

Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics: Goods and Services Results 2019

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In April 2021 NISRA published its Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) results relating to the sales of local businesses' during 2019 to markets both within and outside Northern Ireland. The latest publication provides further disaggregation of these results into the value of goods and services sold.

Key points

- Total sales by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £71.9 billion in 2019, an increase of 4.6% (£3.2 billion) over the year.
 - Total sales of goods were estimated to be worth £47.8 billion in 2019, an increase of 3.1% (£1.5 billion) over the year. Total goods represented 66.5% of total sales in 2019.
 - Sales of services represented 33.5% of total sales in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £24.1 billion. Sales of services increased by 7.6% over the year (£1.7 billion).
- External sales to markets outside of NI increased by £0.7 billion (3.3%) to £23.0 billion in 2019.
 - External sales of goods by NI companies were estimated to be worth £15.9 billion in 2019, 69.3% of all external sales. This represents an increase of 2.1% over the year (£0.3 billion).
 - External sales of services were estimated to be worth £7.0 billion or 30.7% of all external sales in 2019. This represents an increase of 6.2% (£0.4 billion) over the year.
- Exports (sales outside the UK) were estimated to be worth £11.7 billion in 2019, an increase of 0.4% (£45 million) over the year.
 - Exports of goods were estimated to be worth £9.1 billion in 2019, an increase of 0.3% (£31 million). Exports of goods represented 78.0% of all exports sales.
 - Exports of services represented 22.0% of total export sales in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £2.6 billion. Exports of services increased by 0.6% (£14 million) over the year.

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1 Introduction and Context

Delay in Publication

This BESES publication, originally scheduled for release in March 2021, was delayed until July 2021, as it was necessary to extend the data collection period in light of the economic climate and pressures being faced by local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Users should refer to the [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#) page for more information.

Experimental Status

The Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) is an experimental annual measure of local businesses' sales to markets outside Northern Ireland (NI).

BESES data is gathered through the Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry and has been running since 2011. The ABI surveys all businesses with 50 or more employees; all multi-site businesses with 20-49 employees; all manufacturing businesses with more than 5 employees; and a representative sample of other smaller businesses. In all, the ABI samples about 20% of the eligible business population each year.

Ongoing development of the methodology (as outlined in the associated published [methodology paper](#) of March 2015) will be informed by user feedback, both in terms of the usefulness and reliability of the estimates and their comparability with other sources and the statistics will remain experimental until user feedback indicates that they are useful and credible.

These statistics are currently undergoing review by the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#) with a view to attaining [National Statistics](#) accreditation.

NISRA has engaged extensively throughout the evolution of this output with expert users of NI economic statistics whose views have already helped to inform the current approach. Users include DfE, DoF, and DAERA economists, the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre and a number of NI economic commentators and ONS. NISRA will continue to consult on any further methodological changes which may improve the quality and value of the statistics.

Users should refer to the [Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics Development Plan 2021](#) for further information on the progress made by NISRA in developing Northern Ireland trade statistics over the last 5 years alongside an overview of the plans for the next 2 years.

Background

The Northern Ireland Executive's [Economic Strategy](#) referred to the need to improve the measurement of Northern Ireland's exports beyond that of the manufacturing sector. NISRA subsequently published initial estimates of 'broad economy' sales and exports by industry sector in [March 2015](#).

More recently, the DfE [Economic Recovery Action Plan: Rebuilding A Stronger Economy](#) (February 2021) recognises that promoting trade and investment will be an important part of recovery coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic. It acknowledges that the size of the NI market

is relatively small and external sales provide a vital part of business growth in NI. The Plan identifies a series of actions that will be implemented by DfE to, inter alia, promote investment, trade and exports including assisting businesses to explore and increase cross border and GB market trade and develop new markets. As such, statistics such as those published in this release will be a vital source to monitor the impact of the interventions implemented.

This release provides a further breakdown of the revised estimates for 2018 and provisional estimates for 2019 first published in [April 2021](#) by splitting total sales into its goods and services elements.

The contents of this report will be of interest to government policy makers, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the business community, economic commentators, academics and members of the general public with an interest in the NI economy.

The BESES data has been of significant interest to Departments involved in EU Exit preparations and negotiations. Users of the data include the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department for Exiting the EU (DExEU), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), HM Treasury (HMT), Cabinet Office and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The latest DfE [Economic Commentary](#) provides an overview of the state of the Northern Ireland economy, setting it in a global context.

DfE have also relied heavily on the BESES data as part of their EU Exit related research. Some of their research and analysis can be found on the [DfE EU Exit Analysis](#) webpage.

Other sources

The International Trade in Services (ITIS) survey is a UK wide survey which collects information on overseas transactions of consultants and companies offering business services. Information collected from the survey is fed into the UK balance of payments and published at the UK level. The full bulletin can be accessed on the [ONS website](#).

While directly comparable UK data for the BESES do not exist (the BESES covers goods and services produced in Northern Ireland), HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) are responsible for collecting the [UK's international trade in goods data](#), which are published as two National Statistics series - the 'Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS) of the UK' and the 'UK Regional Trade Statistics (RTS)'.

International trade in goods data at summary product and country level, by UK regions and devolved administrations can be found on the HMRC Regional Trade Statistics webpage. In addition, HMRC also provide an interactive table-builder to allow users to build custom tables and drill down into trade in specific commodities.

The Scottish Government also publish export statistics from the Exports Statistics Scotland series (formerly called the Global Connections Survey). These statistics can be accessed on the [Scottish Government's website](#). The Welsh Government has recently developed an experimental trade measure called "Trade Survey for Wales". The latest release can be accessed on the [Welsh Government's website](#).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) has issued guidance on comparing official statistics produced by each nation of the UK. This guidance can be found in the report [Comparing Official Statistics Across the UK PDF \(635KB\)](#).

NISRA's exports statistics are considered as "Partially Comparable at Level D" with the ONS's statistics on importers and exporters in GB on the [ONS website](#).

Level D comparability is described as:

"Figures which are produced from separate sources of data. Methods and standards are broadly comparable, but users should be made aware of the limitations."

Interactive mapping tool

NISRA has developed an interactive trade in goods map to allow users to explore official trade in goods data by country and world region using data from HMRC's Regional Trade Statistics. The tool was developed by NISRA based on the existing [UN Comtrade](#) tool developed by [DIT \(Department for International Trade\)](#) and [BEIS \(Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy\)](#) and can be found below:

- [UK Regions Imports and Exports of Goods by Country and World Region](#)

Status of figures in current bulletin

The most recent figures relate to survey year 2019. These figures are provisional and are subject to revision in the next reporting period.

It is normal practice to revise the data from the previous year based on ongoing data validation and clarification of responses from individual businesses. In line with this, previously published provisional BESES estimates for 2018 have been revised throughout this publication.

Sales and exports values are reported in £ billion unless otherwise specified.

Percentages are reported to one decimal place.

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

All values are in **current** prices.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted on the collection and validation of business data gathered throughout the majority of 2020. The collection period for the survey data for the 2019 reference year was from March 2020 – March 2021. During this time many businesses were either closed or working on a much reduced scale. Thus the achieved response rate of 52% is somewhat lower than the rate normally achieved (approximately 70%).

As a result, estimates for 2019 contain a larger number of imputations (estimates) than previous years and may be subject to higher revisions than normal next year.

That said, imputation methods for the survey are robust and well-established, and the coefficients of variation for the headline figures for Turnover (i.e. total sales) and Exports (i.e. total sales outside the UK) are 0.8% and 1.6% respectively, indicating a strong level of precision for the estimates.

Definitions used in this publication

Turnover (also referred to as **total sales**) is defined as total sales and work done. This is calculated by adding the value of sales of goods produced, goods purchased and resold without further processing, work done and industrial and non-industrial services rendered.

External Sales are comprised of those sales made outside Northern Ireland, that is, sales to Great Britain, Ireland, the Rest of the European Union and the Rest of the World.

Exports are defined as all sales outside the United Kingdom.

The **Rest of the EU (REU)** is composed of the following countries: Germany; France; Belgium; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Italy; Denmark; Portugal; Spain; Greece; Austria; Sweden; Finland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia (Croatia joined the EU in July 2013 and is included in the 2014 reporting period).

The **Rest of the World (ROW)** refers to all other destinations outside the EU.

Goods refers to specific, tangible products.

Services refers to intangible products.

Broad Economy: The information needed to produce BESES is collected via the NI Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI). Like the NIABI, the BESES results are classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (SIC) system. The SIC 2007 sections covered by the NIABI defines the term 'Broad Economy' and are as follows:

- A. Agriculture (support activities), forestry and fishing
- B. Mining and quarrying
- C. Manufacturing
- D. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
- E. Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
- F. Construction
- G. Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles (Distribution industries)
- H. Transport and storage
- I. Accommodation and food service activities
- J. Information and communication
- L. Real estate activities
- M. Professional, scientific and technical activities
- N. Administrative and support service activities
- P. Education (excludes local authority and central government bodies)
- Q. Human health and social work activities (excludes local authority and central government, and medical and dental practice activities (group 86.2))
- R. Arts, entertainment and recreation
- S. Other service activities

Users should refer to the document "[Background information - Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics](#)" for further detail on survey coverage and definitions.

Reference Tables

To support this release a set of reference tables with further sectoral and geographic breakdowns are available on the [NISRA website](#).

User Engagement

We welcome any feedback you might have in relation to this report, and would be particularly interested in knowing how you make use of these data to inform your work. Please contact us at economicstats@nisra.gov.uk.

Next Publication

Imports data for survey year 2019 will be published in Autumn 2021.

The next exports bulletin, with results for survey year 2020, will be published in December 2021.

All publications will be available on the [NISRA website](#).

For Further Information

Further information on the BESES can be accessed on the [NISRA website](#).

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2 Summary and Commentary

2.1 Sales and Exports Performance

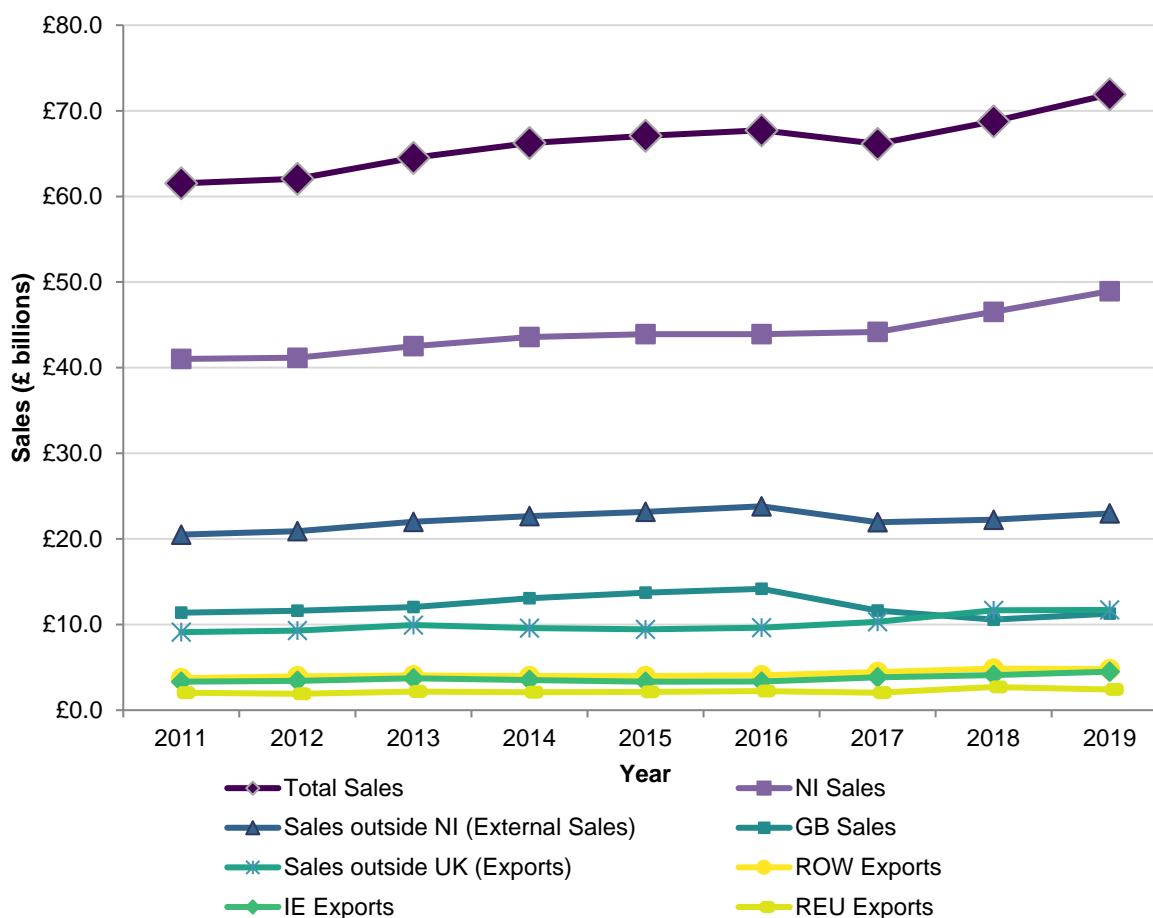
Total sales by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £71.9 billion in 2019. This represents an increase of 4.6% (£3.2 billion) over the year and compares to a previous annual increase of 4.0% in 2018.

In 2019, 32.0% of total sales were made to customers outside NI (external sales). This equated to £23.0 billion, representing an increase of 3.3% (£0.7 billion) over the year.

Sales outside the UK (exports) were estimated to be worth £11.7 billion in 2019. This represented an increase of 0.4% over the year, and follows an increase in the previous period (2017 – 2018) of 13.0%.

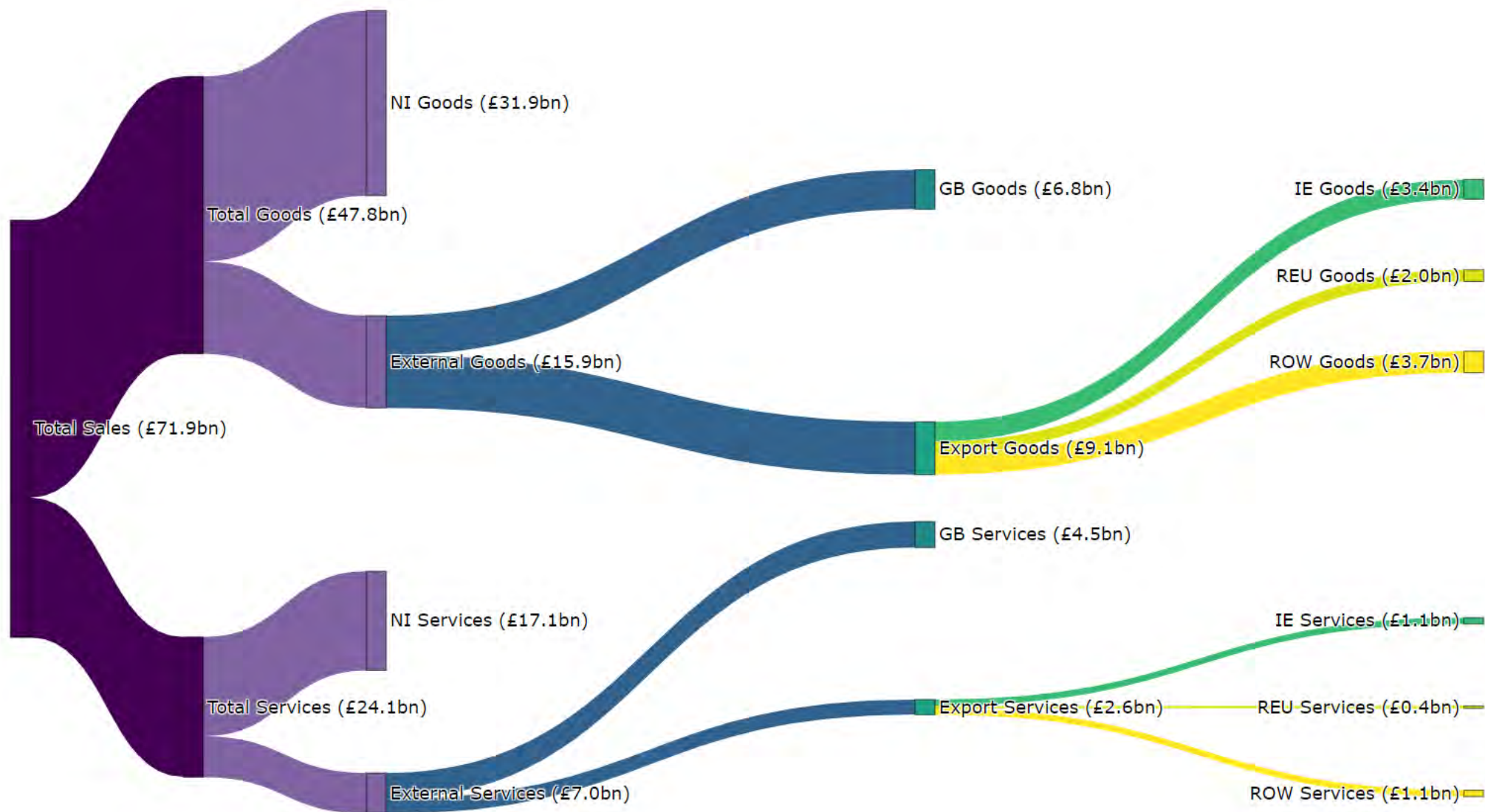
Figure 1 shows the values of total sales, and their broad destinations over the 8 year period (2011 to 2019). Over the period 2011 – 2019, sales to all broad destinations increased with the exception of sales to GB, having fallen in both 2017 and 2018, before increasing again in 2019. Sales to GB are still below their peak value of £14.2 billion in 2016.

Figure 1: Sales by broad destination, 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 1 Data](#)

Figure 2: Sales of Goods and Services by Broad Destination, 2019 (£ billion)



2.2 Sale of Goods and Services over Time

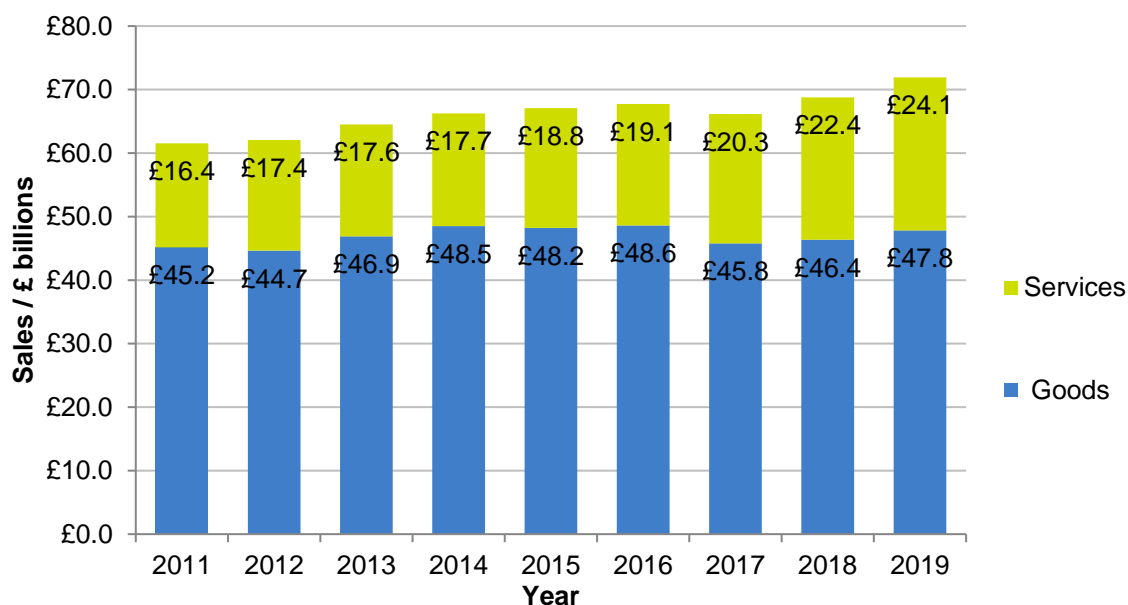
Total Sales

Total sales of goods were estimated to be worth £47.8 billion in 2019. Sales of goods increased by 3.1% over the year (£1.5 billion), compared to an increase of 1.3% the previous year. Total sales of goods represented two thirds (66.5%) of total sales in 2019.

Sales of services represented 33.5% of total sales in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £24.1 billion. Sales of services increased by 7.6% over the year (£1.7 billion), compared to an increase of 10.1% the previous year. Figures 3 – 5 show the values of total sales, external sales and export sales of goods and services over the 8 year period (2011 – 2019).

Over the period 2011 – 2019, total sales have increased. The level of total sales of goods has remained relatively constant while sales of services have increased steadily, driving the increasing levels of total sales.

Figure 3: Total Sales of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 3 Data](#)

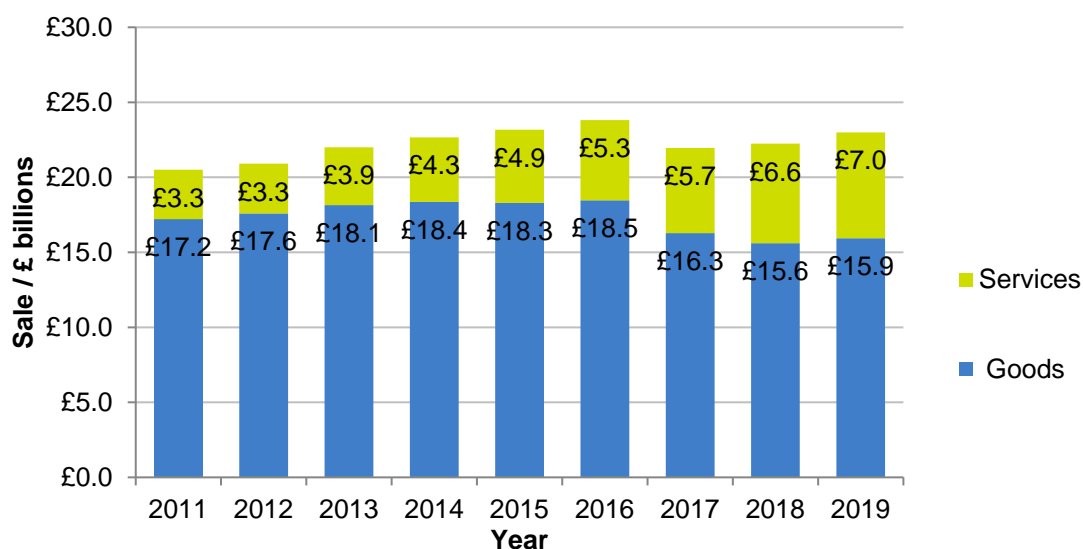
External Sales

The total value of external sales of goods by Northern Ireland companies was estimated to be worth £15.9 billion in 2019. This represents an increase of 2.1% over the year (£0.3 billion) compared to a decrease the previous year of 4.1%. External sales of goods represented 69.3% of all external sales in 2019.

External sales of services were estimated to be worth £7.0 billion in 2019. This represents an increase of 6.2% (£0.4 billion) over the year and compares to an increase of 16.9% in 2018. External sales of services represented 30.7% of all external sales over the year.

Over the period 2011 – 2019, external sales of goods peaked in 2016, falling in the next two years before recovering slightly in 2019. External sales of services have increased each year, partly offsetting the losses in external goods in 2017 and 2018.

Figure 4: External Sales of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 4 Data](#)

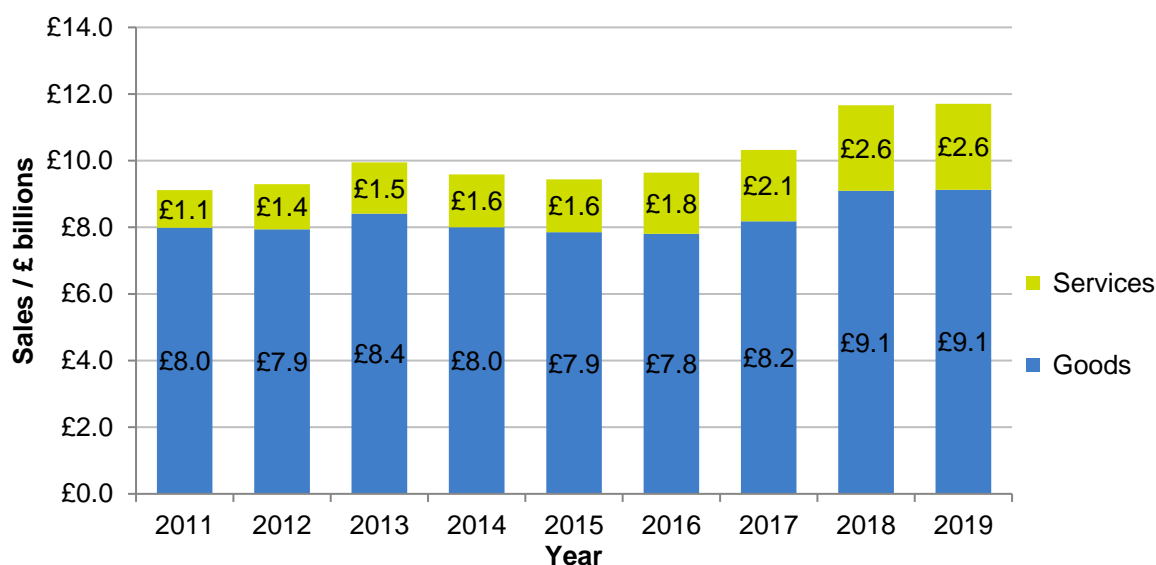
Exports

Total exports of goods were estimated to be worth £9.1 billion in 2019. This represents an increase of 0.3% (£31 million) over the year and compares to an increase of 11.2% in 2018. The export of goods represented 78.0% of all exports in 2019.

Exports of services represented 22.0% of total export sales in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £2.6 billion. Exports of services increased by 0.6% (£14 million) over the year compared to an increase of 19.8% (£0.4 billion) the previous year.

Over the period 2011 – 2019, the trend in total exports has been inconsistent, however, in more recent years (from 2015 onwards), exports have grown every year. This has been driven by increases in both the export of goods and the export of services.

Figure 5: Exports of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)



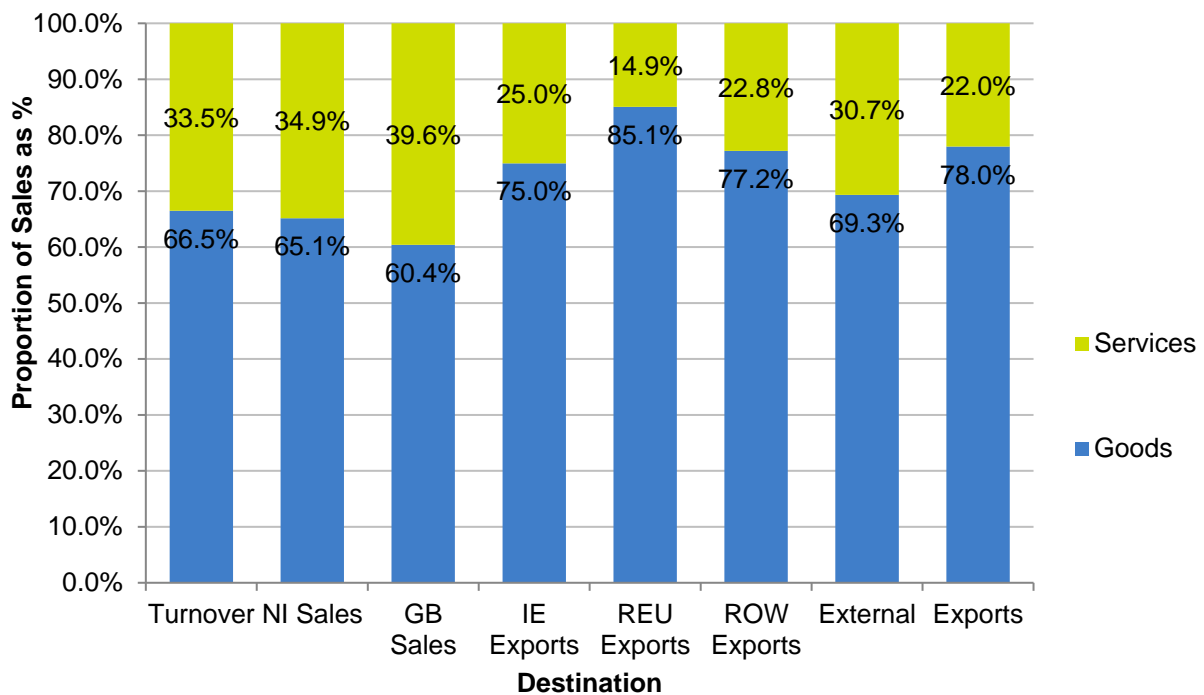
[Download Figure 5 Data](#)

2.3 Analysis by Destination

Figure 6 shows the proportion of broad destination sales accounted for by goods and services. Sales of goods account for the largest proportion of sales within each broad destination in 2019. Goods account for 65.1% of total Northern Ireland sales, compared to 60.4% of GB sales, 75.0% of Ireland sales, 85.1% of Rest of Europe sales and 77.2% of all Rest of World sales. Sales of goods account for 78.0% of all export sales and 69.3% of all external sales.

For sales of services it is apparent that the closer the market the greater the proportion of service sales occur, with services accounting for 34.9% of total sales in Northern Ireland, 39.6% of all Great Britain sales and 22.0% of all exports.

Figure 6: Goods and Services, as a proportion of sales, to each destination, 2019

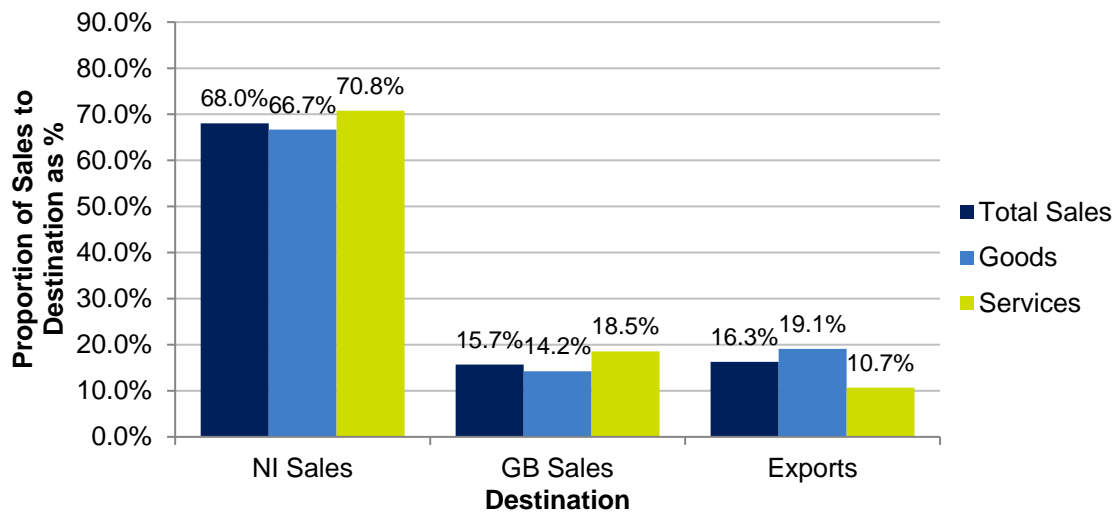


[Download Figure 6 Data](#)

Figure 7 shows the proportion of total sales, sales of goods and sales of services sold to Northern Ireland, Great Britain and those sold as exports. It is apparent that the highest proportion of service sales occurs internally, with 70.8% of all service sales being made within Northern Ireland. Outside of Northern Ireland, the sale of services to GB was higher than the sales of services outside the UK (i.e. Exports), accounting for 18.5% and 10.7% of the total sale of services respectively. The more distant the market, the smaller the proportion of sales of services becomes, with 18.5% of sales in GB and 10.7% of sales exported.

66.7% of all sales of goods occur within Northern Ireland. However, in contrast to the position regarding the sale of services, the share of goods sold in GB (14.2%) is less than those exported outside of the UK (19.1%).

Figure 7: Proportion of the sale of Goods and Services to each destination, 2019



[Download Figure 7 Data](#)

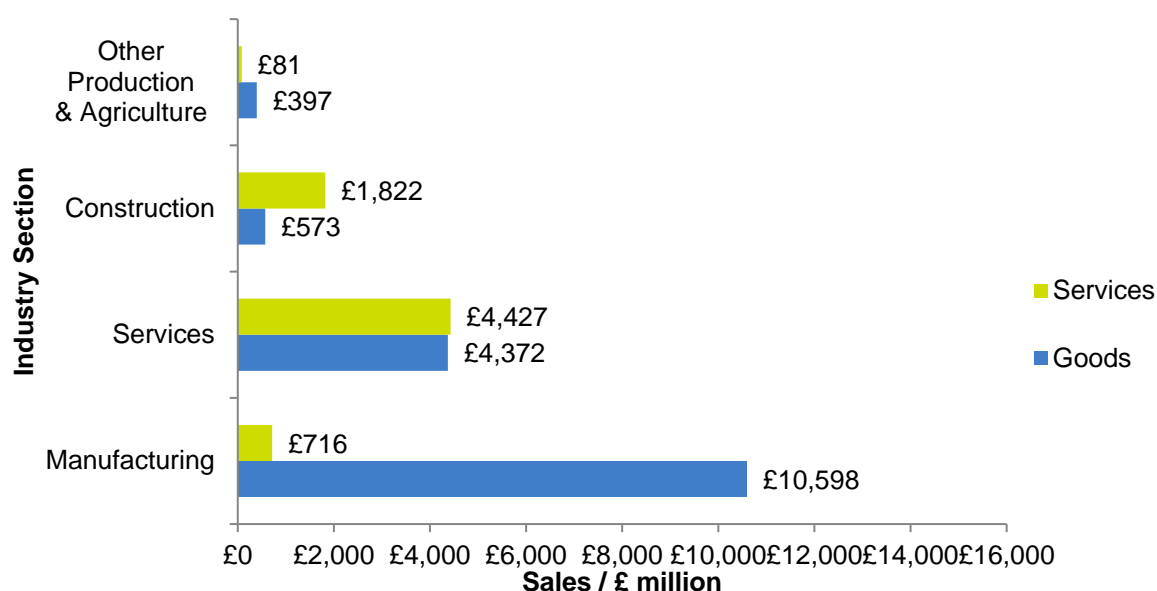
2.4 Analysis by Industry Section

External sales to markets outside Northern Ireland are comprised of sales to GB plus the value of exports combined. Figures 8 – 10 show the value, trends and proportion of external sales of goods and services over the year. In 2019, the largest proportion of external sales of goods was from the Manufacturing sector (Section C) which made up 66.5% (£10,598 million) of all external sales of goods. External sales of goods by businesses in the Manufacturing sector decreased by £80 million over the year.

The next largest sector for external sales of goods was the Services sector¹, with 27.4% (£4,372 million) of external sales of goods. External sales of goods in this sector increased by £346 million (8.6%).

The Construction sector (Section F) saw the next largest proportion of external sales of goods (3.6% or £573 million) while the Other Production & Agriculture² sections represented just 2.5% (or £397 million) of external sales of goods.

Figure 8: External sales of goods and services by industry section, 2019 (£ millions)



[Download Figure 8 Data](#)

The largest proportion of external sales of services was, not surprisingly, from the Services sector which made up 62.8% (£4,427 million) of all external sales of services. Such activity saw an increase of £627 million (16.5%) between 2018 and 2019.

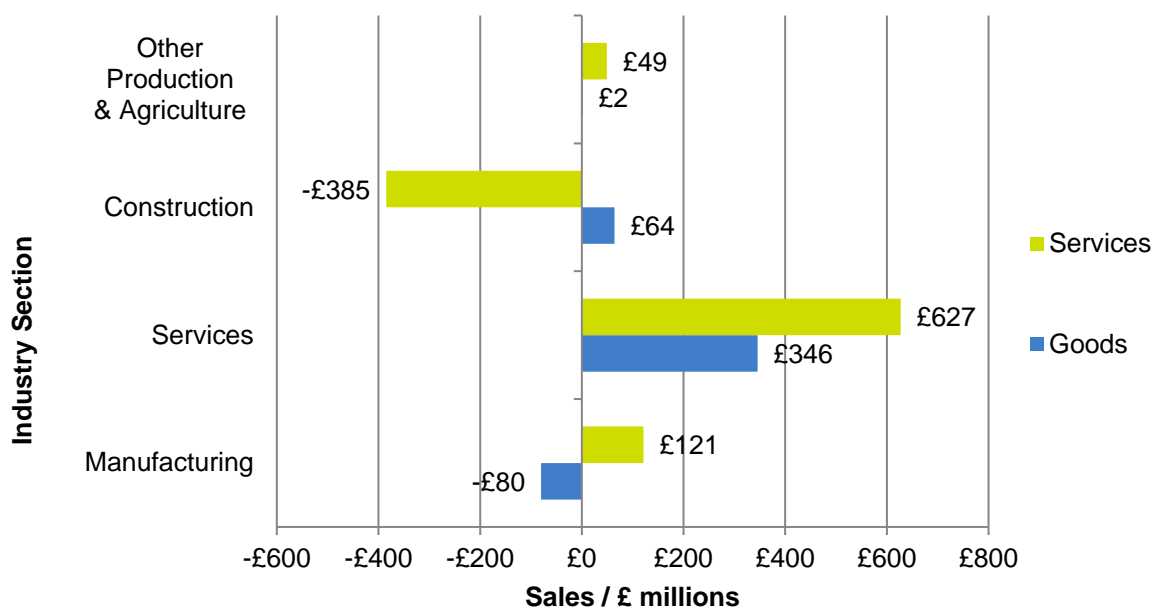
The next largest sector for external sales of services was the Construction sector, with 25.9% (£1,822 billion) of external sales of services. However the Construction sector also saw a fall in external sales of services over the year, decreasing by £385 million over the year (17.4%).

Manufacturing saw the next largest proportion of the external sale of services with 10.2% (£716 million) of such sales in 2019. The Manufacturing sector increased in external sales of services over the year, by 20.4% (£121 million). The Other Production & Agriculture section represented just 1.2% (£81 million) of external sales of services in 2019, and saw an increase (£49 million or 154.2%) over the year, although this change is based on a relatively low level of sales.

¹ The Services section comprises sectors G – J, L – N and sectors P – S

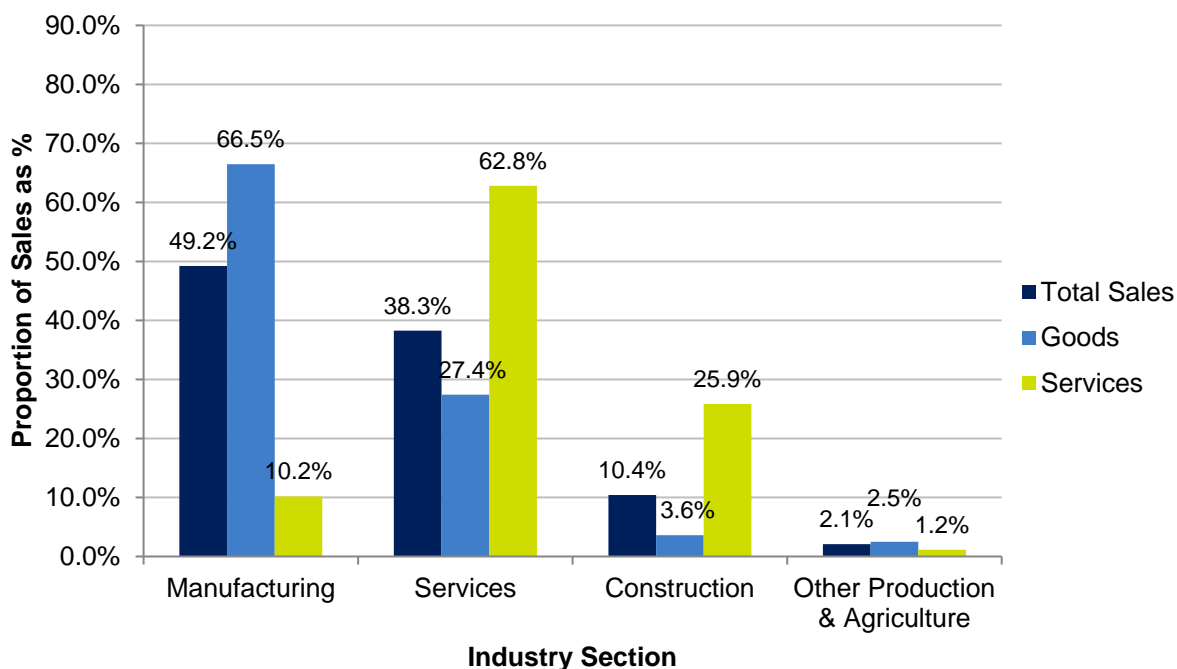
² The Other Production & Agriculture section comprises sectors A, B, D & E

Figure 9: Trends in external sales of goods and services: change by industry section, 2018 – 2019 (£ millions)



[Download Figure 9 Data](#)

Figure 10: Proportion of external sales of goods and services by industry section, 2019



[Download Figure 10 Data](#)

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Table 1.2	Annual Series	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 - 2019 (£m)
Table 1.3	Annual Series	Exports of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 – 2019 (£m)
Table 1.4	Annual Series	External sales of goods and services by broad industry sector, 2011 - 2019 (£m)

The tables below include annual estimates with associated quality indicators (confidence intervals and coefficient of variation)

Table 2.1	2019	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
Table 2.2	2019	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
Table 2.3	2019	Exports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 3.1	2018	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
Table 3.2	2018	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
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Table 4.1	2017	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
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Table 5.1	2016	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
Table 5.2	2016	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
Table 5.3	2016	Exports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 6.1	2015	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
Table 6.2	2015	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
Table 6.3	2015	Exports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 7.1	2014	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
Table 7.2	2014	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
Table 7.3	2014	Exports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 8.1	2013	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
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Table 9.1	2012	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations
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Table 10.2	2011	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector
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[BESES Goods and Services Tables – 2019 \(Microsoft Excel\)](#)



[BESES Goods and Services Tables – 2019 \(Open Document Spreadsheet\)](#)