

Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics: Trade in Goods and Services Results 2020

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In December 2021 NISRA published its Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) results relating to the sales of local businesses' during 2020 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 and also provides information on the value of goods and services purchased by NI businesses.

Key points

- Total sales of goods were estimated to be worth £44.7 billion in 2020, a decrease of 7.4% (£3.6 billion) over the year. Total goods represented 66.6% of total sales in 2020.
- Sales of services represented 33.4% of total sales in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £22.4 billion. Sales of services decreased by 2.9% over the year (£0.7 billion).
- Exports of goods were estimated to be worth £7.9 billion in 2020, a decrease of 14.0% (£1.3 billion). Exports of goods represented 77.3% of all exports sales.
- Exports of services represented 22.7% of total export sales in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £2.3 billion. Exports of services decreased by 7.5% (£0.2 billion) over the year.
- Total purchases of goods represented 77.4% of total purchases in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £33.6 billion. Purchases of goods decreased by 9.1% (£3.3 billion) over the year.
- Total purchases of services represented 22.6% of total purchases in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £9.8 billion. Purchases of services increased by 0.8% over the year (£0.1 billion).
- Imports of goods were estimated to be worth £6.3 billion in 2020, a decrease of 8.0% (£0.5 billion). Imports of goods represented 88.2% of all imports.
- Imports of services represented 11.8% of total imports in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £0.8 billion. Imports of services increased by 6.2% (£49 million) over the year.
- Exports of goods and services combined were worth £10.3 billion, while imports of goods and services combined were worth £7.1 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of £3.2 billion.

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NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

These statistics [were designated](#) as National Statistics in March 2022 following a [full assessment of the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for statistics](#).

Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and seek to continue with the development and improvement of the BESES series.

Users should refer to the [Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics Development Plan](#) for details of further planned developments.

1 Introduction and Context

Publication Restructure

Following two events that sought user views on the BESES (a [user consultation](#) held in Summer 2021; and the recently concluded [assessment](#) of the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics by the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#)), the desire for more timely data was a theme that emerged strongly from both. NISRA subsequently hosted a [user group meeting](#) with users on the 20th January 2022 where we outlined proposals to bring forward publication of the annual imports publication (typically released in May/June each year) to early April 2022, combining it with our annual exports goods and services publication. This plan was well received and the current publication is the outworking of that proposal.

This single publication is now titled “*Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics: Trade in Goods and Services Results*” and brings imports and exports goods and services data together into one publication and, importantly, will facilitate the production of balance of trade analysis (as measured by BESES coverage) for the first time.

Status of figures in current bulletin

The most recent figures relate to survey year 2020. 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 2019 have been revised throughout this publication.

Trade 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 fieldwork period for survey year 2020. During this time many businesses were either closed or working on a much reduced scale. Thus the achieved response rate of 58% is somewhat lower than the rate normally achieved (approximately 70%).

As a result, estimates for 2020 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, Exports and Purchases are 0.8%, 1.4% and 1.0% 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.

Total purchases are defined as the **sum of all purchases from** Northern Ireland (NI), Great Britain (GB), the Republic of Ireland (IE), the Rest of the European Union (REU) and the Rest of the World (ROW). Total purchases include all non-deductible VAT. In the case of imports the cost includes import and excise duties.

Imports consist of all purchases made from **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.

Trade balance is [defined](#) as the difference between the value of exports and the value of imports, or:

$$\text{trade balance} = \text{value of exports} - \text{value of imports}$$

Reference Tables

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

For Further Information

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

2 Summary and Commentary - Exports

2.1 Sales and Exports Performance

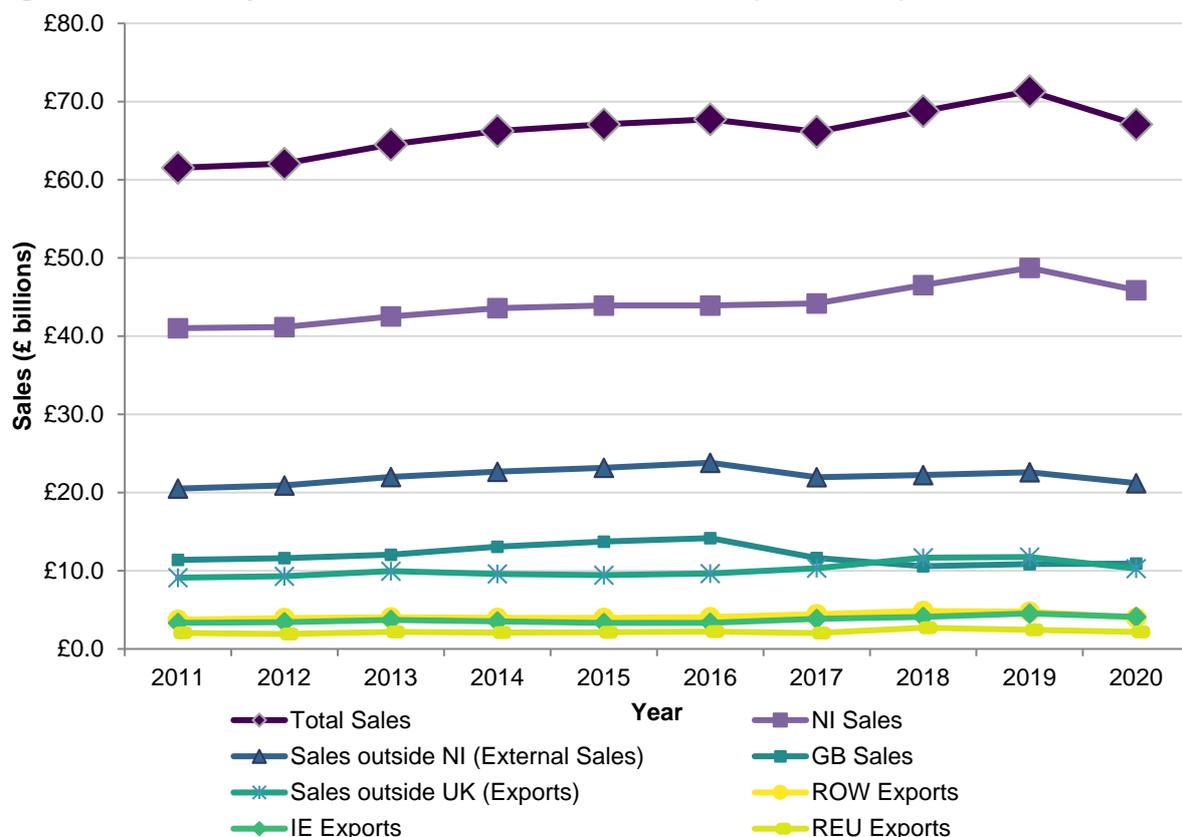
Total sales by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £67.1 billion in 2020. This represents a decrease of 6.0% (£4.3 billion) over the year and compares to a previous annual increase of 3.7% in 2019.

In 2020, 31.6% of total sales were made to customers outside NI (external sales). This equated to £21.2 billion, representing a decrease of 6.2% (£1.4 billion) over the year.

Sales outside the UK (exports) were estimated to be worth £10.3 billion in 2020. This represented a decrease of 12.6% over the year, and follows an increase in the previous period (2018 – 2019) of 0.8%.

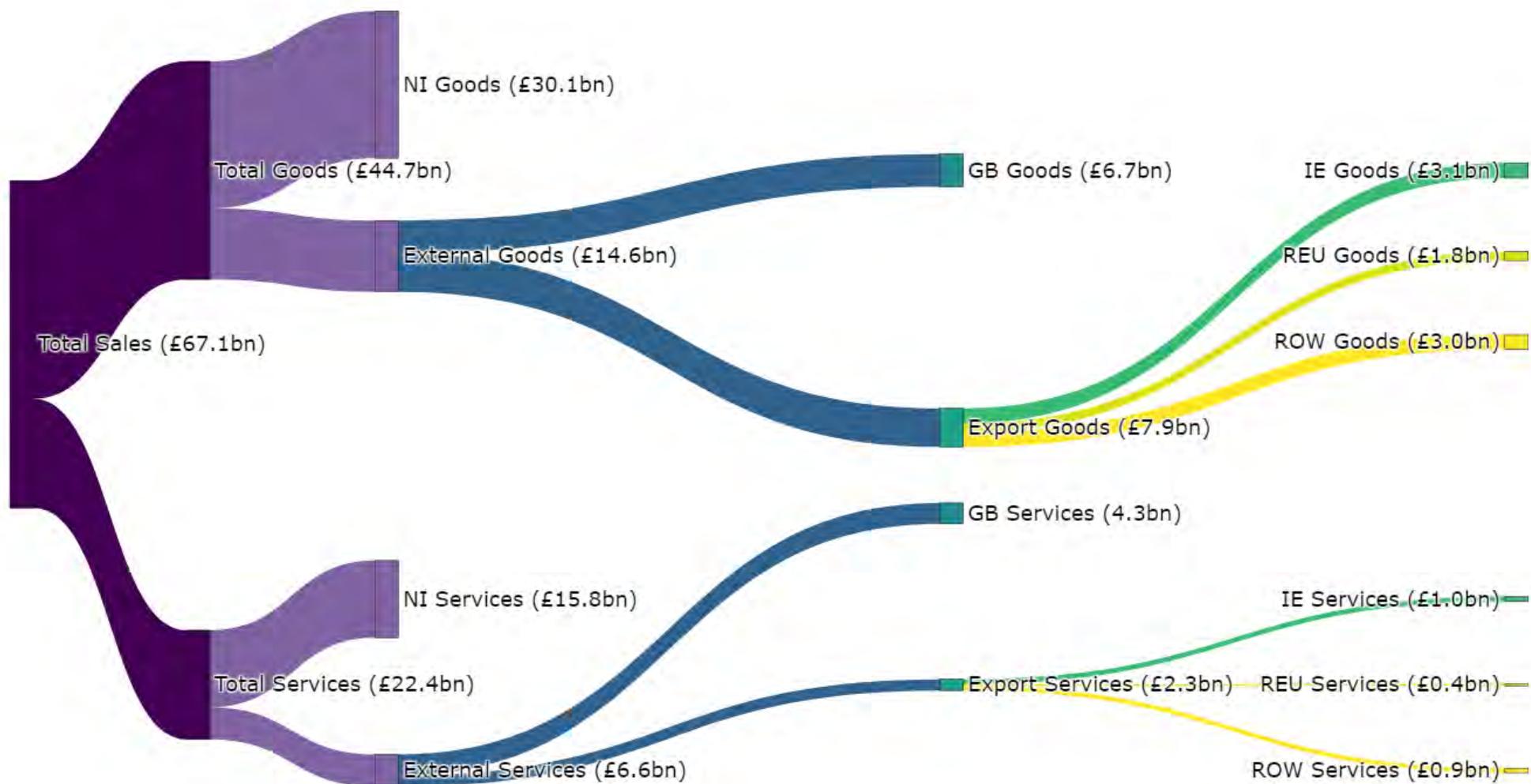
Figure 1 shows the values of total sales, and their broad destinations over the 9 year period (2011 to 2020). The downturn in total sales in 2020 and the concomitant effect on sales to each broad destination can be seen clearly. The vast majority of businesses reported that the decrease in total sales in 2020 was as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on business operations.

Figure 1: Sales by broad destination, 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 1 Data](#)

Figure 2: Sales of Goods and Services by Broad Destination, 2020 (£ billion)



2.2 Sale of Goods and Services over Time

Total Sales

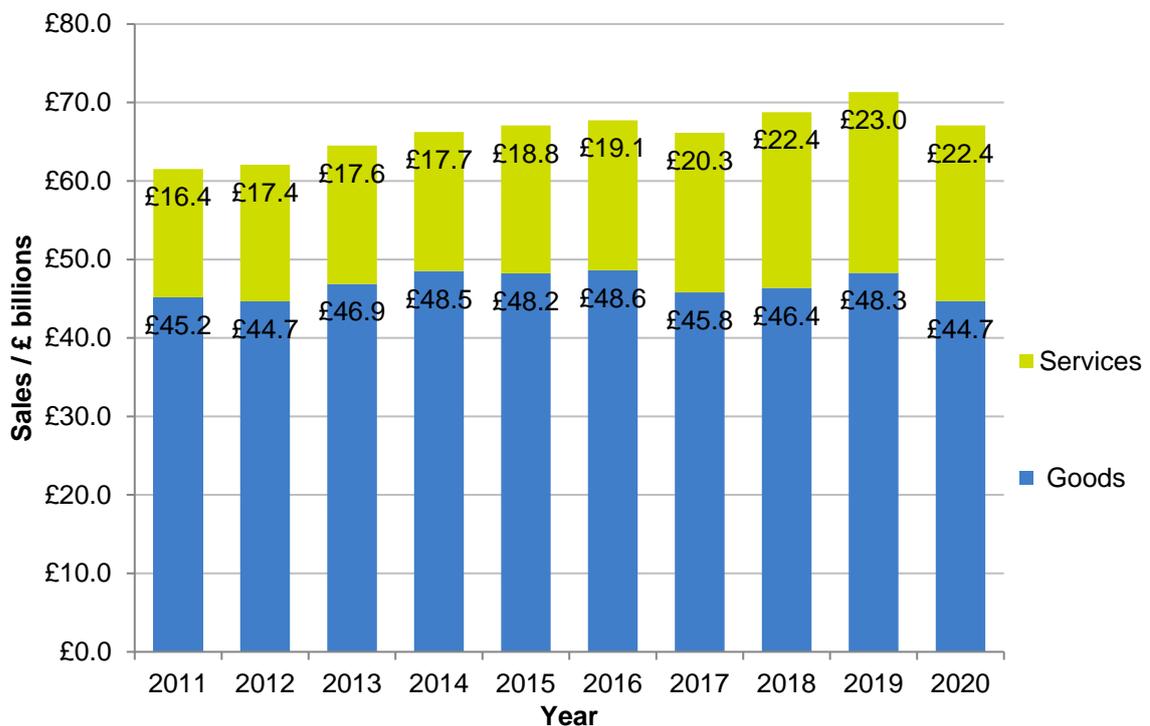
Total sales by Northern Ireland businesses were estimated to be worth £67.1 billion in 2020. This comprised sales of goods estimated to be worth £44.7 billion and sales of services estimated to be worth £22.4 billion.

Sales of goods (£44.7 billion) represented two thirds (66.6%) of total sales in 2020 and decreased by 7.4% over the year (£3.6 billion), compared to an increase of 4.1% the previous year.

Sales of services (£22.4 billion) represented 33.4% of total sales in 2020 and decreased by 2.9% over the year (£0.7 billion), compared to an increase of 2.9% the previous year. Figures 3 – 5 show the values of total sales, external sales and export sales of goods and services over the 9 year period (2011 – 2020).

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. The fall in total sales in 2020 was mostly driven by falling sales in goods.

Figure 3: Total Sales of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 3 Data](#)

External Sales

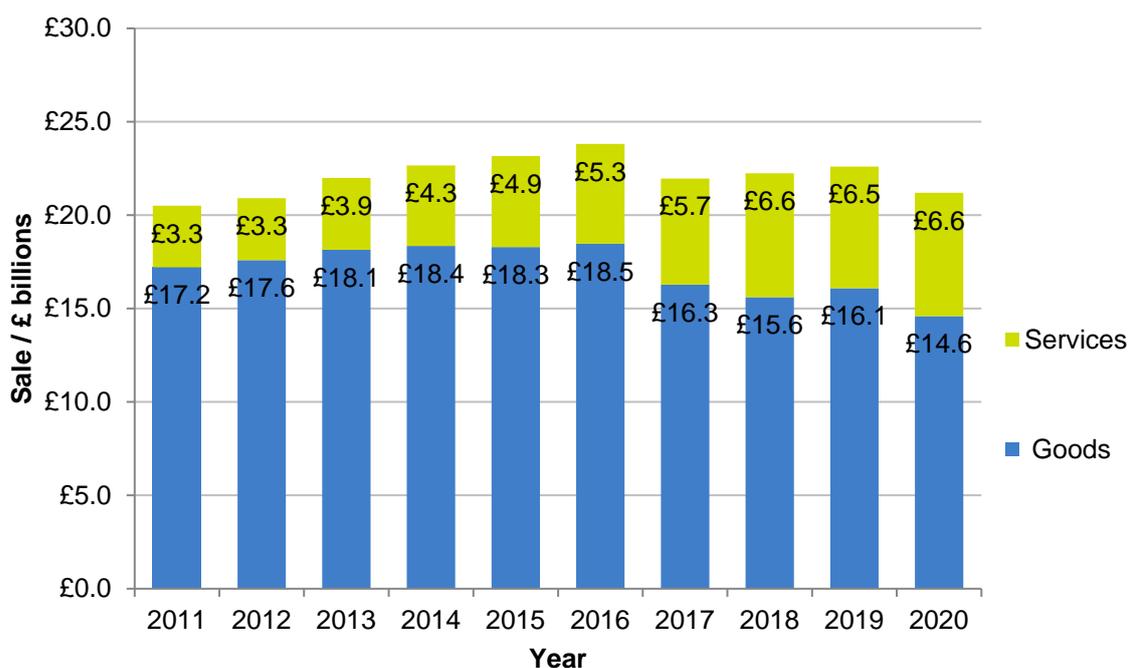
Total external sales were estimated to be worth £21.2 billion in 2020. This comprised external sales of goods estimated to be worth £14.6 billion and external sales of services estimated to be worth £6.6 billion.

External sales of goods by Northern Ireland companies (£14.6 billion) represented 68.9% of all external sales in 2020 which represents a decrease of 9.3% over the year (£1.5 billion) compared to an increase the previous year of 3.1%.

External sales of services (£6.6 billion) in 2020 represented 31.1% of all external sales over the year which represents an increase of 1.4% (£0.1 billion) over the year and compares to a decrease of 1.9% in 2019.

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 generally been increasing each year, partly offsetting the losses in external sale of goods in 2017 and 2018. The fall in external sales in 2020 was driven by falling sales in goods.

Figure 4: External Sales of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 4 Data](#)

Exports

Total exports were estimated to be worth £10.3 billion in 2020. This comprised exports of goods estimated to be worth £7.9 billion and exports of services estimated to be worth £2.3 billion.

Total exports of goods (£7.9 billion) represented 77.3% of all exports in 2020 and represents a decrease of 14.0% (£1.3 billion) over the year and compares to an increase of 1.5% in 2019.

Exports of services (£2.3 billion) represented 22.7% of total export sales in 2020 and decreased by 7.5% (£0.2 billion) over the year compared to a decrease of 1.7% (£43 million) the previous year.

Over the period 2011 – 2019, the trend in total exports has been variable, peaking at just under £12 billion in 2018 and 2019 driven by increases in both the export of goods and the export of services. The fall in total exports in 2020 was mostly driven by falling exports of goods.

Figure 5: Exports of Goods and Services, 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)



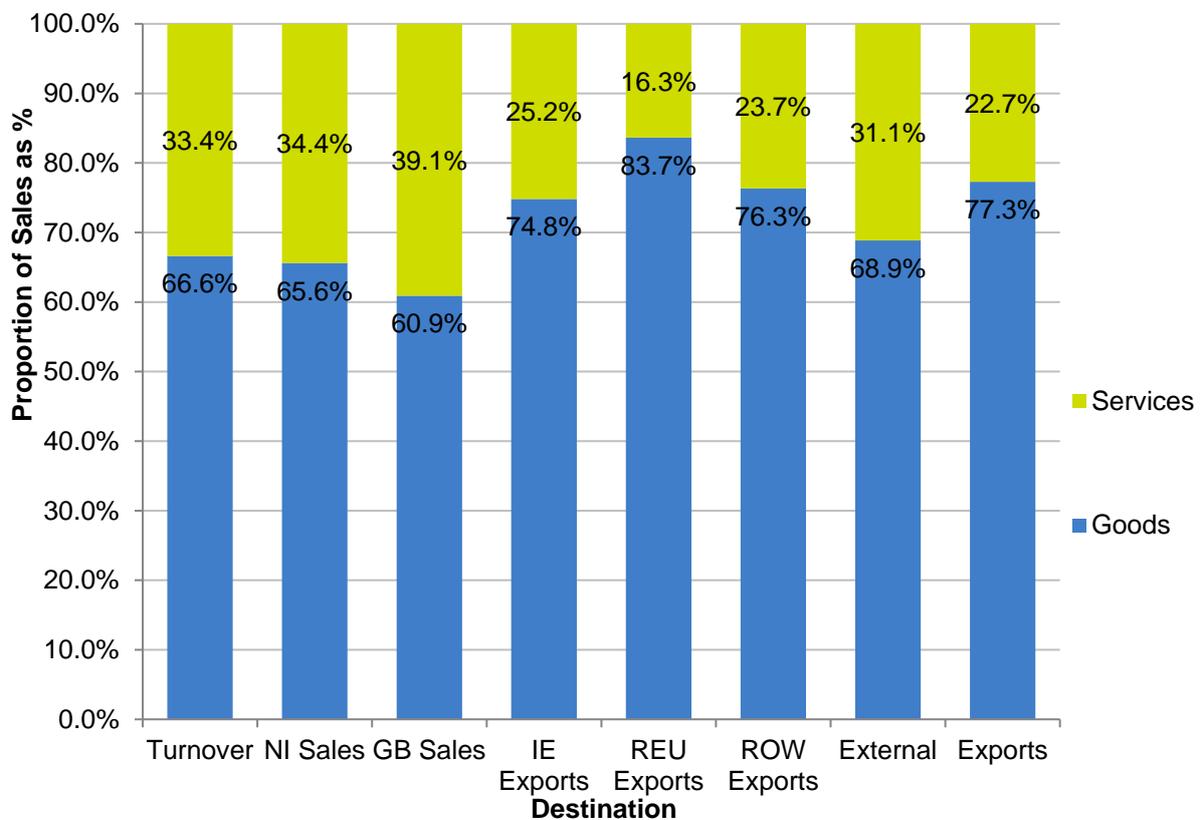
[Download Figure 5 Data](#)

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 2020. Goods account for 65.6% of total Northern Ireland sales, compared to 60.9% of GB sales, 74.8% of Ireland sales, 83.7% of Rest of Europe sales and 76.3% of all Rest of World sales. Sales of goods account for 77.3% of all export sales and 68.9% of all external sales.

For sales of services it is apparent that proximity to Northern Ireland is an influencing factor, with services accounting for 34.4% of total sales in Northern Ireland, 39.1% of all Great Britain sales and 25.2% of Ireland sales.

Figure 6: Goods and Services, as a proportion of sales, to each destination, 2020

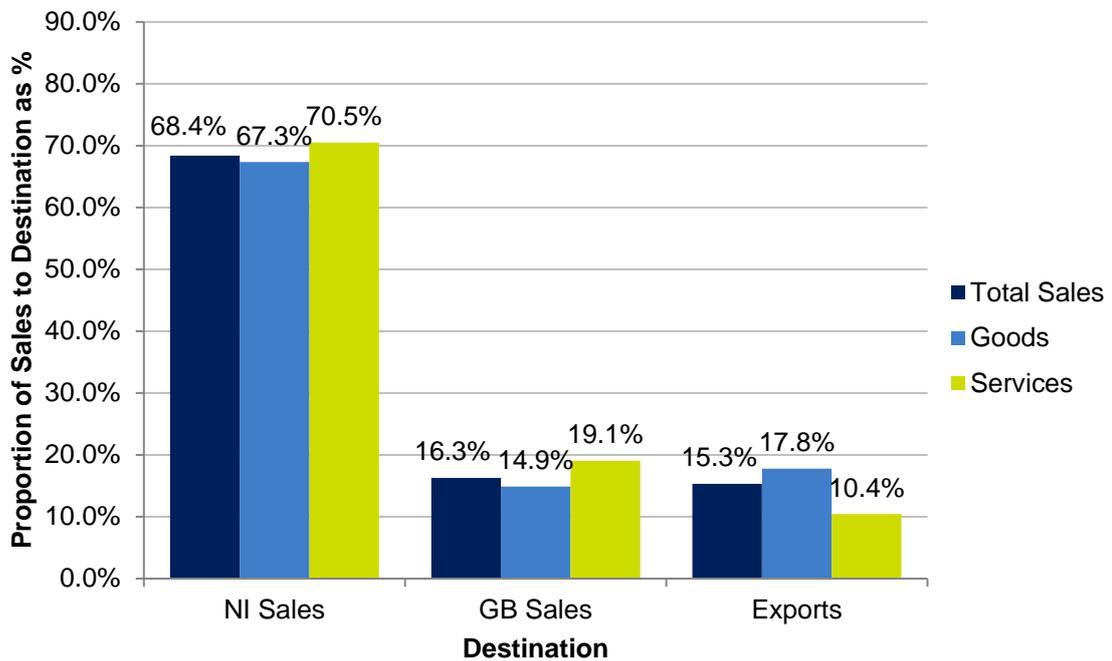


[Download Figure 6 Data](#)

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 70.5% 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 19.1% and 10.4% of the total sale of services respectively.

67.3% 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 (14.9%) is less than those exported outside of the UK (17.8%).

Figure 7: Proportion of the sale of Goods and Services to each destination, 2020



[Download Figure 7 Data](#)

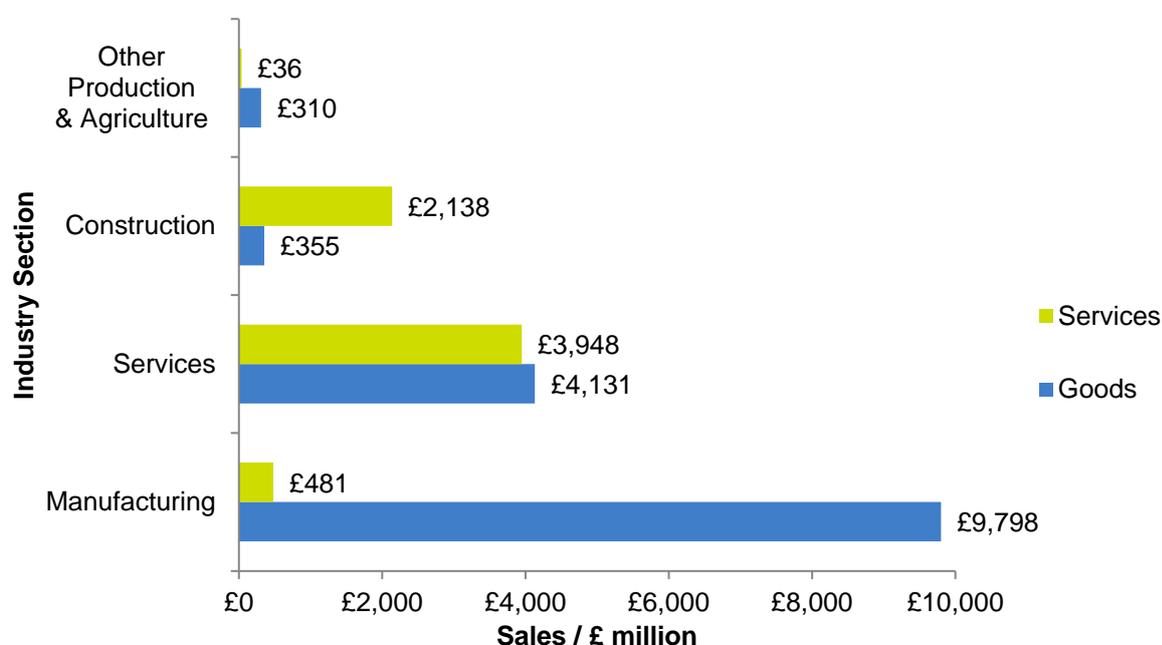
2.4 Analysis by Industry Section

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 2020, the largest proportion of external sales of goods was from the Manufacturing sector (Section C) which made up 67.1% (£9.8 billion) of all external sales of goods. External sales of goods by businesses in the Manufacturing sector decreased by £0.9 billion (8.7%) over the year.

The next largest sector for external sales of goods was the Services sector¹, with 28.3% (£4.1 billion) of external sales of goods. External sales of goods in this sector decreased by £0.2 billion (4.9%).

The Construction sector (Section F) saw the next largest proportion of external sales of goods (2.4% or £0.4 billion) while the Other Production & Agriculture² sections represented just 2.1% (or £0.3 billion) of external sales of goods.

Figure 8: External sales of goods and services by industry section, 2020 (£ millions)



[Download Figure 8 Data](#)

The largest proportion of external sales of services was, not surprisingly, from the Services sector which made up 59.8% (£3.9 billion) of all external sales of services. Such activity saw a decrease of £0.1 billion (3.4%) between 2019 and 2020.

The next largest sector for external sales of services was the Construction sector, with 32.4% (£2.1 billion) of external sales of services. The Construction sector saw an increase in external sales of services over the year, increasing by £0.3 billion over the year (17.7%).

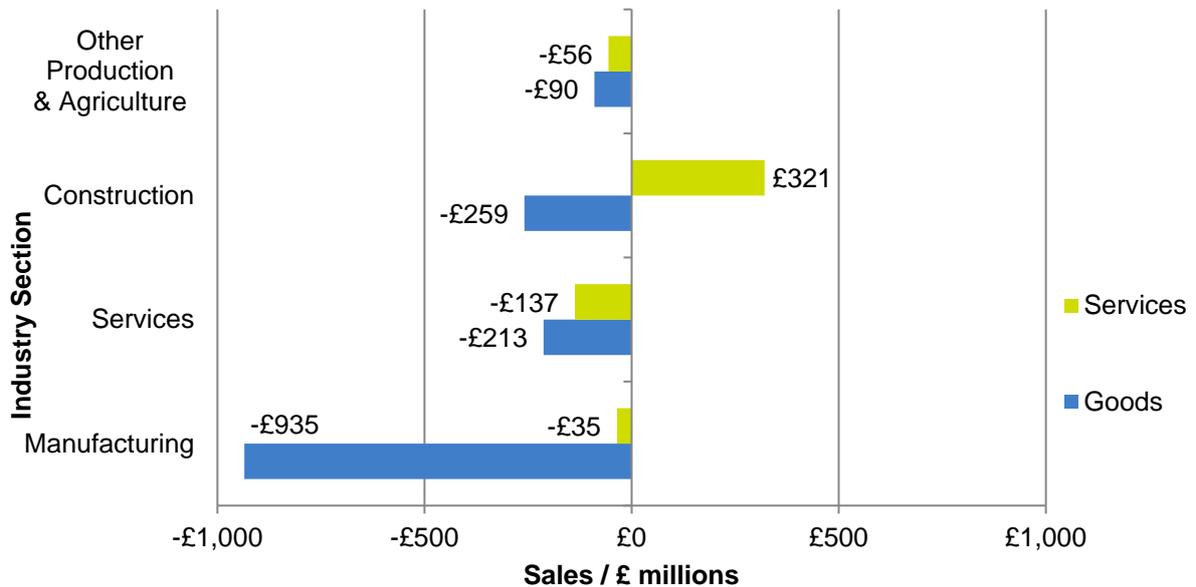
Manufacturing saw the next largest proportion of the external sale of services with 7.3% (£481 million) of such sales in 2020. The Manufacturing sector decreased in external sales of services over the year, by 6.8% (£35 million). The Other Production & Agriculture section

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

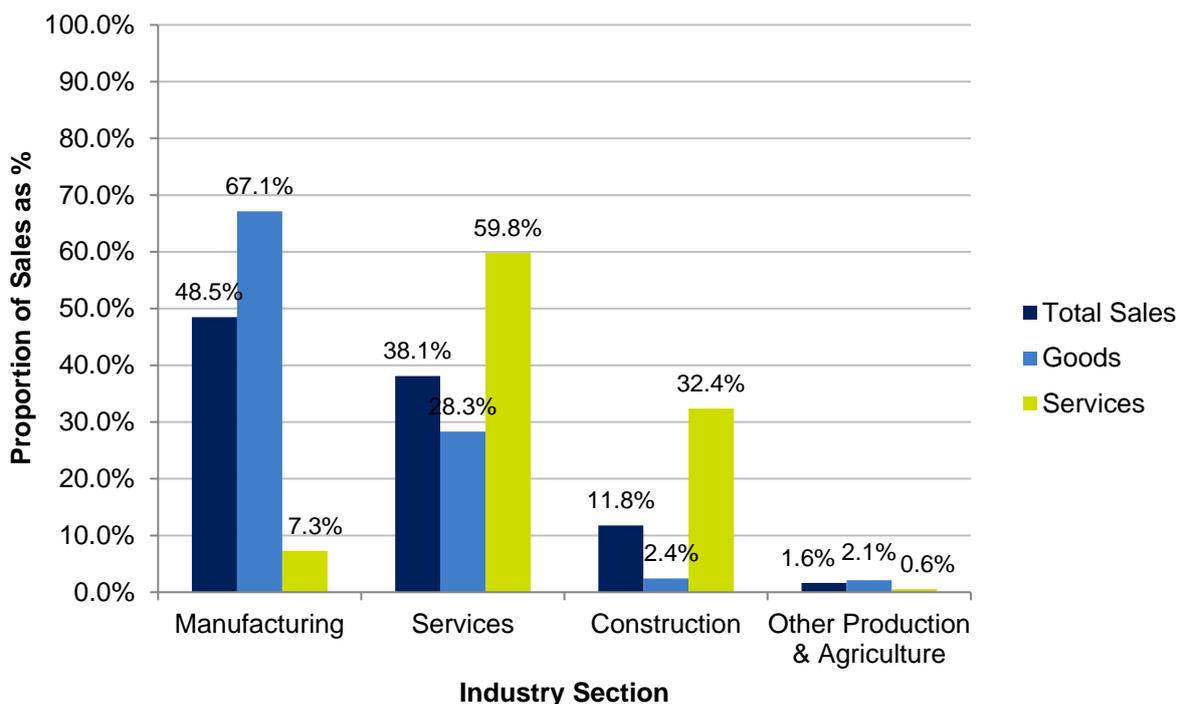
represented just 0.6% (£36 million) of external sales of services in 2020, and saw a decrease (£56 million or 60.5%) over the year, although this change is based on a relatively low level of sales.

Figure 9: Trends in external sales of goods and services: change by industry section, 2019 – 2020 (£ millions)



[Download Figure 9 Data](#)

Figure 10: Proportion of external sales of goods and services by industry section, 2020



[Download Figure 10 Data](#)

3 Summary and Commentary - Imports

Imports from Ireland, the Rest of the EU and the Rest of the World had a combined worth of £7.1 billion in 2020. When combined with purchases from GB (£13.2 billion) and purchases within NI (£23.1 billion), this equates to total purchases by companies in NI estimated to be worth £43.7 billion in 2020.

Table 1: Purchases and Imports from Trade Partners Split by Goods and Services: 2020 (£ millions)

Trade Partner	Total Purchases	Total Purchases of Goods	Total Purchases of Services
Total Purchases	43,369	33,582	9,787
NI Purchases	23,065	16,730	6,335
GB Purchases	13,204	10,588	2,616
IE Imports	2,778	2,456	322
REU Imports	2,281	2,048	233
ROW Imports	2,040	1,760	280
Total Imports	7,099	6,264	835

**Figures may not sum due to rounding.*

[Download Table 1 Data](#)

Total Purchases

Total purchases by companies in NI (£43.7 billion) in 2020 comprised purchases of goods estimated to be worth £33.6 billion and purchases of services estimated to be worth £9.8 billion.

Total purchases of goods (£33.6 billion) equates to 77.4% of total purchases and decreased by 9.1% (£3.3 billion) over the year in 2020. This compares to a previous annual increase of 4.4% in 2019.

Total purchases of services (£9.8 billion) represents 22.6% of total purchases and increased by 0.8% over the year (£0.1 billion), compared to a decrease of 9.5% the previous year.

The largest market for purchases of both goods and services is NI, which accounted for 53.2% (£23.1 billion) of all purchases. The next largest market is GB which represents 30.4% (£13.2 billion) of all purchases in 2020.

Purchases of goods within NI (£16.7 billion) represents 49.8% of all purchases of goods with the next largest market being GB representing 31.5% (£10.6 billion) of all goods purchased. Similarly for services, NI is the largest market followed by GB representing 64.7% (£6.3 billion) and 26.7% (£2.6 billion) of total purchases of services respectively.

Imports

Imports were estimated to be worth £7.1 billion in 2020, a decrease of 6.5% (£0.5 billion) over the year. Of which, imports of goods were estimated to be worth £6.3 billion in 2020 (88.2%

of all imports). Imports of services were estimated to be worth £0.8 billion representing 11.8% of total imports in 2020.

The profile of the total purchases and imports is broken down in Figure 11 below which shows the origin of the purchases of goods and services and how they contribute to the overall purchases value of £43.7 billion in 2020. Figure 11 presents the time series of how purchases from the various origins have changed over time, whilst Figure 12 provides details of the time series and split of goods and services purchases from NI, GB, IE, REU and ROW.

Figure 11: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services by Trade Partner, 2020 (£ billions)

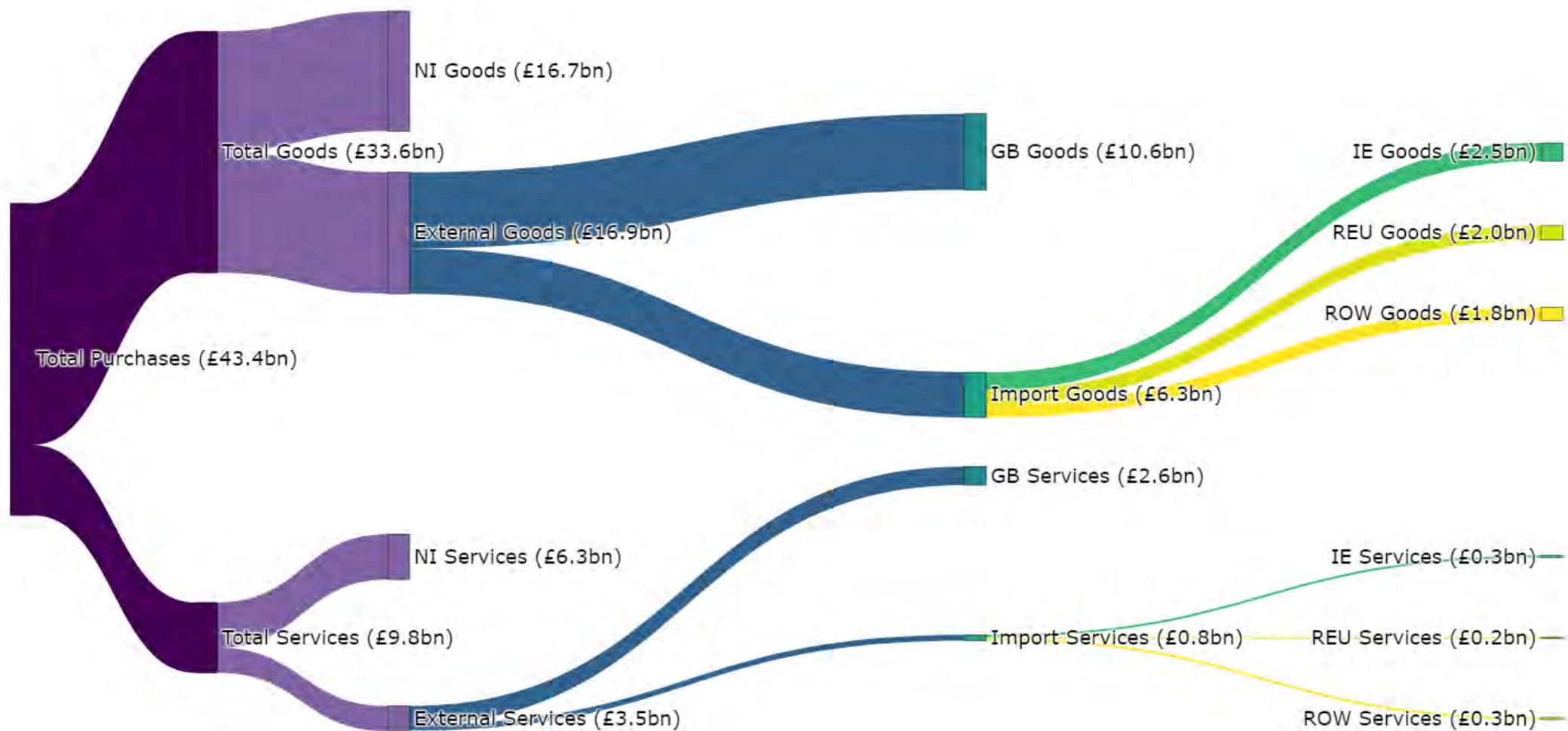
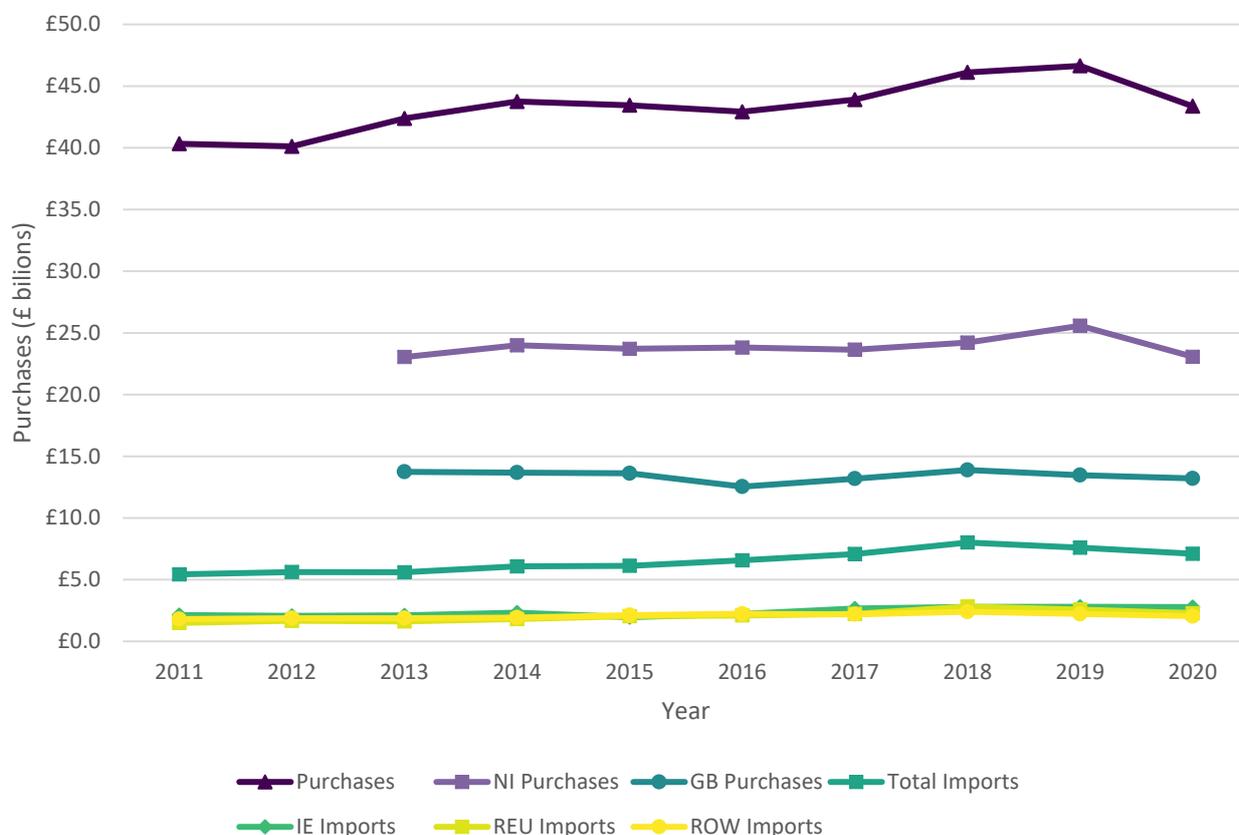


Figure 12 shows that the decrease in total purchases over the year of 7.0% (£3.3 billion) was driven by the decrease in purchases within NI of £2.5 billion, the decrease of imports from REU (£0.3 billion), imports from ROW (£0.2 billion) and a decrease in purchases from GB (£0.3 billion). The decrease in imports from IE was modest (£26 million).

Figure 12: Purchases and Imports from Trade Partners: 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)*



[Download Figure 12 Data](#)

* Data for NI and GB purchases are only available from survey year 2013 onwards

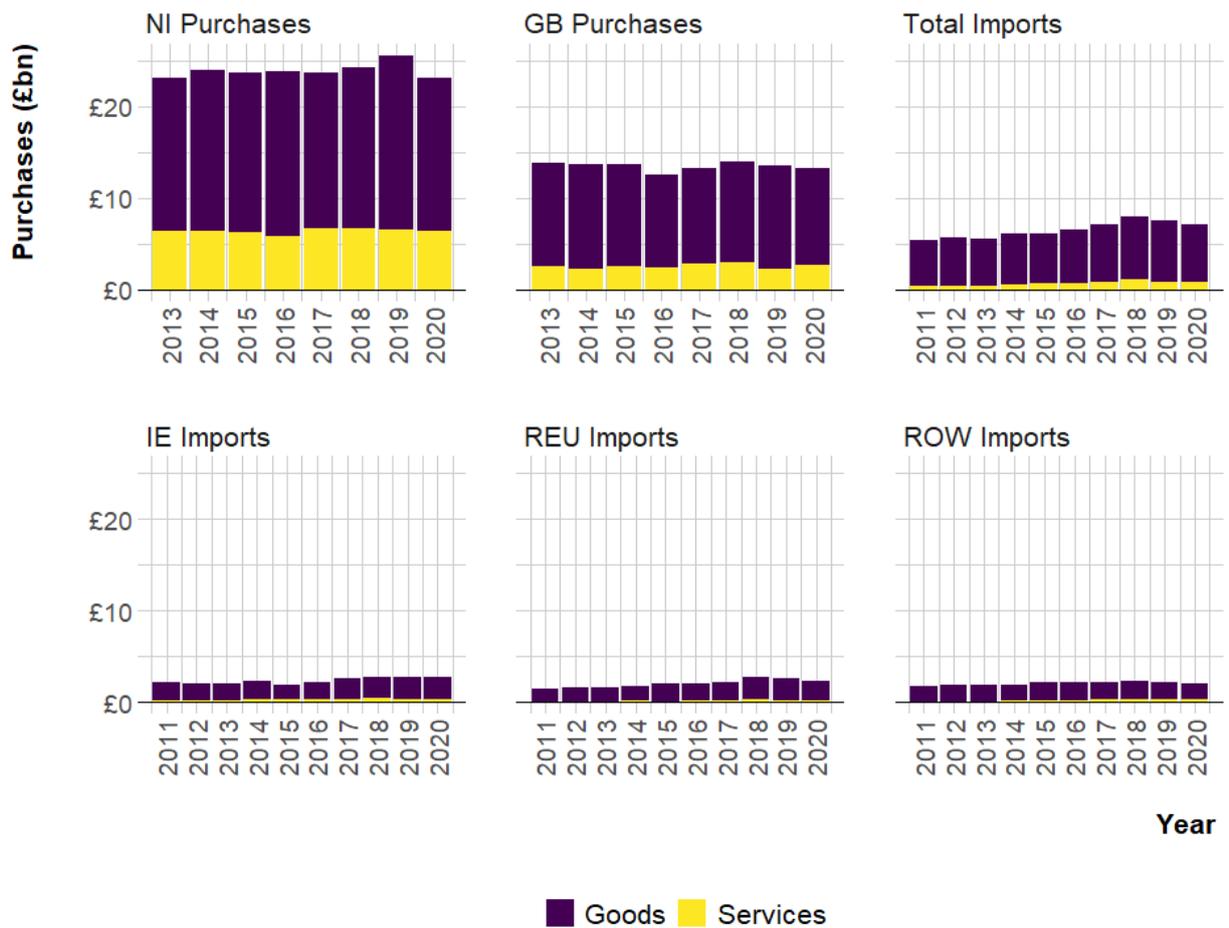
The time-series shows that total purchases have increased by 15.1%, from £40.3 billion in 2011 to £46.6 billion in 2019. Purchases then fell to £43.4 billion in 2020. The decrease in 2020 is the largest in survey history and the vast majority of businesses reported that this was as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on business operations.

Despite the long-term pattern of growth, there have been periodic annual decreases in total purchases in 2012 (0.5%), 2015 (0.7%), 2016 (1.2%) and, of course, 2020 (7.0%).

Figure 13 below shows that the vast majority of purchases are purchases of goods, no matter the trade partner. Total purchases of goods represented 77.4% of total purchases in 2020 and were estimated to be worth £33.6 billion.

Larger amounts of services tend to be bought from partners closer to NI compared to more distant partners, with the largest value of services actually bought from within NI.

Figure 13: Purchases and Imports split by goods and services: 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)*



[Download Figure 13 Data](#)

* Data for NI and GB purchases are only available from survey year 2013 onwards

4 Summary and Commentary – Trade Balance

As noted in Section 1, the restructuring of the BESES publications allows for analysis of trade balance. Trade balance is [defined](#) as the difference between the value of exports and the value of imports and, in this case, is the NI trade balance as measured by the BESES. Users are reminded that the BESES does not capture trade in the public sector; the financial and insurance sectors; and the vast majority of agriculture (users should refer to the notes on coverage in the [BESES Background Information](#) for more detail). Users should also bear in mind the following from the Eurostat guidance:

*“If exports exceed imports then the country has a **trade surplus** and the trade balance is said to be positive. If imports exceed exports, the country or area has a **trade deficit** and its trade balance is said to be negative. However, the words ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ have only a numerical meaning and do not necessarily reflect whether the economy of a country or area is performing well or not.”*

4.1 Trade Balance Performance

Table 2 below shows imports and exports of goods and services as well as the balance of trade for each. In 2020, exports of goods and services combined were worth £10.3 billion, while imports were worth £7.1 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of £3.2 billion.

Exports of goods were worth £7.9 billion, with imports of goods worth £6.3 billion, resulting in a surplus of £1.7 billion.

Exports of services were worth £2.3 billion, with imports worth £0.8 billion, resulting in a surplus of £1.5 billion.

Table 2: Exports, Imports and Trade Balance Split by Goods and Services³: 2020 (£ billions)

Sales Type	Exports	Imports	Trade Balance (Exports - Imports)
ALL	£10.3	£7.1	£3.2
Goods	£7.9	£6.3	£1.7
Services	£2.3	£0.8	£1.5

* Figures may not sum due to rounding

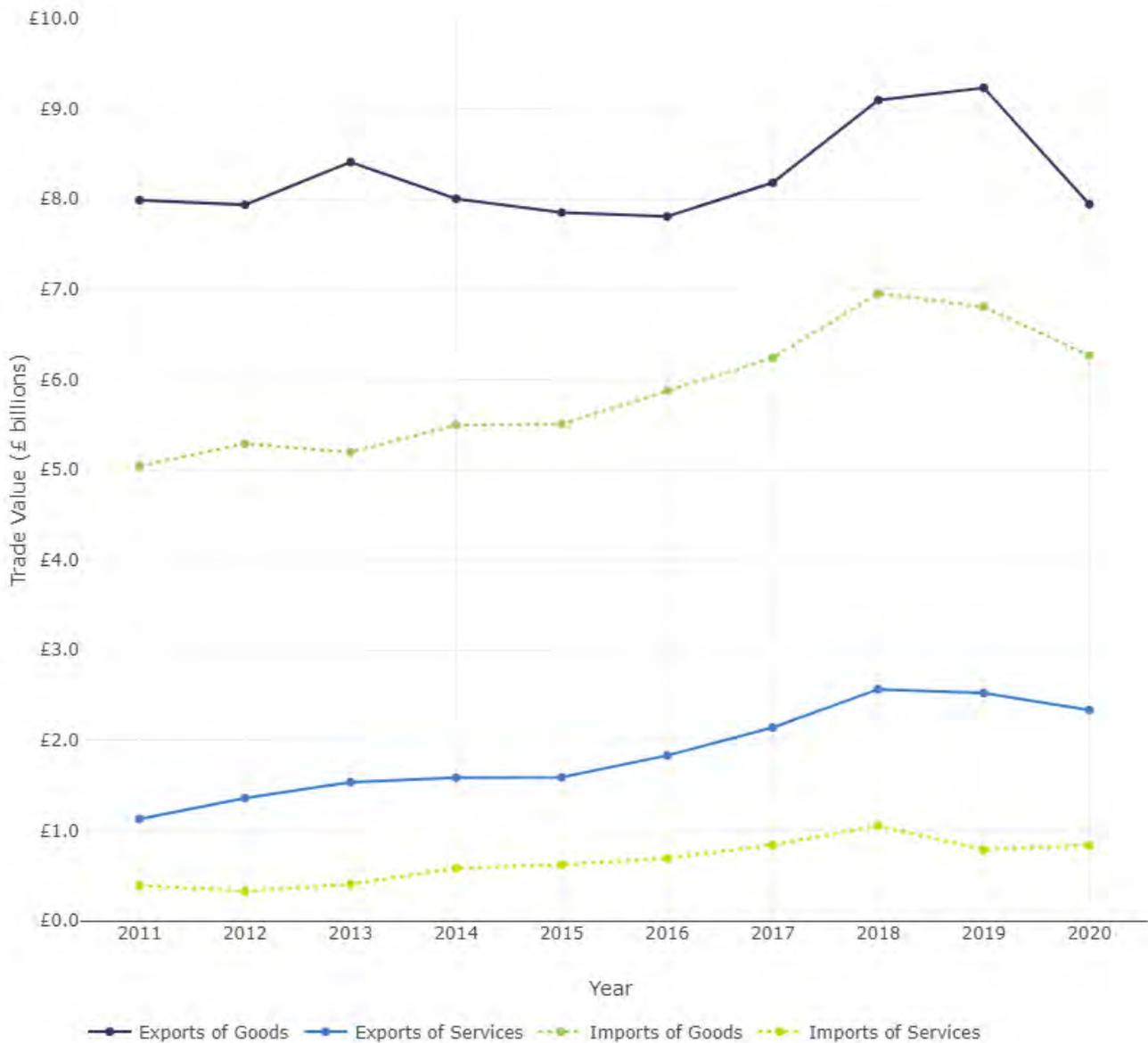
[Download Table 2 Data](#)

³ Note that this excludes trade with GB

4.2 Trade in Goods and Services over Time

Figure 14 below shows a time-series for the imports and exports of both goods and services. It is clear that the exports of goods and exports of services have consistently been greater than their import equivalent, thus the balance of trade has remained positive for each year on survey record.

Figure 14: Imports and Exports of goods and services: 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 14 Data](#)

4.3 Trade Balance over Time

Figure 15 below shows the time-series for the value of exports, the value of imports and the value of the trade balance for goods and services combined. Exports have always been greater than imports and hence the trade balance has always been positive.

Figure 15: Exports, Imports and Trade Balance: 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)

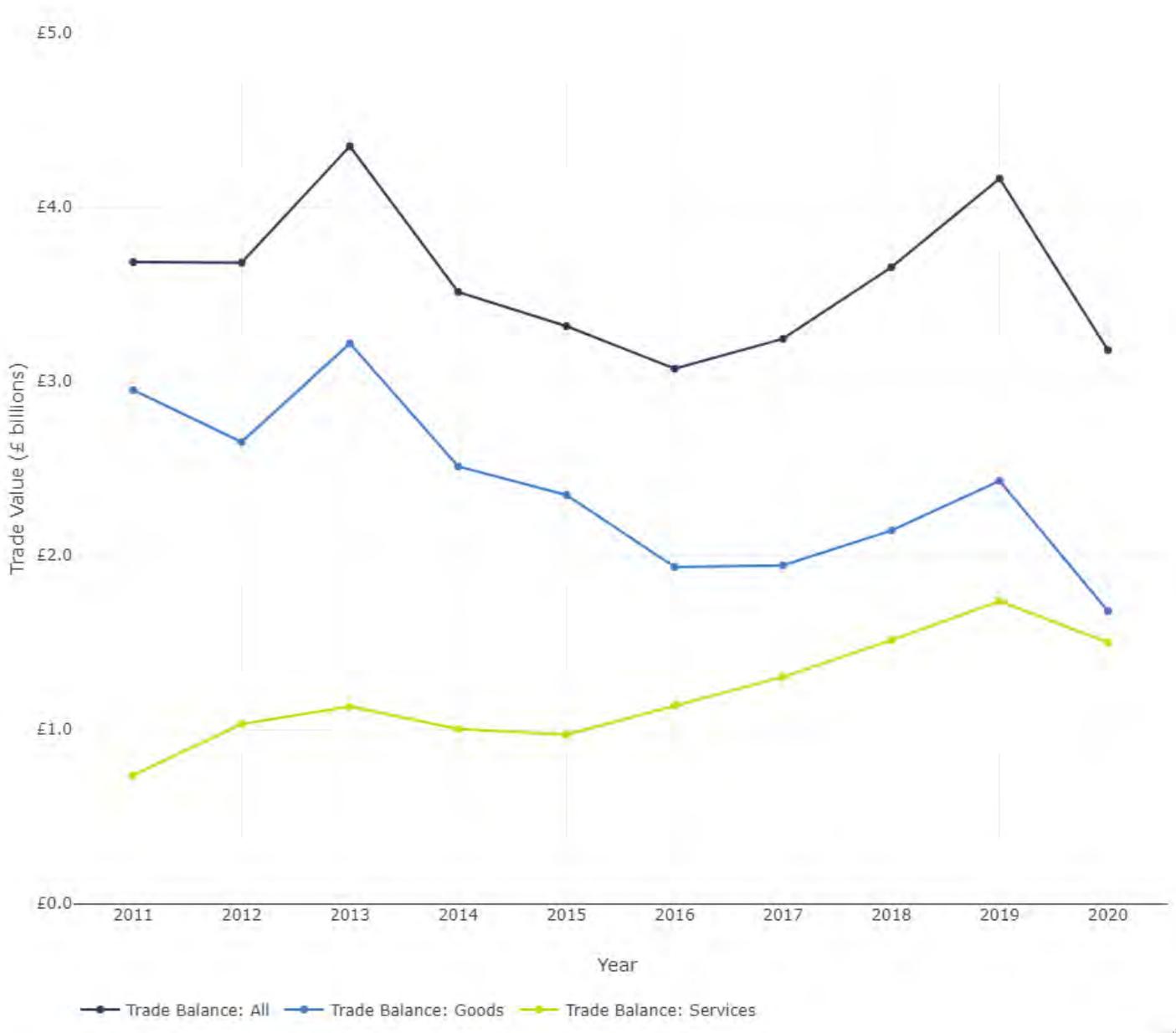


[Download Figure 15 Data](#)

Figure 16 below shows the time-series for the trade balance of goods; services and goods and services combined. For all three categories, the trade balance has remained positive every year, indicating that exports have always been greater than imports (i.e. a trade surplus).

With the exception of a spike in 2013, the trade balance for goods and services combined and goods only trended downwards from 2011 – 2016. From 2016 onwards, both balances increased consistently until survey year 2020, where the vast majority of businesses reported that the downturn in trade in 2020 was as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on business operations. The balance of services trade was relatively flat from 2011 – 2015, but has consistently increased from then, again with the exception of 2020.

Figure 16: Trade Balance of Goods and Services: 2011 – 2020 (£ billions)

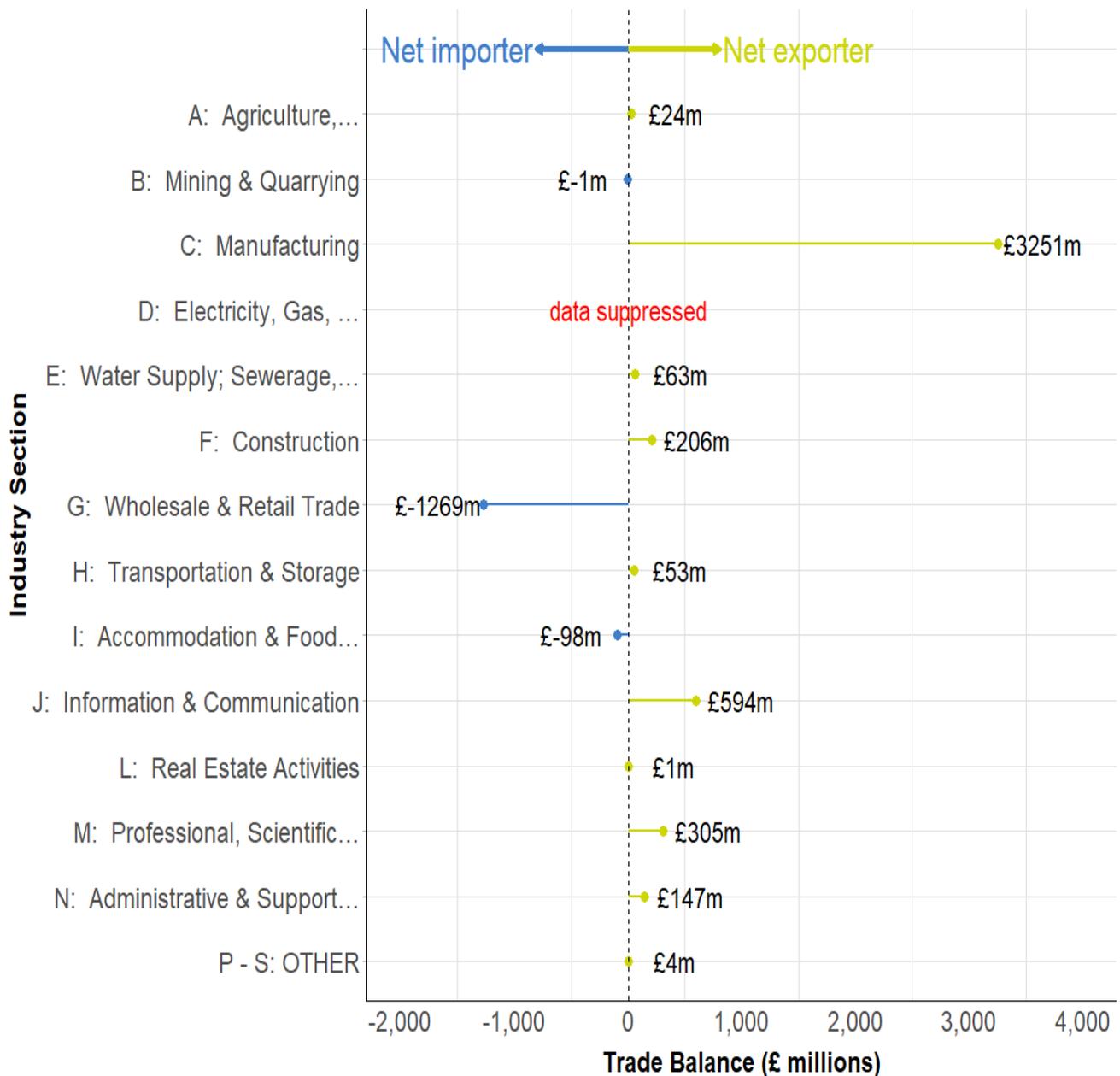


[Download Figure 16 Data](#)

4.4 Trade Balance by Industry

Figure 17 below shows the trade balance of goods and services combined by industry section for 2020. The vast majority of industries were net exporters, with section C (Manufacturing) having the largest trade balance (£3.3 billion). Three industries were net importers: section B (Mining and Quarrying); section I (Accommodation and Food Services) and section G (Wholesale and Retail Trade). Section G was the largest net importer with a trade balance of -£1.3 billion.

Figure 17: Trade Balance by Industry Section: 2020 (£ millions)



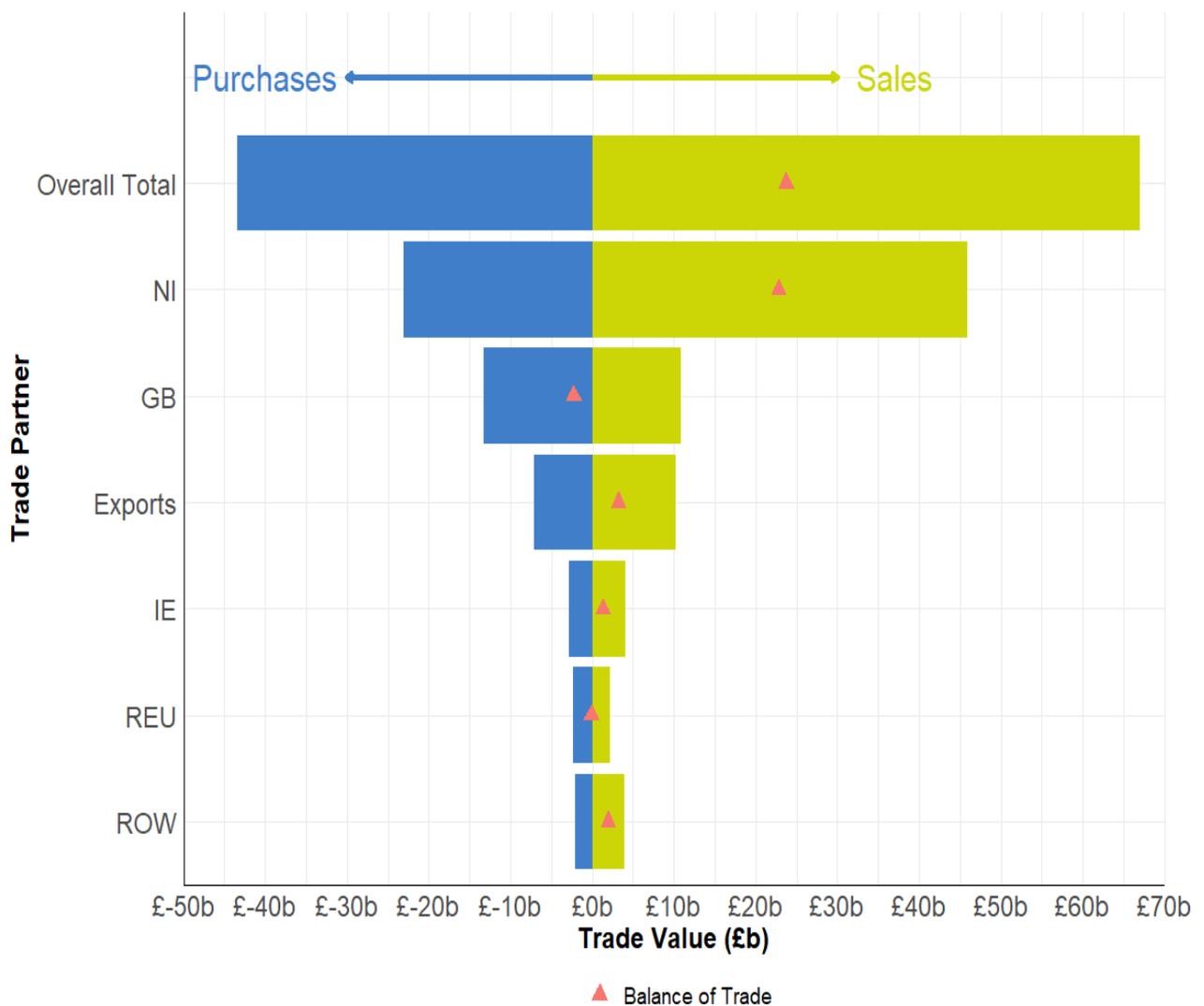
[Download Figure 17 Data](#)

4.5 Other Balance of Trade Estimates

While trade balance usually refers to the difference between exports and imports, it is possible to derive a balance of trade for any domain of interest for which for both sales and purchases data exist.

Figure 18 below shows the balance of trade for Northern Ireland’s principal trade partners. Total sales massively outweigh total purchases, with a difference of £23.7 billion. This is mainly driven by NI trade where sales are worth £45.9 billion and purchases are worth £23.1 billion, resulting in a surplus of £22.8 billion. NI has a trade surplus with IE of £1.3 billion and with ROW (£2.0 billion), and a trade deficit with GB of £2.3 billion and REU (£0.1 billion).

Figure 18: Trade and Balance of Trade by Trade Partner: 2020 (£ billions)



[Download Figure 18 Data](#)

5 Index of Tables – Sales/Exports: 2011 - 2020

Table 1.1	Annual Series	Sales & exports of goods and services to broad destinations and annual change, 2011 - 2020 (£m)
Table 1.2	Annual Series	Total sales of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 - 2020 (£m)
Table 1.3	Annual Series	Exports of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 – 2020 (£m)
Table 1.4	Annual Series	External sales of goods and services by broad industry sector, 2011 - 2020 (£m)

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

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[BESES Goods and Services Tables – 2020 \(Microsoft Excel\)](#)



[BESES Goods and Services Tables – 2020 \(Open Document Spreadsheet\)](#)

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Table 9.1	2013	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
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[BESES: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services Tables – 2020 \(Microsoft Excel\)](#)



[BESES: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services Tables – 2020 \(Open Document Spreadsheet\)](#)

7 Background Notes

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 2019 and provisional estimates for 2020 first published in [December 2021](#) by splitting total sales into its goods and services elements. The release also includes imports and, for the first time, some balance of trade analysis (as measured by BESES coverage).

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) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The latest Department for the Economy [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](#)

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

The next exports bulletin, with results for survey year 2021, will be published in December 2022.

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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