China-Britain Business Council
英中贸易协会

Key Facts about UK-China Relations (Updated 09 September 2026)

Trade and Economic Ties[1]

- China (including Hong Kong) is the UK's **third largest trading partner** for goods and services after the US (**£314.3 billion**) and Germany (**£151.5 billion**), with total trade amounting to **£134.8 billion** (**+6.9%** YoY) in the four quarters ending Q1 2026.
- China is the UK's **fourth largest export market**, with exports of goods and services worth **£48.7 billion** (**+10.3%** YoY) in the four quarters ending Q1 2026, equal to **5.4%** of total UK exports.
- China is the UK's **third largest import market** after the US (**£112.9b**) and Germany (**£89.4b**). The UK imported **£86.1 billion** (**+5.1% YoY**) worth of Chinese goods and services in the four quarters ending Q1 2026.
- UK goods exports to China grew **9.5%** YoY to **£26.9 billion** in the four quarters ending Q1 2026, while goods imports from China increased **4.7%** to **£76.9 billion**.
- UK service exports to China grew **11.3%** YoY to **£21.8 billion**, while service imports from China grew **8.6%** YoY to **£9.2 billion**, ending Q1 2026 with a surplus of **£12.6 billion.**

China is the UK's Third Largest Trading Partner

China is the UK's Fourth Largest Export Market

The UK has an £12.6 Billion Surplus with China in Services

Contribution to the UK Economy

- Chinese-owned firms across services, manufacturing and energy employed over **57,000** people in the UK and generated **£98.7 billion** in revenue in 2024.[2]
- British exports to China supported an estimated **452,600** jobs in the UK in 2022.[3]
- The UK has historically been the leading European destination for Chinese FDI, attracting a cumulative **£76.9 billion** between 2000 and 2026.[4]
- The stock of Chinese and Hong Kong FDI in the UK stood at **£32.5 billion** in 2024.[5]

Chinese Owned Firms in the UK Generated £98.7 Billion in 2024

Financial Services

- In 2025, London is the world's **second-largest** offshore RMB trading hub, accounting for **22%** of total trading volume — just behind Hong Kong at **29.7%.**[6] Daily foreign exchange volumes reached **£135.5 billion**, a **21%** YoY decrease.[7]
- London is the **only** offshore centre for Chinese sovereign green bonds (excluding Hong Kong), with the first **£624 million** (**¥6 billion**) issued in April 2025.[8]

London is a Top Offshore RMB Trading Hub

Education & Tourism

- The UK is the **top study destination** for Chinese students.[9] There were **159,955** Mainland and Hong Kong students enrolled at UK universities in 2024/25, making them the **largest** cohort.[10]
- Chinese students contributed **£4.9 billion** to the UK economy in 2024 through tuition and living costs.[11]
- China is the UK's **second-biggest** research partner[12], with joint publications rising steadily across science and tech fields.
- Chinese tourist visits to the UK are estimated to surge **28%** to an estimated **667,000** in 2025. Travel spending is set to hit **£1.3 billion.**[13]
- **69** Chinese provinces and cities have sister relationships with localities in the UK.[14]

The UK is the Top Study Destination for Chinese Students

China's Economic Heft

- China is the world's second-largest economy with an estimated GDP of **£15 trillion** in 2025[15] – roughly **3.8 times** the UK's projected GDP for the same year.[16]
- The IMF estimates China will grow **4.5%** this year[17], nearly the equivalent of adding another **Poland** to the world economy.
- China has the world's **largest** middle-class population as of 2024, with over **500 million** individuals earning more than 120,000 yuan (£13,200) annually.[18]
- China **leads** the world in **66** out of **74** critical technologies, including space, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum technologies.[19]

The IMF Estimates China will Grow by 4.5% in 2026

September 2026

Sources

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