The UK Wine and Spirit Trade In Focus

wsta

speaking for the wine and spirit trade

Economically valuable and valued

The wine and spirit industry is a huge asset to the UK, both in terms of its contribution to the economy and the number of jobs it sustains. In this booklet the Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) takes you inside the industry and its unique supply chain to reveal why Britain has earned its place at the global heart of the wine and spirit trade.

To further explore the rich and vibrant layers that make up this sector the WSTA commissioned an Economic Analysis study produced by leading economists, Cebr*.

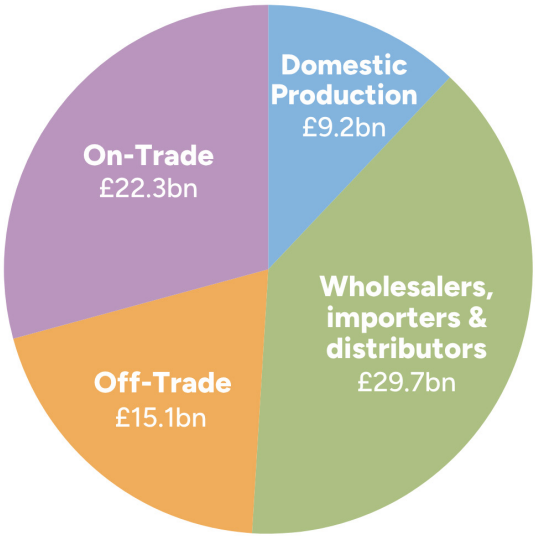
In 2022, the UK wine and spirit industry generated

£76.3 bn

in UK economic activity

£43bn from Spirit sector

£33bn from Wine sector



- **In total generated over £22 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy**
- **The UK spirits sector contributed £13.7 bn and wine £8.9bn in GVA**

We exported 1.5bn bottles (70cl) of spirits in 2024 - that's the equivalent volume of over 430 Olympic sized swimming pools.

Source: WSTA Economics Analysis study of Wine & Spirit industry conducted by Cebr analysis of NIQ off-trade and CGA on-trade data | total wine & spirits | MAT 2022 data, HMRC Alcohol Bulletin, MESAS, HMRC Trade Info | EY economic study conducted in 2018 on behalf of WSTA

The UK boasts the world's most diverse and dynamic wine market. It is the global hub for the fine wine trade, including bonded warehouses and wine storage facilities, world famous auction houses and leading wine exchanges, which have created a critical mass of wine merchants with a global outlook. The UK accounts for 30% of this trade globally.

In 2024, the UK:

Exported the equivalent of

1.5bn

spirits bottles (70cl)

Imported the equivalent of

1.7bn

still and sparkling wine bottles (75cl)

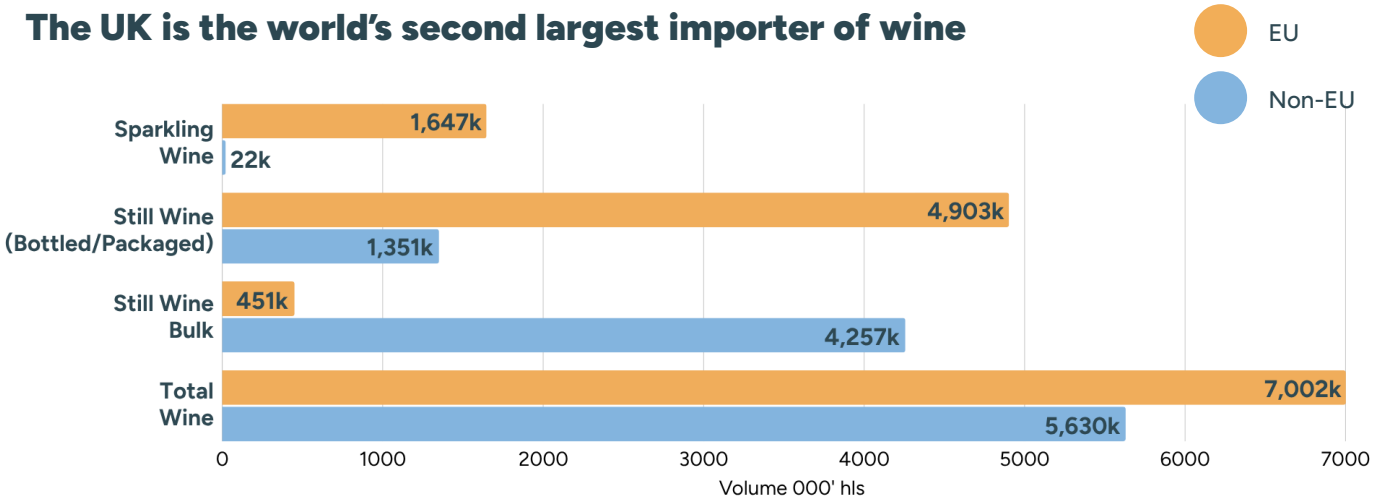
Bottled and Packaged

471m

litres of wine imported in bulk

Wine and spirits accounted for **70%** of all alcohol excise duty receipts in 2024, with £8.7bn out of a total of £12.4bn. Spirit receipts made up 32% with wine at 38%.

The UK is the world's second largest importer of wine



In 2024, the UK bottled and packaged 471m litres of wine that had been imported in bulk. This is more than Bordeaux's annual production!

Sources: HMRC UK Trade Info Stats | 2024
HMRC tax receipts and National Insurance contributions for the UK 2024

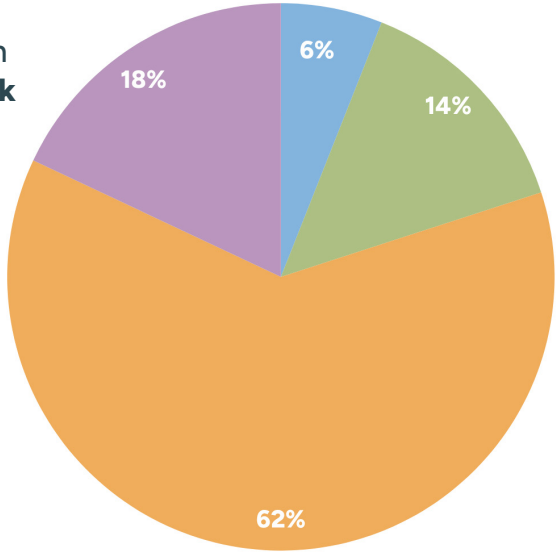
People in the wine and spirit industry

The wine and spirits industry supported over **412k full time equivalent (FTE) employees** in the UK in 2022, 62% of whom were in the on-trade. An earlier 2018 EY study* reported **359k FTE jobs**.

The largest contribution to FTE jobs came from the on-trade, with 256,255 FTE Employees. With a sectoral split of:

53%
Spirit

47%
Wine



Economic value of the supply chain

The largest contribution to economic activity came from the UK supply chain – importers, wholesalers, distributors and bottlers of imported wine at £29.7bn out of £76.3bn.

Education

There are currently 423 active Masters of Wine (MW) based in 31 countries. The UK hosts the highest number of MWs globally, with approximately half residing or working in the UK.

The Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) is the world's largest provider of wine and spirit qualifications providing courses to 100k students per year, across over 70 countries in 15 languages.

There are approximately the same number of people working in the UK hospitality sector as there are in agriculture, forestry and fishing combined.

Source: WSTA Economics Analysis study of Wine & Spirit industry conducted by Cebr analysis of NIQ off-trade and CGA on-trade data | total wine & spirits | MAT 2022 data, HMRC Alcohol Bulletin, MESAS, HMRC Trade Info | EY economic study conducted in 2018 on behalf of WSTA

Supply chain - past

The UK has a rich history in producing and importing wines and spirits.

The Romans were the first to plant vines in the UK in the first century A.D. Wine making continued throughout the Middle Ages, primarily in Monasteries. The Doomsday book (1086) recorded at least 42 vineyards in the South of England. However, the majority of wine enjoyed in the UK has been imported. The marriage of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 marked a turning point for the UK wine trade. England gained direct control of the Duchy of Aquitaine, including Bordeaux and by the late 12th Century, wine imports were booming.

Distillers have been producing spirits on British soil since the Middle Ages, with the earliest being made by monks who used it primarily for medicinal purposes. Gin gained popularity in the late 17th century after King William III (William of Orange) came to power in 1689, when the Government encouraged gin production as a patriotic alternative to imported spirits. The art of gin distillation grew in popularity, which spawned what became known as the 'Gin Craze'.

Supply chain - present

The UK's wine and spirit trade has a diverse supply chain, including distilleries, vineyards, importers and distributors, bottling plants, logistics, warehouses and storage, retailers, pubs and the wider hospitality sector. The UK is a major hub for imports - not only for wine consumed in the UK but also, thanks to our state-of-the-art bottling facilities, for wine sent here from around the world for onward shipment to northern Europe.

Some of the ingredients used in alcohol production are typically sourced from within the UK, but also imported, especially grains and botanicals. Both UK wineries and distilleries rely on imported machinery and equipment, including stills, presses, bottling technology and storage tanks. This requires intricate logistic networks to ship goods and transport to and from production plants. In 2024, 43% of all still wine imported into the UK was imported in bulk for packaging. Every step of the journey - grape or grain to glass - involves thousands of workers in the supply chain, creating a thriving UK wine and spirit industry.

Today 99% of all wine consumed in the UK is imported with half coming from the EU and the other half from the rest of the world.

Source: Wine GB Production Numbers and Market Data | 2024
HMRC Stats | 2024. HMRC UK Trade Info Stats | 2024

Grape to glass

Grape Grower

Wine Producer

Bulk Distributor

Finished Goods Distributor

Filler/Packer

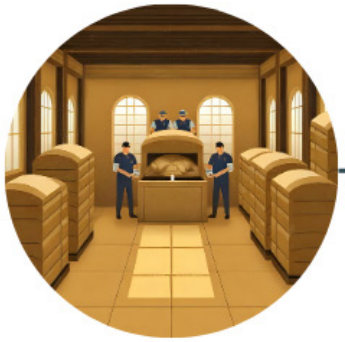
Transit Cellar

Wholesaler

Retailer

Glass

Grain to glass



Grain Suppliers

Botanicals

Distilleries

Wholesaler

Distribution Centres

Bottling

Retailer

Glass

In 2024, the UK exported £6.1bn worth of whisky and gin, which by value is worth more than twice the UK exports of salmon, chocolate and cheese combined.

Distilleries and vineyards

In 2024 there were a total of 426 distilleries registered in the UK, according to HMRC, an increase of 39 since 2023. New registrations included 23 in England, 15 in Scotland, 2 in Northern Ireland and 1 in Wales.

The UK spirit sector is well-established and continues to grow. Spirits are one of the UK's most valuable exports and are increasingly becoming more diverse, with gin exporting the equivalent of over 185m bottles around the world in 2024, worth over £500m. The UK gin industry is a becoming a standard bearer for British brands, accounting for 2 in every 3 bottles of gin exported around the world.

The UK has experienced a gin boom, dubbed the "ginaissance", over the last 15 years. Although sales have now steadied the number of distilleries in the UK continues to grow as distillers innovate and introduce new English and Welsh whiskies and rums. The total number of distilleries in the UK has increased from 116 in 2010 to 426 in 2024.

The UK wine sector continues to grow with over 1,000 vineyards recorded in 2023 and 220 wineries in operation. Around three quarters of wine produced on UK soils is sparkling wine, mostly produced using traditional bottle fermentation, like Champagne. The English and Welsh wine sector has been going from strength to strength since its renaissance in the early 1990s.

A total of

426

Distilleries

1,000+

Vineyards

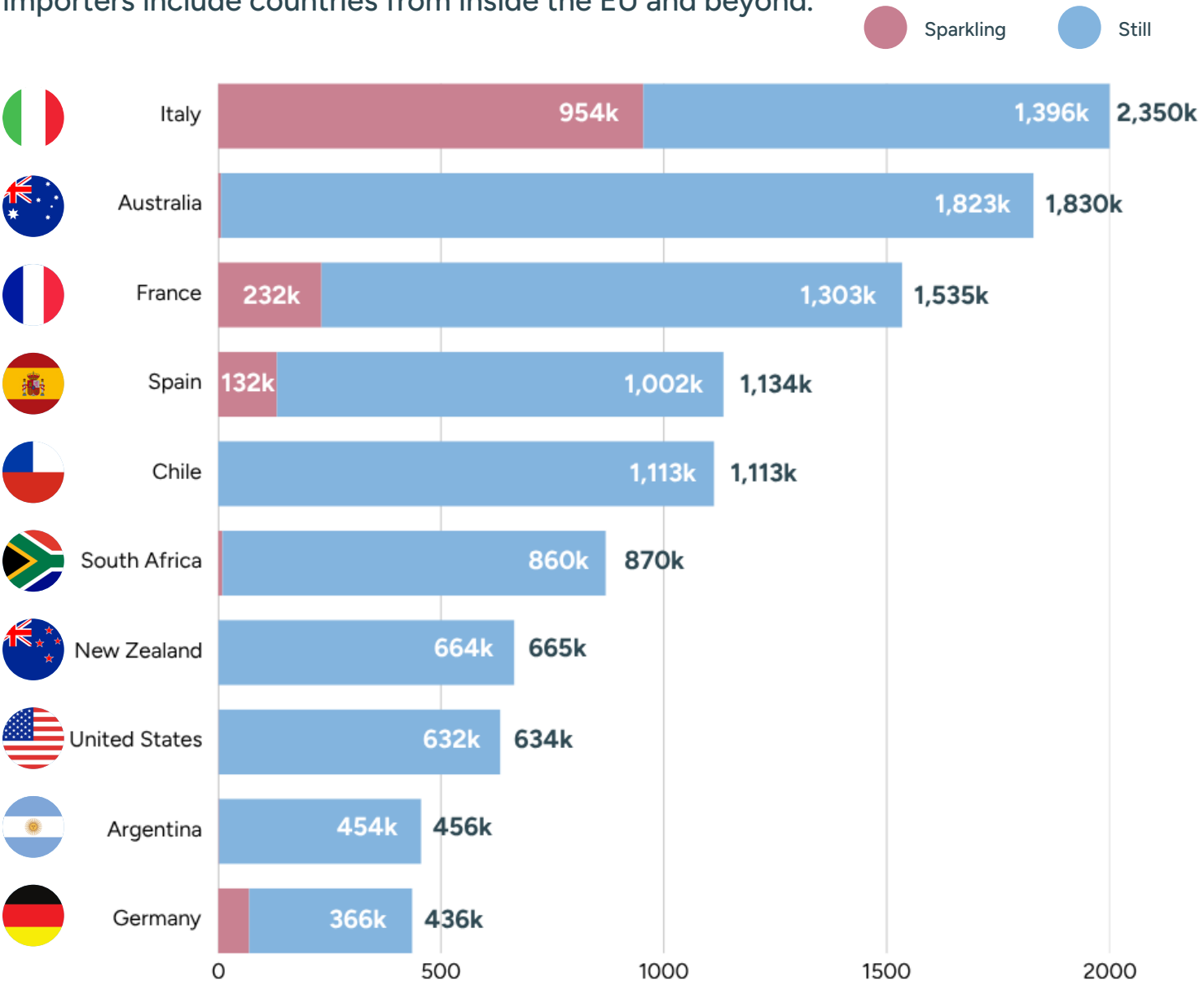
View a full map on our website

Gin is legally required to taste predominately of juniper. Most juniper used in gin making is grown in the wild, juniper plants take 1-3 years to mature and only female plants produce berries.

Source: Wine GB | 2024

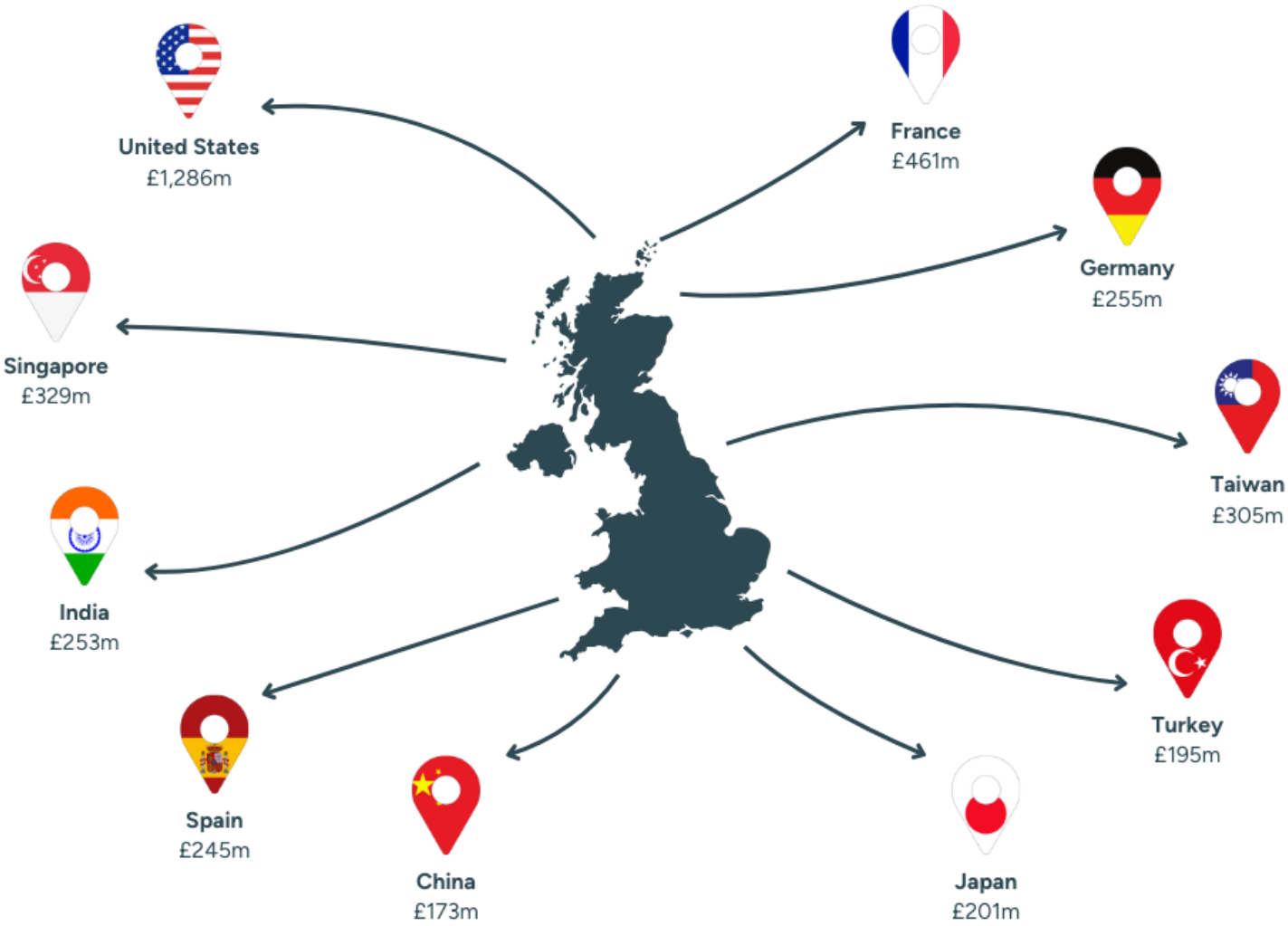
A global hub for the wine and spirit trade

The UK is the world's second largest importer of wine, it brings in the equivalent of 1.7bn bottles of wine a year from countries across the globe. The top 10 largest importers include countries from inside the EU and beyond.



Source: HMRC UK Trade Info Stats | 2024

The UK is the world's largest spirits exporter sending the equivalent of 1.5bn bottles overseas. The top 10 largest export destinations span the globe and are primarily outside of the EU.



When wine is imported in flexitanks, shipping containers can carry than double the volume compared to bottled wine, reducing both costs and carbon emissions.

Source: HMRC UK Trade Info Stats | 2024
Food and Drink Federation Trade Snapshot | 2024

An environmentally sustainable industry

Vineyards, wineries and distilleries in the UK and across the globe implement environmentally sustainable activities, based on the unique characteristics of their geographical regions and associated environmental risks. These activities, which aim to protect the environment and conserve natural resources, cover amongst others: water efficiency, energy efficiency, soil health, waste management, air quality, climate resiliency and management of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Across the supply chain, UK wine and spirit businesses have a strong record of pursuing an ambitious environmental sustainability agenda with many committing to achieve net zero well in advance of the UK's 2050 target.

Transport: Shipping in bulk now occurs for approximately 45% of still wine imports, massively reducing CO_2 emissions.

Sustainable distillery production: The UK has some of the most efficient distilleries in the world, with huge investment to reduce waste, water and energy use.

Sustainable vineyard production: Compared to other arable practices, vineyards can improve soil health, foster biodiversity and have a net carbon sequestration capacity.

Packaging: Our industry has spent millions on reducing packaging, bottle light-weighting and introducing new packaging designs to reduce emissions.

Supply chain: The wine and spirit supply chain has introduced more efficient ways to store and collect stock, including cutting edge technology to minimise emissions in logistics. Manufacturers are investing hundreds of millions in reducing emissions, such as electrifying glass furnaces.

Innovation: Wine and spirit businesses are constantly innovating and investing in communities and infrastructure. Those businesses are committed over the long term to maximising resource efficiency and protecting the natural environment.

50/50

Wine and spirit packaging – innovation and revolution

Wine and spirits packaging is undergoing a quiet revolution, driven by sustainability and consumer demand. While the glass bottle retains iconic status, new approaches are emerging in the dynamic UK market. Innovation across wine and spirits packaging is a multi-faceted response to reducing waste and emissions, while meeting evolving consumer demand. From lightweight glass to paper bottles, and the growing use of alternative formats, the industry demonstrates a long-term commitment to a more sustainable future, with UK brands playing a pivotal role in driving this global transformation.

Shipping wine in bulk from the southern hemisphere to the UK saves about 125g CO_2 per bottle, with bulk containers transporting double the volume of pre-bottled equivalent. 43% of still wine imported to the UK is imported in bulk.

A significant trend is glass light-weighting. Glass production and transport are major CO_2 contributors, and a 10% reduction in glass weight can lead to a 5% reduction in CO_2 emissions. This trend is supported by initiatives to further decarbonise, including greater use of recycled glass, use of biofuels and investment in low carbon furnaces.

Beyond optimisation, UK wine and spirit brands are at the forefront of exploring alternative packaging. The bag-in-box has seen a renaissance while aluminium cans are gaining traction for single-serve wines and pre-mixed spirits due to their lightweight nature, high recyclability and convenience.

Perhaps the most visually disruptive innovations are paper and plastic bottles. A 94% recycled paperboard bottles with a food-grade liner weighs just 83g, which significantly reduces transport emissions resulting in total carbon savings of up to 84%. A flat wine bottle made of recycled PET is 87% lighter than the glass equivalent with a shelf life up to 21 months.

Refillable and reusable packaging is gaining momentum, particularly for spirits. Some brands offer postal return and reuse, using aluminium pouches, providing convenience and emissions. While the feasibility of a UK-wide consumer re-use system is explored, WSTA members alongside the on-trade and off-trade are increasing their adoption of alternative formats.

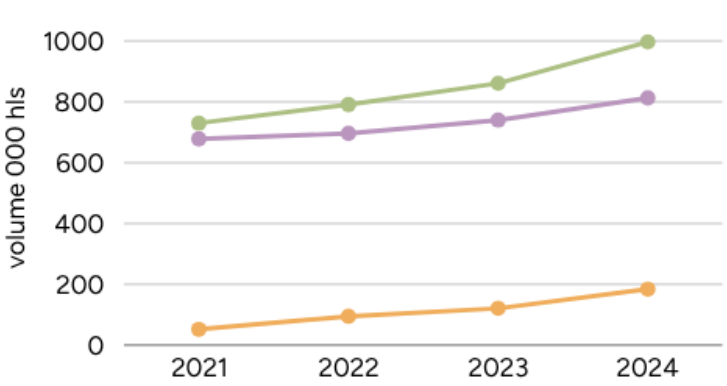
Cork is a carbon negative material. Harvesting cork bark boosts the tree's ability to absorb carbon dioxide. For every kilo of cork produced the cork oak forest can absorb up to 73kg of CO_2.

Source: HMRC UK Trade Info Stats | 2024
Amorin Cork Solutions

Socially responsible and sustainable industry

UK wine and spirit businesses have a strong record of promoting socially responsible and socially sustainable production, consumption and retail of alcohol; and of working with the Government to develop self regulatory solutions.

Growth of Low and No

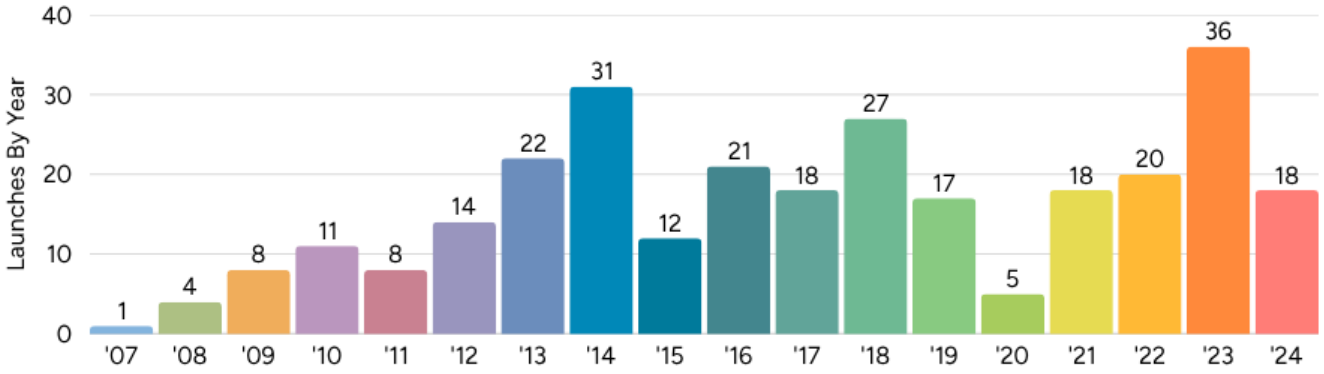


On-Trade Off-Trade Total

+17% growth in the **off-trade** since 2022

+94% growth in the **on-trade** since 2022

Growth of Community Alcohol Partnerships



Community Alcohol Partnerships (CAP) supports local communities across the UK to reduce alcohol harm among young people. The number of CAPs has increased from 30 to over 300 in 2025 - and aims to double its size over the next three years. Since its launch there has been a 63% reduction in weekly drinking among under 18s.

Source: CGA by NIQ On-trade OPM | Total No/Low BWS | MAT 12mths P13 2021-2024
NIQ Off-trade RMS | Total No/Low BWS | MAT 12 mths P13 2021-2024
Community Alcohol Partnerships Horizon Scanner | 2025

Responsible retail and marketing

Challenge 25 is the proof of age scheme, created by the Retail of Alcohol Standards Group, to eradicate underage sales of alcohol in the UK. In 2015, 67% of the public, including 86% of 18-24 year olds were aware of Challenge 25.

UK alcohol consumption has fallen by

14%

since 2010

Binge drinking has fallen by over a quarter,

28%

since 2010

Voluntary labelling

94%

of all alcoholic drinks, show unit information

Voluntary labelling and digital technology used for labelling, including QR codes

Working alongside Government the UK's alcohol sector has an excellent track record of self-regulation and effective cooperation.

Many wine and spirit bottles in the UK now carry energy information on labels and include a QR code guiding consumers to more detailed information on ingredients and nutrition.

The UK alcohol sector is committed to ensuring relevant health and content information is available for consumers. This is why we are providing, on a voluntary basis, more information than ever before online. QR codes are used on labels as an important way to sign-post consumers to a greater variety information, including ingredients and calories in a way that is fit for purpose and relevant to how people now consume information.

Alcohol labels in the UK: 99% carry the pregnancy warning, 94% carry the units per product, 86% carry UK chief medical officers' recommended guidelines.

In 2022 the UK Home Office, in partnership with the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), authorised nine trials across England to test age estimation technology and digital proof of age in a variety of retail environments that sold alcohol. A digital verification system, driven by the industry, is already under development.

Source: Portman Group Parliamentary UK Alcohol Factsheet September 2024

The Wine and Spirit Trade Association is proud to represent over 300 companies producing, importing, transporting and selling wine and spirits. The WSTA works with its members to promote responsible production, marketing and sale of alcohol.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about our vibrant and innovative industry. If you would like to find out more, you can contact the WSTA through its social media channels below or email info@wsta.co.uk.

If you would like to quote data found in this publication, please contact the WSTA.

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