

Statistics on UK Trade

March 2015

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The Greater London Authority (GLA) welcomes the chance to respond to the UK Statistics Authority's inquiry into the quality of statistics, their accessibility and the way that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) engages with users of the statistics. The GLA has long-running concerns about the lack of available regional level services trade statistics. The lack of a regional breakdown or a regional version of a broad number of UK-wide statistics has hindered analysis of London's economy both within the GLA and by the national government, which given the size of London's economy (representing over 20 per cent of the UK's total output) is detrimental to a detailed analysis and understanding of the UK's economy as a whole.

In relation to the specific questions outlined by the inquiry:

1. Which of these statistics do you use, and for what purposes? Please be as specific as possible. For example, if you use the statistics to provide briefing and further analysis to others, it would be helpful to know what the end use is.

We use a variety of statistics on an ad hoc basis. For instance, we've used the statistics to support the development of the economic evidence base² which underpins the development of Mayoral strategies like the London Plan and the Economic Development Strategy. As such the analysis is used to inform policy decisions, which in turn affects public spending in London.

2. Are the statistics of sufficient quality for your needs? How clear is the advice from ONS about the strengths and limitations of the statistics? What further information would you like?

The Greater London Authority would find a breakdown of the national services trade data down to the Government Office Regions useful. At the moment, detailed trade in goods data (by Standard International Trade Classification (SITC)) for London are available from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). However, there is currently no official data on trade in services available at the regional level. With services accounting for around 91 per cent of London's economy in 2012 (as measured by the Gross Value Added) it would be useful to have a better idea of the extent to which London trades in services and, if possible, who are the key trading partners for London. A useful measure to have would be the value of services trade with estimates for exports and imports of services broken down by industry where possible. For example, a regular periodical on the regional breakdown of trade in services would provide a valuable input into the regional policy-making process.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/current-assessments/statistics-on-uk-trade.html>

² See for instance Chapter 1 at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/evidence-base-2010-final-low.pdf>

3. Is the statistical commentary helpful to you? How could it be improved?

The commentary is generally acceptable; however an analysis of regional data would be useful.

4. How do you usually access the latest statistics, for example from the ONS website, through the media etc? How could access be improved?

We mainly access it through the ONS website, however an easier and more user friendly means of searching that website would be helpful.

5. If you have requested additional data or raised queries with ONS about these statistics, or if the statisticians have sought your views about any aspect of the statistics, please tell us how well ONS engaged with you.

N/A

6. These statistics have been previously assessed in 2011 in Assessment Report number 144. Have you noticed any improvements since then?

N/A