

24 April 2006

**Coverage**

Great Britain

**Theme**

The Economy

## Retail sales down in first quarter

The underlying rate of retail sales growth has slowed in the first three months of 2006, according to figures released today by the Office for National Statistics. This follows a period of increasing growth seen towards the end of last year.

The volume of retail sales in the three months January 2006 to March 2006 was 0.7 per cent lower than in the previous three months. This follows growth of 0.4 per cent in the three months to February and compares with an increase of 0.3 per cent at the same time in 2005.

Three-monthly growth in sales volume was 0.1 per cent for food stores compared to a decrease of 1.4 per cent for non-food stores. Within non-food the largest decrease was for 'other' non-food stores with a decrease of 2.5 per cent. This partly reflects lower sales volumes for specialist retailers of books and personal electrical goods. Household goods stores showed a decrease of 1.8 per cent, mainly reflecting reduced sales by DIY stores. Compared with the same period a year ago, total sales volumes in the three months to March 2006 were up 1.8 per cent.

Monthly figures show that the total sales volume increased by 0.7 per cent between February 2006 and March 2006. It follows growth of 0.3 per cent in February and a decrease of 1.7 per cent in January. Both food stores and non-food stores showed an increase on the month of 0.4 per cent. Within non-food stores non-specialised stores showed the strongest growth at 3.0 per cent, the highest growth since January 2005. The non-store retailing sector showed growth of 5.3 per cent, the highest since April 2005. The total volume of sales in March was 2.6 per cent higher than in March 2005.

For the three months to March the unadjusted value of retail sales was 0.1 per cent higher than in the same period a year earlier. The average weekly value of sales in March was £4.5 billion, 0.1 per cent higher than in March 2005. Food stores increased by 2.0

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per cent over the year compared with a decrease of 1.9 per cent for non-food stores.

### **BACKGROUND NOTES**

1. More details on these figures are found in the Retail sales first release published today at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/rs0406.pdf>
2. The March period covered the 5 weeks from 26 February to 1 April 2006.
3. The volume of retail sales is the total takings adjusted for inflation and the value of retail sales is the total actual takings.
4. All volume statistics referred to above are seasonally adjusted.
5. Internet sales by retailers, for whom the majority of sales are in-store, are included in the sales of the relevant store category. Sales by specialist internet retailers are included in the 'Non-store retailing and repair' category along with sales by catalogue based retailers.
6. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
7. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2006.