



BRIEFING PAPER

CBP 8173, 26 July 2019

Statistics on UK trade with Ireland

By Matthew Ward

Contents:

1. Key Statistics, 2018
2. International context
3. Trade in goods
4. Trade in Services
5. Regional trade
6. Northern Ireland
7. The Republic of Ireland's trade with the UK
8. Appendix: UK-Ireland trade 1999 - 2018

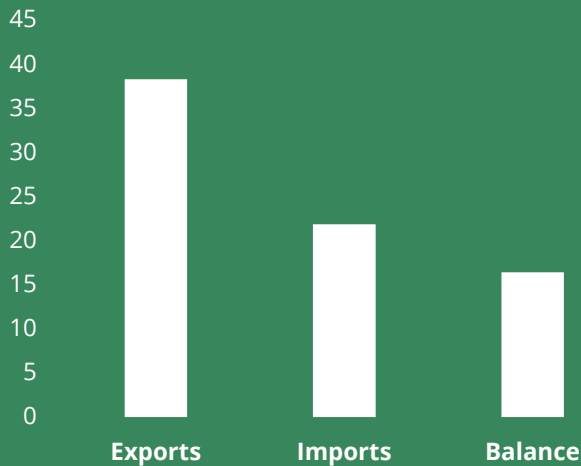


Contents

Summary	3
1. Key Statistics, 2018	4
2. International context	5
3. Trade in goods	7
3.1 Exports	7
3.2 Imports	7
4. Trade in Services	8
4.1 Exports	8
4.2 Imports	8
5. Regional trade	10
6. Northern Ireland	11
6.1 Trade in goods	11
7. The Republic of Ireland's trade with the UK	13
8. Appendix: UK-Ireland trade 1999 - 2018	15

UK trade with Ireland: a summary

UK trade in goods and services with Ireland, 2018 (£ bn)



The UK recorded a trade surplus of £16.4 billion with Ireland in 2018.

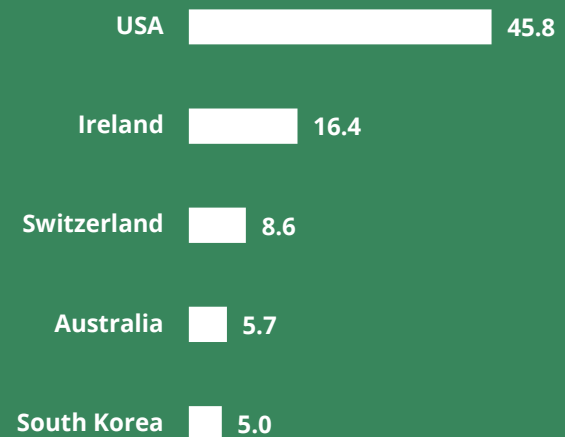
UK exports of goods and services to the Ireland were worth £38.3 billion (6.0% of all UK exports), while imports were worth £21.9 billion (3.3% of all UK exports).

The UK recorded a trade surplus with Ireland in both goods and services and has done every year since 1999.

The UK trade surplus with Ireland was the UK's second largest trade surplus in 2018.

Ireland was one of four EU countries the UK had a trade surplus with in 2018 - the remaining three were Sweden, Malta and Luxembourg. Overall, Ireland was the UK's fifth largest export market and ninth largest source of imports in 2018.

The UK's five largest trade surpluses 2018 (£ bn)



Trade in goods with Ireland compared, 2018 (% of total goods trade)



Northern Ireland's trade with the Republic of Ireland is particularly pronounced.

In 2018, 36% of Northern Ireland's goods exports were to the Republic of Ireland (compared to 6% for the UK as a whole) while 28% of Northern Ireland's goods imports were from the Republic of Ireland (compared to 3% for the UK as a whole).

1. Key Statistics, 2018

In 2018, UK exports to Ireland were worth £38.3 billion, a record high, up from £34.0 billion in 2017. This is the third successive year on year increase in British exports to Ireland. UK imports from Ireland in 2018 were £21.9 billion, also a record high. This is the fifth successive year UK imports from Ireland have grown.

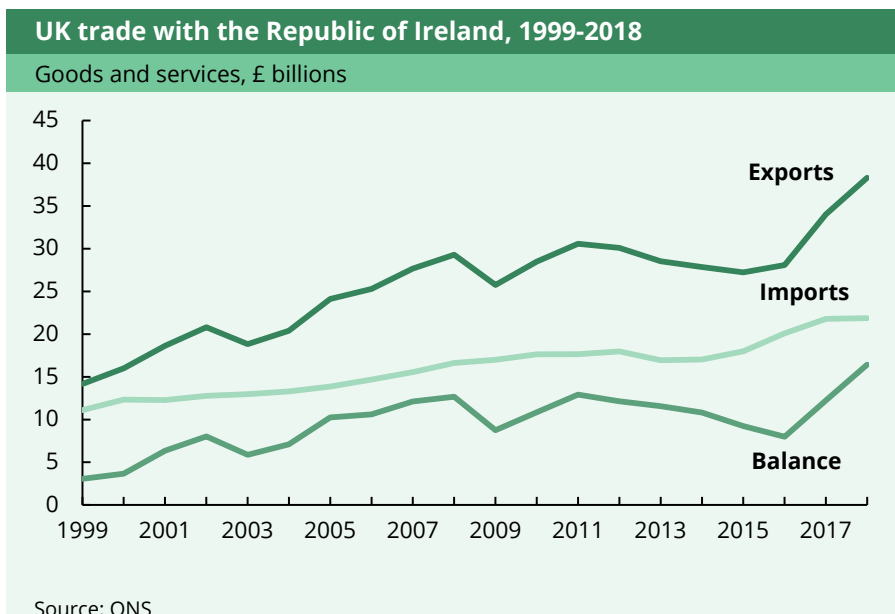
The UK's trade surplus with Ireland was £16.4 billion in 2018. This was the UK's second highest trade surplus, after the surplus with the United States. Ireland was one of four EU states the UK had a trade surplus with in 2018 – the other three were with Luxembourg, Sweden and Malta.

Overall, UK exports to Ireland represented 6.0% of all UK exports and 13.3% of all UK exports to the EU. UK imports from Ireland represented 3.3% of all UK imports and 6.2% of all UK imports from the EU.

Looking at trade in goods only, the UK exported £22.2 billion to Ireland in 2018, a record high. UK imports of goods from Ireland were £14.1 billion, down slightly from 2017, resulting in a trade surplus of £8.1 billion in trade in goods.

The UK had a surplus of £8.3 billion on trade in services with Ireland in 2017, exporting £16.1 billion of services to Ireland and importing £7.8 billion. UK imports of services from Ireland reached a record high in 2018 and have now grown every year since 2000.

In cash terms, UK exports to Ireland have increased from £14.2 billion in 1999; imports from Ireland have increased from £11.1 billion – details on UK with Ireland since 1999 are available in [the Appendix](#).



2. International context

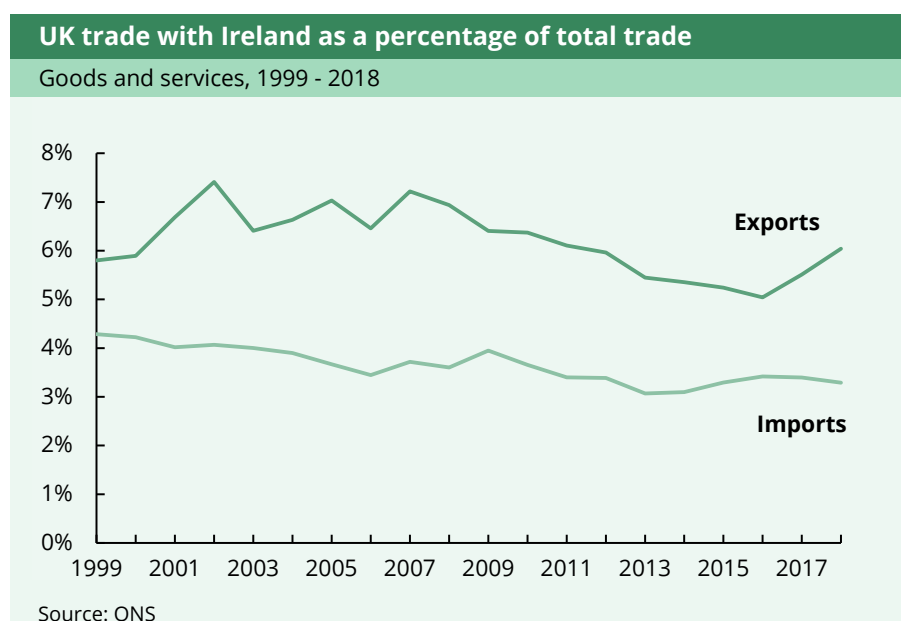
In 2018, Ireland was the UK's fifth largest export market and ninth largest source of imports.

UK top 10 trading partners 2018, goods and services					
Exports	£ billions	% of total	Imports	£ billions	% of total
USA	118.2	18.6%	Germany	77.3	11.6%
Germany	55.4	8.7%	USA	72.4	10.9%
Netherlands	44.0	6.9%	Netherlands	49.1	7.4%
France	42.1	6.6%	China	45.4	6.8%
Ireland	38.3	6.0%	France	42.8	6.4%
China	23.1	3.6%	Spain	32.3	4.9%
Italy	19.7	3.1%	Belgium	29.1	4.4%
Switzerland	19.6	3.1%	Italy	24.8	3.7%
Belgium	19.4	3.1%	Ireland	21.9	3.3%
Spain	17.6	2.8%	Norway	21.7	3.3%
EU	288.9	45.6%	EU	353.0	53.1%
World	634.1	100.0%	World	665.0	100.0%

Source: ONS Pink Book

UK exports to Ireland were equal to 6.0% of all UK exports in 2018, up from 5.5% in 2017, though UK exports to Ireland as a percentage of total UK exports have generally fallen in recent years, from a high of 7.4% in 2002.

UK imports from Ireland as a percentage of all UK imports fell slightly from 3.4% to 3.3%.



In 2018, UK exports to Ireland accounted for 13.3% of all UK exports to the EU – the highest percentage share since 2008.

UK imports from Ireland as a percentage of all UK imports from the EU have fluctuated in recent years, having generally fallen from a high of 7.6% in 2009.



Overall, Ireland was the UK's fourth largest EU export market in 2018 and seventh largest source of imports.

3. Trade in goods

3.1 Exports

In 2018, the UK's single largest export to Ireland was petroleum and petroleum products, valued at £1.5 billion; this represented 9.1% of all UK goods exports to Ireland.

Other British goods exports to Ireland included "miscellaneous manufactured articles", valued at £1.3 billion (6.5% of goods exports) – this category includes manufactured plastic goods – and clothing valued at £1.0 billion (4.8% of all goods exports).

UK goods exports to Ireland, 2018		
	£ millions	% of total
Petroleum, petroleum products	1,503	9.1%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	1,341	6.5%
Articles of apparel & clothing accessories	1,016	4.8%
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	1,015	4.8%
Road vehicles	968	4.6%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps	815	3.8%
Electrical machinery & appliances	780	3.7%
Telecomms & sound recording equipment	723	3.4%
Cereals & cereal preparations	716	3.4%
Office machines & adp machines	714	3.4%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

3.2 Imports

In 2018, the UK's single largest import from Ireland was medicinal and pharmaceutical products, valued at £2.1 billion, representing 15.6% of all UK goods imports from Ireland.

UK goods imports from Ireland, 2018		
	£ millions	% of total
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	2,145	15.6%
Meat & meat preparations	1,681	12.2%
Dairy products & birds' eggs	846	6.2%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	653	4.7%
Office machines & adp machines	570	4.1%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps	524	3.8%
Electrical machinery & appliances	453	3.3%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles	442	3.2%
Organic chemicals	440	3.2%
Live animals	372	2.7%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

Other imports from Ireland included meat, valued at £1.7 billion (12.2% of goods imports), dairy products and eggs, valued at £0.8 billion (6.2% of goods imports) and miscellaneous manufactured articles, valued at £0.7 billion (4.7% of all goods imports).

In 2018, Ireland was the UK's second largest source of imported food and live animals (after the Netherlands), accounting for 11.5% of total food and live animal imports.

4. Trade in Services

4.1 Exports

In 2017, the UK's single largest service export to Ireland was "other business services", valued at £8.0 billion; this represented 58.6% of all UK service exports to Ireland. This category includes legal, accounting, advertising, research and development, architectural, engineering and other professional and technical services.

Other British service exports to Ireland included financial services, valued at £1.5 billion (10.6% of service exports) and travel services, valued at £1.6 billion (11.9% of service exports). Travel services include services provided by hotels and restaurants, travel agencies and tour operators and will include services consumed by a resident of one country in another – for example an Irish tourist staying in a hotel in the UK will count as a British service export; a British tourist staying in an Irish hotel would count as a service import.

UK service exports to Ireland, 2017

	£ millions	% of total
Other business services	8,044	58.6%
Travel	1,632	11.9%
Financial	1,461	10.6%
Transportation	688	5.0%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	688	5.0%
Intellectual Property	653	4.8%
Construction	251	1.8%
Insurance & Pension	97	0.7%
Personal, cultural and recreational	67	0.5%
Government	17	0.1%
Total	13,725	100.0%

Source: ONS, Pink Book

4.2 Imports

In 2017, the UK's single largest service import to Ireland was "other business services" followed by travel services. Combined, these categories made up 56.4% of UK service imports from Ireland.

UK service imports from Ireland, 2017

	£ millions	% of total
Other business services	2,457	33.7%
Travel	1,662	22.8%
Telecommunications, computer and information services	894	12.2%
Transportation	890	12.2%
Financial	599	8.2%
Intellectual Property	539	7.4%
Construction	169	2.3%
Personal, cultural and recreational	46	0.6%
Government	16	0.2%
Total	7,300	100.0%

Source: ONS, Pink Book

5. Regional trade

HMRC publish data on trade for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions. These figures are for trade in goods only – they do not include services.¹

Northern Ireland accounted for 15.2% of all UK goods exports to Ireland and 16.1% of all UK goods imported from Ireland.

UK goods exports to the Republic of Ireland, 2018		
	£ millions	% total
Northern Ireland	3,213	15.2%
South East	2,549	12.0%
London	1,994	9.4%
North West	1,834	8.7%
East	1,664	7.9%
West Midlands	1,555	7.3%
Scotland	1,532	7.2%
Wales	1,518	7.2%
East Midlands	1,330	6.3%
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,176	5.6%
South West	906	4.3%
North East	474	2.2%
Unallocated	1,433	6.8%
Grand Total	21,178	100%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

London, the South East and the East of England also had relatively high shares of the UK's trade in goods with Ireland.

UK goods imports from the Republic of Ireland, 2018		
	£ millions	% total
Northern Ireland	2,206	16.1%
London	1,626	11.9%
East	1,464	10.7%
South East	1,356	9.9%
North West	966	7.1%
West Midlands	937	6.8%
Yorkshire and the Humber	829	6.1%
South West	528	3.9%
Scotland	510	3.7%
East Midlands	497	3.6%
Wales	331	2.4%
North East	202	1.5%
Unallocated	2,235	16.3%
Grand Total	13,687	100.0%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

¹ HMRC, [Regional Trade Statistics](#)

6. Northern Ireland

Data published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) indicates that in 2017 the total value of Northern Ireland's 'external sales' – i.e. sales of goods and services to the rest of the UK plus exports of goods and services was £21.4 billion.

Of this total:

- £11.3 billion were sales to the rest of the UK
- £10.1 billion were exports – i.e. sales outside the UK.

Of Northern Ireland's exports:

- £3.9 billion (39%) were to the Republic of Ireland – making it Northern Ireland's single largest export market.
- £2.0 billion (19%) were to the rest of the EU (i.e. excluding the Republic of Ireland)
- £4.3 billion (42%) were to the rest of the world.²

Northern Ireland's exports were heavily skewed toward goods exports rather than services, with goods accounting for 80% of Northern Ireland's total exports.

The value of Northern Ireland's total purchases – i.e. purchases of goods and services from the rest of the UK plus imports of goods and services was £20.4 billion.

Of this total:

- £13.3 billion were purchases from the rest of the UK
- £7.1 billion were imports.

Of Northern Ireland's imports:

- £2.6 billion (37%) were imported from the Republic of Ireland – making it Northern Ireland's single largest source of imports.
- £2.2 billion (31%) were from the rest of the EU (i.e. excluding the Republic of Ireland)
- £2.3 billion (32%) were from the rest of the world.³

Again, Northern Ireland's imports were heavily skewed toward imported goods rather than services, with goods accounting for 88% of Northern Ireland's total imports.

6.1 Trade in goods

Exports

Northern Ireland's goods exports to the Republic of Ireland by type of good are shown in the table below.

² NISRA, [Overview of Northern Ireland Trade](#), June 2019

³ NISRA, [Overview of Northern Ireland Trade](#), June 2019

Northern Ireland goods exports to the Republic of Ireland, 2018

	£ millions	% of total
Dairy products & birds' eggs	367.5	11.4%
Road vehicles	225.3	7.0%
Meat & meat preparations	172.6	5.4%
Petroleum & petroleum products	166.3	5.2%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles n.e.s.	155.4	4.8%
Beverages	154.1	4.8%
Machinery specialized for particular industries	140.7	4.4%
Cereals & cereal preparations	138.7	4.3%
Crude materials, inedible, except fuels	134.4	4.2%
Manufactures of metal n.e.s.	115.6	3.6%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

Overall, food and live animals made up 32% of all Northern Ireland's goods exports to the Republic of Ireland, followed by machinery and transport equipment, which made up 16%.

36% of Northern Ireland's total goods exports were to the Republic of Ireland (compared to 6% for the UK as a whole).

Imports

Food and live animals made up 41% of all Northern Ireland's goods imports from the Republic of Ireland, followed by manufactured goods, which made up 15%.

28% of Northern Ireland's total goods imports were from the Republic of Ireland (compared to 3% for the UK as a whole).

Northern Ireland goods imports from the Republic of Ireland, 2018

	£ millions	% of total
Meat & meat preparations	307.7	14.0%
Dairy products & birds' eggs	173.3	7.9%
Cereals & cereal preparations	158.4	7.2%
Non-metallic mineral manufactures n.e.s.	127.3	5.8%
Crude materials, inedible, except fuels	110.7	5.0%
Miscellaneous manufactured articles n.e.s.	96.2	4.4%
Vegetables & fruit	78.4	3.6%
Essential oils & perfume materials; toilet preps	73.5	3.3%
Machinery specialized for particular industries	73.1	3.3%
Beverages & tobacco	70.8	3.2%

Source: HMRC, UK Trade Info

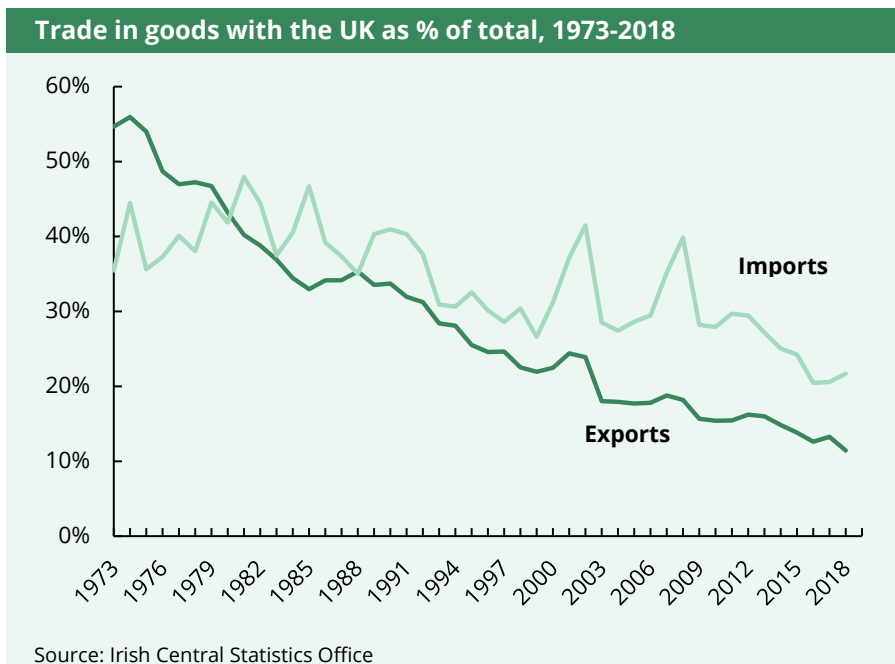
7. The Republic of Ireland's trade with the UK

In 2017:

- The UK was the Republic of Ireland's second largest export market for goods (behind the USA), accounting for 12% of goods exports and largest source of imported goods, accounting for just under a quarter of Ireland's total goods imports.
- The UK was the Republic of Ireland's largest export market for services, accounting for 16% of service exports and second largest source of imported services (behind the USA), accounting for 9% of Ireland total service imports.⁴

While the UK remains one of the Republic of Ireland's most important trading partners, Ireland's trade with the UK as a proportion of its total trade has gradually declined over time – in 1953, 91% of the Republic of Ireland's goods exports were to the UK; by 2018, this had fallen to 11%.⁵

The graph below shows the Republic of Ireland's trade in goods with the UK as a percentage of its total trade in goods since 1973.



Over this period:

- Irish goods exports to the UK fell from a high of 56% of total goods exports in 1974 to 11% in 2018.
- Goods imports from the UK fell from a high of 48% of total goods imports in 1981 to 20% in 2016.

⁴ Figures taken from the [Irish Central Statistics Office statistical database](#)

⁵ Data from IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics

14 Statistics on UK trade with Ireland

Similarly, the importance of Republic of Ireland's trade with Northern Ireland has generally declined over this period:

- In 1975, 20% of the Republic of Ireland's goods exports were to Northern Ireland; this fell to 7% in 2002, but has increased since, reaching 13% in 2018.
- The proportion of the Republic of Ireland's goods imports coming from Northern Ireland has remained at 2% or lower since 2003, down from a high of 5% in 1981.



8. Appendix: UK-Ireland trade 1999 - 2018

UK trade with Ireland, 1999 - 2018					
Goods and services					
	Exports		Imports		Balance
	£ billion	% total	£ billion	% total	£ billion
1999	14.2	5.8%	11.1	4.3%	3.1
2000	16.0	5.9%	12.3	4.2%	3.7
2001	18.6	6.7%	12.3	4.0%	6.3
2002	20.8	7.4%	12.8	4.1%	8.0
2003	18.8	6.4%	13.0	4.0%	5.9
2004	20.4	6.6%	13.3	3.9%	7.1
2005	24.1	7.0%	13.9	3.7%	10.2
2006	25.3	6.5%	14.7	3.4%	10.6
2007	27.7	7.2%	15.6	3.7%	12.1
2008	29.3	6.9%	16.6	3.6%	12.7
2009	25.7	6.4%	17.0	3.9%	8.8
2010	28.5	6.4%	17.6	3.7%	10.9
2011	30.6	6.1%	17.7	3.4%	12.9
2012	30.1	6.0%	18.0	3.4%	12.1
2013	28.5	5.4%	16.9	3.1%	11.6
2014	27.9	5.4%	17.0	3.1%	10.8
2015	27.2	5.2%	18.0	3.3%	9.2
2016	28.1	5.0%	20.1	3.4%	8.0
2017	34.0	5.5%	21.8	3.4%	12.2
2018	38.3	6.0%	21.9	3.3%	16.4

Source: ONS

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).