

Statistical bulletin

# Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 11 November 2021

Early data and analysis for UK economy and society. Includes activity and change in business, spending, travel and jobs using rapid-response surveys, novel data sources and experimental methods.

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# 1 . Main points

- The number of seasonally adjusted new VAT reporters in October 2021 increased by 9% from September 2021 and was notably higher than the 2015 to 2019 longer-term average (HM Revenue and Customs VAT returns). [Section 3](#).
- Shelf availability of items between 5 November and 8 November 2021 were lowest for the “frozen turkeys” category, with 18% of this item's availability marked as none or low; shelf availability was the highest for the “beer” category, as 68% of this item was recorded as being high availability (Kantar Public). [Section 4](#).
- In Wave 43, 29% of businesses reported a decrease in turnover in the last month, compared with normal expectations for this time of year; this is a 5 percentage point increase from Wave 41 (initial results from Wave 43 of Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)). [Section 5](#).
- In the week to 6 November 2021, after higher figures the previous week because of half-term across England and Wales, overall retail footfall in the UK decreased by 9% and was at 87% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019; this was caused by falls in High Street, Retail Park and Shopping Centre footfall (Springboard).
- The system average price (SAP) of gas decreased by 11% in the week to 7 November 2021, which was the largest week-on-week decrease since February 2021; however, the SAP of gas remains 288% higher than the February 2021 level (National Grid). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- The total volume of online job adverts on 5 November 2021 increased by 4% from the previous week, to 147% of its February 2020 average level (Adzuna). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- The highest level of job adverts relative to February 2020 continues to be in the “transport, logistics and warehouse” category, at 423%, which is an 18 percentage point increase from the previous week and likely reflects the strong demand in this category in the run up to Christmas (Adzuna). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- In the week to 4 November 2021, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases increased by 5 percentage points from the previous week, to 105% of its February 2020 average (Bank of England CHAPS data). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- There was an increase across all spending categories this week; “staple” by 9 percentage points (partly from monthly cyclical effects), “work related” by 5 points (bringing this indicator close to pre-fuel crisis levels), “delayable” by 4 points and “social” by 2 points (Bank of England CHAPS data). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- The seven-day average estimate of UK seated diners in the week to 8 November 2021 was 116% of the level in the equivalent week of 2019, which is a 13 percentage point decrease from the previous week, and follows four consecutive weekly increases (OpenTable).
- There was an average of 264 daily ship visits in the week to 7 November 2021, a 3% fall from the previous week; the average number of daily cargo and tanker ship visits fell by 2% to 86 (exactEarth). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- The seven-day average number of UK daily flights was 3,458 in the week ending 7 November 2021, which is 62% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019 (EUROCONTROL). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- Transactions at Pret A Manger stores in the week ending 4 November 2021 remained lowest when compared with their January averages in London airport and London city stores at 77% and 86%, respectively (Pret A Manger).
- There were 14,660 company incorporations in the week to 5 November 2021, an increase of 3% from the previous week and a 15% increase from the equivalent week of 2019 (12,733) (Companies House). See the [accompanying dataset](#).

- There were 5,848 voluntary dissolution applications (an application from a company to dissolve) in the week to 5 November 2021, an increase of 3% from the previous week and a 2% increase from the equivalent week of 2019 (5,750) (Companies House). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- There were 20,552 compulsory dissolution first gazettes (a notice issued by Companies House indicating their intention to remove a company from the register) in the week to 2 November 2021 (Companies House). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- In the week ending 7 November 2021, the seasonally adjusted average count of traffic camera activity for cars in London remained broadly similar to the previous week, at 112% of the average level seen in the week before the first UK-wide lockdown (week ending 22 March 2020) (Transport for London). See the [accompanying dataset](#).
- The volume of motor vehicle traffic on 8 November 2021 was at 96% of its level in the first week of February 2020, unchanged for the third consecutive week ([Department for Transport](#)).

Results presented in this bulletin are experimental and may be subject to revision.

## 2 . Latest indicators at a glance

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

**Notes:**

1. Users should note that the break in the available shipping data (from 14 to 19 June 2021) is when the data collection system changed.

## 3 . Value-added tax returns

## New reporters

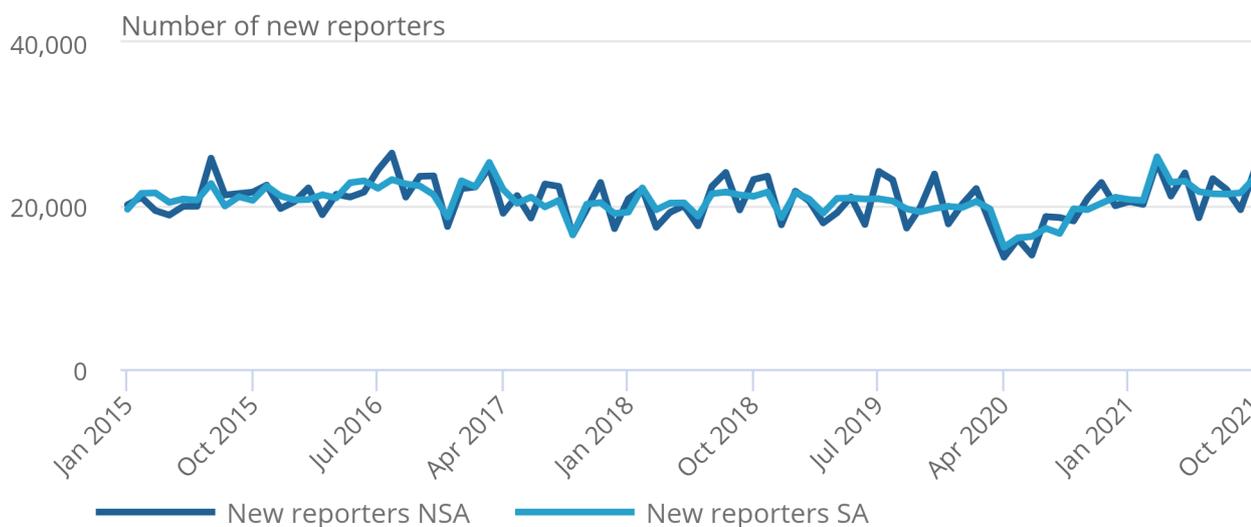
The new reporters index measures the number of UK firms sending value-added tax (VAT) returns to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for the first time, which is related to the number of business creations.

**Figure 1: The seasonally adjusted number of new VAT reporters in October 2021 increased by 9% from September 2021 and was notably higher than the 2015 to 2019 longer-term average**

Number of new firm reporters, January 2015 to October 2021, seasonally adjusted and non-seasonally adjusted, UK

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Number of new firm reporters, January 2015 to October 2021, seasonally adjusted and non-seasonally adjusted, UK



Source: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

There were 23,420 new VAT reporters in the UK in October 2021, an increase of 9% from 21,570 in September 2021. This was notably higher than the 2015 to 2019 longer-term average (20,886).

The number of new reporters in the construction industry rose by 13% from 3,110 in September 2021 to 3,510 in October 2021. In the services industry, there were 18,120 new VAT reporters in October 2021, a 7% increase from the 16,890 reported in September 2021.

The figures explained in this section refer to seasonally adjusted data. Non-seasonally adjusted data are available in the [accompanying dataset](#).

## Business turnover estimates

Turnover diffusion indices are an aggregate measure used to track whether most firms are reporting an increase or decrease in turnover in their VAT returns. They are calculated as the percentage of firms with increasing turnover minus the percentage with decreasing turnover.

The heatmap in Figure 2 is a visual way of showing the VAT diffusion indices based on the standard deviation from their historical 2008 to 2019 average. Larger deviations are more darkly coloured, with red representing a negative change, while teal represents a positive change when compared with the previous period.

## Figure 2: An equal number of firms reported increasing turnover as those that reported decreasing turnover in September 2021

Heatmap of business turnover estimates, UK, diffusion index standard deviation from the mean, up to September 2021. New reporters, UK, up to October 2021

### Notes:

1. Agri - Agriculture, forestry and fishing, All - All industries, SA - Seasonally adjusted.
2. More information is available in the [methodology article](#).

### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The month-on-month, all-industry turnover estimate for September 2021 shows that in the past month, out of 39,000 firms, an equal number of firms (net 0%) reported increasing turnover as those that reported decreasing turnover.

A net 2% of firms in the construction industry reported decreasing turnover in September 2021. This is the seventh consecutive month where more firms have reported decreasing turnover than increasing turnover. A net 1% of firms in the production industry reported decreasing turnover in the last month.

In the service industry, a net 2% of firms reported increasing turnover in September 2021. Meanwhile, in the agricultural industry in the last month, an equal number of firms (net 0%) reported increasing turnover as those that reported decreasing turnover.

The figures explained in this section refer to seasonally adjusted data. Non-seasonally adjusted data are available in the [accompanying dataset](#).

## 4 . Shelf availability of items from UK shops

Shelf availability research for shops across the UK has been undertaken by Kantar Public. Collectors gathered information on a range of items from up to three different stores across multiple locations, recording availability across four categories: "none", "low", "medium", or "high". It is important to note these categories are subjective as they are recorded by individual collectors. The data were collected between 5 and 8 November 2021. This new series will be updated weekly.

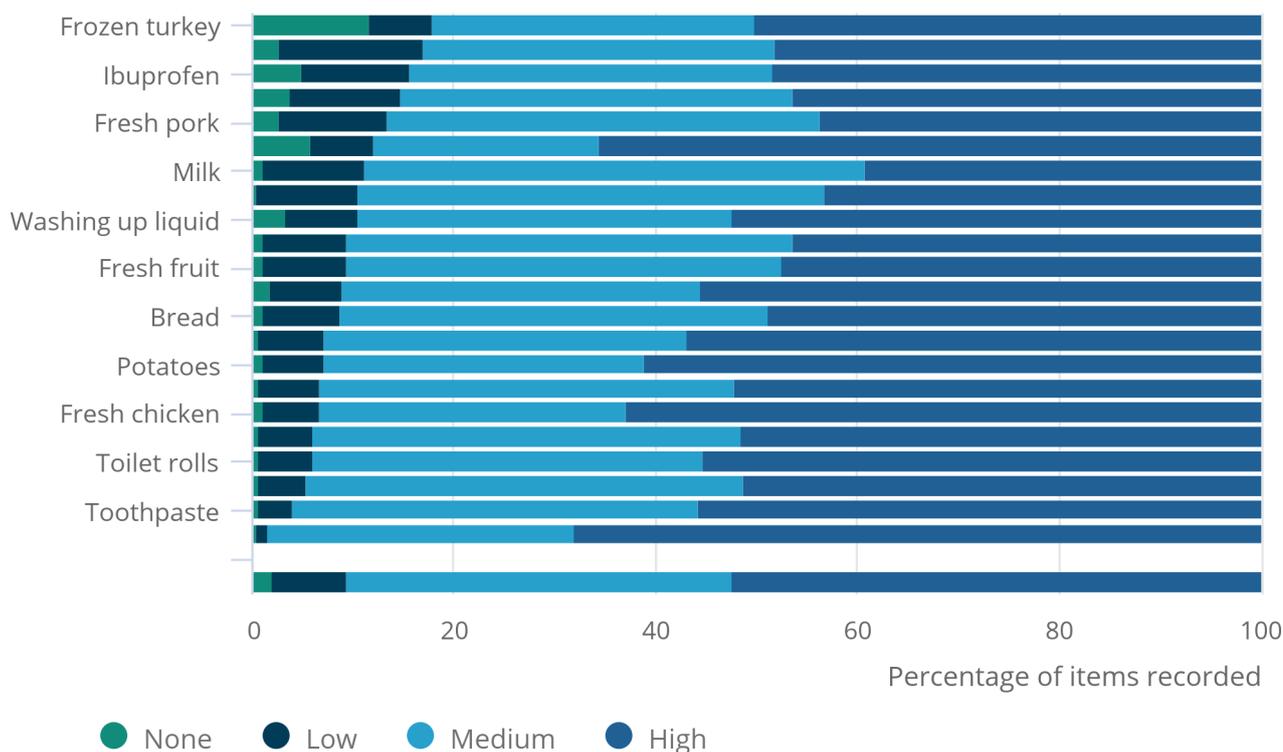
Users should be aware that this is the second week of reporting this indicator; therefore, these data should be treated with caution.

**Figure 3: Shelf availability of items sold in UK stores between 5 and 8 November 2021 were lowest for “frozen turkeys”, with 18% of this category reported as either “none” or “low”**

Item availability in stores across 130 locations covering UK countries and English regions, between 5 and 8 November 2021

Figure 3: Shelf availability of items sold in UK stores between 5 and 8 November 2021 were lowest for “frozen turkeys”, with 18% of this category reported as either “none” or “low”

Item availability in stores across 130 locations covering UK countries and English regions, between 5 and 8 November 2021



Source: Kantar Public

Notes:

1. Shelf availability does not imply stock availability in warehouses or storage units and is simply the level of available products in a selected sample of shops at the time of data collection.
2. Total count of shops visited were 288 and total observations made were 5,764.
3. Categories in this chart have been rounded for illustrative purposes and may not sum to category total or 100.

In the current period (5 to 8 November 2021), the overall proportion of observations for all items recorded as “high” was 52%; this was broadly similar to the previous four-day period (29 October to 1 November 2021). Observations for all items recorded at “none” or “low” was 9%, also remaining broadly similar compared with the previous period.

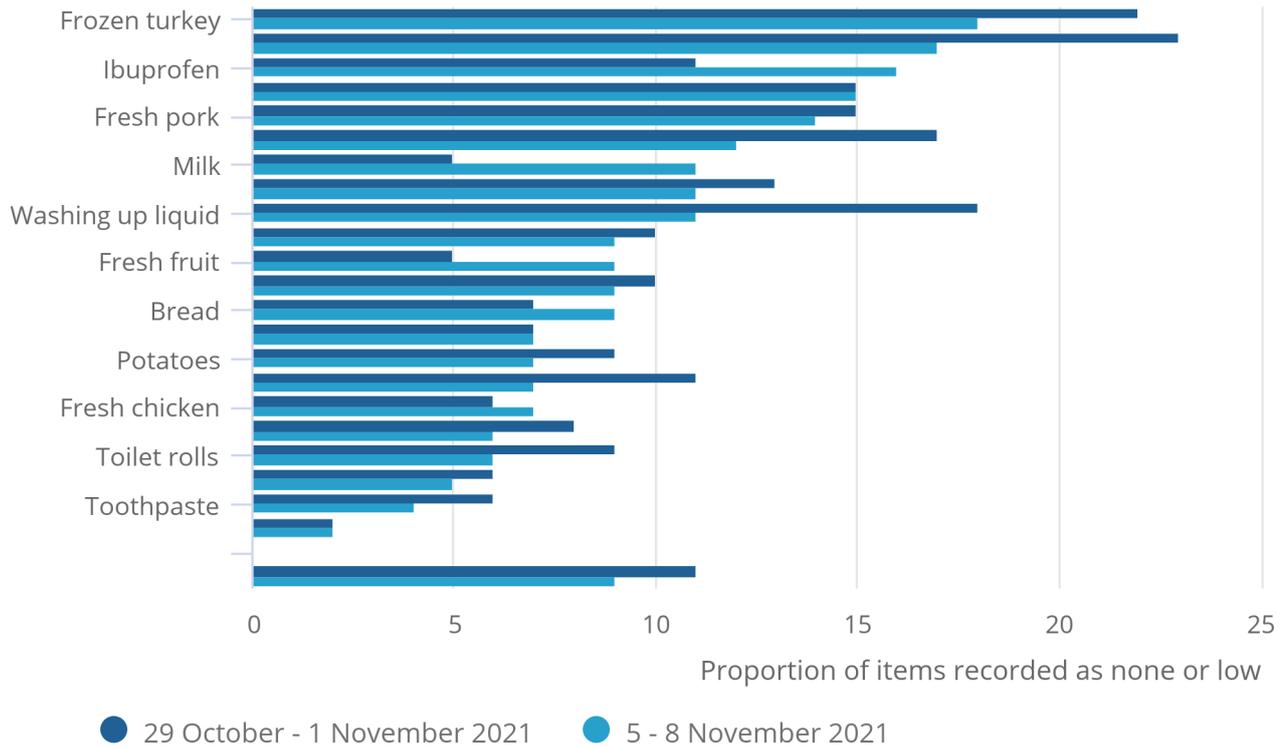
Across the four included availability categories, the largest proportion of observations recorded as “high” was “beer” at 68%; the lowest category was “milk” at 39%. The highest proportion items with availability recorded as either “none” or “low” were “frozen turkey” and “sparkling water”, at 18% and 17%, respectively.

**Figure 4: The largest changes in shelf availability were in washing up liquid and sparkling water, where the number of items recorded as “none” or “low” decreased by 8 and 7 percentage points, respectively**

Proportion of items recorded as "none" or "low" across 130 locations covering UK countries and English regions, 29 October to 1 November 2021 and 5 to 8 November 2021

Figure 4: The largest changes in shelf availability were in washing up liquid and sparkling water, where the number of items recorded as “none” or “low” decreased by 8 and 7 percentage points, respectively

Proportion of items recorded as “none” or “low” across 130 locations covering UK countries and English regions, 29 October to 1 November 2021 and 5 to 8 November 2021



Source: Kantar Public

Notes:

1. Week-on-week changes can be attributed to general volatility and sample changes.

Data for all categories are available in the [accompanying dataset](#).

## 5 . Business impacts and insights

Initial results from Wave 43 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) cover the reference period 18 October to 9 November 2021, with a response rate of 19.7% (7,505 responses). The survey was live for the period 1 to 9 November 2021.

Table 1: In Wave 43, 29% of businesses reported a decrease in turnover in the last month, compared with normal expectations for this time of year; this is a 5 percentage point increase from Wave 41  
Impact on turnover, businesses currently trading, weighted by count, UK, 18 October to 9 November 2021

| <b>All Industries</b>                             |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Turnover has increased by more than 50%</b>    | Less than 1% |
| <b>Turnover has increased between 20% and 50%</b> | 2%           |
| <b>Turnover has increased by up to 20%</b>        | 5%           |
| <b>Turnover has not been affected</b>             | 51%          |
| <b>Turnover has decreased by up to 20%</b>        | 14%          |
| <b>Turnover has decreased between 20% and 50%</b> | 10%          |
| <b>Turnover has decreased by more than 50%</b>    | 6%           |
| <b>Not sure</b>                                   | 13%          |

Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)

### Notes

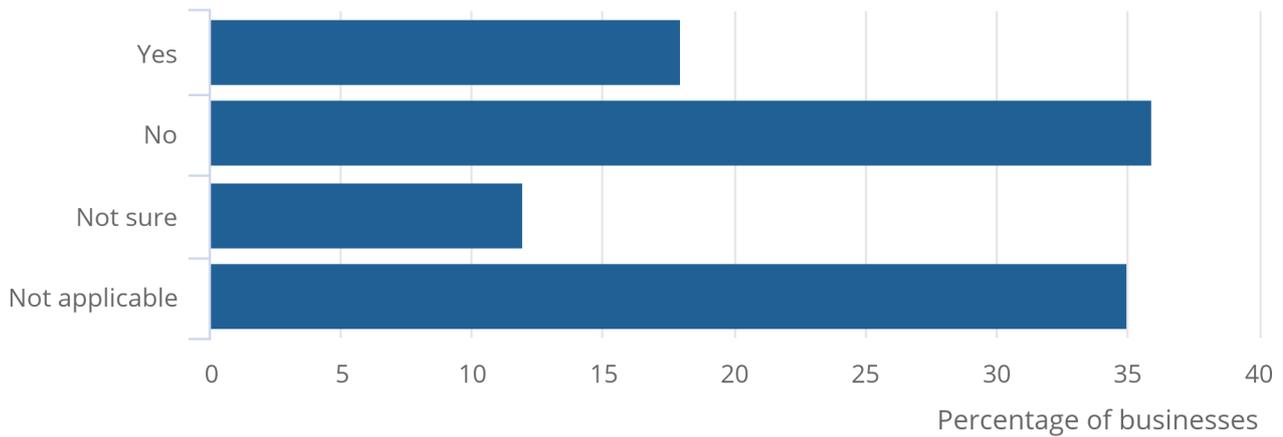
1. Initial weighted results, Wave 43 of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).
2. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding and percentages less than 1% being removed for disclosure purposes.
3. Businesses were asked for their experiences for the reference period 18 October to 9 November 2021. However, for questions regarding the last month, businesses may respond from the point of completion of the questionnaire (1 November to 9 November 2021).

**Figure 5: In Wave 43, 36% of UK businesses reported that they were not intending on using increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forwards**

Homeworking business model arrangements, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, 1 November to 9 November 2021

Figure 5: In Wave 43, 36% of UK businesses reported that they were not intending on using increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forwards

Homeworking business model arrangements, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, 1 November to 9 November 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)

Notes:

1. Initial weighted results, Wave 43 of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).
2. Bars may not sum to 100% because of rounding and percentages less than 1% being removed for disclosure purposes.

## 6 . Data

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

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Experimental indicator for monitoring UK retail purchases derived from the Bank of England's CHAPS data.

### [Weekly shipping indicators](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Experimental weekly and daily ship visits dataset covering UK ports.

### [Traffic camera activity](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Experimental daily traffic camera counts data for busyness indices covering the UK.

### [Online job advert estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Experimental job advert indices covering the UK online job market.

### [Company incorporations, voluntary dissolutions and compulsory dissolutions](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Weekly dataset showing the number of Companies House incorporations and voluntary dissolutions accepted, and companies placed into compulsory dissolution.

### [Daily UK flights](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Experimental daily UK flight numbers and rolling seven-day average, including flights to, from, and within the UK.

### [System Average Price \(SAP\) of gas](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Daily and rolling average System Average Price (SAP) of gas traded in the UK.

### [Shelf availability of items from UK shops](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Data provided by Kantar Public, recording item availability of 23 popular products across the UK and English regions

### [Value Added Tax](#)

Dataset | Released 11 November 2021

Value Added Tax (VAT) turnover and expenditure diffusion indexes and new VAT reporters using data from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) VAT returns

## 7 . Glossary

### **Faster indicator**

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

### **Company incorporations**

Incorporations are when a company is added to the Companies House register of limited companies. This can also include where an existing business applies to become a limited company, where it was not one before.

## Voluntary dissolution applications

A voluntary dissolution application is when a company applies to begin dissolution proceedings. As such, they effectively choose to be removed from the Companies House register. For a company to be eligible to voluntarily dissolve, it should not have completed any trading activity for a period of three months.

## Compulsory dissolutions

When a company fails to file the required financial accounts and/or confirmation statements, if no contact is received by Companies House following a series of letters to the company and its officers, a first gazette notice is published in the Gazette, a notice of the Registrar's intention to dissolve the company.

## Diffusion index

The diffusion index tracks the growth in turnover and expenditure of firms. It is constructed to lie between negative 1 and 1. For example, if 65% of firms have increasing turnover, 30% have decreasing turnover and 5% turnover remains unchanged, then the diffusion index is 0.35.

## New reporter

A new reporter is defined as a firm with a Value Added Tax (VAT) reference (that is, firm identification number), which has not previously reported its VAT returns. New reporters are published within one month of the end of the reporting period. The new reporting behaviour measure is classified by the month the data were received by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), known as the receipt date; this is not necessarily the same as the reference period (the period for which the VAT return is made).

# 8 . Measuring the data

## UK coronavirus restrictions

A full overview of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions for each of the four UK constituent countries can be found here:

- [England](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

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

## Pret A Manger index

The index shows total weekly till transactions at Pret A Manger stores as a proportion of the companies' average weekly level in the first four weeks of 2020 (between 3 January 2020 and 30 January 2020).

These data are delivered weekly from Friday to Thursday in a week-ending format.

The index is broken down by region:

- Yorkshire
- London: Suburban (stores within Greater London but outside zones 1 & 2)
- London: City (Key Office Areas)
- London: West End (Key Retail Areas)
- London: Airports (4 Major Airports in London)
- London: Stations (3 Large Train Stations in London)
- Manchester
- Scotland
- Regional Towns (stores in towns not included in this index)
- Regional Stations (stores in stations in towns not included in this index)

These regions have been selected because there are limited numbers of Pret A Manger stores in some areas of the UK. For example, at the time of index creation, there were two stores open in Leeds and two in York, leading to these being grouped together as “Yorkshire”.

Wales is omitted from the index as it has a low number of stores. Regional towns include shops in towns other than those listed.

## 9 . Strengths and limitations

Information on the strengths and limitations of the indicators in this bulletin is available in the [Coronavirus and the latest indicators of the UK economy and society methodology](#).

## 10 . Related links

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest data and analysis](#)

Webpage | Updated as and when data become available

Latest data on the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK and its effect on the economy and society.

### [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Bulletin | Released 22 October 2021

Latest indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

### [Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional](#)

Bulletin | Released 2 November 2021

Provisional counts of deaths registered in England and Wales, including deaths involving COVID-19, in the latest weeks for which data are available.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Infection Survey, UK](#)

Bulletin | Released 29 October 2021

Initial data from the COVID-19 Infection Survey (delivered in partnership with IQVIA, the University of Oxford and Lighthouse laboratories).