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Geographical pattern of UK trade

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The geographical pattern of UK trade: a summary

Share of UK trade with the EU, 1999-2019 (% total trade)



Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's largest trading partner.

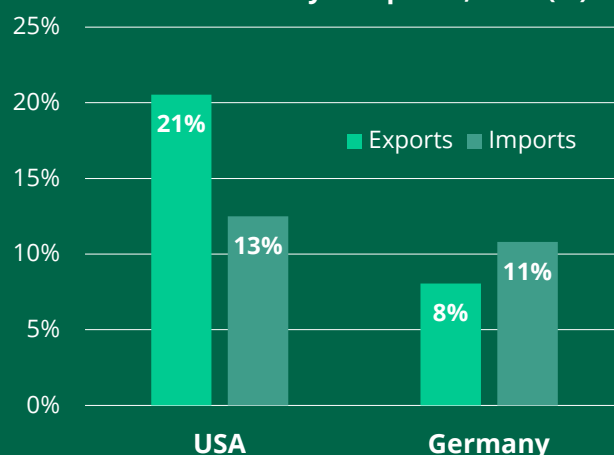
In 2019 the EU accounted for 43% of UK exports and 52% imports and 7 of the UK's 10 largest export markets and sources of imports.

However, the EU's share of UK trade has generally declined in recent years - in 2006, the EU accounted for 54% of UK exports and 57% of imports.

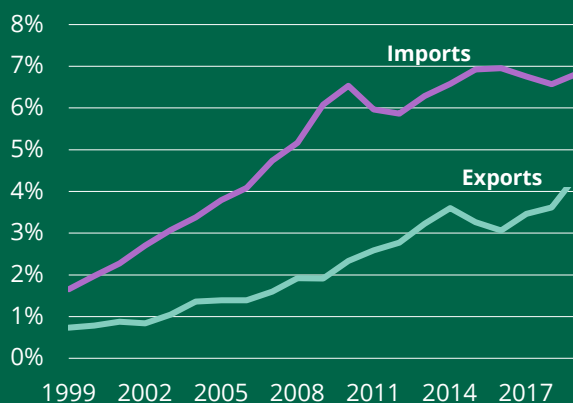
Looking at individual countries, the USA is the UK's largest export market and source of imports.

In 2019, the US accounted for 21% of UK exports, followed by Germany, though UK exports to the USA were around two and a half times greater than exports to Germany. The USA was also the UK's largest source of imports, accounting for 13% of total imports, followed by Germany at 11%.

UK trade in goods and services with USA and Germany compared, 2019 (%)



Share of UK trade with China, 1999-2018 (% total trade)



UK trade with China has expanded rapidly since the turn of the century.

In 1999, China was the UK's 26th largest export market and 15th largest source of imports, accounting for around 1% of both exports and imports.

In 2019, China was the UK's 6th largest export market and 4th largest source of imports, accounting for 4% of exports and 7% of imports.

1. Introduction

In 2019:

- The UK exported £691 billion of goods and services and imported £721 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of -£31 billion. This was equal to -1.4% of GDP, compared to -1.2% in 2018.
- The UK recorded a trade deficit in goods – UK exports of goods were £373 billion while imports were £504 billion, resulting in a deficit of -£131 billion. This was equal to -5.9% of UK GDP, down from -6.4% in 2018.
- The UK recorded a trade surplus in services – UK exports of services were £318 billion while imports were £217 billion, resulting in a surplus of £100 billion. This was equal to 4.5% of GDP, down from 5.2% in 2018.¹

UK trade, 2019 (£ billions)

	Exports	Imports	Balance
Goods	373.1	504.0	-130.9
Services	317.7	217.3	100.4
Total	690.8	721.3	-30.5

Source: ONS

UK trade, 2019

£ billions



Source: ONS

¹ Data taken from ONS, [Pink Book 2020](#)

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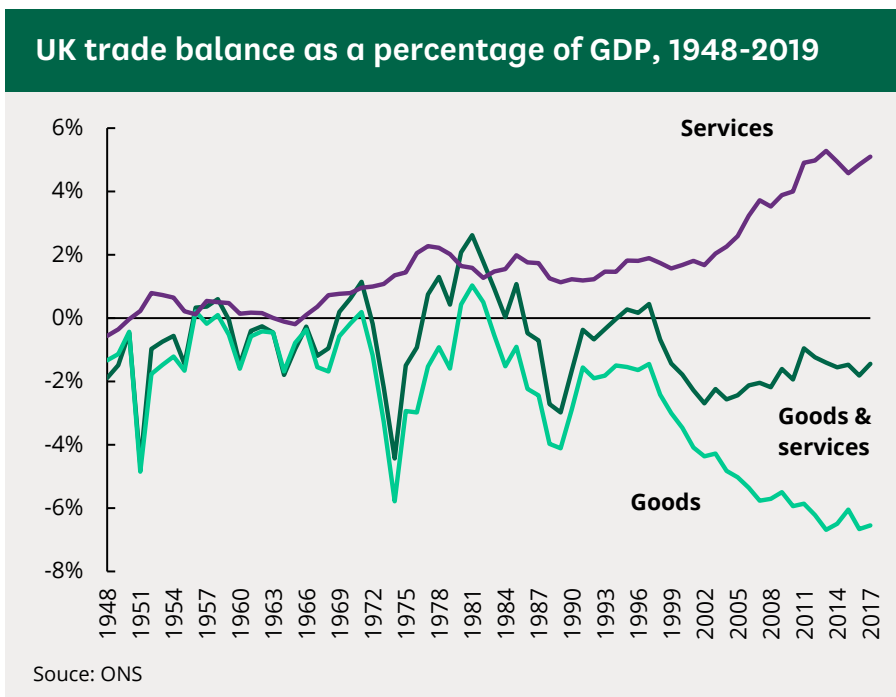
In 2019, the UK accounted for 3.5% of world exports and 3.9% of world imports and was the world's sixth largest exporter and fourth largest importer.

UK rank in world trade, 2019				
Goods and services, % world total				
	Exports		Imports	
China	11.1%	USA	USA	12.6%
USA	10.1%	China	China	10.3%
Germany	7.3%	Germany	Germany	6.4%
Netherlands	3.9%	UK	UK	3.9%
Japan	3.6%	Japan	Japan	3.7%
UK	3.5%	France	France	3.7%
France	3.4%	Netherlands	Netherlands	3.5%
Italy	2.6%	India	India	2.6%
South Korea	2.6%	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	2.6%
Hong Kong	2.5%	South Korea	South Korea	2.5%

Source: UNCTAD

Looking at trade in goods and services separately, the UK was the world's 11th largest exporter of goods and 2nd largest exporter of services and 5th largest importer of goods and 5th largest importer of services.

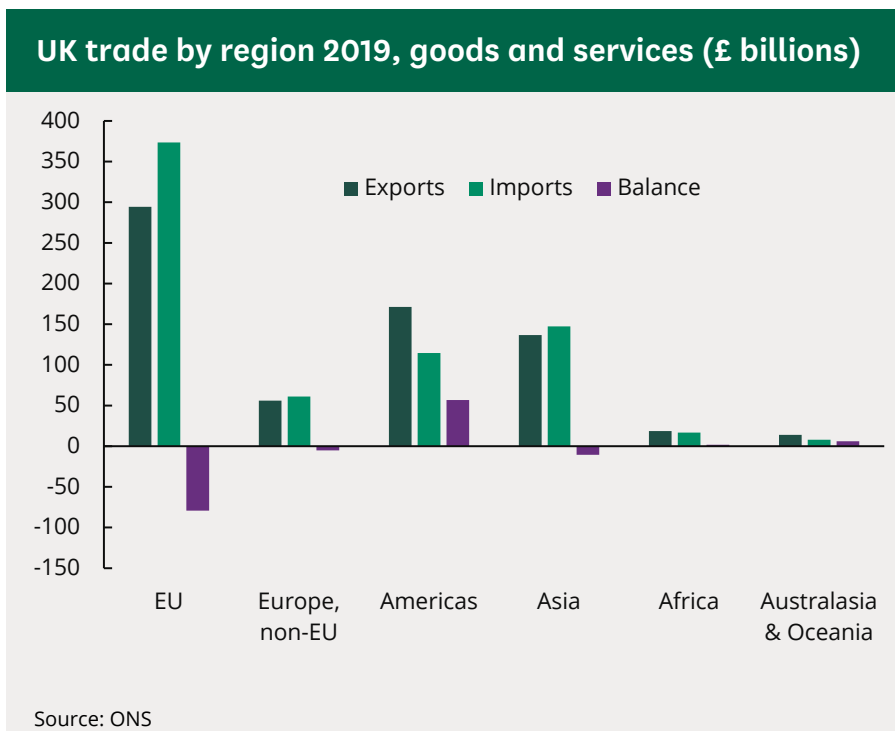
The UK's pattern of trade in 2019 is generally reflective of recent trends – the UK has now recorded an overall trade deficit every year since 1998, a deficit in goods every year since 1983 and a surplus in services every year since 1966.



2. Overview

The chart below shows the overall geographical pattern of UK trade in 2019.

- In total, Europe accounted for 51% of UK exports and 60% of imports.
- The majority of the UK's trade with Europe was conducted with EU member states, accounting for 43% of all exports and 52% of all imports; the rest of Europe accounted for around 8% of both exports and imports.
- Asia accounted for 20% of both UK imports and exports; the Americas accounted for 25% of UK exports and 16% of imports.
- Africa accounted for 3% of exports and 2% imports; Australasia accounted for 2% of exports and 1% of imports.



Overall, the UK recorded a trade deficit with Europe (both EU non-EU countries combined) and Asia; surpluses were recorded with the Americas, Africa and Australasia and Oceania.

Looking at trade in goods and services separately, the picture is more mixed – the UK recorded trade deficits in goods with all regions except the Americas and Australasia and Oceania; by contrast a trade surplus in services was recorded with all regions.

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The table below shows trade by region, divided between trade in goods and services. In 2019:

- Europe accounted for the majority of UK exports and imports of goods and imports of services and just under half of UK service exports.
- The EU accounted for a greater proportion of UK imports than exports for both goods and services.
- The Americas accounted for a greater proportion of UK exports than imports for both goods and services.
- Asia accounted for a greater proportion of UK goods exports than goods imports and a roughly equal proportion of UK service exports and imports.

UK trade by region, 2019 (% total)				
	Goods		Services	
	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports
Europe	53%	62%	48%	57%
EU	46%	53%	39%	49%
Europe, non-EU	7%	9%	9%	8%
Americas	20%	12%	31%	24%
Asia	23%	22%	16%	16%
Australasia	2%	1%	3%	1%
Africa	3%	2%	3%	2%

Source: ONS

3. Trade in goods and services

3.1 Trade in goods

In 2019, road vehicles were the UK's single largest export, valued at £39 billion, 11% of all UK goods exports. Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's largest export market for road vehicles, accounting for 45% of exports; looking at individual countries, it is the USA, which accounted for 22% of UK exports of road vehicles in 2019.

Other British goods exports included petroleum, valued at £29 billion (8% of goods exports) and power generating machinery valued at £29 billion (8% of all goods exports).

Top 10 UK goods exports, 2019

	£ billions	% of total
Road vehicles	38.5	10.5%
Power generating machinery & equipment	29.2	8.0%
Petroleum, petroleum products	29.2	7.9%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	27.5	7.5%
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	22.7	6.2%
Gold, non-monetary	18.8	5.1%
Other transport equipment	16.3	4.4%
General industrial machinery & eqp.	15.4	4.2%
Electrical machinery & appliances	14.2	3.9%
Professional, scientific & controlling ins & app n.e.s.	11.2	3.1%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

In 2019, road vehicles were the also UK's single largest import, valued at £58 billion, 11% of all UK goods imports. Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's single largest source of imported road vehicles, accounting for 84% imports; looking at individual countries, it is Germany, which accounted for 34% of UK imports of road vehicles in 2019.

Other British goods imports included non-monetary gold, valued at £56 million (10% of goods exports) and petroleum, valued at £35 billion (7% of goods exports).

Top 10 UK goods imports, 2019

	£ billions	% of total
Road vehicles	57.8	10.6%
Gold, non-monetary	56.3	10.3%
Petroleum, petroleum products	35.4	6.5%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles n.e.s.	25.7	4.7%
Electrical machinery & appliances	24.6	4.5%
Power generating machinery & equipment	24.2	4.4%
Telecomms & sound recording & reproducing app. & eqp	23.4	4.3%
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	22.6	4.1%
Articles of apparel & clothing accessories	20.8	3.8%
General industrial machinery & eqp.	17.7	3.2%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

3.2 Trade in services

In 2019, the UK's single largest service export "other business services", valued at £111 billion; this represented just over a third of all UK service exports. This category includes legal, accounting, advertising, research and development, architectural, engineering and other professional and technical services. Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's largest export market for other business services, accounting for 37% of exports; looking at individual countries, it is the USA, which accounted for 30% of UK exports of other business services in 2019.

Other British service exports included financial services, valued at £59 billion (20% of service exports). Combined, these two categories made up just over half of all UK service exports.

UK service exports, 2019

	£ billions	% of total
Other Business Services	111.0	34.9%
Financial	59.2	18.6%
Travel	41.3	13.0%
Transportation	28.9	9.1%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	21.4	6.7%
Insurance and Pension	19.9	6.3%
Intellectual property	16.7	5.3%
Personal, Cultural and Recreational	6.0	1.9%
Construction	3.9	1.2%
Maintenance and Repair	3.3	1.0%
Government	3.2	1.0%
Manufacturing	2.8	0.9%

Source: ONS

In 2019, the UK's single largest service import was other business services, which made up 33% of UK service imports.

Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's single largest source of imported other business services, accounting for 40% imports; looking at individual countries, it is the USA, which accounted for 30% of UK imports of other business services in 2018.

UK service imports, 2019

	£ billions	% of total
Other Business Services	74.4	34.2%
Travel	56.3	25.9%
Transportation	28.6	13.2%
Financial	18.1	8.3%
Intellectual property	12.5	5.8%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	11.0	5.1%
Personal, Cultural and Recreational	4.9	2.3%
Government	3.6	1.7%
Construction	2.6	1.2%
Insurance and Pension	2.6	1.2%
Maintenance and Repair	1.4	0.6%
Manufacturing	1.3	0.6%

Source: ONS, Pink Book

4. Top 25 trading partners

The UK's top 25 trading partners in 2019 are shown in the two tables below.

- The USA is by some way the UK's largest export market if attention is limited to individual countries, rather than trading blocs like the EU. Exports to the US were £141 billion in 2018, 21% of all UK exports.
- Germany was the second largest export market in 2019 at £56 billion, less than half those to the US.
- 11 of the UK's top 25 export markets in 2019 were EU member states.

Top 25 UK export markets, 2019

Goods and services

	£ billion	% total
USA	141.9	20.5%
Germany	55.7	8.1%
Netherlands	41.8	6.0%
France	40.4	5.8%
Irish Republic	40.0	5.8%
China	30.4	4.4%
Switzerland	23.6	3.4%
Italy	20.2	2.9%
Spain	20.0	2.9%
Belgium	17.9	2.6%
Japan	14.7	2.1%
Hong Kong	13.6	2.0%
United Arab Emirates	12.1	1.8%
Australia	12.0	1.7%
Canada	11.5	1.7%
Singapore	10.7	1.6%
Sweden	10.0	1.4%
Saudi Arabia	7.9	1.1%
India	7.8	1.1%
Poland	7.7	1.1%
Turkey	7.7	1.1%
Norway	7.4	1.1%
South Korea	6.8	1.0%
Denmark	6.6	1.0%
Luxembourg	5.4	0.8%

Source: ONS

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- The USA was the UK's largest source of imports in 2019, with imports of £90 billion, 13% of all UK imports.
- Germany was the second largest source of imports at £78 followed by the Netherlands at £52 billion.
- 11 of the UK's top 25 sources of imports in 2019 were EU member states.

Top 25 UK import markets, 2019

Goods and services

	£ billion	% total
USA	90.2	12.5%
Germany	77.9	10.8%
Netherlands	51.6	7.1%
China	49.2	6.8%
France	45.3	6.3%
Spain	32.0	4.4%
Irish Republic	30.0	4.2%
Belgium	28.6	4.0%
Italy	25.5	3.5%
Norway	17.7	2.5%
India	15.7	2.2%
Japan	15.4	2.1%
Poland	14.6	2.0%
Switzerland	13.5	1.9%
Sweden	12.3	1.7%
Canada	10.9	1.5%
Turkey	10.9	1.5%
Hong Kong	10.0	1.4%
Russia	9.6	1.3%
Denmark	8.1	1.1%
United Arab Emirates	7.2	1.0%
Czech Republic	6.9	1.0%
Singapore	6.9	1.0%
Australia	6.5	0.9%
South Africa	6.1	0.8%

Source: ONS

5. The EU

In 2019:

- The UK exported £294 billion of goods and services to other EU member states, 43% of all UK exports; imports from the EU were worth £374 billion, 53% of all UK imports.
- The UK recorded a trade surplus in services with the EU of £18 billion. This was more than outweighed by a deficit in goods of -£131 billion.
- Overall, the UK had a trade deficit of -£79 billion with the EU but a surplus of £49 billion with non-EU countries.
- The UK's trade deficit with the EU was equal to -3.6% of UK GDP, down from a high of -3.7% in 2016. The UK's trade surplus with non-EU countries was equal to 2.2% of UK GDP, up from a high of 2.0% in 2019.

UK trade with EU and non-EU countries, 2019

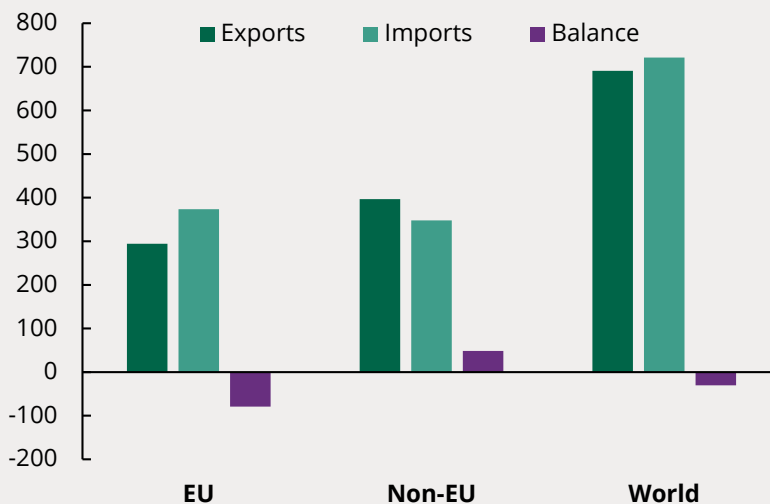
Goods and services

	Exports		Imports		Balance
	£ billion	%	£ billion	%	£ billion
EU	294.3	42.6%	373.5	51.8%	-79.2
Non-EU	396.5	57.4%	347.8	48.2%	48.7
Total	690.8	100.0%	721.3	100.0%	-30.5

Source: ONS

UK trade with EU and non-EU countries, 2019

Goods and services, £ billions

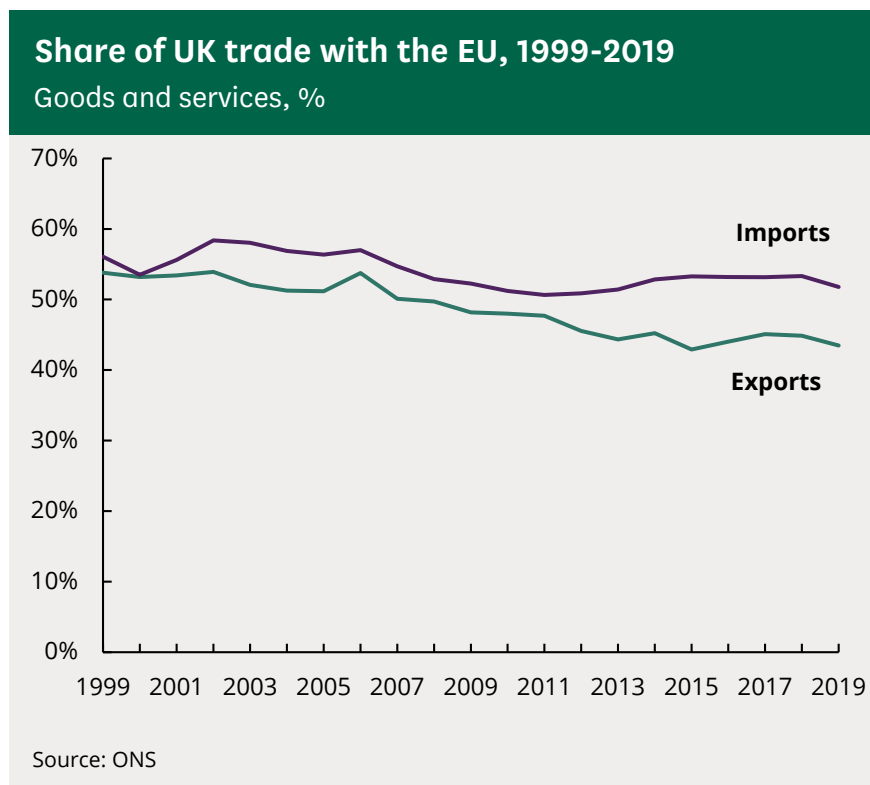


Source: ONS

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The share of UK exports going to the EU has declined gradually in recent years:

- In 2006, the EU accounted for 54% of all UK exports. By 2015, this had fallen to 42%, before rising to 45% in 2018.
- The picture on imports is slightly less clear. In 2002, 58% of UK imports were from the EU. Between 2014 and 2018, this remained at around 53%, falling to 51% in 2019.
- The overall fall in the UK's share of exports to the EU has been more pronounced in goods than in services.



The table in the Appendix shows UK trade with each of the 27 EU member states in 2019 - the UK had a trade deficit with 16 of these countries, a surplus with 6 and was broadly in balance with 5.

5.1 The Rotterdam effect

All of these figures do not account for what is known as the Rotterdam effect – this is the theory that the UK's trade with the Netherlands is artificially inflated owing to goods being dispatched to or arriving from the port of Rotterdam, even if the original source or eventual destination country is elsewhere.

This will also have a potential knock-on effect, as some trade recorded with the Netherlands, and thus the EU, may ultimately be with non-EU countries.

The scale of this effect is not known - a 2015 ONS article on the subject states:

There are legitimate, proven reasons as to why trade with the Netherlands is high, even relative to its population. It is also

reasonable to assume that trade with the Netherlands suffers from an element of distortion. However, it is not possible to estimate, with any certainty, the impact that the Rotterdam effect has on UK Trade with the Netherlands and its subsequent impact on UK Trade with EU and non-EU countries.²

Even if a high proportion of recorded UK trade with the Netherlands is with non-EU countries, the EU remains the UK's largest trading partner by a considerable margin.

For more information on trade with the EU, see the Library briefing [Statistics on UK trade with the EU](#).

² ONS, [UK Trade in Goods estimates and the 'Rotterdam Effect'](#), 6 February 2015

6. China, India and the US

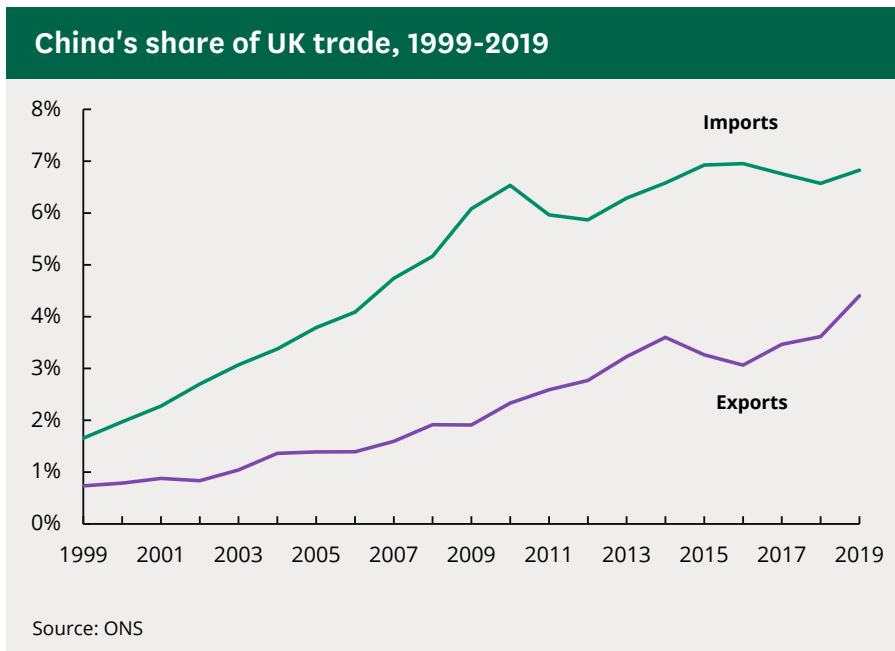
Trade with China has expanded rapidly over recent years.

UK exports to China were £30 billion in 2019 – this was an increase of 27% on 2018. In 2019, China accounted for 4% of UK exports, compared with less than 1% in 1999.

Imports from China have increased even more rapidly, reaching £49 billion in 2019, up from £45 billion in 2018. China now accounted for 7% of UK imports, compared with 2% in 1999.

Overall, the UK recorded a trade deficit with China of -£19 billion in 2019 – a surplus in services of £3 billion was more than offset by a deficit in goods of -£22 billion.

For more information on UK trade with China, see the Library briefing [Statistics on UK trade with China](#).

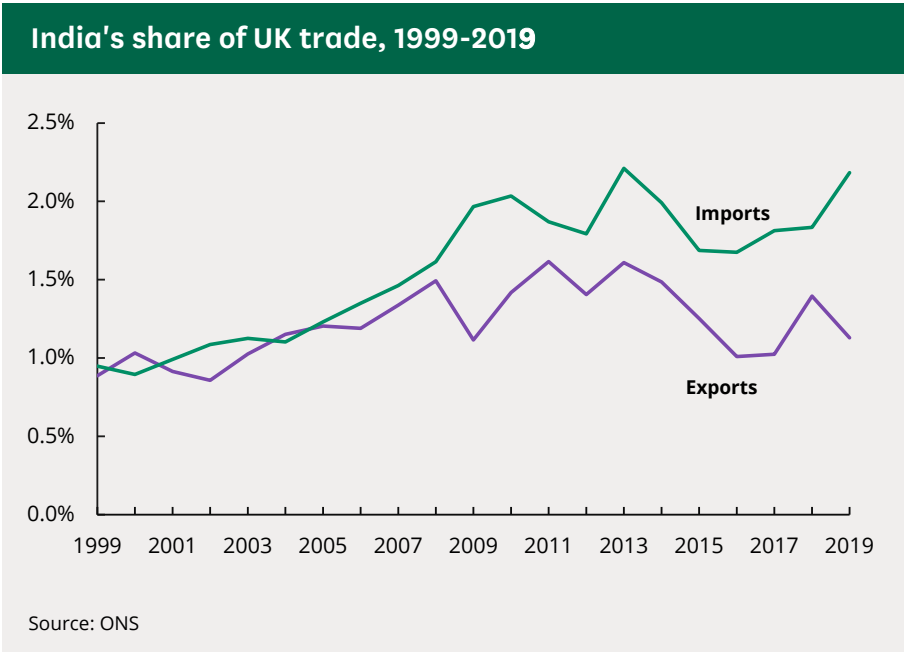


Trade with India has also increased, although less rapidly than with China.

UK exports to India were worth £8 billion 2018, down from £9 billion in 2018. UK imports from India were worth £16 billion, up from £13 billion in 2018 and their highest level on record.

India accounted for just over 1% of UK exports in 2019, down around 1.5% in 2018. India accounted for just over 2% of UK imports in 2018 – this has remained fairly consistent over the last ten years.

Overall, the UK recorded a trade deficit with India of -£8 billion in 2019, with a deficit in goods of -£4 billion and a deficit in services of -£4 billion.

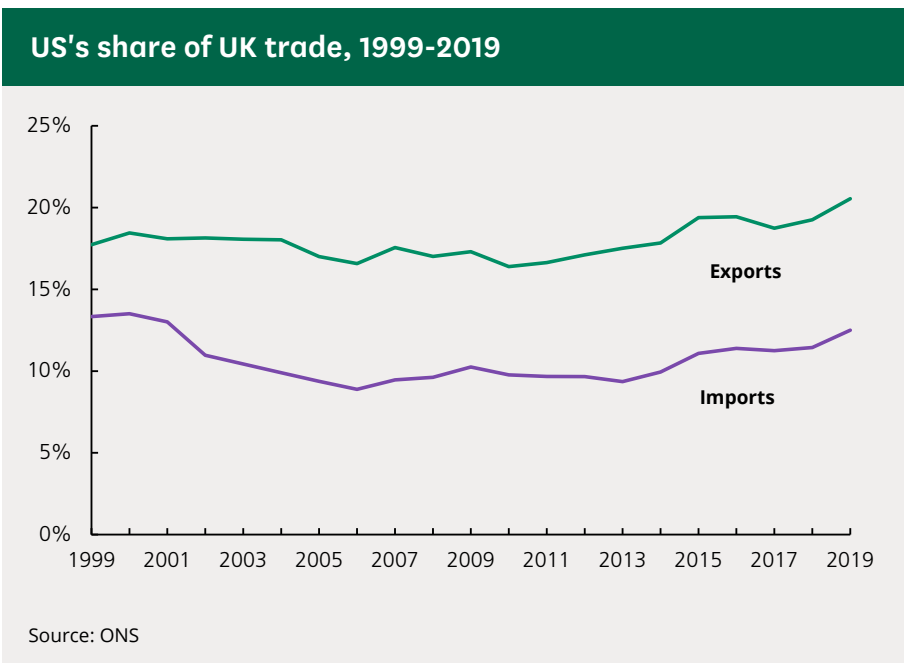


The USA is the UK's largest single trading partner - in 2019 the USA was the UK's single largest export market (accounting for just over a fifth of all UK exports) and largest source of imports.

UK exports to the USA were worth £142 billion in 2019, up from £127 billion in 2018. In 2019, the USA accounted for 20.5% of UK exports – this share has remained fairly consistent over the last 20 years.

Imports from the USA were worth £90 billion in 2019, up from £79 billion in 2018, with the USA accounting for 13% of UK imports. Over the last 20 years, UK imports from the USA have fluctuated between 9% and 14% of all UK imports.

Overall, the UK recorded a trade surplus with the USA of £52 billion in 2019, with a surplus of £15 billion in goods and £37 billion in services.



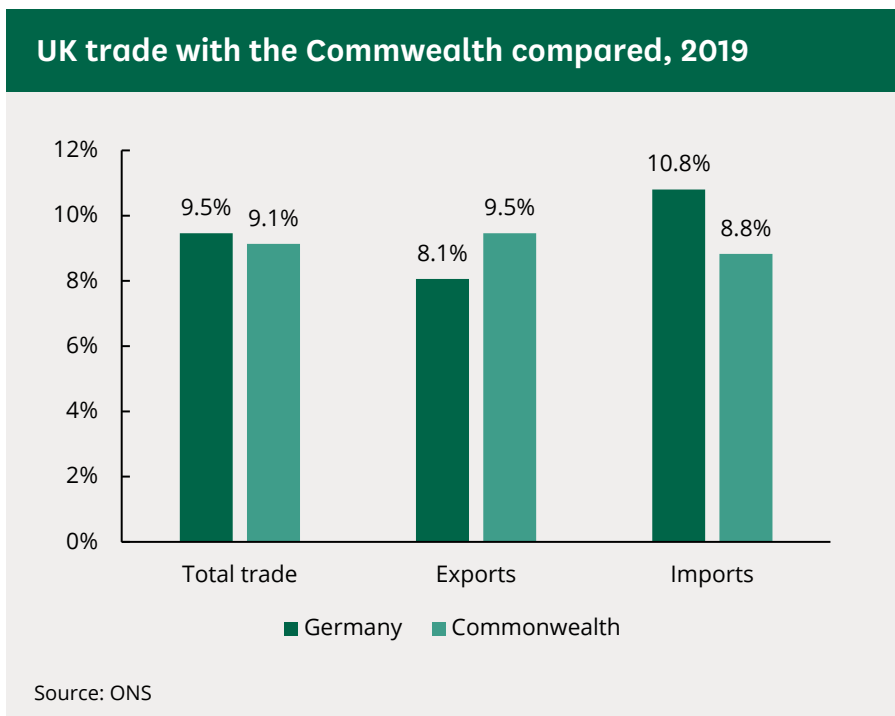
7. Trade with the Commonwealth

There are 52 members of the Commonwealth besides the UK. These vary greatly in size from G20 economies such as Australia, Canada, India and South Africa to very small economies such as Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Nauru. Two Commonwealth states are also members of the EU – Cyprus and Malta.

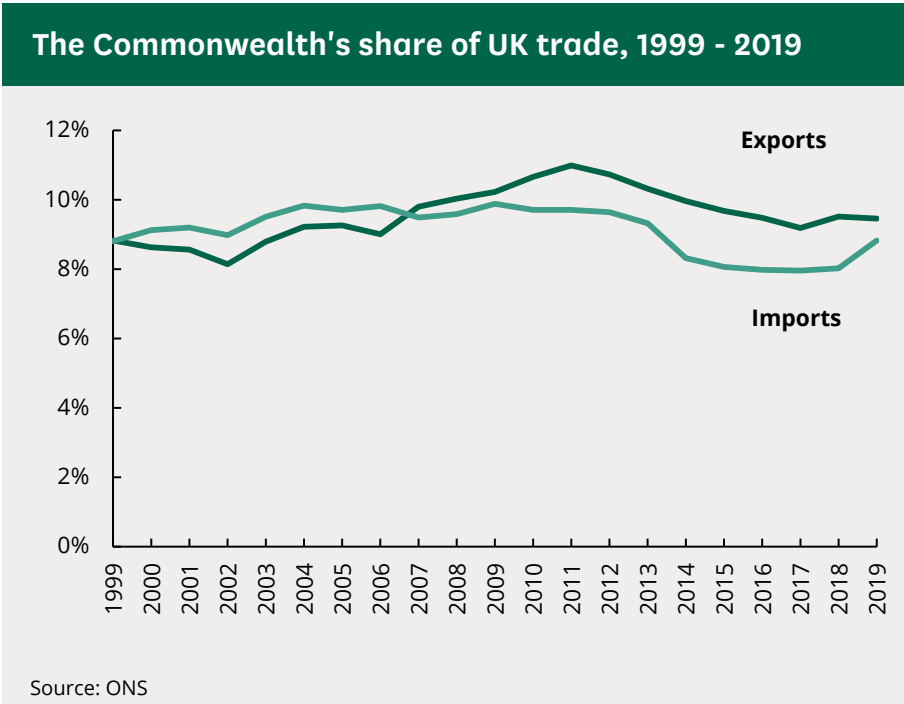
In 2019, UK exports of goods and services to the Commonwealth were £65 billion (9% of all UK exports) while imports were £64 billion (9% of all UK imports) resulting in a trade surplus of £1 billion – a deficit in goods of -£7 billion was more than offset by a surplus in services of £8 billion.

The UK has now recorded a trade surplus with the Commonwealth every year since 2010.

UK trade with the Commonwealth is roughly the same as UK trade with Germany – in 2019 Germany accounted for 9.5% of the UK's total trade (i.e. the combined of exports and imports), while the Commonwealth accounted for 9.1%; the Commonwealth accounted for a slightly higher percentage of UK exports than Germany, while Germany accounted for a slighter higher percentage of UK imports than the Commonwealth.



The chart below shows UK trade with Commonwealth since 1999 – over the last twenty years, the Commonwealth has accounted for between 9%-11% of UK exports and between 8%-10% of UK imports.



The UK's trade with the Commonwealth is heavily focussed on a small number of countries - five countries (Australia, Canada, India, Singapore and South Africa) accounted for 72% of UK exports to Commonwealth countries and 73% of UK imports from the Commonwealth in 2019.

The table below shows the 10 largest Commonwealth export markets for the UK in 2019.

- Australia was the UK's largest Commonwealth market - UK exports to Australia were £12 billion in 2019, 18% of all UK exports to the Commonwealth and 2% of all UK exports.
- Canada was the UK's second largest export market in the Commonwealth, followed by Singapore.

UK's largest Commonwealth export markets, 2019

	£ billions	% C'wealth	% world
Australia	12.0	18.4%	1.7%
Canada	11.5	17.6%	1.7%
Singapore	10.7	16.4%	1.6%
India	7.8	11.9%	1.1%
South Africa	4.7	7.2%	0.7%
Malaysia	2.7	4.1%	0.4%
Nigeria	2.5	3.8%	0.4%
Malta	2.0	3.1%	0.3%
Cyprus	1.8	2.7%	0.3%
New Zealand	1.7	2.6%	0.2%

Source: ONS

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The equivalent data for imports are shown in the table below.

- The UK imported more from India than any other Commonwealth country in 2019 - UK imports from India were £16 billion, just under a quarter of all UK imports from the Commonwealth and 1.5% of all UK imports.
- Canada was the UK's second largest source of imports in the Commonwealth, followed by Singapore and Australia.

UK's largest sources of Commonwealth imports, 2019

	£ billions	% C'wealth	% world
India	15.7	24.7%	1.5%
Canada	10.9	17.1%	1.0%
Singapore	6.9	10.8%	0.9%
Australia	6.5	10.3%	0.8%
South Africa	6.1	9.6%	0.4%
Bangladesh	3.2	5.0%	0.4%
Malaysia	2.6	4.1%	0.3%
Pakistan	1.9	3.1%	0.2%
Nigeria	1.8	2.8%	0.2%
New Zealand	1.2	1.9%	0.2%

Source: ONS

For more information on UK-Commonwealth trade see the House of Commons Library briefing [Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth](#).

8. Appendix 1, UK trade by trading partner

UK trade in goods and services by trading partner, 2019					
	Exports		Imports		Balance
	£ billion	% exports	£ billion	% imports	£ billion
Europe					
EU	294.3	42.6%	373.5	51.8%	-79.2
EFTA	32.0	4.6%	32.0	4.4%	-0.1
Other Europe	24.0	3.5%	29.1	4.0%	-5.1
Total Europe	350.2	50.7%	434.6	60.2%	-84.4
Americas					
Canada	11.5	1.7%	10.9	1.5%	0.6
United States of America	141.9	20.5%	90.2	12.5%	51.7
Total Americas	171.3	24.8%	114.6	15.9%	56.7
Asia					
China	30.4	4.4%	49.2	6.8%	-18.8
Hong Kong	13.6	2.0%	10.0	1.4%	3.6
India	7.8	1.1%	15.7	2.2%	-7.9
Japan	14.7	2.1%	15.4	2.1%	-0.7
Singapore	10.7	1.6%	6.9	1.0%	3.8
South Korea	6.8	1.0%	5.0	0.7%	1.8
Total Asia	136.7	19.8%	147.4	20.4%	-10.6
Australasia & Oceania					
Australia	12.0	1.7%	6.5	0.9%	5.5
New Zealand	1.7	0.2%	1.2	0.2%	0.5
Total Australasia & Oceania	14.0	2.0%	8.0	1.1%	6.0
Total Africa	18.5	2.7%	16.7	2.3%	1.8
World total	690.8	100.0%	721.3	100.0%	-30.5

Source: ONS

9. Appendix 2, UK-EU trade by member state

UK trade with EU Member States, 2019

Goods and services

	Exports		Imports		Balance
	£ billion	% all UK exports	£ billion	% all UK exports	£ billion
Austria	3.1	0.4%	5.4	1.4%	-2.3
Belgium	17.9	2.6%	28.6	7.7%	-10.7
Bulgaria	0.9	0.1%	1.5	0.4%	-0.6
Croatia	0.4	0.1%	0.8	0.2%	-0.4
Cyprus	1.8	0.3%	1.1	0.3%	0.7
Czech Republic	3.4	0.5%	6.9	1.8%	-3.6
Denmark	6.6	0.9%	8.1	2.2%	-1.5
Estonia	0.3	0.0%	0.3	0.1%	0.0
Finland	3.2	0.5%	3.1	0.8%	0.1
France	40.4	5.8%	45.3	12.1%	-4.9
Germany	55.7	8.0%	77.9	20.9%	-22.3
Greece	2.5	0.4%	3.6	1.0%	-1.0
Hungary	2.1	0.3%	4.7	1.3%	-2.6
Ireland	40.0	5.7%	30.0	8.0%	10.0
Italy	20.2	2.9%	25.5	6.8%	-5.3
Latvia	0.5	0.1%	1.0	0.3%	-0.5
Lithuania	0.8	0.1%	1.3	0.4%	-0.5
Luxembourg	5.4	0.8%	3.8	1.0%	1.6
Malta	2.0	0.3%	0.7	0.2%	1.3
Netherlands	41.8	6.0%	51.6	13.8%	-9.8
Poland	7.7	1.1%	14.6	3.9%	-6.9
Portugal	3.2	0.5%	5.7	1.5%	-2.5
Romania	2.5	0.4%	4.0	1.1%	-1.5
Slovakia	1.5	0.2%	3.3	0.9%	-1.8
Slovenia	0.4	0.1%	0.5	0.1%	0.0
Spain	20.0	2.9%	32.0	8.6%	-12.1
Sweden	10.0	1.4%	12.3	3.3%	-2.2
Total EU28	294.3	42.1%	373.5	100.0%	-79.2

Source: ONS

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