

# BHTA Brief 2024: UK Med Tech Import / Export – Untapped Growth Potential

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*The British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA) calls for the UK government to resource existing UK import/export plans. Government must add med tech to these plans to ensure UK competitiveness in a post-Brexit market. We call for:*

*-- Including med tech in UK import/export plans, with four focus areas:*

- 1. Government Investment*
  - 2. Trade Agreements*
  - 3. UK Export Research & Development*
  - 4. Digital Infrastructure*
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Now that the UK has left the EU, UK med tech importers/exporters face different requirements for each EU trading partner. This presents serious business risks, including:

- Unclear rules and different on-the-ground practicalities for each export country
- Increased cost, regulatory burden, and administrative resource

These challenges are leading to a shrinking UK import/export capability and capacity, losses to UK plc as businesses close (especially SMEs), and knock-on UK economic effects (to services, financial products, insurance, etc).

***Adopting the recommendations outlined here could boost UK exports to G20 countries alone by c. £75bn per year, grow the UK med tech export market beyond its current level of c. £6bn per year, and boost the UK med tech export sector in global standings, with positive inward-investment effects.***

In a recent Government report on the life sciences sector, med tech import/export ambitions were outlined in only the broadest brushstrokes: “in addition to core trade policy, the UK will be unrelenting in supporting both inward investment and export promotion, and proactively develop more and better mechanisms to support this” ([Life Sciences Vision](#) (Jul-21; OLS, DSIT, DBT), p. 42).

***Recommendation – Include Med Tech in UK Import/Export Plans:*** *In close partnership with industry, Government should ensure clear, consistent application of the 2025 UK Border Strategy<sup>1</sup>, UK Export Strategy<sup>2</sup>, and UK Single-Trade Window<sup>3</sup>. These key plans must be updated to include med tech.*

## UK Med Tech Import/Export Plans – Four Areas of Focus

Though BHTA strongly supports Government’s 12-Point UK Export Plan<sup>4</sup>, med tech is conspicuous in its absence from the UK Export Strategy (neither “assistive technology” nor “medical devices” are mentioned in the document). From a med tech perspective, we suggest the UK’s import/export approach should focus on:

**Government Investment:** Health & Social Care (H&SC) targeted financial incentives, grants, export promotion, and SME support to encourage businesses to explore international markets, for example:

- [DBT Export Support Service \(ESS\)](#) should receive proper resource, investment, and strategy, beginning with a reconfirmation of Government’s £45m spending commitment<sup>5</sup>. ESS should be able to fulfil its three aims, rather than functioning as a helpline and online service for UK businesses, answering questions about exporting products or services to EU customers.

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<sup>1</sup> [2025 UK Border Strategy](#), HM Government, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> [Export strategy: Made in the UK, Sold to the World](#), Dept for Business & Trade and Dept for International Trade, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [The UK Single Trade Window Public Consultation](#), Cabinet Office, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> See [UK Export Strategy](#), pp. 17-18 for full detail of the 12 Points.

<sup>5</sup> As outlined in [UK Export Strategy](#), pp. 19-20.

**Trade Agreements:** UK government should prioritise H&SC products and services, for example:

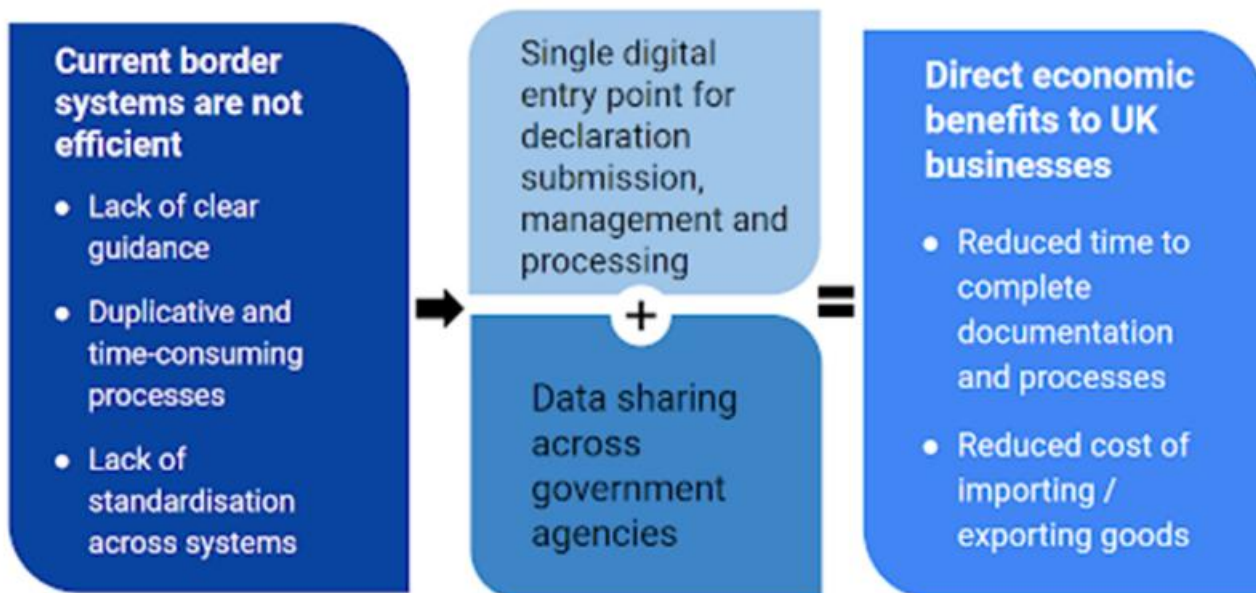
- UK Export Strategy – Government-to-Government Partnerships<sup>6</sup> and Opening Markets Worldwide<sup>7</sup> need fully-resourced commitment in general, and application of a med tech lens in particular, to mitigate operational risk<sup>8</sup>.

**UK Export R&D:** Government should support market research to identify target countries with high demand for UK H&SC products and services, for example:

- Addition of Med Tech Sectoral Strategy for UK Export, since med tech would currently fall between the existing Life Sciences, Healthcare & Chemicals and Technology strategies<sup>9</sup>, Health Tech surely deserves focus as its own sector. It is an area of both strength (boasting a 16% compound annual growth rate 2016-2020 for a total of nearly £6m in 2020 exports) and weakness (UK falls behind many developed companies in its exports of med tech ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in recent Imperial College research and 12<sup>th</sup> by DBT's Office for Life Sciences)<sup>10</sup>.

**Digital Infrastructure:** HMT, HMRC, and MHRA should collaborate closely to harmonise digital infrastructure and technology adoption within the H&SC sector to help UK businesses reach global customers, for example:

- Implementation of the Single Trade Window (STW), in partnership with industry, to deliver on the STW's headline promise:



## Benefits to Government

Adoption of these recommendations stands to deliver the following benefits:

- Reducing market access barriers at G20 countries could boost UK exports by c. £75 billion per year<sup>11</sup>
- Growth of UK med tech export market beyond its current c. £6bn level<sup>12</sup>
- Advancement of UK med tech export sector in global standings, with positive inward-investment effects

<sup>6</sup> See [UK Export Strategy](#), pp. 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> See [UK Export Strategy](#), pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., "[Exporting from UK Freeports: Duty Drawback, Origin and Subsidies](#)," Peter Holmes et al, *UK Trade Policy Observatory – University of Sussex and Chatham House*, Briefing Paper 69: September 2022; see also "[export](#)" [thread on UKTPO blog](#).

<sup>9</sup> See [UK Export Strategy](#), p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> [Sectoral Systems of Innovation and the UK's Competitiveness: The UK MedTech Sector](#), pp. 21-22.

<sup>11</sup> See [UK Export Strategy](#), p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> See Note 42 for estimated market size.