

Statistical bulletin

UK government debt and deficit: March 2020

Quarterly estimates of UK government deficit and debt, given to the European Commission under the excessive deficit procedure protocol, as part of the Maastricht Treaty.



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1 . Main points

- General government gross debt was £1,877.5 billion at the end of the financial year ending March 2020, equivalent to 84.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 24.7 percentage points above the reference value of 60.0% set out in the protocol on the excessive deficit procedure.
- General government gross debt first exceeded the 60.0% Maastricht reference value at the end of the financial year ending March 2010, when it was 69.1% of GDP.
- General government deficit (or net borrowing) was £60.3 billion at the end of the financial year ending March 2020, equivalent to 2.7% of GDP and 0.3 percentage points below the reference value of 3.0% set out in the protocol on the excessive deficit procedure.
- This is the fourth consecutive financial year in which general government deficit has been below the 3.0% Maastricht reference value.

2 . Debt

This bulletin reflects data up to and including March 2020 and so does not reflect the subsequent unprecedented impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the UK's debt and deficit.

Find the latest data and analysis on borrowing

- Find the latest [monthly figures for UK public sector debt and deficit \(or borrowing\)](#).
- Get a breakdown of [public sector finances borrowing by sub-sector](#).

Table 1: General government gross debt
UK, financial year ending March 2013 to financial year ending March 2020

£ billion³

Financial year ending March ¹	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Debt ²	1,425.6	1,522.5	1,604.1	1,652.3	1,720.5	1,764.5	1,821.9	1,877.5
as % GDP	82.6	84.3	85.7	85.4	85.2	84.6	84.1	84.7

Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes

1. Financial year represents the period of April to March. [Back to table](#)
2. Debt is recorded as at the end of March of each financial year. [Back to table](#)
3. Consolidated and at nominal values. [Back to table](#)
4. Unless otherwise stated. [Back to table](#)

Table 2: General government gross debt
UK, calendar years 2012 to 2019

£ billion³

Calendar years ¹	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Debt ²	1,424.8	1,499.8	1,604.9	1,666.2	1,731.8	1,786.7	1,838.2	1,891.8
as % GDP	83.2	84.2	86.2	86.9	86.8	86.2	85.7	85.4

Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes

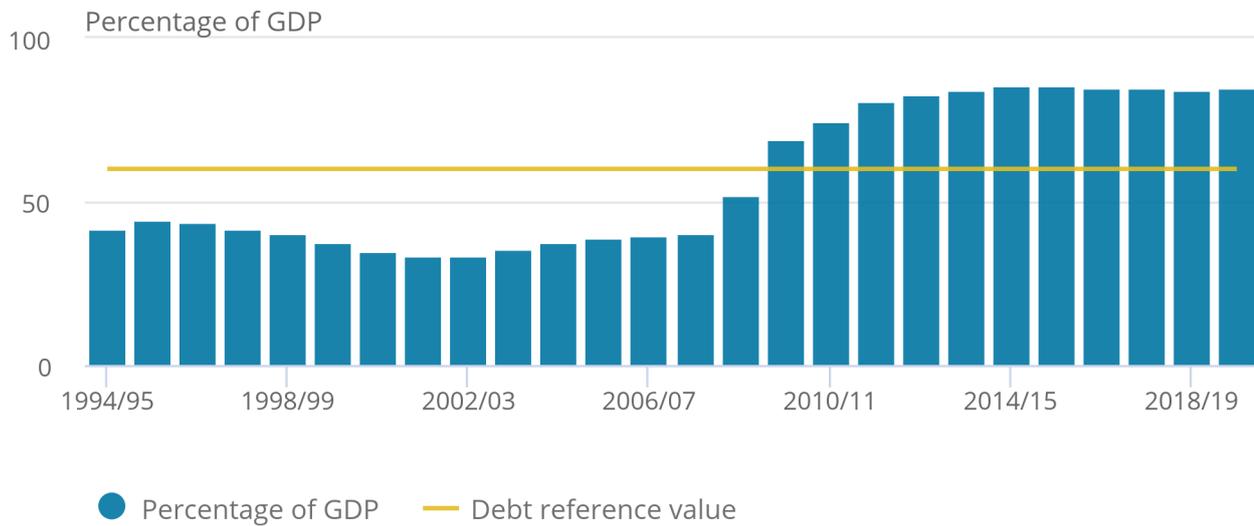
1. Calendar year represents the period of January to December. [Back to table](#)
2. Debt is recorded as at the end of December of each calendar year. [Back to table](#)
3. Consolidated and at nominal values. [Back to table](#)
4. Unless otherwise stated. [Back to table](#)

Figure 1: General government gross debt has been above the 60% of GDP reference value since the financial year ending March 2010

General government gross debt as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), UK, financial year ending March 1995 to financial year ending March 2020

Figure 1: General government gross debt has been above the 60% of GDP reference value since the financial year ending March 2010

General government gross debt as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), UK, financial year ending March 1995 to financial year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes:

1. GDP – gross domestic product.
2. Deficit to GDP ratio reference value is 60%.

3 . Deficit

Table 3: General government deficit
UK, financial year ending March 2013 to financial year ending March 2020

£ billion²

Financial year ending March ¹	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Deficit	127.0	103.9	94.6	83.7	56.3	56.4	41.0	60.3
as % GDP	7.4	5.8	5.1	4.3	2.8	2.7	1.9	2.7

Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes

1. Financial year represents the period of April to March. [Back to table](#)
2. Unless otherwise stated. [Back to table](#)

Table 4: General government deficit
UK, calendar years 2012 to 2019

£ billion²

Calendar years ¹	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Deficit	139.7	98.5	103.5	88.0	66.8	50.8	48.5	49.1
as % GDP	8.2	5.5	5.6	4.6	3.3	2.5	2.3	2.2

Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes

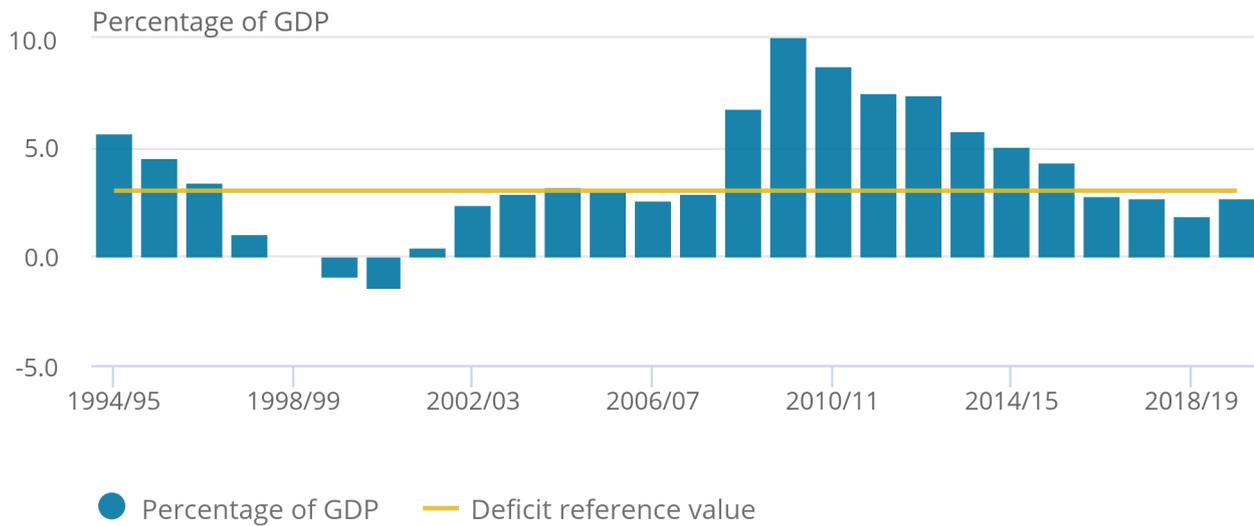
1. Calendar year represents the period of January to December. [Back to table](#)
2. Unless otherwise stated. [Back to table](#)

Figure 2: For the first time since the financial year ending March 2004, general government deficit has been below 3% of GDP for four consecutive years

General government net borrowing (deficit) as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), UK, financial year ending March 1995 to financial year ending March 2020

Figure 2: For the first time since the financial year ending March 2004, general government deficit has been below 3% of GDP for four consecutive years

General government net borrowing (deficit) as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), UK, financial year ending March 1995 to financial year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – UK government debt and deficit

Notes:

1. GDP – gross domestic product.
2. Deficit to GDP ratio reference value is 3%.

4 . UK government debt and deficit data

[Government deficit and debt return](#)

Dataset | Released 17 July 2020

This table provides summary, reconciliation, and revisions information on UK government deficit and debt figures by calendar and financial year since the last publication.

[General government main aggregates: ESA Table 2](#)

Dataset | Released 17 July 2020

Main aggregates of general government European System of Accounts 2010 (ESA) Table 2 provides a breakdown of general government expenditure (both current and capital) and general government revenue.

[General government quarterly non-financial accounts: ESA Table 25](#)

Dataset | Released 17 July 2020

Quarterly non-financial accounts of general government ESA Table 25 provides a breakdown of general government expenditure (both current and capital) and general government revenue.

[General government quarterly financial accounts: ESA Table 27](#)

Dataset | Released 17 July 2020

Quarterly financial accounts of general government ESA Table 27 provides a complete set of quarterly financial accounts of the general government sector and its sub-sectors, compiled according to the ESA .

[General government quarterly debt \(Maastricht debt\): ESA Table 28](#)

Dataset | Released 17 July 2020

Quarterly government debt (Maastricht debt) for general government ESA Table 28 provides a summary of government debt on a quarterly basis, for general government and its sub-sectors.

5 . Glossary

General government

UK general government consists of two sub-sectors: central government and local government.

Debt

Debt represents the cumulative amount the general government sector owes to organisations in other UK sectors and overseas institutions, which is largely a result of government financial liabilities on the bonds (gilts) and Treasury bills it has issued.

Deficit

Deficit (or net borrowing) measures the gap between total revenue and total spending. A positive value indicates borrowing, while a negative value indicates a surplus.

6 . Measuring the data

The UK government debt and deficit statistical bulletin is published quarterly in January, April, July and October each year. This is to coincide with when the UK and EU member states are required to report on their deficit (or net borrowing) and debt to the European Commission.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This bulletin reflects data up to and including March 2020 and so does not reflect the subsequent unprecedented impact of the pandemic on the UK's debt and deficit.

[Recent and upcoming changes to public sector finance statistics: May 2020](#) explains our provisional assessments of some of the largest coronavirus (COVID-19) schemes and the ongoing challenges we face in measuring the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on tax receipts.

Effects of the coronavirus pandemic recorded in this bulletin

On 19 March 2020, the UK government introduced its [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme \(CJRS\)](#). This temporary scheme is designed to help employers pay the wages and salaries to those employees who would otherwise lose their jobs because of the pandemic. The provisional recording of the CJRS increased subsidies paid by central government by an estimated £2.5 billion in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2020 and so increased the deficit in that period by a corresponding amount.

Central government current grants paid to local government increased in Quarter 1 2020, primarily because of additional payments to assist with addressing the pandemic made in late March. We are not yet able to confirm when local government expenditure funded by these grants will take place.

Departure from the EU

As the UK leaves the EU, it is important that our statistics continue to be of high quality and are internationally comparable. During the transition period, those UK statistics that align with EU practice and rules will continue to do so in the same way as before 31 January 2020.

These statistics, and our sector classification process, draw on the [European system of accounts - ESA 2010](#), the [Manual on Government Deficit and Debt](#), and associated guides.

During the transition period until the end of 2020, the UK is continuing to send data to Eurostat. In publications, Eurostat will present data for the UK after, and separated from, the member states.

After the transition period, we will continue to produce our government finance statistics in line with the UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and in accordance with internationally agreed statistical guidance and standards.

To ensure comparability with other countries, the statistical aggregates within the UK government debt and deficit release will continue to be produced according to the existing definitions and standards until further notice or those standards are updated.

Revisions since previous publication

This is the first time that debt and deficit figures for the financial year ending March 2020 have been reported in this statistical bulletin series. It is the second time that debt and deficit figures for the full calendar year ending 2019 have been reported.

The revisions between releases are primarily the result of improved departmental (and other government bodies) data replacing previous estimates.

The [Government deficit and debt return table](#) presents the revisions to our main aggregates since the last publication of the government debt and deficit return, as reported to the European Commission in June 2020. These revisions are consistent with revisions incorporated within the [Public sector finances statistical bulletin](#).

The [public sector finances revisions policy](#) provides information on when users of the statistics published in the [Public sector finances](#) and [UK government debt and deficit](#) statistical bulletins should expect to see methodological and data-related revisions.

7 . Strengths and limitations

The [public sector finances methodological guide](#) provides comprehensive contextual and methodological information concerning the monthly [Public sector finances statistical bulletin](#) and related publications, including this release.

The guide sets out the conceptual and fiscal policy context, identifies the main fiscal measures, and explains how these are derived and interrelated. Additionally, it details the data sources.

Information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Public sector finances QMI](#).

Comparability with monthly public sector finances

The general government debt and deficit figures published in this statistical bulletin (for the time period 1997 onwards) are fully consistent with those published in the [Public sector finances, UK: May 2020 statistical bulletin](#), published on 19 June 2020.

There are two main differences between the headline debt and deficit measures published in the public sector finances and those published in this bulletin.

First, this bulletin includes only the debt and deficit of central and local government bodies. The public sector finances' measures also include the debt and deficit of other public sector bodies, including public non-financial corporations and the Bank of England.

Secondly, this bulletin reports gross debt, while the focus of the public sector finances is net debt. Gross debt represents only the financial liabilities (debt securities, loans and deposits) of central and local government, while net debt deducts any liquid assets (official reserve assets and other cash or cash-like assets) from these financial liabilities.

Comparability with EU member states

This release is fully consistent with the latest data transmission on UK government deficit (or net borrowing) and debt that the UK and each of the 27 EU member states are required to report quarterly to the European Commission.

Although the UK is no longer an EU member state, during the transition period, those UK statistics that align with EU practice and rules will continue to do so in the same way as before 31 January 2020.

[Article 126 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU](#) obliges member states to avoid excessive budgetary deficits.

The protocol on the excessive deficit procedure, annexed to the Maastricht Treaty, defines two criteria and reference values with which member states' governments should comply. These are: a deficit (or net borrowing) to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of 3% and a debt to GDP ratio of 60%.

The UK debt and deficit figures in this statistical bulletin will be [published by Eurostat on 22 July 2020](#) in context with each of the 27 EU member states.

According to the [latest published figures](#) (23 April 2020), there were 11 member states in addition to the UK that had a gross debt that exceeded the 60% of GDP reference value at the end of December 2019.

The average gross debt as a percentage of GDP across all 27 member states at the end of December 2019 was 77.8%, exceeding the 60% of GDP reference value by 17.8 percentage points.

8 . Related links

[Public sector finances, UK: May 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 19 June 2020

How the relationship between UK public sector monthly income and expenditure leads to changes in deficit and debt.

[Public sector finances borrowing by sub-sector](#)

Dataset | Released 19 June 2020

Public sector finances analytical tables (PSAT) showing transactions related to borrowing by sub-sector. Total Managed Expenditure (TME) is also provided.

[The debt and deficit of the UK public sector explained](#)

Article | Released 16 March 2016

A detailed explanation of the debt and deficit of the UK public sector.

[Looking ahead – developments in public sector finance statistics: 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 31 May 2019

Outlines what the Office for National Statistics (ONS) sees as areas for future development in the public sector finances.