



UK Government

# Shaping tomorrow: The UK's Digital Standards Strategy (2026 to 2030)

Promoting economic growth and innovation, encouraging tech adoption, demonstrating global leadership

# Executive summary

---

- **Digital technical standards underpin everyday technologies and the economic benefits of standardisation are strong.** As shared rules, they provide essential guidance and confidence for businesses, industry, investors and consumers. They accelerate the adoption of new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and support trade and market access.
- **Digital standards ensure different devices, systems and software can connect, communicate and work together effectively.** Being able to influence and shape digital standards presents significant advantage, both commercially and in terms of safety, security and resilience.
- **Digital standards can complement regulation and reduce red tape.** They set internationally-agreed best practice that can adapt quickly, helping create the right conditions to innovate, develop and deploy new technology in the UK. This is particularly important in a world of rapid change with the advancement of AI a prime example.
- **However, the digital standards landscape is increasingly complex.** Stakeholder incentives are diverse and outcomes are often determined by industry trends, national ambitions and values, geopolitical dynamics and even individual interests. These combine to create risks and vulnerabilities that require active engagement and close partnership with industry, tech stakeholders and wider allies.
- **This strategy sets out how the UK will leverage the economic potential of digital standards and support the growth of our tech industry, while navigating these challenges to reinforce our leadership in a digitally connected world.** The strategy aligns with the UK Industrial Strategy, Trade Strategy and National Security Strategy which all emphasise the importance of UK influence in international standards.
- **The UK supports a robust international digital standards ecosystem and standards that reflect our economic interests, security interests and values.** We will work closely with those who share our commitment and seek to build a broad and diverse set of international partners.
- **UK action will focus on technologies and standards development organisations that are strategically important, present the highest risk, offer high economic growth potential, and attract high-value jobs and skills.** These include AI, cybersecurity, advanced connectivity technologies, quantum technologies, semiconductors and the internet.

# Shaping tomorrow: The UK's Digital Standards Strategy (2026 to 2030)

---

Everyday life depends on standards, though it is not always obvious. Digital standards are at the heart of technology, keeping us connected to people, products and services almost anywhere in the world. They ensure the technologies we use every day work together effectively and are safe, secure and resilient, while upholding our society and values. They are generally voluntary and set by industry and the tech community – mostly through international standards development organisations (SDOs).

By giving guidance to businesses, certainty to suppliers and investors, and confidence to consumers, digital standards drive the innovation, development and adoption of new technologies. They also facilitate trade and access to markets. Studies, including by the British Standards Institution (BSI), have highlighted the important role that standards play in promoting economic growth and employment.

A first of its kind, 'Shaping tomorrow: The UK's Digital Standards Strategy (2026 to 2030)' (the strategy) sets out how the UK can leverage the economic potential of digital standards and navigate the challenges in the years ahead to reinforce our longstanding leadership in a modern, digitally-connected world. Through the strategy, the UK government is supporting the growth and development of our digital and tech sector.

## About digital standards

The economic benefits of standardisation are strong. One study suggests that around 23% of the UK's gross domestic product (GDP) growth since 2000 can be attributed to standards, by lowering production costs, enabling interoperability across borders and technologies, encouraging innovation and development, and reducing barriers to trade.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the digital and technologies sector contributed an estimated £207 billion in gross value added (GVA) in 2023, accounting for 9% of the UK economy.<sup>2</sup>

Internationally, a 2025 World Bank report found that nearly 90% of world trade is shaped by non-tariff measures, most linked to standards. This is up from 15% in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> An Austrian study found that over the period 2013 to 2023, 6.5% of annual employment growth can be traced back to technical standards.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Centre for Economics and Business Research (2022): The contribution of standards to the UK economy, page 32. Available at: [www.bsigroup.com/siteassets/pdf/en/about-us/bsi-the-economic-contribution-of-standards-to-the-uk-economy-uk-en.pdf](http://www.bsigroup.com/siteassets/pdf/en/about-us/bsi-the-economic-contribution-of-standards-to-the-uk-economy-uk-en.pdf)

2 Business.gov.uk: Digital and technologies. Available at: [www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/digital-and-tech](http://www.business.gov.uk/campaign/invest-in-great/digital-and-tech)

3 World Bank (2025:) World development report 2025, page 2. Available at: [www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2025](http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2025)

4 Austrian Standards (2025): Impact of standards. Available at: [www.austrian-standards.at/en/newsroom/pressemeldungen/impact-of-standards](http://www.austrian-standards.at/en/newsroom/pressemeldungen/impact-of-standards)

From our mobile phones and payment systems to the most advanced AI systems and the internet, digital standards define how the technologies and services we use are designed, deployed and governed. They create opportunities for new entrants and foster competition within markets, helping to lower costs.

Rather than adding red tape and regulatory burden, digital standards provide a more flexible alternative to regulation by establishing internationally-agreed best practice for how technology should be developed and implemented. Because they are not written into law and are voluntary, digital standards can more easily adapt to changes in technology. They facilitate the right conditions for industry to innovate, develop and deploy products in the UK.

In 2022, BSI reported on **the contribution of standards to the UK economy**, finding that standards play a vital role not only for the economy but also in supporting trade, investment, innovation and environmental progress. Standards are recognised as drivers of competitiveness, particularly in export markets.

Businesses of all sizes report more advantages than drawbacks from using standards, with 81% of surveyed businesses stating that standards provide a sustained boost to productivity. The information and communication technology sector, along with healthcare and financial services, show the greatest gains in GVA – a measure of the economic value generated by producing goods and services.



Setting digital standards in SDOs, such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), is both a technical and geopolitical process. To those who seek to shape them, digital standards offer strategic advantage. Countries can encourage national champions at the cutting edge of technology. Frontrunners can achieve technological predominance, especially if they can secure a first-adopter advantage.

Some governments around the world go further, attempting to use digital standards to extend control of emerging technologies with potentially serious implications for the global economy, security, safety and interoperability. In this way, technology could have the potential to create a range of new vulnerabilities and risks. Only by participating actively in the development of digital standards can the UK and our partners engage with and push back against these challenges.

Against this backdrop, the UK government released its Industrial Strategy and accompanying Digital and Technologies Sector Plan, along with its Trade Strategy, in June 2025.<sup>5,6,7</sup> From an economic growth perspective, these strategies emphasise the need to influence international standards to spark and create value from innovation and adoption of technology. The Industrial Strategy specifically called for the publication of this Digital Standards Strategy. The UK National Security Strategy, released in August 2025, also highlights the important role that digital standards play with regards to UK security.<sup>8</sup>

**The ETSI standard on cyber security for AI (EN 304 223)** has been shaped with significant UK government input from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the National Cyber Security Centre. It draws from the UK's Code of Practice for the Cyber Security of AI. The standard embeds secure-by-design principles and establishes baseline security requirements to secure AI systems across their lifecycle. The UK's role in developing EN 304 223 reinforces our leadership in AI, cyber security and international standards development, and demonstrates our broader commitment to shape technical standards globally.

---

5 Department for Business and Trade (2025): The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy-2025](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy-2025)

6 Department for Business and Trade (2025): Digital and Technologies Sector Plan. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-and-technologies-sector-plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-and-technologies-sector-plan)

7 Department for Business and Trade (2025): The UK's Trade Strategy. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-trade-strategy/the-uks-trade-strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-trade-strategy/the-uks-trade-strategy)

8 Cabinet Office (2025): National Security Strategy 2025: Security for the British people in a dangerous world. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-2025-security-for-the-british-people-in-a-dangerous-world](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-2025-security-for-the-british-people-in-a-dangerous-world)

# The UK's objectives and how we will achieve them

---

It is in the UK's national interest to retain its leadership position in international tech policy by actively participating in the development of international digital standards. The UK supports a robust international digital standards development ecosystem. Our vision is to continue to see international digital standards that reflect our values and interests, positioning the UK at the forefront in developing, adopting and deploying new technologies. Our goal is to ensure we are well-equipped to play our part into the future.

By way of priorities, this strategy is focused on technologies recognised by the [Digital and Technologies Sector Plan](#) as having the greatest growth potential for the UK, and supporting UK security and sovereignty interests.<sup>9</sup> These are advanced connectivity technologies, AI, cybersecurity, quantum technologies and semiconductors – as well as the internet.

## Objectives

The UK's strategic objectives – what we aim to achieve – are as follows.

- **Facilitate responsible technology innovation, deliver market benefit and support economic value for the UK through standardisation.** Sustained and consistent participation, supported by a strong pipeline of talent, is required across all stages of standardisation research, development, deployment, assurance and compliance.
- **Ensure the international standards development ecosystem is effective, efficient and responsive, and participation remains open, collaborative, merit-based and expert-led.** A co-ordinated, collaborative and defined ecosystem avoids duplication and wasting resources. More voices make better standards.
- **Ensure international digital standards reflect our society's values and interests, are fit-for-purpose, and meet national security and resilience needs as technological capabilities grow in sophistication.** Standards that could permit intrusiveness by technology – for example, that infringe our democratic values, human rights and freedom of speech – or that lack appropriate safeguards create risks to our resilience.
- **Collaborate and demonstrate international leadership to the benefit of the UK and our like-minded partners.** A joined-up UK approach across industry, the tech community and government on our priorities, and working closely with like-minded partners, will lead to better outcomes.

---

<sup>9</sup> Department for Business and Trade (2025): Digital and Technologies Sector Plan. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-and-technologies-sector-plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-and-technologies-sector-plan)

**The Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) is the standard that started global digital mobile communication, enabling the success of mobile phones and subsequent developments in digital connectivity.**

Drawing inspiration from the UK and our efforts to bring government and industry together across Europe, GSM transformed the way we communicate and led to the creation of the multi-billion pound industry we see today.



## Action plan

Implementing this strategy will take sustained and co-ordinated action, supported by appropriate governance and oversight. Our approach to digital standards is unlikely to change significantly. However, over time the things we do will need to adapt to circumstances. Specific efforts will be guided by close collaboration with our stakeholder community.

### Outline of intended actions

#### Growth and innovation

- 1.1. Assess and monitor UK participation in standardisation, prioritising technologies and organisations that are strategically important, present the highest risk, offer high economic growth potential, and attract high-value jobs and skills.
- 1.2. Mobilise talent and develop capability to ensure we remain fit to participate over the long term, through grant schemes, expert exchange programmes, mentorship networks, secondments and placements, teaching, training, and knowledge sharing.
- 1.3. Promote UK industrial, academic, research and innovation sector engagement with standardisation to drive economic growth and market value. Provide platforms for collaboration, co-ordination and networking.
- 1.4. Promote generation of UK intellectual capital in, and through, technical standards by working with the Intellectual Property Office to increase UK-based standards essential patents.
- 1.5. Identify and address systemic barriers to participation in SDOs with domestic and international partners. Provide relevant support through initiatives such as the UK's AI Standards Hub and the Quantum Standards Network.
- 1.6. Build awareness and capacity within UK government policy and delivery teams on digital standards for frontier technologies, through upskilling, training programmes and learning from mature sectors. Mainstream digital standards as part of the regulatory and policy toolkit, noting different technologies are at different lifecycle points.

## Outline of intended actions

### National interests and values

- 2.1 Champion an inclusive, multistakeholder, industry-led approach to standardisation. Support an environment for business success. Rally stakeholders including through networks and participation in UK delegations.
- 2.2 Uphold and promote integrity, transparency and resilience in the standards development ecosystem. Use our platform in SDOs to promote our values and vision to inspire change where needed.
- 2.3 Regularly monitor, map and assess risks and opportunities, including in relation to geopolitics, societal values and national security. Raise awareness and guide the standards-making community, ensuring risks are kept in balance. Convene advanced learning programme open to industry and others.

### Leadership and collaboration

- 3.1 Continue and build collaboration, outreach and information-sharing by UK government across the digital standards community – comprising industry, academia, civil society, UK National Quality Infrastructure bodies and others – to maximise influence and inform public policy. Convene regular events and establish ongoing consultation mechanisms.
- 3.2 Seek to embed UK talent and expertise in SDO leadership roles and positions of responsibility over the long term, and appointment to governing bodies such as ITU Council, ETSI Board and others as appropriate. Recognise and reward achievements and notable contributions.
- 3.3 Build, nurture and expand our coalition of like-minded partners beyond traditional allies to include more middle ground and developing countries. Push back collectively against common challenges. Share expertise, good practice, information and knowledge. Act as convenor, facilitate collaboration and pool resources where it makes sense to do so.

## Outline of intended actions

- 3.4 Recognise that other international partners bring valuable perspectives and expertise to international digital standards development, even though we may disagree on some issues. Encourage their engagement while remaining robust in protecting UK interests and values.
- 3.5 Continue international capability building, awareness raising and digital development initiatives to support our outreach, showcase UK expertise and approaches, and build regional and global connectivity. Continue to position the UK as a recognised, reliable and trusted partner of choice.
- 3.6 Strengthen and build bilateral engagement with like-minded international partners on topics of mutual interest through joint projects, enhanced collaboration and closer working in international standardisation.

## Reporting and governance

- 4.1 Annual public reporting by UK government on progress against objectives and actions outlined in this strategy. Embed robust governance, co-ordination and consultation mechanisms to support implementation and reporting.



## ANNEX 1: List of standards development organisations

Organisation	Responsibilities and relevance to the UK
<b>British Standards Institution (BSI)</b>	BSI is the UK’s national standards body and represents UK stakeholders as the national member of the regional and international standards bodies CEN, CENELEC, ISO and IEC, and the national member of ETSI.
<b>European Committee for Standardization (CEN)</b>	CEN is a European regional standards organisation that acts as a platform for the development of European standards and technical specifications, including harmonised European standards.
<b>European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC)</b>	CENELEC is a European regional standards organisation that acts as a platform for the development of European standards and technical specifications, including harmonised European standards. CENELEC has a formal agreement with IEC, in a similar arrangement to CEN and ISO, and is made up of 34 national members, identical to CEN.
<b>European Telecommunication Standards Institute (ETSI)</b>	ETSI is a European-centred organisation that provides standards for a range of telecommunications and digital services, with a global membership of over 900 members from more than 60 countries.
<b>Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Standards Association (IEEE SA)</b>	IEEE SA is a US-centred SDO that brings together stakeholders from more than 160 countries to create electrical and electronic engineering standards.
<b>Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)</b>	IETF is the main global standards body for the internet’s infrastructure, producing standards that define how internet technology functions and can be managed and operated. It is a large community of network designers, operators, vendors and researchers who participate on a voluntary, individual basis.
<b>International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)</b>	IEC develops and publishes standards for electrical and electronic related technologies. It is made up of national committees which represent their countries’ electrotechnical interests. It is recognised by the World Trade Organization.

Organisation	Responsibilities and relevance to the UK
<b>International Standards Organization (ISO)</b>	<p>ISO is an independent, non-governmental organisation that develops and publishes standards to ensure the quality, safety and efficiency of products and services. It comprises representatives from the national standards bodies of each member country, and covers a range of industries, facilitating international trade and global co-operation.</p>
<b>International Telecommunication Union (ITU)</b>	<p>ITU is the United Nations' specialised agency for telecommunications and information and communication technologies. It develops technical standards and manages the co-ordination of radio spectrum allocations and satellite filings. Its work is mostly driven by governments, although members from industry and academia are allowed limited rights to participate.</p>
<b>Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP)</b>	<p>3GPP is a partnership of seven regional standards organisations that produces standards for global mobile communications, currently 5G and 6G.</p>
<b>World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)</b>	<p>W3C is the main standards body for the World Wide Web. It also undertakes education and outreach, develops software and serves as an open forum for discussion about the web. It is a membership-based organisation, with members including businesses, non-profit organisations, universities and governmental entities.</p>

## ANNEX 2: UK agencies and organisations

Organisation	Responsibilities
<b>Alan Turing Institute (ATI)</b>	ATI is the UK's national institute for data science and artificial intelligence.
<b>British Standards Institution (BSI)</b>	See ANNEX 1.
<b>Department for Business and Trade (DBT)</b>	DBT leads on the UK government's relationship with BSI, the UK's national standards body.
<b>Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)</b>	DSIT leads the UK government's approach to digital technologies including standardisation. It is the sponsoring department for NPL.
<b>Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)</b>	In the context of digital standards, FCDO supports international tech diplomacy.
<b>Intellectual Property Office</b>	Intellectual property rights play a critical role in standards development, with approaches varying across sectors.
<b>National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and National Protective Security Authority (NPSA)</b>	These organisations make up the UK's technical authorities for physical and cyber security. NCSC and NPSA work closely with DSIT on security-related standards.
<b>National Physical Laboratory (NPL)</b>	NPL is the UK's national metrology institute, providing the measurement capability.
<b>National Quality Infrastructure (NQI)</b>	NQI is a national framework of policies and regulations, institutions and practices aimed at delivering confidence and credibility for markets, governments and consumers. The NQI comprises BSI, NPL, UKAS and OPSS.
<b>Network Interoperability Consultative Committee (NICC)</b>	NICC supports industry and government on UK telecommunications standards needs.

Organisation	Responsibilities
<b>Ofcom</b>	Ofcom is the UK's regulator for communications services and, under the Communications Act 2003, represents the UK (on behalf of DSIT) in some international standardisation and standards-adjacent activities.
<b>Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS)</b>	OPSS is part of DBT. It has responsibility to protect people and places from product-related harm, ensuring consumers and businesses can buy and sell products with confidence.
<b>Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO)</b>	RIO, which sits within DSIT, aims to foster a more adaptive regulatory environment that reduces barriers to innovation and growth opportunities.
<b>UK Accreditation Service (UKAS)</b>	UKAS is the government-appointed national accreditation body for the UK.

