



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth

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# UK trade with the Commonwealth: a summary



**The UK recorded a trade surplus of £1.7 billion with the Commonwealth in 2019.**

UK exports of goods and services to the Commonwealth were worth £65.4 billion, while imports totalled £63.7 billion.

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

The value of UK exports to the Commonwealth increased by 4% between 2018 and 2019, while the value of imports grew by 15%.

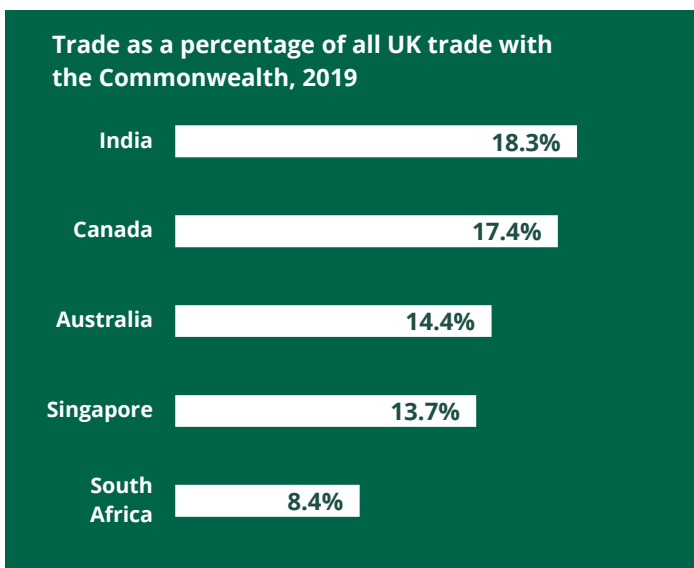
**The Commonwealth accounted for 9.1% of the UK's total trade in 2019 (i.e. the combined value of exports and imports).**

This was around the same as the UK's total trade with Germany - the Commonwealth accounted for a slightly higher percentage of the UK's exports than Germany, while Germany accounted for a slightly higher percentage of the UK's imports than the Commonwealth.



**UK trade with the Commonwealth is heavily concentrated on a small number of countries.**

Combined, India, Canada, Australia, Singapore and South Africa accounted for 69% of the UK's total trade with the Commonwealth in 2019; 44 countries accounted for the remaining 31%.



# 1. Commonwealth membership

Including the UK, there are 54 Commonwealth member states, with a combined population of 2.4 billion. Commonwealth countries vary greatly in size – India accounts for over half of the Commonwealth's population with a population of 1.3 billion. Five Commonwealth countries have a population of under 1 million – Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Nauru, St Kitts and Nevis and Tuvalu; Tuvalu and Nauru are the least populous Commonwealth members, with populations of around 10,000.































Commonwealth countries also vary greatly in their economic development – in 2019, Australia and Singapore had a GDP per capita of over \$50,000 while six Commonwealth countries had a GDP per capita of less than \$1,000.

The vast majority of Commonwealth countries are former British colonies, though some have no historic colonial or constitutional links with the UK – for example, Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975, while Rwanda gained independence from Belgium in 1962.
























16 Commonwealth members states (including the UK) are 'Commonwealth realms', having the Queen as monarch and head of state.

Two Commonwealth states – Cyprus and Malta are also members of the European Union.

## Commonwealth member states

Country	Area	Year joined	Population (millions)	GDP (\$ billions)	GDP per head (\$)
 Antigua and Barbuda	Caribbean and Americas	1981	0.1	1.7	17,195
 Australia	Oceania	1931	24.8	1,387.1	54,348
 Bahamas	Caribbean and Americas	1973	0.4	13.6	35,664
 Bangladesh	Asia	1972	163.2	302.5	1,816
 Barbados	Caribbean and Americas	1966	0.3	5.2	18,139
 Belize	Caribbean and Americas	1981	0.4	1.8	4,498
 Botswana	Africa	1966	2.3	18.5	7,773
 Brunei	Asia	1984	0.4	13.5	29,314
 Cameroon	Africa	1995	24.3	38.9	1,524
 Canada	Caribbean and Americas	1931	36.7	1,736.4	46,272
 Cyprus	Europe	1961	0.9	24.6	28,049
 Dominica	Caribbean and Americas	1978	0.1	0.6	8,305
 Eswatini	Africa	1968	1.1	4.6	4,114
 Fiji	Oceania	*1970	0.9	5.4	6,043
 Gambia	Africa	**1965	2.1	1.8	774
 Ghana	Africa	1957	28.3	67.0	2,221
 Grenada	Caribbean and Americas	1974	0.1	1.2	11,193
 Guyana	Caribbean and Americas	1966	0.8	5.2	6,594
 India	Asia	1947	1,316.9	2,868.9	2,098
 Jamaica	Caribbean and Americas	1962	2.8	15.9	5,826
 Kenya	Africa	1963	46.7	95.4	2,004
 Kiribati	Oceania	1979	0.1	0.2	1,672
 Lesotho	Africa	1966	2.0	2.4	1,185
 Malawi	Africa	1964	19.2	7.7	378
 Malaysia	Asia	1957	32.0	364.7	11,193
 Maldives	Asia	***1982	0.4	5.8	15,505
 Malta	Europe	1964	0.5	15.0	30,374
 Mauritius	Africa	1968	1.3	14.0	11,090
 Mozambique	Africa	1995	29.5	15.2	488
 Namibia	Africa	1990	2.4	12.5	5,072

## Commonwealth member states

Country	Area	Year joined	Population (millions)	GDP (\$ billions)	GDP per head (\$)
 Nauru	Oceania	1968	0.01	0.1	9,365
 New Zealand	Oceania	1931	4.8	205.2	41,667
 Nigeria	Africa	1960	188.7	448.1	2,230
 Pakistan	Asia	****1947	197.3	276.1	1,349
 Papua New Guinea	Oceania	1975	8.3	24.8	2,884
 Rwanda	Africa	2009	11.8	10.1	816
 Samoa	Oceania	1970	0.2	0.9	4,231
 Seychelles	Africa	1976	0.1	1.7	17,127
 Sierra Leone	Africa	1961	7.4	4.2	539
 Singapore	Asia	1965	5.6	372.1	65,234
 Solomon Islands	Oceania	1978	0.6	1.6	2,494
 South Africa	Africa	*****1931	56.5	351.4	5,978
 Sri Lanka	Asia	1948	21.4	84.0	3,852
 St Kitts and Nevis	Caribbean and Americas	1983	0.1	1.1	18,854
 St Lucia	Caribbean and Americas	1979	0.2	2.1	11,803
 St Vincent and the Grenadines	Caribbean and Americas	1979	0.1	0.8	7,464
 Tanzania	Africa	1961	50.0	60.8	1,080
 Tonga	Africa	1970	0.1	0.5	5,151
 Trinidad and Tobago	Caribbean and Americas	1962	1.4	24.1	17,276
 Tuvalu	Oceania	1978	0.01	0.05	4,309
 Uganda	Africa	1962	37.7	36.5	916
 Vanuatu	Oceania	1980	0.3	0.9	3,186
 Zambia	Africa	1964	17.2	24.2	1,318

\* Fiji originally joined the Commonwealth in 1970, before its membership lapsed in 1987. Fiji rejoined the Commonwealth in 1997 and was suspended between 2000-01 and 2009-14

\*\* Gambia withdrew from the Commonwealth in 2013, rejoining in 2018

\*\*\* The Maldives originally joined the Commonwealth in 1982, withdrew in 2016, before rejoining in 2020

\*\*\* Pakistan withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1972, rejoining in 1989. Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth between 1999 and 2004

\*\*\*\* South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961, before being readmitted in 1994

Sources: <http://thecommonwealth.org> and IMF World Economic Outlook database; flag images taken from <http://www.countryflags.com>

## 2. Trade Statistics

In 2019:

- The UK exported £65.4 billion of goods and services to Commonwealth countries and imported £63.7 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of £1.7 billion.
- The UK recorded a trade deficit in goods – UK exports of goods to the Commonwealth were £33.0 billion while imports were £39.5 billion, resulting in a deficit of -£6.5 billion.
- The UK recorded a trade surplus in services – UK exports of services to the Commonwealth were £32.4 billion while imports were £24.2 billion, resulting in a surplus of £8.2 billion.<sup>1</sup>

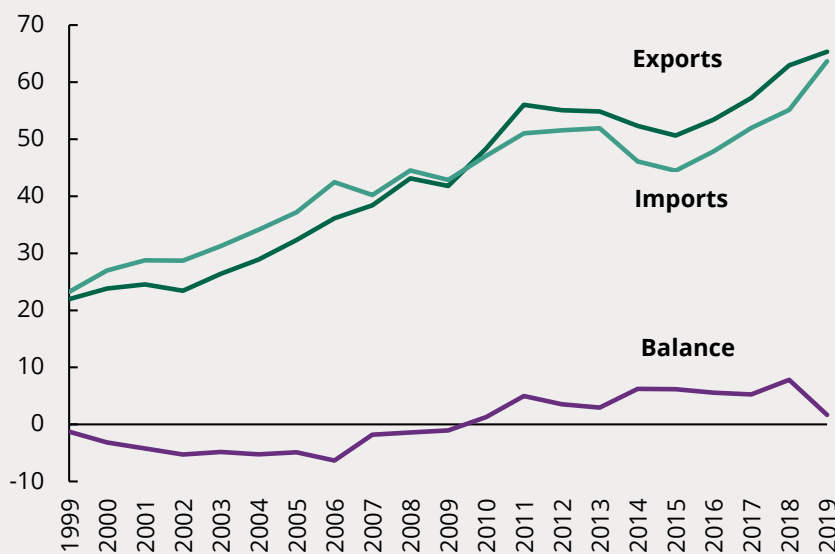
### UK trade with the Commonwealth, 2019 (£ billions)

	Exports	Imports	Balance
Goods	33.0	39.5	-6.5
Services	32.4	24.2	8.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Source: ONS

The UK has now recorded a trade surplus with the Commonwealth every year since 2010 – the largest was £7.8 billion in 2015. The UK has recorded a trade deficit in goods and a trade surplus in services with the Commonwealth every year since 1999.

### UK trade with the Commonwealth, 1999-2019 (£ bns)



Source: ONS

<sup>1</sup> Figures are based on data for 49 of the 53 Commonwealth countries – data are not available for Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu.

## 8 Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth

The UK's trade surplus with the Commonwealth narrowed significantly between 2018 and 2019, from £7.8 billion to £1.7 billion. This is mainly due to a significant increase in the value of imports from the Commonwealth, which increased from £55 billion in 2018 to £64 billion in 2019, an increase of 15%; the value of UK exports to the Commonwealth over the same period increased by 4%.

This growth in the value of imports from the Commonwealth was driven by growth in imports from a small number of high value markets – imports from Australia increased by 37% (from £4.8 billion to £6.5 billion), while imports from India increased by 25% (from £12.6 billion to £15.7 billion).



### 3. International context

In 2019, the Commonwealth accounted for 9.1% of the UK's total trade (i.e. the combined value of exports and imports) – this was around the same as the value of UK trade with Germany, which accounted for 9.5% of the UK's total trade in 2019.

The Commonwealth accounted for 9.5% of the UK's imports in 2019, down from a high of 11.0% in 2011; imports from the Commonwealth accounted for 8.8% of UK imports in 2019, down from a high of 9.9% in 2009.

<b>UK trade with the Commonwealth, 1999-2019</b>				
<b>Goods and services</b>				
	<b>Exports</b>		<b>Imports</b>	
	£ billion	% of total	£ billion	% of total
1999	22.0	8.8%	23.2	8.8%
2000	23.8	8.6%	27.0	9.1%
2001	24.6	8.6%	28.8	9.2%
2002	23.4	8.1%	28.7	9.0%
2003	26.4	8.8%	31.3	9.5%
2004	28.9	9.2%	34.1	9.8%
2005	32.3	9.3%	37.2	9.7%
2006	36.1	9.0%	42.5	9.8%
2007	38.4	9.8%	40.2	9.5%
2008	43.1	10.0%	44.5	9.6%
2009	41.8	10.2%	42.9	9.9%
2010	48.4	10.7%	47.1	9.7%
2011	56.0	11.0%	51.0	9.7%
2012	55.1	10.7%	51.5	9.6%
2013	54.9	10.3%	51.9	9.3%
2014	52.3	10.0%	46.1	8.3%
2015	50.6	9.7%	44.5	8.1%
2016	53.4	9.5%	47.8	8.0%
2017	57.2	9.2%	52.0	8.0%
2018	63.0	9.5%	55.1	8.0%
2019	65.4	9.5%	63.7	8.8%

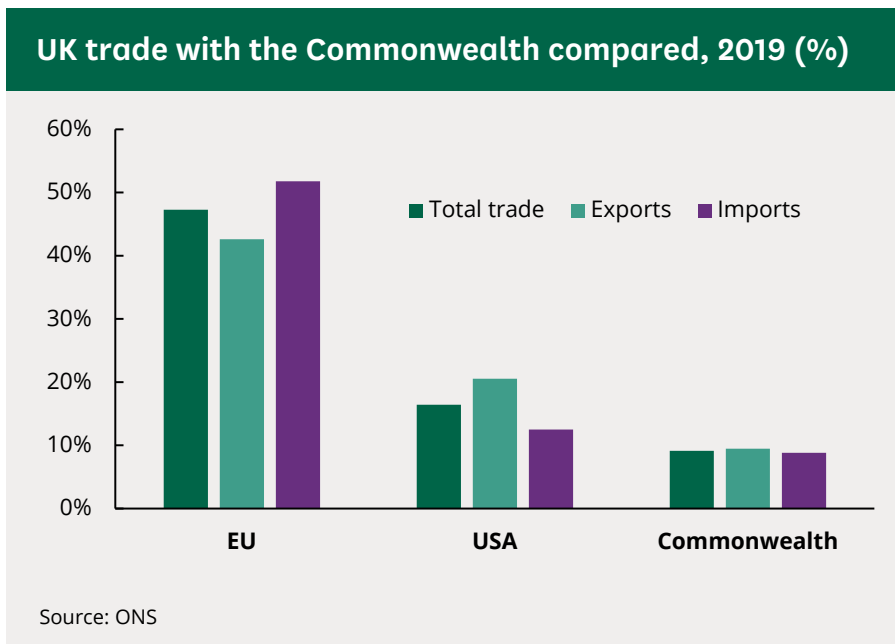
Source: ONS

Taken as a bloc, the EU is the UK's largest export market and source of imports – UK exports to the EU were four and a half times greater than exports to the Commonwealth, while imports from the EU were around six times greater than UK imports from the Commonwealth.

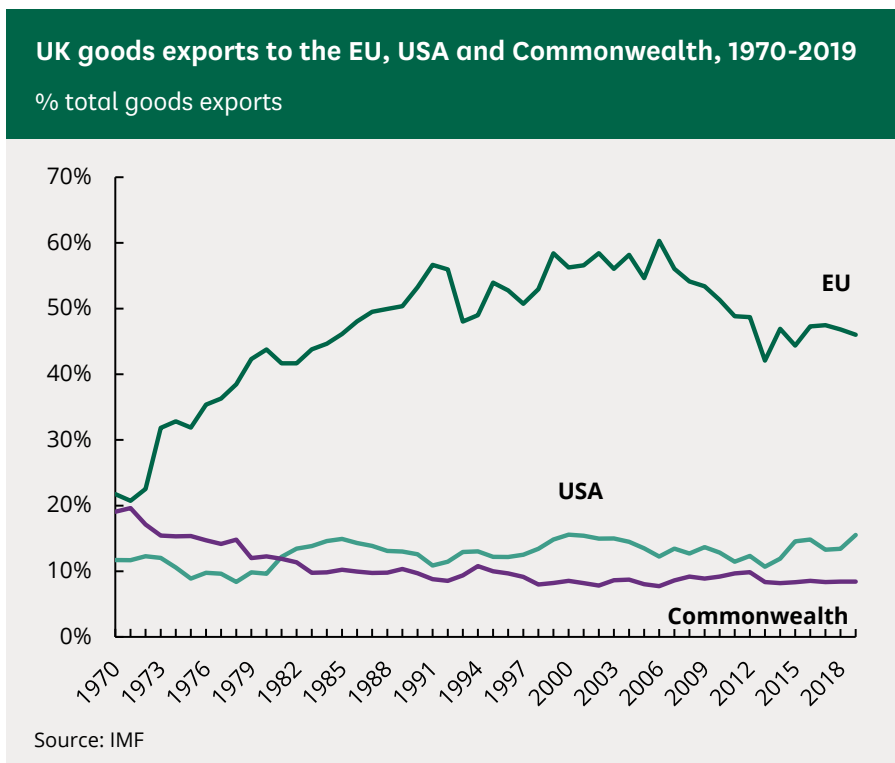
UK exports to the EU represented 42.6% of all UK exports in 2019 (down from a high of 53.7% in 2006); imports from the EU represented 51.8% of all UK imports (down from a high of 58.4% in 2002).

## 10 Statistics on UK trade with the Commonwealth

Looking at individual countries, the USA is the UK's largest export markets and largest source of imports. In 2019, the USA accounted for 20.5% of UK exports and 12.5% of all UK imports.



The graph below shows the change in the importance of the Commonwealth, USA and EU as an export market for the UK (figures are for trade in goods only) since 1970.



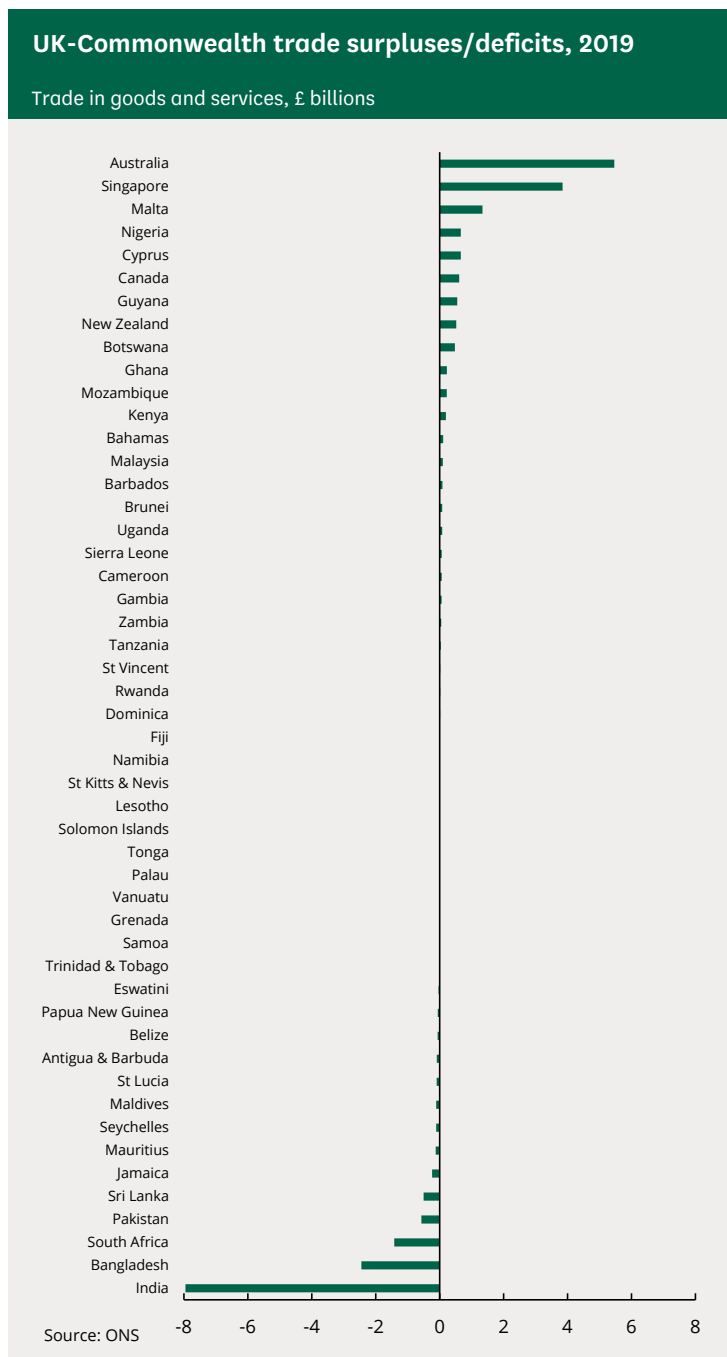
In 1970, the then EEC accounted for 22% of UK goods exports, while the Commonwealth accounted for 19% and the USA for 12%. At this point, the EEC consisted of 6 countries, while the Commonwealth consisted of 31 countries.

In 2019, the EU accounted for 46% of UK goods exports, while the Commonwealth accounted for 9% and the USA for 16%. At this point, the EU consisted of 27 countries, while the Commonwealth consisted of 53 other countries.

## 4. Trade with individual Commonwealth countries

The graph below shows UK trade with 50 of the 53 other Commonwealth member states in 2019 - data are not available for Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu. The UK had a trade surplus with 31 of these countries and a deficit with 19.

The UK's largest Commonwealth trade surplus was with Australia and was worth £5.5 billion, followed by Singapore (£3.8 billion) and Malta (£1.4 billion). The UK's largest Commonwealth trade deficit was with India and was worth -£8.0 billion, followed by Bangladesh (-£2.5 billion) and South Africa (-£1.4 billion).



## 5. Largest Commonwealth trading partners

The tables below show the UK's 10 largest Commonwealth export markets and sources of imports in 2019. UK trade with the Commonwealth is heavily concentrated with a small number of countries – combined, Australia, Canada, Singapore, India and South Africa accounted for 72% of UK exports to the Commonwealth and 73% of UK imports from the Commonwealth.

### UK's largest Commonwealth export markets, 2019

	<b>£ billions</b>	<b>% C'wealth</b>	<b>% world</b>
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

Australia was the UK single largest export market in the Commonwealth in 2019 - UK exports to Australia were £12 billion, around a fifth of UK exports to the Commonwealth and just under 2% of all UK exports.

### UK's largest sources of Commonwealth imports, 2019

	<b>£ billions</b>	<b>% C'wealth</b>	<b>% world</b>
India	15.7	24.7%	2.2%
Canada	10.9	17.1%	1.5%
Singapore	6.9	10.8%	1.0%
Australia	6.5	10.3%	0.9%
South Africa	6.1	9.6%	0.8%
Bangladesh	3.2	5.0%	0.4%
Malaysia	2.6	4.1%	0.4%
Pakistan	1.9	3.1%	0.3%
Nigeria	1.8	2.8%	0.2%
New Zealand	1.2	1.9%	0.2%

Source: ONS

The UK imported more from India than any other Commonwealth country in 2019. UK imports from India were £15.7 billion, just under a quarter of UK imports from the Commonwealth and just over 2% of all UK imports.

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