

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: April and May 2019 provisional results

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and spending by travellers, using provisional passenger traffic data.



Contact:
Giles Horsfield
socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)1633 455731

Release date:
29 August 2019

Next release:
24 September 2019

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Things you need to know about this release](#)
3. [Main trends in visits and spending](#)
4. [Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents](#)
5. [Trends in overseas visits by UK residents \(non-seasonally adjusted\)](#)
6. [Links to related statistics](#)
7. [Quality and methodology](#)

1 . Main points

- There were 3.1 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in April 2019 (8% fewer than in April 2018) and 3.3 million visits in May 2019 (6% fewer than in May 2018).
- Overseas residents spent £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in April 2019 (14% less than in April 2018) and £2.1 billion on visits in May 2019 (1% less than in May 2018).
- UK residents made 6.1 million visits overseas in April 2019 (4% fewer than in April 2018) and 6.2 million visits in May 2019 (the same as in May 2018).
- UK residents spent £3.7 billion on visits overseas in April 2019 (11% more than in April 2018) and £3.7 billion on visits overseas in May 2019 (3% less than May 2018).

2 . Things you need to know about this release

This bulletin presents estimates of overseas visits to and from the UK. An overseas visitor to the UK means a person who, being permanently resident in a country outside the UK, visits the UK for a period of less than 12 months. UK citizens resident overseas for 12 months or more coming home on leave are included in this category. Visits abroad are visits for a period of less than 12 months by people permanently resident in the UK (who may be of foreign nationality).

Overseas travel and tourism quarterly estimates are revised during the processing of the annual dataset. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for the previous year's published quarters can be found in the [latest edition of Travel trends](#).

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has recently transferred outputs from data collected on paper forms to an improved method using tablet computers. Tablet data collection was phased in gradually from September 2017 to April 2018. More [background information about the rollout](#) is available.

The tablets allow us to improve the quality of the IPS data collected. Discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are therefore possible. We have worked with academic experts and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology team to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Further analysis using a longer series of data is required to determine whether there are any discontinuities. Some caution is therefore advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Further methodological changes are planned to the estimates on international visitors in the IPS. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance (that is, large differences in numbers) in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for some nationalities. The new method has been developed in consultation with users and methodological experts, and it is currently being finalised. The new method will be implemented as soon as possible, and the implementation date will be published in advance. A revised back series will also be published at this time.

The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in the [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article, in July 2018.

Please note that while the imbalance work is unlikely to affect long-term migrants in the IPS, we have committed to exploring whether the survey processes that cause the imbalance in international visitor estimates also impact on long-term migration further, as part of the [ONS migration statistics' workplan](#) to understand different migration data sources.

Estimates contained in this bulletin are produced from responses provided by international passengers arriving in and departing from the UK, sampled on our IPS, as outlined in the [International passenger survey Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#) report.

Responses to the survey are scaled up to represent all passengers, using information on total international passenger traffic for the reporting period.

Estimates are based on interviews conducted when passengers end their visit. Any visits commencing in the reported month but not completed until later are not included in estimates for the reported month. The reported expenditure for visits includes any spending associated with the visit (excluding fares) that occur before, during or after the trip.

Parts of the bulletin refer to countries visited abroad. It should be noted that if a UK resident visited more than one country on a trip abroad, the country recorded as visited in this bulletin is the country that was visited for the longest period.

Estimates are subject to sampling error, and confidence intervals are provided to help you interpret the estimates (see Accuracy of IPS estimates in Section 7 for more information). Further guidance is available about the [quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates in the IPS QMI](#) report.

3 . Main trends in visits and spending

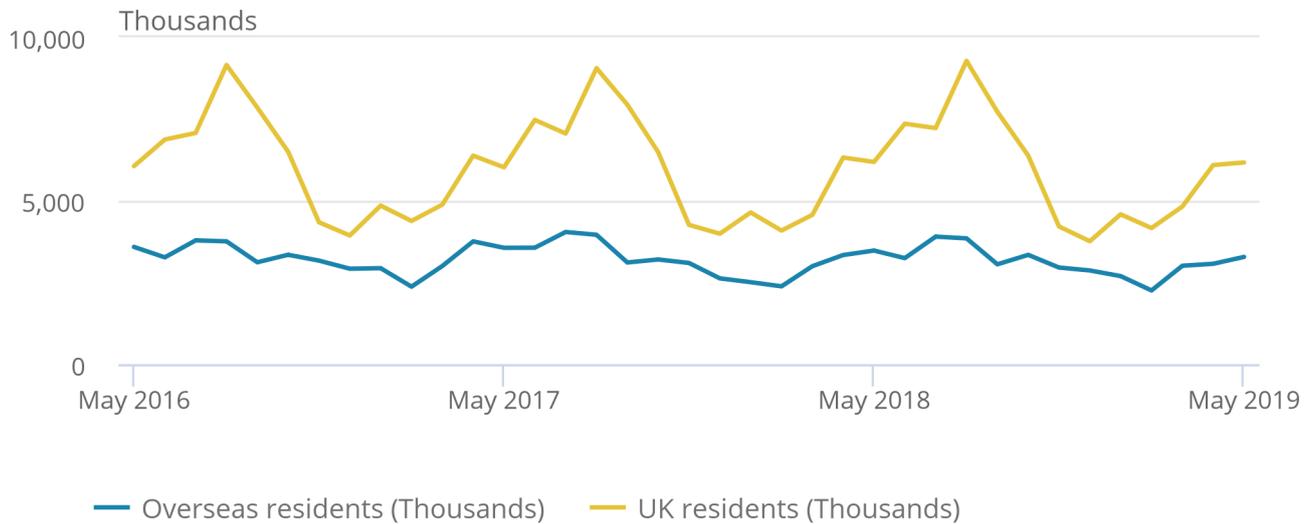
UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK. The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK. The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in the summer. This is the case both for UK residents and overseas residents. However, UK residents show a much sharper peak both in visits and expenditure during the month of August, which is traditionally the only complete month of the UK school summer holidays.

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad are greatest in the summer

Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month from May 2016 to May 2019

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad are greatest in the summer

Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month from May 2016 to May 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 2: Patterns in spending over the year closely track patterns in visits to the UK and visits overseas by UK residents

Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from May 2016 to May 2019

Figure 2: Patterns in spending over the year closely track patterns in visits to the UK and visits overseas by UK residents

Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from May 2016 to May 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

4 . Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 1 – Overseas residents’ visits to the UK by month
- Table 2 – Purpose of overseas residents’ visits to the UK by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

Overseas residents made an estimated 3.1 million visits to the UK in April 2019, which was 8% fewer than in April 2018. Overseas residents spent £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in April 2019, which was 14% less than in April 2018.

Overseas residents made an estimated 3.3 million visits to the UK in May 2019, which was 6% fewer than in May 2018. Overseas residents spent £2.1 billion on visits to the UK in May 2019, which was 1% less than in May 2018.

During the period March to May 2019, there were 9.4 million visits to the UK, which was 5% fewer than the corresponding period a year earlier. Overseas residents spent £5.3 billion in the UK over this period, which was 7% less than the previous year.

Different trends were observed for different areas of the world for this three-month period: there was an increase of 10% in visits from North American residents to 1.2 million, while visits by European residents decreased by 6% to 6.9 million and visits from residents of “other countries” (countries outside Europe and North America) decreased by 7% to 1.2 million.

Considering the reasons for visiting the UK, holiday visits decreased by 6% to 3.8 million for this period, business visits decreased by 5% to 2.2 million, and visits to friends and relatives decreased by 3% to 2.8 million.

Table 1: Main visit and spending estimates for overseas residents' visits to the UK in May 2019

| Overseas residents' visits to UK | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Visits (Thousands) | % change from year earlier | Earnings (£ million) | % change from year earlier |
| Non seasonally adjusted | | | | |
| May 2019 | 3,280 | -6 | 2,060 | -1 |
| March to May 2019 | 9,360 | -5 | 5,310 | -7 |
| Year to date 2019 | 14,310 | -3 | 7,920 | -6 |
| Latest 12 months | 37,520 | -2 | 22,400 | -8 |
| Seasonally adjusted | | | | |
| December 2018 | 3,280 | +7 | 1,850 | +9 |
| January 2019 | 3,160 | +7 | 1,950 | -1 |
| February 2019 | 3,080 | -5 | 1,900 | -5 |
| March 2019 | 3,290 | -1 | 2,040 | -10 |
| April 2019 | 2,960 | -9 | 1,720 | -14 |
| May 2019 | 2,910 | -6 | 1,950 | -1 |

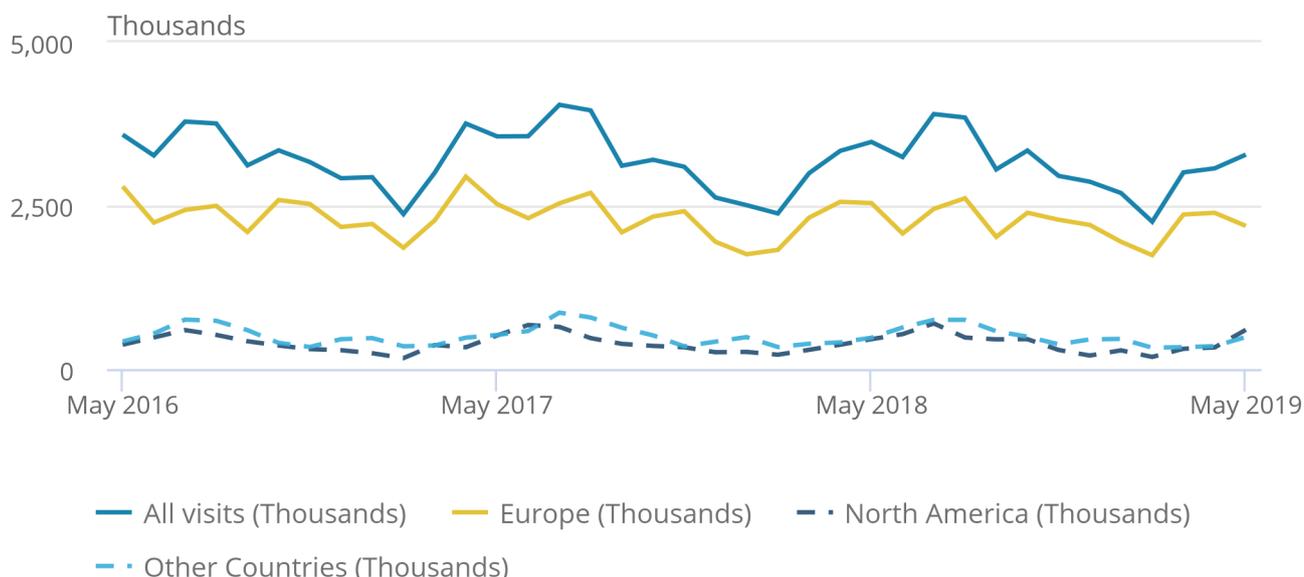
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents decreased by 5% in the three months to May 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from May 2016 to May 2019

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents decreased by 5% in the three months to May 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from May 2016 to May 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

5. Trends in overseas visits by UK residents (non-seasonally adjusted)

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 3 – UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 4 – Purpose of UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

There were an estimated 6.1 million visits overseas by UK residents in April 2019, which was 4% fewer than in April 2018. UK residents spent £3.7 billion on visits overseas in April 2019, which was 11% more than in April 2018.

There were an estimated 6.2 million visits overseas by UK residents in May 2019, which was the same as in May 2018. UK residents spent £3.7 billion on visits overseas in May 2019, which was 3% less than in May 2018.

During the period March to May 2019, there were 17.1 million visits abroad by UK residents, which was the same as the corresponding period a year earlier. UK residents spent £10.4 billion on these visits, which represents an increase of 1% when compared with the previous year.

There were 2.7 million visits to “other countries” (countries outside North America and Europe) over this three-month period, a decrease of 4% when compared with the same period a year earlier. There were 0.8 million visits to North America, which was a decrease of 21%. However, there was an increase in visits to European countries of 2% to 13.6 million.

Considering the reasons for visits, holiday visits increased by 2% (to 11.2 million) from the same period in the previous year, business visits decreased by 11% (to 1.5 million), while visits to friends and relatives remained the same (at 4.1 million).

Table 2: Main visit and spending estimates for UK residents' visits abroad in May 2019

UK residents' visits abroad

| | Visits (Thousands) | % change from year earlier | Expenditure (£ million) | % change from year earlier |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Non seasonally adjusted | | | | |
| May 2019 | 6,170 | 0 | 3,700 | -3 |
| March to May 2019 | 17,080 | 0 | 10,420 | +1 |
| Year to date 2019 | 25,830 | 0 | 15,910 | +1 |
| Latest 12 months | 71,760 | 0 | 45,660 | +2 |
| Seasonally adjusted | | | | |
| December 2018 | 5,810 | -4 | 3,890 | +5 |
| January 2019 | 5,970 | -1 | 4,040 | +10 |
| February 2019 | 5,850 | +1 | 3,600 | -4 |
| March 2019 | 5,880 | +2 | 3,700 | -6 |
| April 2019 | 5,910 | -3 | 3,880 | +12 |
| May 2019 | 6,020 | 0 | 3,770 | -3 |

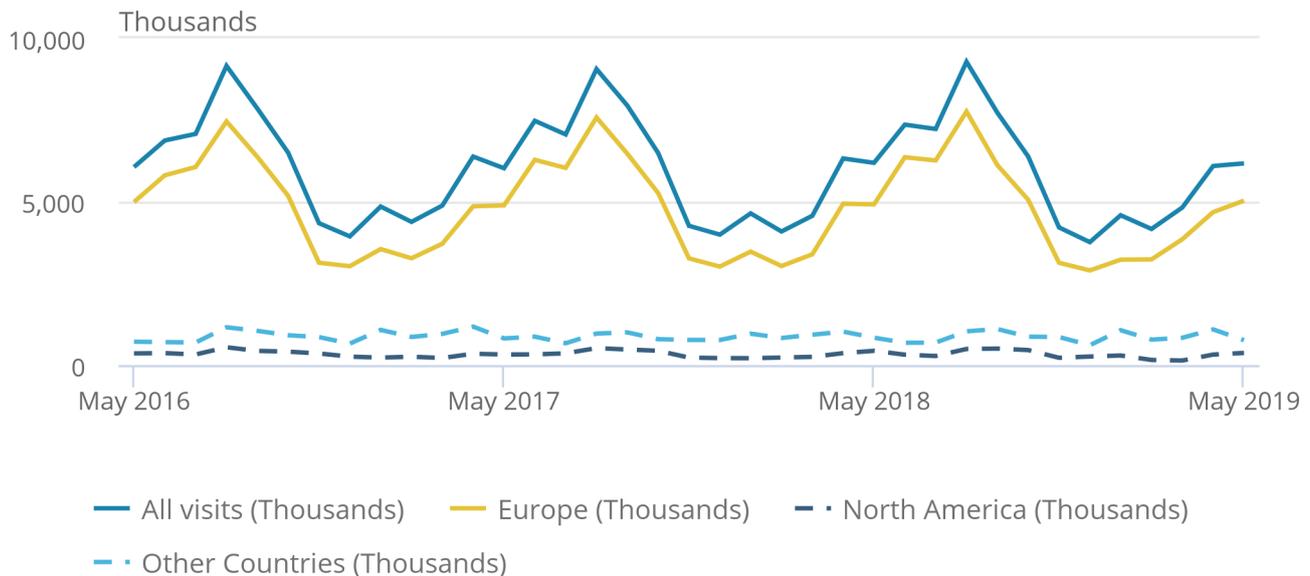
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents remained the same in the three months to May 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from May 2016 to May 2019

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents remained the same in the three months to May 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from May 2016 to May 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest article (Travel trends 2018) was published on 24 May 2019. This provides final overseas travel and tourism estimates and more detailed analysis of visits and spending, including analysis by demographics, towns visited in the UK and countries visited by residents of different parts of the UK.

[Travelpac](#): a dataset that allows you to conduct your own analyses of quarterly and annual data on main variables – the datasets are provided in SPSS and Excel.

[Overseas travel and tourism quarterly](#): the latest article (for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2019) was published on 25 July 2019. This provides more detailed analysis of visits and spending, isolating aspects such as countries of visit, mode of travel used, nationality of visitors and regions of the UK visited.

7 . Quality and methodology

The [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\) Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#) report contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

The IPS QMI report outlines the definitions and sample methodology.

Accuracy of International Passenger Survey estimates

This section describes how revisions are carried out in the standard production cycle of the survey. Additional potential revisions, to be made on a one-off basis, are described in the [Things you need to know about this release](#) section.

Figures for the most recent months are provisional and subject to revision in light of more accurate data on passenger figures becoming available at the end of each quarter, and additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

International Passenger Survey (IPS) monthly estimates are revised in line with the IPS revisions policy. The revisions policy is available in the IPS Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report, to assist you in understanding the cycle and frequency of data revisions. You are strongly advised to read this policy before using these data for research or policy-related purposes.

Planned revisions usually arise from the receipt of revised passenger traffic data. Unplanned revisions are made to correct errors to existing data, identified later in the quarterly and annual processing cycle. Those of significant magnitude will be highlighted and explained.

Revisions to published monthly IPS estimates can be expected at the following times in the normal overseas travel and tourism publication schedule:

- monthly estimates for the current reference year will usually be revised and statistically benchmarked across the quarter, following the publication of the quarterly estimates that that month falls within
- monthly and quarterly estimates for the current reference year will be revised in the survey year's annual data release ([Travel trends](#))
- monthly estimates for the full calendar year will be statistically benchmarked as part of the annual data processing and the monthly estimates for the year will then be replaced in the monthly release, with the benchmarked estimate following publication of the annual report ([Travel trends](#))

All other revisions will be regarded as unplanned and will be dealt with by non-standard releases. All revisions will be released in compliance with the same principles as other new information. [Please refer to our guide to statistical revisions.](#)

Seasonally adjusted figures are no longer shown in the main figures in the bulletin but continue to be presented in the tables.

The estimates produced from the IPS are subject to sampling errors that occur because not every traveller to and from the UK is interviewed on the survey. Sampling errors are determined both by the sample design and by the sample size.

Generally, the larger the sample supporting a particular estimate, the proportionately lower its sampling error. The survey sample size is approximately 20,000 per month. However, as the intensity of the sampling varies at each port, figures of a similar magnitude will not necessarily have the same percentage sampling error.

The accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of confidence intervals. The confidence interval is a range within which the true value of a proportion lies with known probability. For example, the 95% confidence interval represents the range into which there are 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure would fall had all passengers been sampled. This is obtained as plus or minus 1.96 multiplied by the standard error.

Table 3: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates in April 2019

| April 2019 monthly estimates | Estimate | Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate) |
|--|-----------------|---|
| Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands) | 3,070 | 8.5% |
| Earnings from visits to UK (£ million) | 1,600 | 11.8% |
| Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands) | 6,090 | 6.5% |
| Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million) | 3,670 | 7.8% |

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Table 4: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates in May 2019

| May 2019 monthly estimates | Estimate | Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate) |
|--|-----------------|---|
| Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands) | 3,280 | 11% |
| Earnings from visits to UK (£ million) | 2,060 | 11.9% |
| Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands) | 6,170 | 6.8% |
| Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million) | 3,700 | 8.4% |

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Confidence intervals for [quarterly estimates](#) and [annual estimates](#) are provided in our relevant overseas travel and tourism publications.

One indication of the reliability of the main indicators in this release can be obtained by monitoring the size of revisions. Table 5 records the size and pattern of revisions to the quarterly IPS data that have occurred over the last five years to the following main seasonally adjusted estimates:

- the number of visits by overseas residents to the UK (GMAT)
- the number of visits abroad by UK residents (GMAX)
- earnings made from overseas residents in the UK (GMAZ)
- expenditure abroad by UK residents (GMBB)

Table 5: Revisions to quarterly International Passenger Survey data over the last five years

Revisions between first publications and estimates three years later

| Value in the latest period Quarter 1 (January to March 2019) | Average over the last five years (bias) | Average over the last five years without regard to sign (average absolute revision) |
|---|--|--|
| GMAT 9,500 | 51.50 | 108.50 |
| GMAX 17,610 | 152.00 | 255.00 |
| GMAZ 5,920 | *125 | *151 |
| GMBB 10,970 | *116.5 | *162.5 |

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes

1. Units: GMAT and GMAX in thousands. [Back to table](#)
2. A statistical test has been applied to find out if the revision to each key indicator is statistically different from zero. An asterisk (*) indicates where the mean revision has been significantly different from zero. [Back to table](#)

Note that estimates are subject to revision between the monthly statistical bulletin and the quarterly publication, and again when [Travel trends](#) is published. Revisions result from more accurate passenger figures being made available.

More information about the [IPS revisions policy](#) is available in the Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for all published months can be found in the latest edition of the [Overseas travel and tourism monthly statistical bulletin](#).

Note that although data from the IPS feed into the calculation of migration statistics, the overseas travel and tourism publications do not provide any information relating to international migration.

Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and [requests for data analysis](#) (a service governed by our [Income and charging policy](#)), please get in touch using the contact details accompanying this release.