

# Retail Sales Index Scotland 2020, Quarter 1

29 April 2020

This is the Retail Sales Index Scotland (RSIS) for Quarter 1 (January to March) 2020. RSIS can be used as an early indicator of consumer spending and economic performance.

## Headline results

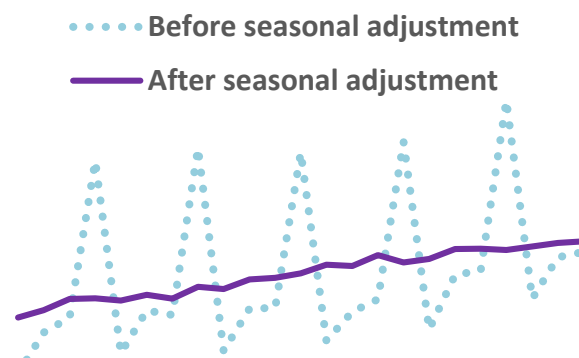
**-1.1%** The **volume** of Retail Sales (amount of goods bought) has contracted by -1.1% during the first quarter of 2020. Over the same period Great Britain as a whole saw a -1.6% contraction.

**-1.1%** The **value** of Retail Sales (how much was spent) contracted by -1.1% during the first quarter of 2020. Over the same period Great Britain as a whole saw a -1.4% contraction.

## How is the Retail Sales Index calculated?

The Retail Sales Index statistics for both Scotland and Great Britain are estimated using a monthly survey of 5,000 businesses in Great Britain carried out by the Office for National Statistics. The survey always includes the largest retailers (around 900 businesses) plus a representative sample of smaller businesses. It captures around 90% of the retail industry turnover, including online sales. Due to the volatile nature of retail sales, revisions to previous quarters are frequent. A revision table is included in the downloadable material for this publication.

Retail Sales have a strong and predictable seasonal pattern, with dramatic rises in the fourth quarter driven primarily by Christmas spending. In order to analyse the underlying economy the data are seasonally adjusted to take these predictable rises and falls into account.



# COVID-19

## Impact on data

Many stores ceased trading from 23 March following official government guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic. These closures have had a noticeable negative effect on retail output.

## Comparisons to Great Britain

The Scottish Retail Sales Index tends to be more volatile than the one at Great Britain level because the number of sampled businesses is smaller. In order to compare the impact on retail businesses in Scotland to those at Great Britain level we would need several quarters of data to take account of this. The figures in this publication therefore should not be taken as an indication of the relative impact of COVID-19 on Scottish retail compared to the rest of Great Britain.

## Faster indicators

Scottish Government has been investigating ways to make faster use of available data to allow more up to date monitoring of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy, and to help policy makers and economic forecasters. The two strands to this work are:

1. **Monthly Business Index (MBI)** – fast and general, similar to private sector indicators but based on larger sample size of companies
2. **Monthly GDP estimates (mGDP)** – based primarily on turnover and output data for the private sector.

Note that these statistics are faster but based on less data than quarterly GDP, meaning results are likely to be less reliable and more prone to revision than quarterly estimates. More information on these proposals is available in <https://www.gov.scot/publications/gdp-quarterly-national-accounts-for-scotland-2019-q4/>

## Proposed suspension of RSIS

As part of this work, we are proposing to change some of our normal outputs, and we shall consult users in due course. Proposals include that the Retail Sales index be amalgamated with the MBI and mGDP and suspended as a separate release until further notice. This will free up resources to work on the estimates for the whole economy.

## Scottish Retail Sales volume fell by -1.1% this quarter

The latest estimate of RSIS shows -1.1% contraction of sales volume between 2019 Q4 and 2020 Q1.

Over the same period Great Britain's sales volume contracted by -1.6%.

## Scottish Retail Sales value fell by -1.1% this quarter

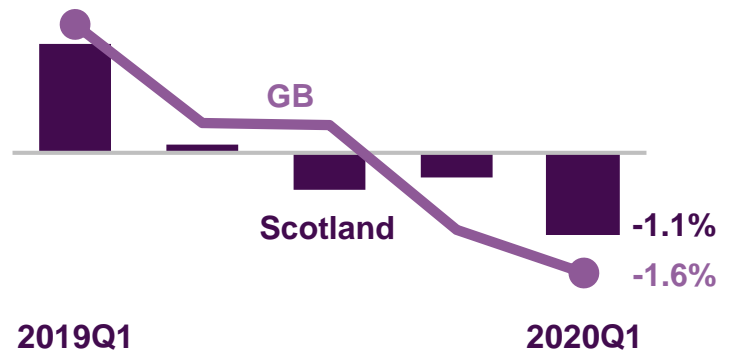
The value of retail sales contracted by -1.1% between 2019 Q4 and 2020 Q1.

Over the same period, the value of retail sales in Great Britain as a whole contracted by -1.4%.

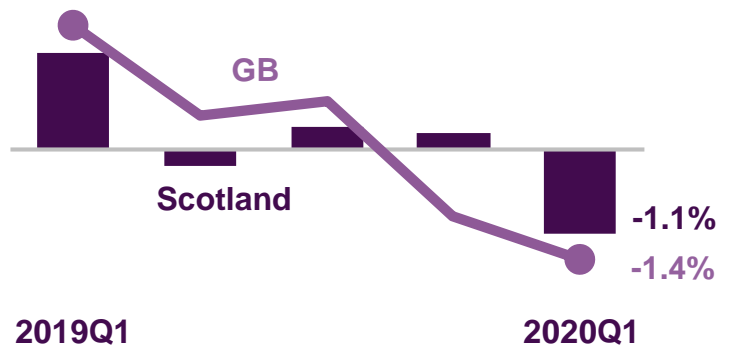
## Effect on prices

This quarter the value and volume of retail sales have both fallen at the same rate, suggesting that prices have remained stable.

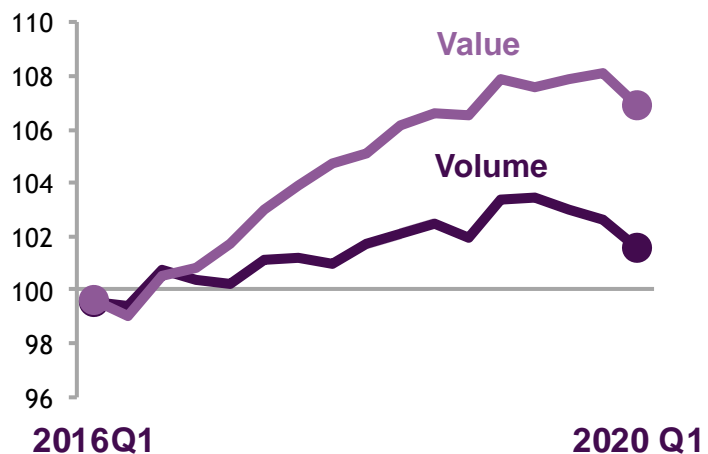
Growth in Sales Volume



Growth in Sales Value



Volume and Value of Retail Sales (Indexed at 2016 = 100)



## A National Statistics publication for Scotland

Retail Sales Index for Scotland was assessed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) in January 2011. The assessment report, designating this publication national statistics status can be found here:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/scottish-macro-economic-statistics-scottish-government/>.

Since that report there have been numerous improvements made, including: more user friendly explanatory text to accompany the figures, and use of infographics in presenting the results.

Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

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## How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [benjamin.hansson@gov.scot](mailto:benjamin.hansson@gov.scot) for further information.

## Complaints and suggestions

If you are not satisfied with our service or have any comments or suggestions, please write to the Chief Statistician, 2WR, St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG, Telephone: (0131) 244 0302, e-mail [statistics.enquiries@gov.scot](mailto:statistics.enquiries@gov.scot)

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