

Press release: UK drinks industry helps drive up British exports

Latest figures (10th April) show UK exports continue to go from strength to strength as they reached £639.9bn in the year to February 2019, an increase of 3.1% since the previous year.

Goods exports in the same period remained particularly strong, increasing by 3.5% to £353.2bn.

UK exports of beverages, which include the world-renowned British gin and Scotch whisky, reached a high of £8.3bn in the year to February 2019, increasing by 7% on the previous year. The unprecedented demand for British soft drinks, wine and spirits have seen exports more than double in the past 15 years.

The UK boasted a healthy £1.6bn trade surplus in beverages. In fact, if the UK never exported beverages, the trade deficit would have been 26.1% greater.

October and November saw a spike in beverage exports approximately 23% above the 12-monthly average for drinks exports, as people across the world stocked up on Scotch whisky and gin ahead of the festive period.

Non-EU countries were the top destination for British beverages, accounting for 63.4% of all exports. There has been a massive increase in demand from India and Japan, with exports growing by 49.2% to £179m and 23.7% to £188m respectively. The US remains the top destination for UK drinks, growing by 3.9% to £1.8bn.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox, said:

Today's figures show that despite the challenging global economic environment, people across the world are continuing to demand high-quality British exports.

The UK's drink industry has global appeal and it's fantastic to see the sector continue to deliver real tangible economic benefits for the UK. My international economic department stands ready to help businesses of all sizes achieve their exporting ambitions.

Scotch Whisky Association International Director Sarah Dickson said:

Scotch whisky continues to blaze a trail for UK exports, making up more than half of all UK beverage exports.

Last year, 41 bottles of Scotch whisky were shipped from Scotland every second to around 180 global markets, with an export value of £4.7bn. We should be proud that Scotland's national drink is the world's premier whisky, enjoyed by millions around the globe.

Consumers in key global markets are looking for products with a strong story, and with Scotch whisky they can discover a spirit with an unrivalled reputation for quality, authenticity and provenance.

One Yorkshire business that's tapped into increased global demand for British gin is Spirit of Harrogate, which has seen an increase in exports across markets including New Zealand, Germany, Malta, Finland, Denmark and Croatia.

Co-Founder of Spirit of Harrogate, Mike Carthy, said:

We're very proud that British gins are being so well received across the world.

When we launched the Spirit of Harrogate and Slingsby, everything had to reflect the essence of Harrogate and its traditions as a place where people could relax, indulge and socialise, taking us back to Victorian Britain and the heritage of the town.

The response from international buyers has been extremely positive, and we look forward to opening up in new markets and developing our brand further afield so that more people can enjoy our award-winning products.

Since its launch in November 2015, Spirit of Harrogate has developed a range with five different types of Slingsby gin, a Slingsby vodka and two 'gin experiences'.

The strong export figures follow the launch of the Export Strategy last year, which sets out a new ambition to increase exports as a proportion of UK GDP to 35%, making the UK one of the G7's most successful exporters.

Notes to editors

- Latest trade data for the year to February 2019 comes from ONS: UK Trade: February 2019.
- The calculation analysing the hypothetical impact on the trade deficit of excluding beverage exports uses the ONS: UK Economics Accounts Q4 2018. The analysis relies on the assumption that the UK continued to import beverages.