



Department for
Business & Trade

Unlocking Digital Trade

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1. Main messages

The UK's recent trade agreements include advanced digital trade provisions covering issues like smoother cross-border data flows, e-signatures, and paperless trade. The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) works to encourage UK firms to adopt these practices. However, many SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) are unaware of agreement details or face compliance challenges. Factors like awareness, risk perception, investment costs, and digital literacy affect adoption. Businesses and stakeholders generally agree that larger firms are better positioned to comply with and benefit from emerging trade provisions, while SMEs can face greater hurdles, despite their potential agility. This research examines how behavioural factors shape adoption of digital trade provisions.

1.1 Key Findings

- Businesses trading services digitally tend to have very low awareness of digital trade provisions within existing trade agreements; yet almost all routinely make use of various digital tools and practices, often without realising these are exactly the kinds of activities supported by digital trade provisions, such as e-signatures, e-contracts, e-invoicing, virtual consultations, and cross-border data transfer systems.
- When looking to either enter new international markets, or when exploring the use of new digital tools and practices, businesses most commonly say they are driven by their existing customers but agree that new trade agreements provide certainty that an international market is 'safe' to trade with.
- The key factors influencing businesses' adoption of the digital trade provisions include:
 - *Capability*: digital literacy, and awareness and knowledge
 - *Opportunity*: market context, access to government support and resources, time and resources available, decision-making and operational processes
 - *Motivation*: organisational mindset towards digitalisation, perception of risks and trust in digital tools.

1.2 Implications

- DBT should continue to explore further trade agreements including digital and free trade agreements, as evidence suggests that, even with low awareness, digital trade provisions are helping to facilitate greater use of digital tools and practices. DBT should lead in ensuring that businesses have access to relevant guidance and assurances – working with trade associations, professional bodies, regulators, and commercial vendors – including information on the benefits of the provisions, security assurances for digital tools, case studies, and training opportunities for integrating new technologies into business workflows.

2. Executive summary

2.1 Background & objectives

Recent UK trade agreements have introduced advanced digital trade provisions, including measures to streamline cross-border data flows and enable the use of e-signatures, e-invoicing, and paperless processes. The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) promotes the uptake of these measures across UK businesses. Despite the opportunities these provisions create, many SMEs remain unaware of them or encounter practical and compliance-related challenges. Adoption is shaped by factors such as perceived risks, digital capability, initial investment requirements, and levels of trust. Larger firms tend to be better equipped to meet emerging requirements, whereas SMEs often face more constraints, reflecting the challenges outlined above, even if they can adapt quickly once engaged. This research examines how behavioural drivers and barriers influence firms' use of digital trade provisions, helping to identify ways for UK businesses to better access the benefits of digital trade. Key objectives are to:

1. understand how, if at all, businesses respond to, or are influenced by, new digital and service provisions
2. use behavioural frameworks to better understand:
 - i. the behavioural impacts of existing agreements
 - ii. how businesses interact with new provisions once agreements are in force; and
 - iii. how these provisions impact on businesses' behaviour and trade in specific markets.
3. understand where improvements can be made to future agreements
4. understand how, if at all, similar provisions in agreements of different sizes and types (large trade groups, comprehensive trade deals and small, targeted deals) affect business behaviour and how they trade.
5. pilot cross-cutting Monitoring & Evaluation by focusing on areas that are highlighted in the Trade Strategy.

2.2 Methodology summary

In-depth interviews were conducted with DBT staff, businesses, and stakeholder groups:

- Four initial interviews with DBT staff in December 2025 to shape the subsequent business and stakeholder interview format.
- 60 interviews from January to March 2026 with businesses trading digital services internationally. The research focused on Financial Services (e.g., banking, insurance and investment services), Digital Technology (e.g., software and IT services), and Other Business Services sectors (e.g., management consulting and IP advisory), as these sectors' adoption patterns are less visible in existing evidence. Participating firms

operated in at least one of the following markets: Australia/New Zealand (Free Trade Agreement, FTA), Singapore (UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement, UKSDEA), remaining Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) countries (Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam), and Brazil or Thailand (included as markets not covered by existing agreements).

- Nine interviews with stakeholder organisations across professional and business services groups, trade associations, government-linked organisations, academic institutions, and professional membership bodies during the same period, with one additional stakeholder provided high-level feedback via email.

2.3 Key findings

- Businesses tend to have very low awareness of the digital trade provisions contained in existing trade agreements; however, almost all already use a wide range of digital tools and practices that these provisions are designed to support and facilitate – most commonly e-signatures, e-contracts, e-invoicing, virtual consultations, and cross-border data transfer systems. Importantly, these tools are used across both day-to-day operations and international trade activity, rather than being reserved for cross-border transactions.
- When looking to enter new international markets or adopt new digital tools and practices, businesses are primarily responding to the preferences of their existing customers but note that new trade agreements provide additional certainty that an international market is reliable and ‘safe’ to trade with. This suggests that, presently, trade agreements – and the digital provisions within them – act less as a direct motivator and more as a confidence-building mechanism that supports decisions already driven by customer demand.

2.3.1 Key behavioural enablers and barriers to the adoption of digital trade provisions

The key factors influencing business behaviour in relation to the digital trade provisions have been analysed using the COM-B model, exploring a business’s *capability*, *opportunity*, and *motivation* to perform a behaviour.

2.3.1.1 Capability enablers / barriers

- **Internal digital literacy skills:** firms with higher digital literacy find it easier to embed new digital tools into their day-to-day operations, while those with lower digital literacy struggle to know how to do so.
- **Awareness and knowledge:** related to digital literacy, firms are limited by their awareness of digital tools and practices, with many ‘unknown unknowns’ resulting in businesses not knowing where to begin when exploring digital tools.

2.3.1.2 Opportunity enablers / barriers

- **Market context:** The perceived alignment between the UK and an international market (regulatory, cultural etc.) influences how easy a business thinks using digital tools within that market will be.
- **Time and resources available:** Businesses with fewer resources (e.g. smaller firms with no dedicated IT staff) are less readily able to explore new digital tools and practices than those with significantly more time and resources.
- **Access to resources and government support:** Being able to easily access information and support from the government impacts a business’s awareness and understanding of the digital trade provisions, which in turn increases adoption rates.
- **Decision-making processes:** Stricter decision hierarchies are most common in large or enterprise-scale organisations and in heavily regulated sectors such as finance, insurance and defence. Multiple layers of sign-off help manage legal and reputational risk but slow the adoption of new digital tools and can hinder innovation.

2.3.1.3 Motivation enablers / barriers

- **Organisational mindset towards digitalisation:** Some businesses (typically SMEs or tech firms) exist with an innovation mindset, constantly wanting to use cutting edge technology which creates efficiencies. These businesses are more likely to explore digital tools and practices on a regular basis. Other businesses operate with a more conservative mindset, being reluctant to change business practices without clear evidence regarding return on investment.
- **Perceptions of risk and trust in digital tools:** Implementing and using a new digital tool often comes with significant time and financial costs, as well as security and reputational risks if anything were to go wrong. More risk averse businesses are less likely to be motivated to adopt new digital tools and practices due to this. Additionally, firms with higher confidence in the perceived legitimacy of digital tools, and trust that they will be recognised and enforced in international markets, more readily make use of them.

Table 1 - Summary of hypotheses outcomes

The below hypotheses were developed alongside DBT. For more detail on the rationale behind each outcome, see Table 3 (page 28-29).

Hypothesis	Outcome
Businesses’ capability, opportunity, and motivation shape whether and how businesses use digital trade provisions.	TRUE
Businesses do not need explicit awareness of digital trade provisions for behavioural change to occur, but when awareness does exist, it amplifies	UNCLEAR

perceived benefits and strengthens firms' capability, opportunity and motivation to change their trading behaviours.	
Firms operating in markets with digital trade provisions will demonstrate distinct behavioural patterns compared with firms trading in markets without comparable provisions.	TRUE
The behavioural influence of digital trade provisions is limited when businesses face structural or internal barriers which constrain their capability, opportunity or motivation to engage with the provisions.	TRUE
The behavioural influence of digital trade provisions is enhanced when businesses face fewer structural or internal barriers, increasing their capability, opportunity, or motivation to engage with the provisions.	TRUE
Businesses operating in markets that include digital trade provisions are more likely to expand their digitally delivered services trade with those markets, reflecting increased capability, opportunity , and motivation to do so.	TRUE

2.4 Implications for DBT

Despite businesses having limited awareness of the digital trade provisions, most are already making use of them unknowingly. Many are conscious that using new digital tools is almost an inevitable necessity, and there is generally strong motivation to continue to adapt, evolve, and implement new practices. The low awareness also means the type of agreement currently has little impact on perceptions of the provisions.

However, the pace of change is so fast that many businesses feel they are struggling to keep up, and are concerned about keeping their data, and their customers' data, secure. This can lead to delayed adoption of digital tools, reduced competitiveness and missed opportunities for growth in markets that increasingly expect digital capability. They would like to see DBT, in collaboration with trade associations, professional bodies, regulators and commercial vendors, support them by:

- providing clarity on which digital tools are deemed to be safe, secure, and worthwhile investments, supported by clear guidance and assurances
- offering guidance on the cost implications of adopting new digital tools and practices, including where efficiencies or savings may be realised
- supplying information and support about technological compatibility and market acceptance, helping businesses understand which tools and practices are recognised or enforceable in different markets
- providing access to training and educational resources to help businesses understand the benefits of digital trade provisions and integrate new technologies into their workflows.

3. Introduction

3.1 Background & context

The UK's most recent trade agreements, including the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (UKSDEA), Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Australia and New Zealand, and the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), include pioneering provisions on digital trade, such as the legal recognition of e-signatures, e-invoicing, and paperless trade.¹ These agreements aim to reduce trade barriers for UK businesses and promote cross-border data flows while maintaining domestic data protection standards.²

The UK's Trade Strategy identifies digital trade as integral to the success of the UK's service economy. It includes a specific commitment to explore new Digital Trade Agreements (DTAs) with a range of partners, while also pursuing advanced digital trade provisions through FTAs and plurilateral initiatives.³ The overarching goal is to balance the benefits of digital trade for UK businesses and the wider economy with the need to protect consumer rights, privacy and competitive fairness.

To achieve this, the Department for Business & Trade (DBT) need to ensure practices encouraged and enabled by these trade provisions are actively adopted by UK firms, especially in sectors like financial and business services, where adoption may be less visible than goods services. However, policy changes rarely translate seamlessly into business practices – many businesses, particularly SMEs, lack awareness of agreement details or struggle with compliance, even when opportunities exist.

3.2 Aims & objectives

The key objectives of this research are to:

1. understand how, if at all, businesses respond to, or are influenced by, new digital and service provisions
2. use behavioural frameworks to better understand:
 - I. the behavioural impacts of existing agreements
 - II. how businesses interact with new provisions once agreements are in force; and
 - III. how provisions impact on businesses' behaviour and trade in specific markets.
3. understand where improvements can be made to future agreements

¹ Department for Business and Trade and Department for International Trade (2022) [UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement: final agreement explainer](#)

² UK Parliament (2024) [Digital trade governance: The UK's approach](#)

³ UK Government (2025) [The UK's Trade Strategy](#)

4. understand how, if at all, similar provisions in agreements of different sizes and types (large trade groups, comprehensive trade deals and small, targeted deals) affect business behaviour and how they trade.
5. pilot cross-cutting Monitoring & Evaluation by focusing on areas that are highlighted in the Trade Strategy.

This research aims to explore not just how firms adopt these practices, but how behavioural barriers and enablers impact different firms. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to help UK businesses take advantage of new and future digital trade opportunities.

3.3 Methodology summary

Pye Tait Consulting and Blue Marble Research conducted a programme of extended depth interviews with DBT colleagues, businesses, and representatives from stakeholder organisations. All fieldwork took place between December 2025 and March 2026.

Phase 1: 4x scoping interviews with DBT staff
The findings from these interviews were used to inform the design of the business and stakeholder interviews, and to consolidate thinking from across the Department.
Phase 2a: 10x stakeholder interviews
Nine stakeholders participated in an in-depth interview; one gave high-level email feedback. Stakeholders represented industry bodies, professional and business services groups, trade associations, government-linked organisations, academic institutions, and professional membership bodies.
Phase 2b: 60x business interviews
Interviews with businesses who trade digital services with overseas markets (i.e., services sold or bought across international boundaries without the physical movement of people, transmitted through digital networks such as the internet). All traded with at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia and New Zealand (bilateral Free Trade Agreements) • Singapore (covered by the United Kingdom-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (UKSDEA)) • At least one of: Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam (covered by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) deal) • Brazil or Thailand (representing markets without a Free Trade Agreement) <p>Additionally, all businesses operated within one of three key sectors – Financial services, Digital Technology, and other business services (e.g., management consulting and IP advisory services).</p> <p>It is important to note that some businesses also export physical goods to the relevant markets. Where relevant, comparisons drawn from these businesses have been highlighted.</p>

A detailed methodology, with a full sample profile, can be found in the appendix.

3.3.1 Research limitations

1. While the research provides valuable insight into the views and experiences of participating businesses, it is important to note that the sample has not been designed to be fully representative of all UK businesses operating with the key target sectors. Recruitment was based on a combination of known contacts with prior engagement with DBT, and businesses identified through Moody's FAME database – neither of which cover the full population. As a result, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative of the wider population.
2. Due to general low awareness of the four trade agreements covered in this research, and when they came into force, businesses struggled to articulate any changes in their business practices as a result of the agreements. As such, any comparative analysis of trading practice pre- and post- these agreements coming into force, or between the different agreements, is limited. This should be explored further in any future evaluation work.
3. The original ambition for this work was as a pilot for monitoring and evaluation activity. However, limited inferences can be made as to the impact of the trade agreements, largely due to the aforementioned low awareness levels. While some evidence points to a positive association between trade agreements and the adoption of digital tools and practices, the exploratory nature of this research means that no firm conclusions can be drawn about the underlying relationship. Additionally, the COM-B model used to analyse the data does not control for external variables. Future monitoring and evaluation could build on this work by exploring ways to account for these factors and by designing samples that enable further comparison between businesses entering the relevant markets before and after the trade agreements came into force.

4. Understanding of current trade agreements

Awareness of the four key trade agreements among the businesses interviewed is generally limited and uneven, with many stakeholders suggesting it is largely confined to larger organisations that have the capacity and resources to monitor policy changes or seek specialist advice. For most firms, decisions about entering or expanding trade with international markets are shaped far more by their commercial priorities and operating models than by the agreements themselves. Decisions about entering or expanding trade with international markets continue to be driven by demand, partnerships, and local operating conditions, and these factors remain dominant even when trade agreements are in place.

Interviewed firms do not expect recent trade agreements to materially influence their day-to-day operations, nor have they observed any clear differences since they came into effect, yet many still recognise a set of indirect benefits. These include greater stability and predictability, reduced administrative friction, improved access to finance, and clearer signals about the openness or reliability of partner markets. Taken together, the findings point to trade agreements rarely shaping firms' international strategies directly, although they can play a meaningful supporting role when their provisions align with operational needs or when they help to reduce uncertainty in cross-border activity.

4.1 Reasons for entering new international markets

Businesses tend to expand into new international markets when commercial opportunity, operational feasibility, and strategic alignment converge. While firms describe these decisions as being primarily driven by market signals, partnerships, and local conditions, many of the factors they cite are themselves shaped, often indirectly, by the presence of a trade agreement, even if businesses are not consciously aware of this influence. This dynamic appears particularly relevant for firms delivering services digitally, where the benefits of agreements are less tangible than, for example, tariff reductions. The themes below, presented in order of importance, outline the logic that shapes where firms choose to operate and the conditions they consider essential before committing resources.

4.1.1 Market demand and product-market fit (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

The primary driver of international expansion is clear, evidence-based demand. Businesses target markets where their product or service solves a recognised problem, where sector activity is strong, or where customer enquiries indicate readiness to buy. For some firms, demand depends on technical conditions; for others, it is shaped by broader economic trends, such as middle-class growth, which increases disposable income, or sustainability regulations, including packaging requirements. A significant minority expand because multinational clients pull them into new geographies, effectively pre-validating demand. For many SMEs, this reactive model reduces risk and lowers the cost of entry.

“We don't really target anything... we follow the market and the market comes to us.”

Business – Other business services (strategic advisory, logistics)

This pathway is particularly common among businesses with limited resources or those whose services can be delivered remotely, where the absence of physical supply chains can make it easier to respond to overseas demand.

4.1.2 Perceived ease of doing business (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Ease of doing business is a strong determinant of market selection. Firms consistently prefer English-speaking or regulatorily familiar markets, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, where they perceive communication as being more straightforward and regulatory information more accessible. Transparent regulations, predictable tax systems, low corruption, and the ability to operate or incorporate remotely all reduce friction.

Even in non-English-speaking markets, businesses emphasise the importance of their own language capability and clear regulatory frameworks. These conditions make digital delivery more straightforward and reduce the administrative burden of cross-border work.

4.1.3 Digital differences (*capability and opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Beyond general ease of doing business, firms encounter a digital divide that affects how smoothly they can operate across borders. This divide is shaped by differences in language, digital infrastructure, and digital regulatory standards, all of which influence the administrative and operational burden of trading internationally.

- **Language and digital systems:** Language barriers become more acute when digital systems, i.e., procurement portals, regulatory platforms, certification tools, are available only in local languages. Even where digital tools exist, their usability drops sharply without English-language interfaces or support, increasing the risk of errors and slowing down transactions.
- **Digital infrastructure and readiness:** Markets that still rely on paper documentation, wet-ink signatures, or in-person verification create bottlenecks for firms accustomed to digital workflows. Limited broadband coverage, unreliable cloud access, or low adoption of digital documentation force companies to maintain manual or hybrid processes, increasing cost and complexity.
- **Regulatory divergence and data governance barriers:** Divergent rules on electronic documentation, cybersecurity, or digital identity systems can make routine processes more complex. These issues affect how firms submit documents, verify identities, or comply with digital requirements. Brazil is mentioned by many as being a more challenging regulatory environment to trade within, compared to markets like Australia

and Singapore. It is possible this is in part due to Brazil not being part of a trade agreement, but more data is required to confirm this.

Where these three elements overlap, firms experience the highest friction. SMEs in particular rely on intermediaries – agents, distributors etc.– to navigate these gaps, meaning they benefit from digital processes only indirectly. This reliance increases costs and reduces control, making digitally misaligned markets less attractive unless commercial opportunities are compelling. It is worth noting that many of the markets with trade agreements with digital provisions tend to be more digitally aligned, and therefore feel lower-friction (such as Australia and New Zealand), even though firms often do not consciously attribute this to the agreements themselves.

4.1.4 Partnerships and local networks (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Partnerships are a central mechanism through which firms enter and navigate new markets, particularly for SMEs that lack the resources to establish a direct presence abroad. Local distributors, agents, and resellers help businesses manage linguistic, cultural, and procedural complexity and differences, particularly in Thailand, Brazil, Mexico, and Japan. These intermediaries provide access to customers, interpret local norms, and guide firms through procurement and compliance processes that would otherwise be difficult to manage remotely.

Government-supported networks also form an important complement to these commercial partnerships. Some firms described DBT as a key source of introductions, market intelligence, and event support, noting that DBT's ability to broker initial connections and maintain continuity as opportunities develop provides meaningful value. Businesses also highlighted the role of in-market Foreign Office teams, whose deeper regional expertise extends DBT's broader UK-based guidance and helps firms assess the viability of emerging opportunities.

“DBT have been the source of most of our connections... they do all they can, and it's everything we seem to need so far.”

Business – Digital Tech

This layered model of UK-level support and localised in-country insight reduces uncertainty, accelerates relationship-building, and enables SMEs to navigate unfamiliar markets more effectively, even though time constraints and limited visibility over event participation (as some firms will only attend an event if they know they will be able to network for new client) can still limit how fully firms engage with available support.

4.1.5 Market access barriers (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Even where demand exists, firms assess whether structural barriers make a market impractical. Common constraints include procurement rules requiring a local office, visa

restrictions, double-taxation risks, complex regulatory approvals, and high data localisation costs. Administrative burdens in certain regions can also deter entry. Export control rules further restrict access for firms with dual-use or defence-adjacent products. These barriers often determine feasibility more strongly than commercial opportunity.

4.1.6 Risks and ethical considerations (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

Political instability, sanctions, human rights concerns, and weak legal protections shape firms' risk appetite. Intellectual property risks, particularly in markets with weaker enforcement, are a recurring deterrent. Some firms apply explicit ethical filters, avoiding markets or industries that conflict with organisational values, including commitments linked to B Corp status (where a company is verified as meeting various social and environmental commitments).⁴ These considerations can override otherwise attractive commercial opportunities.

4.1.7 Technology maturity and digital readiness (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Technology maturity and digital readiness relate to whether a firm's product or service can function effectively in a given market. This matters most for companies offering cloud-based, software-driven, or technically specialised solutions. Firms assess whether the target market has the sector-specific infrastructure, platform compatibility, and user capability required for adoption. This factor is therefore about product viability, not administrative processes.

4.1.8 Client-led and opportunity-led expansion (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Not all expansion is strategic. Some firms grow internationally because existing clients take them into new regions, inbound enquiries reveal unexpected demand, or a single tender or exhibition creates a foothold. These opportunity-led pathways reflect the agility of smaller firms and the role of serendipity in early-stage internationalisation.

4.1.9 Regulatory and compliance alignment (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

For firms in regulated sectors, regulatory alignment is a critical determinant of market entry. Supportive regulations can unlock opportunities, while misalignment in areas such as approvals, tax treaties, or export controls can make a market inaccessible. Firms assess whether the regulatory environment enables or constrains their ability to operate effectively.

4.2 Awareness of existing trade agreements

A common pattern among interviewed businesses is very low awareness of trade agreements and little perceived practical relevance to their operations. This is not simply a knowledge gap but a structural feature of how different firms engage with international trade. Most do not see

⁴ <https://bcorporation.uk/b-corp-certification/what-is-a-b-corp/>

them as part of their commercial environment and have never needed to draw on them in day-to-day decisions. For these firms, trade agreements sit outside their operational focus and do not shape market entry, sales processes, or planning.

As mentioned, this low awareness is driven by many businesses feeling trade agreements do not apply to their business model. These firms do not routinely deal with customs processes, physical borders, or import duties. Given that no physical goods cross borders, firms believe trade agreements don't apply to their digitally delivered services. Many say these agreements only matter when shipping products, so they pay little attention to updates or details. It is important to note that this is a fallacy, and there is an opportunity for DBT to work to counter this perception.

4.2.1 Size and capability differences (*capability enabler/barrier*)

Awareness also varies because capability is unevenly distributed across the business landscape. Stakeholders note that the expertise needed to monitor policy developments and interpret technical provisions tends to cluster within trade associations and specialist teams, meaning larger firms are far better positioned to engage. These organisations can draw on compliance functions or external advisers, allowing them to track emerging rules, understand their implications, and link them to commercial decisions in a way that smaller firms cannot.

“It’s only the largest institutions that genuinely spend time thinking about this – engaging with the process and developing perspectives on what these free trade agreements could do to make their lives easier.”

Stakeholder

Smaller firms, by contrast, have limited exposure to trade agreements and little ability to translate them into operational terms. Many lack the capacity, funding, and specialist skills needed to interpret trade provisions, which leaves them dependent on intermediaries such as trade associations, government roadshows, export advisers, and sector networks to explain what agreements mean in practice. This reliance reinforces the perception that trade agreements are not something they need to understand in depth, because specialist intermediaries will step in if issues arise.

4.2.2 Surface-level knowledge (*capability enabler / barrier*)

Where awareness exists, it tends to remain at the level of broad concepts rather than practical understanding. Firms can often name elements such as cross-border data flows or electronic documentation, but they cannot explain how these rules operate or how they would apply them in real situations. This reflects the way businesses prioritise immediate operational demands over policy detail; without a clear commercial incentive, they do not invest time in interpreting technical provisions or tracking updates.

This limited understanding has two main effects. It prevents firms from recognising opportunities that agreements could unlock, because they cannot translate high-level concepts into concrete actions. It also reinforces the perception that trade agreements are abstract and distant from day-to-day business activity. When firms cannot see a direct operational link, they treat agreements as background context rather than tools that could shape market access or reduce friction.

4.2.3 Consequences of low awareness (*impacts on behaviour*)

This research shows that low awareness of trade agreements and related regulatory requirements has practical implications for firms. When businesses do not track developments or understand how rules apply to their model, they say they are more likely to encounter unexpected requirements, including invoicing differences, documentation demands, data-handling obligations, export-control steps or market-specific formalities. As a result, businesses often experience operational disruption and are forced into reactive adjustments, such as redesigning processes, rerouting supply chains or delaying or abandoning market activity.

Low awareness also reduces the strategic value firms attach to trade agreements. Where agreements are not seen as mechanisms that can shape market access, support digital trade or lower barriers, they are not factored into decisions about where to expand or how to structure international operations. This keeps agreements peripheral to commercial planning, even when provisions could help firms navigate documentation requirements, data-flow rules or compliance obligations more efficiently. In turn, businesses remain less prepared for changes that do apply to them, and may miss opportunities to use agreements to reduce friction or anticipate regulatory shifts.

A further consequence is that firms with greater internal capability, typically larger organisations with compliance or legal teams, are better positioned to avoid disruption and capture any benefits that agreements offer. These firms described being able to anticipate requirements, manage documentation and respond quickly to regulatory changes. Smaller firms, which tend to rely more on intermediaries to interpret requirements, remain reactive and dependent on external prompts. This creates an uneven landscape in which the businesses most able to use trade agreements are those that already have the resources to navigate international markets, while others face avoidable delays, costs, or market exists due to unanticipated rules.

4.3 Perceived benefits of existing trade agreements

Interviewed firms identify a range of potential benefits from trade agreements in principle (despite low knowledge regarding the three agreements included in this research), but these benefits are unevenly understood and often indirect. Most firms do not expect trade

agreements to transform their operations, yet many still see value in the stability, signalling effects, and the incremental improvements that the agreements can provide. The analysis below brings these themes together and explains how firms interpret the benefits in practice.

4.3.1 General positivity despite limited detail (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

Some firms express a broadly positive attitude toward the agreements even when they cannot identify specific benefits. They view the agreements as signals of openness, reduced friction, and a more supportive environment for cross-border activity – which often results in increased motivation to explore new markets (see 4.3.2). This positivity often reflects a contrast with recent experiences of increased administrative burden following Brexit. For these firms, the agreements represent a shift toward smoother processes and fewer delays, even if the practical implications for their own operations remain unclear.

4.3.2 Perception of new market exploration (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

A smaller group see the agreements as creating opportunities to explore new markets. They interpret the agreements as making regions such as Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, or CPTPP countries more accessible or more welcoming to UK firms. While the agreements are not the sole driver of expansion, they can encourage firms to test demand, build partnerships, or consider markets they might otherwise overlook. In these cases, the agreements function as confidence-building measures rather than direct sources of commercial advantage.

“Businesses that have probably excluded themselves from international trade because of its complexity may find that all of a sudden, the international trade and the financing of it becomes simpler. And as I say, if it makes it simpler, then more folks are more likely to, you know, seek overseas opportunities...”

Stakeholder

These businesses tend to be mid-to-large or smaller firms within group structures that have compliance support (e.g., a parent company has in-house legal or regulatory support functions). They are already exporting and are comfortable using partners or government channels to de-risk expansion. For this group, trade agreements operate as de-risking tools – providing clearer rules, more predictable operating conditions, and as one participant put it, “*data-flow certainty and legal clarity.*” Firms outside this profile generally see agreements as peripheral to their model, which shapes how they interpret their relevance and value.

4.3.3 Incremental operational improvements (*capability enabler/barrier*)

Some firms identify specific operational improvements that trade agreements could help support. These include:

- easier participation in public tenders

- more standardised procurement processes
- smoother invoicing and compliance

In practice, firms link these improvements to their existing digital tools and procurement portals, rather than to trade agreement provisions. Digital invoicing and e-signatures were far more widespread, though adoption varied by market, with some jurisdictions still requiring physical signatures of bespoke formats.

Overall, firms saw these improvements as helpful for reducing friction and freeing staff time but not as changes that would reshape business models or open new markets. They reflect broader digitalisation trends rather than direct, widely felt impacts of trade agreements.

“Anything that smooths the paper trail, the red tape, is a good thing. A lot of the companies we deal with are state operators, government bodies of some description.”

Business – Digital Tech

4.3.4 Stability and predictability (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

Stakeholders highlight that the agreements can provide stability by locking in rules and reducing the risk of sudden policy changes. A small number of businesses also note that multi-party agreements such as the CPTPP can, in principle, offer a broader and more predictable framework than bilateral corridors. For firms operating across multiple jurisdictions, stable rules reduce uncertainty and support long-term planning, especially in areas such as cross-border data flows. Among the firms who discuss this theme, stability consistently emerges as important, though this reflects only part of the sample rather than a universal view.

4.3.5 Improved access to finance (*opportunity enabler/barrier*)

Stakeholders also identify a potential benefit in the form of improved access to finance, though this is not widely recognised by firms. They suggest that more standardised and reliable digital trade data – such as electronic invoices, customs and tariff information, export-license records, and verified contractual documentation – can reduce uncertainty for lenders by strengthening the quality and traceability of transaction information. This is seen as a possible indirect effect of greater digital interoperability across borders. However, firms themselves rarely make this connection, and the idea that improved data flows could support lender confidence remains more of a stakeholder-driver expectation than a widely observed outcome.

4.3.6 Rare examples of strategic use (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

Only a very small number of firms treat the agreements as strategic tools. These firms attend events linked to the agreements, open offices in relevant countries, and use the agreements for positioning and visibility. This behaviour shows that the agreements can function as catalysts for expansion, but it also highlights how uncommon this approach is more generally.

4.3.7 Responding to compliance triggers (*motivation enabler/barrier*)

Some firms engage with the trade agreements only when compliance issues arise. They pay attention to agreements when they intersect with sanctions, tax rules, or documentation requirements. In these cases, engagement is reactive: firms turn to the trade agreements to resolve a problem rather than to pursue an opportunity.

“We are agile, but if there's something that's going to shift the user experience or we need to consider the legalities of, yeah, we will go through an approval process and ensure it.”

Business – Digital Tech

4.3.8 Expectations of direct commercial impact (*capability enabler/barrier*)

However, underpinning perceptions of the benefits of the trade agreements is the common view is that they will not materially change how firms operate. Many rely on established partnerships, or work in sectors where trade policy is thought to have limited influence on day-to-day activity. For these firms, the agreements do not alter the fundamental drivers of international growth for their businesses, which remain market demand, local frameworks, and the strength of commercial relationships. This perspective reflects a broader assumption that trade agreements are more relevant to goods-based sectors than to services or digital businesses.

These businesses note that tariffs, customs processes, and physical border requirements – areas where agreements typically have the greatest effect – are not part of their operating model. Because they deliver software, digital platforms, or consultancy rather than physical goods, they see the agreements as peripheral to their commercial environment. This perception limits the extent to which they expect to benefit from the agreements, even when provisions on data flows or digital trade could, in theory, support their activities. As noted earlier, this is a fallacy, and the trade agreements do apply to the export of digital services.

“I feel like, to be honest, most of the context under which I've understood trade agreements have normally been for the physical export and import of goods.”

Business – Digital Tech

5. Current use of digital tools and practices

5.1 Use and consideration of digital tools and practices

Firms' use of digital tools is widespread and deeply embedded in day-to-day operations, but this does not translate into proactive engagement with digital trade provisions. For example, most interviewed businesses rely heavily on digital systems for administration, communication, and compliance, yet few connect these practices to the opportunities or protections offered by trade agreements. The analysis below explains how firms use digital tools to enable cross-border trade in services, what drives adoption, and why digital trade provisions remain largely invisible in their decision-making.

5.1.1 Extensive adoption of digital tools

Digital tools are now standard across almost all firms in the research, both as part of their standard operations, and their international trading practices. Businesses routinely use e-contracts, e-signatures, e-invoicing, cloud-based document sharing, and secure digital storage. Platforms such as DocuSign, Adobe Sign, SAP Ariba, Xero, QuickBooks, and proprietary systems underpin core administrative processes. For many firms, digitalisation is not an optional enhancement but a structural requirement: their business models would not function without digital workflows.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift. Remote work, virtual meetings, and digital signatures became normalised, prompting many organisations to move from paper-based to fully digital operations. The only exceptions arise in markets or sectors where digital infrastructure is limited or where some organisations still require physical documentation (such as Vietnam and Thailand).

5.1.2 Digital trade provisions: invisible infrastructure enabling cross-border operations

Businesses describe digital operations, such as seamless data movement, cloud-based collaboration, and electronic documentation – as standard features of the tools and platforms they use. These practices are framed as commercial or technical norms rather than outcomes of trade agreements. Whereas stakeholders characterised digital trade provisions as rules in trade agreements designed to make cross-border digital activity easier, cheaper, and more legally certain. They highlight commitments to support cross-border data flows, limits on data localisation requirements, access to foreign cloud services, interoperability, recognition of electronic documents, and protections for source code and algorithms. It can be inferred that the benefits stakeholders associate with digital trade provisions are largely invisible to firms because they are experienced through everyday tools rather than recognised as policy

outcomes. Firms are already operating in ways these provisions are intended to support, but they do not attribute these capabilities to trade agreements.

5.1.3 Cross-border data flows and cloud services

The ability to move data freely is fundamental to how firms operate internationally. Businesses routinely transfer customer information, engineering files, financial data, and operational records between the UK and overseas markets, with cloud platforms such as AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud underpinning these processes. Provisions that prevent forced localisation or discriminatory treatment of foreign cloud providers directly support these models. Yet firms rarely connect this freedom to trade agreements; awareness tends to grow only when they encounter restrictions in markets with tight controls, such as China, Vietnam, or parts of the Middle East, where cloud access is limited, monitored, or requires local hosting. In these contexts, firms feel the absence of digital trade provisions more strongly than their presence.

5.1.4 Limited awareness of digital trade provisions

Despite relying heavily on digital tools within their trade practices, most firms show limited awareness of digital trade provisions embedded in the four trade agreements. Everyday practices, i.e., e-signatures, e-invoicing, automated documentation, cloud collaboration, digital contracting, are not associated with the legal frameworks that enable them. For SMEs, this disconnect is reinforced by reliance on intermediaries who manage digital processes on their behalf, making the underlying rules largely invisible. Larger firms tend to have more familiarity, but even they treat provisions as background context rather than strategic levers.

Even when firms are aware of digital provisions, they struggle to interpret what they mean in practice. Participants describe the terminology as abstract and disconnected from day-to-day operations. Businesses typically learn about trade provisions through trade associations, law firms, or consultancies rather than directly from government sources, and stakeholders emphasise that firms engage far more effectively when information is translated into practical, business-facing case studies.

“They get it [information about digital trade provisions] through their trade association, otherwise they’re not getting much... the more case studies you can use the better... businesses always like to hear from other businesses.”

Stakeholder

This creates a persistent gap between digital trading practices, which are widespread, sophisticated, and central to firms’ international operations, and digital trade policy, which remains largely invisible and difficult for businesses to translate into operational relevance. This gap limits firms’ ability to use digital provisions proactively, whether to reduce friction, challenge barriers, or identify new opportunities.

5.1.5 Impact of digital trade provisions coming into force

Most firms did not report any noticeable change in their operations that they attribute directly to digital trade provisions coming into force. Many described digital practices such as remote delivery, cloud-based collaboration, e-signatures, and reduced face-to-face interaction as already well-established before recent agreements. Where businesses did observe shifts, for example, faster communication cycles or wider acceptance of tools like DocuSign, these were linked to broader technological trends or the effects of COVID-19 rather than to trade policy.

Stakeholders suggest that digital provisions may provide background legal certainty and help prevent regression to analogue processes, but this indirect effect is not directly evidenced in the business accounts. However, businesses have not reported any regression in markets covered by agreements, which stakeholders view as consistent with, though not proof of, the steadying influence of digital chapters, even if firms do not recognise the connection themselves.

They further emphasise this interpretation, noting that it is simply too early for most businesses to perceive the effects of digital trade provisions in a meaningful way. Businesses tend to notice policy impacts only when barriers arise, such as data localisation requirements or restricted cloud access, rather than when provisions quietly enable continuity. Stakeholders also highlight that the implementation of digital chapters is gradual, with benefits accruing over time rather than through immediate, visible shifts in business behaviour. They note that provisions appear to keep core digital practices steady, such as cross-border data flows, but are less fully taken advantage of where business awareness and capacity remain low.

"So much of [the implementation of digital tools and trade provisions] relies on them being taken forward and further implemented by both governments together to be fully usable and leverageable."

Stakeholder

As a result, the early stages of these agreements feel largely invisible to firms, even though the underlying rules may already be shaping the digital environment in which they operate.

5.1.6 Use of digital trade provisions across markets and sectors

The extent to which businesses make use of digital trade rules is shaped less by their own awareness and more by the digital maturity of the markets they operate in, the role of intermediaries, and the nature of their sector.

Across digitally mature markets (and markets involved in the four trade agreements), such as Australia, Singapore, and parts of East Asia, firms operate in environments where e-signatures, e-invoicing, and electronic customs documentation are already embedded in commercial practice. In these contexts, digital trade provisions function as invisible

infrastructure: they underpin the systems firms rely on, but businesses rarely recognise them as policy tools. Even when firms use electronic documentation or digital data transfer systems, they typically attribute these efficiencies to technology providers rather than to the legal frameworks that enable them.

In contrast, firms operating in markets with slower digital adoption – such as Vietnam, Cambodia, or parts of Europe – encounter more friction. Requirements for wet-ink signatures, paper documentation, or in-person verification mean that digital trade provisions have limited practical effect. Businesses must maintain hybrid processes to accommodate local norms, and the benefits of digitalisation are uneven across borders. Evidence from this research suggests that the digital trade provisions within agreements with markets with slower digital adoption (such as Vietnam) have limited impact on encouraging these partner countries to speed up said adoption.

5.1.6.1 Sector differences in engagement

Evidence from the interviews suggests that engagement with digital trade provisions varies sharply by sector:

- **Financial services and fintech** are the most aware of data-flow rules, cloud restrictions, and regulatory alignment because compliance is central to their operating model. Large firms actively monitor digital trade commitments; smaller firms benefit passively.
- **Digital and software firms** rely heavily on cross-border data flows and cloud services but rarely engage with the policy frameworks that enable them. They assume digital delivery is inherently borderless unless they encounter restrictions.
- **Business who export goods in addition to digital services** also experience digital trade provisions through customs digitalisation – prearrival document submission, electronic certificates, automated clearance – but attribute these efficiencies to logistics providers rather than FTAs.
- **Professional services** benefit from remote delivery and secure document sharing but do not connect these practices to digital trade rules.

5.1.6.2 Impact of size and capabilities

Larger firms in financial services, logistics, and regulated industries are typically best positioned to engage with digital trade rules because they have the internal expertise to understand compliance requirements and integrate digital systems into their operations. These firms often use electronic documentation, automated reporting, and pre-clearance systems to reduce delays and manage risk.

SMEs, by contrast, tend to access digital trade provisions indirectly. They rely heavily on intermediaries – logistics providers, freight forwarders, e-commerce platforms, and banks – who manage digital customs processes, documentation, and compliance on their behalf. As a result, SMEs benefit from faster clearance times, reduced paperwork, and integrated digital workflows without needing to understand the underlying provisions. Their engagement is therefore mediated rather than direct.

5.1.7 How firms make decisions about digital adoption

Decision-making processes vary substantially by company size and structure:

- **Smaller firms appear to adopt digital tools (for both general operations, and for international trade) quickly**, often through informal discussions among senior managers. Their agility allows them to trial tools, iterate, and implement changes without lengthy approval cycles.
- **Larger organisations typically require more formal processes**, involving procurement, IT, compliance, and business units. Adoption is slower but more structured, especially when changes relate to IPO preparation, data governance, or enterprise-wide systems.
- **Micro-businesses and sole traders tend to make unilateral decisions** based on immediate operational needs.
- **Some firms build tools in-house** to maintain flexibility or meet specific requirements (for example, bespoke financing systems or internal operations tools), while others rely on trial-and-error testing before committing to a platform.

Across all sizes, digital adoption is shaped by four core considerations: client expectations, organisational culture, efficiency gains, and security requirements.

5.1.8 Client-driven and market-responsive adoption

Client expectations are the strongest driver of digital tool use. Firms adopt the systems their clients prefer, especially in international contexts where alignment with local norms is essential. Many businesses work with clients who already use digital platforms, making integration straightforward. Others adapt to each opportunity individually, following the rules of both the UK and the client's jurisdiction. This responsiveness ensures smooth transactions but reinforces a reactive rather than strategic approach to digitalisation.

5.1.9 Organisational culture and internal capability

Digital practices are often embedded in company culture. Firms that prioritise efficiency and innovation tend to train staff to use digital tools and encourage experimentation. Family owned

or SME-led organisations can find that they benefit from the absence of shareholder constraints, enabling rapid adoption. Larger firms more commonly rely on structured governance and cross departmental coordination to ensure compliance and consistency. Typically, internal capability, rather than external policy, determines how digital tools are used.

5.1.10 Efficiency gains and hybrid working practices

Firms consistently highlight the efficiency benefits of digital tools, even if they are not aware of how these tools relate to digital trade provisions. Businesses describe using a largely unified digital tool stack, including digital signatures, automated invoicing, cloud-based workflows and AI-enabled administrative tools – across both domestic and international operations. These systems can reduce turnaround times, lower administrative burdens, and support hybrid working models. Where distinctions do arise, they relate to market-specific add-ons required for cross-border activity, such as international payment platforms, translation tools, or customs and export-licensing systems. This suggests the efficiency gains stems from an integrated digital architecture, with additional tools activated only when regulatory or market requirements necessitate them.

“Getting documents signed by [client], we can have those turned around in minutes often rather than quite often...2 or 3 weeks going around in internal mail.”

Business – Digital Tech

However, digitalisation does not replace the need for in-person engagement. Many firms still prefer face-to-face meetings for relationship-building, complex negotiations, and workshops – even when conducting work internationally. Many businesses stated that in-person interactions were often key in the earlier stages of a working relationship, with interactions moving digital once some rapport had been established. The result is a hybrid model in which digital tools streamline operations while personal interaction anchors commercial relationships.

5.1.11 Security, fraud prevention, and compliance

Security is a major determinant of digital adoption, both in general and in a trade context. Firms implement VPNs, secure portals, multi-factor authentication, and verification processes to protect sensitive data. Compliance with GDPR, ISO standards, and sector-specific regulations shapes how digital tools are selected and used. Financial services firms tend to employ multi-layered security systems to protect clients and funds.

Concerns about data privacy, reliability, and legal implications make some firms cautious about adopting advanced AI tools. Many rely on in-house compliance and IT teams to assess risks before approving new systems.

5.2 Enablers and barriers to use of digital tools and practices

This section uses the COM-B behavioural model to analyse key enablers and barriers to the adoption of digital tools and practices among businesses trading digitally delivered services.

The COM-B model is a theoretical framework often used to help in the design of new interventions or analysing behaviours in a controlled or planned context.

The model draws on its components (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation) to identify actual behaviours that exist, and how they act as enablers or barriers to achieving target (desired) outcomes. This helps to identify what needs to change in order for target desired outcomes to occur.

The table below outlines the Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation factors outlined in the framework developed for this research following the scoping phase. This section examines the findings to test and refine the framework.

Table 2 - COM-B Framework

Capability	Opportunity	Motivation
<i>Do businesses have the physical and psychological ability to make greater use of digital trade provisions?</i>	<i>Do external factors (physical and social environment) make it possible for businesses to make greater use of digital trade provisions?</i>	<i>Are businesses motivated to make greater use of digital trade provisions?</i>
Key measures acting as enablers/barriers	Key measures acting as enablers/barriers	Key measures (reflective/conscious) acting as enablers/barriers
Awareness & knowledge	Environmental context	Business goals & intentions – what matters
Skills	Government support – availability & adequacy	Beliefs about risks & consequences
Confidence	Time available	Optimism / pessimism
Behaviour regulation (habits)	Supportiveness of work environment	Key measures (automatic/unconscious) acting as enablers/barriers
Decision-making & operational processes		Emotions/impulses
Ability to overcome challenges		Reinforcing behaviour
Actual business behaviours		

5.2.1 Outcome of hypotheses

Six hypotheses were developed prior to conducting this research. The table below summarises whether or not the evidence collected points to each hypothesis holding true. This is followed by a detailed discussion relating to key themes.

Table 3 - Outcome of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Outcome	Rationale
Businesses' capability, opportunity, and motivation shape whether and how businesses use digital trade provisions.	TRUE	Businesses with higher capability, opportunity, and motivation, appear more likely to make use of digital trade provisions (albeit unconsciously).
Businesses do not need explicit awareness of digital trade provisions for behavioural change to occur, but when awareness does exist, it amplifies perceived benefits and strengthens firms' capability, opportunity and motivation to change their trading behaviours.	UNCLEAR	The findings suggest that businesses do not need to be aware of digital trade provisions for behavioural change to occur. However, no interviewed businesses had strong awareness of the provisions, so whether or not this amplifies the perceived benefits cannot be said.
Firms operating in markets with digital trade provisions will demonstrate distinct behavioural patterns compared with firms trading in markets without comparable provisions.	TRUE	Firms operating in markets with digital trade provisions demonstrate higher engagement with trading digitally, and increased usage of digital tools like e-contracts (however they do not attribute this to the provisions).
The behavioural influence of digital trade provisions is limited when businesses face structural or internal barriers which constrain their capability, opportunity or motivation to engage with the provisions.	TRUE	The findings point to internal barriers – such as time and resource constraints – having a substantial bearing on behaviour, even in markets where digital provisions exist.
The behavioural influence of digital trade provisions is enhanced when businesses face fewer structural or internal barriers, increasing their capability, opportunity, or motivation to engage with the provisions.	TRUE	The findings suggest that businesses facing fewer internal barriers (such as resource limitations, risk-averse senior leadership etc.) often more actively explore the adoption of new and innovative digital tools and practices, despite not actively engaging with the provisions.
Businesses operating in markets that include digital trade provisions are more likely to expand their digitally	TRUE	The findings suggest that businesses often consider market fit and ease of conducting business digitally when exploring new markets to enter.

delivered services trade with those markets, reflecting increased capability, opportunity, and motivation to do so.		
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5.2.2 Capability enablers and barriers

Capability refers to whether businesses have the knowledge, skills, and mental bandwidth required to engage with the digital tools and trade provisions.

Businesses cite a number of capability-related enablers and barriers to their use of digital trade provisions.

5.2.2.1 Internal digital skills and literacy

Many firms feel that while digital tools are readily available, the real challenge lies in ensuring their staff have the skills, confidence, and consistency to use them effectively. Some mention uneven levels of digital literacy across their workforce and highlight the need to upskill in areas like AI.

Even in more digitally mature firms, participants often feel they do not use tools to their full potential, or that embedding new practices is always a challenge, highlighting that the technology is only as effective as the people adopting it.

“There is still... a bit of upskilling that everybody in the workforce is going to need to do.”

Business – Digital Tech

Despite these challenges, some, often digital-native companies, have strong internal IT support, or have embedded digital tools from the outset. For these firms, digital practices are simply “how we operate,” and any issues are minor or routine.

5.2.2.2 Awareness and knowledge of digital tools and digital trade provisions

Stakeholders and smaller businesses highlight that there is often a knowledge gap preventing increased use of digital trade provisions. Many smaller businesses have limited awareness of a) the digital trade provisions in general, and b) how the provisions can actually benefit their businesses. Some note that having access to clear business cases would help them become more aware of how they can benefit from the various trade agreements and digital trade provisions.

5.2.3 Opportunity enablers and barriers

Opportunity relates to the environment and context in which businesses operate – do they have the time and resources to engage with digital trade provisions, and what impact does their current context have?

5.2.3.1 Market context and alignment

As mentioned earlier in this report, most businesses highlight that adoption of digital practices is largely driven by their customers within a given market. Businesses mentioned a number of factors relating to specific markets which influences their behaviour. These are detailed below, ordered from most to least cited.

- **External reliance on paper-based or non-digital processes as a barrier.** Firms which mention this barrier were digitally ready themselves but faced friction when clients or overseas markets insisted on hard-copy documents, wet signatures, or manual purchase orders. One respondent described the challenge of working with partners who still preferred physical documentation. Some highlight the persistence of analogue trade measure is especially common in parts of Asia, the Middle East, Brazil, and certain government or transport sectors. They do note however that these requirements do not block digital trade, rather they force hybrid workflows and create delays.
- **Cross-border regulatory or legal barriers.** As noted earlier, many interviewed businesses state that international markets with a similar regulatory environment, and indeed those which speak English, tend to be easiest to trade digitally with. The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are described as straightforward because of shared language, familiar legal frameworks and cultural comfort with digital tools. Singapore is also perceived as a highly digital-friendly market, with a few businesses highlighting its openness, ease of tendering and strong English proficiency. It is important to note that businesses do not appear to reconcile that these countries often have trade agreements with the UK, with provisions in place to help facilitate digital trade (which has potentially helped align the regulatory environments). Additionally, they often contrast these markets with regions where language, bureaucracy or cultural expectations create more complexity.
- **Low digital adoption by certain clients.** Some businesses emphasise that differences in digital adoption often arise at the *client* or *organisational* level rather than the country level (even in situations where the government may accept the legitimacy of things like e-signatures, for example). They say specific clients can still rely on faxes, prefer face-to-face meetings, or have internal IT departments which impose heavy restrictions on software access.

- **Client digital procurement systems and client-mandated platforms.** These systems – ranging from procurement portals to document-upload platforms – are often described as cumbersome, inconsistent, or bureaucratic. The lack of standardisation across clients means businesses must repeatedly navigate different systems, each with its own requirements, slowing down contracting and increasing administrative burden. This in turn leads businesses to focus less on specific tools themselves. A few businesses also mention interoperability issues, where their systems and client systems were technically incompatible.
- **Banking-related barriers.** A few businesses mention issues including currency controls, anti-money-laundering checks, slow international transfers, and manual banking processes in certain markets. These challenges can significantly delay payments and, in some cases, require establishing local entities to streamline financial flows.
- **Data security and cloud hosting constraints.** A few businesses note that some clients require data to be stored in-country (for example, in Australia), or that some national firewalls disrupt cloud-based services. These issues necessitate architectural changes, local hosting, or technical workarounds, adding complexity to digital delivery.

“Sometimes some clients will – even just because of where they get their money from or some local laws, they’ll say that it must live in, for example, an Australian cloud, like a cloud that’s hosted in a data centre that lives in the Australia region as dictated by like AWS or Google Cloud.”

Business – Digital Tech

5.2.3.2 Time and resources available

Businesses – especially SMEs and micro businesses – often struggle to find time to evaluate new tools, implement them without disrupting productivity, or train staff properly. Several note that the pace of technological change means systems can become outdated quickly, requiring constant reassessment. Others describe time lost during implementation phases or delays caused by time-zone differences when collaborating internationally. Even firms already using a number of digital tools and provisions mention that time, rather than technology, is one of the main barriers to adopting new practices.

Many firms, especially smaller ones, describe digital exploration as something that gets pushed down the list because day-to-day operations dominate. Several note that digital work is “everyone’s job”, which in practice means it is no one’s dedicated responsibility. They call for more education, support, training, and signposting from the government and industry bodies.

“There’s no one who’s got the luxury of stepping back and saying, this is my job to look at this... it’s done by people who are trying to do it as part of their day jobs where they can.”

Business – Other business services (healthcare consulting)

Some also note financial resources as a barrier. These firms note that advanced systems such as customer relationship management systems (CRMs) or financial management platforms can be expensive to implement, maintain, and update. Some worry about investing heavily in systems that become outdated quickly, while others question whether the value justifies the cost, especially for large organisations where system failures could be costly (both financially and reputationally).

However, time and resource constraints can also encourage businesses to make more use of the digital trade provisions and related tools. Many perceive it as much more cost-effective to trade digitally with international markets than it is to trade via physical means, which has encouraged them to explore digital tools further.

5.2.3.3 Access to resources and government support

Many businesses and stakeholders acknowledge that having greater access to information, resources, and guidance from the government and other industry bodies can help businesses to overcome some of the existing barriers they face (namely knowledge and time constraints). Where there is clear signposting to information on appropriate, useful digital tools and practices which have been verified as secure and widely accepted, businesses are better able to adopt them.

5.2.3.4 Decision-making and operational processes

These can be either a significant enabler, or large barrier, to the use of digital trade provisions, largely dependent on the size of an organisation. Larger businesses tend to have more thorough and bureaucratic processes, which for some can hinder uptake of new tools. Often a full cost-benefit analysis is required. Meanwhile, smaller businesses are often much more agile with their decision-making – their senior leadership are more deeply involved in the day-to-day business operations.

5.2.4 Motivation enablers and barriers

Motivation relates to business' desires, impulses, and emotions – to what extent do they want to engage with digital tools and trade provisions?

5.2.4.1 Organisational mindset towards digitalisation

The culture of an organisation plays a significant role in the adoption of digital tools and trade provisions. Many businesses are already realising the benefits of using digital tools and trade provisions and have embedded them in their everyday operations. These firms emphasise that digital systems are what allow them to cope with demand, maintain efficiency, or interface with

international partners – and they only see this increasing with further developments in areas such as AI. For exporters in particular, digital practices are described as unavoidable, with staff training and adaptation to foreign systems seen as routine. Digitalisation is not optional – it is fundamental to how they function. This in turn encourages the continued adoption of digital practices. However, some businesses (particularly smaller start-ups) tend to prioritise whatever investment they can into their products/services, rather than ‘back-office processes’.

Conversely, some businesses only have support to explore digital tools when it is seen by senior leadership as commercially sensible to do so. For example, automation is introduced when manual tasks become too time-consuming, and new features are developed only when multiple clients request them or when market research identifies clear value. Digitalisation is therefore pursued selectively, based on tangible business impact rather than as a standalone strategic initiative. This “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mindset results in new practices not being explored unless something goes wrong with existing processes.

5.2.4.2 Perception of risks and trust in digital tools

For some businesses, senior leadership tend to be risk-averse with less trust in digital tools. This risk-averse nature is often related to security concerns, with new practices only being adopted once rigorous safety checks have been conducted. This mindset is especially prevalent amongst financial services businesses, who are mindful that they often transfer large amounts of money and personal data. These businesses often note their senior leadership are unsure whether it is worth the considerable time and resource required to explore new digital tools and practices. Some mention that seeing news about cybersecurity attacks, or other fraud incidents involving digital tools only serves to reinforce this viewpoint. When thinking about cybersecurity and fraud incidents, businesses most commonly referred to email phishing and fraudulent inquiries via digital business portals. Some mentioned that new stories about the misuse of AI, such as in Canada where Deloitte was found to have used AI to generate a government report, leads them to be more careful about adopting AI tools in general.

“I have a bit of reservation about if there's something very hypersensitive, am I able to put 100% faith into that? We're talking about administrative things that potentially have a legal basis. That's holding me back in adopting some of these new tools. But I do try to dabble.”

Business – Digital Tech

A few businesses additionally express concerns about the enforceability of digital tools – such as e-signatures – which deters them from fully adopting them. These businesses will tend to invest significantly more time in doing their due diligence. Some mention that if they were more confident in the legal standing of digital tools across different international markets, they would move to trade digitally as much as possible due to the cost and time-related efficiencies. This appears to largely be a knowledge issue– businesses spoke about legal enforceability quite

generally, as opposed to in relation to a specific market. Greater awareness of the digital trade provisions is likely to help allay these concerns.

5.2.5 Impact on behaviours

Within the COM-B model, *behaviour* refers to any action, activity, or practice a business does or does not do in response to internal or external events. The model posits that for a behaviour to occur, *capability*, *opportunity*, and *motivation* must interact to generate the action.

Most interviewed businesses are currently making use of digital tools and practices when trading digitally with the markets included in the four trade agreements covered within this study. The barriers they face when adopting new digital tools and practices do not appear to be stopping them using tools in general, only slowing them down, or making the process less streamlined (however, in some markets, such as Vietnam, businesses feel less able to make use of specific tools, such as e-signatures, due to specific company requirements or policies). Additionally, this does not seem to be deterring businesses from further digital adoption, with most saying they are motivated to increasingly use more digital tools in the future. Efficiency, ease of access to international markets, and innovation are some of the top motivating factors cited.

“When all of the trading structures are digital and embedded in the user flows, it just takes away so much administration time. It scales much faster, so we will only be going more digital and more automated, not less.”

Business – Digital Tech

As noted earlier in this report, awareness of digital trade provisions within the trade agreements is very low, with no businesses spoken to as part of this research having anything more than superficial awareness that the provisions exist. Despite this, there is some evidence which suggests it is possible that the provisions have still aided in the reduction of barriers for businesses. For example, businesses often say that they find it easier to trade in international markets with similar regulatory environments, or with similar digital contexts, to the UK. The markets they commonly mention in this way include Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Canada – all of which have a trade agreement with the UK which includes digital provisions. However, this could be a correlation only, and further evidence is required.

“There are certain markets where it's slightly easier. I just think that the customs and norms are a bit more maybe aligned to either our other partners that we already have or to the ones [customs and norms] ...we have existing in the UK. And then that is easy, that makes it a bit easier just to approach those markets.”

Business – Digital Tech

Some stakeholders note that they have seen digital trade provisions creating certainty that businesses need to enter or expand into a new market. They also highlight that many businesses (particularly SMEs) are benefiting from the provisions indirectly, and without even realising.

Some countries within the CPTPP (namely Vietnam), are seen as more challenging to trade with, due to a cultural preference for analogue trade measures like wet-ink signatures and paper documentation. This indicates that having digital trade provisions in place will not automatically result in them being adopted by the various international markets involved (despite them being legally accepted). This is echoed by stakeholders, who mention that while the digital trade provisions are beneficial, officials in different markets can often revert to printing documents, pulling systems back to being paper based.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Understanding how businesses respond to, and are influenced by, new provisions: This research suggests that while awareness of digital trade provisions within the trade agreements is low, the introduction of these provisions has had some impact on business behaviours, and as such should continue to be enshrined in future trade agreements. There is a growing recognition of the value that digital tools and practices can bring, particularly in enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and making international trade more seamless. However, widespread, streamlined adoption is hampered by a number of persistent barriers.

Understanding the behavioural impacts of existing agreements and businesses interactions with them: Due to the low awareness levels, businesses are not consciously engaging with the digital provisions. However, the research has highlighted a number of capability, opportunity, and motivation related factors which both enable and block adoption of digital tools and practices. The largest hurdles are often internal – time and resource constraints, which are often compounded by a lack of awareness and knowledge, and a company mindset focused on improving core service delivery over trade processes.

Understanding where improvements can be made to future agreements: Businesses see DBT as having an important role in supporting them to further adopt digital tools and practices. There is a lack of awareness about available government support, grants, and trade agreements, emphasising the need for clearer, more proactive communication from government bodies. It is clear that to help facilitate increased adoption of the digital trade provisions, DBT should work to reduce internal barriers (such as low awareness of digital provisions, and concerns around risks) to engaging with the digital trade provisions and streamline the overall process for businesses.

Understanding how similar provisions across different agreements affect business behaviour: The only difference of note across the different trade agreements included in this research is where some businesses perceive countries within the CPTPP (namely Vietnam) to be resistant to tools such as e-signatures and e-contracts, with a cultural preference for paper documents instead. This is also evident in markets without a trade agreement, like Brazil and Thailand. Based on this research, the type of agreement that is in place (bilateral, plurilateral, digital trade agreement etc.) does not impact businesses' adoption of digital tools and practices. However, this insight should be treated with caution and explored in any future evaluation.

6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below are drawn from overall analytical findings, taking into account suggestions from businesses.

Conduct targeted and practical outreach: Businesses ask for DBT to continue pursuing trade agreements, especially those with digital provisions, and to provide support around how to make use of these. The pattern of low and uneven awareness creates a clear need for outreach from the Government and industry bodies that is practical, repeated, and tailored to how firms make decisions. The findings suggest the issue is not only that firms lack information, but that the information they receive does not translate into actions they can take. Most firms do not engage with trade agreements unless they see a direct operational link, so generic briefings or high-level summaries do little to shift behaviour. Within this, DBT should look to work with industry to map digital trade benefits onto real-world business processes and ways of working, to help clearly demonstrate the value of not only the trade agreements, but of digital trade in general.

Targeting future agreements: Alongside the above, the findings suggest that efforts could be focused where implementation conditions are likely to be more favourable, and thus digital trade provisions are likely to have a greater impact (i.e., countries with a similar digital culture to the UK). In countries with slower digital adoption, such as Vietnam, introducing the digital trade provisions appears to have had a limited impact so far – with businesses saying that cultural differences are still driving preferences for analogue trade practices at an organisation-level, despite digital practices being recognised within the regulatory and legal environments.

That being said, there is still value in including such provisions in agreements with countries with different digital cultures. As mentioned earlier, businesses tend to feel the absence of digital trade provisions more strongly than their presence, so including these provisions as widely as possible is likely to still have a positive impact – even if smaller in certain countries. There is also evidence of a possible signalling effect – new trade agreements appear to highlight to businesses new potential markets that are easier to trade with.

Provide access to training and education: Many businesses explicitly ask for more education and practical training on how to use digital tools effectively. They feel this could include government-run or government funded / endorsed training sessions or courses to make upskilling more accessible. Businesses recall past government initiatives such as Business Link, which provided valuable seminars and support for exporting, but feel that current systems are lacking accessibility for smaller companies. Businesses also note that support from local delivery teams associated with DBT is appreciated, especially when it provides guidance and opportunities for business growth in international markets. Alongside this, stakeholders indicate that clear, practical roadmaps should be developed by DBT in collaboration with businesses already making effective use of digital trade provisions and tools.

This will address limited awareness and understanding of trade agreements, particularly among SMEs.

Provide guidance on processes and which tools are worthwhile using: There is interest in government-backed platforms that could verify and endorse businesses, making it easier to establish trust with international customers. Some businesses feel that government processes should be kept as simple and barrier-free as possible to facilitate digital trade. Equally some call for the government to endorse specific tools and practices, which would provide an additional layer of confidence when using those tools. However, these businesses emphasise that government and industry bodies should highlight the benefits and practical uses of digital tools (such as improved efficiencies and cost savings), and not just IT safety and security.

Provide information on technological compatibility: Findings suggest the ease of integration of digital tools with existing systems (both internally and across borders) is key to increasing adoption rates, as is the ease of use and accessibility for all staff. Additionally, providing guidance on emerging technologies like AI will also be useful – as some businesses say they are unsure on which AI tools are appropriate to use.

When looking to support the increased adoption of digital trade provisions, there are a number of business motivations that DBT can capitalise on:

- **Promoting positive company culture:** Some businesses operate within a culture of innovation, where there are limited internal barriers to exploring new tools. They suggest that DBT could use these businesses as success stories, showing how adopting digital tools and practices within the various trade agreements have facilitated increased efficiencies in business operations. This could help businesses with a more analogue mindset to make use of the digital trade provisions.
- **Quelling concerns through increasing awareness:** Many businesses are hindered by senior leadership having concerns about the safety and security of new digital tools, and whether they are going to be accepted and enforceable across international markets. Businesses suggest that DBT could work to increase awareness of digital provisions within trade agreements which enshrine the legal standing of digital tools such as e-signatures, to help businesses overcome this barrier.

7. Appendices

7.1 Detailed methodology

7.1.1 Scoping interviews

Four scoping interviews with DBT colleagues were conducted in December 2025. The high-level findings of these were used to inform the design of the topic guides used in the business and stakeholder interviews (see Appendix 8.2).

7.1.2 Sampling strategy and recruitment

A multi-pronged approach to recruitment was used:

- **Desk research:** Publicly available information sources, and Moody's FAME database, were used to identify relevant businesses. Additional sources such as the websites of these businesses and specialist subject matter / trade body websites were reviewed to cross-reference and identify businesses operating in the relevant markets and find contact details.
- **Close collaboration with DBT to identify relevant businesses and known contacts:** DBT supplied an export from its DataHub as a core sample source for the business interviews.
- **Close engagement with industry stakeholders:** A longlist of stakeholder organisations and relevant industry bodies was developed, and these contacts formed the basis of the stakeholder sample, with some also helping by advertising the research through mailing lists and inviting relevant businesses to express interest in participating.

Initial recruitment efforts included a recruitment email which included:

- A brief introduction to Blue Marble/Pye Tait Consulting and the research, explaining its purpose and the incentive offered (£150 compensation for time/charity donation per business participant)
- An invitation to apply to participate with a link to a secure form where they can sign up
- The secure form included:
 - Further details about the research, what it entailed, benefits of taking part and incentive
 - Firmographic questions to check the participant's segment allocation
 - Questions to determine any support requirements (e.g. accessibility, tech confidence)
 - GDPR details, including how data will be used and stored, and relevant consents
 - Fields to collect participant contact information

Simultaneously, significant phone efforts were deployed to introduce the research, build rapport, identify the best contact points and secure interviews.

7.1.3 Business interviews

In total, 60 interviews were conducted with businesses who trade digital services with overseas markets (i.e., services sold or bought across international boundaries without the physical movement of people, transmitted through digital networks such as the internet), conducted between January and March 2026.

After the first five interviews, an inception report was delivered, highlighting recommended changes to the approach and design of the research.

The pilot business interviews highlighted that recruiting participants for this project would be more challenging and time-intensive than initially anticipated. To help mitigate this, and ensure timeframes were met, additional telephone resource was added to the project to bolster recruitment efforts. This included using the FAME database to cold call relevant businesses to invite them to participate.

The sample profile was designed to include businesses operating within three key sectors of interest – Financial services, Digital Technology, and Other business services

Additionally, the sample focused on businesses trading digitally with at least one of the following markets:

- Australia and New Zealand (bilateral Free Trade Agreements)
- Singapore (covered by the United Kingdom-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (UKSDEA))
- At least one of: Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam (covered by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) deal)
- Brazil or Thailand (representing markets without a free trade agreement)

7.1.4 Stakeholder interviews

Nine stakeholders participated in an in-depth interview conducted between January and March 2026, and a tenth gave high-level email feedback. Stakeholders represented industry bodies, professional and business services groups, trade associations, government-linked organisations, academic institutions, and professional membership bodies.

Stakeholder sample was generated during the desk review phase, where researchers developed a long list of potential organisations.

Stakeholder recruitment efforts covered 40 contacts across industry bodies, professional and business services groups, trade associations, government-linked organisations, academic institutions, and professional membership bodies, using a mix of emails, calls, online contact forms and outreach to both named and general contacts.

7.1.4 Analysis

A thematic analysis was undertaken of all stakeholder and business interview transcripts, drawing on an inductive, data-led approach. Rather than applying a predefined coding framework, recurring concepts and patterns were identified through close reading, iterative comparison, and structured analysis sessions. These sessions generated a set of higher-level themes, which were subsequently mapped onto the COM-B framework. Scoping interviews were analysed separately and were not incorporated into the main thematic structure.

It is important to note that within the COM-B framework, the components (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation) are considered direct determinants of behaviours and not extraneous factors or confounding variables. In other words, factors that might be considered external or potentially confounding variables in observational studies (including some types of impact evaluation) are part of the cause being investigated in a COM-B model and not extraneous to it.

7.2 Summary of findings from scoping interviews

Views on the definition of digital trade provisions

- Generally considered comprehensive
- May need to be careful around word “bespoke” since don't think any two trade agreements are exactly the same word for word.
- DBT may want to also consider goods and how they can be delivered through digital means

Perceptions of digital trade provisions are that they:

- Enable and facilitate trade by tackling/removing barriers and opening market opportunities
- Help to reduce costs and make it easier for SMEs to enter a market or expand cross-border
- Provide legal certainty for businesses
- Can feel too technical for some businesses – indicates work to be done to help articulate what the digital trade chapters are trying to achieve
- Would benefit from DBT input to help address businesses barriers and enable businesses to embrace opportunities such as AI and emerging technologies

Some provisions risk appearing as being more about government-to-government cooperation, thus benefits to businesses may not be so obvious.

View on how digital trade provisions fit within DBT's wider trade and economic strategy

The 2025 UK Trade Strategy seeks to boost economic growth, security, and competitiveness by making the UK the world's most connected nation through faster, more practical deals, strengthening trade defences against protectionism, supporting key sectors like services and green tech, and reducing friction for businesses with digital tools and tailored support, all while integrating national priorities like sustainability and supply chain resilience.

Scoping interviewee comments:

- Digital trade provisions are perceived as key to delivering the strategy
- Digital trade provisions are considered important for the UK to be using digital tools to harness trade capabilities (paperless trading etc.)
- Digital trade provisions are perceived as largely in alignment with strategic goals

Anticipated outcomes from greater business use of digital provisions

- Simpler and more straightforward trading arrangements
- Cost and time savings
- Greater legal certainty and safeguards
- Removal of trade barriers
- Stimulation of new market opportunities
- Increased trade
- Economic growth
- Innovation and global competitiveness

7.3 Respondent profile

Phase 1: Scoping interviews with DBT staff		Total n=
DBT staff across the key policy and operational functions		4

Phase 2a: 10x stakeholder interviews		Total n=
Business representative body		4
Technology industry body		2
Academia		2
Public sector		2

Phase 2b: 60x business interviews – sector and market					
Sectors and markets	Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Australia and New Zealand	UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement (UKSDEA)	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific	Brazil and Thailand	Total n=

			Partnership (CPTPP) deal		
Financial services including insurance/pensions (FS)	7	4	6	2	19
Digital tech, i.e. app and software development or AI	7	6	4	4	21
Other Business Services (OBS)	6	5	5	4	20
Totals	20	15	15	10	60

Phase 2b: 60x business interviews – organisation demographics	
Across the full sample	Total n=
Size band	
• Micro (0-9 staff)	22
• Small (10-49 staff)	15
• Medium (50-249 staff)	16
• Large (250+ staff)	7
Start ups	4
Trade timing	
• Business has been trading digital services longer than the trade agreement has been in place for their recruited market	44
• Business has not been trading digital services longer than the trade agreement has been in place for their recruited market	16
Total	60

7.4 Glossary of terminology

To support clarity and consistency across the report, this glossary defines key terms used when discussing digital trade, services exports and digitalisation. Interviewed firms often used these concepts interchangeably or informally, and several terms have specific meanings in a trade context. These definitions draw on standard trade and digital policy terminology and have been adapted for clarity within this report to ensure a shared understanding throughout.

Term	Definition	Example
Data localisation	Legal requirements that data generated in a country must be stored, processed, or hosted within that country.	Local data-hosting mandates, in-country cloud storage, restricted cross-border data transfers.

Digital infrastructure	The underlying systems that enable digital activity in a market.	Broadband coverage, cloud reliability, digital identity systems.
Digital practices	The ways businesses use digital tools to manage operations, deliver services, or engage customers.	Remote onboarding, digital contracting, online customer support workflows.
Digital regulatory environment	Rules governing digital activity in a market.	Data protection, cybersecurity requirements, e-documentation standards.
Digital tools	Specific technologies or software used to support business operations, sales, or service delivery.	Procurement portals, CRM systems, e-signature tools, cloud platforms.
Digital trade	Cross-border trade in goods and services enabled or delivered through digital technologies, including the movement of data.	E-commerce, digital contracting, cloud-based service delivery.
Digitalisation	The adoption and use of digital tools, systems, and processes within a business.	Cloud systems, digital payments, e-signatures.
Digitally delivered services	Services provided to customers in another country through digital or online channels, without physical presence.	Software as a Service (SaaS), online consulting, digital marketing, remote diagnostics.
Market access	The conditions, rules, and practical barriers that determine how easily a firm can sell into a foreign market.	Licensing requirements, registration processes, digital compliance checks.
Other business services (OBS)	A broad services export category covering professional, technical, and business support services.	Includes consulting, engineering, R&D, legal, accounting, advertising.
Regulatory divergence	Differences in rules, standards, or compliance requirements between countries that create friction for cross-border trade.	Differing cybersecurity standards, incompatible e-signature rules.
Services exports	Any service sold to a customer located outside the UK, whether delivered digitally or in person.	Digitally delivered services are a subset of this.

The Department for Business and Trade

The Department for Business and Trade is an economic growth department. We ensure fair, competitive markets at home, secure access to new markets abroad and support businesses to invest, export and grow. Our priorities are the Industrial Strategy, Make Work Pay, the Trade Strategy and the Plan for Small Business.

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