Office for National Statistics

Statistical bulletin

Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators: 14 April 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.

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1 . Main points

- Debit card spending on "pubs, restaurants and fast food" increased by 17 percentage points from the previous week, meanwhile UK high street footfall was 113% of the level of last week; this coincides with increased activity over the Easter weekend (Revolut, Springboard). Section 3: Consumer behaviour.

- In the latest week, the System Average Price (SAP) of gas increased by 1%, while the System Price of electricity decreased by 19%; both are over 50% lower than the equivalent period last year and 75% below the peak seen in August 2022 (National Gas Transmission, Elexon). Section 4: Energy and housing.

- The total number of online job adverts grew by 1% on 6 April 2023 compared with the previous week; with increases in 11 of the 28 categories, and five of the 12 UK countries and English regions; but was 18% lower than the equivalent period of 2022. (Adzuna). Section 5: Business and workforce.

- One in five (20%) trading businesses reported that turnover had increased in March 2023 compared with the previous calendar month, the highest proportion since the introduction of this question in March 2022 (initial results from Wave 80 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey). Section 5: Business and workforce.

- Transport indicators varied in the most recent week, with the average number of daily ship visits up by 9% and cargo and tanker ship visits unchanged, though both were below the level in the equivalent period of 2022; road traffic levels on Monday 10 April 2023 were down by 22 percentage points from the previous week, likely because of the Easter Monday bank holiday (EUROCONTROL, 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. The gaps in the shipping timeline data are caused by technical issues.

3 . Consumer behaviour

UK Spending on debit and credit cards: weekly CHAPS-based indicator

These data series are experimental real-time indicators for estimating UK spending on credit and debit cards, as shown in our dataset. 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:

- "staple" 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 6 April 2023, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases increased by 7 points from the previous week and increased by 5 points compared with the same week in 2022

A backward-looking seven-day rolling average, 13 January 2020 to 6 April 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices

Figure 1: In the week to 6 April 2023, the aggregate CHAPS-based indicator of credit and debit card purchases increased by 7 points from the previous week and increased by 5 points compared with the same week in 2022

A backward-looking seven-day rolling average, 13 January 2020 to 6 April 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices

Index: February 2020 = 100
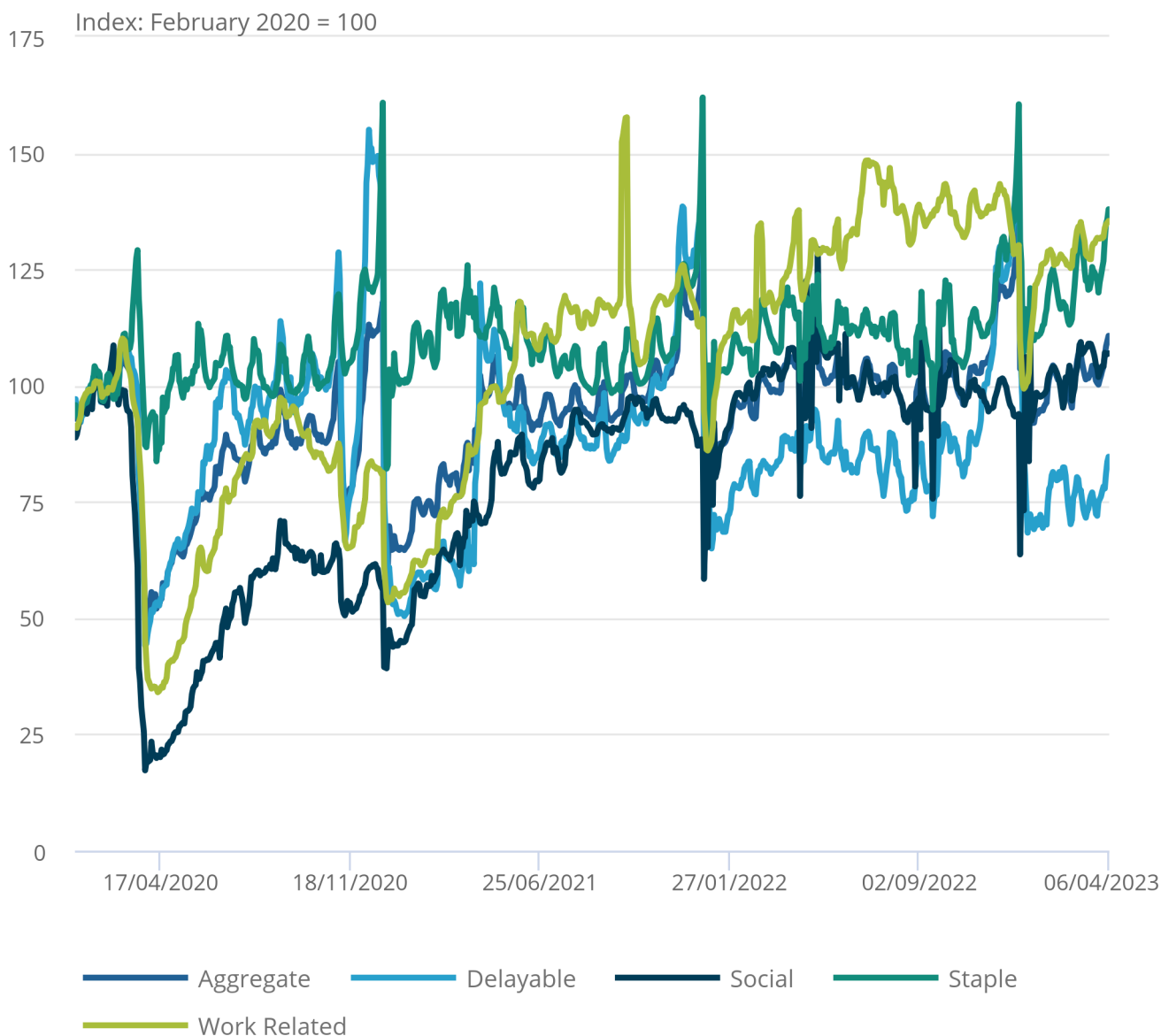
Source: Office for National Statistics and Bank of England calculations

Notes:

1. Users should note the daily payment data is 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.

2. Percentage 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:

- "staple" increased by 13 percentage points

- "delayable" increased by 7 percentage points

- "work-related" increased by 4 percentage points

- "social" increased by 3 percentage points

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

- "staple" increased by 19 percentage points

- "work-related" increased by 6 percentage points

- "social" decreased by 1 percentage point

- "delayable" decreased by 4 percentage points

UK Spending on debit and credit cards: monthly CHAPS-based indicator

The monthly data time series is available in our accompanying UK spending on credit and debit cards dataset and includes methodological notes that users should bear in mind. The monthly CHAPS index is calculated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), rather than being an additional series that is produced and validated by the Bank of England.

The monthly CHAPS-based indicator of aggregate credit and debit card spending in March 2023 was 3 percentage points higher than in February 2023, having trended upwards since the start of the year, in line with usual seasonal patterns. All spending categories except "delayable" increased from February 2023 to March 2023, with the largest increase reported in the "staple" category, which was up 7 percentage points compared with February 2023. "Delayable" decreased by 3 percentage points compared with February 2023.

The monthly indicator in March 2023 was 2 percentage points higher than in March 2022. All categories except "delayable" increased compared with March 2022, with "staple" spending seeing the largest increase of 12 percentage points, followed by "work related" increasing by 10 percentage points and "social" increasing by 3 percentage points. "Delayable" spending reduced by 8 percentage points when compared with March 2022. "Delayable" spending is also the only category that is below the pre-coronavirus baseline, at 24 percentage points below.

The monthly CHAPS-based aggregate index can provide an indication of the direction of retail sales data, having followed similar trends since the CHAPS index was established in January 2020. The ONS publishes retail sales data around the middle of each month, approximately two weeks after the monthly CHAPS index is published in this bulletin.

Figure 2: Retail sales data follow a similar trend to the CHAPS index of aggregate credit and debit card spending

Monthly average, non-seasonally adjusted, nominal prices and retail sales values, January 2020 to March 2023

Index: February 2020 = 100

Retail Sales — CHAPS Aggregate
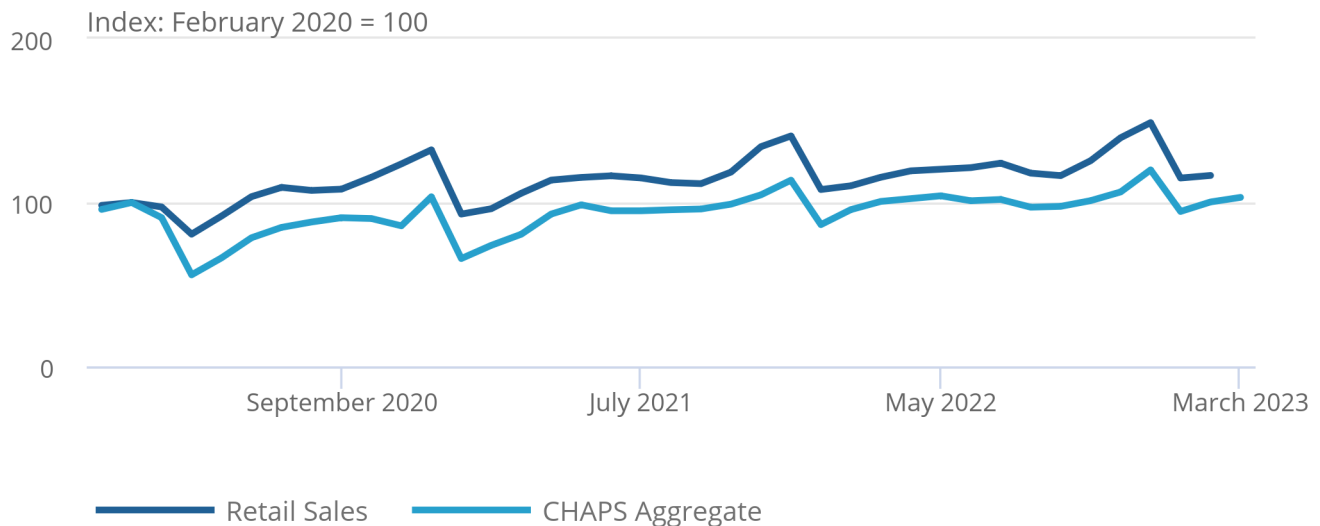
Source: Calculations on Bank of England data, and the Monthly Business Survey Retail Sales Inquiry, from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. CHAPS uses a broader definition of retail than the Retail Sales Index, including expenditure on train fares and social activities such as meals or drinks in pubs and restaurants.

2. The CHAPS index is currently not adjusted for seasonality as there are not enough back data. Non-seasonally adjusted data will include the impact of factors such as the number of trading days in the month and bank holidays.

3. The monthly CHAPS index is calculated by the ONS, rather than being an additional series that is produced and validated by the Bank of England.

4. Our Retail sales bulletin'smain measure is seasonally adjusted volume, which differs to the series presented in this figure.

Revolut spending on debit cards

In the week to 9 April 2023, Revolut debit card spending increased by 3 percentage points when compared with the previous week, which was 26 percentage points higher than the equivalent period last year.

When compared with the previous week, four of the six categories saw increases in debit card spending, while the "travel and accommodation" category remained broadly unchanged. The "retail" category was the only category that decreased, dropping by 9 percentage points, which is likely because of an increase in the number of retail stores being closed for periods of the Easter weekend. The category that saw the largest increase was "pubs, restaurants and fast food", which increased by 17 percentage points.

All six categories have increased considerably when compared with the equivalent period last year, with "food and drink" showing the largest year-on-year increase of 38 percentage points. These large increases are likely because the equivalent period last year did not contain the Easter weekend (Easter Friday fell on 7 April 2023, but it occurred on 15 April in 2022). Our accompanying Revolut spending on debit cards dataset is available.

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 14 of 2023 refers to the period Monday 3 April 2023 to Sunday 9 April 2023. All quoted figures have been rounded to the nearest integer.

Figure 3: UK high street footfall was 113% of the level from the previous week, coinciding with increased activity over the Good Friday bank holiday and Easter weekend

Volume of daily retail footfall, percentage compared with the equivalent week of 2019, 1 January 2020 to 9 April 2023, UK

Source: Springboard

Download the data

.xlsx

In the week to 9 April 2023, overall retail footfall increased to 108% of the level in the previous week. All three categories increased, with high street footfall, shopping centre footfall and retail park footfall at 113%, 105% and 101%, respectively, likely because of increased activity over the Easter weekend at the three main destination types. Similarly, all categories were above the level in the equivalent period of 2022, with high street footfall, shopping centre footfall and retail park footfall at 115%, 107% and 103%, respectively.

Retail footfall increased in all of the 12 UK regions and countries in the week to 9 April 2023, with the largest increase in the South West where footfall was 113% of the level of the previous week. Footfall in all 12 UK regions and countries was above the level in the equivalent period of 2022, with Scotland and Northern Ireland the furthest above this, both at 118%.

4 . Energy and housing

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 4: The preceding seven-day rolling average of gas price increased by 1% when compared with the previous week

System Average Price of gas, pence per kilowatt hour, preceding seven-day rolling average, 1 January 2020 to 9 April 2023, Great Britain, non-seasonally adjusted

Figure 4: The preceding seven-day rolling average of gas price increased by 1% when compared with the previous week

System Average Price of gas, pence per kilowatt hour, preceding seven-day rolling average, 1 January 2020 to 9 April 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 (ONS) because of the differences in data sources and methods.

In the week to 9 April 2023, the SAP of gas rose for the second week in a row, increasing by 1% when compared with the previous week. Additionally, the SAP of gas is 350% higher than the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) baseline of February 2020, however, it is 54% lower than the equivalent period last year and 77% lower than the peak seen in August 2022. Our accompanying System Average Price of gas dataset is available.

System Price of electricity

The [System Price of electricity, made available by Elexon](#), is used to settle the difference between contracted generation or consumption of electricity, and actual generation or consumption, in each half-hour trading period in the Balancing Market, the mechanism used to balance supply and demand in Great Britain's electricity market.

Companies are contracted to generate or consume a certain amount of electricity within each half hour (known as the Settlement Period). However, this may differ from the actual amount generated or consumed. Where companies have generated more or less than the amount of energy their customers consume, this difference is balanced by the UK's National Grid Transmission System, which buys or sells enough electricity to reconcile the difference. The System Price is designed to reflect the cost incurred by National Grid in doing this.

More [information about how prices are calculated](#) is available on the Elexon website.

We have taken a daily average of the half-hourly system prices and averaged them again over the preceding seven days to bring out the trends and smooth volatility.

Figure 5: In the latest week, the preceding seven-day rolling average of the System Price of electricity decreased by 19% when compared with the previous week

System Price of electricity, pound per megawatt hour, preceding seven-day rolling average, 1 January 2020 to 9 April 2023, Great Britain, non-seasonally adjusted

Figure 5: In the latest week, the preceding seven-day rolling average of the System Price of electricity decreased by 19% when compared with the previous week

System Price of electricity, pound per megawatt hour, preceding seven-day rolling average, 1 January 2020 to 9 April 2023, Great Britain, non-seasonally adjusted
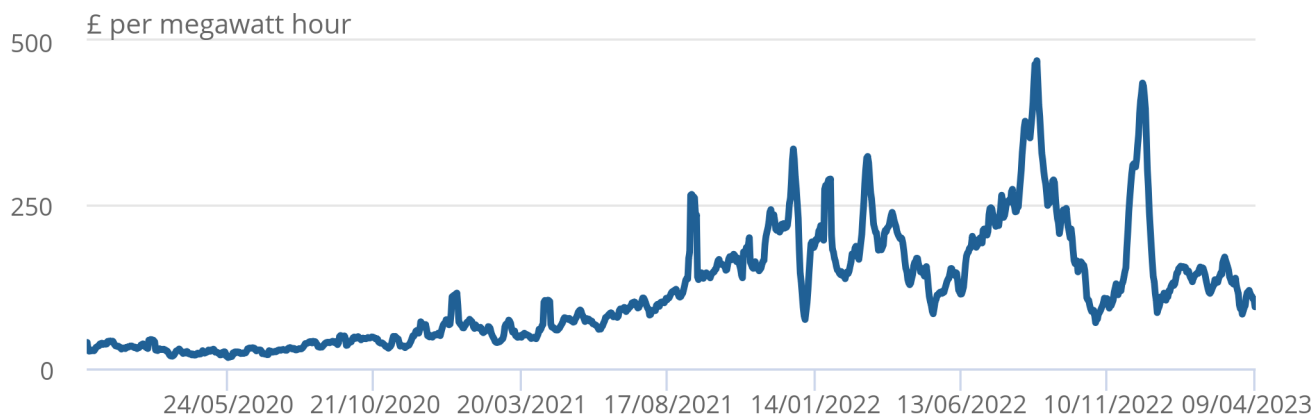
Source: Calculations on BMRS data from the Office for National Statistics and © Elexon Limited copyright and database right 2023

In the week to 9 April, the System Price of electricity decreased by 19% compared with the previous week. The System Price of electricity was 51% lower than the equivalent period last year and 80% lower than the peak seen on 28 August 2022. Additionally, the System Price of electricity was 189% higher than the average price of the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) baseline in February 2020. Our accompanying [System Price of electricity dataset](#) is available.

5 . Business and workforce

Business insights and impact on the UK economy

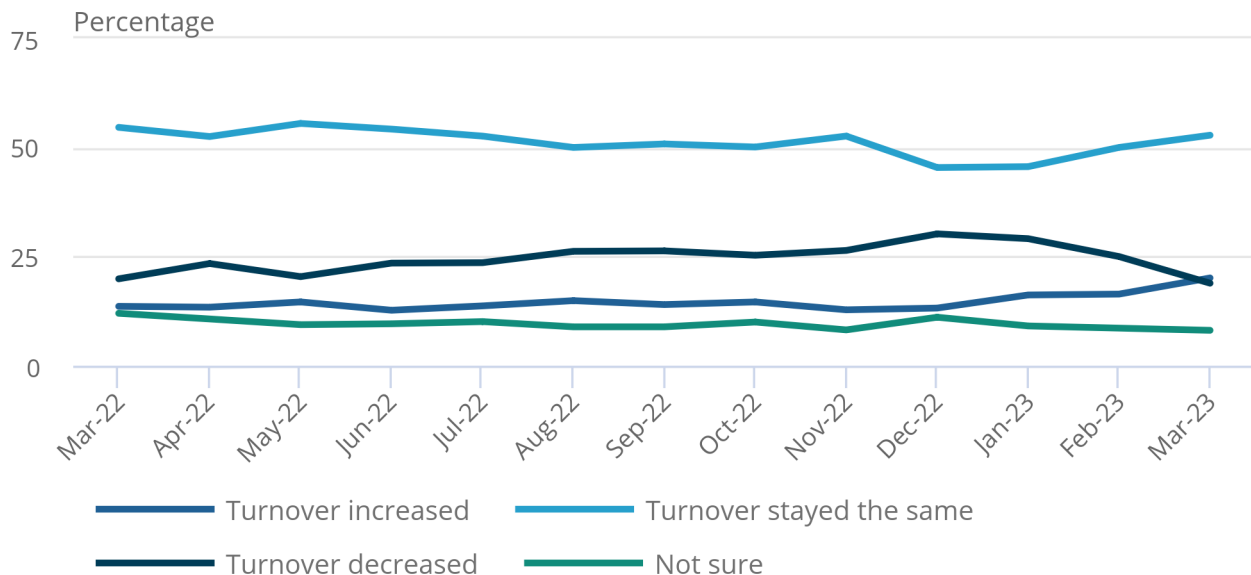Initial results from Wave 80 of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) were collected from 3 to 11 April 2023, with a response rate of 17.9% (7,052) responses).

Figure 6: One in five (20%) businesses reported that turnover had increased in March 2023 compared with the previous calendar month, the highest proportion in comparable records (March 2022)

Business turnover, businesses currently trading, weighted by count, UK, 1 March 2022 to 31 March 2023

Figure 6: One in five (20%) businesses reported that turnover had increased in March 2023 compared with the previous calendar month, the highest proportion in comparable records (March 2022)

Business turnover, businesses currently trading, weighted by count, UK, 1 March 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

Notes:

1. Initial weighted results, Wave 80 of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS).

2. Chart may not sum to 100% because of rounding and percentages less than 1% being removed for disclosure purposes.
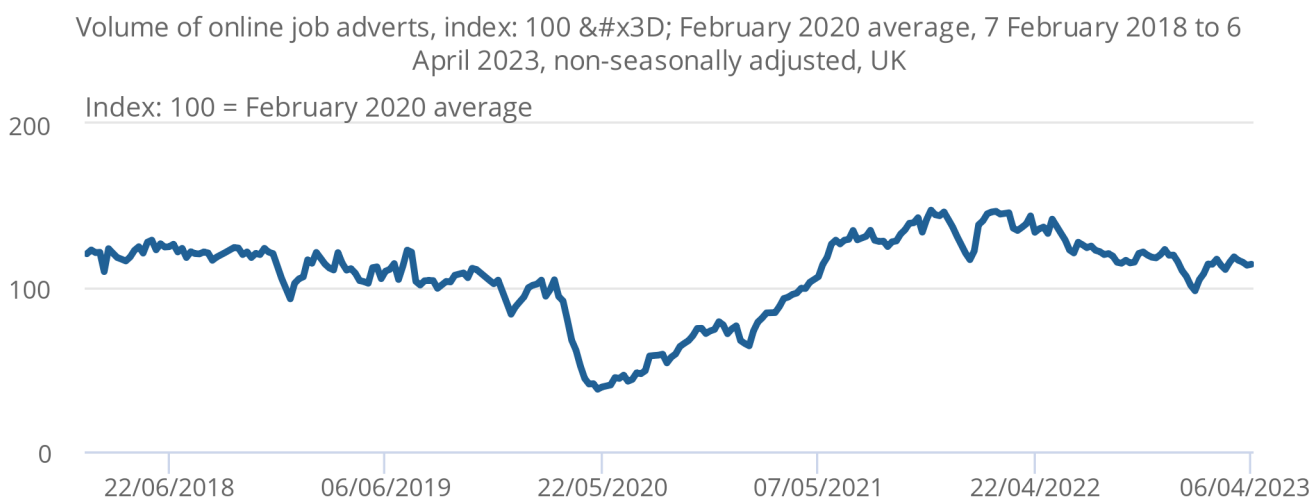
Online job adverts

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 our Vacancy Survey.

Figure 7: The total number of online job adverts increased slightly by 1% on 6 April 2023 compared with the previous week and was 18% below the level seen in the equivalent period of 2022

Volume of online job adverts, index: 100 = February 2020 average, 7 February 2018 to 6 April 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, UK

Figure 7: The total number of online job adverts increased slightly by 1% on 6 April 2023 compared with the previous week and was 18% below the level seen in the equivalent period of 2022

Volume of online job adverts, index: 100 = February 2020 average, 7 February 2018 to 6 April 2023, non-seasonally adjusted, UK

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 charts and [our accompanying dataset.](#)

The total number of online job adverts increased by 1% on 6 April 2023 compared with the previous week. In the latest week, there were increases in 11 of the 28 job categories, falls in 10 categories, and seven remained unchanged.

"Legal" saw the largest growth in the latest week, increasing by 11%, followed by "energy / oil & gas" and "accounting / finance", both of which increased by 5%. The "scientific / QA" category saw the largest decrease in the latest week, falling by 2%.

The total number of online job adverts was 18% lower than the level seen in the equivalent period of 2022. "Human resources (HR) and recruitment" saw the largest decrease relative to last year's levels at 53% lower, followed by "creative / design / arts and media" and "manufacturing", which were 48% and 47% lower, respectively.

The number of online job adverts increased in five of the 12 UK countries and English regions, was unchanged in six and decreased in one when compared with the previous week. The increases were seen in the East Midlands, London, Northern Ireland, North East and South West, each of which grew by 1%. Additionally, the East Midlands saw the largest decrease compared with the equivalent period in 2022 at 34% lower, followed by the West Midlands, which decreased by 26%. Our accompanying Online job advert estimates dataset is available.

Advanced notification of potential redundancies

Calculated as a rolling four-week average, the number of potential redundancies reported in the week to 2 April 2023 was 10% below the level in the equivalent week of 2022, while the number of employers proposing redundancies was 70% above the level in the equivalent week of 2022.

Comparisons with the equivalent period a year ago help account for any seasonal impacts. Our accompanying Advanced notification of potential redundancies dataset is available.

6 . Transport

Weekly shipping visits

The seasonally adjusted average number of daily ship visits increased by 9%, rising from 228 to 249 visits in the week to 9 April 2023, while cargo and tanker ship visits were unchanged at 88 visits. Compared with the equivalent period in 2022, ship visits were 6% lower (264 visits) and cargo and tanker ship visits were 4% lower (92 visits). Our accompanying Weekly shipping indicators dataset is available.

Road traffic for Great Britain

Road traffic levels on 10 April 2023 were down 22 percentage points from the previous week for all vehicle types, likely because Monday 10 April was a national bank holiday. This was largely because of a 66-percentage-point decrease in heavy goods vehicles, as well as a 40-percentage-point decrease in light goods vehicles in line with usual bank holiday patterns. Car traffic was also down 12 percentage points. Overall traffic levels were at 18 percentage points below the level on the equivalent day last year (Monday 11 April 2022). Users should note that the figures for 10 April 2023 may appear lower than last week as a result of the bank holiday rather than any other trend change. These statistics are provided by the Department for Transport (DfT).

7 . Data

Advanced notification of potential redundancies
Dataset | Released 14 April 2023
Number of potential redundancies from Insolvency Service HR1 forms and number of employers proposing redundancies, Great Britain.

Online job advert estimates
Dataset | Released 14 April 2023
Experimental job advert indices covering the UK job market.

System Average Price (SAP) of gas
Dataset | Released 14 April 2023
Daily and rolling average System Average Price (SAP) of gas traded in Great Britain over the On-the-Day Commodity Market (OCM).

Transactions at Pret A Manger
Dataset | Released 14 April 2023
Weekly transactional data from approximately 400 Pret A Manger stores around the UK.

UK spending on credit and debit cards
Dataset | Released 14 April 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 14 April 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, 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.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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