

Scotland is the only part of the UK running a consistent...

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As some readers of the blog will know I have been taking an interest in the data underpinning Scottish economic reporting this year. As a continuation of this theme I have, over the last few days, been aware of the reports on the [Wings Over Scotland blog](#) that UK Regional Trade Data has been restated to allocate to Scotland the benefit of oil sales previously allocated to the head offices of the companies making the sales in the past, and treated as unallocated for the purposes of the statistics as a result.

Let me start by saying that I am aware of all the controversy that surrounds the Wings blog. Just, however, because almost any mention of this blog riles every Scottish unionist does not mean that what is written on it is wrong: this report seems reliable; Scottish oil data does seem to have been consistently under-reported by HMRC who are responsible for these statistics, which also seems to rather prove my hypothesis that Scotland has been supplied with poor quality data by the UK government as a whole.

I have been asked by some people to establish whether this means the GERS statement for Scotland is wrong, and right now I am not sure of the answer to that. That is because the GERS data for the North Sea is estimated by academics according to the [GERS methodology note](#) and it is not clear what influence the Regional Trade Data has on that estimate. The best that can be concluded then is that the data as a whole, as well as GERS, remains as unclear and unreliable as ever.

What I did happen to note from the Regional Trade Data is this (extracted from the excel download [available here](#)):

Note that only Scotland runs a consistent trade surplus according to the Regional Trade Data.

Now, don't get too excited: this excludes services, and is notoriously unreliable (as noted already, the data can include errors running to billions of pounds and still get published) but for those with an interest in Scottish economics the implication is at least interesting. The persistent claim that Scotland has a weak economy and is unable to

sustain itself is not supported by this data. The chance that it may now and certainly did, support the UK economy as a whole, is, however supported.

This will need more work. I offer it as a curiosity for now, but one that certainly needs to be investigated further.