

Statistical bulletin

# Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 3 February 2023

Early experimental data and analysis on economic activity and social change in the UK. These real-time indicators are created using rapid response surveys, novel data sources and experimental methods.

Contact:  
Tom Williams  
[realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk](mailto:realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk)  
+44 1633 455932

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## Notice

### 3 February 2023

This week the bulletin contains a reduced suite of indicators as we assess our future publication schedule. This will continue to be a weekly release, but the frequency of some indicators may change. If you have any questions or comments, please contact [realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk](mailto:realtime.indicators@ons.gov.uk).

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# 1 . Main points

- Most consumer behaviour indicators increased in the latest period, in line with usual monthly patterns, however, debit card spending on "entertainment" and "pubs, restaurants and fast food" remains below the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) baseline, and overall retail footfall was 90% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019 (Revolut, Springboard). [Section 3: Consumer behaviour](#).
- The preceding seven-day rolling average gas price decreased by 2% in the week to 29 January 2023, having decreased sharply since the start of the year, in line with usual seasonal expectations (National Gas Transmission). [Section 4: Energy](#).
- The total number of online job adverts rose for the third consecutive week, increasing by 5% when compared with the previous period; however, it is 19% lower than the equivalent week of 2022 (Adzuna). [Section 5: Business and workforce](#).
- Less than a fifth (19%) of businesses reported energy prices are their main concern in February 2023, down from 22% for January 2023 (initial results from Wave 75 of the [Business Insights and Conditions Survey](#) (BICS)). [Section 5: Business and workforce](#).
- The average number of daily ship visits increased by 23% in the week to 29 January 2023 but was 14% below the level in the same period last year, while the average number of cargo and tanker ship visits increased by 6% in the latest week and was broadly unchanged from the level in the same period last year (exactEarth). [Section 6: Transport](#).

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

## 2 . Latest indicators at a glance

### Notes:

1. Revolut adjustments to user count are at an aggregate level and as such age bands may not adjust evenly.
2. Users should note that card spending over time is pushed upwards by the impacts of both inflation on value of transactions and cash-to-card conversion.
3. Data for the CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases from 5 December 2022 onward are no longer provisional.
4. The gaps in the shipping timeline data are caused by technical issues.

## 3 . Consumer behaviour

In the week leading up to 22 January 2023, the estimated demand for fuel per transaction was broadly unchanged from the previous week and was 95% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2022. Similarly, average fuel prices were broadly unchanged in the week to 22 January 2023 and were 111% of the level in the equivalent week of 2022. Our accompanying [Automotive fuel spending dataset](#) is available.

## UK spending on debit cards

Revolut debit card spending increased by 11 percentage points in the week to 29 January 2023 compared with the previous week, with increases in all six sector categories. After experiencing the largest decrease in the previous period, spending in "retail" rose by the most in the latest period, increasing by 20 percentage points. Spending in "entertainment" and "pubs, restaurants and fast food" also continued to rise, increasing by 7 percentage points and 6 percentage points, respectively.

All categories were above the level of spending seen in the equivalent week of 2022, with spending on "automotive fuel" being 40 percentage points higher, followed by spending in "retail" being 34 percentage points greater. Spending on "entertainment" and "pubs, restaurants and fast food" remains below the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) baseline, at 11 and 2 percentage points below this baseline, respectively. Users should note that these data are not adjusted for the potential effects of inflation on the value of transactions.

Spending increased in all age categories compared with the previous week and the equivalent period of 2022. Spending by those in the age 18 to 34 years category experienced the largest week-on-week increase of 14 percentage points, in line with expected monthly spending patterns. Spending by those aged 55 years and over increased the most compared with the equivalent of week of 2022, rising by 35 percentage points. Our accompanying [Revolut spending on debit cards dataset](#) is available.

## Daily CHAPS-based indicator

These data series are experimental 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 via online platforms. More information on the indicator is provided in the accompanying [methodology article](#).

Companies are allocated to one of four categories based on their primary business:

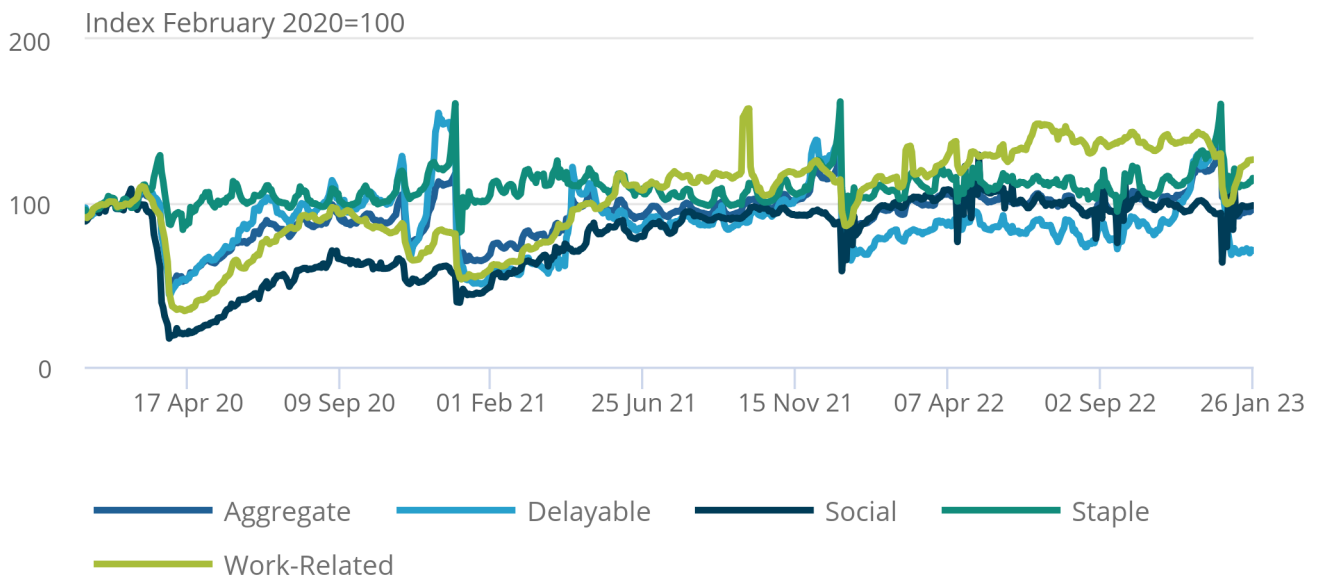
- "staples" refers to companies that sell essential goods that households need to purchase, such as food and utilities
- "work-related" refers to companies providing public transport or selling petrol
- "delayable" refers to companies selling goods whose purchase could be delayed, such as clothing or furnishings
- "social" refers to spending on travel and eating out

**Figure 1: In the week to 26 January 2023, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases increased by 2 points and increased by 6 points compared with the same week in 2022**

A backward looking seven-day rolling average, 13 January 2020 to 26 January 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices

Figure 1: In the week to 26 January 2023, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases increased by 2 points and increased by 6 points compared with the same week in 2022

A backward looking seven-day rolling average, 13 January 2020 to 26 January 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices



Source: Office for National Statistics and Bank of England calculations

Notes:

1. Data for the CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases from 5 December 2022 onward are no longer provisional.
2. Revisions to the Staple series between 5 December 2022 and 5 January 2023 led to slight revisions to the Aggregate series over the same period.
3. Users should note the daily payment data are the sum of card transactions processed up to the previous working day, so there is a slight time lag when compared with real-life events on the chart.
4. Point difference is derived from current week and previous week index before rounding.

Figure 1 shows changes in the value of CHAPS payments received by large UK corporates from their credit and debit card processors, "merchant acquirers".

The spending categories recorded the following changes in the latest week:

- "work-related" increased by 3 points
- "social" was broadly unchanged
- "staple" increased by 4 points
- "delayable" was unchanged

When compared with the same week in 2022, the spending categories recorded the following changes:

- "work-related" increased by 15 points
- "social" increased by 7 points
- "staple" increased by 11 points
- "delayable" decreased by 2 points

## National retail footfall

National retail footfall figures are supplied by Springboard, a provider of data on customer activity. The breakdowns in this indicator are as follows:

- overall footfall, which is the sum of the average footfall in each destination type weighted by their respective footfall volumes
- shopping centre, which is a space that does not form part of the public highway, and is owned and managed by a single landlord
- high street, which is the central part of the main business and commercial area of a town
- retail parks and shopping parks, which comprise retail warehouse units, wholly owned and managed by a single landlord

Springboard's weekly data are defined over a seven-day period running from Monday to Sunday. Week 4 of 2023 refers to the period Monday 23 January to Sunday 29 January 2023. All quoted figures have been rounded to the nearest integer.

## Figure 2: In the week to 29 January 2023, overall weekly retail footfall was 90% of the level in the equivalent week of 2019

Volume of daily retail footfall, percentage compared with the equivalent week of 2019, 1 January 2020 to 29 January 2023, UK

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Overall retail footfall increased in the week to 29 January 2023 to 103% of the level of the previous week and 90% of the level seen in the equivalent week of 2019. Footfall in all categories remains below the 2019 level with retail parks the closest at 96%.

Retail footfall also increased in 10 of the 12 UK countries and English regions in the latest week, remaining unchanged in the other two. The largest increase was in Northern Ireland at 113% of the level of the previous week. All regions were down on 2019 levels, with the South West of England closest at 95% and Yorkshire and The Humber lowest at 88%.

## 4 . Energy

## System Average Price (SAP) of gas

This is the average price of all gas traded through the balancing market. Market participants post bids or offers for volumes of gas a day-ahead and within-day trades. The SAP aggregates the trades conducted on the On-the-Day Commodity Market (OCM). This is the market that the National Gas Transmission use in their role as residual balancer. Other markets exist for wholesale gas trading in Great Britain.

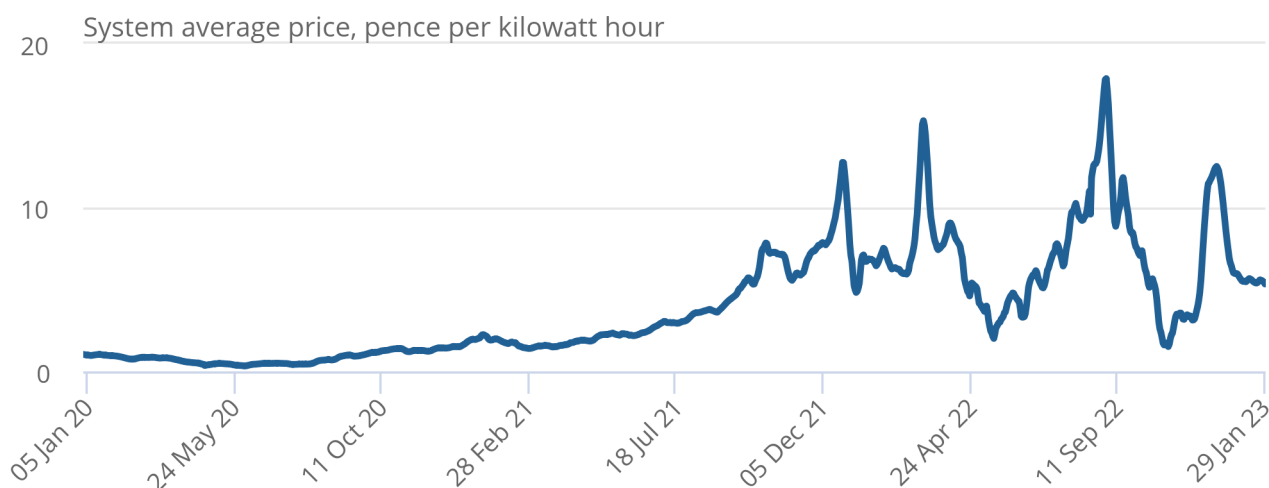
These data can be used to understand the general trend of gas prices within the UK. However, the data should be treated with caution, as these can be subject to extreme within-day trading prices and may skew actual traded prices. Additionally, while these prices reflect spot prices on the day, traders can opt for futures contracts where the buyer and the seller agree the market-determined price for gas for a future date. The daily SAP is used to determine the futures price and is therefore a useful indicator of supply constraints and demand pressures.

**Figure 3: The preceding seven-day rolling average gas price decreased by 2% in the week to 29 January 2023, having decreased sharply since the start of the year, in line with usual seasonal expectations**

System average price of gas, pence per kilowatt hour, 1 January 2020 to 29 January 2023, Great Britain, non-seasonally adjusted

Figure 3: The preceding seven-day rolling average gas price decreased by 2% in the week to 29 January 2023, having decreased sharply since the start of the year, in line with usual seasonal expectations

System average price of gas, pence per kilowatt hour, 1 January 2020 to 29 January 2023, Great Britain, non-seasonally adjusted



Source: National Gas Transmission

Notes:

1. The price trends observed will differ from that of the monthly Producer Price Inflation (PPI) series published by the Office for National Statistics because of the differences in data sources and methods.

The SAP of gas is now 27% lower than the equivalent period last year and 68% lower than the peak level observed for 2022 in late August. However, it is 546% higher than the February 2020 average level.



# 5 . Business and workforce

## Online job adverts

These figures are experimental estimates of online job adverts provided by Adzuna, an online job search engine, by category and by UK country and English region. 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 the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Vacancy Survey.

**Figure 4: The total number of online job adverts rose for the third consecutive week, increasing by 5% when compared with the previous week, however, it is 19% lower than the equivalent day of 2022**

Volume of online job adverts by category, index: 100 = February 2020 average, 3 January 2020 to 27 January 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, UK

### Notes:

1. Further category breakdowns are included in the [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 charts and [accompanying dataset](#).

### Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The total number of online job adverts rose by 5% on 27 January 2022 compared with the previous week. This reflects typical seasonal changes seen in previous years where job advert numbers increase in the middle of January after declining over the Christmas and New Year periods.

The number of online job adverts increased in 27 of the 28 job categories and decreased in just one category ("wholesale and retail"). The largest increases were in "education" and "charity/voluntary", both increasing by 12%. "Charity/voluntary" decreased by 23% when compared with the previous year, whereas "education" increased by 22% over the same period.

Of the 28 online job advert categories, four were above the level seen in the equivalent period of 2022, while the remaining 24 were below this level. The "part time/weekend" category experienced the largest increase compared with the previous year, rising by 23%, with the number of adverts trending upwards since the beginning of November 2022. "HR and recruitment" decreased by 54% compared with the previous year, with the number of adverts in this category largely trending downwards since the beginning of February 2022.

All 12 of the UK countries and English regions saw increases in the number of online job adverts in the latest week, however, only Scotland has a higher number of online job adverts when compared with the equivalent period last year.

## Business impact and insights

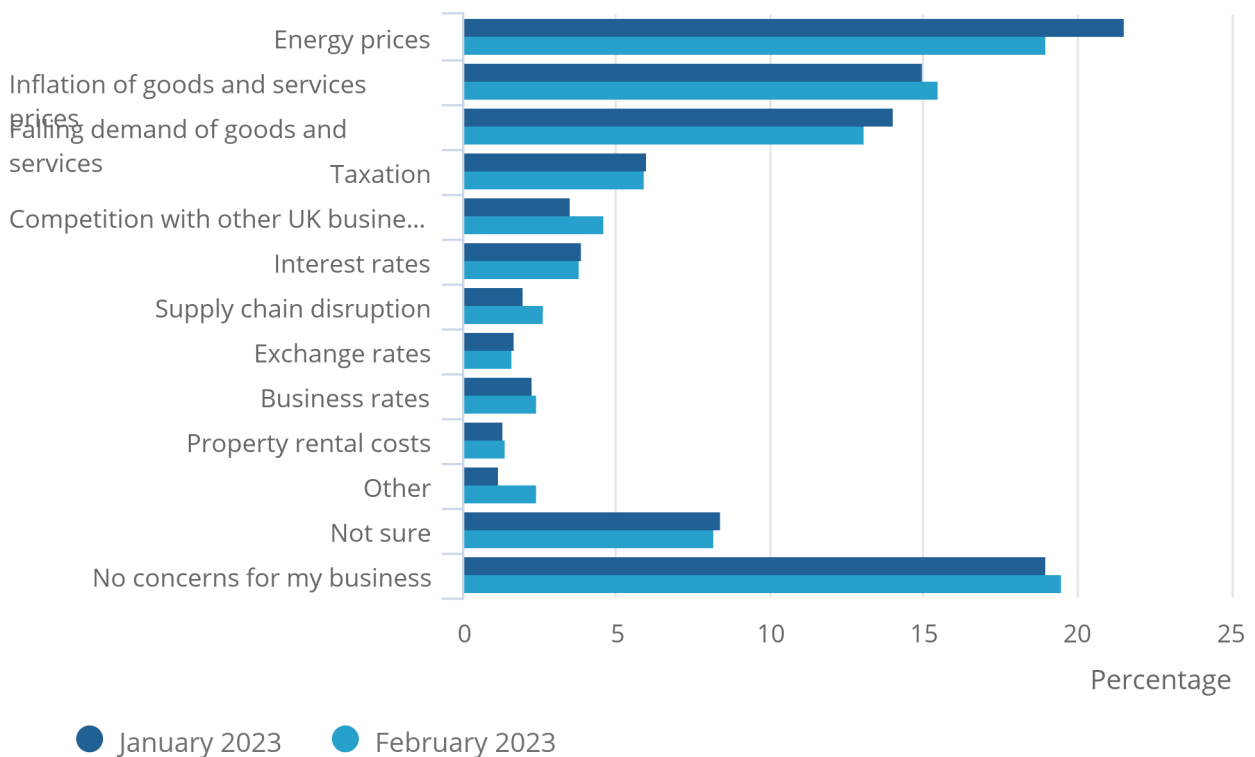
Initial results from Wave 75 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) were collected from 23 to 31 January 2023, with a response rate of 23.3% (9,145 responses).

**Figure 5: Less than a fifth (19%) of businesses reported energy prices are their main concern in February 2023, down from 22% for January 2023**

Businesses' main concerns, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, January to February 2023

Figure 5: Less than a fifth (19%) of businesses reported energy prices are their main concern in February 2023, down from 22% for January 2023

Businesses' main concerns, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, January to February 2023



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

Notes:

1. Initial weighted results, Wave 75 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.

Table 1: Of businesses currently trading, 16% said they were affected by industrial action in December 2022, as opposed to 44% who said they were not

Industrial action, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, November to December 2022

	<b>Yes, the business was affected</b>	<b>No, the business was not affected</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
<b>November 2022</b>	15.6%	42.8%	10.8%	29.5%	1.3%
<b>December 2022</b>	15.8%	44.2%	7.5%	29.7%	2.7%

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

#### Notes

1. Initial weighted results, Wave 75 of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).
2. Rows may not sum to 100% because of rounding and percentages less than 1% being removed for disclosure purposes.

## 6 . Transport

In the week to 29 January 2023, the average number of daily ship visits increased by 23% compared with the week ending 22 January 2023, from 194 visits to 239, but was 14% lower than the same period last year (279 visits). Similarly, the average number of cargo and tanker ship visits increased by 6%, from 86 to 91 in the most recent week, and was broadly unchanged from the level in the same period last year (90 visits). Our accompanying [Weekly shipping indicators dataset](#) is available.

## 7 . Data

### [Automotive fuel spending](#)

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

Estimated quantity of automotive fuel demand per average transaction is an experimental indicator used to isolate real demand after adjusting for growth in fuel prices.

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

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

Experimental job advert indices covering the UK job market.

### [Revolut spending on debit cards](#)

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

Experimental indices of Revolut debit card transaction data, UK. Includes sectoral, age and online versus in-store breakdowns. Daily seven-day averages updated weekly, plus monthly averages.

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

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

Daily and rolling average System Average Price (SAP) of gas traded in Great Britain over the On-the-Day Commodity Market (OCM).

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

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

These data series are experimental real-time indicators for monitoring UK spending using debit and credit cards. They track the daily CHAPS payments made by credit and debit card payment processors to around 100 major UK retail corporates, based on data supplied by the Bank of England.

### [Weekly shipping indicators](#)

Dataset | Released 3 February 2023

Experimental weekly and daily ship visits dataset covering UK ports.

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](#).

## 8 . 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 Statistics, which represent useful economic and social concepts.

## 9 . Measuring the data

Information on the methodology used to produce the indicators in this bulletin is available in our [Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators methodology](#).

## 10 . 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 Experimental Statistics.

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.

## 11 . Related links

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

Bulletin | Released fortnightly

Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, working arrangements and well-being 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.

## 12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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