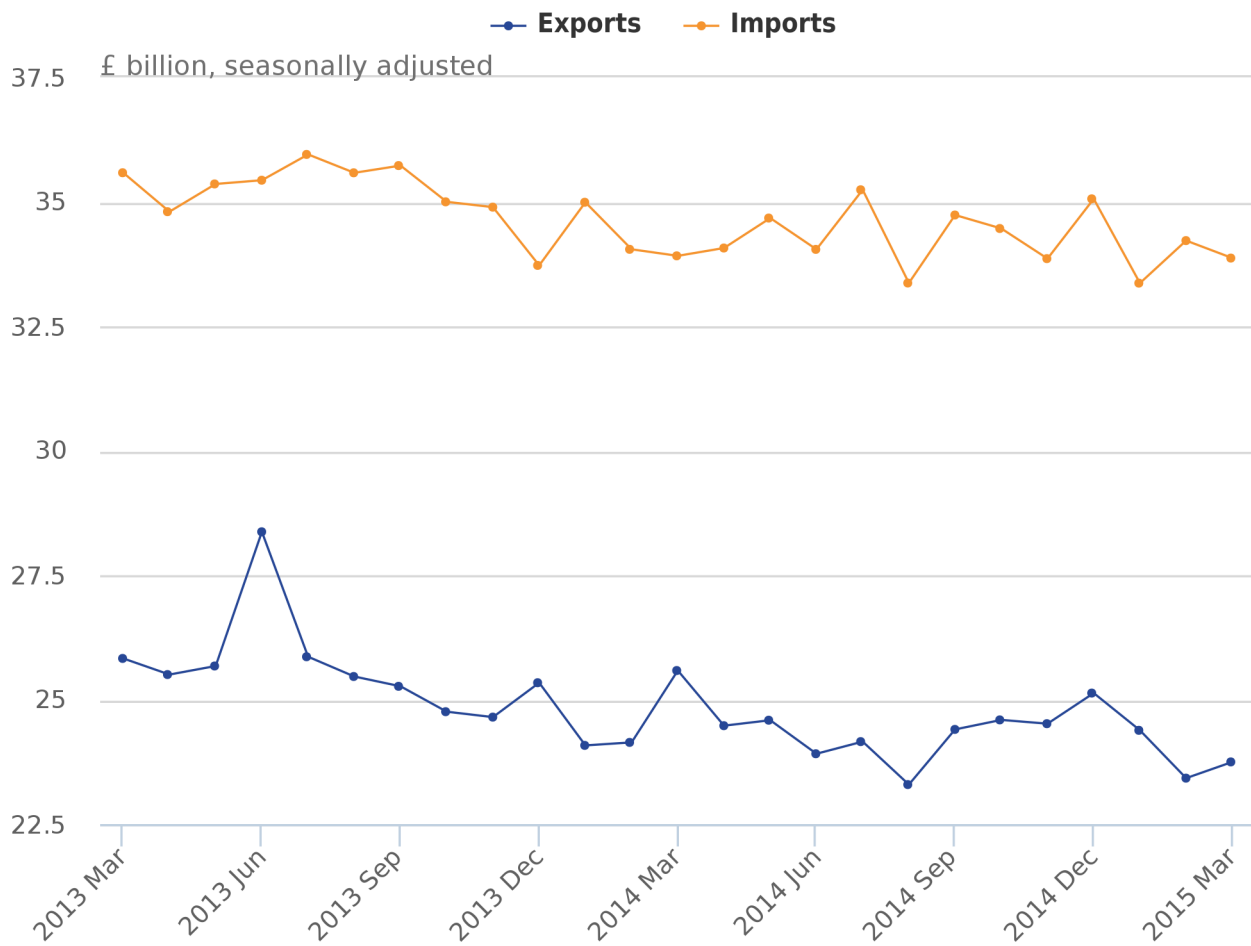
At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Change in UK main commodity value, quarter 1 (January to March) 2015 compared with quarter 4 (October to December) 2014

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on "trade in oil")	-2,123	-2,239
Cars	+51	+588
Consumer goods other than cars	+319	+840
Intermediate goods	-102	+142
Capital goods	-263	-302
Chemicals	+833	-446
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	-689	+50

Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 2: Value of UK trade in goods, March 2013 to March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 3: Value of UK trade in goods excluding oil, March 2013 to March 2015



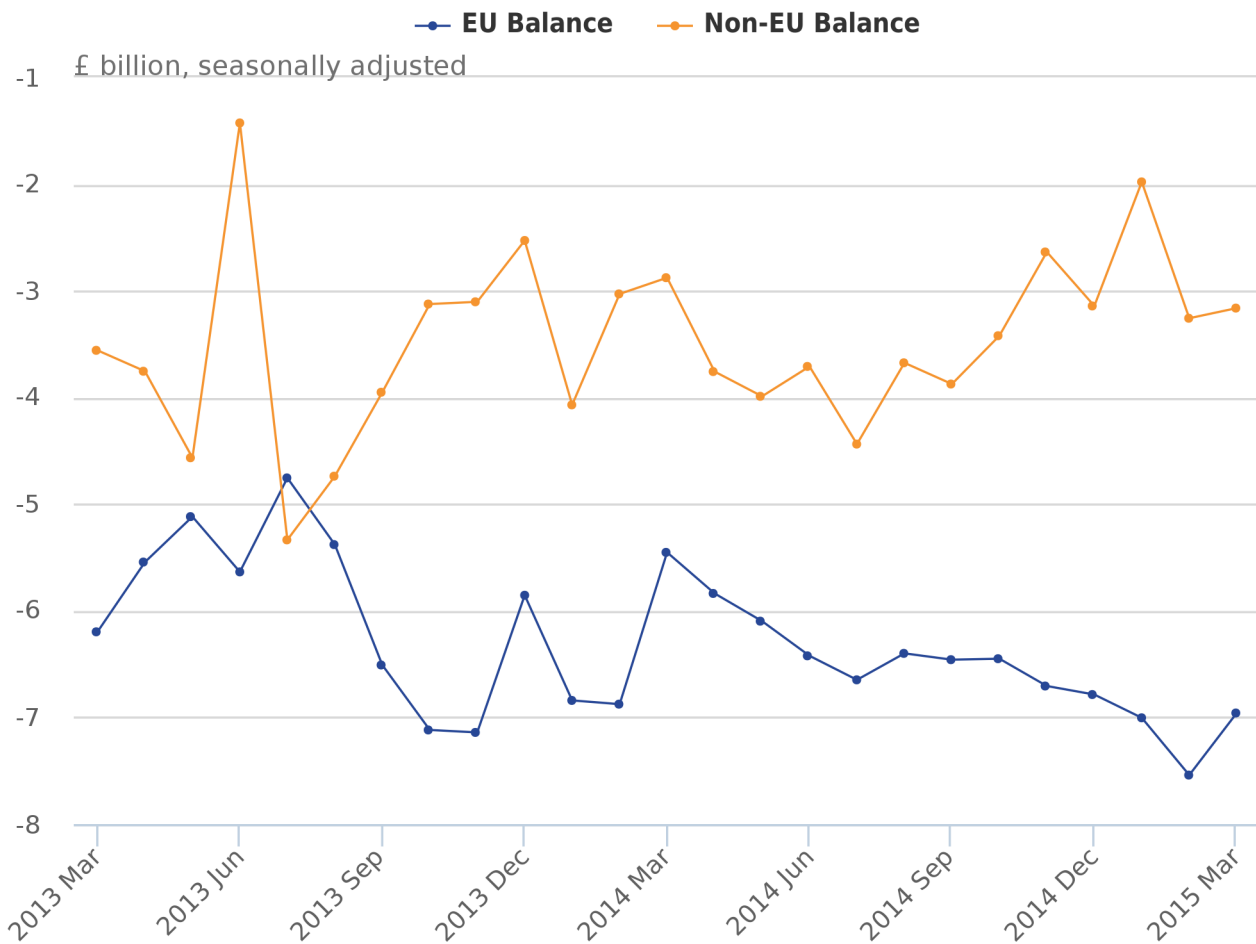
Source: Office for National Statistics

6. Trade in goods - analysis by area

Monthly analysis

In March 2015, the deficit on trade in goods with EU countries narrowed by £0.6 billion to £7.0 billion. The deficit on trade in goods with non-EU countries narrowed by £0.1 billion to £3.2 billion (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Balance of UK trade in goods - EU and non-EU countries, March 2013 to March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Between February 2015 and March 2015, exports to the EU decreased by £0.3 billion (2.9%) to £10.9 billion. Exports to the Netherlands decreased by £0.4 billion and to the Irish Republic by £0.1 billion. These decreases were partially offset by an increase in exports to both France and Germany of £0.1 billion.

Between February 2015 and March 2015, imports from the EU decreased by £0.9 billion (4.8%) to £17.9 billion. Imports from France decreased by £0.3 billion, from the Irish Republic by £0.2 billion and from Belgium and Luxembourg (combined), Czech Republic, Italy and the Netherlands by £0.1 billion.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Change in UK main commodity value (EU), March 2015 compared with February 2015

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on "trade in oil")	-175	+34
Cars	+6	+244
Consumer goods other than cars	-40	-71
Intermediate goods	-49	-231
Capital goods	-108	-110
Chemicals	-100	-55
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	+6	-214

Source: Office for National Statistics

Between February 2015 and March 2015, exports to non-EU countries increased by £0.7 billion (5.4%) to £12.8 billion. Exports to both India and South Korea increased by £0.2 billion and to China, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland and the USA by £0.1 billion. These increases were partially offset by a decrease in exports to both Brazil and Singapore of £0.1 billion.

Between February 2015 and March 2015, imports from non-EU countries increased by £0.6 billion (3.6%) to £16.0 billion. Imports from China increased by £0.2 billion and imports from Brazil, Canada, Qatar, Switzerland and Turkey all increased by £0.1 billion. These increases were partially offset by a decrease in imports from Norway of £0.3 billion.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Change in UK main commodity value (non-EU), March 2015 compared with February 2015

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on 'trade in oil')	+227	+232
Cars	+3	+7
Consumer goods other than cars	+213	+507
Intermediate goods	-78	-86
Capital goods	-14	-7
Chemicals	+250	-11
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	+172	+53

Source: Office for National Statistics

Quarterly analysis

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the deficit on trade in goods with EU countries widened by £1.6 billion to £21.5 billion.

Between quarter 4 October to December 2014 and quarter 1 January to March 2015, exports to the EU decreased by £3.0 billion (8.3%) to £33.6 billion. Exports to the Netherlands decreased by £1.2 billion, to both Belgium and Luxembourg (combined) and the Irish Republic by £0.5 billion, to France by £0.3 billion and to Sweden by £0.2 billion.

Between quarter 4 October to December 2014 and quarter 1 January to March 2015, imports from the EU decreased by £1.5 billion (2.6%) to £55.1 billion. Imports from Italy decreased by £0.5 billion, from Germany by £0.4 billion, from Belgium and Luxembourg (combined) by £0.3 billion and from Denmark by £0.2 billion. These decreases were partially offset by an increase in imports from France of £0.2 billion.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Change in UK main commodity value (EU), quarter 1 (January to March) 2015 compared with quarter 4 (October to December) 2014

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on "trade in oil")	-2,043	-438
Cars	-80	+484
Consumer goods other than cars	-299	+241
Intermediate goods	-184	-223
Capital goods	-114	-294
Chemicals	-158	-535
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	-186	-356

Source: Office for National Statistics

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the deficit on trade in goods with non-EU countries narrowed by £0.8 billion to £8.4 billion.

Between quarter 4 October to December 2014 and quarter 1 January to March 2015, exports to non-EU countries increased by £0.4 billion (1.0%) to £38.0 billion. Exports to the USA increased by £2.2 billion, to South Korea by £0.3 billion and to Canada, Japan, Qatar, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates by £0.2 billion. These increases were partially offset by a decrease in exports to Switzerland of £2.5 billion, to China of £0.8 billion, to India of £0.4 billion, to Saudi Arabia of £0.3 billion and to Russia of £0.2 billion.

Between quarter 4 October to December 2014 and quarter 1 January to March 2015, imports from non-EU countries decreased by £0.4 billion (0.9%) to £46.4 billion. Imports from Canada decreased by £1.4 billion, from Norway by £0.5 billion and from India, Kuwait, Nigeria and United Arab Emirates by £0.2 billion. These decreases were partially offset by an increase in imports from China of £1.1 billion and from both the USA and Qatar of £0.3 billion.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Change in UK main commodity value (non-EU), quarter 1 (January to March) 2015 compared with quarter 4 (October to December) 2014

	Exports (£m)	Imports (£m)
Oil (see section on 'trade in oil')	-80	-1,801
Cars	+131	+104
Consumer goods other than cars	+618	+599
Intermediate goods	+82	+365
Capital goods	-149	-8
Chemicals	+991	+89
Semi-manufactured goods other than chemicals	-503	+406

Source: Office for National Statistics

7. Trade in goods - geographical analysis

The UK's top 5 export trading partners were unchanged in March 2015 when compared with February 2015. An increase in exports to France of £0.1 billion and a decrease in exports to the Netherlands of £0.4 billion (Table 8), meant that France moved to the 3rd position and the Netherlands moved to the 5th position when compared with February 2015. Anecdotal evidence suggests this decrease to the Netherlands was due to the reduction in exports of crude oil.

Outside of the top 10, exports to Qatar were at a record high in March 2015, with a rise of £14.0 million (7.6%) when compared with February 2015.

The UK's top 5 import trading partners were also unchanged when compared with February 2015. Germany remains the UK's top import partner, with imports of £5.1 billion. Outside of the top 5, a £0.3 billion decrease in imports from Norway meant that it traded positions with Spain as the 9th largest import partner.

Outside of the top 10, imports to Turkey were at a record high in March 2015, with a rise of £0.1 billion (10.4%) when compared with February 2015.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, there were record exports to the USA, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Exports to the USA increased by £2.2 billion (23.4%) to £11.5 billion, exports to the United Arab Emirates increased by £0.2 billion (15.6%) to £1.7 billion and exports to Qatar increased by £0.2 billion (48.8%) to £0.6 billion.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, there were record imports from China. Imports from China increased by £1.1 billion (12.0%) to £9.9 billion.

Table 8: Change in UK monthly trade with significant partner countries, March 2015 compared with February 2015

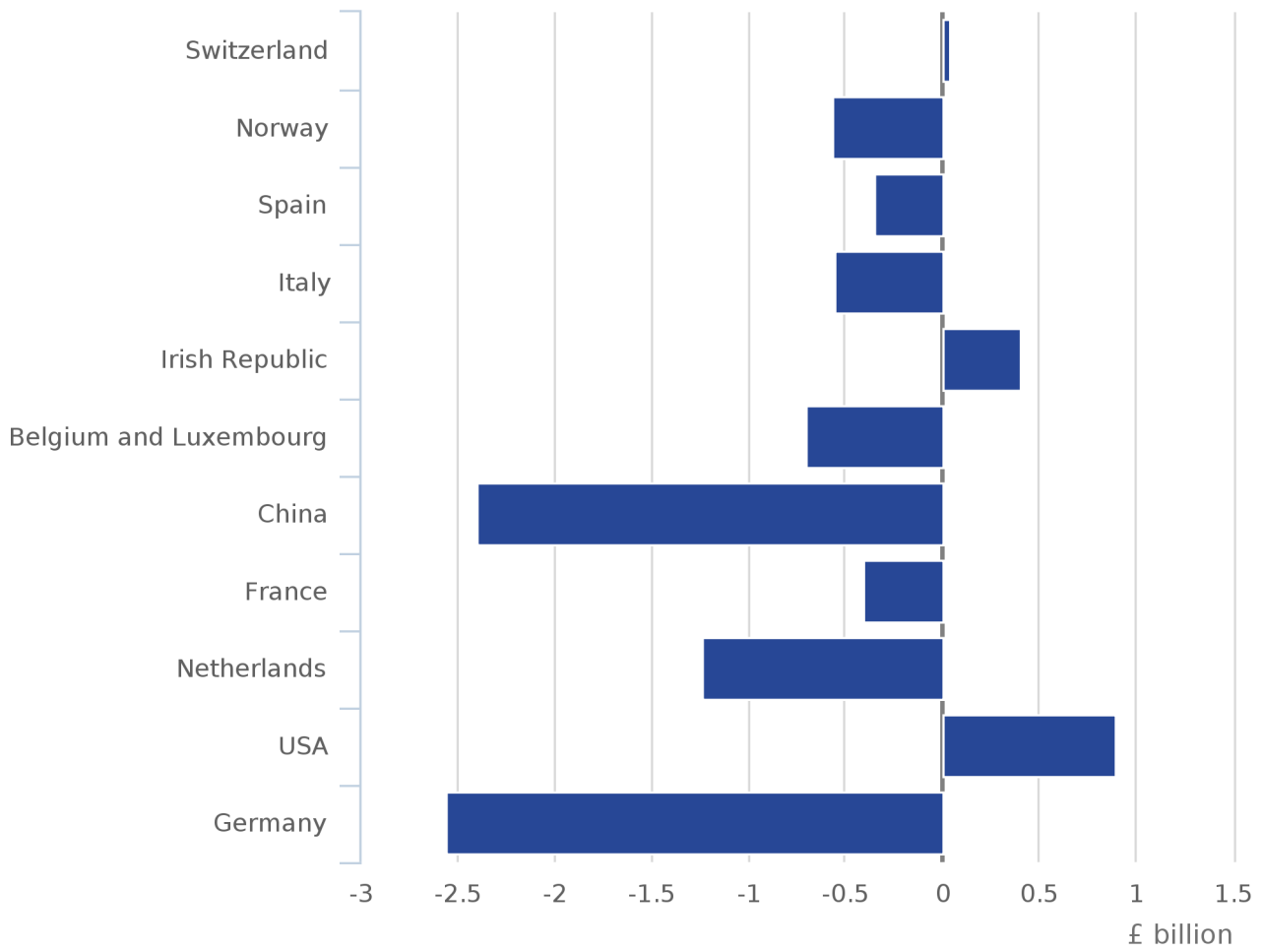
		Exports (£m)	
		March 2015 value	1-month change
1	USA	3,648	+83
2	Germany	2,509	+51
3	France	1,586	+93
4	Irish Republic	1,277	-104
5	Netherlands	1,260	-385
6	China	1,101	+94
7	Belgium and Luxembourg	972	+39
8	Spain	763	+7
9	Italy	725	+16
10	Switzerland	704	+89
		Imports (£m)	
		March 2015 value	1-month change
1	Germany	5,070	+9
2	China	3,502	+190
3	USA	2,753	+13
4	Netherlands	2,492	-63
5	France	1,993	-306
6	Belgium and Luxembourg	1,672	-130
7	Italy	1,274	-123
8	Spain	1,107	-17
9	Norway	882	-290
10	Irish Republic	869	-161

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Significant trading partners defined as top 10 export markets & import sources 2014 (see attached table 14)
2. USA includes Puerto Rico

Figure 5: Significant UK partner countries, 1-month balances, March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Table 9: Change in UK quarterly trade with significant partner countries, quarter 1 (January to March) 2015 compared with quarter 4 (October to December) 2014

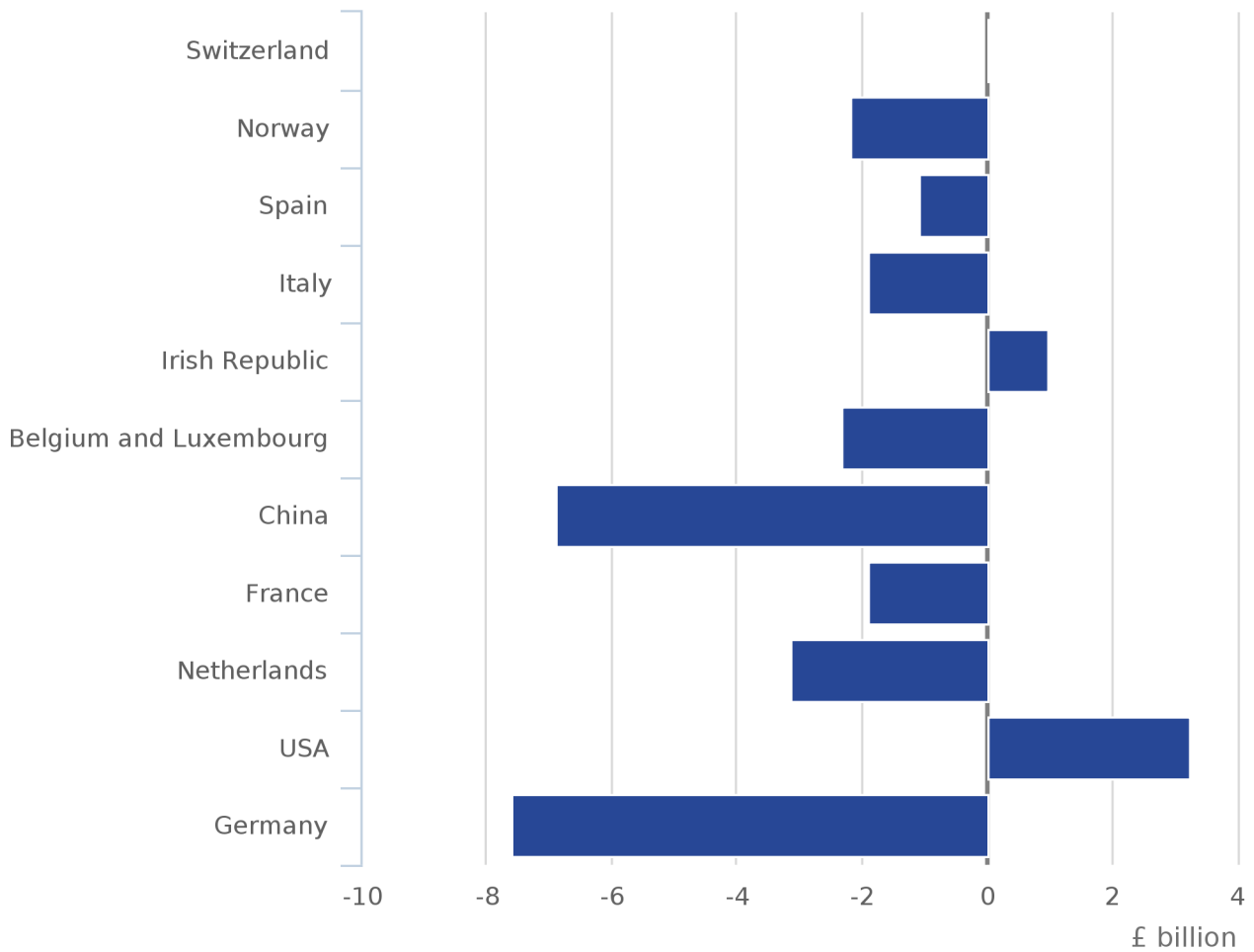
		Exports (£m)	
		Quarter 1 value	Quarterly change
1	USA	11,471	+2173
2	Germany	7,632	+2
3	France	4,544	-266
4	Netherlands	4,425	-1202
5	Irish Republic	4,011	-533
6	China	3,016	-808
7	Belgium and Luxembourg	2,844	-532
8	Spain	2,278	+4
9	Italy	2,132	+18
10	Switzerland	1,902	-2464
		Imports (£m)	
		Quarter 1 value	Quarterly change
1	Germany	15,221	-384
2	China	9,891	+1060
3	USA	8,225	+302
4	Netherlands	7,563	-88
5	France	6,411	+156
6	Belgium and Luxembourg	5,148	-346
7	Italy	4,017	-478
8	Spain	3,361	-29
9	Norway	3,037	-492
10	Irish Republic	3,013	-135

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Significant trading partners defined as top 10 export markets & import sources 2014 (see attached table 14)
2. USA includes Puerto Rico

Figure 6: Significant UK partner countries, quarterly balances, quarter 1 (January to March) 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

8. Volume of total trade in goods, excluding oil and erratics

Between February 2015 and March 2015, the total volume of exports decreased by 1.0% and the total volume of imports were unchanged.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Change in UK main commodity volume, March 2015 compared with February 2015

	Exports percentage change	Imports percentage change
Food, beverages and tobacco	+2.1	-3.8
Basic materials	+2.6	+7.6
Semi-manufactured goods; of which	+4.0	-1.0
Chemicals	0.0	0.0
Finished manufactured goods; of which	0.0	0.0
Cars	+0.8	+13.0
Consumer goods other than cars	+7.5	+9.0
Intermediate goods	-3.8	-6.2
Capital goods	-5.1	-1.7

Source: Office for National Statistics

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the volume of exports increased by 2.2% and the volume of imports increased by 2.3% when compared with the previous quarter.

At the commodity level, the data are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Change in UK main commodity volume, quarter 1 (January to March) 2015 compared with quarter 4 (October to December) 2014

	Exports percentage change	Imports percentage change
Food, beverages and tobacco	-1.0	-2.8
Basic materials	-8.7	-1.2
Semi-manufactured goods; of which	+1.3	+2.0
Chemicals	+7.7	+0.3
Finished manufactured goods; of which	+0.3	+3.8
Cars	0.0	+15.1
Consumer goods other than cars	+4.1	+6.0
Intermediate goods	+0.7	+1.5
Capital goods	-1.7	-1.4

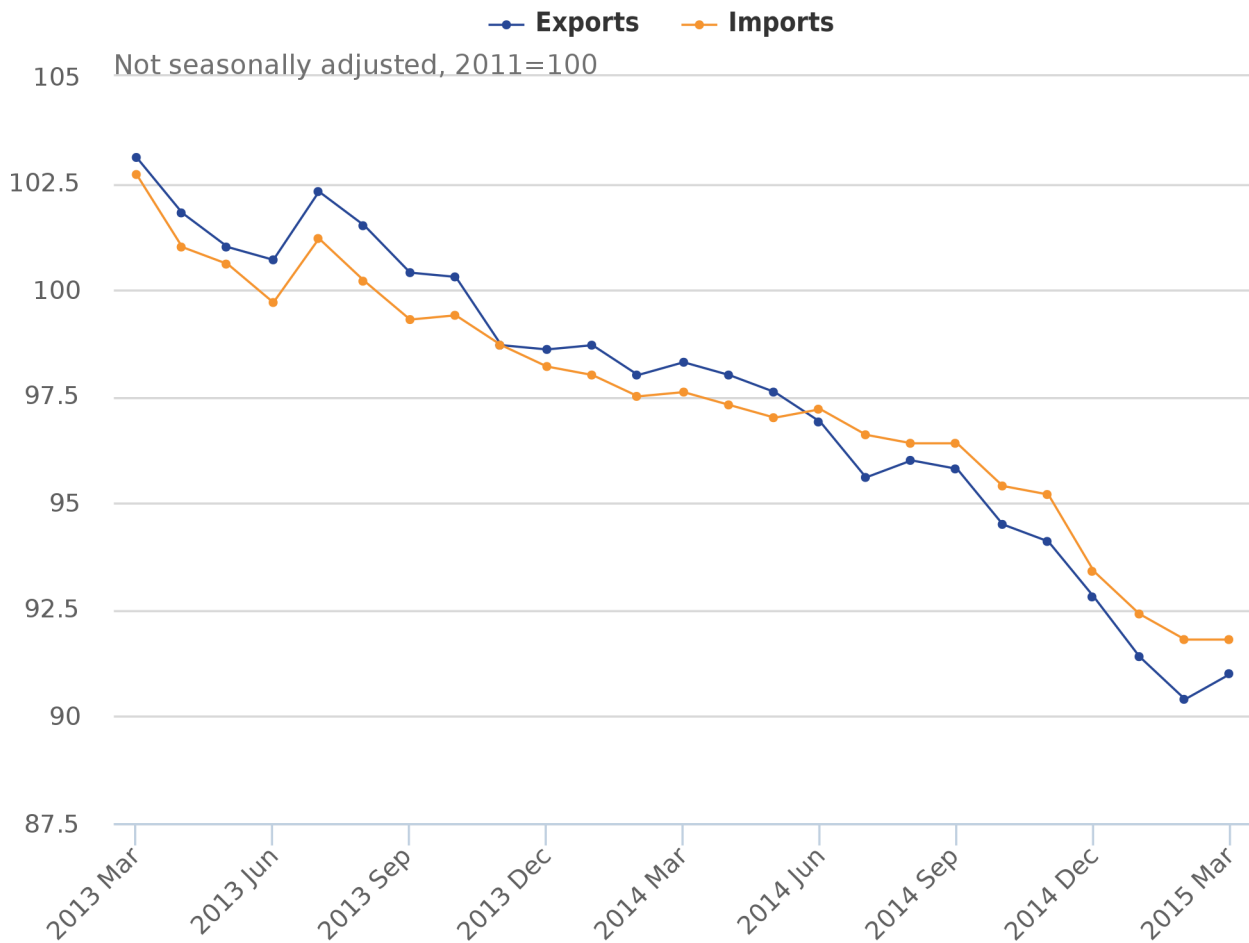
Source: Office for National Statistics

9. Export and import prices for trade in goods (not seasonally adjusted)

In March 2015, compared with February 2015, export prices increased by 0.7% and import prices were unchanged. Excluding the oil price effect, export prices increased by 0.4% and import prices decreased by 0.4%.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, when compared with the previous quarter, export prices decreased by 3.1% and import prices decreased by 2.8%. Excluding the oil price effect, export prices decreased by 0.7% and import prices decreased by 0.5%.

Figure 7: UK Trade in goods export and import prices, March 2013 to March 2015



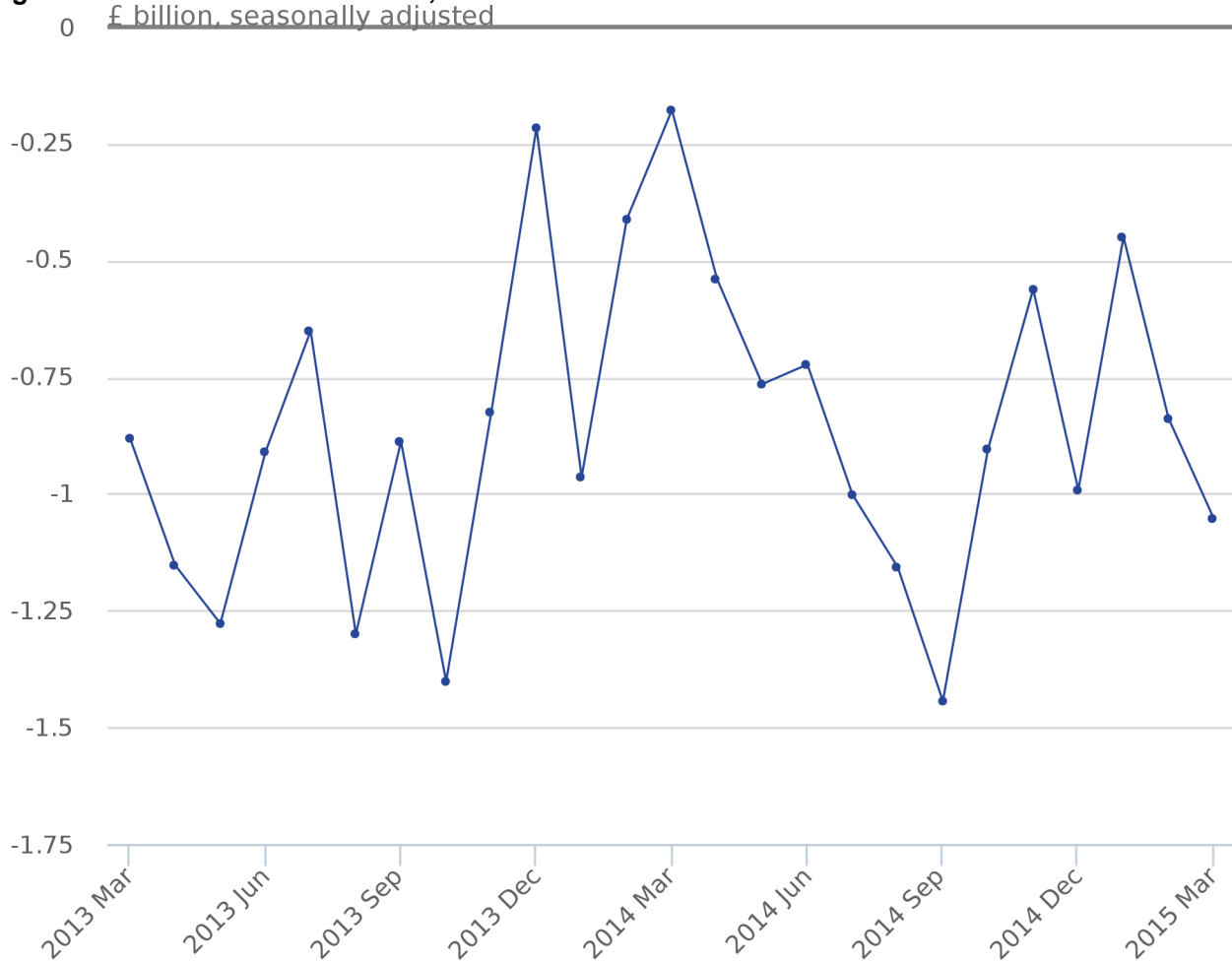
Source: Office for National Statistics

10. Trade in oil

In March 2015, the balance on trade in oil was in deficit by £1.1 billion, when compared with a deficit of £0.8 billion in February 2015. Oil exports increased by £0.1 billion to £1.7 billion and oil imports increased by £0.3 billion to £2.8 billion.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the balance on trade in oil was in deficit by £2.3 billion, narrowing by £0.1 billion when compared with the previous quarter. Oil exports decreased by £2.1 billion to £5.2 billion and oil imports decreased by £2.2 billion to £7.6 billion.

Figure 8: Balance of UK trade in oil, March 2013 to March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

11. Trade in services

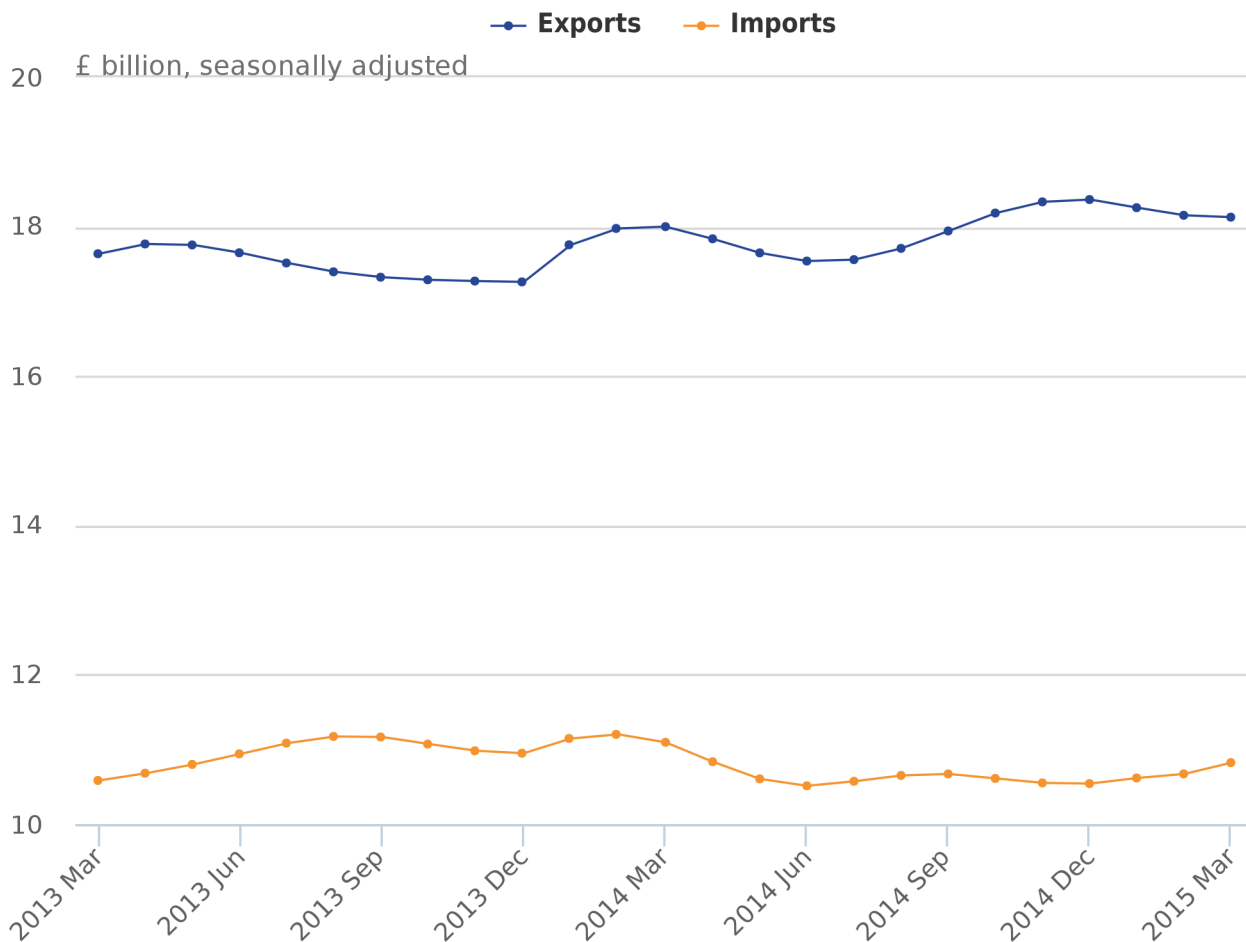
In March 2015, the UK's estimated surplus on trade in services was £7.3 billion.

Exports in March 2015 were estimated to have been £18.1 billion and imports £10.8 billion.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the estimated surplus on trade in services was £22.4 billion.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, exports were estimated to have been £54.5 billion and imports £32.1 billion.

Figure 9: Value of UK trade in services, March 2013 to March 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

The surplus on trade in services for March 2015 was estimated at £7.3 billion, which saw little movement when compared with February 2015, with very little change in the levels of exports (£18.1 billion) and a change in the level of imports (£10.8 billion) due to an increase in imports of insurance and pension services and other business services.

In quarter 1 January to March 2015, the estimated surplus on trade in services was £22.4 billion. This represents a reduction of £0.8 billion in the surplus from the record high of £23.2 billion in the previous quarter. Exports of services decreased by £0.3 billion to £54.5 billion in quarter 1 January to March 2015 and imports increased by £0.4 billion to £32.1 billion.

12. Records sheet

The [UK Trade record information for March 2015 \(35.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) can be accessed on our website.

13. Background notes

1. What's new?

The UK Statistics Authority [suspended the National Statistics designation of UK Trade](#) on 14 November 2014. The Authority's re-assessment of UK Trade against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics is now under way. More details are available from the [Authority's website](#).

EMU enlargement

As of 1 January 2015, Lithuania joined the European Monetary Union (EMU). Therefore the EMU totals in this UK Trade release include Lithuania.

Related publications

On 6 February 2015, we published an article on the [Rotterdam effect](#) and its potential impact on the UK trade in goods estimates.

On 23 January 2015, we published a short story exploring [the reasons behind the UK trade deficit](#).

Erratics

Non-monetary gold is now included in the erratics series; along with ships, aircraft, precious stones and silver. In compliance with the BPM6 changes, non-monetary gold which is held as a store of wealth, is now recorded within trade in goods.

Non-monetary gold

To comply with international statistical guidelines, we introduced estimates for trade in non-monetary gold and other precious metals into the quarterly national accounts from 30 September 2014, and the monthly UK Trade statistics released on 10 October 2014. In developing these estimates further it had been proposed to use data from a Bank of England (BoE) survey, collecting estimates of physical holdings of gold and other precious metals for the reporting period March 2013 onwards, as described in the article '[Measurement of non-monetary gold](#)' published on 23 January 2014.

However, on receiving the aggregated survey results, the data were volatile with large monthly changes that, despite being on a net trade basis, significantly distorted the estimated monthly trade balance. Due to this volatility and given that the survey is relatively new, having only commenced from the reporting period March 2013, it has been decided to undertake further work to quality assure these data and to review the methods used to measure non-monetary gold and other precious metals more generally. In addition, further disclosure assessment is required to ensure the confidentiality of businesses within the survey is maintained. So, the method used for the series pre-2013, derived from BoE information of gold as a store of wealth by UK MFIs, has been extended with the survey information being used to inform the movements of the later periods, but rescaled to the level of the pre-2013 data.

We will keep users informed of progress and it is likely we will seek views on how best to proceed.

Revisions

In this release, periods from January 2015 are open for revision.

2. Missing trader intra-community (MTIC) fraud

Users should be aware that in some periods, the monthly data does not sum precisely to the quarters (or the quarters to the annual), for the MTIC series due to rounding.

Deflation

It is common for the value of a group of financial transactions to be measured in several time periods. The values measured will include both the change in the volume sold and the effect of the change of prices over that year. Deflation is the process whereby the effect of price change is removed from a set of values.

Chain-linked indices (chained volume measures) which are indexed to form the volume series in this bulletin differ from fixed base indices in that the growth from one year to the next is estimated by weighting the components using the contribution to value of trade in the immediately preceding year (effectively re-

basing every year). This series of annually re-weighted annual growths is then "chain-linked" to produce a continuous series.

The implied price deflators derived by comparing current price data to chained volume measures data are not the same as the price indices published in this statistical bulletin because the former are current weighted while the latter are base (2011) weighted.

Changes in trade associated with VAT MTIC fraud mean that comparisons of volume and prices (both including and excluding trade associated with VAT MTIC fraud) should be treated with a great deal of caution.

3. Special events

An article outlining the [ONS policy on special events](#) is available on our website.

4. Code of Practice for Official Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#). They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2015.

5. Short guide to UK trade

Ever since statistics on exports and imports of goods were first collected in 1697, UK trade has been one of the country's key economic indicators.

All information included in the monthly UK Trade statistical bulletin is on a balance of payments (BoP) basis and is seasonally adjusted unless otherwise specified. The release contains tables showing the total value of trade in goods together with index numbers of volume and price, figures analysed by broad commodity group (values and indices) and according to geographical area (values only). In addition the UK Trade statistical bulletin also includes early monthly estimates of the value of trade in services.

Data appearing in the UK Trade statistical bulletin are also used as a direct input into the quarterly balance of payments and national accounts.

Interpreting the data

In months where quarterly and 3-monthly ending percentage changes for index data coincide, there may be small differences between the data for methodological reasons. Quarterly data are the indexed form of an underlying constant price (for volume indices) or consistent quantity (for price indices) series. 3-month ending data are the average of the index data in that period.

VAT missing trader intra-community (MTIC) fraud

Import figures for trade in goods include adjustments to allow for the impact of VAT MTIC fraud.

The adjustments to trade in goods relate only to part of the carousel version of VAT MTIC fraud. This fraud leads to under recording of imports as fraudsters import goods from the EU, which they then sell on before disappearing without paying VAT on that sale. The goods are eventually exported. Such exports are declared and are therefore already reflected in the UK's trade in goods statistics.

Changes to the pattern of trading associated with MTIC fraud can make it difficult to analyse trade by commodity group and by country as changes in the impact of activity associated with this fraud affect both imports and exports. However, the MTIC trade adjustments are added to the EU import estimates derived from Intrastat returns as it is this part of the trading chain that is not generally recorded. In particular, adjustments affect trade in capital goods and intermediate goods—these categories include mobile phones and computer components, which are still the most widely affected goods.

International convention determines that the treatment of the impact is to adjust imports upwards by the relevant amounts of missing declarations (non-response). However, users may wish to interpret short-term movements in imports excluding that part of the fraudulent activity that is not included in the import estimates. For this purpose, an analysis of the import figures with the VAT MTIC adjustments excluded is shown in Table 13.

Definitions and explanations

A glossary of terms is published in the [UK Balance of Payments - The Pink Book, 2014](#).

Use of the data

UK Trade is a key economic indicator due to the importance of international trade to the UK economy. It is also a very timely statistic, providing an early indicator of what is happening more generally in the economy.

In addition, it is a major component of two other key economic statistics: UK gross domestic product (GDP) and the UK balance of payments. This means that there is a threefold potential for UK Trade statistics to inform the government's view of the UK economy, as well as the views of others, such as economists, City analysts, academics, the media and international organisations.

Notes on tables

Rounding: The sum of constituent items in tables does not always agree exactly with the totals shown due to rounding.

Symbols:

.. Not applicable

- Nil or less than half the final digit shown.

6. Methods

Composition of the data

Detailed methodological notes are published in the [UK Balance of Payments - The Pink Book, 2014](#).

Seasonal adjustment

Seasonal adjustment aims to remove effects associated with the time of the year or the arrangement of the calendar so that movements within a time series may be more easily interpreted.

7. Quality

Basic quality information

Accuracy: Trade in goods figures for the most recent months are provisional and subject to revision in the light of:

- late trader data, revisions to trade prices and revised estimates of trading associated with VAT MTIC fraud
- revisions to seasonal adjustment factors which are re-estimated every month

Trade in services estimates have been derived from a number of monthly and quarterly sources. For components where no monthly data are available, estimates have been derived on the basis of recent trends. The results should be used with appropriate caution, as they are therefore likely to be less reliable than those for trade in goods.

Reliability: Revisions to data provide one indication of the reliability of key indicators. Table 12 below shows summary information on the size and direction of the revisions which have been made to the data covering a 5-year period. A statistical test has been applied to the average revision to find out if it is statistically significantly different from zero. An asterisk (*) shows that the test is significant.

On 9 May 2005, we published an article explaining the [past revisions performance for UK Trade statistics](#) and what is being done to improve the first published estimates, on 9 May 2005.

Table 12: Revisions analysis, UK trade, March 2015

		Revisions between first publication and estimates 12 months later		£million
	Value in latest period	Average over the last 5 years (mean revision)	Average over the last 5 years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)	
Total trade exports (IKBH)	41,876	646		884
Total trade imports (IKBI)	44,693	303		564
Total trade balance (IKBJ)	-2,817	346		650

Source: Office for National Statistics

The table covers estimates of UK trade first published from June 2010 (for April 2010) to May 2014 (for February 2014). [Revision spreadsheets](#) giving these estimates and the calculations behind the averages in the table are available on the our website.

The May 2007 edition of Economic and Labour Market Review, published by ONS, includes an article [analysing past revisions to quarterly balance of payments current account data \(2.33 Mb Pdf\)](#).

More [information about revisions](#) material in this statistical bulletin can be found on our website.

8. EMU coverage

The coverage of EMU countries was extended to cover Cyprus and Malta from July 2008, Slovakia from January 2009, Estonia from January 2011, Latvia from January 2014 and Lithuania from January 2015. Some EU and non-EU breakdowns of commodity data for chained volume measures which are available on request may be less reliable than the current price data. Please consult Katherine Kent on +44 (0)1633 455829 if you are considering using them.

Data have been combined for the United States and Puerto Rico and for Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah (the United Arab Emirates) from January 2009 onwards. Estimates are separately available for the United States and Dubai up to the end of 2008 on request.

9. Summary quality report

A [summary quality report \(91.3 Kb Pdf\)](#) for this statistical bulletin and associated data can be found on our website.

10. National accounts revisions policy

[National Accounts revision policy \(43.3 Kb Pdf\)](#) can be found on our website.

11. Revisions

Revisions table 17R shows revisions to the main aggregates since the last UK Trade statistical bulletin of 9 April 2015. The revisions to trade in goods from January 2015 reflect revised data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and other data suppliers, revised estimates of trading associated with VAT MTIC fraud, later survey data on trade prices and a re-assessment of seasonal factors.

There are no revisions to trade in services data.

12. Publication policy

A list of the organisations given [pre-publication access](#) to the contents of this bulletin can be found on our website.

13. Accessing data

Supplementary quarterly data analysed by industry according to the Classification of Product by Activity (08) ([UK trade in goods by classification of product by activity](#)) are also available.

The complete run of data in the tables of this statistical bulletin are also available to view and download in other electronic formats free of charge using our [time series data](#) website service. Users can download the complete statistical bulletin in a choice of zipped formats, or view and download their own selections of individual series.

We are constantly aiming to improve this release and its associated commentary. We would welcome any feedback you might have and would be particularly interested in knowing how you make use of these data to inform your work. To provide feedback on the bulletin or to request further information, please contact us via email on trade.in.goods@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Overseas Trade Statistics

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) publish [Overseas Trade Statistics](#) on the same day as we release the UK Trade data each month. The aggregate estimates here will differ slightly from those that are published by us as part of the [balance of payments](#) (BoP), as the 2 sets of data are compiled to different sets of rules. The BoP publication shows a high level picture of UK trade in goods, whereas the OTS publication shows a detailed picture of the UK's trade in goods by commodity and partner country.

14. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and receive up to date information about our statistical releases.

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16. Next publication: 9 June 2015

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17. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk