

UAE | UK 2027

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES



مجلس الأعمال الإماراتية البريطانية
UAE - UK Business Council

RANGE ROVER



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HE Saeed Al Hajeri & Lord Mervyn Davies

Co-Chairs, UAE-UK Business Council



HE Saeed Al Hajeri



Lord Mervyn Davies

The past six years have seen a global pandemic, tariff wars and conflicts in Europe, the Middle East and the Gulf – but despite these challenges, trade and investment flows between the UK and the UAE have continued to grow, and in fact, they have recently surpassed the target of £25 billion which was set by both Governments when the UAE-UK Business Council was set up.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the UAE has always shown remarkable resilience and adaptability when threatened with challenges, and it quickly recalibrated its economic model to sustain the business community following the attacks from Iran in 2026. This capacity to innovate is part of a wider narrative in which economic diversification, investment in infrastructure and new supply chains, and the adoption of new technologies, has made the country agile and quick to respond to and manage disruption.

Secondly, the UAE and the UK are like-minded in their commitment to free and fair international trade, and both countries have been pursuing ambitious trade agreements with their key trading partners around the world. The UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement, for which negotiations were concluded in June 2026, will remove an estimated £580 million in duties a year once the agreement is fully implemented, with £360 million worth of these estimated duties to be removed on day one of the agreement entering into force. But, perhaps more importantly, it will remove many non-tariff regulatory barriers across a large number of sectors, easing trade flows between our two countries. We hope that the Agreement comes into force as quickly as possible and can be supplemented with bilateral arrangements that will strengthen collaboration, particularly in new and emerging industries that are harnessing the transformative power of data, AI and innovation.

The UAE-UK Business Council will reflect these opportunities and trends in its programme of campaigns, events, reports and advocacy over the year ahead.

We look forward very much to working with the business community in the UK and the UAE to strengthen trade and investment ties between our two countries. ■

Bradley Jones

CEO, UAE-UK Business Council



Bradley Jones

The UAE-UK Business Council's mandate is to support collaboration and knowledge exchange and to help create the enabling environment for our entrepreneurs and business leaders to forge new partnerships. We have delivered a busy programme of campaigns, events and white papers over the last five years, and have built an influential network of experts from both countries. Our work is aligned with the strategic commercial priorities of both Governments, including the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and the UAE's 2031 Vision. Over the last year, we have focused on areas where thought leadership and knowledge exchange can create new pathways to bilateral collaboration, in areas such as energy transition, infrastructure, healthcare and skills.

Trade and investment relations between the UK and the UAE are going from strength to strength, surpassing the £25 billion target that was set when the UAE-UK Business Council was relaunched in 2020. The UAE is now the UK's 17th largest export market. Much of this growth is coming from emerging industries such as AI and data as well as service sectors such as financial and professional services, education and life sciences. This is a reflection of the continuing economic diversification of the UAE, where 77% of the economy is now derived from non-oil GDP and the transformational impact of innovation, technology and creativity in both countries.

The UK and the UAE are like-minded in their world view on international trade – both countries seek to cultivate the growth of the industries of the future through investment in skills, technology and research and development, and they both value entrepreneurship and ingenuity. They also believe strongly in the value of reducing the blockages that hinder the growth of international trade.

The UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement, for example, will boost trade and investment flows between the UK and the region by £16 billion, and through the tariff and non-tariff barriers that will be dismantled as part of the Agreement, new opportunities for exports, investment, and collaboration across a range of sectors will emerge. As a Business Council, we will continue to champion the concerns and interests of companies in both markets as the Free Trade Agreement comes into force and subsequent bilateral trade instruments between the UK and the UAE are negotiated.

Both countries are attractive springboards for global growth for entrepreneurs, start-ups and businesses of all sizes looking to expand into high-growth markets around the world. We are witnessing an increasing number of UK companies establishing themselves in the UAE's Free Zones in order to build their footprint across Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Likewise, there are an increasing number of UAE corporates leveraging the UK's strengths to internationalise and build a presence in high-growth markets.

The UAE-UK Business Council's role in fostering knowledge exchange and delivering impactful thought leadership activity will become increasingly important over the years ahead, and we encourage all of our members and stakeholders to help us identify our future strategic priorities and participate in our campaigns, events and research. ■

UAE

A resilient hub for global investment & innovation

Over the past decade, the UAE has transformed itself from an oil-dependent economy into one of the most globally connected and diversified markets in the Middle East. Its economic strategy is outward-looking and partnership-driven, combining large-scale infrastructure investment with regulatory reforms designed to attract international capital, talent and technology.

Although the wider region has experienced a period of evolving geopolitical complexity, the UAE continues to offer many of the qualities international investors value most: economic stability and resilience, connectivity, policy continuity and a clear commitment to remaining open to global trade.

For UK companies in particular, the UAE offers a familiar and accessible commercial environment. English is widely used as the language of business, British education and professional qualifications are highly regarded, and the legal and financial frameworks incorporate many principles derived from English common law. Combined with a business-friendly regulatory regime and world-class logistics infrastructure, these factors have helped position the UAE as a leading gateway to regional markets across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

A diversified economy

2025 economic performance reflects the success of this diversification strategy. The UAE economy expanded by around 5.4%, significantly above many advanced economies. Non-oil sectors accounted for more than 77.5% of GDP in real terms, the highest share on record¹.

Growth has been particularly strong across sectors such as manufacturing, financial services, construction and real estate, reflecting sustained government investment programmes and rising international demand. The

UAE has also become a major global destination for international investment. In 2025 the country attracted approximately £34 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI), an almost 50% increase on the previous year². This placed the UAE among the top 10 recipients of FDI globally³.

This resilience is even more important in the current regional context, with the UAE's diversified economy, strong fiscal position, modern infrastructure and pro-investment policy framework continuing to drive confidence. Rather than hampering the country's relevance, the geopolitical situation has made reliable, well-connected and business-friendly hubs more valuable to companies planning regional growth.

Deepening ties with international partners

The UAE's economic transformation has been closely linked to expanding international partnerships. Trade agreements such as the country's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) have strengthened its position as a regional trading hub and integrated the economy more deeply into global supply chains.

Strong bilateral relationships underpin this approach. The UK is one of the UAE's most important economic partners, with thousands of British companies already operating in sectors ranging from energy and financial services to technology and advanced manufacturing. Shared commercial norms and extensive cultural links continue to make the country a natural base for UK firms seeking opportunities across the wider region.

The conclusion of negotiations on the UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement in May 2026 adds further momentum to this trend. Once ratified, the agreement is expected to reduce barriers, improve market access and support stronger

trade and investment flows between the UK and the Gulf. The UK Government estimates that total UK-GCC trade could increase by 19.8%, potentially adding £15.5 billion a year in the long run⁴.

Investment in infrastructure and future industries

A defining feature of the UAE's development strategy is sustained investment in infrastructure and emerging industries. Large-scale projects across transportation, logistics, utilities and energy are expanding the country's capacity to support long-term economic growth.

These investments complement a broader national programme aimed at strengthening the UAE's position in advanced technology sectors. Artificial intelligence has become a central pillar of this strategy. The country's National AI Strategy seeks to position the UAE as a global leader in artificial intelligence by 2031, with the technology expected to contribute around £67 billion to economic output by that date.

Substantial investment is already underway to build the required digital infrastructure. The UAE has rapidly expanded its data-processing capacity and is developing new hyperscale data centres to support AI development and cloud computing services. Partnerships between government entities, global technology firms and research institutions are accelerating this process and helping to establish a vibrant innovation ecosystem.

A globally connected gateway

Geography also plays a crucial role in the UAE's economic appeal. Situated between Europe, Asia and Africa, the country has built one of the world's



most efficient aviation and logistics networks. Its airports and seaports connect global trade routes, while airlines such as Emirates and Etihad link the country to hundreds of destinations worldwide.

From a UK perspective, the conclusion of UK-GCC FTA negotiations, combined with long-standing commercial links, close diplomatic ties and shared business norms, give the UK-UAE relationship renewed momentum. ■

¹ <https://www.bna.bh/En/UAE%20oil%20sector%20contributes%2077.5%20oil%20share%20of%20real%20GDP%20AED%2036%20billion%20hotel%20revenues.aspx>

² <https://www.acuma.com/news/UAEs-foreign-investment-climbs-50-percent-to-USD-45bn-in-2025>

³ <https://unctad.org/publication/world-investment-report-2025>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-gulf-cooperation-council-gcc-trade-deal-conclusion-summary/uk-gulf-cooperation-council-gcc-trade-deal-conclusion-summary-2>



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Financial support for closer UK-UAE business and trade

Gabriela Martinez de Aragon, UK Country Head, Mashreq Bank



Gabriela Martinez de Aragon

A pioneering UAE-based financial institution has big plans to expand its presence, product portfolio and client base in London, as Gabriela Martinez de Aragon, UK Country Head of Mashreq explains.

What is the history of Mashreq?

With a legacy dating back to 1967, Mashreq was one of the first private-sector banks in the UAE. Originally established by the Al Ghurair Group to support burgeoning trade and commerce in the region, Mashreq's heritage is deeply anchored in innovation; from the outset, we have approached banking with a challenger mindset, thinking like a startup backed by our legacy of trust and best-in-class customer experience. During the 1970s and 1980s, we were among the first UAE banks to introduce ATMs, credit cards and consumer loans, expanded regionally throughout the GCC, and established an international presence in key financial hubs including London, New York and Hong Kong. A defining milestone followed in 1993, when the Bank adopted the Mashreq name, marking the beginning of a new chapter in its growth journey.

Today, Mashreq is a leading financial institution headquartered in Dubai, serving individuals, entrepreneurs, corporates, and institutions across the UAE and key regional and international markets. With a heritage spanning nearly six decades, Mashreq combines digital-first innovation with

deep relationship banking across retail banking, corporate and investment banking, global markets, transaction banking, Islamic banking, wealth management, and treasury. With an extensive international footprint in 15 countries, including the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Pakistan, Türkiye, India, the UK, the US, and China, Mashreq seamlessly connects regional businesses with global markets while maintaining deep local expertise.

How has Mashreq developed over the past six decades?

Mashreq has evolved from a local financial institution into a leading regional bank with a growing international presence, renowned for its focus on innovation, customer-centricity, and digital leadership. As a leader in consumer and corporate banking in the UAE since its formation, the Bank has focused on regional and international presence, establishing a corporate banking platform and real estate lending across the international network. Our branding as Mashreq in 1993 symbolised a new era of growth and expansion that would see us extend our presence to 15 countries across the globe, with offices in major financial hubs across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States.

In addition to being a forerunner in product development, the financial institution is a regional leader in technological

innovation, driving digital banking services throughout its network, and has been widely recognised by the industry. At Mashreq, our strategic approach is built on resilience, early adoption of digital solutions, and a commitment to shaping the future of banking rather than simply responding to change. This continuous evolution has transformed Mashreq from a traditional local bank into a diversified, technology-driven financial institution, equipped to serve a digitally native and globally connected economy.

Can you explain the banking and technological innovations pioneered by Mashreq?

Mashreq's aim has always been to enhance experiences that blend data-driven insights with human decision-making, delivering solutions that are both fast and intuitive. Advancements in technology, such as AI, blockchain, and data analytics, are enabling a vastly enhanced customer journey; indeed, AI is now present in every element of the customer journey and across our operations. Beyond adopting technological trends, we have actively invested in designing our own solutions to meet evolving needs.

We developed an award-winning digital online banking platform called NEO. The NEO ecosystem lies at the core of Mashreq's digital transformation, offering solutions for individuals, SMEs, and corporates with instant account opening, real-time payments, and AI-driven insights. Platforms such as Mashreq NEO, NEO BIZ, and NEO CORP allow the bank to scale high-quality digital experiences across segments and markets, facilitating seamless integration for clients.

We have built what we call the Mashreq Global Network (MGN) across India, Pakistan and Egypt, providing a portfolio of innovative products in collaboration with the Bank's Head Office and its global hubs. Established to support the Bank's growth and expansion efforts, MGN has built world-class people capabilities, bringing together a global talent base that strategically collaborates with the business groups based in the Dubai Headquarters and



worldwide. With agility, customer-centricity and innovation at its core, MGN supports Mashreq across all groups and functions of the bank. This includes operations, credit, internal audit, retail banking, corporate and investment banking, risk management, client experience & conduct, technology, treasury & capital markets, compliance, and marketing & corporate communication.

Mashreq also invests heavily in operational resilience and security, ensuring technology innovations are reliable and future-ready. Operational resilience reached new heights with a major uplift in recovery, cybersecurity, and platform stability, leveraging automation to reduce Recovery Time Objective (RTO) by 70-75% across key platforms.

“ Mashreq’s aim has always been to enhance experiences that blend data-driven insights with human decision-making, delivering solutions that are both fast and intuitive. ”

By combining human-centred design, technological leadership, and disciplined operations, Mashreq has built a reputation as a forward-looking bank and a trusted digital partner.

What is the background to Mashreq establishing in the UK?

We opened our London branch in 1978, and for the last 20 years we have been specialising in trade finance and supporting financial institutions. Recent developments in London include the creation of a corporate banking team, providing lending services to UK corporate clients, and a dedicated Treasury and Global Markets unit, which is delivering autonomous liquidity and product solutions for the business and wider client base.

Describe the range of services you offer from your UK branch and its typical clients

Mashreq offers a comprehensive corporate banking service, encompassing all lending products, across multiple sectors. We also offer trade finance as well as treasury products and sales - money market, certificates of deposit issuance (a dedicated UK programme), foreign exchange and hedging solutions.

We are continually developing the Mashreq product suite, collaborating with product partners in Head Office and the wider international network to meet client requirements, across lending, hedging and investment solutions. Typical UK clients range from FTSE100-FTSE250 corporate clients to GCC sovereign wealth funds, commercial clients for real estate investment, as well as global financial institution relationships, with banks and non-banks.

What is the attraction of a Middle East-based bank to UK/European clients?

The Middle East continues to grow its global footprint at pace, and Dubai is the regional hub for commerce, attracting high-profile corporate and

financial institutions to establish an on-the-ground presence to provide access to regional and Asian markets.

Mashreq UK can manage and bridge these relationships for UK-based companies, providing relationship services seamlessly for any global requirement, whilst also giving access to the bank’s GCC and global network clients who wish to transact business in the UK.

In what ways can you support UK clients looking to develop trade with, or establish a business presence, in the Middle East?

Mashreq UK is perfectly placed to support clients looking to develop their business across the GCC and beyond. The transparency and collaborative model of the Bank allows its Head Office and global hub teams to work together to enhance the client experience and provide access to trade corridors, investment opportunities and expertise in establishing business in the region and beyond.

How significant is the UK to Mashreq’s global footprint and expansion plans?

Mashreq has a stated objective to grow its international business aggressively. As the branch in one of the major and safest financial hubs, with extremely robust governance and regulatory standards, Mashreq UK has extensive access to major global companies and financial institutions, diversified liquidity pools and sophisticated product suites.

This has been recognised by the Mashreq board, and over the past two years the focus on growing the activities and value of the London operation has seen it develop enhanced banking capabilities, attract top talent, deploy first-in-network system upgrades and participate in landmark transactions. ■



Recognising Possibilities

UK tax strategy for UAE relocations

INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND OWNER-MANAGED BUSINESSES



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Relocating to the UAE is rarely just a move. It is a UK tax event — personal, commercial, and often intergenerational.

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Relocating to the UAE: UK tax strategy for individuals and business owners

Trident Tax

A move to the UAE can be decisive for entrepreneurs and internationally mobile families – but it only works when the UK tax position is planned, evidenced and executed properly. In practice, a relocation is rarely “just” personal. It often involves business governance, value extraction, future succession planning, and a clear plan for ongoing UK connections.

This article was prepared before the recent escalation of conflict in the region. Notwithstanding the wider context, we continue to see internationally mobile individuals, families and business owners considering relocation both to and from the UAE, with UK tax planning remaining a key part of that decision-making process.

Trident Tax is a boutique, independently owned UK tax advisory practice, supporting HNW and UHNW clients and their advisers with UK private client and international business tax. We advise on UK tax and coordinate with UAE legal and corporate service providers where required.

Our advice is defined by our knowledge and refined by our experience.

Case study: a five-week UK exit and UAE relocation for a long-standing UK family business

(Names and certain details changed for confidentiality.)

The context

“Raj and Meera” are non-resident Indians who had lived in the UK for almost 60 years. They owned and managed a group of UK companies, including valuable patents and intellectual property, employing staff across the UK and selling internationally.

While their circumstances meant UK inheritance tax exposure was not the immediate driver (given the UK-India inheritance tax treaty position), their

concern was broader: the direction of UK taxation and the increasing scope of rules impacting long-standing UK residents. They also wanted a tax-efficient exit strategy for the businesses over the medium term and were worried that an exit tax could be introduced with little notice.

Timing was critical. Planning took place shortly before a Budget, leaving limited time to restructure sensibly.

Why the UAE

The family explored several jurisdictions, including Spain, Switzerland and Italy. The UAE ultimately offered the most practical combination of:

- Speed of transition (personal and commercial)
- Clear operational footing for the next phase of the business
- A commercial environment aligned with international expansion
- A low tax environment (alongside the need for local compliance).

The UK issues we needed to solve

Relocation planning needed to be robust across three connected areas:

1) Breaking UK tax residence – without losing control

The UK’s Statutory Residence Test (SRT) is fact-driven and evidence-driven. A clean result requires more than day counting; it needs a practical operating plan.

We:

- built an SRT strategy around the Automatic Overseas Tests, with a clear timeline and travel pattern
- mapped permitted UK days against their ties (family, accommodation, work and other connections)
- ensured the plan was deliverable in real life, not just “theoretically correct”

- designed the supporting evidence file (contracts, travel records, working patterns, governance minutes).

2 | Establishing full-time work in the UAE

The family's move required a genuine and compliant work position in the UAE.

With UAE counsel and a corporate service provider, we helped structure:

- a UAE presence for the group (through an appropriate UAE vehicle/branch arrangement)
- employment contracts from an agreed start date
- working patterns consistent with the chosen SRT route and local UAE requirements.

3 | Business migration and “exit” considerations

The businesses needed a plan that balanced commercial continuity with UK tax risk.

Key considerations included:

- how to reposition governance and decision-making to manage UK tax exposures
- how to handle IP and value, including whether to transfer or license intellectual property (and the UK tax consequences of each)
- how to sequence steps to manage the risk of UK charges during transition
- protecting flexibility if the family returned to the UK within the temporary non-residence window
- preserving certain relief positions (including EIS-related considerations) where relevant to their wider planning.

4 | Succession planning for the next generation

The family's goal was not only relocation; it was a durable framework for intergenerational ownership.

We worked with their legal advisers to shape an approach to:

- long-term holding structures

- governance and control across family members
- ensuring that future planning remained coherent if residency positions changed again.

Outcome

The family achieved:

- a structured UK residence exit plan with supporting evidence
- a compliant UAE working arrangement aligned to the UK strategy
- a clear pathway for business governance, value planning and eventual exit
- an integrated framework for longer-term succession planning.

This was delivered end-to-end in approximately five weeks, requiring close coordination between the family, Trident Tax, and UAE legal/corporate advisers.

What this illustrates

UAE relocations succeed when the UK planning is approached as a single integrated project:

- Residency strategy (SRT, day count, work patterns, evidence)
- Business structuring (governance, IP, value extraction, sequencing)
- Future-proofing (temporary non-residence, return risk, succession).

Relocation can create genuine opportunity – but only when the UK position is managed properly and practically.

Speak to Trident Tax

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Recognising possibilities. ■

Financial & Professional Services: A mature market with global reach

Over the past two decades, the UAE has transformed itself into one of the world's most internationally connected centres for financial and professional services. Building on the success of its financial hubs in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the country plays a central role in regional and cross-border financial activity, serving markets across the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

This growth has been accompanied by a strong influx of UK-based and international firms. The UAE hosts one of the largest concentration of English and Welsh-qualified lawyers outside the UK¹, alongside a significant presence of UK banks, insurers, consultancies and asset managers. Today, the market continues to deepen, not only in scale, but in sophistication, as regulatory frameworks evolve and new areas such as fintech, private capital and wealth management gain momentum.

Regulatory architecture and financial oversight

The UAE's financial services ecosystem is underpinned by a dual regulatory structure, combining federal oversight with internationally aligned free zone regimes.

At the federal level, the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (CBUAE) acts as the primary monetary authority, regulating banks, finance companies, payment services and insurers operating outside the financial free zones.

Alongside this, the Securities and Commodities Authority (SCA) actively regulate and oversee capital markets, listed securities and investment activities across the wider UAE.

While these bodies provide stability and systemic oversight, much of the UAE's international financial activity is concentrated within two specialist financial free zones: the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM). These operate under independent legal systems based on English common law, offering a familiar and predictable environment for cross-border business.

Financial free zones: competing and complementary hubs

Although they compete for global talent and investment, DIFC and ADGM share a number of defining features. Both permit 100% foreign ownership, impose no restrictions on capital repatriation, and allow firms to employ foreign professionals without limitation. They also continue to offer long-term tax incentives, including zero personal income tax and favourable corporate tax treatment for qualifying activities, subject to economic substance requirements. Crucially, both DIFC and ADGM operate independent court systems and regulatory authorities, creating a trusted legal environment for complex international transactions.

“Running in parallel to the expansion of traditional financial services is the UAE’s rapid emergence as a regional fintech leader.”

”

Regulation within the DIFC is overseen by the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA), whose regulatory standards are closely aligned with those of major international financial centres.

The ADGM has developed rapidly into a centre of excellence for private banking, wealth management and asset management, with a growing international focus on private capital, alternative investment strategies and sustainable finance.

Fintech and digital finance: a structural growth driver

Running in parallel to the expansion of traditional financial services is the UAE’s rapid emergence as a regional fintech leader. The country has consistently ranked among the world’s most advanced digital economies², supported by strong infrastructure, high levels of technology adoption and a proactive regulatory approach.

Dubai, in particular, is positioning itself alongside global fintech hubs such as London and Singapore. Within the DIFC, the Innovation Hub and accelerator programmes support fintech, regtech, insurtech and Islamic fintech start-ups, offering streamlined licensing, regulatory guidance and access to capital.

The DIFC remains a dominant global hub for institutional financial services, operating alongside the emirate’s dedicated Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA) to provide a comprehensive, cross-jurisdictional digital asset

framework. The ADGM has similarly established itself as a testing ground for digital assets, blockchain-based structures and tokenisation initiatives, supported by bespoke regulatory frameworks and sandboxes.

These developments form part of a wider national strategy embracing digital currencies, artificial intelligence, data analytics and open finance, with the CBUAE advancing work on digital payments infrastructure and central bank digital currency initiatives.

Investment climate and risk considerations

Despite recent geopolitical tensions in the region, the UAE’s investment environment remains positive.

Financial and professional services firms continue to benefit from sustained inflows linked to regional wealth creation, global capital reallocation and geopolitical realignment. This underlines an important point for investors: the UAE has introduced measures to strengthen its resilience in order to mitigate regional risks, ensuring that its institutions, liquidity, regulatory infrastructure and diversified investor base give it a strong platform for continuity and recovery.

The market has also matured. Investors and new entrants must now navigate a more sophisticated regulatory and tax framework, particularly in relation to transfer pricing, substance requirements and multinational tax alignment.

Business setup

From a market-entry perspective, the UAE offers a range of establishment routes tailored to financial and professional services firms.

Companies may operate either onshore (mainland), regulated by emirate-level economic departments and federal authorities, or within one of the specialist free zones.

Recent reforms now permit full foreign ownership across most professional and financial activities, removing a long-standing barrier and simplifying market entry for international firms.

Licensing processes have also become increasingly streamlined, with digitalised application systems, faster approvals and simplified visa and employment procedures.

While the introduction of corporate tax represents a structural shift, the UAE's rates remain internationally competitive, and free zone entities continue to benefit from preferential treatment where qualifying criteria are met.

UK-UAE cross-border dimensions

UK firms continue to play a central role in the UAE's financial and professional services ecosystem. This relationship is reinforced by the UK-UAE Double Taxation Convention, which provides clarity on withholding taxes, permanent establishment risk and profit repatriation.

Beyond taxation, strong professional links, particularly in law, accounting, consulting and asset management, support cross-border collaboration,



secondments and joint ventures. The shared use of English law within the DIFC and ADGM further strengthens this alignment, lowering barriers for UK firms expanding into the region.

The conclusion of UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiations in May 2026 adds further momentum to the relationship, signalling a clear political and commercial commitment to deeper UK-Gulf trade and investment links. ■

¹ <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/international-data-insights-report-2025>

² <https://www.zyen.com/publications/professional-articles/the-global-financial-centres-index-38/>

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Forward planning more critical than ever for UK businesses seeking UAE expansion

Tommaso Barindelli, Director, Hawksford



Tommaso Barindelli

Despite recent regional geopolitical headwinds, the opportunities for UK businesses in the Middle East remain compelling – but understanding the underlying dynamics of the UAE market and undertaking rigorous forward planning is more critical than ever if those businesses are to thrive, writes Tommaso Barindelli, Director at global service provider Hawksford...

Prior to the recent conflict in the Middle East, the UAE had made great strides to position itself as a market of opportunity and a springboard for ambitious companies to pursue their global growth objectives – and this work has not been undone.

At an economic level, the UAE has made a concerted effort to move away from a focus on fossil fuels to encompass a greater diversity of sectors from fintech and renewables to life sciences. Earlier this year, a report highlighted that at the end of 2025 the UAE's non-oil foreign trade exceeded one trillion dollars for the first time – a 25% increase over the previous year (Khaleej Times).

At a regulatory and practical level too, the UAE has successfully enhanced its infrastructure, tax regime, and business-friendly environment, while also developing a deep and diverse pool of talent.

In 2024, for example, the FATF removed the UAE from its 'grey list' of high-risk countries and in 2025 the EU followed suit, recognising its progress in introducing measures to tackle money laundering. Meanwhile trade agreements

like the landmark UK-Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Agreement, agreed in May 2026, have the potential to increase UK trade with the GCC by at least 16% (GovUK).

As a result, UK businesses are continuing to look at the UAE as an attractive hub for supporting their international growth plans. In the first quarter of 2026 alone, Dubai attracted more than 560 new British companies, bringing the total number of British businesses registered with the Dubai Chamber to 10,334 – compared to 2,402 at the end of 2020 (British Chamber of Commerce Dubai).

Success is not guaranteed though and, particularly against a persistent complex geopolitical backdrop, there are a number of considerations for UK businesses, if they are to realise their ambitions through the UAE.

Clarifying purpose

When it comes to setting out a strategy involving the UAE, a useful place to start is with a clear 'purpose test'.

Company structures in the UAE differ significantly depending on whether the business intends to trade internationally, sell within the UAE, establish a regional headquarters, or operate a holding or special purpose vehicle. Clarity around what the business wants to achieve is critical in selecting the right structure from the outset.

The next step is selecting the right jurisdictional 'operating envelope'. Free zones (more on these below) are highly efficient for international-facing activities, while mainland

structures provide broader access to the domestic UAE market and eligibility for government contracts. In some cases, dual licensing can allow a free zone company to operate beyond the zone.

Businesses should also avoid focusing solely on speed of set-up. While incorporation can be quick, long-term costs and complexity often arise in areas such as banking, KYC, and visa and office quotas, as well as ongoing compliance obligations. Taking a longer-term view at the outset can prevent costly restructuring later.

Free zones

As alluded to above, the ongoing expansion of free zones across the UAE has increased the region's appeal by enabling expats and overseas investors to have full ownership of companies. Today, the free zone landscape is extensive, with more than 40 free zones nationwide and over two dozen in Dubai alone.

However, this evolution has prompted a degree of fragmentation, creating meaningful differences in license scope, facilities, visa allocation ratios and renewal costs. As a result, UK businesses should compare free zones on a like-for-like basis before making a decision.

Many of the UAE's most effective free zones function as strategic, sector-led hubs. For example, the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC) offers more than 1,000 permitted business activities and reports over 25,000 member companies. It operates a fully digital, paperless set-up process, with incorporation typically completed in around two weeks, making it particularly attractive for internationally focused businesses.

Another notable example is the Dubai International Finance Centre (DIFC), widely recognised as the region's leading financial hub. DIFC specialises in banking, asset management, fintech and insurance, and is home to more than 5,000 active companies, ranging from global financial institutions to start-ups. With a robust legal and regulatory framework based on English common law, and access to a wide pool of skilled professionals and world-class infrastructure, DIFC is especially appealing for businesses seeking to operate in the financial services sector.

It is also essential to understand the limits of onshore trading from a free zone entity. While free zone companies can access the UAE market through local agent or distributor arrangements, these structures have implications for revenue recognition, VAT treatment and overall commercial flexibility.

Evolving tax and regulatory landscape

The UAE has focused considerably in recent years on the sophistication of its fiscal and regulatory landscape, and businesses should ensure they are familiar with the new environment.

Corporate tax, for instance, forms a significant part of the UAE's credibility story. A 9% corporate tax now applies to taxable income above AED 375,000 – a threshold designed to be SME-friendly – and businesses are expected to plan substance, governance and reporting fully from day one.

Meanwhile, compliance expectations have risen materially. Know Your Customer (KYC), Ultimate Beneficial Ownership (UBO) and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) requirements mean clearer ownership records and stronger internal controls, while economic substance requirements ensure tangible evidence of real economic activity.

Encouragingly, the policy environment remains pro-growth. New maritime, digital economy and industrial strategies actively support sectors such as logistics, fintech, advanced manufacturing and clean energy.

Trade and investment structuring also remains a major attraction. The UAE emphasises its network of Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements with 137 countries, alongside significant logistics advantages through the UAE's ports and airports.

Support

Despite current geopolitical headwinds, the UAE continues to assert itself as a resilient and progressive market that is more than capable of supporting the growth ambitions of UK businesses. More than ever, though, when it comes to expanding into and onward from the UAE, forward planning and getting high quality guidance from experts 'on the ground' is absolutely critical.

The environment is attractive but evolving – and global service providers like Hawksford, who are in the region and close to local developments, can now offer high quality technical advice around entity choice and licensing, as well as governance and compliance but also provide vital local insights, being cognisant of the nuances of the UK and UAE markets.

For more information on how we can support you and your business with its UAE journey, visit **Hawksford.com**, or contact Tommaso on +971 521489061 or at **tommaso.barindelli@hawksford.com**. ■

From stability to resilience: How the UAE built the foundations to endure and thrive through disruption

ADB Advisors

For years, the UAE has been described as a “stable” jurisdiction in an unstable region. That description is now outdated. Stability was never the end goal. It was the foundation. What the UAE has built (deliberately and consistently) is something far more strategic: Resiliency. At a time when the Middle East is being reshaped by geopolitical friction, particularly the tensions over the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE has moved beyond simply absorbing volatility. It has positioned itself to convert that volatility into economic and financial endurance.

Leadership that executes, not signals

The UAE's advantage begins with a factor often underestimated in regional analysis: delivery. Across sectors, the defining characteristic of UAE leadership is not vision alone, but execution credibility and risk management. Policies are implemented with speed, regulatory shifts are coordinated, not fragmented, and strategic initiatives translate into real infrastructure, real capital deployment, and real outcomes

For decision-makers, this creates a rare environment: one where commitments can be relied upon without political discounting. In a region where risk is often priced into every contract, the UAE has built a system where predictability itself becomes a competitive asset.

No exit narrative, only strategic reallocation

Despite heightened regional tensions, there is no meaningful shift away from the UAE. There is, however, a clear shift within it. Companies are not exiting. They are repositioning for the future opportunities:

- Expanding regional headquarters
- Centralising decision-making functions
- Structuring investments more deliberately through UAE platforms

Because the underlying question has changed. It is no longer: Is the UAE a safe market? It is: How to get passed the difficult times and how much of our regional strategy should be anchored here?

The UAE as a platform, not just a market

What distinguishes the UAE today is not its domestic market size, but its function. It has become a platform jurisdiction, a place where capital is structured, risk is managed, and regional exposure is orchestrated. This leverages UAE's resiliency play, which is particularly visible in multiple areas:

Sovereign Wealth: the Balance Sheet to Endure

The UAE's sovereign wealth is perhaps its most important source of structural resilience. The scale is exceptional: the UAE's total sovereign assets were estimated at approximately US\$3.1 trillion in 2026, making it the largest sovereign investor in the Middle East and the fourth-largest globally¹. Abu Dhabi alone accounts for a substantial share of this sovereign capital base. At the centre is the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), whose assets are approximately US\$1.1–1.2 trillion, making it one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds². Mubadala Investment Company reported AED 1.4 trillion (US\$385 billion) in assets under management for 2025, up 17% year-on-year, while maintaining annualised five- and ten-year returns above 10%³. ADQ, another major Abu Dhabi sovereign investor, has also built a portfolio of strategic domestic and international assets; the IMF cited an asset base of approximately US\$200 billion⁴. Dubai adds further sovereign capacity through the Investment Corporation of Dubai (ICD) and other government investment vehicles.

Built over decades and deployed globally through those institutions, sovereign capital provides the country with a balance sheet capable of absorbing external shocks while continuing to invest through economic cycles.

ADB Advisors is a premier consultancy founded by a team of highly experienced professionals specialising in market studies, due diligence, and risk analysis. Based in Dubai, our experts deliver in-depth insights, strategic guidance, and customised solutions to help clients navigate complex markets, mitigate risks, and ensure thorough due diligence.

We cover a wide range of industries, including appliances, automotive, airport & aviation, e-commerce, FMCG, food & beverage, healthcare (pharmaceutical and medical devices and equipment), hospitality & entertainment, mining, oil & gas, petrochemical, ports, power (renewable and conventional), property development and construction, road & railway, shipping, telecom, tobacco, trading, and water.

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This capital is more than a financial reserve. It gives the UAE the capacity to act during crisis: absorbing external shocks, maintaining investment when private capital retreats, and acquiring strategic assets during periods of dislocation. It also provides the financial architecture for economic transformation, allowing sovereign capital to be deployed into technology, AI, infrastructure, energy, advanced manufacturing and other sectors central to the UAE's future competitiveness.

The result is a form of resilience that only few jurisdictions can replicate. The UAE possesses not only substantial fiscal buffers, but a globally diversified sovereign balance sheet that can be actively deployed across economic cycles. This gives the country the capacity not merely to withstand disruption, but to use periods of disruption to strengthen its strategic position.

Energy: Dual-Track Dominance

The UAE continues to expand in hydrocarbons while simultaneously investing at scale in renewables and energy infrastructure, treating transition as expansion, not substitution.

Technology: Owning Strategic Layers

With accelerated investment in AI, data centres, and digital infrastructure, the UAE is positioning itself not as a user of technology, but as a regional owner of critical systems.

A system built for tackling the difficulties and for what comes next

In a fragmented Middle East, the UAE has built more than resilience, it has built strategic optionality. A system where leadership delivers, policy translates into execution, and geopolitical uncertainty is not merely absorbed, but converted into advantage.

Against the backdrop of intensifying competition between major economic powers (most notably, the US and China) strategic exposure is no longer



optional; it is essential. The UAE offers precisely that a jurisdiction through which global businesses can anchor their regional presence while maintaining flexibility across geopolitical fault lines. For companies operating at scale, the implication is clear. The UAE is not simply a place to operate. It is a place to structure from, expand through, and position for what comes next, including entry into markets that remain constrained today but hold significant future potential.

In this sense, the UAE is no longer defined by where it stands. It is defined by what it enables. ■

¹ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/business/economy/2026/06/01/no-slowdown-in-gulf-sovereign-investments-amid-iran-war/>

² <https://www.swfinstitute.org/profile/598cdaa50124e9fd2d05a79b>

³ <https://www.swfinstitute.org/profile/598cdaa60124e9fd2d05b883>

⁴ <https://www.swfinstitute.org/profile/5d0c7854d5ad707266741fc3>

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- Freezone company formation & administration
- Individual and family residence visa processing
- Golden Visa processing
- Retirement Visa processing
- Orientation services, schools, property etc.
- Offshore company formation & administration
- Private Foundations

ISLE OF MAN SERVICES

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Independence matters in cross-border wealth planning

Jessica Coutts, Group CEO, & Richard Smith, Managing Director – Dubai, Charterhouse Lombard



Jessica Coutts

Independent private wealth structuring and governance are becoming increasingly important considerations for entrepreneurs and high-net-worth individuals considering a move to the UAE, say Jessica Coutts, Group CEO of Charterhouse Lombard and Richard Smith, Managing Director of the Isle of Man-based firm's Dubai office.

Could you outline the history of Charterhouse Lombard, and your reasons for setting up in the UAE?

Charterhouse Lombard is an independent boutique trust and corporate services provider with more than 30 years' experience advising international families, entrepreneurs, and professional advisers. Headquartered in the Isle of Man, the firm has built its reputation on long-term stewardship, technical depth, and highly personal service, prioritising quality and continuity over scale.

We established a presence in the UAE more than 20 years ago, in response to the evolution of global private wealth. The region has become a strategic hub for internationally mobile families, and Dubai in particular, offers global connectivity and access to international capital. Having a local office allows us to support clients on the ground while maintaining the same governance standards and independence that define our group.



Richard Smith

What are your core services, and how would you characterise a typical client?

Charterhouse Lombard provides a comprehensive range of corporate and fiduciary services, trust administration, private office support, and cross-border structuring, delivered in close collaboration with professional advisers. Our approach is governance-led and long-term, ensuring that structures remain robust, compliant, and effective as clients' circumstances evolve.

A typical client is a high- or ultra-high-net-worth individual or family with international assets and activities spanning multiple jurisdictions. They are often entrepreneurs or business owners who seek a long-term relationship with a trusted adviser to support ongoing corporate administration, governance, and relocation needs, while helping to protect and preserve wealth over the long-term.

In recent years, we have seen a growing number of clients considering a move to Dubai for a combination of practical and lifestyle reasons. These include a desire for safety and security for their families, access to high-quality private schools, an attractive lifestyle, and a stable tax environment with no personal income tax, capital gains tax, or inheritance tax. For many, Dubai represents not just an economic opportunity, but a compelling long-term base for family and business life.

Describe the range of services offered by your Dubai office?

Our Dubai office provides a comprehensive suite of corporate, fiduciary, and relocation-related services designed to support our international clients. These services include corporate structuring and ongoing administration, advisory coordination, private office support, and assistance with regional establishment and governance requirements.

Importantly, the Dubai team acts as an access point, connecting clients into our wider Isle of Man and international platform. This integrated approach ensures consistency of governance, continuity of oversight, and a single point of coordination across jurisdictions. From a practical perspective, our Dubai office supports clients with:

- Free zone company formation and ongoing administration
- Individual and family residence visa processing
- Golden Visa applications
- Retirement visa processing
- Relocation and orientation services, including support with schools, property, and local settling-in requirements
- Offshore company formation and administration
- Establishment and administration of private foundations.

Why is independence so important when supporting internationally mobile families?

Independence is central to effective fiduciary and wealth planning. As an independently owned firm, Charterhouse Lombard is not influenced by balance-sheet priorities, private equity ownership, or external shareholder expectations. This allows decisions to be made solely on the basis of what is appropriate for the client, both today and over the long-term.



For clients with complex cross-border arrangements, independence delivers impartial advice, flexibility in structuring, and the ability to work seamlessly with advisers of the client's choosing. It removes product bias and commercial conflicts, which is particularly important in an environment of increasing regulatory scrutiny and global uncertainty.

Independence also supports continuity. Long-standing senior management, short decision-making lines, and direct access to decision-makers provide clients with consistency and confidence over time. For families and entrepreneurs planning across generations, that stability is not optional – it is essential.

Ultimately, independence enables us to prioritise governance, reputation, and long-term relationships over short-term commercial outcomes.

How would you describe the growth in UAE-UK investment and trade?

The UAE-UK investment corridor has strengthened markedly in recent years, driven by international business expansion, professional mobility, and increasingly sophisticated cross-border capital flows. There is a clear rise in UK families and businesses establishing a presence in the UAE, alongside UAE-based families investing into the UK and related international markets.

Bilateral trade between the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom exceeded £24 billion in 2024, the highest level recorded in recent history. This growth is not purely commercial. It reflects a deeper alignment in legal systems, professional standards, and governance expectations, which provides a stable foundation for long-term cross-border investment and wealth planning.

Together, the UAE, the UK, and the Isle of Man form a complementary group: the UAE as a global hub for capital and entrepreneurship; the UK as a centre of legal and professional expertise; and the Isle of Man as a secure, neutral platform for asset protection and long-term structuring. This alignment continues to underpin the growth of cross-border investment between the regions and supports the evolving needs of international families and businesses.

Could you explain how “Residency by investment” works in the UAE?

The UAE offers long-term residency options, most notably the Golden Visa, which may be granted on the basis of qualifying investment, business ownership, professional standing, or, more recently, philanthropic contribution. Another key route to residency is through the establishment of a UAE company, which entitles the business owner to an initial two-year residency visa that can be renewed.

This route is frequently the first step for entrepreneurs and business owners relocating to the UAE. We support clients by assisting with relocation to Dubai and coordinating the residency application process. Crucially, residency planning is approached as part of a broader framework, ensuring it is aligned with a client’s wider wealth structuring, governance, and succession objectives.

Can you outline how your private office team supports HNW individuals and families?

Our private office team provides centralised oversight of a client’s structures, assets, and professional relationships, acting as a single point of coordination across jurisdictions. This includes close coordination with legal, tax, investment, and lifestyle advisers, alongside oversight of governance frameworks, reporting, and family succession planning.

Drawing on more than 30 years’ experience, we deliver bespoke private wealth, corporate, and trust services to international families, entrepreneurs, and advisers. Our long-standing team builds enduring relationships and supports cross-border structuring, asset protection, and multi-generational wealth planning in a manner that is both practical and sustainable over the long-term.

Why do you believe that being based in the Isle of Man gives you a competitive advantage?

Being based in the Isle of Man provides a clear competitive advantage. The jurisdiction is internationally recognised for its political stability, tax neutrality, strong regulatory governance, and long-standing expertise in private wealth and fiduciary administration.

It offers a mature financial services ecosystem that combines robust oversight with commercial pragmatism, making it particularly well suited to internationally mobile families. Its close proximity to the UK further enhances its appeal, providing ease of access to UK legal, professional, and financial markets while benefiting from an independent, well-established regulatory framework. ■



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RTC Suite

Helping global organisations execute, monitor, and optimise tax compliance across every market, system, and regulatory framework.

From e-Invoicing mandates and Continuous Transaction Controls (CTCs) to real-time reporting and digital tax initiatives, compliance is becoming increasingly complex for multinational organisations. Markets such as the UAE are introducing structured digital frameworks, while the UK continues its journey toward a more connected and digital tax ecosystem.

For businesses operating across multiple countries, the challenge is no longer simply meeting regulatory requirements. It is maintaining visibility, consistency, and operational efficiency as regulations continue to evolve.

This is where RTC makes the difference.

RTC is a Compliance Intelligence Platform that helps organisations execute, monitor, and optimise tax compliance across multiple jurisdictions through a single intelligent platform. Rather than treating compliance as a standalone obligation, RTC integrates it into everyday business operations, enabling finance, tax, and IT teams to work from a common operational framework.

Built natively on SAP BTP and designed to integrate with any ERP landscape, RTC provides a scalable architecture that supports both SAP and non-SAP environments while preserving Clean Core principles. As regulatory requirements evolve, organisations can adapt without introducing unnecessary complexity into their business systems.

Whether supporting new market entries, expanding regulatory coverage, or preparing for future mandates, RTC helps organisations build a compliance foundation that is intelligent, connected, and ready for what's next.

Because the future of compliance is not just about meeting mandates – it's about operating with confidence.

Real-Time Compliance. Simplified

Built on SAP BTP – Designed for Any ERP

Delivering Connected, Intelligent, and Scalable Compliance

Managing global compliance shouldn't require multiple platforms, disconnected processes, or country-specific solutions.

RTC brings together tax compliance, regulatory reporting, document exchange, and operational visibility within a single Compliance Intelligence Platform. From transaction data to regulatory submission, every step is managed through one connected architecture – helping organisations standardise compliance operations across countries, business units, and ERP landscapes.

Global e-Invoicing, CTC & PEPPOL

Support for country-specific e-Invoicing mandates, Continuous Transaction Controls (CTCs), and PEPPOL frameworks, enabling compliant domestic and cross-border document exchange.

SAF-T & Real-Time Reporting

Automated generation, validation, and submission of tax and regulatory reports in accordance with local requirements, reducing manual effort while improving accuracy.

e-Transport, Reconciliation & e-Archiving

End-to-end management of compliance documents, logistics reporting, reconciliation processes, and long-term archiving through a single operational framework.

Multi-Country & Multi-ERP Architecture

A scalable platform that enables organisations to manage compliance consistently across multiple jurisdictions, legal entities, and both SAP and non-SAP environments.

Compliance Intelligence, AI & Analytics

Built-in dashboards, AI-powered assistance, and operational insights provide complete visibility into compliance activities, enabling teams to identify issues earlier, monitor performance, and make faster decisions.

Built natively on SAP BTP, RTC preserves Clean Core principles while integrating seamlessly with existing ERP landscapes. As regulatory requirements continue

to evolve, organisations can extend compliance capabilities without increasing operational complexity.

The result is more than regulatory compliance – it is a connected, intelligent operating model that helps organisations execute, monitor, and optimise compliance from a single platform.

Built for Operational Excellence

Compliance Across Teams, Systems, and Processes

Compliance is no longer the responsibility of tax teams alone.

Today, it spans finance, procurement, logistics, IT, and shared service operations – requiring seamless collaboration across business functions and technology landscapes.

As regulatory requirements become increasingly integrated with transactional data, initiatives such as UAE e-Invoicing, Continuous Transaction Controls (CTCs), and real-time reporting models across Europe require organisations to establish greater alignment between systems, teams, and day-to-day operations. They need a connected operating model that provides visibility, consistency, and control across the enterprise.

This is why leading organisations are moving beyond fragmented processes toward a unified Compliance Intelligence approach.

Common Challenges Organisations Face

- Country-specific e-Invoicing and reporting requirements, including emerging mandates such as UAE e-Invoicing
- Multiple ERP systems and disconnected business applications
- Manual validations and spreadsheet-driven compliance processes
- Limited visibility into transaction status, errors, and reporting activities
- Increasing regulatory pressure across finance and tax functions
- Inconsistent compliance processes across legal entities and regions

These challenges create operational inefficiencies, increase compliance risk, and make it difficult to scale across global operations.

One Connected Platform

RTC brings compliance processes together within a single intelligent platform,

enabling organisations to standardise operations across countries, systems, and regulatory frameworks.

Instead of deploying separate solutions for UAE e-Invoicing, PEPPOL, SAF-T, or country-specific reporting, organisations gain a consistent operating model through a single platform.

With RTC, organisations can:

- Monitor compliance operations through a centralised platform
- Reduce manual intervention and repetitive activities
- Gain end-to-end visibility into transaction and reporting processes
- Respond faster to regulatory changes
- Scale compliance without increasing operational complexity.

Compliance becomes an integrated business capability rather than a collection of country-specific projects.

Supporting Digital Transformation

Compliance is increasingly becoming a core component of enterprise transformation initiatives – including ERP modernisation, shared service centres, finance transformation, and process standardisation.

Built on SAP BTP and designed for both SAP and non-SAP environments, RTC enables organisations to extend compliance capabilities while preserving existing business processes and supporting Clean Core principles.

As business and regulatory requirements evolve, organisations can expand their compliance landscape without rebuilding their technology architecture.

Looking Ahead

Regulatory frameworks will continue to evolve toward more digital, connected, and real-time operating models.

Organisations that build a scalable compliance foundation today will be better prepared to respond to future mandates, support business growth, and adapt to regulatory change with confidence.

Because the future of compliance is no longer just about meeting regulatory obligations.

It is about transforming compliance data into operational visibility, better decisions, and Compliance Intelligence. ■

Artificial Intelligence: Engineering the future

The UAE regards artificial intelligence (AI) as a key enabler of its long-term economic transformation. Rather than treating AI as a standalone technology initiative, the country has embedded it within a broader agenda of economic diversification, productivity enhancement and the development of high-value, knowledge-based sectors. This is underpinned by innovative policy leadership, large-scale public investment and a rapidly expanding ecosystem that includes government, academia and the private sector. A key comparative advantage is the country's access to low-cost and reliable energy, which supports the development of energy-intensive digital infrastructure, such as data centres.

A first mover in national AI policy

The UAE was the first country in the region to launch a national AI strategy in 2017, signalling its clear long-term ambition to become a global leader in the technology by 2031¹. The strategy is designed to raise the UAE's long-term growth potential by embedding AI across key economic sectors, improving efficiency in existing sectors while enabling the expansion and creation of new areas of opportunity. To drive implementation, the government appointed a dedicated Ministry of State for AI, Digital Economy and Remote Work Applications, giving AI policy cabinet-level oversight and ensuring coordination across federal and emirate-level institutions².

The AI strategy rests on eight interlinked pillars. These include building a robust regulatory environment, strengthening human capital, expanding data and digital infrastructure, and fostering an innovation-friendly ecosystem³. Together, these pillars aim to position the UAE not only as a user of existing AI technologies, but also as a testbed and creator of new AI solutions.

Economic rationale and scale of ambition

AI is seen as a powerful lever to boost productivity and long-term output. According to estimates cited by the UAE's AI ministry, economy-wide adoption of AI could add approximately £72 billion to output by 2031, equivalent to around 18% of 2023 GDP⁴. This places the UAE among the countries expected to see the largest proportional gains from AI globally.

Initial deployment has focused on priority sectors where AI can quickly enhance efficiency and reduce costs, notably energy, transport and logistics. Over time, the focus will expand to emerging sectors such as healthcare and cybersecurity, where AI is expected to unlock innovation and new business models.

Landmark AI projects and institutions

A defining feature of the UAE's AI strategy is the creation of flagship institutions and technology platforms. Abu Dhabi has emerged as a focal point for AI development, supported by strong government backing and international

partnerships. One of the most prominent players is G42, founded in 2018, which operates across cloud computing, data centres and applied AI solutions. G42 has played a central role in building domestic capabilities and attracting global technology partners.

Another major milestone was the development of the UAE's first home-grown large language model, Falcon 40B, by the Abu Dhabi Technology Innovation Institute in 2023. Falcon 40B is among the largest open-source language models globally and is notable for providing unrestricted access to its parameters⁵. This openness allows government entities, researchers and companies to adapt the model for local use cases, accelerating AI adoption across the economy.

Skills development is anchored by the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI), established in 2019 as the world's first graduate-level, research-focused AI university⁶. Through specialised master's and doctoral programmes, the university aims to build a domestic pipeline of AI talent while fostering collaboration with global technology firms.

Data centres and digital infrastructure

Expanding digital infrastructure is central to the UAE's AI ambitions. AI applications require vast data storage and processing capacity, and the country has invested heavily in scaling up its data centre footprint. Total data-processing capacity has risen sharply over the past decade to the highest level in the GCC⁷.



In 2025, the UAE and US announced a 5GW UAE-US AI Campus in Abu Dhabi, with G42, OpenAI, Oracle, NVIDIA, SoftBank and Cisco partnering on Stargate UAE, the first international deployment of OpenAI's Stargate infrastructure platform⁸, further strengthening bilateral AI cooperation.

Separately, Microsoft and G42 announced a 200MW data-centre capacity expansion through Khazna Data Centers, expected to begin operations before the end of 2026. These projects position the UAE as one of the most ambitious AI infrastructure markets outside the United States⁹.

For UK companies, this massive infrastructure surge unlocks critical export opportunities. British firms specialising in advanced liquid cooling, renewable energy integration, and AI governance frameworks are uniquely positioned to support these rapidly scaling megaprojects.

Data centre expansion is closely linked to broader investment in power generation, including nuclear and renewable energy, to ensure reliable and sustainable electricity supply. The integration of clean energy into digital infrastructure also aligns AI development with the UAE's wider environmental and net-zero objectives.

Governance, ethics and international engagement

Recognising the societal implications of the rapid growth of AI, the UAE places a strong emphasis on governance and ethical frameworks. In October 2024, the country announced an International AI Policy structured around six principles: advancement, cooperation, community, ethics, sustainability and security¹. Through this policy, the UAE seeks to promote greater transparency, responsible use and international collaboration in AI development.

Domestically, regulatory oversight aims to balance innovation with safeguards, ensuring that AI adoption enhances public trust and social welfare. This governance focus aims to make the UAE an attractive destination for global technology firms seeking a stable and forward-looking regulatory environment, while supporting long-term investment, innovation and sustainable economic growth.

Building an AI-enabled growth model

The UAE's AI strategy is deeply integrated with its broader economic model. Strong public finances, effective investment programmes and a pro-growth policy framework provide an ideal environment for large-scale technology investment. AI development is closely linked to rising foreign direct investment, particularly in greenfield and high-tech projects, reinforcing the UAE's position as a regional innovation hub.

Landmark projects such as Falcon 40B and the Abu Dhabi AI Campus, institutions like MBZUAI, and infrastructure expansion in data centres and energy are tangible examples of the country's coherent national effort, as it seeks to shape the future of AI in the global digital economy. ■

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² <https://iapp.org/resources/article/global-ai-governance-uae>

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⁴ <https://staticcdn.mbzuai.ac.ae/mbzuaiwpprd01/2022/07/UAE-National-Strategy-for-Artificial-Intelligence-2031.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.tii.ae/news/uaes-technology-innovation-institute-launches-open-source-falcon-40b-large-language-model>

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⁷ <https://m.digitalisationworld.com/news/66594/uae-largest-data-centre-hub-in-mena-region>

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We are delighted to announce the appointment of Stacy Keating as the new Chief Executive Officer of the British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi. Stacy brings over 15 years of senior international leadership experience, with deep expertise in the Gulf and a proven track record in stakeholder engagement, strategic communications, and crisis leadership. Her extensive work across government, business, and diplomatic networks in the UAE, positions her to advance the Chamber's mission to strengthen UK-UAE trade, investment, and collaboration. We look forward to Stacy leading the Chamber's continued growth throughout 2026 and beyond.

Connect with your local British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi

British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi is an organisation focused on promoting bilateral trade between the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. We have one objective – to enable better business outcomes for our members.

Formed from the British Business Group Abu Dhabi (registered in 1996), the British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi (BCC AD) is a not-for-profit membership organisation for companies trading between the UAE and the UK. The Chamber is part of the Global Business Network of the British Chambers of Commerce providing connectivity to 80 accredited chambers around the world, and 53 UK-based chambers trading world-wide.

BCC AD provides its members with a local network, activities and services that are designed to:

- Inform them of market conditions and trading opportunities, and prevailing policies and legislation
- Connect them to potential funders, partners and customers – both in Abu Dhabi and UK
- Support them in establishing, marketing and developing their business, and by asserting influence on their behalf to promote their interests.

BCC AD offers a range of membership categories, to meet the needs of all sizes and types of corporate, business, and overseas membership available for interested individuals.

BCC AD membership is diverse, representing a wide range of cross sectors. We work closely with our strategic partners across the Abu Dhabi Government including; Abu Dhabi Residents Office, Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development, Abu Dhabi Investment Office and Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce.

Abu Dhabi is home to more than 2 million expatriates of over 200 nationalities. It has been ranked #1 in the category of safest city in the world for the last 6 years as well as happiest city in the Arab region.

The British Chamber of Commerce Abu Dhabi is here to help support you as an individual or company wishing to do business in the United Arab Emirates. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us today at www.bccad.ae or email membership@bccad.ae ■

Scan to explore membership



Follow British Chamber of Commerce Dubai (BCCD) on LinkedIn
and @bccdubai on Instagram for the latest from our business community.



British Chamber of Commerce Dubai

Representing British businesses since 1987, the British Chamber of Commerce Dubai (BCCD) has played an integral role in the development of the commercial landscape of the UAE.

Today the BCCD is an active membership organisation with over **1,100 members** and continues to support the British business community in Dubai. The chamber guides corporates and individual members through the progressive pace of change with an extensive calendar of events – **90+ each year** – which includes business briefings, structured and free-form **networking events**, professional development **masterclasses** and large-scale **sporting and social events**.

Due to the steady rise in British business owners and professionals relocating to, or expanding into, Dubai over the years, the BCCD also hosts regular UK-UAE trade symposiums in the UK to engage prospective members and bring together key stakeholders from both markets.

“Establishing credible connections and maintaining stakeholder relationships are integral to brand longevity in this region” says **BCCD CEO Katy Keenan**. “We support British businesses by facilitating meaningful connections. Our support also extends to showcasing our members’ successes to increase their visibility, as well as sharing timely market insights and regulatory updates through our extensive events calendar and far-reaching communication platforms.”

The BCCD has built a credible voice in the region with an impressive reach across all social media platforms including its weekly update to members,

with a diverse audience in the UAE and the UK. The chamber operates under the auspices of **Dubai Chambers** and is recognised by the UAE authorities as the representative body of British companies and individuals operating in Dubai. Led by a highly experienced business team and supported by a committee of board members elected annually, member experience is at the core of its proposition.

The chamber maintains strong local and international stakeholder relationships and provides credibility and brand exposure opportunities for those looking to increase their local market recognition in the region. There are four tiers of membership: **Platinum; Business Advance; Business;** and **Individual** with proposition benefits aligned to their size of business and needs.

As part of the chamber’s wider communications to the rest of the UAE, GCC and the UK, the BCCD also runs its own **podcast** called Don’t Do That, Do This! which shares insightful advice and actionable business growth stories in support of those already in the region and those looking to move to Dubai.

The BCCD takes pride in its established role as a strategic partner for British business prosperity in the UAE, collaborating closely with the British Embassy, the Department for Business and Trade, and the Dubai Chamber.

For membership enquiries, please email:
membership@britishchamberdubai.com

Visit our website:
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Free Zones: Connecting business to global markets

Free zones (or free trade zones) are a significant element of the UAE's strategy to position itself as a global trading hub. They sit alongside the regular licensing system, and are designed to make company formation and day-to-day administration faster, while giving foreign investors greater financial control and certainty over operations.

The traditional pitch for many free zones has been 100% foreign ownership, streamlined licensing (often via a one-stop authority), and the ability to repatriate capital and profits. However, the regulatory context has evolved in recent years. Since the UAE corporate tax regime came into force for most businesses in 2023, free zone entities are no longer generally outside the tax system. Although they can still potentially benefit from a 0% corporate tax rate on qualifying income if they meet certain conditions, other income is subject to the standard 9% rate¹.

For trading businesses, the customs and VAT incentives matter as much as the incorporation incentives. Goods can move and be stored within a free zone under customs suspension, with customs duty typically only paid when the goods leave the free zone and enter the UAE market. As a general rule, the standard customs duty rate on most goods is 5% (with higher rates for certain products such as tobacco and alcohol). VAT is levied at a standard rate of 5%, and the practical VAT treatment will depend on whether a supply is made in the mainland, within a designated zone, or as part of an export/re-export chain².

At the top end of the market, global tax changes also increasingly shape free zone planning for multinationals. The UAE introduced a 15% domestic minimum top-up tax for large multinational groups in January 2025, aligned with the OECD global minimum tax framework³.

Free zone policies and offerings vary by emirate and by zone. Some are general-purpose (serving trading, services and light industry), while others are specialised ecosystems built around finance, commodities, aviation,

logistics or e-commerce. For UK firms, the key is often less about the headline incentives and more about sector fit, regulatory environment, and the credibility of the ecosystem.

Main UAE free zones

Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) (financial services):

Established in 2004, DIFC operates as an independent common-law jurisdiction with its own civil and commercial legal framework and courts – the DIFC Courts – and an independent regulator, the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA).

DIFC was host over 9,000 registered companies and over 50,000 professionals in 2025⁴, spanning banking, capital markets, asset and wealth management, insurance, fintech and professional services. The centre has seen particularly strong growth in hedge funds, private equity and venture capital firms, reinforcing its role as the region's primary hub for alternative investments. DIFC houses one of the Middle East's largest financial ecosystems, including global banks, sovereign wealth funds, law firms and advisory institutions.

Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) (financial services):

ADGM is Abu Dhabi's international financial centre, located on Al Maryah Island. Established in 2015, ADGM operates as an independent common-law jurisdiction like the DIFC, applying English common law directly, supported by its own courts – the ADGM Courts – and regulator. This framework is designed to provide international investors and institutions with legal certainty and a globally familiar regulatory environment.

ADGM was home to more than 12,600 licensed business in 2025, including banks, asset managers, private equity firms, hedge funds, fintech companies and professional services providers, making it the largest international financial centre in the MENA region. The centre saw particularly strong growth in asset and wealth management, with assets under management rising 36% in 2025⁵.

Dubai Airport Freezone (DAFZ) (logistics): DAFZ is a flagship logistics-and-aviation-adjacent free zone, positioned next to Dubai International Airport. DAFZ's own profile highlights a large, diversified tenant base, describing the zone as home to more than 3,400 registered businesses across 20+ sectors and 20,000+ professionals⁶. For UK businesses with time-sensitive supply chains, proximity to air cargo capacity and specialist freight services can be a decisive advantage.

Dubai CommerCity (e-commerce): Dubai CommerCity has expanded the UAE's free zone offer for digital commerce by integrating licensing, fulfilment and cross-border logistics services into a single platform. The model is designed for firms selling into the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region, and is typically most attractive where a business wants a UAE-based hub for regional fulfilment, marketplace operations, and last-mile partners.

Khalifa Economic Zones Abu Dhabi (KEZAD) (industrial and logistics scale): KEZAD comprises 12 separate economic zones and spans 550km² in total, with 100km² designated as free zone, supporting a wide mix of industrial and logistics activity. By far the largest of these is KIZAD (the Khalifa Port-linked industrial and logistics hub), a large-scale manufacturing and distribution base. This zone is spread over 410km² and home to 600+ companies across sectors including food processing, polymers, metals, automotive, pharmaceuticals and logistics.

Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC): DMCC is one of the UAE's largest and fastest-growing free zones and a global hub for commodities trade and enterprise, with over 26,000 registered companies in 2025⁷. Established in 2002, it was originally created to support Dubai's gold and diamond trade, but has since evolved into a broad-based commercial free

zone serving energy, metals, agricultural commodities, financial services, technology and professional services sectors. The zone is internationally recognised for its commodities infrastructure, including the Dubai Gold & Commodities Exchange (DGCX) and dedicated industry clusters such as DMCC Coffee Centre and DMCC Tea Centre.

Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ): RAKEZ was established in 2017, through the consolidation of Ras Al Khaimah's former free zones. Home to over 40,000 registered businesses⁸, it serves a broad spectrum of sectors including manufacturing, industrial production, logistics, trading, e-commerce and professional services, and operates across multiple specialised zones, including industrial parks, technology parks and business centres. Its location provides access to regional shipping routes via Saqr Port and connectivity to the wider UAE and GCC markets.

Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA): The Jebel Ali Free Zone is Dubai's flagship industrial and logistics free zone and one of the largest globally. Established in 1985, it is strategically integrated with Jebel Ali Port, operated by DP World, creating a fully bonded, multimodal trade platform linking sea, air and land corridors.

The zone hosts more than 11,000 companies from over 150 countries and spans approximately 57km² ⁹, offering pre-built warehouses, light industrial units, office space and land for custom development. Its proximity to Al Maktoum International Airport further strengthens its role within Dubai's integrated logistics ecosystem.

Recent geopolitical volatility has reinforced the strategic value of the UAE's free zones, which remain resilient, long-term operating platforms for regional trade, capital and talent. ■

¹ <https://tax.gov.ae/Datafolder/Files/Guides/CT/Free Zone Persons - 20 05 2024 final for GCD.pdf>

² <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/business/doing-business-in-free-zones/running-a-business-in-a-free-zone->

³ <https://www.reuters.com/markets/uae-impose-15-domestic-minimum-top-up-tax-large-multinationals-jan-1-2024-12-09>

⁴ <https://www.difc.com/whats-on/news/dubai-advances-to-7th-ranking-in-global-financial-centres-index-highest-ever-in-its-history>

⁵ <https://www.adgm.com/media/announcements/adgm-celebrates-decade-of-operations-with-36-surge-in-aum-51-increase-in-workforce-and-over-12000-licences-in-2025>

⁶ <https://www.dafz.ae/en>

⁷ <https://dmcc.ae/latest-news/dmcc-reports-strong-2025-growth-welcomes-over-2300-companies-tech-community-surpasses-4000-as-new-ecosystems-integrate-trade-tech-and-finance>

⁸ <https://rakez.com/en/media-centre/news-detail/articleid/1668/rakez-records-strong-growth-in-2025-welcoming-nearly-19000-new-companies-to-ras-al-khaimah>

⁹ <https://www.jafza.ae/about/>

An aerial photograph of the RAKEZ industrial park, showing rows of large, modern warehouse buildings with white roofs and blue accents. The buildings are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with paved roads and parking areas between them. In the background, other industrial buildings and a city skyline are visible under a clear blue sky.

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Manufacturing momentum: Why UK firms are setting up in Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone

Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ)

At a time when manufacturers are navigating economic shifts, evolving trade dynamics, and increasingly complex supply chains, British companies are seeking cost-efficient, strategically located bases that support both regional operations and global export. In the United Arab Emirates, Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ) is emerging as a natural choice, offering the infrastructure, flexibility, and support that UK manufacturers need to scale internationally.

This shift reflects a broader recalibration taking place across UK industry. As businesses look beyond Europe to diversify risk, access new growth markets, and strengthen supply chain resilience, the Middle East has gained renewed relevance. Within this context, Ras Al Khaimah is increasingly viewed not just as a location, but as a strategic platform that connects manufacturers to markets across the Gulf, Africa, and Asia from a single, efficient base.

RAKEZ is purpose-built to support manufacturing and engineering enterprises at every stage of their growth. Its dedicated industrial zones offer a wide range of customisable solutions tailored to production needs. From customisable warehouses and land plots to on-site labour accommodation, every aspect is designed to optimise workflows and reduce both operational costs and time to market.

Unlike generic industrial parks, RAKEZ has developed an ecosystem that accommodates both light and heavy manufacturing, enabling businesses

to start with ready-built facilities and scale into bespoke, build-to-suit developments as operations expand. This flexibility has proven particularly valuable for UK manufacturers entering new regional markets.

This operational advantage is reinforced by Ras Al Khaimah's strategic location. Situated in the northern UAE and within easy reach of Dubai, the emirate sits at the intersection of major global trade corridors. Direct access to regional ports and airports, with future connectivity through the Etihad Rail network, positions RAKEZ as a highly competitive base for export-oriented manufacturers seeking efficient market access and greater supply chain resilience.

British manufacturers are already seeing results. Companies such as Manchester Paper Bags, Green Rock Group and JRL Fabrications have successfully established efficient production hubs in RAKEZ, serving customers locally across the UAE, as well as the Middle East, Africa, and beyond. These firms benefit from an operating environment that allows them to scale flexibly and sustainably.

Instead of offering a one-size-fits-all solution, RAKEZ provides both free zone and non-free zone entity formation options. This gives manufacturers the flexibility to choose the set-up that best aligns with their market strategy, whether focused on local distribution, exports, or both. Fast-track processes and integrated support services further reduce set-up time and complexity.

Incorporation is often completed within days, and business packages can include UAE residence visas for investors and their families. Beyond licensing, companies benefit from a suite of value-added services, including support with banking, recruitment, administrative processes, and operational set-up, enabling management teams to focus on production and growth rather than regulatory navigation.

Recognising the growing demand among manufacturers, RAKEZ is also investing in sustainable infrastructure to lower its environmental impact. New facilities are being designed to maximise energy efficiency and minimise waste, helping businesses meet Environmental, Social, and Governance targets.

This focus has resonated strongly with UK firms adopting circular economy and responsible manufacturing models. RAKEZ has attracted businesses whose operations prioritise resource efficiency, waste reduction, and long-term environmental performance, demonstrating that industrial growth and sustainability can progress in parallel.

The success of UK firms within RAKEZ reflects a broader trend. The economic zone is home to around 3,000 UK-linked businesses across diverse sectors, illustrating the depth of British enterprise in Ras Al Khaimah. Among them is global tea producer Ahmad Tea, which operates a major regional facility producing millions of tea bags daily for export to international markets. The world's leading laptop remanufacturer, A2C, continues to expand its operations in the zone, supporting circular supply chains while serving clients worldwide. Spatial Composite, a specialist in aircraft cabin crew training simulators, has been established in RAKEZ for over a decade, supplying advanced equipment to aviation customers across Asia and the United States. Social enterprises such as Waste to Wonder further highlight the range of business models supported within the ecosystem.

Underlying this growth is a stable and diversified economic environment. Ras Al Khaimah has maintained strong sovereign credit ratings for over a decade, reflecting fiscal discipline and long-term policy stability. Access to international



schools, modern healthcare, and affordable housing further enhances the emirate's appeal, enabling companies to attract and retain skilled talent while maintaining competitive operating costs. With strong safety standards, a supportive business environment, and a high quality of life, Ras Al Khaimah offers more than just a manufacturing base – it's a place where businesses and people thrive.

For British manufacturers ready to expand internationally, RAKEZ offers a plug-and-play solution, while being a long-term partner for sustainable, scalable growth. As UK-UAE trade continues to deepen and regional demand accelerates, Ras Al Khaimah is fast becoming a strategic base for Britain's next phase of industrial expansion, combining operational efficiency, market access, and long-term stability under one integrated ecosystem. ■

Infrastructure: A strategic shift in national priorities

The UAE government's strategy for infrastructure development aims to guide public capital allocation and national planning in ways that differ markedly from the property-led growth of the past decade. Planning frameworks and major development portfolios emphasise statewide connectivity, system resilience and economic diversification, positioning infrastructure as an essential pillar of long-term productivity.

This strategic shift reflects government efforts to match infrastructure scale with demographic growth, climate adaptation needs, and industrial expansion. Planners are prioritising long-duration assets with multi-decade life cycles, while encouraging international expertise and capital participation through modern procurement frameworks.

Market structure and delivery models

To support this change in priorities, the UAE has reshaped its infrastructure delivery framework. The infrastructure ecosystem is characterised by strong state leadership alongside increasing private-sector participation. While government sponsors and government-related entities continue to own and coordinate strategic assets, delivery structures have evolved to incorporate partnerships, long-term concessions and structured finance.

Central to this overall approach is the federal Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework. This provides a clear, structured basis for procuring, financing and operating key infrastructure assets, laying out standard stages from pre-qualification to contract award while supporting private financing and governance arrangements.

At the emirate level, individual PPP laws also underpin private participation. For example, Abu Dhabi's PPP legal framework enables contractual relationships between government entities and the private sector for the delivery and operation of public services and assets – an important enabler for regulated infrastructure procurement¹.

These delivery models have helped expand both the scale and complexity of projects entering the pipeline. They have also sharpened the focus on areas where long-term planning and operational resilience are most critical, particularly in utilities and water infrastructure.

Focusing on utilities and water security

Across the UAE, utilities and water infrastructure are among the most visible examples of strategic infrastructure investment, with environmental resilience increasingly embedded in infrastructure planning.

In Dubai, for instance, the Dubai Municipality Deep Sewerage and Stormwater Tunnel (DSST) Project has been procured under a PPP model to enhance the emirate's sewerage infrastructure, with packages involving long tunnel sections and associated pumping stations planned for delivery in phases², reinforcing the project's role in strengthening wastewater resilience, flood management and long-term urban expansion. The scheme is one of the region's largest wastewater PPP initiatives³.

The emphasis on utilities reflects a broader planning logic: investing early in foundational systems to support sustained growth, while remaining aligned with national objectives around sustainability and public health.

Transport connectivity and national integration

Transport is vital to enabling the UAE's wider infrastructure ambitions, shaping how cities, industries and population centres connect at a national level.

The country-wide rail network being developed by Etihad Rail is intended to link the seven emirates together with a dedicated freight and passenger network. The project will connect main population centres, freight hubs and industrial areas, and is eventually intended to integrate with wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) rail plans. When complete, the network will provide the UAE's first fully integrated passenger rail

services, linking 11 cities and regions and supporting phased roll-out as the network evolves. This progression highlights a transition from initial freight operations to broader passenger mobility services and represents a major expansion of strategic transport infrastructure in the emirates⁴.

At city level, Dubai has also moved into the delivery phase of the Dubai Metro Blue Line. In December 2024, the Roads and Transport Authority awarded a £4.15 billion contract for the 30.5km line, which will add 14 stations and strengthen connectivity between emerging residential districts, business centres and Dubai International Airport. Construction formally commenced in 2025 as part of the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan⁵. Building on this momentum, the government announced the AED34 billion (£7.2 billion) Dubai Metro Gold Line project. Spanning 42km with 18 stations, this will be the emirate's first fully underground line, connecting 15 major districts – such as Jumeirah Village Circle and Business Bay – while linking directly to the national Etihad Rail network.

Aviation infrastructure is also entering a new phase of expansion. Dubai's £26 billion expansion of Al Maktoum International Airport is intended to create one of the world's largest aviation hubs. Initial development is expected to provide capacity for around 150 million passengers annually in the early 2030s, with long-term plans ultimately raising capacity to 260 million passengers a year⁶.

Investment climate

Despite recent geopolitical complexities, the UAE's infrastructure investment climate continues to benefit from strong institutional support, fiscal capacity and long-term planning. Initiatives like the “Projects of the 50”

portfolio⁷ articulate broad national ambitions that extend beyond energy and economic diversification into transport, utilities, urban services and digital infrastructure, while its strong sovereign balance sheets, established procurement frameworks and commitment to strategic investment have helped maintain international confidence.

The PPP legal frameworks at both federal and emirate levels lend structure to private engagement, making the UAE a market where contractual clarity and procedural transparency are increasingly emphasised. Although complex infrastructure procurement typically involves longer planning and delivery horizons, the risk profile benefits from sovereign creditworthiness, coherent planning frameworks and a consistent public policy direction that encourages foreign expertise and capital participation.

As programmes move from planning into execution, the challenge increasingly lies in delivering complex assets efficiently and over long-term horizons. This has sharpened interest in innovation and digitalisation.

Innovation and digitalisation in delivery

These are now both firmly embedded in the UAE's approach to infrastructure delivery. Digital tools, such as building information modelling (BIM), digital twin platforms and internet-of-things (IoT)-enabled asset monitoring, are being used to improve operational resilience, enhance lifecycle performance and optimise maintenance regimes.

This focus on innovation reinforces a broader shift in how infrastructure opportunity is defined. For international partners, including UK firms, it signals a move beyond construction alone towards long-term collaboration across financing, delivery and operations. ■

¹ <https://radio.abudhabi/investment-opportunities/public-private-partnerships>

² <https://smartwatermagazine.com/news/smart-water-magazine/dubai-municipality-launches-tender-22-billion-sewerage-project>

³ <https://www.utilities-me.com/news/dubai-advances-sewerage-tunnels>

⁴ <https://www.gccrailway.com/etihad-rail-reveals-details-of-the-uae-full-passenger-railway-network/>

⁵ <https://www.railwaygazette.com/metro/dubai-metro-blue-line-construction-officially-launched/68996.article>

⁶ <https://www.mediaoffice.ae/en/news/2025/november/18-11/international-investment-momentum-for-al-maktoum-international>

⁷ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/uae-in-the-future/projects-of-the-50/first-set-of-projects-of-the-50>

Connecting markets, delivering results. Innovo's learnings from the UK-UAE corridor

Simon Penney, Deputy CEO, Innovo



Simon Penney

The UK-UAE relationship has evolved far more than a traditional trade partnership. It is now a high-functioning corridor for innovation, capital and delivery, where success is defined by how effectively ideas are converted into real projects on the ground. As global markets become more competitive, the ability to connect innovation with execution, and ambition with delivery, has become a decisive advantage.

Innovo operates at the centre of this exchange. We are a leading UAE construction company with a strong track record of delivering complex, nationally significant projects, and an emerging developer in the UK, building capability across real estate, innovation and investment.

Operating across both markets, Innovo supports companies seeking to win work, deploy innovation, and scale internationally. For UK firms, this means accelerated access to the UAE's dynamic project pipeline, supported by deep local knowledge and delivery expertise. For UAE businesses, it means leveraging UK development capability, governance and innovation ecosystems to compete, grow and invest with confidence. In this way, Innovo acts not simply as a contractor or developer, but as a practical platform that connects markets, mobilises innovation, and turns opportunity into delivery.

This is observation shaped by direct experience. As former UK Trade Commissioner and Consul General at the British Embassy in Dubai, I observed how businesses from both countries work together to open markets, scale exports and develop innovative solutions.

Local expertise, operating across UAE-UK

At the core of the UK-UAE relationship is a shared outlook. Both countries place enduring value on strong governance, global engagement, and the role of enterprise in supporting communities and economies. For industry heavyweights like Innovo – built in the Middle East and operating internationally – these principles align closely.

Innovo was founded in the UAE. We are deeply rooted in the country, built on long-standing relationships and a team that understands how the region works, both commercially and culturally. Those foundations proved particularly valuable during the recent regional conflict, when local knowledge, trusted relationships and delivery capability helped us maintain momentum across projects despite heightened uncertainty.

At the same time, Innovo adopts an international outlook. Like many enterprises active across the UK-UAE corridor, we apply local expertise to deliver for each market, while sharing insights and extending our capability globally. This combination – regional understanding supported by international standards – is critical in today's interconnected markets.

Sharing ideas, strengthening outcomes

Establishing our headquarters in London in 2024 was a deliberate decision. The UK offers a respected regulatory environment, mature governance frameworks and access to a diverse talent pool. This has enabled us to strengthen our Board with leaders who bring international perspective and



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vast experience. It has also allowed us to assemble Innovo teams that broaden our capability and outlook. This includes teams of finance, technology and innovation experts, as well as a dedicated real estate team, all exploring high-potential opportunities in UAE and UK, as well as globally.

Building such capability in the UK directly supports our Middle East operations. In our UAE construction business, for example, the exchange of expertise and innovation across borders strengthens outcomes, while operating within recognised international frameworks reinforces trust with partners and institutions.

The recent conflict has also highlighted the value of this approach. Businesses with strong local relationships, resilient supply chains and longstanding international partnerships have been better placed to continue delivering for clients despite fast-changing regional conditions.

Through our UK base, we are also able to extend our global technology and innovation scouting network to discover and utilise innovative start-ups, scale-ups, and established businesses who could contribute to our mission to innovate for a better built tomorrow.

That benefit flows both ways.

For example, through investments in innovation platforms such as Bricks and Mortar, and other global innovation ecosystems, we identify and activate ideas that will shape the future of the built environment – in the UAE and in the UK.

The challenge

The scale of construction required over the coming decades is vast and growing. The challenge is not simply to build more, but to deliver better by combining local understanding with innovation, creating international standards of delivery.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the UAE, where demand for infrastructure, accommodation and essential services remains substantial. In Dubai, for example, Innovo is a key contributor to the city's development ambitions. Projects such as the Hamdan Bin Rashid Cancer Hospital, delivered in partnership with Al Jalila Foundation, are bringing world-leading specialist healthcare facilities to the country. In addition, Innovo is delivering construction and infrastructure and building works at the new Dubai Police Academy.



Delivering important projects across the Emirates, Innovo is working in Ras Al Khaimah and in Abu Dhabi, where we are creating an extensive luxury and sustainable residential community on Saadiyat Island, and first of its kind fountain system at the nearby Zayed National Museum that played a starring role during the official 54th Eid Al Etihad ceremony.

The future

The future of global business will be shaped by how effectively markets are connected. The UK-UAE corridor demonstrates what is possible when partnerships are practical, grounded and sustained. For Innovo, the UAE remains home – but it is through the cross-border exchange of talent, innovation and expertise that we are finding new ways to deliver and grow far beyond it, benefiting markets, institutions and communities in UAE and UK. ■



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Supporting major projects in the UAE and wider Middle East

Richard Botting, Managing Director, Barton Engineering FZE



Richard Botting

Barton Engineering FZE, based in the UAE, supplies the Barton brand of premium quality cable management systems and related products to many major projects, as Managing Director Richard Botting explains.

Could you outline the history of Barton Engineering?

Barton Engineering traces its origins to Barton & Sons Ltd, founded by Mr. Barton in the West Midlands in the 1890s. The original business produced malleable iron hardware before moving into conduit tube and cable management products, building a reputation for durable, practical engineering solutions.

Today, Barton Engineering is the worldwide custodian of the Barton brand. The business combines engineering heritage with practical Middle East capability, helping consultants, contractors and distributors through premium quality products, approval support, local stockholding and a responsive service. That combination of heritage and regional execution remains central to Barton's position in the demanding construction market.

How long has Barton Engineering been active in the Middle East and UAE?

Barton began exporting to the UAE in the late 1970s, making it one of the first Middle East markets to stock and promote the range. The company initially followed a traditional British

export model, with regular sales visits into key territories. Opening the Dubai office in 2005 marked the shift from export selling to direct engagement, and the local presence was key to maximising market penetration.

How do you maintain competitiveness?

Barton relies upon continuous product and service innovation to maintain its premium quality range at competitive prices.

While products were historically manufactured in-house in the UK, the company developed high-quality overseas manufacturing partners more than 20 years ago in response to changing global cost pressures.

A diversified supply base, supported by disciplined planning and regional experience, enables Barton to maintain continuity even during periods of major maritime disruption.

Can you give examples of some major projects in the region that you have supplied?

Barton has supplied many of the region's leading aviation, transport, hospitality, commercial, healthcare, education, leisure, and infrastructure developments. Examples include Burj Al Arab, Burj Khalifa, airport expansions across the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the Dubai and Doha Metro projects, Expo 2020, FIFA 2022 World Cup stadiums in Qatar, and major Saudi Arabian developments including Neom, Six Flags Qiddiya and The Third Saudi Expansion of the Grand Mosque.

Large projects require more than product availability. They require confidence in the people delivering the service.

How do you see the prospects for growth across the GCC region?

My first visit to the region was over 25 years ago, and I remember being struck by the number of hotels under construction. At the time, it was difficult to comprehend why so much capacity was required, and it introduced me to the local mindset of building to create demand.

Having experienced both the highs and lows of the market, I remain extremely positive about the continued growth prospects across the GCC and wider Middle East despite recent regional tensions.

The opportunity is substantial, success depends on understanding consultant specifications, approval processes, and commercial practices. Competition is strong and barriers to entry are high, but the scale of announced and active developments continues to create significant opportunities for credible, disciplined and responsive businesses.

What are your plans for expansion in the UAE and wider GCC region?

Our expansion plans focus on strengthening the position of Barton in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, increasing sales across the remaining GCC markets and extending our reach into neighbouring Middle East territories. Growth will come through stronger market coverage, additional resources, closer distributor engagement and continued investment in products suited to our project and specification channels.

We are also developing new products, reviewing selected acquisition opportunities and exploring how Barton can support British products and services with genuine regional potential by helping suppliers navigate the route-to-market.



"Barton's strength is not only in the products we supply, but in the technical knowledge, market understanding and regional operating capability of our employees who sit behind them."

How would you describe Barton Engineering's USPs?

In a sentence "premium quality cable management solutions delivered reliably across the Middle East". That sounds very ordinary for a USP, but in reality, Barton is extra-ordinary. We combine a trusted heritage brand, quality products, and the know-how of getting things done in the region. The Barton name is recognised across the UAE, GCC and wider Middle East, with a supply history approaching 50 years and involvement in many of the region's best-known projects.

“ The scale of announced and active developments continues to create significant opportunities for credible, disciplined and responsive businesses. ”

Our support extends beyond the product itself to include submittals, approvals, specification assistance and distributor coordination. Underpinning this is a strong warehousing capability, project-led planning, responsive customer service and, above all, our people. Their technical expertise, market knowledge, practical judgement and can-do attitude is Barton's greatest differentiator.

Do you distribute directly or use local distributors?

Barton operates through a network of approved distributors serving the Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing contractor market. Most sales are project-led and specification-driven.

Transactions are typically back-to-back project sales, with goods dispatched directly from Barton warehouse to site. With our approval, some larger distributors also appoint sub-distributors to serve smaller contractors and retail customers. This model provides broad market coverage, strong local relationships, improved stock availability and credit protection while maintaining supply chain control.

How did you respond to the challenges caused by the recent regional conflict?

First of all, we have to thank the government and local authorities, for the way they reacted, prioritising safety of the population and promoting resilience. Barton Engineering responded to recent maritime supply chain disruption

with full transparency to customers and suppliers. Goods were rerouted to avoid high-risk areas and, despite significantly higher freight costs, purchasing and material planning continued uninterrupted to maintain stock availability at the Regional Service Centre in Jebel Ali.

Dependable freight partners were selected ahead of the lowest-cost options, warehouse operations continued throughout the disruption and regular leadership updates kept customers informed. The commitment and can-do attitude of our employees, together with close coordination across the supply chain, helped keep regional projects on track.

What next?

Barton Engineering remains committed to the Jebel Ali Free Zone model, which provides important operational advantages. Regional expansion plans mean the recruitment and training of new staff and the development of new services. Through this publication and the UK Department for Business and Trade, Barton also hopes to establish new distribution relationships with UK manufacturers and service providers.

We are also embarking on Project 130+, a digital transformation programme whose working title reflects the company's 130-year heritage with an AI-driven future. The initiative will combine Barton's knowledge and data with machine learning technologies to automate processes and deliver best-in-class experiences for customers and suppliers. ■

Trust the CARES Code

Every bar. Fully traceable. Fully certified.



Behind every **CARES Code** is a full digital record, traceable, transparent and independently verified. No speculation, no grey areas. Just evidence. **CARES** gives you confidence in every decision, from design to **as-built**.

The CARES mark

- Dot-dash-dot denotes CARES approved steel.
- Number of ribs between next two dots after CARES, certification mark, indicate country of origin (In this example, country, = five).
- Number of ribs between next two dots indicates steel mill number. (this example, mill, number, equals 25). - Dash denotes Grade 500.

5 ribs

2 ribs

5 ribs

Bar mark 5-25 is shown



Manufacturer's identification mark using CARES' product marking system

CARES Cloud App



Assured Steel Certification
Independent | Impartial | Trusted
carescertification.com



Your **Digital Golden Thread to Structural Safety**

The importance of CARES Product Certification in the UAE

Lee Brankley, CEO, CARES



Lee Brankley

Dynamism and pace may define the UAE's construction environment – but quality, safety, and compliance remain non-negotiable. From high-rise towers and infrastructure projects to industrial facilities and residential developments, reinforcing steel plays a critical role in structural integrity. Making sure this steel meets internationally recognised standards is vital – and CARES product certification now holds the key to regulatory requirements for the UAE construction industry.

CARES Middle East, part of the CARES Group, is one of the world's most respected independent certification bodies for reinforcing steel, originating in the UK more than forty years ago. Its certification covers both steel manufacturers and reinforcement fabricators, providing assurance that materials and processes meet stringent technical, quality, and traceability requirements. In the UAE, CARES certification is widely referenced by consultants, developers, and regulatory authorities as a benchmark for best practice.

Why CARES Certification matters

Reinforcing steel is a safety-critical product. Any failure related to incorrect material properties, improper fabrication, or poor quality control can have severe consequences, including structural defects, costly remedial work, or, in the worst cases, risks to life. CARES certification helps mitigate these risks by independently verifying reinforcing steel products are

manufactured and processed in accordance with recognised international standards.

CARES-approved manufacturers are regularly audited to ensure consistent steel chemistry, mechanical performance, and production control. CARES-approved fabricators are similarly assessed on cutting, bending, welding (where applicable), storage, traceability, and quality management systems. This dual certification approach, built on decades of experience, ensures that reinforcing steel remains compliant throughout the entire supply chain – from steelmaking to delivery on site.

Regulatory and specification expectations in the UAE

Many project specifications in the UAE explicitly require CARES-certified reinforcement, particularly on major developments and government-linked projects. Consultants often specify CARES approval to align with international codes, reduce technical risk, and ensure consistency across multinational supply chains. Using non-certified reinforcement can lead to project delays, rejection of materials, or costly re-fabrication if compliance cannot be demonstrated.

Under the UAE's world-leading regulation covering rebar and billets, the Emirates Conformity Assessment Scheme (ECAS) represents a minimum annual requirement for manufacturers; many however opt to secure the ISO-9001

compliant Emirates Quality Mark (EQM), valid for three years and supported by rigorous factory audits and manufacturers' quality management systems.

CARES acts as a Notified Body on behalf of the UAE's Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology (MoIAT) delivering secure, digital traceability solutions including dynamic QR codes and a permanent ID mark stamped on bar surfaces.

The UAE Regulation, following a Cabinet Resolution, sets a new standard for steel, with other global markets following these steps with interest. Importantly, CARES certification is not limited to the reinforcing steel itself. It also applies to processing that steel. This is a critical distinction, sometimes overlooked within the industry.

A critical warning to clients and contractors

In order to ensure compliance, project stakeholders must verify both of the following:

- 1| The reinforcing steel has been manufactured by a CARES-approved manufacturer, and;
- 2| The reinforcing steel has been cut, bent, and processed by a CARES-approved fabricator.

Having CARES-certified steel is not sufficient if it is subsequently processed by a non-approved fabricator. Unannounced inspections conducted by CARES' expert auditors have recently identified cases of non-compliance. These issues led to sanctions and serious commercial disruption. Once steel leaves the certified supply chain, the risk of compromised traceability and compliance rapidly accelerates. In such cases, reinforcement on site may no longer meet project or specification requirements – even if the original steel mill was approved.

As a consequence, clients, consultants and contractors are strongly advised to request valid CARES certificates; confirm their scope and expiry dates and verify that both the manufacturer and fabricator are currently approved for the relevant products and processes. This due diligence should be conducted before procurement and maintained throughout the project lifecycle.



Protecting projects, people, and reputations

In an increasingly regulated and quality-driven construction market, CARES product certification provides confidence, transparency, and protection. This, in turn, safeguards structural performance, supports compliance with specifications, and reduces risk across complex supply chains.

A key checklist point when delivering projects in the UAE is to double-check that the reinforcing steel is made by a CARES-approved manufacturer and processed by a CARES-approved fabricator. It is not only good practice, it's essential. Verifying certification at every stage helps protect investments, uphold safety standards, and maintains the reputation of all parties involved in delivering world-class construction. ■

Logistics: A sector on the move

The UAE is transforming its logistics sector into a high-tech, low-carbon, and multimodal engine for economic diversification, investing billions in AI-driven infrastructure and expanding trade connectivity across rail, air, and sea networks. This strategic overhaul leverages the country's central geographical position to build a resilient, efficient hub catering to growing e-commerce and global trade demands.

Geography remains a primary structural advantage. Located at a regional crossroads, the UAE functions as a principal gateway into the wider Gulf region, while also offering swift access to Middle Eastern, North African, and Asian markets. Boasting more than two-thirds of the world's population living within an eight-hour flight radius¹, this positioning has been reinforced through sustained investment in ports, airports, free zones, and rail infrastructure. The resulting highly integrated, multimodal logistics ecosystem provides the resilience and versatility needed to thrive in a multifaceted geopolitical environment.

Economic driver

Logistics and transport infrastructure support a substantial share of national economic activity. The UAE operates 12 commercial trading ports, featuring over 310 berths and an annual cargo handling capacity exceeding 80 million tonnes, excluding oil-dedicated facilities². UAE ports handle a majority of seaborne cargo entering the Gulf, with most imports destined for GCC states arriving via UAE seaports, reflecting the country's role as the region's primary maritime gateway.

Growth in logistics activity is increasingly driven by domestic demand as well as international trade flows. The UAE's e-commerce market is forecast to

reach £6.8 billion by the end of 2026, with online sales accounting for more than 12% of total retail, sharply increasing demand for fulfilment centres, last-mile delivery, and cold-chain capacity³. In Dubai, logistics and industrial uses account for around half of new warehouse demand, with limited supply keeping vacancy rates relatively low.

Maritime freight

Maritime logistics forms the backbone of UAE trade. Two of the UAE's container ports – Jebel Ali Port (Dubai) and Khalifa Port (Abu Dhabi) – rank among the world's top 50, with Jebel Ali consistently placed in the global top 10, underlining the scale and efficiency of the country's port infrastructure⁴.

As well as Jebel Ali, key seaports include Port Rashid and Al Hamriya Port in Dubai; Khor Fakkan Container Terminal and Port Khalid in Sharjah, the region's only natural deep-water port; Mina Saqr in Ras Al Khaimah; Fujairah Port on the Gulf of Oman; and Khalifa Port in Abu Dhabi.

Long-term capacity was dramatically extended through a landmark 50-year concession agreement signed with DP World to fundamentally expand both Fujairah and Dibba ports. This multi-decade initiative will construct advanced new cargo terminals, positioning the eastern coast as a vital strategic gateway.

Khalifa Port epitomises the move towards automation and industrial integration that is transforming the maritime logistics sector, in particular. The port operates as a semi-automated facility, serving more than 24 shipping lines and connecting to over 70 international destinations⁵. Its proximity to the Khalifa Economic Zones Abu Dhabi (KEZAD) enables seamless port-to-factory logistics, supporting manufacturing, metals, and food processing supply chains.

“Dubai’s Economic Agenda D33 identifies logistics, trade facilitation, and infrastructure scale-up as core pillars for doubling the size of the emirate’s economy over the next decade.”

Air transport

Air cargo is another major strength of the UAE’s logistics proposition, particularly for high-value, time-critical, and temperature-sensitive goods. The country’s airports provide rapid access to global markets, with integrated air-to-sea and air-to-land connectivity supporting re-export and distribution activity.

Dubai is the region’s leading air cargo hub. Emirates SkyCargo operates dedicated cargo infrastructure with a combined handling capacity of more than 2.3 million tonnes per year, supported by specialised facilities for pharmaceuticals, perishables, and high-value shipments⁶. The carrier’s pharma logistics offering includes dedicated handling protocols and certified infrastructure designed to support life-sciences supply chains.

Complementing this is Al Maktoum International Airport, also known as Dubai World Central (DWC), located at the heart of the Dubai South logistics district. DWC is currently operational for major cargo handling while its massive terminal expansion moves through active delivery phases to transform it into the world’s largest aviation hub. Linked directly to Jebel Ali Port via a dedicated bonded logistics corridor to enable seamless sea-to-air cargo transfers, the project is backed by a multi-billion pound expansion and is ultimately designed to handle up to 12 million tonnes of cargo annually, securing its position as a central pillar of the emirate’s long-term trade.

Sharjah Airport has also expanded its cargo footprint. In 2025, the airport handled over 204,323 tonnes of cargo, up from 195,909 tonnes in 2024 and 141,358 tonnes in 2023. Sea freight operations also recorded steady gains,

rising to 16,770 tonnes in 2025, compared with 14,035 tonnes in 2024 and 12,566 tonnes in 2023⁷.

Land haulage and rail

The completion of the UAE’s national rail network marks a significant structural upgrade to the logistics system. The Etihad Rail network connects all seven emirates and links major ports, industrial zones, and logistics hubs. Intercity passenger services are now fully operational, following a phased network rollout that commenced with the opening of the strategic Abu Dhabi-Fujairah corridor. The network is scaling up to fully connect 11 cities and regions across the UAE by the end of the 2026.

The rail network is designed to transport up to 60 million tonnes of freight annually, including construction materials, metals, petrochemicals, and general cargo⁸. By shifting freight from road to rail, the network is expected to reduce carbon emissions from road transport by around 21% by 2050, while easing congestion and improving cost efficiency across long-haul domestic routes⁹.

Policy framework and investment outlook

The logistics sector is central and vital to the UAE’s long-term development strategy. Dubai’s Economic Agenda D33 identifies logistics, trade facilitation, and infrastructure scale-up as core pillars for doubling the size of the emirate’s economy over the next decade. At the federal level, long-term transport and industrial strategies continue to prioritise connectivity, resilience, and supply-chain efficiency.

Public investment is a key driver. Dubai has approved a three-year government budget cycle for 2026-2028, with infrastructure representing the largest single area of expenditure¹⁰. The 2026 Dubai budget alone allocates £20 billion in spending, much of it directed towards transport, logistics corridors, and enabling infrastructure that supports aviation, maritime trade, and urban expansion¹¹.

From an investment perspective, logistics benefits from strong structural demand but remains exposed to global trade cycles, shipping volatility, and geopolitical risks. Nevertheless, the UAE's scale, policy continuity, and balance-sheet strength position it well to absorb external shocks. Despite recent regional uncertainties, the country remains one of the world's leading destinations for foreign investment, as reflected in UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2025, which ranks the UAE among the top 10 global destinations for foreign direct investment¹². ■



¹ <https://www.investuae.gov.ae/en>

² <https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/uae-blue-economy>

³ <https://www.wam.ae/en/article/hszrfm4m-uae-e-commerce-market-forecast-reach-92-billion>

⁴ <https://www.worldshipping.org/top-50-container-ports>

⁵ <https://www.agbi.com/logistics/2022/12/khalifa-port-expansion-ad-ports-group>

⁶ <https://www.skycargo.com/our-advantage/>

⁷ <https://gulfnews.com/business/aviation/sharjah-airport-passenger-traffic-jumps-14-to-194-million-in-2025-1.500415844>

⁸ <https://www.etihadrail.ae/en/network>

⁹ <https://www.etihadrail.ae/en/about/about-good-neighbour>

¹⁰ <https://dmo.dof.gov.ae/en/news-and-publications/latest-press-releases/mohammed-bin-rashid-approves-dubai-government-s-general-budget-cycle-for-2026-2028/>

¹¹ <https://www.dof.gov.ae/en-us/Media/Pages/AllNews.aspx?item=616>

¹² <https://unctad.org/publication/world-investment-report-2025>

Energy: Cleaner, greener and growing fast

The opportunities for UK businesses in the UAE's energy market are immense, particularly for those with products and services associated with renewables. The country may be among the world's 10 largest oil producers, but it was the first Gulf country to pledge to achieve net-zero domestic emissions by 2050. The UAE power market continues to experience robust growth, driven by population expansion, economic diversification, and the government's commitment to clean energy transition.

Following its successful hosting of COP28 in late 2023, the UAE government reinforced its climate leadership with an updated National Energy Strategy that sets ambitious targets: tripling renewable power generation capacity and achieving 30% clean energy in the mix by 2030¹. The strategy coordinates emirate-level initiatives while recognising the rapid development already underway in solar and nuclear power. To support these goals, the UAE has committed tens of billions of pounds in investment by the end of the decade².

Private sector opportunities

Achieving these objectives depends on working with the private sector and attracting foreign investment. The UAE's proven Independent Power Producer (IPP) model has become a template for clean energy deployment, drawing billions in international capital while maintaining government alignment with long-term climate goals³.

In Abu Dhabi, the Emirates Water and Electricity Company (EWEC) continues to drive an ambitious solar expansion programme. High-profile announcements have outlined plans for multiple gigawatt-scale projects over the coming years, with officials setting a goal to add at least one gigawatt of solar capacity annually throughout the decade⁴. Perhaps most significantly, work has begun in the Al Dhafra region on what will be the world's largest

combined solar power and battery storage facility – a groundbreaking project that addresses the critical challenge of renewable energy intermittency by providing round-the-clock clean power⁵.

In Dubai, the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park is the centrepiece of the emirate's renewable ambitions. With recent phases completed and additional capacity under development, the park is on track to become one of the world's largest single-site solar installations by 2030⁶. The project exemplifies how the UAE welcomes foreign expertise and investment, with the Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) partnering with Saudi Arabia's Acwa Power and China's Silk Road Fund on the project.

Beyond solar, the UAE is diversifying its clean energy portfolio, too. Dubai's waste-to-energy facility, claimed to be the world's largest and most efficient, now operates at full capacity⁷, while the Barakah nuclear power plant, in Abu Dhabi, is also fully operational, supplying around one-quarter of the UAE's electricity⁸. Looking ahead, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation and ADNOC are exploring advanced nuclear technologies, including small modular reactors, to further diversify the energy mix⁹.

Establishing operations

The UAE has streamlined its business environment significantly, making it increasingly attractive for international energy companies. This business-friendly framework continues to evolve, drawing in nearly 250,000 new companies across all sectors in 2025 alone¹⁰.

Investment opportunities span the energy value chain. Solar and energy storage are primary areas as the country scales deployment dramatically. Green hydrogen is a strategic priority, with the country positioning itself as a future global hub for production and export¹¹. Smart grid technologies,

waste-to-energy projects, and the full spectrum of energy services, from project development through operations and maintenance, all present opportunities for companies with relevant expertise.

Energy sector collaboration between the UK and UAE has deep roots. Partnerships focus on renewable energy development, technology transfer and joint ventures that combine British innovation with Emirati deployment capabilities and financial resources. Examples include ADNOC taking a 25% stake in BP's H2Teesside blue hydrogen project – ADNOC's first investment in the UK, Masdar signing an MoU for BP's HyGreen Teesside green hydrogen project¹², and Mubadala investing around £250 million in the Hornsea 3 wind farm off the Norfolk coast in May 2026. Once completed, Hornsea 3 will be the world's single largest offshore wind farm. These reciprocal partnerships also see BP working with ADNOC to evaluate new hydrogen projects in Abu Dhabi, demonstrating genuine two-way collaboration.

Road ahead

The UK has expertise and experience in every area of renewable energy, and UK businesses are well-placed to capitalise on opportunities in the UAE. With

diverse government programmes driving energy sector development forward, the industry is expected to go from strength to strength in coming years. Crucially, as both nations navigate the global energy transition, the shared imperative of strengthening energy security and grid resilience opens up a vital arena for bilateral knowledge exchange and joint technological innovation.

The combination of ambitious net-zero targets, substantial investment commitments, mature project delivery mechanisms and an increasingly business-friendly regulatory environment creates compelling opportunities for UK energy sector companies. Whether in project development, technology supply, operations, maintenance, or specialised services, businesses with relevant capabilities will find the UAE market both accessible and rewarding.

Success requires understanding the market's nuances, establishing strong local relationships, and committing to long-term engagement. For those prepared to make this investment, the UAE energy sector is one of the most attractive growth markets globally, offering a rare combination of scale, speed of execution, financial resources, and genuine government commitment to the energy transition. ■

¹ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/environment-and-energy/uae-energy-strategy-2050>

² <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/uae/policies-action/>

³ <https://www.ainvest.com/news/strategic-alliances-powering-uae-green-energy-revolution-unlocking-investment-opportunities-2025-2508/>

⁴ <https://solarquarter.com/2024/12/25/ewec-secures-four-new-sites-for-development-of-4-6gw-world-leading-renewable-energy-projects/>

⁵ <https://www.pkvknowhow.com/news/uae-solar-battery-project-stunning-2024-launch/>

⁶ <https://vocal.media/futurism/uae-solar-energy-market-renewable-expansion-policy-support-and-long-term-growth-outlook>

⁷ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/united-arab-emirates-renewable-energy-and-clean-energy-0>

⁸ <https://www.enec.gov.ae/barakah-plant/>

⁹ <https://world-nuclear.org/our-association/publications/world-nuclear-performance-report/united-arab-emirates-UAE-world-nuclear-performance-report>

¹⁰ <https://gulfnews.com/business/economy/how-uae-free-zone-businesses-can-operate-in-the-mainland-new-laws-explained-1.500401960>

¹¹ <https://www.imarcgroup.com/uae-renewable-energy-market>

¹² <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/abu-dhabis-adnoc-and-masdar-to-join-bps-uk-hydrogen-projects.html>

Civil Aviation & Aerospace: A globally connected hub for air transport

The UAE has developed one of the world's most integrated civil aviation and aerospace ecosystems, encompassing airlines, airports, maintenance and repair operations (MRO), manufacturing, training and emerging aviation technologies. Built on a combination of geographic advantage, sustained government investment and international partnerships, the sector plays a central role in the UAE's economic diversification strategy and offers significant opportunities for UK companies.

Structure, scale and strategic direction

Major domestic carriers Emirates and Etihad Airways are complemented by low-cost operators such as flydubai and Air Arabia. Together, these airlines operate some of the youngest fleets in their respective categories globally, with average fleet ages of 11.2 years (Emirates) and 8.6 years (Etihad), compared to the global average of 11.6 years, reinforcing the UAE's positioning as a major long-haul transit and destination market¹.

Regulation and institutional framework

The UAE has developed an internationally aligned regulatory framework, a critical factor in attracting foreign airlines, OEMs and service providers, with civil aviation regulated at the federal level by the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). The GCAA oversees safety, licensing, air navigation services and compliance with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards.

Aviation and aerospace businesses may be licensed through free zones, airport-based jurisdictions or onshore authorities, depending on the nature of the activity. Manufacturing and MRO operations typically require coordination between economic departments, the GCAA and customs

authorities, making early regulatory engagement essential at the very beginning for new market entrants.

Aerospace manufacturing and industrial clusters

Alongside civil aviation, aerospace manufacturing and advanced services are another important industrial pillar, particularly in Abu Dhabi, which has positioned itself as the UAE's primary centre for aerospace manufacturing and engine services. Mubadala-owned Strata Manufacturing is a Tier-1 supplier to leading global original equipment manufacturers, producing advanced composite aerostructures for major commercial aircraft programmes². Its development reflects a deliberate policy to embed UAE manufacturing into global aerospace supply chains, while building domestic technical capability and skilled employment.

Engine maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) is another core strength of the UAE aerospace ecosystem. Sanad, backed by Mubadala, provides advanced engine MRO services in partnership with OEMs such as Rolls-Royce and GE Aerospace³. Dubai complements this capability through Emirates Engineering, one of the largest independent MRO facilities in the world, supporting both the Emirates fleet and third-party airlines.

Industrial clustering has been actively supported through dedicated zones such as Nibras Al Ain Aerospace Park⁴ and Dubai South⁵, an urban development plan that aims to transform the area around Al Maktoum International Airport into a vast new city combining industrial, commercial and residential districts. These zones offer purpose-built infrastructure, integrated logistics connectivity and regulatory facilitation for aerospace and aviation businesses.

Fleet expansion by UAE airlines continues to generate downstream demand for MRO, training, digital aviation services and component manufacturing. At the same time, competition within the wider Middle East is intensifying, with Saudi Arabia and Turkey investing heavily in aviation infrastructure. For investors, this underscores the importance of differentiation, local partnerships and alignment with national capability-building objectives.

Business setup considerations

UK companies seeking to establish operations in the UAE aviation or aerospace sectors typically do so through onshore licensing, free-zone incorporation or partnership with a government-linked entity. Free zones such as Dubai South and Abu Dhabi's industrial zones offer 100% foreign ownership, streamlined customs processes and proximity to airports and logistics hubs.

Aviation-specific activities require certification from the GCAA, while manufacturing and MRO operations are subject to both aviation and industrial regulatory approvals. Incentives may include customs exemptions, purpose-built facilities, and in some cases, co-investment by government-backed entities.

Cross-border implications for UK firms

The UK-UAE relationship provides a strong foundation for cross-border aviation and aerospace collaboration, not least through a double-taxation agreement that provides certainty on corporate taxation, withholding taxes and the repatriation of profits. Beyond taxation, the UAE's long-standing use of UK and EASA-aligned technical standards, professional qualifications and training frameworks reduces barriers to entry for UK aerospace engineers, consultants and training providers. A number of UK firms are already active in the UAE aerospace sector, notably in MRO support (Rolls-Royce, Safran), advanced manufacturing supply chains (GKN Aerospace), and defence aerospace partnerships (BAE Systems).



Civil aviation and aerospace are likely to remain central to the UAE's economic development over the coming decade. Passenger demand, cargo volumes and long-haul connectivity will sustain investment in airlines and airports, while aerospace manufacturing and MRO are expected to deepen as the UAE seeks greater self-reliance and higher-value industrial activity.

For UK businesses, the opportunity lies not only in market scale but in partnership: contributing expertise, technology and skills that align with the UAE's ambition to remain a leading global aviation hub while building a resilient, knowledge-based economy. ■

¹ <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/chart-of-the-week-8-sep/>

² <https://www.mediaoffice.abudhabi/en/economy/strata-part-of-mubadala-produces-and-delivers-100000-aerostructure-components/>

³ <https://www.mubadala.com/en/news/abu-dhabis-sanad-aerotech-and-rolls-royce-announce-landmark>

⁴ <https://www.nibrasalain.com/>

⁵ <https://www.aerotime.aero/articles/we-are-building-the-aviation-capital-for-the-world-ceo-of-mbrah-dubai-south>

Tourism: A new era of growth in the UAE

The UAE's focus on the tourism industry as a priority growth driver reflects its commitment to economic diversification, global connectivity and international engagement. Over the past decade, the sector has evolved from a primarily volume-driven growth story into a more sophisticated visitor economy, shaped by coordinated planning, institutional maturity and sustained investment in quality and resilience.

Over the past five years, the UAE has demonstrated an ability to consolidate its tourism proposition across leisure, business, events and long-stay segments. Tourism is now widely treated by policymakers as fundamental to economic growth, with implications for infrastructure planning, labour markets and inward investment.

While Dubai is the country's principal international gateway, tourism development is increasingly distributed across the country as a whole. Each emirate plays a defined role within a broader national ecosystem, reinforcing resilience and broadening the range of commercial and investment opportunities. This long-term commitment has helped the country's tourism sector remain resilient through changing global conditions and periods of regional uncertainty.

From expansion to managed scale

Historically, the UAE's tourism success has been underpinned by scale and accessibility. Large-scale investment in aviation capacity, hospitality infrastructure and destination branding enabled the country to compete rapidly with established global destinations. This model remains important and continues to deliver strong results, particularly in Dubai.

The current phase of development reflects a nuanced policy stance. Rather than prioritising growth in visitor numbers alone, authorities are increasingly

focused on how tourism growth is managed. Greater emphasis is placed on visitor mix, length of stay, seasonality, destination quality and experience depth, alongside continued expansion of accommodation and attractions.

Visa and residency reforms have supported this shift. Long-stay visas, remote-working permits and expanded residency pathways have blurred traditional distinctions between tourism, business travel and temporary residence. In practice, this has strengthened tourism's links with real estate, professional services, education and the wider consumer economy, reinforcing its role as a cross-cutting growth enabler.

Diversified proposition

The UAE's tourism model is characterised by diversity, both geographically and by product type. Dubai's proposition is centred on global leisure and business tourism, major events, retail and entertainment, supported by extensive air connectivity and a large hotel portfolio. Its scale allows it to compete directly with the world's leading city destinations, while ongoing investment in culture, gastronomy and neighbourhood experiences continues to broaden its appeal.

In comparison, Abu Dhabi's strategy is focused on culture, premium attractions and international sporting events, underpinned by investment in museums, heritage assets and waterfront development. This approach aims to capture higher-value segments and to appeal to visitors seeking depth, authenticity and cultural engagement.

Beyond the two largest markets, tourism development is increasingly multi-polar. Sharjah's focus on culture, education and heritage tourism, and Fujairah's coastal and historical assets all contribute to a more balanced national tourism ecosystem. Ajman and Umm Al Quwain add

family-oriented and diverse nature-based offerings that complement the national mix. Fast-developing Ras Al Khaimah, meanwhile, has increasingly differentiated itself through a tourism strategy centred on nature, wellness and adventure experiences.

This decentralised structure reduces reliance on any single destination or visitor segment and broadens the range of investable tourism assets, from large-scale resorts and attractions to boutique hotels, eco-tourism and experiential offerings.

Strategy, governance and policy alignment

This evolution is being driven by the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031, which provides a federal framework for tourism development across all seven emirates. The strategy emphasises coordination rather than uniformity, aligning infrastructure investment, regulation, skills development, sustainability standards and digital systems under a shared national vision¹.

Institutional governance has been strengthened in parallel. The establishment of the Emirates Tourism Council has improved coordination between federal and emirate-level authorities, supporting greater consistency in regulation, clearer investor engagement and improved data sharing. Policy discussion has increasingly centred on system-level capabilities, including tourism data quality, performance measurement and sustainability governance, signalling a maturing approach to sector management².

Sustainability and resilience

Sustainability has shifted from a supporting role to become an influential theme of tourism policy and destination management. Environmental considerations, resource efficiency and cultural preservation are increasingly embedded in planning frameworks, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where destination management programmes seek to balance long-term regional growth with liveability.

Initiatives focused on waste reduction, energy efficiency and responsible tourism practices are designed to contribute to visitor experience and long-term competitiveness, as well as being positive environmental measures in their own right. This reflects a growing recognition that destination quality, authenticity and environmental stewardship are essential to maintaining global appeal and attracting investment³.

Over time, this emphasis is also expected to support convergence with international sustainability standards, an increasingly important consideration for global hotel operators, event organisers and long-term investors.

Investment landscape

For investors and international partners, the UAE tourism sector offers a combination of policy clarity, demonstrated demand and government commitment. While hospitality remains the most visible segment, opportunities increasingly extend across attractions, cultural infrastructure, events venues, eco-tourism, destination services and tourism-linked real estate. Tourism's integration with aviation, logistics, real estate and financial services further enhances its investment appeal.

While regional uncertainty can affect sentiment in the short term, the UAE's diversified source markets, strong international aviation links and reputation for safety and stability have maintained confidence among visitors, airlines and investors, enabling it to navigate periods of disruption effectively. Continued investment in infrastructure, attractions and destination quality reflects long-term confidence in the sector's prospects.

For international businesses and investors, the UAE continues to view tourism as a strategic pillar of economic diversification and is committed to maintaining its position as one of the world's most open, connected and future-focused visitor economies. ■

¹ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/tourism/uae-tourism-strategy-2031>

² <https://www.moet.gov.ae/en/-/emirates-tourism-council-reviews-performance-of-the-sector-and-discusses-mechanisms-for-utilizing-data-to-support-tourism-growth-and-sustainability>

³ <https://www.dubaidet.gov.ae/en/dubai-can>



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Integrated digital healthcare: Solving today's challenges, enabling tomorrow's growth

The Aceso Group

Healthcare systems in the United Arab Emirates have undergone rapid digital transformation over the past decade, driven by ambitious national strategies led by entities such as the Ministry of Health. Despite this progress, significant structural and operational challenges remain, limiting the full potential of a truly integrated, patient-centric healthcare ecosystem.

One of the most pressing issues is the fragmentation of patient data across healthcare providers. Patients in the UAE often receive care from multiple public and private institutions, each operating its own electronic medical record system. As a result, clinical information is frequently siloed, making it difficult for physicians to access a complete and longitudinal view of a patient's medical history. This fragmentation can lead to duplicated tests, delayed diagnoses, and suboptimal treatment decisions.

At the same time, the UAE faces a growing burden of chronic diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular conditions, and obesity-related illnesses. These conditions require long-term management, continuous monitoring, and coordinated care across multiple providers. Without integrated digital systems, managing chronic diseases becomes more complex and costly. The demand for healthcare services continues to rise, placing additional strain on providers and highlighting the need for scalable, technology-enabled solutions that support preventive care and early intervention.

The high cost of care delivery further compounds these challenges. Inefficiencies caused by fragmented systems, redundant procedures, and manual administrative processes combine to contribute to escalating healthcare expenditures.

Finally, patient experience gaps persist in digital healthcare journeys. Although many providers offer digital touchpoints such as appointment booking, teleconsultations, and mobile applications, these services are often disconnected from one another. Patients may encounter inconsistent interfaces, repeated data entry requirements, and limited continuity between online and in-person care. In an era where consumers expect seamless digital experiences comparable to those offered by other industries, these shortcomings can lead to reduced engagement and satisfaction.

There is an increasing demand for healthcare particularly in the areas of:

- Telehealth
- Remote monitoring
- AI diagnostics

The Aceso Group has pioneered easy access to remote health and the ability to monitor acute and chronic conditions using AI platforms.

A uniform Aceso system allows:

- Virtual care & telemedicine
- Patient engagement tools
- Digital therapeutics integration

For healthcare providers, we are able to provide AI-powered insights for healthcare organisations.

We have been fortunate to have been working across the Middle East with providers who want to enhance their existing facilities but also expand their current healthcare products. ■

Healthcare & Life Sciences: Innovation, investment and opportunity

The UAE is on track to achieve its ambition to become a global life sciences hub. The market was valued at around £27 billion in 2024 and projected to reach £39 billion by 2029¹, driven by a bold strategy, strong government commitment, an ageing population and rapid growth in key sub-sectors.

Building on decades of healthcare development, the country has created one of the region's most sophisticated systems. Life expectancy has risen to over 83 years, up seven years since 2000², reflecting improvements in care. Dubai and Abu Dhabi rank among the world's top medical tourism destinations, attracting tens of thousands of international patients annually seeking world-class treatment at competitive costs.

Strategic vision and investment

Abu Dhabi launched its Healthcare Life Sciences Vision and Strategy in 2023, targeting £23 billion in additional economic activity by enhancing the life sciences sector. The strategy aims to launch 290 biotech startups, increase active clinical trials to over 600, establish at least 24 new life sciences manufacturing sites, and create 22,000 new jobs³. This framework leverages Abu Dhabi's strengths in data, AI and digital transformation to address local and global health priorities.

Healthcare delivery represents the largest share of the ecosystem at 47% of the overall market, split between inpatient and outpatient services, while national health insurance accounts for 20%. Medical devices and supplies show robust growth, with 11% annual expansion expected through 2029⁴.

Private sector growth

Private healthcare spending growth significantly outpaces government expenditure, creating opportunities for international investors. Medical tourism is also driving growth, with some emirates reporting consistent year-over-year increases in demand for specialised healthcare professionals.

King's College Hospital Dubai, a JCI-accredited facility brought to the Emirates through partnership with Al Tayer Group, Dubai Investments, and UK-based

Ashmore Group, exemplifies British healthcare expansion. The 100-bed facility in Dubai Hills, with plans to expand to 200 beds, maintains direct integration with King's College Hospital London – a 175-year-old teaching hospital recognised for clinical excellence.

Digital health and technology integration

The UAE leads the digital health revolution in the region, integrating AI-powered diagnostics, blockchain-based medical records, and IoT-enabled remote monitoring. Almost universal internet penetration is driving growth in telehealth services, creating opportunities for digital platforms. Government initiatives including smart health strategies and universal digital access programmes are accelerating this transformation, positioning the Emirates as a global showcase for technology-driven healthcare.

Home healthcare is a dynamic growth segment, expanding rapidly as compulsory national health insurance extends coverage to millions of previously uninsured workers. This regulatory shift creates demand for home-based therapeutic services, diagnostic capabilities, and mobility care solutions⁵.

Genomics and precision medicine

The UAE is building one of the world's largest genomic databases through the Emirati Genome Programme, which holds 800,000 human samples⁶. Abu Dhabi's Electronic Medical Record System encompasses 2.6 million members, facilitating clinical trial participant identification⁷. In 2025, the UAE made genetic screening mandatory for all Emiratis in premarital exams and approved four nationwide screening programmes for newborns, adults, fertility, and cardiovascular diseases.

This investment in genomics creates opportunities for companies specialising in gene therapy, precision medicine, and diagnostic technologies. Oxford Nanopore Technologies, for example, is a strategic sequencing partner for the Emirati Genome Programme. The Oxford-based company provides the

PromethION platform, enabling population-scale DNA sequencing essential to mapping the Emirati reference genome. In March 2025, the company expanded its collaboration with Dubai Health to advance genetic screening services, deploying adaptive sampling technology to support the UAE's mandatory premarital screening programme launched in January 2025⁸.

Pharmaceuticals and manufacturing

The pharmaceutical market is positioned for expansion, with Dubai targeting £1.8 billion in pharmaceutical research and manufacturing investment. The regulatory environment offers advantages for international companies: rapid approval processes see UAE regulatory approvals ranking third globally for certain products⁹. The medical device market was projected to reach approximately £2.5 billion by the end of 2025, with mid-to-high single-digit growth projected through the remainder of the decade¹⁰.

The Government has launched initiatives aimed at attracting pharmaceutical manufacturing, alongside emerging biosimilars and biologics capabilities. The creation of the Emirates Drug Establishment to consolidate drug regulation demonstrates the country's commitment to a comprehensive life sciences ecosystem. R&D and manufacturing partnerships with companies including AstraZeneca, GSK, and Novartis are reinforcing the UAE's position as a leading regional hub for advanced pharmaceutical production and innovation.

Dynamic business environment

The UAE's business environment for healthcare companies mirrors advantages found in other sectors: 100% foreign ownership in free zones, zero corporate tax on qualifying income, streamlined licensing, and the ability

for free zone companies to operate on the mainland. Healthcare-specific free zones offer additional incentives, including proximity to hospitals, research facilities, and regulatory bodies.

For clinical services and medical technology companies, Dubai Healthcare City and similar developments provide infrastructure including hospitals, clinics, research facilities, and regulatory support under a single umbrella. Product registration is handled by distributors with active licenses through Dubai and Abu Dhabi municipality portals, making local partnership essential for market entry.

Bright futures

Although the UAE is not insulated from geopolitical risk, its healthcare strategy is increasingly aligned with capabilities that matter most in uncertain conditions: local manufacturing, advanced diagnostics, digital health infrastructure, genomics, and reliable regional distribution. The market remains open for robust business, with demand continuing for trusted expertise, technology and investment that can help build a more resilient healthcare ecosystem.

The UK has world-class expertise across all healthcare domains, from the NHS's operational excellence to Britain's innovative medical technology sector and renowned academic institutions. As such, UK businesses are exceptionally well-positioned to capitalise on UAE opportunities. Whether in medical technology supply, pharmaceutical research and manufacturing, clinical trial operations, healthcare facility management, or specialised medical services, companies with relevant capabilities will find the UAE market accessible and rewarding. ■

¹ <https://healthcareasiamagazine.com/healthcare/news/uaes-healthcare-ecosystem-be-valued-50b-fy2029>

² <https://www.worldeconomics.com/Demographics/Life-Expectancy/United%20Arab%20Emirates.aspx>

³ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/united-arab-emirates-healthcare-and-life-science>

⁴ <https://www.consultancy-me.com/news/9842/uaes-healthcare-ecosystem-to-hit-50-billion-by-2029-says-praxis>

⁵ <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/market-entry-home-healthcare-industry-in-uae>

⁶ <https://www.doh.gov.ae/en/news/doh-m42-purehealth-and-gemmabio-therapeutics-plan-to-advance-gene-therapies->

⁷ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/united-arab-emirates-healthcare-and-life-science>

⁸ <https://nanoporetech.com/news/oxford-nanopore-technologies-and-dubai-health-to-collaborate-on-genetic-screening>

⁹ <https://www.doh.gov.ae/en/news/doh-inks-partnership-with-gsk-to-establish-regional-vaccine-distribution-hub-in-abu-dhabi>

¹⁰ <https://www.middleeastbriefing.com/news/the-uaes-healthcare-market-business-and-investment-opportunities/>

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Creating sustainable collaborations across education, research and innovation

The University of Manchester: 1824-2026

It can take generations to build a global reputation. More than 200 years after its foundation, The University of Manchester is now recognised globally for its pioneering research, outstanding teaching and learning, and commitment to social responsibility.

Today, The University of Manchester is ranked among the world's top 50 universities and one of the world's leading universities for impact towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the world's call to action on the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing humanity and the natural world. As one of the world's leading research institutions and the UK's first university to have social responsibility as a core goal, The University of Manchester is playing a leading role in tackling the SDGs, producing 4% of the UK's research across the 17 SDGs and has committed to a zero-carbon campus by 2038. The University is ranked 1st in world in the Times Higher Education Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026.

The University is a member of the prestigious Russell Group and is one of the UK's largest single-site universities with more than 12,000 staff and over 44,000 students on campus – including more than 10,000 international students – and over 550,000 graduates in 190 countries.

As a transnational education provider, the University's mission focuses on three pillars -teaching/learning, research and social responsibility - with the aim of making a positive impact wherever the University is present across the world, including in the UAE.

The University of Manchester is consistently ranked among the world's elite institutions for graduate employability and world-class research

across a diverse range of fields including cancer, advanced materials, global inequalities, energy and industrial biotechnology. 26 Nobel laureates have either worked or studied at The University of Manchester.

Bringing Manchester to the Middle East

The University of Manchester – Dubai represents the University in the Middle East, a region which has a growing profile across the University. As of 2025, the branch is licensed by The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and programmes are accredited by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) in the UAE. This means the programmes are both globally and locally recognised, giving students even more potential career development opportunities, and eligibility for government and private sector roles in the UAE and GCC. With this milestone, the branch continues to deliver world-class, business focused education, strengthening connections with the University's research and teaching excellence while shaping future leaders in the region.

In 2025, the Middle East branch also announced the appointment of its first UAE-based teaching faculty and academic leads in key areas. Dr. Nada Jammoul Messaikeh has been appointed to the role of Senior Lecturer & Associate Director - Research. Dr. Amin El-Kholy has been appointed Senior Lecturer & Associate Director - Teaching & Learning.

The teaching impact of the Middle East branch is clear, having supported over 3,700 students and graduated more than 2,600 since 2006. The branch offers part-time, flexible learning master's programmes: the flagship award-winning MBA programme, MSc Financial Management, and multi award-winning MA

Educational Leadership in Practice programme. All these programmes are led by visiting Manchester faculty and tailored to the needs of working professionals.

The portfolio also includes a complementary range of Executive Education courses that are offered through the Middle East branch and delivered at the Manchester Campus. These programmes are tailored to support professionals at every stage of their leadership journey, from mastering the complexities of major project delivery and navigating data-driven decision-making, to strengthening core leadership capabilities and driving digital transformation.

The branch actively supports the University's three pillars of teaching/learning, research, and social responsibility and works on a range of activities with social responsibility partners in the UAE and the region, including Dubai Cares, Emirates Marine Environmental Group, Emirates Red Crescent, DGrade, Children's Cancer Hospital Egypt 57357, and Oman National Autism Center.

Collaborations have been forged with UAE government and non-government organisations, UK higher education and other organisations, working on projects ranging from the Manchester Innovation Award for Emiratis, research into the opportunities for regional executive education, research into perceptions of creativity and innovation in Dubai Government, and a Covid-19 Recovery Report on the UAE produced in collaboration with Oxford Business Group.

The branch has also established a network of collaborations across the region, through its Strategic Talent Partnerships with local and international companies and professional bodies, and high-profile local organisations. A Strategic Talent Partnership with The University of Manchester - Dubai is a non-binding agreement that gives organisations access to expert resources and talent to help future-proof success. Some of the branch's current Strategic Talent Partners include: Forbes Middle East, General Motors, etc, Oracle, and Alcatel Lucent.



Today, the Middle East branch is the largest and most diverse (nationality, culture, and gender) of the University's five global locations in key cities around the world (comprising Manchester, Dubai, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore) and attracts and supports large numbers of highly qualified students. All regional students start a lifelong relationship with the University and join the Middle East alumni community of more than 5,500 and the global alumni community of half a million.

The branch enrolls around 200 new students each year across all its programmes of which approximately 30% or more are female executives and over 45% of all students reside in the UAE with a third being senior leaders.

The branch aims to create an impact by attracting, supporting, engaging, retaining, and expanding a community of quality students, alumni, staff, and corporate and social responsibility partners, who actively contribute to positive change within the community and uphold The University of Manchester's mission.

“ Today, the Middle East branch is the largest and most diverse (nationality, culture and gender) of the University's five global locations in key cities around the world. ”

Academic and innovation collaboration with Manchester

Manchester's collaborative model means the University focuses partnering with organisations and universities within the Middle East region, actively supported by the branch in Dubai.

There is a very clear affinity between The University of Manchester and the UAE, which has ambitions to become a knowledge society and universities can support this through research and innovation.

The University's new innovation district (ID Manchester) represents a GBP 1.5 billion investment commitment to attract innovative companies and strong entrepreneurs as partners in innovation. Manchester's global reputation and scale of activities are built on the University's innovation and research impact. Collaboration with the UAE in areas of shared importance, such as environmental sustainability and clean water, AI and technology, look extremely promising.

The University already enjoys strong links with the UAE, such as the partnership on Graphene, the revolutionary advanced material first isolated by researchers (later recognised with a Nobel Prize) at the University in 2005 and now an icon of UK innovation.

Today, there is the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre (supported by Masdar) and the Masdar Institute, on campus in Manchester. There is also a growing relationship with Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi around the

applications and commercial development of this potentially world-changing innovation. This international partnership will further accelerate Abu Dhabi's and Manchester's world-leading research and innovation into Graphene.

A spin-out company founded by a graduate from the University's Graphene innovation ecosystem has formed an international partnership to commercialise Graphene and develop large-scale manufacture. Graphene Innovations Manchester Ltd (GIM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Quazar Investment Company to create a new company in the UAE.

The University of Manchester is harnessing all the knowledge acquired at the heart of the world's first industrialised city to partner with the UAE, as it creates one of the world's great innovation hubs of the 21st century.

Looking ahead

The University's Middle East branch in Dubai is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, marking its development into the University's largest international location and transformation into a flexible learning hub for working professionals across the region. It is celebrating the milestones, including the inaugural 'Forbes Middle East Best MBA award in 2019. As the University embarks on its new 10-year global strategy, the branch is set to play an increasingly important role in connecting the University to research, learning and social responsibility opportunities in the region. It's all part of bringing the best from Manchester for the Middle East. ■

Education: A growing market shaped by policy and partnership

Education plays a central role in the UAE's economic and social development agenda. As the country advances towards its 'We the UAE 2031' vision of a more diversified, knowledge-based economy¹, education is seen not only as a public good, but also a strategic growth sector that underpins long-term competitiveness, productivity and innovation.

This is reinforced by positive demographic and economic trends and has led to greater demand for education at all levels, from early years and K-12 schooling through to higher education, professional training and lifelong learning. At the same time, despite recent geopolitical volatility, the macroeconomic environment remains supportive. Within this context, education is seen as both a beneficiary of economic growth and a driver of future productivity and skills development.

Educated growth

Government policy provides a clear signal of long-term commitment. Dubai's 2026-28 budget allocates approximately 28% of total planned expenditure to social development, including education, health and housing². This allocation confirms that education remains a core priority within government spending plans, offering a high degree of medium-term visibility for investors and operators in the sector.

Against this backdrop, the education market itself continues to expand. Independent market assessments project that the UAE education sector will grow by more than £4.1 billion between 2026 and 2030³, driven by rising enrolments, increased private-sector participation and accelerating adoption

of digital and blended learning models. Policy initiatives at emirate level further reinforce this growth trajectory. In Dubai, the Education Strategy 2033 includes plans to expand capacity by delivering 60 new affordable schools by 2033⁴, creating approximately 120,000 additional student places.

Size and structure

The structure of the market reflects the UAE's long-standing openness to private provision and international participation. Private operators dominate the K-12 segment, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where demand is strongest. In Dubai alone, private school enrolments rose by around 6% in 2024-2025⁵, as population growth and housing development feed into higher student numbers. International curricula are a defining feature of this landscape. British, American and International Baccalaureate programmes are among the most sought-after, with English firmly established as the principal language of education across much of the private system. This reflects both parental preferences and government objectives to ensure graduates are well prepared for higher education and employment in an increasingly globalised economy.

Oversight of the UAE's education sector is robust and multi-layered, combining federal policy direction with emirate-level regulation and inspection. While the Ministry of Education sets the overall framework, local authorities are responsible for licensing, quality assurance and school inspections. In Dubai, this role is performed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), while in Abu Dhabi it is carried out by the Department of Education

and Knowledge (ADEK), and in Sharjah by the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA). For international providers, including those from the UK, this framework offers a clear and predictable regulatory environment, albeit one that demands careful compliance and local engagement.

One of the most significant developments in the sector has been the normalisation of public-private partnership models. In Abu Dhabi, charter schools, which are publicly funded but privately operated, have become an established component of the education system. These schools typically deliver English-medium curricula under long-term contracts, combining public funding with private-sector management and expertise. Dubai has adopted a similar approach through its Ajyal (Generation) Schools initiative, under which private operators manage selected public schools while the government continues to fund tuition and operating costs⁶. Together, these models reflect a broader policy shift towards outcomes-based delivery and create clear entry points for experienced international education groups, including UK school operators and education management companies.

Aiming higher

Higher education shows a similar growth story. The UAE continues to position itself as a regional hub for transnational education, attracting students from across the Gulf, South Asia and Africa. At the federal level, this expansion is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR), which maintains rigorous national standards for institutional licensing and degree accreditation. Enrolment growth has been sustained through the 2020s, supported by the expansion of international branch campuses and specialist postgraduate programmes. Dubai's dedicated education clusters, such as Dubai International Academic City, have played

a central role in this strategy, offering an enabling environment for foreign universities through 100% foreign ownership, streamlined licensing and purpose-built infrastructure⁷. UK universities and professional bodies remain particularly prominent within this ecosystem, benefiting from strong brand recognition and regulatory familiarity.

From an investment perspective, the economic climate remains highly favourable. In 2025, the UAE government approved an updated National Investment Strategy aimed at significantly increasing foreign direct investment, with education identified as a priority sector due to its strong economic impact and alignment with national skills objectives⁸. At the same time, investors must navigate rising operating costs, particularly for real estate and skilled teaching staff, as well as increasing competition in mature sub-segments of the market. Nevertheless, strong underlying demand and continued government support mitigate many of these risks.

Prospects for UK investors

For UK organisations, the cross-border framework further strengthens the case for engagement. The UK-UAE Double Taxation Agreement provides protection against double taxation on corporate profits, income and capital gains, enshrining clarity and certainty for UK institutions operating in the UAE. Ongoing dialogue between the UK and Gulf states on trade and investment, including education and professional services, is expected to deepen this relationship further over time.

For UK education providers, investors and service firms, the UAE's combination of scale, policy clarity and openness to international partnership look to cement its position as one of the most dynamic education markets globally as the decade progresses. ■

¹ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/innovation-and-future-shaping/we-the-uae-2031-vision>

² <https://www.agbi.com/economy/2025/11/dubai-approves-2026-28-budget-spend-at-84bn>

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⁵ <https://web.khda.gov.ae/en/Resources/Publications/Papers-and-Statistics/Dubai-private-school-landscape-2024-2025>

⁶ <https://gulfnews.com/uae/education/uae-launches-free-ajyal-schools-supervised-by-top-educators-1.88404118>

⁷ <https://sgaworld.ae/dubai-international-academic-city-the-complete-guide>

⁸ <https://itiqmbh.eu/insight-details/26>



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The global vision behind QE schools

Caroline Pendleton-Nash, CEO, Queen Elizabeth's Global Schools



Caroline Pendleton-Nash

What is the story behind GEDU Global Education?

GEDU Global Education is a UK-registered group of 15 education institutions in 16 countries, so has strong track record of establishing, operating and scaling education brands in the UK and internationally. Across its portfolio, GEDU supports learners from K12 through degrees and Master's, to PhDs and DBAs, plus apprenticeships and language schools. GEDU had a clear purpose: changing lives through education and improving living standards and access to learning worldwide.

Queen Elizabeth's Global Schools brings that delivery expertise into K to 12 education, partnering with our founding school, Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet, whose academic heritage, standards and values are exceptionally strong. The ambition is simple and long-term: to build schools that combine rigorous learning with outstanding pastoral care, character development and meaningful preparation for the future.

How did GEDU establish a partnership with Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet?

The partnership was formed through the Queen Elizabeth's Global Schools initiative, grounded in a mutual understanding of the transformative power of education and the responsibility it carries. It is built upon shared priorities: academic excellence, strong character formation, and an education that prepares young people to thrive in a changing world.

QE Barnet has selected GEDU as its experienced partner to support the establishment and operation of affiliated schools

overseas. The approach is careful and considered, protecting the founding school's ethos and standards while ensuring each international campus is thoughtfully led, locally responsive and designed to deliver consistently high outcomes.

Could you describe the history and strengths of QE School, Barnet?

Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet has served its community since its foundation in 1573 by Royal Charter. It is widely respected for a culture of scholarship, high expectations and intellectual independence.

Its strengths extend beyond academic rigour. QE Barnet is known for developing well-rounded young people through a rich co-curricular life, strong pastoral structures, and a clear values base that encourages students to contribute positively to society. That combination of tradition and ambition is at the heart of what makes a QE education distinctive.

Why is a UK state school such as QE Barnet looking to expand internationally?

The purpose is to share a proven educational ethos more widely, while building a global Elizabethan community rooted in the founding school's values and standards.

Through Queen Elizabeth's Global Schools, QE Barnet is extending its influence in a way that is both pioneering and responsible: the overseas schools will operate as independent campuses, with their own leadership and staff, while drawing inspiration from the founding school's heritage and expectations. Over time, the international network also creates opportunities for collaboration, professional exchange and a broader community for students and alumni.

“ The ambition is simple and long-term: to build schools that combine rigorous learning with outstanding pastoral care, character development and meaningful preparation for the future. ”

What is the appeal of the National Curriculum for England to international students?

The National Curriculum for England is highly regarded for its clear progression, academic breadth and strong foundations in core subjects. It promotes deep understanding, critical thinking and confident communication, while offering a well-established pathway to globally recognised qualifications such as IGCSEs and A Levels.

For many families, it provides reassurance and consistency: clear standards, trusted assessment structures, and strong preparation for leading universities worldwide. In a modern international setting, it also supports the development of wider skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and independence.

Describe the key features of QE Dubai Sports City

Queen Elizabeth's School, Dubai Sports City is a co-educational British school, opening for Academic Year 2026–27, initially from Nursery to Year 8, with phased growth through to Sixth Form.

Our mission is to nurture young people who are confident, able and responsible, prepared to lead happy, fulfilled adult lives and make a positive contribution to others. This is brought to life through QE signature programmes:

- QE House: belonging, leadership and service.
- QE Flourish: character and enrichment through Care, Challenge, Compete and Create.
- QE Futures: future readiness through digital literacy, entrepreneurship, guidance and global perspectives.

- QE Connect: a global alumni network that fosters lifelong connections, mentorship, collaboration and a lasting sense of belonging.

Pastoral care is a cornerstone of school life, underpinned by strong wellbeing provision.

Given its location, how much focus will there be on sport in the new Dubai school?

Sport will be a visible and meaningful part of school life, shaped by our location and our belief in the role of physical education in developing character. Our campus sits within Dubai Sports City, with access to outstanding facilities nearby, including the ISD Dubai Sports City multi-sport complex. This allows us to offer high-quality PE alongside genuine opportunities for training, fixtures and enrichment. Importantly, our approach is inclusive: we want every student to participate, improve and enjoy sport, while also supporting high-potential athletes to progress.

How do you see the potential for collaboration between the new school and its parent in Barnet?

Collaboration will be purposeful and values-led. We see strong potential for professional dialogue between teams, sharing best practice in teaching, learning and pastoral care, and maintaining a clear sense of what “QE standards” look like in daily school life.

Over time, we also expect collaboration to grow through wider community connections: enriching speaker programmes, mentorship and alumni engagement, and opportunities that broaden horizons for students e.g. shared international trips. The intention is that the relationship strengthens both schools, while giving families in Dubai access to a distinctive QE education.

Could you explain the philosophy behind QE Flourish?

QE Flourish reflects a simple belief: education should extend beyond academic outcomes. It is our signature enrichment programme, designed to ignite passions, develop character and help every student discover what they can become.

Through QE Flourish, students engage in structured opportunities that build confidence, independence and purpose, from service and leadership to creative expression, competition and challenge. It is not an “extra”. It is a core part of how we develop well-rounded young people who are prepared to contribute, lead and thrive.

Can you describe what you call the four Cs – care, challenge, compete, create?

The four Cs are the framework that brings QE Flourish to life:

- Care: service, mentoring and community contribution that builds empathy and responsibility.
- Challenge: intellectual stretch and personal growth through ambitious experiences and leadership opportunities.
- Compete: sport and competition that develops resilience, teamwork and healthy ambition.
- Create: the arts and creative pursuits that build expression, imagination and confidence.

Together, they develop the habits and strengths students need for life: character, capability and a clear sense of purpose.



How will QE Futures prepare students for life after school?

QE Futures is our future-readiness programme, designed to prepare students for the next stage with confidence, direction and real-world awareness. It begins early and develops progressively, rather than starting at the end of school.

Students build skills that matter, digital literacy, communication, leadership, entrepreneurship and global citizenship. They benefit from structured guidance, exposure to the world of work, and engagement with universities and industry. Over time, students build a personal portfolio that helps them recognise strengths, make informed choices and step into adulthood ready to thrive. ■



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BEAUTY THROUGH INGENUITY

Grimshaw is an international architecture practice that sits at the intersection of city evolution - where intelligent infrastructure is essential to a thriving future and buildings must be inherently healthy and sustainable.

As a place of ideas and innovation, we recognise the responsibility we have, through design, to advance environmental and social change - challenging preconceived ways of living, solving complexity through collaboration, and bringing beauty through ingenuity.



Terra — The Sustainability Pavilion Expo 2020 Dubai, UAE

grimshaw.global

UK

A powerhouse of innovation

The UK is one of the world's most influential and internationally connected economies. As a leading centre for finance, innovation and global trade, the country offers international investors access to a highly developed business environment, deep capital markets and a world-class research base.

Despite a period of global economic uncertainty, the UK continues to attract international companies seeking a stable and transparent commercial framework. Its legal system, regulatory institutions and strong protection of intellectual property provide a high degree of certainty for investors. Combined with a globally recognised financial centre in London and a strong network of regional industrial clusters, the UK remains one of Europe's most attractive investment destinations for international business.

Major global economy

The UK is the sixth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of approximately £2.96 trillion in 2025, according to IMF data¹. Services dominate the economy, accounting for around four-fifths of total economic output, reflecting the country's strengths in finance, professional services, technology, creative industries and higher education.

Financial services is a particular strength. London is one of the world's leading financial centres, hosting a concentration of global banks, asset managers, insurers and fintech companies. The UK's financial and related professional services sector contributes more than £280 billion annually to the economy and supports over 2.5 million jobs nationwide, reinforcing its central role in national prosperity².

Beyond finance, the UK has developed globally competitive capabilities across sectors including life sciences, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, clean energy and artificial intelligence. These industries benefit from a powerful combination of research universities, skilled talent and strong collaboration between academia and industry.

International trade and investment

Trade and international investment are central pillars of the UK economy. In the 12 months to December 2025, total UK trade in goods and services was around £1.9 trillion, highlighting the country's deep integration with global markets and its role as a hub for international commerce³.

The UK also continues to attract significant levels of FDI. According to international investment monitoring data, the country is one of Europe's leading destinations for new investment projects, facilitated by its stable regulatory environment, deep financial markets and access to global talent.

Government policy continues to emphasise openness to international trade and partnerships. Recent economic strategies have increasingly focused on strengthening relationships with fast-growing regions including the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East, while maintaining strong and stable commercial ties with Europe and North America.

Strength in science and innovation

A defining characteristic of the UK economy is the depth of its research and innovation ecosystem. The country hosts four universities ranked among the world's top ten – Imperial College, Oxford, Cambridge, and UCL, and seven in

“ London is one of the world’s leading financial centres, hosting a concentration of global banks, asset managers, insurers and fintech companies. ”

the European top 10, reflecting the strength of its higher education sector and its role in supporting global research collaboration⁴.

Investment in research and development has also continued to grow. Total UK R&D expenditure exceeds £50 billion annually⁵, with government policy aiming to increase the country’s research intensity over the coming decade as part of a broader science and technology strategy.

These capabilities have helped establish the UK as one of the world’s most dynamic technology ecosystems. The UK technology sector is now valued at nearly £1 trillion, making it the third most valuable technology ecosystem in the world and the most valuable in Europe⁶.

Artificial intelligence is a particular area of focus. The UK Government’s AI strategy aims to position the country as a global leader in research, development and commercial deployment, supported by investments in computing infrastructure, advanced research facilities and specialist digital skills. Between 2021 and 2024, AI firms in London raised £6.7 billion in venture capital, making it the third largest global cluster for venture capital investment⁷.

Infrastructure and regional growth

Economic activity across the UK is supported by extensive transport, digital and energy infrastructure. Major international airports such as Heathrow,

Gatwick and Manchester connect the country to global markets, while the UK’s port network handles hundreds of millions of tonnes of freight each year.

Regional development initiatives are also playing an increasingly important role in shaping the country’s economic landscape. Cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow have developed strong sectoral clusters in areas including advanced manufacturing, digital technology, financial services and life sciences. Government policies designed to support regional growth aim to strengthen these clusters and expand economic opportunity beyond London and the South East.

The UK’s long-term economic strategy places strong emphasis on innovation, sustainability and international collaboration. Government initiatives such as the Science and Technology Framework and the Net Zero Strategy are designed to accelerate growth in emerging sectors including clean energy, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence.

For international investors and businesses, the UK offers more than a large domestic market. It provides access to a highly skilled workforce, a powerful research ecosystem and one of the world’s most sophisticated financial centres. In an increasingly competitive global economy, these strengths continue to position the country as a key hub for international investment, innovation and global trade. ■

¹ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>

² <https://www.thecityuk.com/our-work/enabling-growth-across-the-uk-2025/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-trade-in-numbers/uk-trade-in-numbers-web-version>

⁴ <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/researchanddevelopmentexpenditure/bulletins/businessenterpriseresearchanddevelopment/2024>

⁶ <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/digital-and-tech>

⁷ <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/digital-and-tech>

Financial Services: The UK's enduring financial advantage

The UK's financial services sector is the jewel in the country's economic crown. Rooted in the City of London and Canary Wharf, but extending deeply into regional centres such as Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, the sector combines global connectivity with domestic scale in a way that few countries can match.

Financial and related professional services make a substantial contribution to the UK economy. According to recent data, the industry contributes around 12% of UK gross value added and supports approximately 2.5 million jobs, with roughly two-thirds of employment located outside London¹. The UK also continues to record one of the largest financial services trade surpluses globally, reflecting the sector's strong export orientation.

Internationally, London is Europe's top-ranked financial centre and continues to compete with New York at the top tier globally². Although market access arrangements with the EU have evolved, the UK has deepened bilateral financial regulatory cooperation with major partners, reinforcing its role as a global intermediary bridging North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

International banking and capital markets leadership

At the heart of this dynamic sector is its internationally significant banking system. UK banks' consolidated assets remain above £10 trillion, underscoring both the system's scale and its systemic relevance³. The UK accounts for around one-sixth of global cross-border bank lending, maintaining its position as the world's second-largest international banking centre after the United States⁴. In foreign exchange markets, London is a global leader, handling roughly 38% of global FX turnover⁵.

Capital markets reinforce this outward-facing model. The London Stock Exchange is Europe's leading international equity market by capital raised,

and the UK plays a dominant role in derivatives clearing. Reforms to the UK Listing Rules implemented in 2024-2025 aim to streamline the public market structure and further improve London's competitiveness in attracting high-growth and international issuers⁶.

Fast-growing fintech

Financial technology (fintech) is a particular and fast-growing area of innovation. Global fintech investment reached £38 billion in 2025, up 21% from 2024. The UK retained its second place ranking globally and first in Europe, attracting £2.6 billion, more than the next five European countries combined⁷. London also remains home to more fintech 'unicorns' (start-ups valued at more than US\$1 billion) than any other European city. Overall, the UK has now produced nearly 50 fintech unicorns, worth over £185 billion combined⁸, with the integration of open banking, embedded finance and AI continuing to dramatically reshape both retail and wholesale financial services.

Institutional credibility underpins this ecosystem. The UK's regulatory framework, led by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority, balances prudential resilience with market competitiveness. In the post-Brexit era, regulatory autonomy has become a strategic tool. The Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 and subsequent secondary legislation have enabled the UK to tailor elements of its regime, including capital markets, insurance solvency and digital asset oversight, to domestic priorities.

Innovation in insurance

One notable reform area is insurance capital. Updated Solvency UK rules, implemented during 2024-2025, are expected by HM Treasury to release tens

of billions of pounds of additional investment capacity from the life insurance sector over the coming years⁹. Pension reform is also progressing, with policy measures aimed at consolidating defined contribution schemes and directing more long-term savings into productive domestic investment.

Insurance and asset management provide additional depth. The UK is the largest insurance market in Europe. Industry data indicates that UK insurers manage well over £1.8 trillion in invested assets, making the sector one of the country's largest sources of long-term institutional capital¹⁰. Asset management is similarly significant: UK-based firms oversee assets measured in the trillions of pounds, maintaining the country's position as Europe's largest asset management hub. These long-term pools of capital are central to infrastructure finance, corporate investment and sustainable transition funding.

Sustainable finance has become another increasingly high-profile priority in recent years. The UK has embedded mandatory climate-related disclosures across large corporates and financial institutions and is advancing Sustainability Disclosure Requirements (SDR) to strengthen market transparency. London ranks among the leading global centres for green bond issuance and transition finance, reflecting both policy alignment and investor demand. Green bond issuance, for instance, reached £10.25 billion in the

first half of 2025, with green bond volumes up 10% compared to the same period in 2024¹¹.

Digital developments

Following the expansion of the regulatory framework under the Financial Services and Markets Act, the Government has moved toward establishing a comprehensive regime for digital assets such as stablecoins and broader cryptoasset activities. The stated objective is to position the UK as a credible and well-regulated global hub for digital finance, balancing innovation with financial stability. The signs so far are promising. The UK cryptocurrency market was estimated at £250 million in 2024 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 10.85% to 12.5% between 2025 and 2033, potentially reaching nearly £0.75 billion by 2033¹².

Looking ahead, the UK financial services sector combines three enduring strengths: scale, institutional credibility and adaptability. The system is well-capitalised and internationally integrated; its regulatory framework is both respected and increasingly autonomous; and its ecosystem is actively embracing technological and structural transformation. In an era of intensified global competition, these characteristics, supported by deliberate reform and innovation, suggest the UK will remain one of the world's most influential financial centres well into the coming decade. ■

¹ <https://www.thecityuk.com/research/key-facts-about-uk-based-financial-and-related-professional-services-2025/>

² <https://www.longfinance.net/programmes/financial-centre-futures/global-financial-centres-index/>

³ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/financial-stability-report/2025/december-2025>

⁴ <https://www.londonstockexchange.com/statistics>

⁵ <https://www.lch.com/services/swapclear>

⁶ <https://www.fca.org.uk/markets/primary-markets/listing-rules>

⁷ <https://www.innovatefinance.com/announcements/global-fintech-investment-rises-21-in-2025-reaching-53-billion-across-5918-deals-the-uk-reclaims-second-spot-in-global-rankings/>

⁸ <https://thetechfounders.co.uk/news/uk-became-the-world-s-fintech-unicorn-startups-to-watch/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

¹⁰ <https://www.abi.org.uk/data-and-resources/industry-data/>

¹¹ <https://portfolio-adviser.com/sustainable-shoots-the-rise-of-green-gonds-in-the-uk/>

¹² <https://www.coindesk.com/markets/2025/12/16/number-of-crypto-users-in-the-uk-drops-even-as-amount-held-increases>

Professional & Business Services: Expertise and the global influence

The professional and business services (PBS) sector is one of the most internationally competitive and strategically significant components of the UK economy. Generally understood to encompass legal services, accounting, management consultancy, architecture, engineering, advertising, recruitment and other specialist advisory services, the sector underpins both domestic enterprise and the UK's global commercial footprint.

In global competitiveness rankings for professional services and legal infrastructure, the UK consistently ranks among the leading jurisdictions in Europe. Although competition from EU centres, North America and emerging advisory hubs is growing, the UK's strengths in legal certainty, language, global networks and deep capital markets continue to differentiate it.

Although London is by far the most largest PBS centre, the sector is geographically distributed across the UK, with significant clusters in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In fact, over half of sector employment is located outside the capital, reinforcing its national economic role¹.

Overall, PBS contributes approximately £300 billion in gross value added annually, representing around 13% of total UK economic output². In addition, PBS businesses employ more than five million people, making it one of the largest private-sector employers in the country³.

Institutional credibility is central to the PBS sector's success. Regulatory oversight of legal and accounting services is conducted through a framework of independent professional bodies and statutory regulators, including the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Financial Reporting Council.

Global legal leaders

The legal services market is widely regarded as one of the most influential in the world. English common law underpins a substantial proportion of global commercial contracts, cross-border finance documentation and international dispute resolution.

The UK's legal sector generates over £40 billion in annual revenue, with exports accounting for a significant share of that total⁴. London, in particular, is one of the world's leading centres for international arbitration, dispute resolution and cross-border M&A advisory work.

Major international law firms headquartered in the UK operate across Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia, and English law is the governing law of choice for international commercial agreements, including in free trade zones such as Abu Dhabi General Market and Dubai International Financial Centre. The stability, predictability and global recognition of the UK's legal framework are enduring competitive advantages.

Accounting, audit and advisory services

The UK is also home to one of the largest accounting and audit markets globally. The 'Big Four' global accounting networks maintain substantial UK operations, alongside a broad base of mid-tier and specialist advisory firms.

According to the Financial Reporting Council, UK audit and assurance services generate tens of billions of pounds in annual revenues, while the broader advisory and consulting segments are growing at a faster pace than audit⁵. The UK's accounting standards and governance framework are widely respected, and the country plays an influential role in international standard-setting through its engagement with global accounting bodies.

Management consultancy and strategic advisory

Management consultancy is another fast-growing segment of the PBS sector. Recent industry estimates indicate that the UK consulting market generates over £20 billion in annual revenues, positioning it as Europe's largest consulting market⁶.

UK consultancies advise clients across the globe on hot-button topics such as digital transformation, AI, sustainability strategy, operational restructuring and public sector reform, with the country's deep corporate base, strong technology ecosystem and proximity to global financial markets reinforcing its consultancy leadership.

Engineering, architecture and the built environment

The architecture sector also has a strong export orientation, with British firms involved in landmark projects worldwide. Industry data suggests that exports account for a significant share of revenues in both architecture and engineering consultancy. These capabilities are closely linked to the UK's strengths in project finance, legal structuring and insurance, creating an integrated ecosystem of professional expertise.

Professional engineering and architectural firms headquartered in the UK are accustomed to operating globally, delivering infrastructure, transport, energy and urban development projects across the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Major export engine

According to ONS trade data, professional and management consulting, legal

and accounting services collectively generate tens of billions of pounds in annual exports, contributing significantly to the UK's overall services trade surplus. Indeed, services classed as 'Other business services' accounted for over one-third of UK services exports in 2025⁷.

The UK consistently ranks among the top two global exporters of commercial services, alongside the United States. This export strength reflects the international portability of UK expertise, English language advantages, and the global recognition of British professional standards.

Digital transformation and AI integration

Technology is reshaping service delivery right across the PBS sector. Law firms and consultancies are increasingly deploying AI-powered document review, predictive analytics and compliance automation tools. Digitalisation is also improving productivity, expanding service scalability and enabling new hybrid delivery models that combine in-person advisory with remote and platform-based solutions. The Government is committed to supporting this transformation, highlighting the potential of AI to boost productivity in "knowledge-intensive industries"⁸ in its AI Opportunities strategy.

The UK PBS sector combines scale, international reach and institutional trust. It is deeply embedded in global trade flows and underpins investment, infrastructure and corporate activity worldwide. With strong export performance, a globally recognised legal framework and a highly skilled workforce, the services sector is well placed to remain one of the country's most internationally competitive industries well into the coming decade. ■

¹ <https://www.thecityuk.com/news/financial-and-related-professional-services-remain-key-contributor-to-uk-economy/>

² <https://www.thecityuk.com/news/financial-and-related-professional-services-remain-key-contributor-to-uk-economy/>

³ <https://www.thecityuk.com/news/financial-and-related-professional-services-remain-key-contributor-to-uk-economy/>

⁴ <https://www.thecityuk.com/our-work/uk-legal-services-2025/>

⁵ https://media.frc.org.uk/documents/Audit_market_and_competition_developments_2025_Update.pdf

⁶ <https://www.mca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/MCA-Annual-Industry-Report-2025-Executive-Summary.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan/ai-opportunities-action-plan>

Advanced Manufacturing: At the frontier of technology

The high profile of the manufacturing sector in the UK reflects both its economic importance and its role as an enabler for wider national priorities, such as energy security, net zero, defence resilience and productivity growth.

While ‘manufacturing’ covers a broad range of activities, the Government’s current policy focus is on higher-value, technology-led manufacturing where the UK can compete globally through innovation, specialised capability and integration with world-class R&D.

The Government’s Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan positions the sector as a long-term growth engine and explicitly links it to the next wave of industrial transformation, from decarbonisation to the adoption of AI and digital production methods¹. Rather than concentrating on a single subsector, the UK frames advanced manufacturing as a portfolio of frontier industries where it has scale, talent and competitive strengths. It breaks these down into six priority sectors:

- **Automotive:** Building the next generation of zero emission and connected automated vehicles.
- **Batteries:** Powering the transition to net zero, backed by landmark investments such as Agratas’ £4 billion gigafactory project which will create up to 4,000 new jobs.
- **Aerospace:** Pioneering technologies such as Rolls-Royce’s UltraFan engines and for Airbus’ new narrow body aircraft, and supporting defence activities.
- **Space:** Driven by increasing economic, national security, defence, and geopolitical interests.
- **Advanced materials:** With UK manufacturers leading the charge in next-generation components and sustainability.

- **Agri-tech:** Pioneering revolutionary approaches to agricultural productivity and sustainable food production, supporting both domestic and global supply chains.

National footprint

Advanced manufacturing is significant not only for output, but also for employment and regional impact. According to government figures, advanced manufacturing supports over 760,000 jobs and generates around £82 billion in annual gross value added, with activity distributed across all nations and regions².

This matters strategically: advanced manufacturing is one of the most place-based parts of the economy, anchoring supply chains, export capacity and skilled employment in clusters such as the North East (automotive and batteries), the Midlands (automotive and advanced propulsion), the South West and North West (aerospace), and Scotland and Oxfordshire (space and enabling technologies).

Global market integration

The UK’s advanced manufacturing base is tightly linked to international trade, both as an exporter of high-value goods and as an importer of specialised components and capital equipment. Official government trade statistics show that UK goods exports were £386.4 billion in the 12 months to November 2025, illustrating the scale of the UK’s traded goods economy and the importance of internationally competitive production sectors within it³. While advanced manufacturing is not the entirety of goods trade, the leading UK export categories and markets include many advanced-manufacturing-adjacent areas, such as machinery, transport equipment, aircraft and pharmaceuticals.



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- ✉ sales@barton-engineering.co.uk
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- 🌐 Barton Engineering



What differentiates UK advanced manufacturing is the depth of its surrounding ecosystem. The country combines manufacturing capability with globally recognised strengths in research, engineering services, regulation, finance and intellectual property frameworks. In practice, this supports fast development cycles, from concept and prototyping through to industrialisation, particularly in complex or regulated manufacturing environments, such as aerospace systems, battery technologies and advanced materials.

A major institutional asset is the UK's applied R&D infrastructure. The High Value Manufacturing (HVM) Catapult, for example, works with 5,810 companies (including 3,496 SMEs) and generated around £275 million in collaborative R&D and commercial income in 2025⁴. While these figures do not represent the whole sector, they are a useful proxy for the scale of structured innovation support available to manufacturers seeking to develop new processes, materials and products.

Policy priorities

The current UK strategy is explicitly investment-led. The Government's 10-year strategy aims to grow business investment in advanced manufacturing to £39 billion by 2035, backed by up to £4.3 billion in public funding, including up to £2.8 billion for R&D over the next five years⁵.

Alongside capital and R&D support, the policy package highlights the practical barriers that affect manufacturing competitiveness, particularly energy costs for electricity-intensive industries, skills pipelines, and adoption of digital tools and AI in production.

Looking ahead, the growth of the UK's manufacturing sector will be shaped by three trends, as reflected in the six priority sectors identified in the Government's Sector Plan. First is electrification and the battery value chain, driven by transport decarbonisation, grid storage needs and industrial electrification, with batteries regarded as a frontier industry within the Government's sector plan framework. Second is aerospace and space, where the UK combines advanced engineering, high-value supply chains and strong export orientation, and where demand is shifting towards more efficient propulsion, sustainable aviation solutions and new satellite-enabled services. Third is advanced materials and agri-tech, which connect manufacturing to national priorities on resilience, productivity and sustainability through novel materials, precision engineering, automation, and technologies that strengthen resource efficiency.

Running through all of these is the transformative capabilities of digitalisation and AI-enabled manufacturing. In practice, this spans robotics and automation, digital twins, advanced sensing, predictive maintenance and data-driven quality control; capabilities that raise productivity and reduce time-to-market, while also enabling shorter, more resilient supply chains.

The UK's world-leading advanced manufacturing proposition is based on a proven combination of strong R&D, established clusters, a sophisticated services base, and a policy framework that aims to both attract investment and accelerate commercial scale-up. The opportunities for investors are substantial, particularly where manufacturing growth aligns with the net zero transition, defence and resilience needs, and demand for higher-value engineering solutions. ■

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advanced-manufacturing-sector-plan>

² <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/advanced-manufacturing>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book>

⁴ <https://hvm.catapult.org.uk/resource-hub/annual-reviews>

⁵ <https://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/advanced-manufacturing>

Creative Industries: From cultural capital to economic strength

According to the most recent data from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), UK creative industries generated £145.8 billion in gross value added (GVA) in 2024¹. This places creative industries among the largest individual contributors within the DCMS portfolio and reinforces their significance within the wider services economy. Employment is equally substantial: the DCMS reports that almost 2.5 million people are employed in the sector, demonstrating the breadth of opportunity across production, design, digital content, technical specialisms and entrepreneurial activity².

A national asset with global impact

The UK's creative industries combine global cultural influence with measurable economic scale. Spanning film and television, music, video games, advertising, design, fashion and digital media, the sector is both a driver of economic growth and a powerful instrument of soft power. In recent years, it has moved firmly into the centre of government growth policy, recognised not only for its cultural value but also for its export performance, inward investment and high-skilled employment base.

London is consistently recognised as one of the world's leading creative hubs, but it is far from a one-city proposition. There are major creative clusters across the UK in dynamic cities such as Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow and Belfast. Screen production in Scotland and Northern Ireland, gaming studios in the Midlands and the North, and advertising and digital agencies across England and Wales contribute to a geographically diversified ecosystem. The result is a sector that supports regional regeneration as well as national exports.

Among the most internationally visible segments is film and television production. The UK has become a premier global destination for large-scale production, supported by skilled crews, world-class studios and competitive

tax incentives. According to the British Film Institute (BFI), total UK film and high-end television production spend reached £6.8 billion in 2025, the highest level on record³. Of that total, around £5.8 billion represented inward investment activity, underlining the UK's ability to attract global studios and streaming platforms. The strength of this inward investment model reflects not only fiscal incentives but also the depth of the UK's technical and post-production capabilities.

Music and gaming

Music has long been a global cornerstone of the UK's creative profile, from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones through to more recent superstars such as One Direction, Coldplay and Ed Sheeran. The UK music industry contributed £7.6 billion to the economy in 2024, according to UK Music's most recent data⁴. British artists, producers and songwriters continue to perform strongly in global markets, supported by London's enduring position as a hub for publishing and rights management. Beyond recorded music, live performance and touring contribute meaningfully to economic output, reinforcing the UK's global cultural footprint.

The video games and interactive media sector illustrates how creativity and advanced technology increasingly intersect. The UK is one of Europe's leading games development centres, with a strong track record in original intellectual property and immersive technologies. Ukie, the trade body for the UK games and interactive entertainment industry, reports that UK consumers spent £7.6 billion on video games in 2024, underlining the scale of the domestic market⁵. The sector's integration with digital innovation, AI and advanced design places it at the forefront of the UK's wider technology strategy.

Advertising and creative services further demonstrate the commercial depth of the UK's creative economy. Overall, UK advertising was expected to reach

£45.2 billion in 2025, rising to £47.8 billion in 2026, underlining the scale of the domestic and international client base served by UK agencies⁶. British firms combine creative excellence with data-driven analytics, serving multinational brands across Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia.

A government priority

Creative industries also play a material role in the UK's export economy. According to the Office for National Statistics, total UK services exports reached £487 billion in the 12 months to November 2025, with creative services forming an important component of that outward-facing performance⁷. The portability of intellectual property, English-language advantage and internationally recognised professional standards contribute to this sustained export strength.

Government policy reflects the sector's economic importance. The UK's Creative Industries Sector Vision sets out a long-term framework to expand investment, improve skills pipelines and strengthen international market access⁸. Emphasis is placed on sustaining competitive tax relief regimes for film, television and games, enhancing digital capability, and supporting regional clusters. Increasingly, AI and digital tools are being integrated into content creation, post-production, advertising analytics and game design, reinforcing productivity and scalability across subsectors.

In an increasingly competitive global marketplace for talent and capital, the UK's creative industries retain powerful structural advantages: a deep creative



workforce, internationally recognised content brands, strong institutional support and a stable legal environment. As global demand for content, design and digital experiences continues to expand, the UK remains well positioned to sustain its leadership as one of the world's foremost creative economies. ■

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-gva-2024-provisional/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-gross-value-added-2024-provisional>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-gva-2024-provisional/dcms-sectors-economic-estimates-gross-value-added-2024-provisional>

³ <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/43378/download>

⁴ <https://www.ukmusic.org/research/this-is-music-2025/>

⁵ <https://ukie.org.uk/press-releases/ukie-urges-government-to-back-uk-games-industry-or-miss-out-on-500m-opportunity>

⁶ <https://www.digitalmarketingfirst.co.uk/digital-advertising-spend-in-the-uk/>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/november2025>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-sector-vision>

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Digital & Technologies: At the frontier of technology

The digital and technology sector has assumed a critical role at the centre of the UK's national industrial strategy, investment attraction and global competitiveness. With world-class universities, deep capital markets and an increasingly active government policy framework, the UK has consolidated its position as Europe's leading technology ecosystem and remains one of the most internationally connected innovation hubs globally.

The economic weight of the sector is substantial. According to data tracked by the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST), the digital sector contributed £177.2 billion in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy in 2024 and employed over 1.7 million people across the country¹. These figures place technology among the largest single industrial contributors to national output and employment. This commercial success is underpinned by the continuous expansion of the nation's digital infrastructure, supported by almost universal access to high-speed digital broadband. Over 86% of UK homes have access to gigabit-capable broadband coverage as of January 2025, while 84% of all premises (homes and businesses) can access the same capacity connections.

Unlike many advanced economies where technology activity is heavily concentrated in one metropolitan area, the UK's digital strength is geographically distributed. Unsurprisingly, London is the main focus and remains Europe's largest technology investment hub, but this is complemented by strength in other regions. Cambridge, for example, has developed global prominence in artificial intelligence and deep tech; Manchester and Leeds anchor digital media and platform development; Edinburgh has become a centre of fintech and data science; and Bristol and South Wales host important semiconductor and compound electronics clusters.

Appetite for investment

The high level of capital investment is one of the distinguishing features of the UK digital and tech ecosystem. It is Europe's leading destination for venture

capital investment and has produced around 50 'unicorns' (tech start-ups with a valuation of US\$1 billion or more), ranking first in Europe and third globally, behind only the US and China². The UK is also the largest venture capital (VC) market in Europe, with over £17.5 billion raised in 2025³, more than France and Germany combined, providing access to capital needed to commercialise and scale up innovations.

AI has become a central pillar of this growth story. In 2024, the Government established the AI Security Institute, designed to evaluate frontier AI models and reinforce international trust in AI development⁴. The Institute is intended to position the UK at the forefront of safe and responsible AI deployment. This approach, combining pro-innovation regulation with risk management, differentiates it from more restrictive regulatory environments, making it attractive for AI research and model development.

Sector focus

The policy framework underpinning this ecosystem is set out in the Science and Technology Framework, published in 2025⁵. The framework identifies five priority technologies: advanced connectivity technologies; artificial intelligence; engineering biology; quantum technologies; and semiconductors. Each area is backed by targeted funding commitments and regulatory support mechanisms.

Semiconductors, for example, are supported through the National Semiconductor Strategy, which outlines government backing for design capability and compound semiconductor clusters. The strategy explicitly identifies South Wales and the South West as key centres for compound semiconductor development. The UK's focus is less on large-scale fabrication and more on high-value design, intellectual property and specialised materials – areas aligned with its research strengths.

Quantum computing is another priority. The UK was the first country in the world to launch a national quantum programme in 2015. Over the past

“ The Government has also announced a new UK-US technology partnership to deepen collaboration on quantum research, workforce development and commercialisation. ”

decade, the Government has invested more than £1 billion in public funding, catalysing significant private-sector investment and creating one of the world's most dynamic and diverse quantum ecosystems.

Central to this strategy is roughly £500 million in funding to support quantum computing development, scale-up facilities such as advanced nanofabrication and initiatives including the National Quantum Computing Centre testbed, where multiple hardware platforms are evaluated for industrial use⁶.

The Government has also announced a new UK-US technology partnership to deepen collaboration on quantum research, workforce development and commercialisation, reflecting a broader push to build international alliances while safeguarding economic competitiveness. Together, the funding and transatlantic cooperation are designed to move quantum technologies from experimental promise towards widespread commercial and societal impact.

Policy support

The increasing importance of digital technologies in the national economy raises questions about cybersecurity. With this in mind, the Cyber Security Growth plan⁷, published in September 2025, aims to position the UK as a

global cyber power. The UK hosts one of Europe's largest cybersecurity sectors, underpinned by the National Cyber Security Centre and strong collaboration between government and industry. This capability is increasingly export-oriented, reflecting global demand for cyber resilience.

Regulatory reform has also played a role in sustaining competitiveness. A new Data Use and Access Act 2025 came into force in June 2025, updating some of the legal framework about digital information matters⁸. By refining data protection laws, it aims to reduce administrative burdens without compromising cross-border data flows – a critical factor for multinational technology firms operating in the UK.

As the Government consolidates its position over the next four years, the prospects for the UK digital and technology sector remain positive. Continued public investment in frontier technologies, sustained venture capital leadership in Europe and a regulatory framework designed to balance innovation with trust provide structural advantages. As global competition in advanced technologies intensifies, the UK's combination of research excellence, capital depth and policy clarity, positions it to remain a leading European technology hub and a globally significant innovation centre. ■

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-digital-sector-annual-2010-to-2024-and-regional-2010-to-2022-gross-value-added>

² <https://www.beaurehurst.com/research/unicorn-companies/>

³ <https://www.digit.fyi/uk-vc-investment-rebounds-in-2025>

⁴ <https://www.aisi.gov.uk/about>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/science-and-technology-framework/science-and-technology-framework>

⁶ <https://www.quantumworldcongress.com/news-and-updates/united-kingdom-unveils-next-phase-of-quantum-strategy-with-500m-mission-funding-and-new-ukus-tech-partnership>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cyber-growth-action-plan-2025>

⁸ <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/what-we-do/legislation-we-cover/data-use-and-access-act-2025/the-data-use-and-access-act-2025-what-does-it-mean-for-organisations>

Healthcare & Life Sciences: A national system with global innovation reach

The UK's healthcare and life sciences sector is distinguished by the integration of its institutions, as much as by the scale of its impact. Few countries combine a globally recognised public health system, research-intensive universities, deep biomedical science capability and a sophisticated regulatory framework within a single connected ecosystem.

At the centre of this model are the close connections between academia, industry and the National Health Service (NHS). The UK's university research base consistently ranks among the most cited in biomedical sciences, while the NHS provides a uniquely comprehensive clinical environment for trials, data analysis and innovation adoption. This alignment enables early-stage research to translate more efficiently into diagnostics, therapeutics and medical technologies than in many more fragmented systems.

The sector's strength also lies in its diversity. Pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, medical devices, genomics, digital health and advanced therapeutics operate within a mature investment and regulatory environment. Clusters in Cambridge, Oxford, London and the North West form part of a broader national network of science parks, translational institutes and manufacturing facilities. Together, they support an industry that is research-intensive, export-oriented and increasingly data-driven.

As global healthcare systems confront ageing populations, rising chronic disease burdens and accelerating technological change, the strength of the UK's life sciences ecosystem lies in the ability to combine scientific

excellence, clinical depth and commercial sophistication within a stable and internationally trusted regulatory framework.

Nationally integrated health system

The NHS is one of the largest publicly funded health systems in the world. The scale of public funding is reflected in the £205 billion budget for NHS England, integrated care boards, and NHS providers in 2025/26¹.

This level of nationally coordinated spend underpins the NHS's role not only as a service provider, but also as a major economic actor supporting extensive employment, procurement, and capital investment across the country. The NHS also functions as a unique national 'testbed' for innovation. Its scale allows for population-level research, real-world evidence generation and rapid adoption pathways where policy and procurement align. From advanced imaging and robotics to digital triage systems and AI-supported diagnostics, the NHS is central to the commercialisation pathway for many UK-developed health technologies, particularly within a rapidly evolving global market.

Globally significant life sciences industry

Alongside public service delivery, the UK's life sciences sector is one of Europe's most research-intensive industrial bases. It combines multinational pharmaceutical companies, fast-scaling biotechnology firms, medical technology manufacturers, clinical research organisations and a dense network of universities and teaching hospitals.

Industry data published in October 2025 reports 6,170 businesses in the UK life sciences industry, employing 359,600 people and generating £146.9 billion in turnover². Pharmaceuticals are a particularly high-value segment. The industry contributes £17.6 billion in direct gross value added to the UK economy and supports 126,000 high-skilled jobs, reflecting the capital-intensive and knowledge-intensive nature of medicines development and manufacturing³.

The UK also maintains a strong position in clinical research. Its integrated health system, academic excellence and regulatory expertise enable it to attract early-stage and late-stage trials, particularly in oncology, rare diseases and advanced therapies.

Government strategy

Since 2025, government policy has become more explicitly aligned around integrating NHS transformation with industrial strategy. The Life Sciences Sector Plan, published in July 2025, positions the sector as a core growth engine within the broader Industrial Strategy framework.

A central pillar of the Sector Plan is accelerating innovation adoption within the NHS. The Government announcement accompanying the Plan includes an ambition of up to £600 million to build an advanced health data system to support faster development and deployment of treatments⁴. The emphasis is on reducing trial set-up times, streamlining regulatory processes and embedding research activity within routine care pathways. The aim is to make research a core NHS function, rather than a separate, specialist activity.

Investment trends

The UK is a leading European destination for life sciences investment. The BioIndustry Association reports that UK biotech companies secured £1.9 billion in equity financing in 2025, of which £1.8 billion was raised through venture capital⁵. This level of investment indicates resilience, though companies are

facing longer fundraising cycles and greater scrutiny on commercialisation pathways. Later-stage funding, strategic partnerships and cross-border capital flows remain particularly important for scaling therapies into global markets.

In addition, the UK continues to offer competitive R&D tax credits and manufacturing incentives, reinforcing its attractiveness for pharmaceutical production and advanced therapy manufacturing.

Advanced therapies and digital health

The UK has developed a particularly strong position in advanced therapies, including gene and cell therapies. Research institutions and manufacturing facilities in London, Oxford, Cambridge and the North West form part of a nationally coordinated advanced therapy ecosystem.

Genomics is another strength. The UK's national genomic sequencing initiatives have created one of the largest integrated genomic datasets globally, supporting both research and precision medicine. The globally pioneering UK Biobank serves as a prime template for this capability, actively sharing cross-border data insights with the newly established Abu Dhabi Biobank to accelerate precision medicine and global disease risk mapping. This capability complements broader digital health investments and AI-supported diagnostics development.

Digital health innovation, including remote monitoring, wearable technologies and AI-based clinical decision tools, also continues to expand. The integration of these tools within NHS pathways is increasingly seen as essential to addressing demographic pressures and improving productivity.

Although pressures on NHS performance, global competition for R&D, and supply chain resilience remain challenges, the UK's legal certainty, strong science base, integrated health data and trusted regulatory framework position it well to strengthen its status as both a leading European health system and a globally competitive life sciences hub. ■

¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67ea53664a226ab6c41b2086/dhsc-financial-directions-to-NHS-England-2025-to-2026-web-accessible.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/bioscience-and-health-technology-sector-statistics-2023-to-2024>

³ <https://www.abpi.org.uk/publications/creating-the-conditions-for-investment-and-growth/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/life-sciences-sector-plan-to-grow-economy-and-transform-nhs>

⁵ <https://www.bioindustry.org/resource/uk-biotech-financing-2025.html>

Clean Energy: Scaling deployment and building industrial advantage

The UK's clean energy transition has entered a decisive phase. What was once framed primarily as a long-term climate commitment is now firmly embedded within national industrial strategy, infrastructure planning and energy security policy. The past two years have marked a transition from ambition to execution: expanding renewable capacity at scale, advancing carbon capture and hydrogen deployment, and strengthening domestic manufacturing capability to capture greater economic value from the energy transition.

Official data confirms the structural transformation of the UK's electricity system. Around 47% of total UK electricity generation came from renewable sources in 2025, followed by gas (28%), nuclear (11%) and net imports (10%). Notably, it was the first year with zero generation from coal¹.

This change highlights a wholesale redesign of the UK's energy mix. Offshore wind has been central to this transformation. The year 2025 was a record year for wind power, with offshore wind generating 87TWh, up 4TWh (5%). Wind conditions in 2025 were broadly similar to those in 2024, with the uptick in generation due to additional capacity. The development of the wind power sector has been underpinned by the Contracts for Difference (CfD) mechanism, which provides long-term price stability for low-carbon generators.

Super solar

One of the most successful developments has been the expansion of solar power. Solar panels generated more than 18TWh in 2025 – over 6% of British electricity. While this is still a relatively small share, it marks a growth of more

than 4TWh on 2024². At its peak, solar was producing more than 40% of electricity at certain periods in July 2025. Part of the reason is the expansion of solar panels across the UK. More large solar farms came online in 2025, including the biggest at Cleve Hill near Faversham, in Kent. It was also a record year for solar panels on rooftops, with around 250,000 new small-scale installations reported to the Microgeneration Certification Scheme³.

The UK's biomass energy industry also reported record figures in 2025, with output increasing by 1TWh (2%) to 41TWh. Approximately two-thirds of this is derived from wood-fired power plants, most notably the Drax former coal plant in Yorkshire, which generated 15TWh in 2024⁴. The Government has awarded new contracts to Drax that will apply from 2027 onwards and will see the amount of electricity it generates each year roughly halve, to around 6TWh⁵. The Government is also consulting on how to tighten sustainability rules for biomass sourcing.

Driving decarbonisation

The UK's clean energy strategy extends beyond renewable generation alone. As renewable penetration increases, system resilience and industrial decarbonisation have become parallel priorities. Carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS) has moved from policy design into early-stage implementation. The Government has confirmed progress on its first CCUS clusters under the Track-1 process, enabling selected projects to move forward under agreed commercial frameworks⁶. The development of CCUS clusters is designed to

support decarbonisation in energy-intensive industries such as steel, cement and chemicals, while preserving regional industrial capacity.

Hydrogen policy has similarly advanced. The Government's Hydrogen Strategy update reaffirmed the ambition to support up to 10GW of low-carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030, subject to demand development and market conditions⁷. The strategy maintains the UK's 'twin-track' approach, supporting both electrolytic (green) hydrogen and CCUS-enabled (blue) hydrogen. Hydrogen is positioned not as a universal solution, but as a strategic complement to electrification, particularly for heavy industry, long-duration energy storage and certain transport applications.

Supporting national capabilities

Alongside deployment targets, the UK has sharpened its focus on domestic industrial capability. In 2024, the Government launched the Green Industries Growth Accelerator (GIGA), committing £960 million to strengthen UK-based supply chains across offshore wind, carbon capture, hydrogen and electricity networks infrastructure⁸. GIGA reflects a broader shift in policy emphasis: ensuring that large-scale clean energy deployment translates into domestic manufacturing activity, supply chain resilience and skilled employment.

This industrial dimension is increasingly central to the UK's clean energy narrative. Offshore wind deployment, for example, requires significant investment in turbine assembly, blade manufacturing, subsea cabling and port infrastructure. Hydrogen and CCUS similarly demand specialised engineering, compression equipment and pipeline systems. By directing

funding toward domestic capacity, the Government aims to secure a greater share of value-added activity within the economy rather than relying solely on imported components.

Taken together, these developments illustrate a market that has moved beyond early-stage experimentation. Renewables now provide nearly half of electricity generation. Offshore wind continues to expand through competitive auctions. Carbon capture clusters are entering delivery phases. Hydrogen ambitions have been reaffirmed in updated strategy documents. And targeted industrial funding is being deployed to anchor supply chains domestically.

Delivery momentum

The next phase of the UK's clean energy transition will hinge on maintaining delivery momentum. Grid capacity, planning reform and supply chain competitiveness will shape the pace at which projects can move from award to operation. However, the institutional architecture supporting the transition is now well established: transparent auction mechanisms, statutory climate targets, commercial frameworks for emerging technologies and dedicated industrial funding streams.

For international investors and strategic partners, the UK clean energy sector is a mature but still expanding market. As electrification accelerates and industrial decarbonisation progresses, clean energy in the UK is no longer solely an environmental priority; it is a core economic and industrial strategy shaping the country's growth trajectory for the coming decades. ■

¹ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-uk-renewables-enjoy-record-year-in-2025-but-gas-power-still-rises/>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz947djd3d3o>

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⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-carbon-capture-usage-and-storage-ccus>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-hydrogen-strategy>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-boost-for-uk-green-industries-with-960-million-government-investment-and-major-reform-of-power-network>

Defence: A global defence powerhouse

The UK's defence industry is entering a period of sustained growth. Against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical uncertainty and renewed emphasis on European security, defence has moved to the centre of national economic and industrial debate. Short-term modernisation targets have been replaced by multi-decade capability programmes, expanded alliance commitments and increasing domestic production capacity.

Recent spending commitments underline this trajectory, with the country remaining one of the highest defence contributors in NATO. In February 2025, the Government confirmed plans to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by April 2027, with an ambition to reach 3% of GDP in the next Parliament and 3.5% by 2035, subject to economic conditions¹. The plan includes an £11 billion increase in annual defence spending, including £4.5 billion for munitions and over £6 billion for upgrading nuclear submarine production.

According to government figures, the UK spent £60.2 billion on defence in the 2024/25 period. This is expected to rise to £62.2 billion in 2025/26, and £73.5 billion in 2028/29². This is one of the most significant medium-term increases in defence spending in recent decades and provides enhanced visibility for industry planning and investment.

The industrial impact of this spending is considerable. The defence sector supports over 434,000 jobs across the country, that equates to 1 in 60 jobs, spanning prime contractors, advanced manufacturing suppliers and high-technology SMEs³. Employment is geographically dispersed, reinforcing

advanced aerospace in the South West and North West, naval shipbuilding in Scotland and the South Coast, and digital defence capabilities in the Midlands and South East.

Export strengths

Export performance remains robust, with defence exports reaching £20 billion in 2025⁴. This figure is expected to be the highest since records began over 40 years ago and maintains the UK's position among the world's top defence exporters. Combat air platforms, missile systems and maritime technologies remain central to export success, underpinned by interoperability with NATO allies and long-term service agreements.

The UK is looking to build on this success in 2026 by delivering further deals with allies, actively seeking to export systems such as advanced aircraft, the latest maritime technology and systems, and armoured transport vehicles such as Boxer. To strengthen the UK's position as a leading defence exporter, it has also joined the Agreement on Defence Export Controls, alongside France, Germany and Spain, which will make it easier for British business to export to partner nations⁵.

Sector superiority

Combat air continues to anchor the UK's technological sovereignty. In December 2024, the UK, Japan and Italy formally signed the treaty establishing the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) International Government Organisation (GIIGO)⁶. GCAP is aimed to deliver a next-generation combat

aircraft by 2035 and represents one of the most significant collaborative defence aerospace programmes currently underway globally. The programme is expected to sustain tens of thousands of highly skilled engineering and systems integration roles across its lifecycle.

Maritime and submarine capability is another traditional strength in the sector. The submarine fleet, including the Dreadnought-class ballistic missile submarines and Astute-class vessels, is one of Europe's most technologically advanced defence manufacturing bases. In 2024, the Ministry of Defence confirmed further progress under the AUKUS partnership, deepening submarine cooperation between the UK, US and Australia and expanding long-term industrial collaboration. This integration enhances both domestic production capacity and allied interoperability.

The Government has also committed to securing the future of the country's nuclear deterrent, by committing to a £15 billion investment in the sovereign warhead programme by 2030, supporting over 9,000 jobs⁷.

Digital warfare

Beyond traditional platforms, defence modernisation is increasingly digital. Britain is embarking on a sweeping transformation of its military capabilities, with plans to embed artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and advanced digital infrastructure at the heart of its armed forces within the next two years. Central to this is a shift to what the Ministry of Defence calls an 'Integrated Force' – a digitally networked military built around shared data

and AI. A flagship deliverable is a digital targeting web, due by 2027, designed to link sensors, decision-makers and weapons systems at machine speed. Underpinning this is a defence-wide 'Secret Cloud' for secure data sharing, expected to go live in 2026, alongside a new Digital Warfighter group to be embedded with frontline units⁸.

The strategy places heavy emphasis on uncrewed and autonomous systems as a means of increasing battlefield lethality. A dedicated Defence Uncrewed Systems Centre and a protected AI investment fund are both slated for launch in 2026. The UK is also investing in space resilience and cutting-edge directed energy weapons, including the laser system DragonFire, as part of efforts to maintain a technological edge over adversary⁹.

Backing the entire programme is a significant shake-up of defence procurement. A new body, UK Defence Innovation, was established in July 2025 with a £400 million annual budget. Its mandate is to bring commercial technology into service within three-month contracting cycles, a striking departure from the MoD's historically slow acquisition processes¹⁰.

As NATO defence spending rises across Europe and Indo-Pacific partnerships deepen, the UK's integrated defence ecosystem, combining sovereign engineering capability, export strength and advanced research infrastructure, is well positioned for sustained growth. In an era where security and industrial strategy are increasingly intertwined, the defence industry is both a strategic necessity and a high-value economic asset. ■

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-sets-out-biggest-sustained-increase-in-defence-spending-since-the-cold-war-protecting-british-people-in-new-era-for-national-security>

² <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8175/CBP-8175.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mod-supported-employment-estimates-202223>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2025-sees-highest-british-defence-exports-since-records-began-in-huge-boost-to-workers-and-companies>

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⁶ <https://www.baesystems.com/en-uk/product/global-combat-air-programme>

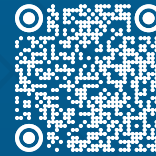
⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home__strong_abroad.pdf

⁸ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home__strong_abroad.pdf

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home__strong_abroad.pdf

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home__strong_abroad.pdf

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