



The Confederation of British Industry's total sales index fell sharply, to a reading of +1%, its lowest since November 2013, from +39% in the month before. This was far below the 42% expected. Nonetheless, it followed six months of "very buoyant" sales and firms were still optimistic that volumes will grow in March.

The UK government has sold another parcel of Lloyds shares, raising £500m and cutting its stake to below 24%. Lloyds ended up being 41% state-owned after the government ploughed in £20bn to keep the bank afloat in 2008 after the financial crisis began to bite. The government started selling Lloyds shares in 2013, and the latest sale means it has now raised nearly £8bn.

Whilst on the subject of banks and their shares, global banking giant HSBC did poorly as one would have to expect topping the loser list on the FTSE 100 falling stocks, dropping nearly 5% after annual profits slumped by 17%. Being hit by fines for a foreign rigging scandal did not help, with its Chief Executive admitting to holding a Swiss bank account.

Tomorrow will see the circulation of the RIO Club review. In this short overview I comment on the Club's twentieth anniversary and the fact that RIO look set to present an all time record in February. The month is not over, yet we have already processed what represents the largest one month increase in Club membership since 2001.

Strangely perhaps the repatriation of a few members' friends from the oil and gas industry simply added to the numbers joining our ranks. It is good to see that some people realize that investing sensibly can produce an added income when you need it rather than by simply parking money in beleaguered banks, which offer little in the way of returns.

### US Market

Home re-sales fell to the lowest level in nine months in January as a shortage of properties on the market deterred potential buyers. The National Association of Realtors reported existing homes sales fell by 4.9% to an annual rate of 4.82 million. Lower levels of properties listed for sale were also responsible for keeping prices higher, preventing many first-time buyers from entering the market.

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