

Statistical bulletin

Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 2 May 2024

Early data on the UK economy and society. These faster indicators are created using rapid response surveys, novel data sources and innovative methods. These are official statistics in development.

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1 . Main points

- Aggregate UK spending on credit and debit cards decreased by 1% in the latest week, and fell by 8% when compared with the equivalent week of 2023; meanwhile, retail park footfall increased by 3% compared with the previous week, and transactions at Pret A Manger stores increased in 8 of the 10 location categories (Bank of England CHAPS, MRI OnLocation, Pret A Manger). [Section 3: Consumer behaviour](#).
- The total number of online job adverts on 26 April 2024 remained broadly unchanged when compared with the previous week but was 20% below the level seen for the equivalent period of 2023 (Adzuna). [Section 4: Business and workforce](#).
- In March 2024, the year-on-year growth rate for sales in small businesses was at negative 4%, down 11 percentage points from the growth rate in March 2023; the year-on-year growth rate for jobs at small businesses was at 2% and up by 2 percentage points from the rate a year ago (Xero). [Section 4: Business and workforce](#).
- In the last 12 months, 21% of trading businesses with 10 or more employees reported they had exported goods, services, or both; of those, 61% reported they had either exported the same amount, or that their exporting had increased in March 2024 compared with the same month last year; while less than 25% had exported less ([initial results from wave 107 of the Business insights and conditions survey](#)).
- In the week to 28 April 2024, the System Price of electricity increased by 36%, while the System Average Price (SAP) of gas decreased by 4%, when compared with the previous week; both remained lower than the levels seen for the equivalent week of 2023, by 29% and 20%, respectively (Elexon, National Gas Transmission). [Section 5: Energy](#).
- The daily average number of UK flights remained broadly unchanged in the week to 28 April 2024, while the traffic camera activity for cars in London decreased by 2% when compared with the previous week (EUROCONTROL, Transport for London). [Section 6: Transport](#).

These are official statistics in development, and we advise caution when using the data. The data sources used to compile these indicators are regularly reviewed to ensure they are representative and relevant, which may mean indicators change at short notice. Read more in [Section 10: Measuring the data section](#).

2 . Latest indicators at a glance

Notes:

1. Card spending over time is pushed upwards by the impacts of both inflation on value of transactions and cash-to-card conversion.
2. Revolut adjustments to user count are at an aggregate level and as such age bands may not adjust evenly.
3. Indicators with SA in the title have been seasonally adjusted.

[Download the data](#)

3 . Consumer behaviour

UK spending on debit and credit cards: weekly, seasonally adjusted CHAPS-based indicator

These data series are real-time indicators for estimating UK spending on credit and debit cards. They track the daily CHAPS payments made by credit and debit card payment processors to around 100 major UK retail corporates. These payments are the proceeds of recent credit and debit card transactions made by customers at their stores, both via physical and online platforms. More information on the indicator is provided in the accompanying [Guide to the Bank of England's UK spending on credit and debit cards experimental data series](#).

Companies are allocated to one of four categories based on their primary business, we are currently publishing two of those categories:

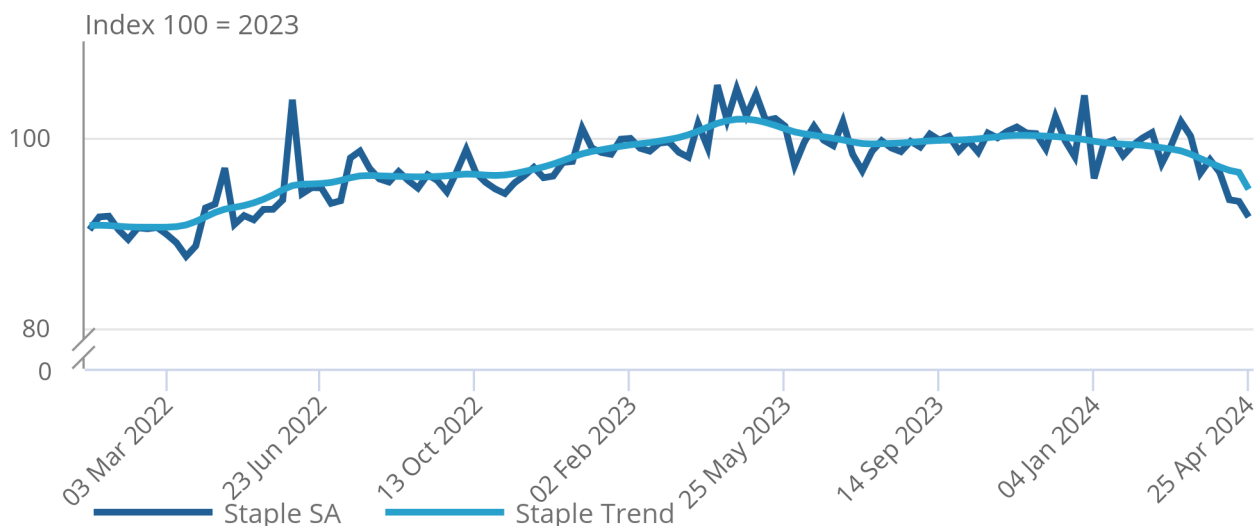
- "delayable" refers to companies selling goods whose purchase could be delayed, such as clothing or furnishings
- "staple" refers to companies that sell essential goods that households need to purchase, such as food and utilities

Figure 1: In the week to 25 April 2024, the “staple” category of CHAPS-based credit and debit card spending decreased by 1% when compared with the previous week, continuing the downward trend in this series

Index of credit and debit card spending on staple goods, seasonally adjusted, nominal prices, UK, week ending 6 January 2022 to week ending 25 April 2024

Figure 1: In the week to 25 April 2024, the “staple” category of CHAPS-based credit and debit card spending decreased by 1% when compared with the previous week, continuing the downward trend in this series

Index of credit and debit card spending on staple goods, seasonally adjusted, nominal prices, UK, week ending 6 January 2022 to week ending 25 April 2024



Source: Calculations from the Office for National Statistics and Bank of England

Notes:

1. Users should note that the weekly payment data show the sum of card transactions processed up to the previous working day, so there is a time lag when compared with real-life events on the chart.
2. Percentage difference is derived from the current and previous index value before rounding.
3. Seasonal adjustment and trend estimates are calculated by the Office for National Statistics using data provided by the Bank of England.
4. Users should note that all series have been re-indexed, using their average value from 2023.

The spending categories, when seasonally adjusted, recorded the following changes in the latest week:

- "aggregate" decreased by 1%
- "delayable" decreased by 2%
- "staple" decreased by 1%

When compared with the same week in 2023, the spending categories, when seasonally adjusted, recorded the following changes:

- "aggregate" decreased by 8%
- "delayable" decreased by 9%
- "staple" decreased by 12%

The weekly and monthly seasonally adjusted CHAPS indices, and the daily and monthly non-seasonally adjusted CHAPS indices, are available in our accompanying [UK spending on credit and debit cards dataset](#).

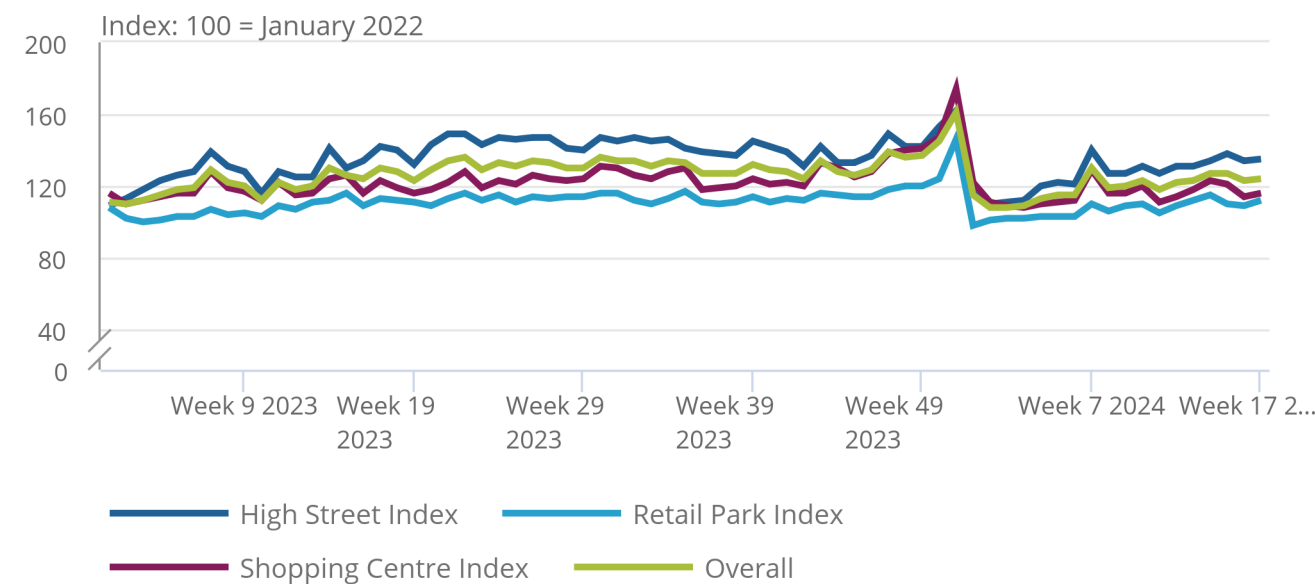
National retail footfall

Figure 2: Retail park footfall in the week to 28 April 2024 increased by 3% when compared with the previous week

Index of daily retail footfall volumes, non-seasonally adjusted, UK, 1 January 2023 to 28 April 2024

Figure 2: Retail park footfall in the week to 28 April 2024 increased by 3% when compared with the previous week

Index of daily retail footfall volumes, non-seasonally adjusted, UK, 1 January 2023 to 28 April 2024



Source: MRI OnLocation (previously known as Springboard)

Notes:

1. The decrease in the final weeks of 2023 and early 2024 is in line with seasonal trends seen in previous years.

Overall retail footfall in the week to 28 April 2024 increased by 1% when compared with the level seen in the previous week, but decreased by 5% when compared with the level seen in the equivalent week of 2023.

All three location categories saw an increase in footfall in the latest week. Retail Park footfall had the largest increase when compared with the level seen in the previous week, increasing by 3%. Meanwhile, shopping centre and high street footfall increased by 2% and 1%, respectively. When compared with the equivalent week of 2023, all three location categories saw a decline in footfall, with the largest fall of 7% seen in high street footfall.

Overall retail footfall increased in 8 of the 12 UK countries and regions when compared with the previous week. The largest increase occurred in Scotland, with a rise of 7% from the level seen in the previous week. Overall retail footfall decreased in two location categories: the North East of England, and Yorkshire and The Humber, falling by 2% and 1%, respectively.

When compared with the equivalent period of the previous year, overall retail footfall decreased in 11 of the 12 UK countries and regions. The only exception was in Scotland where footfall remained unchanged. The largest decrease was seen in Northern Ireland, with a fall of 10%.

Transactions at Pret A Manger

In the week to 25 April 2024, the number of in-store transactions at Pret A Manger stores increased in 8 of the 10 location categories, when compared with the previous week. The largest increases were seen in Scotland, which grew by 7%, followed by London stations and London West End, which both grew by 5%. The only location category to decrease in the week to 25 April 2024 was Yorkshire, which fell by 3%.

Compared with the equivalent week of 2023, the number of in-store transactions at Pret A Manger decreased in all 10 of the location categories. The location category with the largest decrease was Regional towns, falling by 25%, followed by Manchester, with a fall of 16%.

Our accompanying [Transactions at Pret A Manger dataset](#) is available.

4 . Business and workforce

Online job adverts

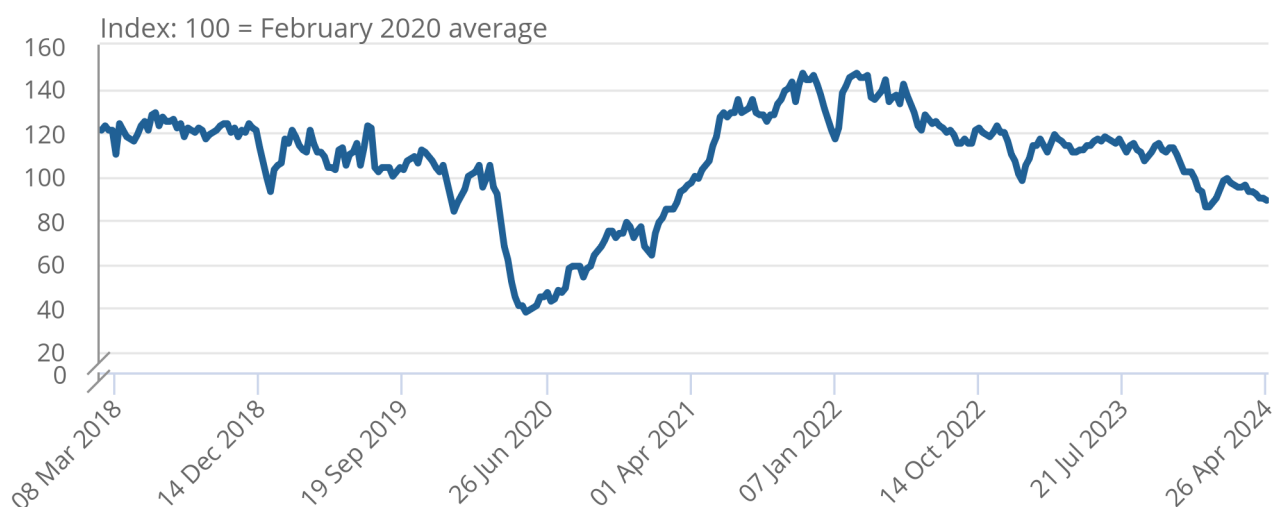
These figures are estimates of online job adverts by category, UK country, and English region, provided by Adzuna, an online job search engine. The number of job adverts over time is an indicator of the demand for labour. The Adzuna categories used do not correspond to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) categories, so these values are not directly comparable with our Vacancy Survey.

Figure 3: The total number of online job adverts on 26 April 2024 was 20% below the level seen in the equivalent period of 2023

Volume of online job adverts, non-seasonally adjusted, UK, 7 February 2018 to 26 April 2024

Figure 3: The total number of online job adverts on 26 April 2024 was 20% below the level seen in the equivalent period of 2023

Volume of online job adverts, non-seasonally adjusted, UK, 7 February 2018 to 26 April 2024



Source: Adzuna

Notes:

1. Further category breakdowns are included in our [Online job advert estimates dataset](#), and more details on the methodology can be found in our [Using Adzuna data to derive an indicator of weekly vacancies: Experimental Statistics methodology](#).
2. Users should note that week-on-week changes in online job advert volumes are outlined as percentages, rather than as percentage-point changes. Percentage change figures quoted in the commentary will therefore not necessarily match the percentage-point changes observed in the chart and our [Online job advert estimates dataset](#).

The number of online job adverts on 26 April 2024 remained broadly unchanged when compared with the previous week. Of the 12 UK countries and English regions, the number of online job adverts decreased in 7, increased in 2 and remained broadly unchanged in 3. The largest week-on-week change was an increase of 3%, which was in Northern Ireland.

When compared with the equivalent period of 2023, the total number of online job adverts fell by 20%, with all regions decreasing. The largest decreases were seen in Scotland and London, falling by 34% and 27%, respectively.

When compared with the equivalent period of 2023, the total number of online job adverts fell in 26 of the 28 job categories and increased in two. The largest decreases were seen in the "Domestic help" and the "Construction and trades" categories, falling by 52% and 47%, respectively.

Our accompanying [Online job advert estimates dataset](#) is available.

Advanced notification of potential redundancies

Calculated as a four-week rolling average, the number of potential redundancies in the week to 21 April 2024 was 14% below the level in the equivalent week of 2023, while the number of employees proposing redundancies was 3% below the level in the equivalent week of 2023.

Comparisons with the equivalent period a year ago help account for any seasonal impacts. For more information, our accompanying [Advanced notification of potential redundancies dataset](#) is available.

Sales and jobs in small businesses

The year-on-year growth rate for sales in small businesses was negative 4% in March 2024. This was 7 percentage points lower than the growth rate in February 2024, and a fall of 11 percentage points when compared to the growth rate in March 2023. Sales growth was weakest in the "retail trade" category at negative 11%; it is possible that this was affected by the Easter weekend falling in March 2024.

The year-on-year growth rate for jobs in small businesses, measured by the number of employees issued a payslip in the month, was 2% in March 2024. This is broadly unchanged from the growth rate in February 2024 but is 2 percentage points higher than the growth rate in March 2023. Jobs growth was strongest in the "healthcare and social assistance" category with an 8% annual growth, and weakest in "administrative and support services" and "education and training", both with a negative 1% annual growth.

Our accompanying [Sales and jobs in small businesses dataset](#) is available.

5 . Energy

System Average Price (SAP) of gas

The System Average Price (SAP) of gas decreased by 4% in the week to 28 April 2024 when compared with the previous week. This was 20% below the level seen in the equivalent week of 2023.

Our accompanying [System Average Price of gas dataset](#) is available.

System Price of electricity

The System Price of electricity increased by 36% in the week to 28 April 2024 when compared with the previous week. This was 29% below the level seen in the equivalent week of 2023.

Our accompanying [System Price of electricity dataset](#) is available.

6 . Transport

Traffic camera activity

The average traffic camera activity for cars in London decreased by 2% in the week to 28 April 2024, when compared with the previous week. Although, in the same period, average pedestrian and cyclist levels in London increased by 3%.

Our accompanying [Traffic camera activity dataset](#) is available.

Daily UK flights

The daily average number of UK flights remained broadly unchanged in the week to 28 April 2024 when compared with the previous week. This number was 4% higher than the number seen in the equivalent week of 2023.

Our accompanying [Daily UK flights dataset](#) is available.

7 . User engagement initial findings

Real Time Indicators ran an engagement survey between 25 January 2024 and 14 March 2024 to better understand the needs of our users. We are still in the process of analysing the responses, but high-level findings show that:

- approximately 75% of respondents visited the bulletin on a weekly basis, with our datasets being the most useful part of our release
- the commentary in the weekly release is read by the majority of our users with 61% of respondents reading the commentary "always" or "sometimes" (33% always, 28% sometimes, 19% rarely, 20% never)
- respondents would like to see more granularity in our data, for example regional breakdowns and spending categories, along with a broader range of indicators

A formal response and an accompanying action plan will be published in due course.

8 . Data

[Online job advert estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 2 May 2024V Weekly snapshot of online job advert indices covering the UK job market. These are official statistics in development. Source: Adzuna

[UK spending on credit and debit cards](#)

Dataset | Released 2 May 2024V Daily, weekly and monthly data showing seasonally adjusted and non-seasonally adjusted UK spending using debit and credit cards. These are official statistics in development. Source: CHAPS, Bank of England

This section lists a selection of the data available in this publication. For the full list of available datasets, please see our [accompanying dataset page](#).

9 . Glossary

Real-time indicator

A real-time indicator provides insights into economic activity using close-to-real-time big data, administrative data sources, rapid response surveys or experimental estimates, which represent useful economic and social concepts.

10 . Measuring the data

Official statistics in development

These statistics are labelled as "official statistics in development". Until September 2023, these were called "experimental statistics". Read more about the change in our [Guide to official statistics in development](#).

We are developing how we collect and produce the data to improve the quality of these statistics. Read more in our [Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators methodology article](#).

Once the developments are complete, we will review the statistics with the Statistics Head of Profession. We will decide whether the statistics are of sufficient quality and value to be published as official statistics, or whether further development is needed. Production may be stopped if they are not of sufficient quality or value. Users will be informed of the outcome and any changes.

We value your feedback on these statistics. Contact us at realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk.

Dataset release dates and intended release frequency

Latest release dates and intended release frequency of our associated datasets are available in the following list. Please note that there may be some change to the intended release frequency due to a variety of reasons. If you would like further information about any of these datasets, please email: realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk.

Weekly data release

- The [UK spending on credit and debit cards dataset](#) was last updated on 2 May 2024.
- The [Revolut spending on debit cards dataset](#) was last updated on 1 February 2024.
- The [Automotive Fuel spending dataset](#) was last updated on 28 March 2024.
- The [Advanced notification of potential redundancies dataset](#) was last updated on 2 May 2024.
- The [System Average price of gas dataset](#) was last updated on 2 May 2024.
- The [System Price of electricity](#) dataset was last updated on 2 May 2024.
- The [Traffic camera activity](#) dataset was last updated on 2 May 2024.
- The [Weekly shipping indicators](#) dataset was last updated on 5 April 2024.
- The [Daily UK Flights](#) dataset was last updated on 2 May 2024.

Fortnightly data release

- The [Transactions at Pret A Manger](#) dataset was last updated on 2 May 2024.

Monthly data release

- The [Monthly Direct Debit failure rate and average transaction amount](#) dataset Was last updated on 14 March 2024.
- The [Value Added Tax, flash estimates](#) dataset was last updated on 18 April 2024.
- The [Renter affordability for new tenancies dataset](#) was last updated on 11 April 2024.
- The [Sales and jobs in small businesses](#) dataset was last updated on 2 May 2024.

11 . Strengths and limitations

These statistics have been produced to provide timely indicators of the effect of developing world events on the UK economy and society, using close-to-real-time big data, administrative data sources, rapid response surveys, or Official Statistics in development.

The data presented in this bulletin are reviewed and refreshed on a regular basis. Indicators are swapped in and out of the publication based on their suitability and availability.

UK coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions

Coronavirus restrictions should be considered when interpreting the data featured throughout this bulletin.

Seasonality

Seasonal fluctuations are likely to be present in many of these indicators so caution must be applied when interpreting changes in series that are not seasonally adjusted.

12 . Related links

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain](#)

Bulletin | Released fortnightly

Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, well-being and shortages of goods from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

[Business insights and impact on the UK economy](#)

Bulletin | Released fortnightly

The impact of challenges facing the economy and other events on UK businesses. Based on responses from the voluntary fortnightly business survey (BICS) to deliver real-time information to help assess issues affecting UK businesses and economy, including financial performance, workforce, trade, and business resilience. These are official statistics in development

13 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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