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Media contact:  
HMRC Press Office  
020 7147 2318

Statistical contacts:  
Rafael Mastrangelo  
Tel: 03000 593 178  
[rafael.mastrangelo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rafael.mastrangelo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Customs Trade Statistics  
HM Revenue & Customs  
21 Victoria Avenue  
Southend-on-Sea  
SS99 1AA

Email:  
[uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Website:  
<http://www.uktradeinfo.com>

# UK trade in goods statistics by business characteristics 2014

## *Experimental Official Statistics*

### *Summary*

- In 2014, there were a total of 143,000 active exporting businesses in the UK, with a total employee count of 9.8 million. This is compared with 210,000 importing businesses in the UK with a total employee count of 12.3 million.
- Over half of UK businesses engaged in international trade in goods (57 per cent of exporters and 53 per cent of importers, excluding those where age is unknown) are at least ten years old. These businesses contribute the majority of UK international trade.

## Introduction

HMRC has linked the Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS) trade in goods data with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) business statistics sourced from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). This release expands the analyses to show overseas trade by business characteristics. Whereas the OTS shows the values and volumes of goods being traded by product and country, this analysis provides information about the types of businesses that are trading those goods. This report focuses on trade by industry group, age of business and size of business (number of employees). In addition, you can download Excel spreadsheets with more detailed information.

This publication is for 2014 data, with 2013 data included for ease of comparison. The 2013 data has not been recalculated to account for revisions to the OTS and is identical to that published last year on 28 November 2014<sup>1</sup>. This means care should be taken when making direct comparisons between 2013 and 2014. This is due to the experimental nature of these statistics and resource constraints.

Currently these statistics are labelled as experimental which is consistent with UK Statistics Authority guidance on new statistical outputs. The reasons for this are:

- To allow this new publication to incorporate new methodology which is subject to change;
- To allow external users to provide feedback on the publication so that enhancements can be made to future releases.

For more information and guidance on the use of experimental statistics, please visit the [Guide to Experimental Statistics](#) on the ONS website:

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of these statistics. If you have any comments, please send them to:

[uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

## Methodology Update

Due to changes in the OTS methodology from January 2014, non-monetary gold is now included in all OTS data back to 2005. It is therefore present in both the 2014 and 2013 datasets compared here<sup>2</sup>.

For more information on this methodology change, see the [Inclusion of non-monetary gold in the OTS](#) publication.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Statistics/Documents/IDBR\\_OTS\\_2013.pdf](https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Statistics/Documents/IDBR_OTS_2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The linked publication [UK Trade in Goods by Business Characteristics 2009 to 2012](#) that was published in November 2013 does not contain non-monetary gold. Users should be cautious when making comparisons between this dataset and the 2013 or 2014 datasets.

# Analysis

## Industry Group

**Table 1: Total value of UK trade by industry group**

£ millions

Industry Group	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
Group 1 Agriculture and Food	16,419	16,080	19,291	19,223
Group 2 Mining, Petroleum products and Waste	31,639	25,352	35,887	31,772
Group 3 Chemicals	13,667	13,755	10,359	10,048
Group 4 Pharmaceuticals	8,490	7,950	3,993	3,343
Group 5 Electronic and Electrical equipment	18,008	17,662	13,431	13,056
Group 6 Machinery and equipment n.e.s	16,678	17,406	9,573	9,462
Group 7 Motor vehicles, transport equipment (excluding aerospace)	22,010	27,039	22,922	24,827
Group 8 Aerospace and related machinery	18,803	17,085	8,602	8,022
Group 9 Other manufacturing	15,582	15,415	13,498	13,683
Group 10 Services	174,052	140,687	273,681	279,400
Unknown	14,484	11,455	6,483	7,180
<b>Total</b>	<b>349,831</b>	<b>309,887</b>	<b>417,721</b>	<b>420,015</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 1 shows that the value of imports and exports declined for the majority of industry groups between 2013 and 2014. Excluding the Services group and the Unknown group:

- Exports:
  - ↑ Three groups show growth (Chemicals, Machinery & equipment and Motor vehicles).
  - ↓ Six groups show a decrease (Agriculture, Mining & petroleum, Pharmaceuticals, Electronic and electrical equipment, Aerospace and Other manufacturing).
- Imports:
  - ↑ Two groups show growth (Motor vehicles and Other manufacturing).
  - ↓ Seven groups show a decrease (Agriculture, Mining & petroleum, Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals, Electronic and electrical equipment, Machinery & equipment and Aerospace).
- Other:
  - ↑ Notable rise: Motor vehicles was the only group to show a rise in both imports (up 23 per cent) and exports (up 8 per cent).
  - ↓ Notable fall: Imports by the Pharmaceutical industry fell 16 per cent from £4.0bn to £3.3bn.
  - ↓ Notable fall: The Mining & petroleum industry saw a 20 per cent fall in exports and an 11 per cent fall in imports.

**Table 2: Business count by industry group**

Industry Group	number			
	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
Group 1 Agriculture and Food	6,841	6,828	10,536	10,989
Group 2 Mining, Petroleum products and Waste	1,674	1,657	1,818	1,958
Group 3 Chemicals	1,461	1,461	1,380	1,399
Group 4 Pharmaceuticals	204	216	230	242
Group 5 Electronic and Electrical equipment	4,165	4,151	4,231	4,201
Group 6 Machinery and equipment n.e.s	3,509	3,435	3,272	3,263
Group 7 Motor vehicles, transport equipment (excluding aerospace)	1,329	1,331	1,319	1,331
Group 8 Aerospace and related machinery	177	170	183	186
Group 9 Other manufacturing	13,258	13,086	13,258	13,443
Group 10 Services	105,991	104,706	153,384	158,132
Unknown	5,337	5,874	13,683	15,006
<b>Total</b>	<b>143,946</b>	<b>142,915</b>	<b>203,294</b>	<b>210,150</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 2 shows that the number of exporting businesses was largely steady between 2013 and 2014. In particular:

- ↑ The number of importing businesses in the Mining & petroleum industry increased by 8 per cent, up from 1,818 to 1,958.
- ↑ For the Pharmaceutical industry, the number of exporting businesses rose by 6 per cent, while the number of importing businesses rose by 5 per cent.
- ↓ There was a 4 per cent decrease in the number of exporting Aerospace businesses.

**Table 3: Employee count for businesses by industry group**

Industry Group	number			
	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
Group 1 Agriculture and Food	463,501	482,584	540,776	551,435
Group 2 Mining, Petroleum products and Waste	304,436	305,820	346,104	346,487
Group 3 Chemicals	89,624	91,071	89,152	90,753
Group 4 Pharmaceuticals	49,998	48,290	50,434	48,989
Group 5 Electronic and Electrical equipment	181,594	177,850	182,798	179,600
Group 6 Machinery and equipment n.e.s	164,207	169,231	161,570	166,810
Group 7 Motor vehicles, transport equipment (excluding aerospace)	142,550	145,805	144,213	147,841
Group 8 Aerospace and related machinery	97,941	95,767	97,732	95,743
Group 9 Other manufacturing	483,859	485,125	496,265	500,856
Group 10 Services	7,644,639	7,777,499	10,127,345	10,167,730
Unknown	.	.	.	.
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,622,349</b>	<b>9,779,042</b>	<b>12,236,389</b>	<b>12,296,244</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 3 shows a slight increase in the number of people employed by businesses engaged in international trade in goods. This is true for both importers and exporters.

- ↑ The largest percentage increase was in employees within the Machinery & equipment sector (up 3 per cent for both exporting businesses and importing businesses).
- ↓ The largest percentage decrease was in employees within the Pharmaceuticals sector (down 3 per cent for both exporting and importing businesses). This was in line with the decrease in the value of imports and exports by this group, but was in contrast to the rise in the number of individual businesses trading.

## Age Group

**Table 4: Total value of UK trade by age of business**

£ millions

Age (years)	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
0 to 1	7,105	6,427	9,483	12,350
2 to 3	15,818	13,313	17,618	15,678
4 to 5	17,557	16,424	19,294	14,963
6 to 9	34,118	39,891	42,002	44,330
10 to 20	74,142	68,894	108,634	96,063
20 +	179,013	149,573	207,111	220,371
Unknown	22,077	15,365	13,579	16,259
<b>Total</b>	<b>349,831</b>	<b>309,887</b>	<b>417,721</b>	<b>420,015</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.

2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 4 shows the value of trade by age of business. Interpretation of movements in age group categories should be treated with caution, since individual businesses naturally progress through the groups.

- ↑ The largest percentage increase in imports is for businesses aged 0-1 year (up 30 per cent), although the businesses in this group saw a decrease in exports of 10 per cent.
- ↓ The biggest percentage decrease in imports is for businesses aged 4-5 years (down 22 per cent).
- ↑ The largest percentage increase in exports is for businesses aged 6-9 years (up 17 per cent).
- ↓ The biggest percentage decrease in exports is for businesses aged 20+ years (down 16 per cent).

## Employee Size

**Table 5: Total value of UK trade by employee size**

£ millions

Employee Size	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
0	27,545	27,553	43,649	44,994
1 to 9	16,485	16,269	23,601	26,661
10 to 49	26,531	25,226	45,692	47,417
50 to 249	44,563	42,340	62,317	63,194
250 +	212,932	183,253	229,596	221,825
Unknown	21,775	15,246	12,867	15,924
<b>Total</b>	<b>349,831</b>	<b>309,887</b>	<b>417,721</b>	<b>420,015</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 5 shows that, excluding the Unknown category, most employee size groups experienced relatively small changes (less than 5 per cent) in imports and exports between 2013 and 2014. The most notable changes are:

- ↑ The biggest percentage increase in imports is for businesses with 1-9 employees (up 13 per cent).
- ↓ Exports decreased for all groups apart from the zero employees category, where there was a slight increase.
- ↓ The biggest percentage decrease in exports was for businesses with 250+ employees (down 14 per cent).

**Table 6: Business count by employee size** number

Employee size	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
0	10,174	9,493	14,886	14,730
1 to 9	77,305	76,650	108,181	112,256
10 to 49	33,159	33,519	42,696	44,254
50 to 249	10,396	10,295	12,780	13,009
250 +	3,467	3,463	4,316	4,359
Unknown	9,445	9,495	20,435	21,542
<b>Total</b>	<b>143,946</b>	<b>142,915</b>	<b>203,294</b>	<b>210,150</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 6 shows that that there were minimal changes between 2013 and 2014 in the number of importers and exporters by employee size.

- ↓ The number of exporting businesses with zero employees on their pay roll decreased more in percentage terms than any of the other groups (down 7 per cent).
- ↑ There was an increase in the number of importing businesses for all employee size groups apart from businesses with zero employees, which decreased slightly in number.

**Table 7: Employee count for businesses by employee size** number

Employee size	Exports		Imports	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
0	0	0	0	0
1 to 9	260,305	257,594	366,446	379,776
10 to 49	708,804	720,353	903,577	941,210
50 to 249	1,069,794	1,064,730	1,312,216	1,338,042
250 +	7,583,446	7,736,365	9,654,150	9,637,216
Unknown	.	.	.	.
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,622,349</b>	<b>9,779,042</b>	<b>12,236,389</b>	<b>12,296,244</b>

Note: 2013 data as published 28 Nov 2014.  
2014 data as published 12 Nov 2015.

Source: HMRC OTS and ONS IDBR data

Table 7 shows that between 2013 and 2014, there was little change to the number of people employed by importing and exporting businesses.

- For importing businesses, there were increases in the number of employees for all SME groups (businesses with less than 250 employees), while large businesses (250+ employees) saw a minor decrease in employees.
- For exporting businesses, the large business group saw the biggest percentage increase in number of employees (up 2 per cent).



## **Access to data**

The detailed tables for 2014 data are available on the uktradeinfo website in [excel format](#). The 2013 data (published November 2014) is also available on the same webpage.

These excel files contain tables for Industry Group, Age, and Employee Size individually and also 2 dimensional tables which show:

- Industry Group by Age;
- Industry Group by Employee Size;
- Employee Size by Age.

A breakdown of Industry, Age or Employee Size by country for 2014 is only available for a small number of countries. These countries are Germany, USA, France, China, Netherlands, Brazil, Italy, Russia, Spain, India, Portugal, South Africa, Irish Republic, Japan, Cyprus, Australia, Greece, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Hong Kong, EU (all EU countries combined), NEU (all Non EU countries combined).

## **Annex: Metadata FAQ**

### **What is the purpose of these experimental statistics?**

To produce trade statistics based on 10 predefined industry groups to show the total value of UK trade imported and exported, broken down by age and employee size of UK businesses.

### **Why is this release “experimental statistics”?**

Experimental statistics allows a new publication to incorporate new methodology which is subject to change. It also allows external users to provide feedback on the publication and enhancements can be made to future releases.

### **What data has been used to produce this release?**

This release combines data from the Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS) published by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) with the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The OTS is a detailed dataset covering the UK’s trade in goods with other nations by partner country and product. More information can be found in the [methodology paper](#) for the Overseas Trade Statistics. Since 1994 the IDBR has been the comprehensive list of UK businesses that is used by government for statistical purposes. More information about the [Inter-Departmental Business Register](#) can be found on the ONS website.

### **How has the data matching been done?**

By matching the businesses reference on the IDBR data with its corresponding VAT number on the trade statistics data. If a match was not found, then a fuzzy matching on the name was attempted. Any remaining unmatched VAT numbers were treated as businesses, with industry group obtained from departmental VAT records where possible. For more detailed information or to comment on this methodology, contact the uktradeinfo helpdesk (email: [uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:uktradeinfo@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)).

### **Which variables are being published?**

Age (0-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-9, 10-20, 20+, unknown)  
Employee size (0, 1-9, 10-49, 50-249, 250+, unknown)  
Industry group (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, unknown)  
Statistical Value of trade in goods  
Employee count  
Business count

## What are the industry groupings?

The SIC 2007 groupings within each Industry group are:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>SIC 2007</b>
Group 1	Agriculture and Food	A, 10 – 17
Group 2	Mining, Petroleum products and Waste	B, 19, 24, D, E
Group 3	Chemicals	20
Group 4	Pharmaceuticals	21
Group 5	Electronic and Electrical equipment	26, 27
Group 6	Machinery and equipment n.e.s	28
Group 7	Motor vehicles, transport equipment (excluding aerospace)	29, 30 (excluding 30.3)
Group 8	Aerospace and related machinery	30.3
Group 9	Other manufacturing	18, 22, 23, 25, 31, 32
Group 10	Services	33, F – U

For further details on SIC 2007 visit the [ONS website](#).

## What partner countries or geographical areas are available?

Only a selection of partner countries are available, which are Germany, USA, France, China, Netherlands, Brazil, Italy, Russia, Spain, India, Portugal, South Africa, Irish Republic, Japan, Cyprus, Australia, Greece, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Hong Kong, EU (all EU countries combined), NEU (all Non EU countries combined).

This is available in [excel format](#) for expert users.

## How were the employee count and business count fields calculated?

The business count is the total number of businesses who imported or exported, with the specified characteristics. The employee count is the total number of employees for those businesses. It does *not* mean that all these employees are directly involved in the activity of international trade.

## How have suppressions been applied to these experimental statistics?

While the OTS is subject to passive disclosure control, due to linking with the IDBR these experimental statistics are subject to active disclosure control. Disclosure control procedures applied are in line with those recommended by GSS guidance on disclosure control.

Where the data has been suppressed additional suppressions, called masks, have been used making it impossible to calculate the contents of suppressed cells. All suppressed cells are shown with an “S”.

A 3-way cross-tabulation between Age, Employee size and Industry group was not possible due to the number of suppressions and masks needed to the data.

## **Are there any similar statistics available on the characteristics of UK exporters and importers?**

The ONS publish the **Annual Business Survey (ABS) estimates on exporters and importers** (latest release published 12 November 2015). This includes details of the number and proportion of GB enterprises (excluding Northern Ireland) engaged in international trade in goods and services, categorised by employment size group, broad industry group, ownership (UK/foreign owned), turnover and age of business. The latest release also contains a regional breakdown.

The aim of the **ABS estimates on exporters and importers** is to supply comprehensive information on business trading behaviour for both goods and services to provide answers to questions such as:

- What share of businesses export goods and/ or services?
- What share of businesses import goods and/ or services?
- Are importing businesses also those that export or do some businesses only import or export?

The aim of the HMRC **UK Trade Statistics by Business Characteristics** is to add value to the UK Trade in Goods figures by looking at the characteristics of businesses trading. This may provide answers to questions such as:

- How many people are employed by businesses engaged in international trade in goods?
- What share of exports/imports is carried out by particular industry groups?
- How many new businesses involved in international trade in goods are trading with specific partner countries?

Due to **methodological differences** between these ABS statistics and the HMRC statistics published in this release, the 'Trade in goods' figures within each dataset are not directly comparable and may differ.