

12 December 2018

# Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics 2017

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland  
Theme: Economy  
Frequency: Annual

These latest estimates of local businesses' sales to markets outside Northern Ireland remain designated as 'experimental' to reflect the fact that they are under development. All values are in current prices and relate to the sales of both **goods and services**.

## Key points

- Total sales by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £66.6 billion in 2017, a decrease of 1.7% (£1.1 billion) over the calendar year.
- Sales within NI increased by £1.3 billion to £45.2 billion, up 2.9% over the year and are at the highest level since the survey commenced in 2011.
- Sales to Great Britain (GB) decreased by £2.9 billion to £11.3 billion, down 20.2% over the year.
- Sales to markets outside the UK (exports) increased by £467 million (4.8%) over the year, to £10.1 billion.
- Sales to all markets outside NI (external sales) i.e. GB sales plus exports, fell by £2.4 billion (10.1%) to £21.4 billion, and accounted for almost a third of total sales in 2017 (32.1%).
- The falls in External sales and sales to GB over the calendar year are the first since the survey began in 2011. These were driven by a substantial decline in the Food, Beverages and Tobacco sub sector.
- Exports to the Republic of Ireland (IE) increased by £540 million (16.2%) over the year, to £3.9 billion.
- Exports to the Rest of the EU (REU, excluding IE) fell over the year by £269 million (12.1%) to £2.0 billion. Exports to the Rest of the World (RoW) increased by £195 million (4.8%) over the year, to £4.3 billion.
- BESES estimates are not directly comparable with HMRC Regional Trade Statistics due to methodological differences. See Appendix B for further details.

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# 1 Introduction and Context

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## 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. Any comments should be sent to [economicstats@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:economicstats@nisra.gov.uk).

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 methodologists. NISRA will continue to consult on any further methodological changes which may improve the quality and value of the statistics.

## Status of figures in current bulletin

- The figures presented relate to sales of both goods and services. A goods and services split will be available in Summer 2019.
- The most recent figures, 2017, are provisional and are subject to revision in the next reporting period. As such, previously published figures for 2016 have been revised as a result of additional information becoming available since the last publication.
- Sales and exports values are reported in £ million unless otherwise specified.
- All values are in current prices (data reported in current prices for each year are in the value of the currency for that particular year and therefore include the effects of inflation).
- Percentage changes are reported to one decimal place.
- The Broad Economy Sales and Exports series is classified as experimental (see above).
- Total UK sales can be derived by summing NI and GB sales.

## Delay in the publication of number of exporters

In 2017, the ABI incorporated methodological improvements to the outlier procedure used in producing both the ABI and BESES results. The methodology used to produce estimates of the number of exporters now includes these improvements. However, as an experimental series, these new BESES estimates are now required to undergo a rigorous process of

quality assurance and validation prior to publication. The new estimates will be published in due course.

### **Definitions used in this publication**

**Total sales** are defined as the sum of sales to Northern Ireland, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, the Rest of the European Union and the Rest of the World. Total sales include all taxes and duties on goods invoiced with the exception of VAT which is excluded from total sales.

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

**Exports** consist of all sales made outside the United Kingdom.

**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

## **Reference Tables**

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

## **Further Information**

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

## 2 Summary and Commentary

### 2.1 Sales and Exports Performance

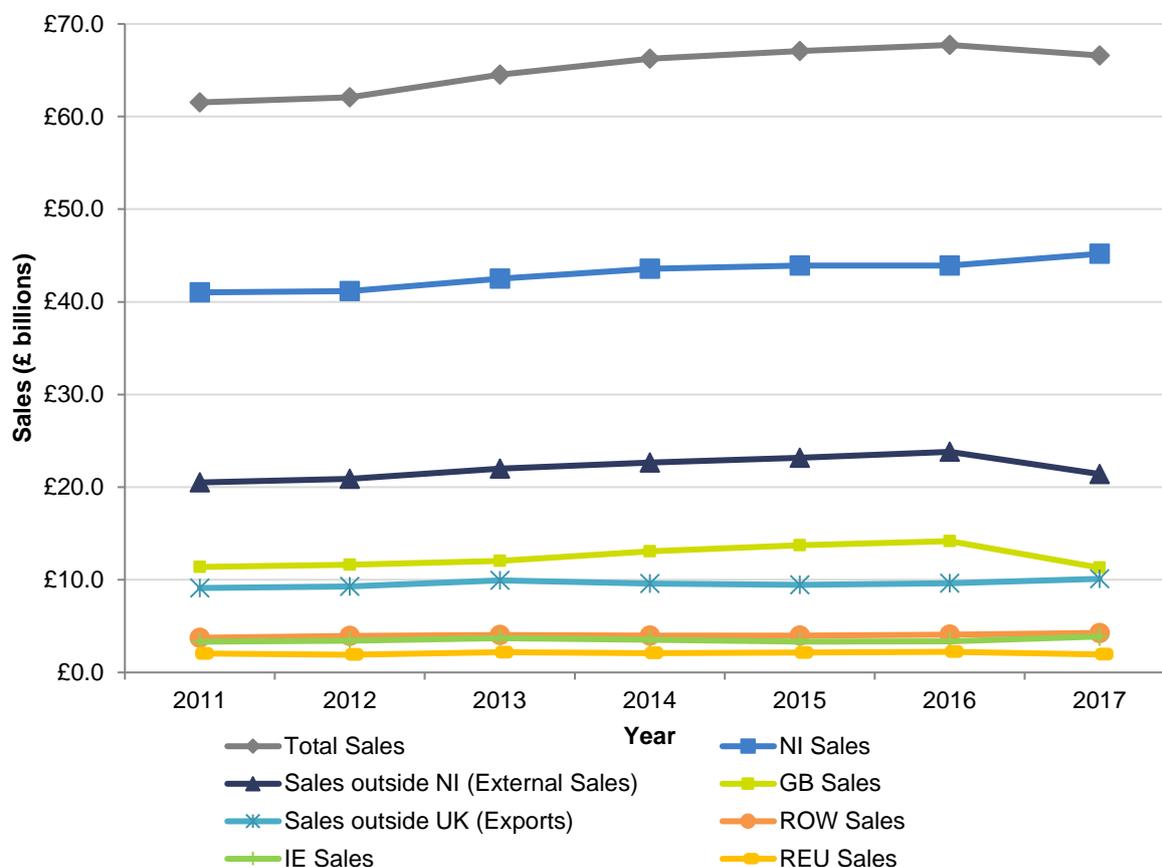
Total sales by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £66.6 billion in 2017. This represents a decrease of 1.7% (£1.1 billion) over the year and compares to a previous annual increase of 1.0% in 2016.

In 2017, 32.1% of total sales were made to customers outside NI (external sales). This equated to £21.4 billion, representing a decrease of 10.1% (£2.4 billion) over the year. This figure has fallen below the previously recorded peak in 2016 (£23.8 billion), and this is the first fall in external sales on survey record since recording began in 2011.

Sales outside the UK (exports) were estimated to be worth £10.1 billion in 2017. This represented an increase of 4.8% over the year, and follows an increase in the previous period (2015 – 2016) of 2.1%.

Figure 1 shows the values of total sales, and their broad destinations over the 7 year period (2011 to 2017). Over the period 2011 – 2017, sales to all broad destinations increased with the exception of sales to REU and GB (and thus external sales). The fall in sales to GB in 2017 was mainly driven by a substantial fall in turnover in the manufacturing sub sector of food, beverages and tobacco.

**Figure 1: Sales by broad destination, 2011 – 2017 (£ billions)**



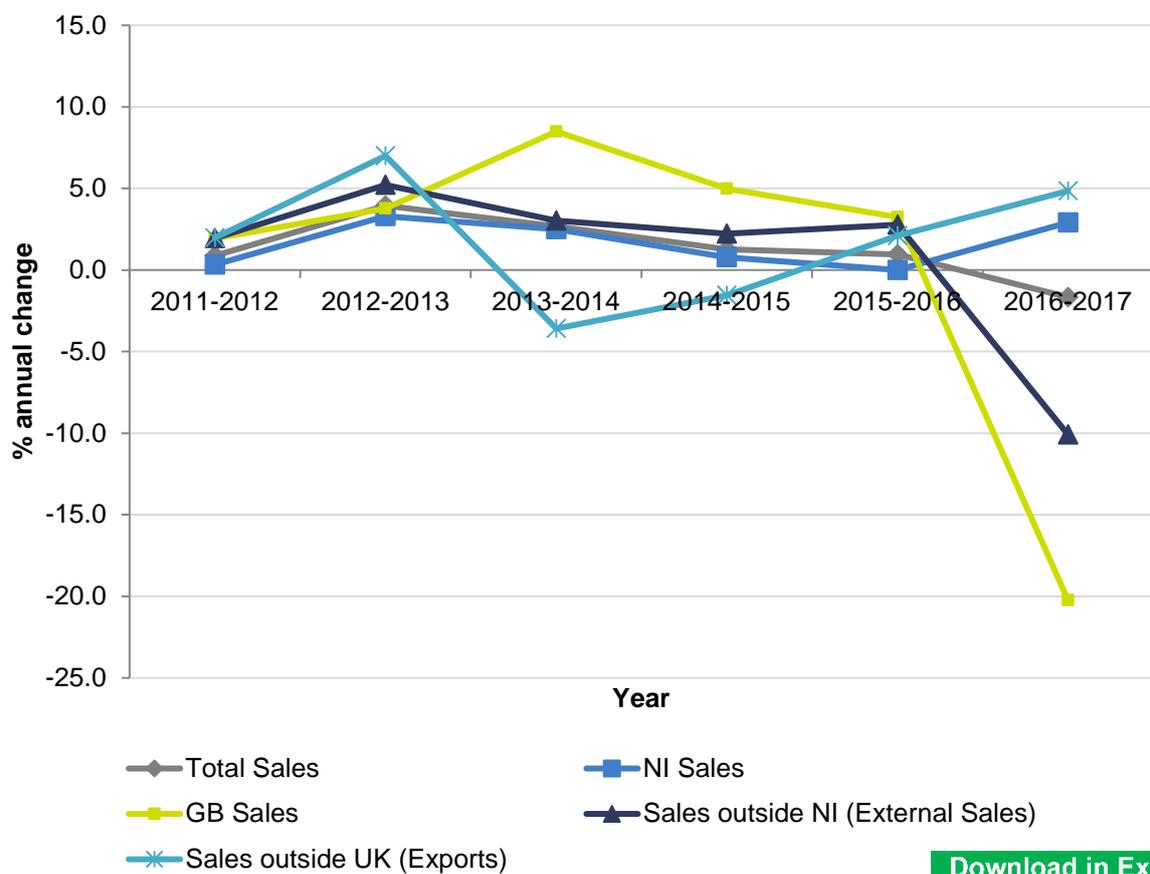
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## 2.2 Annual Changes in Sales over Time

Figure 2 provides information on annual percentage changes in total sales to selected destinations.

The annual rate of growth of sales increased in the period 2011/12 – 2012/13 for all destinations. This was followed by a fall in growth across the board in the period 2013/14, with the exception of sales to GB, which peaked in 2013/14. Since then there has been a general pattern of declining rate of sales growth. However, all high-level destinations saw growth in 2015/16 albeit with a decreasing annual rate of growth in some cases. In 2016/17, total sales experienced negative growth for the first time in the time series - this was mainly driven by a substantial decrease in GB sales.

**Figure 2: Annual Rate of Growth of Sales to Selected Destinations, 2011 – 2017**



## 2.3 Analysis by Destination

Over the last year (i.e. between 2016 & 2017), total sales decreased by 1.7% (£1.1 billion). This was largely driven by decreasing sales to GB (down 20.2% or £2.9 billion). This fall was partially offset by increased sales to NI (up 2.9% or £1.3 billion) and exports (up 4.8% or £467 million).

Over the last year, sales to IE (£3.9 billion) have increased by 16.2% (£540 million). This follows an increase of 0.4% between 2015 and 2016 and a fall of 5.5% between 2014 and 2015. Sales to the REU decreased by 12.1% over the year while sales to the RoW increased by 4.8%.

Sales to GB decreased for the first time on survey record, falling by 20.2% (£1.3 billion) to £11.3 billion in 2017. Great Britain remains the most significant single market for external sales from Northern Ireland businesses, accounting for 17.0% of total sales.

Sales to outside the UK (exports) accounted for 15.2% of total sales. Sales to IE, which account for 5.8% of total sales and over a third (38.4%) of sales outside the UK, increased by 16.2% over the year.

Over the last year sales to the REU<sup>1</sup> decreased by 12.1% (£269 million) to £2.0 billion. Sales to the rest of the EU (i.e. excluding the Republic of Ireland) account for 2.9% of total sales and nearly a fifth of exports (19.4%).

Exports to the RoW<sup>2</sup> increased by £195 million (4.8%) over the year, to £4.3 billion. RoW sales account for 6.4% of total sales, and 42.2% of all exports.

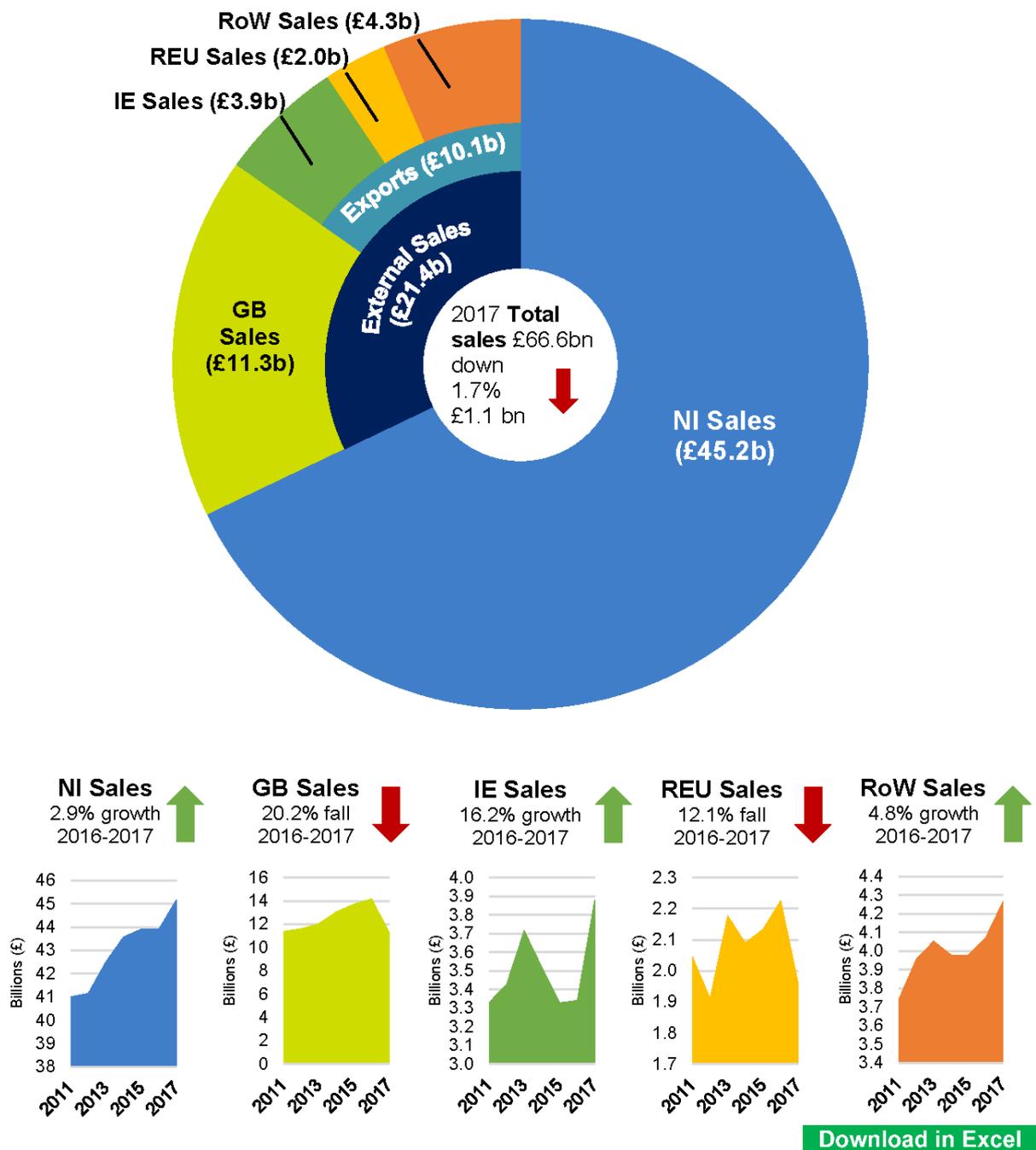
External sales to markets outside Northern Ireland are comprised of sales to GB plus the value of exports combined. These decreased by £2.4 billion to £21.4 billion, and accounted for almost one third of total sales in 2017 (32.1%). This figure has fallen below the previously recorded peak in 2016 (£23.8 billion), and this is the first fall in external sales on survey record since recording began in 2011. This was mainly caused by a substantial fall in sales in the manufacturing sub sector of food, beverages and tobacco.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of EU member countries is available at: [http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> The Rest of World refers to all destinations outside the European Union

Figure 3: Total Sales and trends<sup>3</sup> by Broad Destination, 2017



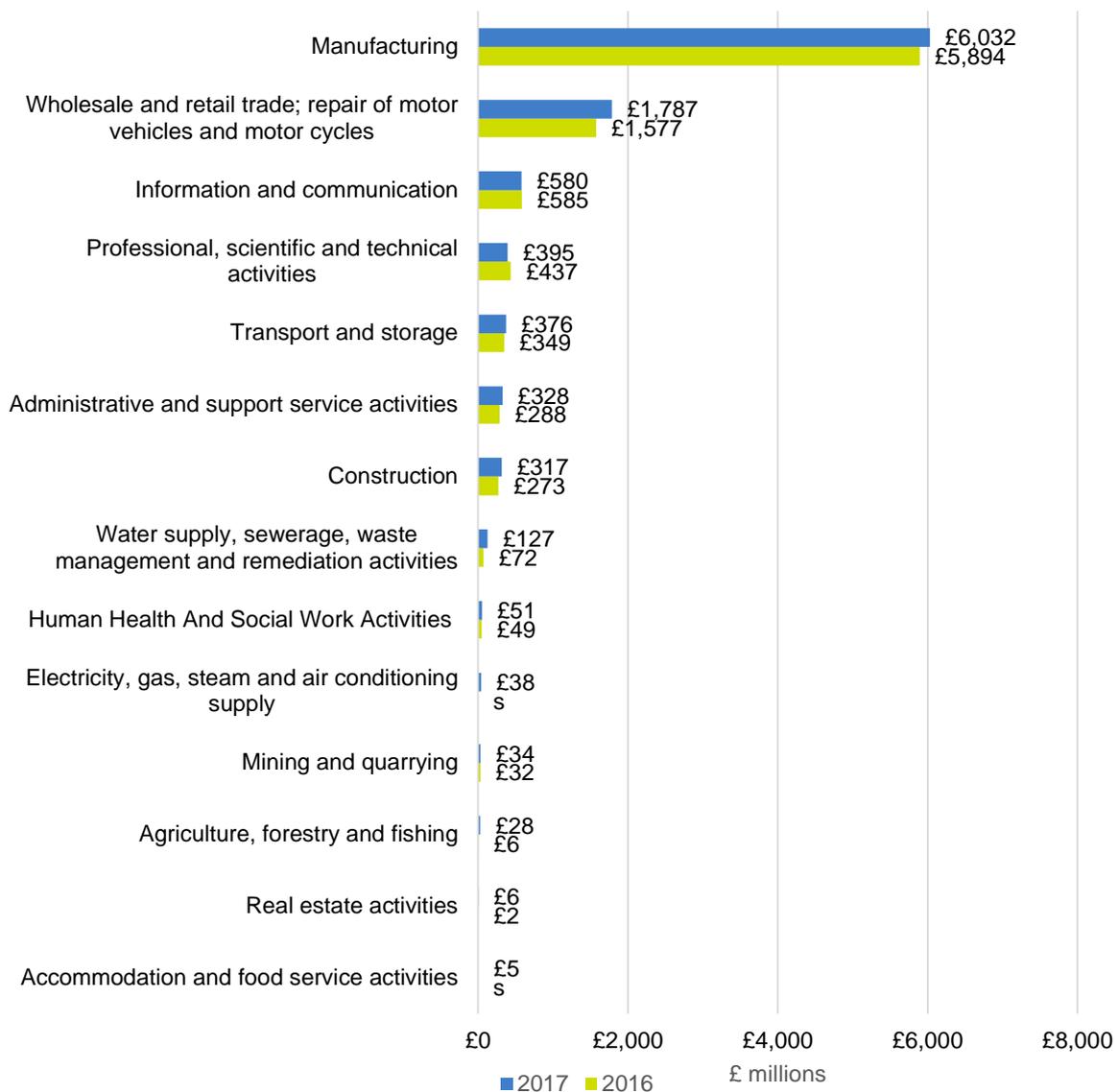
<sup>3</sup> Trend data uses different axis values for illustration purposes  
Figures may not sum due to rounding

## 2.4 Analysis by Industry Section

In 2017, the largest proportion of export sales was from the Manufacturing sector (Section C) which made up 59.7% (£6.0 billion) of all exports sales (£10.1 billion). Manufacturing exports increased by 2.3% over the year, and have increased by 8.8% between 2011 and 2017.

The next largest exporter was Wholesale and Retail Trade (Section G) with 17.7% (£1.8 billion) of all exports sales. Exports in this section increased by 13.3% over the year. This was followed by Information and Communication (Section J) which accounted for 5.7% of export sales (£580 million) and Professional, scientific and technical activities (Section M) which accounted for 3.9% (£395 million) of export sales.

**Figure 4: Trends in Export Sales by Industry Section, 2016 – 2017 (£ millions)**



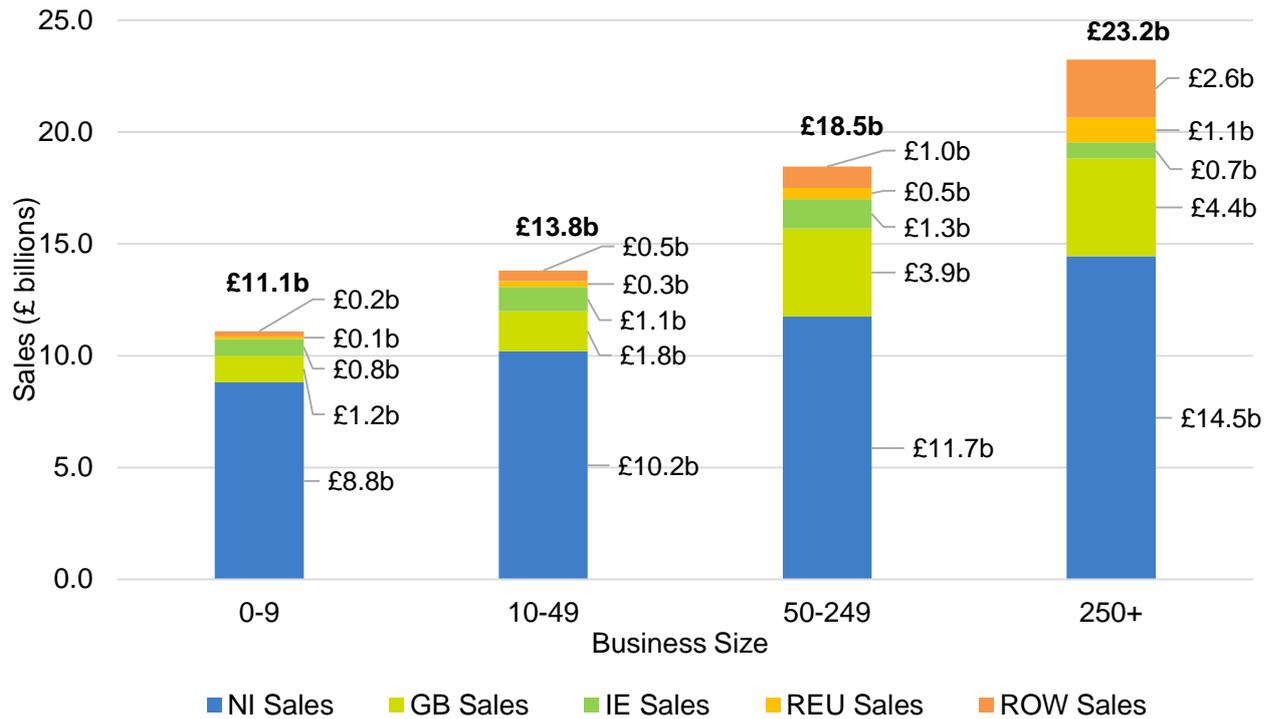
S = Data has been suppressed to protect confidentiality

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## 2.5 Analysis by Business Size

In 2017, large (250+) business had the largest total sales (£23.2 billion) and exports (£4.4 billion). Large businesses also export more to the REU than all other businesses combined. This pattern is also true for exports to ROW. However sales to IE are largely driven by businesses with fewer than 250 employees. Micro (0-9) and small (10-49) businesses are much more reliant on NI sales than the medium (50-249) and large businesses.

**Figure 5: Destination of Sales by Business Size, 2017 (£ billions)**



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### 3 Results Tables: 2011 - 2017

Table 1: Sales by broad destination, 2011 – 2017 (£ millions)

Broad Destination	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
NI Sales	£41,022	£41,159	£42,517	£43,579	£43,918	£43,918	£45,193
GB Sales	£11,392	£11,612	£12,051	£13,075	£13,728	£14,174	£11,304
<b>UK sales</b>	£52,414	£52,771	£54,568	£56,653	£57,646	£58,092	£56,497
IE Sales	£3,330	£3,428	£3,716	£3,520	£3,328	£3,341	£3,881
REU Sales	£2,044	£1,911	£2,177	£2,090	£2,134	£2,226	£1,958
ROW Sales	£3,741	£3,956	£4,053	£3,979	£3,977	£4,071	£4,267
<b>Exports</b> (all sales outside UK)	£9,116	£9,295	£9,946	£9,589	£9,440	£9,638	£10,106
<b>External Sales</b> (all sales outside NI i.e. GB sales + Exports)	£20,508	£20,907	£21,997	£22,664	£23,167	£23,812	£21,410
<b>Total Sales</b> (NI + External sales)	£61,530	£62,067	£64,514	£66,242	£67,085	£67,730	£66,603

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**Table 2: Sales by broad Destination and Industry Section, 2017 (£ millions)**

Standard Industrial Classification	Description	NI Sales	GB Sales	UK Sales	IE Sales	REU Sales	ROW Sales	Exports	External Sales	Total Sales
A – S	Agriculture, fishing, production, construction, distribution and services	£45,193	£11,304	<b>£56,497</b>	£3,881	£1,958	£4,267	£10,106	£21,410	<b>£66,603</b>
A (part)	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	£118	£5	<b>£123</b>	£13	*	*	£28	£33	<b>£151</b>
B	Mining and quarrying	£284	£54	<b>£338</b>	£33	*	*	£34	£88	<b>£372</b>
C	Manufacturing	£4,228	£5,334	<b>£9,562</b>	£1,564	£1,358	£3,110	£6,032	£11,366	<b>£15,595</b>
D	Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	£1,978	£15	<b>£1,993</b>	£30	*	*	£38	£54	<b>£2,031</b>
E	Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	£700	£71	<b>£771</b>	£12	£70	£46	£127	£199	<b>£898</b>
F	Construction	£5,201	£2,025	<b>£7,226</b>	£270	£35	£12	£317	£2,342	<b>£7,543</b>
G	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles	£20,794	£2,017	<b>£22,811</b>	£1,251	£186	£351	£1,787	£3,804	<b>£24,599</b>
H	Transport and storage	£2,056	£667	<b>£2,723</b>	£237	£106	£32	£376	£1,042	<b>£3,098</b>
I	Accommodation and food service activities	£1,852	£14	<b>£1,866</b>	£3	*	*	£5	£19	<b>£1,871</b>
J	Information and communication	£934	£406	<b>£1,340</b>	£146	£38	£395	£580	£985	<b>£1,920</b>
L	Real estate activities	£822	£64	<b>£886</b>	£5	*	*	£6	£69	<b>£891</b>
M	Professional, scientific and technical activities	£1,692	£378	<b>£2,070</b>	£156	£60	£180	£395	£773	<b>£2,465</b>
N	Administrative and support service activities	£1,739	£195	<b>£1,934</b>	£133	£75	£120	£328	£523	<b>£2,262</b>
P - S	Others	£2,797	£60	<b>£2,857</b>	£28	£5	£19	£51	£111	<b>£2,908</b>

\* = Cells have been suppressed to protect confidentiality

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**Table 3: Sales outside the UK (Exports) by Industry Section, 2011 – 2017 (£ millions)**

Standard Industrial Classification	Description	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
A – S	Agriculture, fishing, production, construction, distribution and services	£9,116	£9,295	£9,946	£9,589	£9,440	£9,638	£10,106
A (part)	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	£25	£29	£33	£24	£18	£6	£28
B	Mining and quarrying	£52	£56	£49	£37	£30	£32	£34
C	Manufacturing	£5,543	£5,660	£6,109	£5,714	£5,805	£5,894	£6,032
D	Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	£73	£44	£40	£26	*	*	£38
E	Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	£184	£141	£116	£136	£105	£72	£127
F	Construction	£218	£297	£252	£310	£225	£273	£317
G	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles	£2,017	£1,964	£2,045	£1,975	£1,736	£1,577	£1,787
H	Transport and storage	£303	£307	£324	£306	£294	£349	£376
I	Accommodation and food service activities	£10	£14	£17	£15	*	*	£5
J	Information and communication	£248	£252	£475	£450	£502	£585	£580
L	Real estate activities	£15	£24	£15	£17	£9	£2	£6
M	Professional, scientific and technical activities	£237	£249	£205	£314	£347	£437	£395
N	Administrative and support service activities	£170	£225	£227	£223	£279	£288	£328
P - S	Others	£22	£33	£37	£41	£58	£49	£51

\* = Cells have been suppressed to protect confidentiality

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**Table 4: Share of Total Sales by Broad Destination as %, 2011 - 2017**

<b>Broad Destination</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Total Sales	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
NI Sales	66.7	66.3	65.9	65.8	65.5	64.8	67.9
GB Sales	18.5	18.7	18.7	19.7	20.5	20.9	17.0
IE Sales	5.4	5.5	5.8	5.3	5.0	4.9	5.8
REU Sales	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.3	2.9
ROW Sales	6.1	6.4	6.3	6.0	5.9	6.0	6.4
External Sales	33.3	33.7	34.1	34.2	34.5	35.2	32.1
Exports	14.8	15.0	15.4	14.5	14.1	14.2	15.2

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**Table 5: Exports to markets within the rest of the EU, 2011 – 2017 (£ millions)**

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
REU Sales	£2,044	£1,911	£2,177	£2,090	£2,134	£2,226	£1,958
Germany Sales	£475	£510	£473	£492	£552	£539	£579
France Sales	£375	£345	£486	£413	£384	£469	£232
Belgium Sales	£136	£119	£113	£92	£118	£129	£135
Luxembourg Sales	£3	£2	£3	£2	£2	£4	£3
Netherlands Sales	£224	£222	£398	£416	£345	£293	£282
Italy Sales	£138	£121	£118	£97	£108	£112	£97
Denmark Sales	£71	£73	£64	£65	£48	£65	£80
Portugal Sales	£54	£48	£44	£46	£34	£42	£61
Spain Sales	£204	£156	£185	£172	£178	£168	£157
Greece Sales	£18	£22	£19	£14	£15	£13	£9
Austria Sales	£24	£33	£22	£18	£22	£48	£34
Sweden Sales	£69	£49	£54	£41	£70	£73	£53
Finland Sales	£50	£33	£31	£39	£30	£36	£41
Cyprus Sales	£5	£7	£6	£7	£15	£10	£14
Czech Republic Sales	£22	£25	£26	£39	£39	£26	£42
Estonia Sales	£2	£7	£3	£7	£4	£4	£4
Hungary Sales	£31	£44	£22	£33	£23	£29	£30
Latvia Sales	£9	£7	£6	£4	£5	£5	£6
Lithuania Sales	£4	£8	£8	£8	£9	£6	£9
Malta Sales	£5	£3	£12	£8	£10	£8	£5
Poland Sales	£95	£49	£46	£44	£85	£95	£47
Slovakia Sales	£5	£5	£7	£5	£4	£14	£8
Slovenia Sales	£3	£3	£3	£2	£2	£2	£2
Bulgaria Sales	£4	£4	£5	£5	£6	£9	£7
Romania Sales	£18	£17	£24	£17	£22	£20	£17
Croatia Sales <sup>1</sup>	-	-	-	£1	£3	£6	£5

<sup>1</sup> Croatia joined the EU in July 2013 and is included for the first time in the 2014 reporting period.

A list of EU member countries is available at:  
[http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm)

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**Table 6: Exports to markets outside the EU, 2011 – 2017 (£ millions)**

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
ROW Sales	£3,741	£3,956	£4,053	£3,979	£3,977	£4,071	£4,267
Switzerland Sales	£748	£865	£784	£884	£903	£735	£372
Turkey Sales	£41	£32	£40	£18	£35	£49	£46
Eastern Europe	£5	£9	£19	£8	£14	£9	£8
Norway Sales	£42	£55	£93	£67	£33	£47	£46
Russia Sales	£81	£104	£121	£93	£68	£37	£33
Rest of Europe Other	£19	£23	£19	£24	£22	£15	£15
Australia Sales	£225	£251	£189	£183	£128	£94	£124
New Zealand Sales	£20	£16	£13	£15	£11	£20	£59
Rest of World Other	£13	£19	£18	£44	£28	£62	£126
North America Total	£1,323	£1,320	£1,548	£1,523	£1,605	£1,862	£1,916
Central and South America Total	£110	£153	£94	£88	£80	£53	£40
Middle East Total	£289	£273	£276	£265	£258	£302	£393
Asia Total	£550	£566	£582	£549	£578	£608	£901
Africa Total	£275	£272	£256	£219	£214	£179	£186

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**Table 7: Sales by Broad Destination and Business Size, 2017 (£ millions)**

<b>Business Size</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>NI Sales</b>	<b>GB Sales</b>	<b>IE Sales</b>	<b>REU Sales</b>	<b>ROW Sales</b>	<b>External Sales</b>	<b>Exports</b>
0-9	£11,086	£8,809	£1,189	£754	£105	£228	£2,277	£1,088
10-49	£13,810	£10,187	£1,807	£1,086	£259	£471	£3,623	£1,815
50-249	£18,465	£11,746	£3,946	£1,316	£495	£962	£6,719	£2,774
250+	£23,242	£14,451	£4,362	£725	£1,098	£2,606	£8,792	£4,429
<b>Total</b>	<b>£66,603</b>	<b>£45,193</b>	<b>£11,304</b>	<b>£3,881</b>	<b>£1,958</b>	<b>£4,267</b>	<b>£21,410</b>	<b>£10,106</b>

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# 4 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](#).

This release provides revised estimates for 2016 and provisional estimates for 2017. In addition, estimates of the number of businesses selling to markets outside Northern Ireland are presented (see section "Delay in the publication of number of exporters" on page 3 for details of a delay in the publication of number of exporters due to methodology changes aimed at improving the quality of the estimates).

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 latest Department for the Economy Economic Commentary provides an overview of the state of the Northern Ireland economy, setting it in a global context. This can be found at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/df-e-economic-commentary>.

## Other sources

Further information relating to Northern Ireland exports has historically been available from the Exporting Northern Ireland Services Study (ENIS). The Exporting Northern Ireland Services (ENIS) Study is a survey which was first introduced by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in 2003 to further understand and estimate the value to the Northern Ireland economy of exporting services. The study is based on information collected via the International Trade in Services Survey (ITIS), which additionally collects information on the nature of services. However, service sector sales outside Northern Ireland are now collected via the BESES. In light of developments on the production of the BESES NISRA have ceased publication of the ENIS series (last published in August 2015). The ITIS data will continue to be collected for UK level purposes and NISRA will consult with users on any future plans in relation to this.

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 does 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)'. These UK regional statistics can be accessed [here](#).

A joint NISRA/HMRC statement referencing the differences between the methodologies and ongoing collaborative working is available in Appendix B.

## Counts of Businesses Exporting

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has recently begun to produce an experimental count of importers and exporters in GB. For conceptual reasons, ONS were not able to derive data for NI as part of this series. While the methodologies used by NISRA and ONS to produce their respective counts are broadly similar, users should be aware that differences still exist and caution should be exercised when comparing the two measures.

An information paper describing the methodology used by ONS can be found [here](#).

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 Governments website](#).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) has issued guidance on comparing official statistics produced by each nation of the UK. This guidance can be accessed [here](#).

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."*

## 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](mailto:economicstats@nisra.gov.uk).

## Next Publication

A further disaggregation of the data in this bulletin into its goods and services components will be published in Spring 2019.

Imports data for survey year 2017 will be published in Summer 2019.

The next bulletin, with results for survey year 2018, will be published in December 2019.

All publications will be available at:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/business-statistics/broad-economy-sales-and-exports-statistics>

## For Further Information

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# 5 Appendices

## 5.1 Appendix A: Overview of Methodology to Estimate the Number of Businesses Selling Outside NI

Ongoing advancements in the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics series include the development of an estimate of the number of businesses that trade to particular destinations.

The method for creating the counts is an adaptation of the method used to derive population estimates for the destination variables. Full details of the BESES methodology can be found in Appendix B of the methodology paper on the [Production of Northern Ireland Broad Economy Exports Estimates](#).

Users should pay particular note to the gaps in survey coverage when using these data.

To derive the counts, only the design weight is used when weighting returned data. The design or 'a' weight is a simple expansion estimator (i.e.  $\frac{N_x}{n_x}$ ) for similar groups in the population

An example of how the number of exporters in a particular stratum is found is shown below:

- In stratum  $x$  there are 6 returns ( $n_x$ ) from a population of 12 businesses ( $N_x$ ).
- The  $a$  weight for stratum  $x$  ( $a_x$ ) is given by:

$$a_x = \frac{N_x}{n_x} = \frac{12}{6} = 2$$

- If, say, 3 of the 6 responders in stratum  $x$  are exporters, then the estimated number of exports in  $x$  is given by:

$$\text{exporters}_x = a_x \times \text{number of returned exporters in } x, \text{ so}$$

$$\text{exporters}_x = 2 \times 3 = 6$$

- The total number of exporters in the population is thus given by summing the number of exporters in each stratum.

The methodology used to compute these counts is in its infancy and, at this stage, the estimates should be considered as experimental statistics.

NISRA is constantly working to improve and develop BESES output and welcomes any feedback users might have. Ongoing development of the methodology will be informed by user feedback, both in terms of the usefulness and reliability of the estimates and their comparability with other sources. Any comments should be sent to [economicstats@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:economicstats@nisra.gov.uk).

## 5.2 Appendix B: NISRA/HMRC joint statement referencing the differences in methodological approaches between BESES and HMRC RTS

Due to methodological differences, the BESES (NISRA's Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics) and HMRC Regional Trade Statistics (RTS) are not directly comparable.

HMRC's primary source data is collected from the EU-wide Intrastat survey and from Customs import and export entries, both administered by HMRC. These record the movement - for trade purposes - of goods only between the UK and both EU and non-EU countries. There is a legal requirement for all VAT-registered businesses to supply this data, although for trade with the EU this only applies to businesses trading above the Intrastat threshold.

The RTS methodology allocates trade to a region based on the location of the business exporting or importing the goods. For multi-branch businesses, it allocates trade to a region, based on the proportional distribution of employees of that business across the regions of the UK. HMRC consider this to be a good proportionate reflection of trade at a regional basis. This methodology is in harmony with other regional statistical products from across the GSS, including the Annual Business Survey and the recently launched Regional Trade in Services from the ONS.

This main allocation method is used for all trade except for specific goods, the treatment of which are outlined in the published [RTS methodology](#).

The BESES is an experimental measure, based on an annual survey 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.

Users should refer to Appendix C of the [2015 publication](#) for estimates of the size of the difference between HMRC and NISRA measures of trade.

Statisticians in NISRA and HMRC are working together to understand the differences. This will lead to the documentation of the differences which will assist users. In the long term it may lead to future methodological enhancements of the products.