



BRIEFING PAPER

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Statistics on UK trade with Ireland

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UK trade with Ireland: a summary

UK trade in goods and services with Ireland, 2019 (£ bn)



The UK recorded a trade surplus of £10.0 billion with Ireland in 2019.

UK exports of goods and services to the Ireland were worth £40.0 billion (5.8% of all UK exports), while imports were worth £30.0 billion (4.2% of all UK exports).

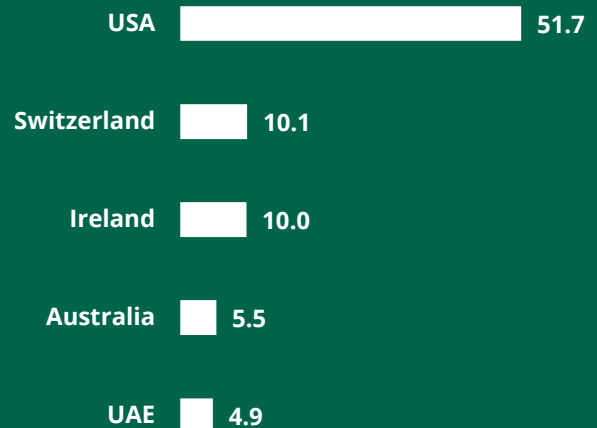
The UK recorded a trade surplus with Ireland in both goods and services and has done every year since 1999.

The UK trade surplus with Ireland was the UK's second largest trade surplus in 2019.

Ireland was one of six EU countries the UK had a trade surplus with in 2019 - the remaining five were Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Finland and Estonia.

Overall, Ireland was the UK's fifth largest export market and seventh largest source of imports.

The UK's five largest trade surpluses 2019 (£ bn)



Trade in goods with Ireland compared, 2019 (% of total, trade in goods)



Northern Ireland's trade with the Republic of Ireland is particularly pronounced.

In 2019, 35% of Northern Ireland's goods exports were to the Republic of Ireland (compared to 6% for the UK as a whole) while 29% of Northern Ireland's goods imports were from the Republic of Ireland (compared to 3% for the UK as a whole).

1. Key Statistics

In 2019:

- UK exports of goods and services to Ireland were worth £40.0 billion, down slightly from £40.4 billion in 2018. This is the first year on year fall in British exports to Ireland since 2015.
- UK imports of goods and services from Ireland in 2019 were £30.0 billion, down slightly from £30.3 billion in 2018.
- The UK's trade surplus with Ireland was £10.0 billion in 2019, down slightly from £10.1 billion in 2018. The UK recorded a trade surplus with Ireland in both goods and services.
- The UK's trade surplus with Ireland was the UK's third highest trade surplus, after the surplus with the United States and Switzerland. Ireland was one of six EU states the UK had a trade surplus with – the other five were with Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus, Finland and Estonia.

UK trade with Ireland, 2019 (£ billions)			
	Exports	Imports	Balance
Goods	21.9	13.8	8.1
Services	18.1	16.2	1.9
Total	40.0	30.0	10.0

Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

Looking at trade in goods only, the UK exported £21.9 billion to Ireland in 2019, a record high. UK imports of goods from Ireland were £13.8 billion, up slightly from 2018, resulting in a trade surplus of £8.1 billion.

The UK had a surplus of £1.9 billion on trade in services with Ireland in 2019, exporting £18.1 billion of services to Ireland and importing £16.2 billion. UK imports of services from Ireland reached a record high in 2018 of £16.8, falling slightly in 2019.

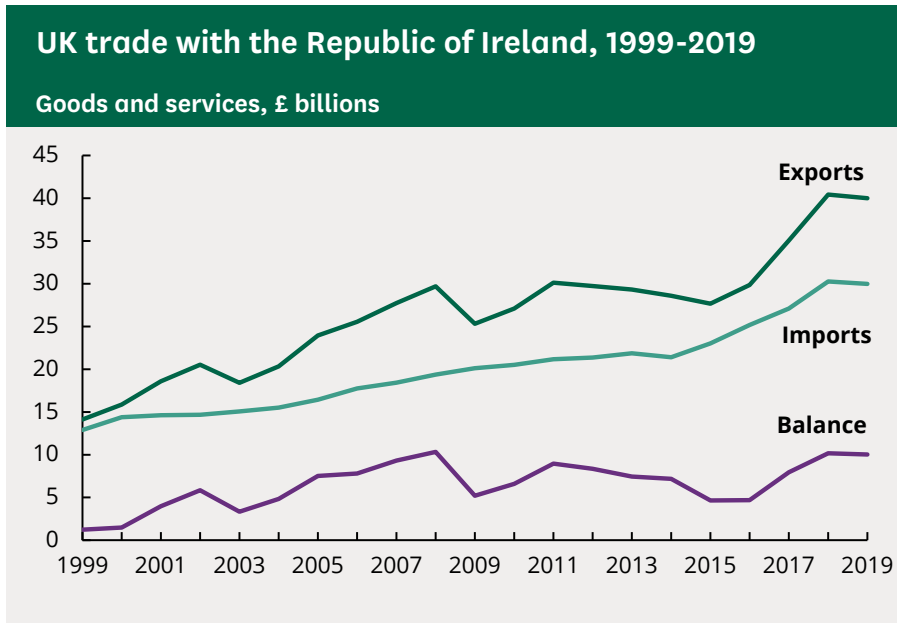


Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

The UK has now recorded an overall trade surplus with Ireland every year since 1999.

The UK's largest overall trade surplus with Ireland over this period was £10.2 billion in 2018.

In cash terms, UK exports to Ireland have increased from £14.1 billion in 1999; imports from Ireland have increased from £12.9 billion – details on UK with Ireland since 1999 are available in [the Appendix](#).



Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

2. International context

In 2019, Ireland was the UK's fifth largest export market and seventh largest source of imports.

UK top 10 trading partners 2019, goods and services

Exports	£ bns	% total	Imports	£ bns	% total
USA	141.9	20.5%	USA	90.2	12.5%
Germany	55.7	8.1%	Germany	77.9	10.8%
Netherlands	41.8	6.0%	Netherlands	51.6	7.1%
France	40.4	5.8%	China	49.2	6.8%
Ireland	40.0	5.8%	France	45.3	6.3%
China	30.4	4.4%	Spain	32.0	4.4%
Switzerland	23.6	3.4%	Ireland	30.0	4.2%
Italy	20.2	2.9%	Belgium	28.6	4.0%
Spain	20.0	2.9%	Italy	25.5	3.5%
Belgium	17.9	2.6%	Norway	17.7	2.5%
EU	294.3	42.6%	EU	373.5	51.8%
World	690.8	100.0%	World	721.3	100.0%

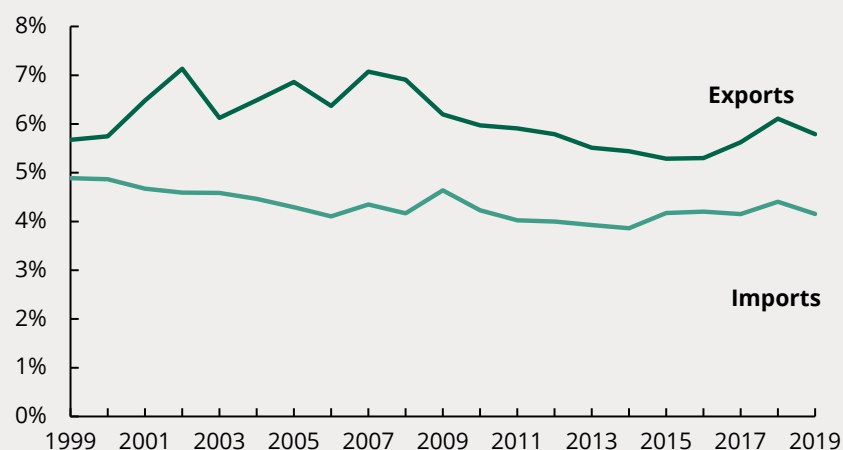
Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

Overall, UK exports to Ireland represented 5.8% of all UK exports and 13.6% of all UK exports to the EU. UK imports from Ireland represented 4.2% of all UK imports and 8.0% of all UK imports from the EU.

UK exports to Ireland were equal to 5.5% of all UK exports in 2019, up slightly from 2018, though UK exports to Ireland as a percentage of total UK exports have generally fallen in recent years, from a high of 7.1% in 2007. UK imports from Ireland as a percentage of all UK imports fell slightly from 4.4% to 4.2%.

UK trade with Ireland as a percentage of total trade

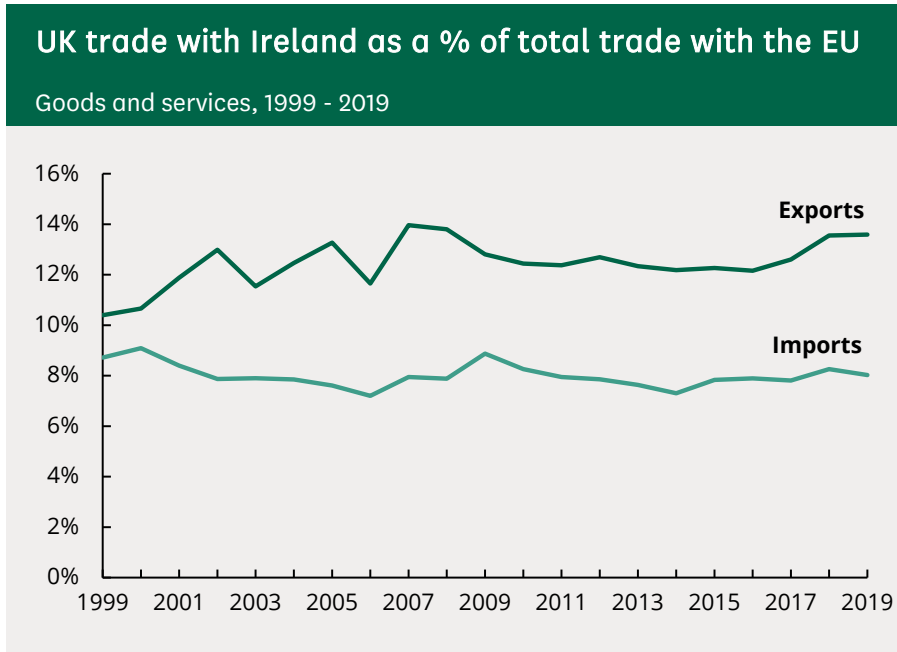
Goods and services, 1999 - 2019



Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

In 2019, UK exports to Ireland accounted for 13.6% of all UK exports to the EU, the highest level since 2008.

UK imports from Ireland as a percentage of all UK imports from the EU have fluctuated in recent years, having generally fallen from a high of 8.9% in 2009.



Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

Ireland was the UK's fourth largest EU export market in 2019 and fifth largest source of EU imports.

3. Trade in goods

3.1 Exports

In 2019, the UK's single largest export to Ireland was petroleum and petroleum products, valued at £2.0 billion; this represented 9.3% of all UK goods exports to Ireland.

Other British goods exports to Ireland included "miscellaneous manufactured articles", valued at £1.4 billion (6.2% of goods exports) – this category includes manufactured plastic goods – and medicinal and pharmaceutical products valued at £1.2 billion (5.5% of all goods exports).

UK goods exports to Ireland, 2019

	£ millions	% of total
Petroleum, petroleum products	2,021	9.3%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	1,359	6.2%
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	1,204	5.5%
Articles of apparel & clothing accessories	1,003	4.6%
Road vehicles	996	4.6%
Office machines & adp machines	981	4.5%
Telecomms & sound recording equipment	837	3.8%
Electrical machinery & appliances	773	3.6%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps	712	3.3%
Cereals & cereal preparations	677	3.1%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

3.2 Imports

In 2019, the UK's single largest import from Ireland was medicinal and pharmaceutical products, valued at £2.2 billion, representing 16.0% of all UK goods imports from Ireland.

UK goods imports from Ireland, 2019

	£ millions	% of total
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	2,196	16.0%
Meat & meat preparations	1,566	11.4%
Dairy products & birds' eggs	827	6.0%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	617	4.5%
Organic chemicals	527	3.8%
Office machines & adp machines	520	3.8%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps	505	3.7%
Electrical machinery & appliances	470	3.4%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	416	3.0%
Live animals	410	3.0%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

Other imports from Ireland included meat, valued at £1.6 billion (11.4% of goods imports), dairy products and eggs, valued at £0.8 billion (6.0% of goods imports) and miscellaneous manufactured articles, valued at £0.6 billion (4.5% of all goods imports).

In 2019, Ireland was the UK's second largest source of imported food and live animals (after the Netherlands), accounting for 11.1% of total food and live animal imports.

4. Trade in Services

4.1 Exports

In 2019, the UK's single largest service export to Ireland was "other business services", valued at £10.3 billion; this represented 54.2% of all UK service exports to Ireland. This category includes legal, accounting, advertising, research and development, architectural, engineering and other professional and technical services.

Other British service exports to Ireland included financial services, valued at £3.1 billion (16.3% of service exports) and travel services, valued at £1.2 billion (6.5% of service exports). Travel services include services provided by hotels and restaurants, travel agencies and tour operators and will include services consumed by a resident of one country in another – for example an Irish tourist staying in a hotel in the UK will count as a British service export; a British tourist staying in an Irish hotel would count as a service import.

UK service exports to Ireland, 2019		
	£ millions	% of total
Other Business Services	10,295	54.2%
Financial	3,102	16.3%
Travel	1,237	6.5%
Intellectual property	1,139	6.0%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	1,015	5.3%
Transportation	968	5.1%
Construction	462	2.4%
Insurance and Pension	282	1.5%
Maintenance and Repair	211	1.1%
Personal, Cultural & Recreational	202	1.1%
Manufacturing	77	0.4%
Government	13	0.1%
Total	19,003	100.0%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

4.2 Imports

In 2019, the UK's single largest service import to Ireland was transportation services (which includes passenger and freight transport), followed by other business services.

Combined, these two categories made up just over three quarters of UK service imports from Ireland.

UK service imports from Ireland, 2019		
	£ millions	% of total
Transportation	7,173	44.2%
Other Business Services	5,612	34.6%
Travel	1,241	7.6%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	853	5.3%
Financial	637	3.9%
Personal, Cultural & Recreational	146	0.9%
Insurance and Pension	64	0.4%
Government	15	0.1%
Total	16,228	100.0%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

5. Regional trade

HMRC publish data on trade for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions. These figures are for trade in goods only – they do not include services.

Northern Ireland accounted for 14.6% of all UK goods exports to Ireland and 16.7% of all UK goods imported from Ireland.

UK goods exports to RoI, 2019		
	£ millions	% of total
Northern Ireland	3,170	14.6%
South East	2,427	11.2%
London	2,349	10.8%
North West	1,791	8.2%
West Midlands	1,783	8.2%
Wales	1,692	7.8%
East	1,639	7.5%
East Midlands	1,330	6.1%
Scotland	1,238	5.7%
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,195	5.5%
South West	813	3.7%
North East	453	2.1%
Unallocated	1,879	8.6%

HMRC, [Regional Trade Statistics](#)

London, the South East and the East of England also had relatively high shares of the UK's trade in goods with Ireland.

UK goods imports from RoI, 2019		
	£ millions	% of total
Northern Ireland	2,297	16.7%
London	1,904	13.9%
East	1,465	10.7%
South East	1,280	9.3%
West Midlands	1,032	7.5%
North West	892	6.5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	705	5.1%
South West	552	4.0%
Scotland	537	3.9%
East Midlands	467	3.4%
Wales	291	2.1%
North East	197	1.4%
Unallocated	2,128	15.5%

HMRC, [Regional Trade Statistics](#)

6. Northern Ireland

Data published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) indicates that in 2018 the total value of Northern Ireland's 'external sales' – i.e. sales of goods and services to the rest of the UK plus exports of goods and services was £21.7 billion.

Of this:

- £10.6 billion (49%) were sales to the rest of the UK
- £11.2 billion (51%) were exports

Of Northern Ireland's exports:

- £4.2 billion (37%) were to the Republic of Ireland, making it Northern Ireland's largest export market (though sales to Great Britain were worth 2.5 times more)
- £2.5 billion (22%) were to the rest of the EU
- £4.5 billion (40%) were to the rest of the world.¹

Northern Ireland's exports were skewed toward goods exports rather than services, with goods accounting for around 60% of Northern Ireland's total exports.

In 2018, the value of Northern Ireland's total purchases – i.e. purchases of goods and services from the rest of the UK plus imports of goods and services was £21.4 billion.

Of this total:

- £13.4 billion (63%) were purchases from the rest of the UK
- £7.9 billion (37%) were imports.

Of Northern Ireland's imports:

- £2.8 billion (36%) were imported from the Republic of Ireland – making it Northern Ireland's single largest source of imports.
- £2.6 billion (33%) were from the rest of the EU (i.e. excluding the Republic of Ireland)
- £2.4 billion (31%) were from the rest of the world.²

Again, Northern Ireland's imports were heavily skewed toward imported goods rather than services, with goods accounting for 88% of Northern Ireland's total imports.

6.1 Trade in goods

Exports

Northern Ireland's goods exports to the Republic of Ireland by type of good are shown in the table below.

¹ NISRA, [Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics](#), December 2019
[Overview of Northern Ireland Trade](#), June 2019

² NISRA, [Overview of Northern Ireland Trade](#), May 2020

NI goods exports to the Republic of Ireland, 2019

	£ millions	% of total
Dairy products & birds' eggs	335.5	10.6%
Road vehicles	213.0	6.7%
Beverages	180.1	5.7%
Meat & meat preparations	168.4	5.3%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	160.1	5.1%
Machinery specialized for particular industries	149.8	4.7%
Cereals & cereal preparations	136.3	4.3%
Manufactures of metal	117.8	3.7%
Feeding stuff for animals	105.0	3.3%
Vegetables & fruit	100.3	3.2%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

Overall, food and live animals made up 31% of all Northern Ireland's goods exports to the Republic of Ireland, followed by machinery and transport equipment, which made up 17%.

35% of Northern Ireland's total goods exports were to the Republic of Ireland (compared to 6% for the UK as a whole).

Imports

Food and live animals made up 38% of all Northern Ireland's goods imports from the Republic of Ireland, followed by chemicals and related products, which made up 16%.

29% of Northern Ireland's total goods imports were from the Republic of Ireland (compared to 3% for the UK as a whole).

NI goods imports from the Republic of Ireland, 2019

	£ millions	% of total
Meat & meat preparations	288.1	12.5%
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	193.7	8.4%
Cereals & cereal preparations	162.4	7.1%
Dairy products & birds' eggs	136.9	6.0%
Non-metallic mineral manufactures	106.6	4.6%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	99.6	4.3%
Vegetables & fruit	82.8	3.6%
Beverages	81.1	3.5%
Machinery specialized for particular industries	74.3	3.2%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps etc	69.2	3.0%

Source: HMRC, [UK Trade Info](#)

7. The Republic of Ireland's trade with the UK

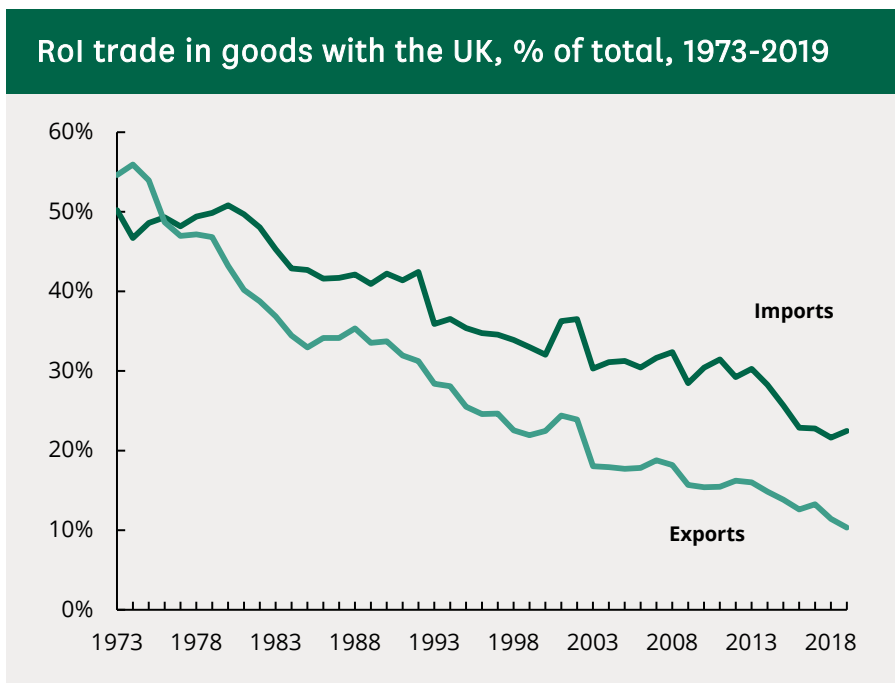
In 2019, the UK was the Republic of Ireland's second largest export market for goods (behind the USA), accounting for 10% of goods exports. Taken as a separate entity, Northern Ireland was the rest of the UK's 12th largest goods export market.

The UK was Ireland's largest source of imported goods, accounting for just under a quarter of Ireland's total goods imports. Taken as a separate entity, Northern Ireland was the rest of the UK's 9th largest source of imported goods.

In 2019, the UK was Ireland's largest export market for services, accounting for 16% of service exports and third source of imported services (after the USA and the Netherlands) accounting for 7% of service imports.³

While the UK remains one of the Republic of Ireland's most important trading partners, Ireland's trade with the UK as a proportion of its total trade has gradually declined over time – in 1953, 91% of the Republic of Ireland's goods exports were to the UK; by 2019, this had fallen to 10%.⁴

The graph below shows the Republic of Ireland's trade in goods with the UK as a percentage of its total trade in goods since 1973.



Source: [Irish Central Statistics Office statistical database](#)

³ Figures taken from the [Irish Central Statistics Office statistical database](#)

⁴ Data from IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics

16 Statistics on UK trade with Ireland

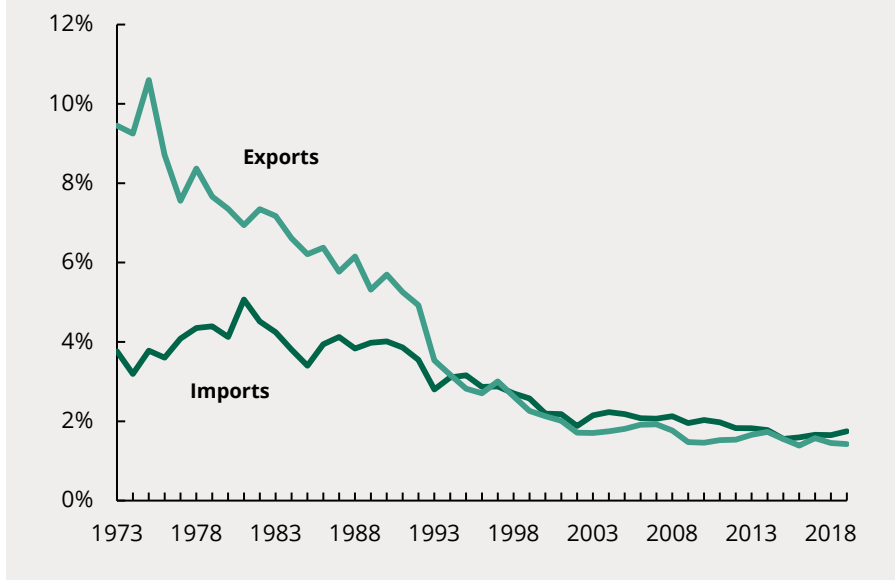
Over this period:

- Irish goods exports to the UK fell from a high of 56% of all goods exports in 1974 to 10% in 2019.
- Goods imports from the UK fell from a high of 51% of total goods imports in 1981 to 22% in 2019.

Similarly, the importance of Republic of Ireland's trade with Northern Ireland has generally declined over this period:

- In 1975, 11% of the Republic of Ireland's goods exports were to Northern Ireland; this fell to just under 1.5% in 2019.
- The proportion of the Republic of Ireland's goods imports coming from Northern Ireland has remained at 2% or lower since 2000, down from a high of 5% in 1981.

ROI trade in goods with NI as % of total, 1973-2019



Source: [Irish Central Statistics Office statistical database](#)

8. Appendix: UK-Ireland trade 1999 - 2019

UK trade with Ireland, 1999 - 2019					
Goods and services					
	Exports		Imports		Balance
	£ billion	% total	£ billion	% total	£ billion
1999	14.1	5.7%	12.9	4.9%	1.2
2000	15.9	5.7%	14.4	4.9%	1.5
2001	18.6	6.5%	14.6	4.7%	4.0
2002	20.5	7.1%	14.7	4.6%	5.8
2003	18.4	6.1%	15.1	4.6%	3.3
2004	20.3	6.5%	15.5	4.5%	4.8
2005	23.9	6.9%	16.4	4.3%	7.5
2006	25.6	6.4%	17.7	4.1%	7.8
2007	27.7	7.1%	18.4	4.3%	9.3
2008	29.7	6.9%	19.4	4.2%	10.3
2009	25.3	6.2%	20.1	4.6%	5.2
2010	27.1	6.0%	20.5	4.2%	6.6
2011	30.1	5.9%	21.2	4.0%	9.0
2012	29.7	5.8%	21.4	4.0%	8.4
2013	29.3	5.5%	21.9	3.9%	7.4
2014	28.6	5.4%	21.4	3.9%	7.2
2015	27.7	5.3%	23.0	4.2%	4.6
2016	29.9	5.3%	25.2	4.2%	4.7
2017	35.0	5.6%	27.1	4.2%	7.9
2018	40.4	6.1%	30.3	4.4%	10.2
2019	40.0	5.8%	30.0	4.2%	10.0

Source: ONS, [Pink Book](#)

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