

Press release

New techUK reports calls for action to help unlock UK SME export potential

- *Less than 12% of UK SMEs export internationally, affecting the UK's economic growth*

LONDON, 3 March 2026 – techUK today publishes *'Spreading Wings: Taking Innovative SMEs Global'*, a new report highlighting the untapped export potential of the UK's small and medium-sized (SMEs) technology enterprises.

The report finds that despite the UK becoming the world's fourth-largest exporter, too few SMEs (11.6%) export their services abroad. SMEs account for 60% of UK employment and 52% of business turnover, yet significant barriers are preventing them from expanding their trade globally.

This presents a significant missed opportunity for productivity, innovation and long-term national economic growth.

The UK's digital and technology sectors have powered record export growth in recent years. Digital trade now accounts for around half of total UK exports and has grown three times faster than other exports. Yet despite this strong performance at the national level, the majority of SMEs remain absent from international markets.

According to the techUK report, fewer UK small and medium-sized firms export than in many peer countries, particularly among firms with 10–249 employees. This represents a significant portion of the very businesses with significant revenue potential and innovation capacity.

Exporting is strongly linked to innovation and productivity. Firms that export are more likely to innovate, and smaller firms are often especially well placed to translate insights from international markets into new products and services. Unlocking SME export growth is therefore not just a trade issue, but a central pillar of the UK's economic strategy.

Drawing on interviews with senior leaders from 34 SME techUK members across AI, quantum, cybersecurity, fintech, defence, telecoms and smart cities, the report identifies persistent barriers to international expansion, including:

- Complex and fragmented regulatory requirements, particularly around data localisation, IP and compliance.
- Limited access to clear, sector-specific guidance on overseas rules and standards.
- High costs of participating in trade shows and missions.
- Fragmented government export support and difficulty navigating multiple programmes.
- Perceived lack of deep sector expertise among some trade officials.

- Cross-border payment delays and limited flexible financial assistance.

While many firms praised targeted interventions from government departments and overseas networks, others described the overall system as ‘complex, inconsistent and difficult to navigate’.

To address these barriers, techUK’s report proposes five recommendations for the UK government to reduce this gap and enhance the ecosystem for high-growth technology companies:

1. Introduce a Single Point of Contact for High-Growth Scale-Ups

A “hub-and-spoke” model within the Department for Business and Trade to provide dedicated account management and a “no wrong door” policy

2. Domain Expertise in Trade Support

Reverse cuts to sector specialists, recruit officials with industry experience, and deepen coordination across departments.

3. Improve and Target Trade Missions and Commercial Diplomacy

Focus on quality over quantity, adopt cohort-based approaches, and increase financial support to reflect real-world costs.

4. Upgrade Online Regulatory Guidance

Develop accessible, up-to-date country- and sector-specific playbooks to reduce reliance on costly external consultancies.

5. Reduce Administrative and Compliance Barriers

Prioritise structural reforms through trade negotiations, including faster visa processes, mutual recognition of standards, and streamlined certification

Sabina Ciofu, Associate Director for International Trade and Strategy Lead, Policy, techUK said:

“The UK has a strategic opportunity to close the SME export gap and fully realise the country’s digital trade potential. Supporting SME exporters is one of the most effective levers available to drive productivity and restore growth across the UK. For smaller firms, timely and well-designed support can be transformational, often determining whether international expansion succeeds or stalls.”

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

[techUK International Trade and Policy hub](#)

About techUK

techUK is the technology trade association that brings together people, companies and organisations to realise the positive outcomes of what digital technology can achieve.



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With over 1,100 members (the majority of which are SMEs) across the UK, techUK creates a network for innovation and collaboration across business, government and stakeholders to provide a better future for people, society, the economy and the planet.

By providing expertise and insight, we support members, partners and stakeholders as they prepare the UK for what comes next in a constantly changing world.