

ABHI Response. Department for Business and Trade: Trade Strategy Consultation

HealthTech plays a vital role in delivering high-quality healthcare and is a cornerstone of the UK's economic growth. Employing 154,000 people across 4,465 companies, the sector generates a combined turnover of £34.3bn, making it the largest employer within the broader life sciences industry. HealthTech's potential to transform healthcare and the UK economy is immense, supported by innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum sensing, 3D printing, and robotics. These advancements enable earlier diagnosis, more accurate treatments, and cost-effective, high-quality care for millions of NHS patients daily.

Traditional HealthTech also underpins the delivery of healthcare services, ensuring resilience and efficiency across the NHS. With the right support, the sector can significantly contribute to the UK Government's mission to drive economic growth, delivering an annual growth rate of around 5% in recent years.

However, the UK market is relatively small in a global context. For most HealthTech companies, exporting their services and technologies is a critical next step for growth and sustainability. Recognising this, ABHI has developed a comprehensive programme of international activities to support UK businesses in accessing overseas markets.

Despite these efforts, existing Government support for exports remains fragmented and has diminished in value over recent years. Companies report a wide variation in the quality and level of support, with some citing Embassy engagement as a particular strength, while others find the available resources inadequate or inconsistent. Moreover, the lack of coordination across Government and support organisations has created unnecessary competition and confusion, diluting the collective impact of these initiatives.

With this context, we have detailed our response under three areas:

- 1. Facilitation of Trade and Practical Support Tools**
- 2. The Role of Partnerships**
- 3. International Policy**

Each area is accompanied by specific asks, which, if implemented, could unlock the full potential of UK HealthTech, driving sustainable economic growth and ensuring the industry continues to support the delivery of high-quality healthcare both at home and abroad.

Facilitation of Trade and Practical Support Tools

HealthTech companies have consistently highlighted the importance of access to international exhibitions and trade missions as key enablers of export success. These platforms allow businesses to showcase their innovations, build relationships, and navigate the complexities of global markets. For SMEs in particular, participation in these initiatives can be transformational, providing opportunities to connect with buyers, investors, and healthcare leaders in high-potential markets.

Government support through the Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) grants has historically been instrumental in enabling SMEs to attend international trade shows and overseas missions. However, the reduction in funding for these programmes has severely limited their reach and impact. To maintain the UK's competitive edge, it is essential to restore and enhance such funding, ensuring SMEs can continue to access these vital opportunities.

In addition to broad international exhibitions, targeted trade missions and country-specific or technology-focused seminars play a critical role in preparing companies for market entry. Tailored initiatives focusing on areas like medical devices, diagnostics or digital health, enable businesses to engage directly with the most relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. Such initiatives are further strengthened by in-market expertise and Embassy support, ensuring a deep understanding of local regulatory, reimbursement, and market access challenges.

To support these efforts, a streamlined export toolkit, developed collaboratively with industry stakeholders, would simplify export processes, providing SMEs with the practical guidance they need to succeed internationally.

Asks:

- a. Reinstate and expand TAP grants or similar funding programmes to enable SMEs to participate in international trade shows, country-specific missions, and sector-focused events.
- b. Increase support for targeted trade missions, focusing on high-growth markets and specific disease or technology areas.
- c. Develop a comprehensive programme of country-specific seminars and missions, with strong involvement from in-market experts and local Embassy staff, to equip UK companies with the knowledge and connections needed for success.
- d. Establish in-market HealthTech champions with sector expertise, embedded in Embassies and consulates, to facilitate trade connections and provide localised support.
- e. Create a streamlined export toolkit, developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders, to simplify export processes and provide practical guidance for SMEs.

The Role of Partnerships

Partnerships are pivotal in scaling HealthTech exports because they enable companies to leverage existing expertise, networks, and resources, reducing the complexities of entering new markets.

Collaboration with trusted in-market organisations, mentors, and anchor partners ensures that companies can navigate regulatory landscapes, build valuable connections, and tailor their offerings to meet local healthcare needs. Partnerships also foster credibility, helping businesses to establish a foothold in competitive international markets.

The success of ABHI's US Accelerator Programme highlights the value of well-structured partnerships. This programme, which has enabled UK HealthTech companies to access the US market effectively, is built on years of effort and collaboration with key in-market mentors, anchor organisations, and regional stakeholders. Such partnerships have been instrumental in helping companies articulate their value propositions, engage with buyers, and address regulatory and reimbursement challenges in the US.

The ABHI US Accelerator has generated significant results, with over \$150 million in business won by participating companies. On average, companies expect to generate more than \$15 million in business over five years due to their involvement in the programme. Participants have reported winning contracts valued between \$250,000 and \$60 million and the programme has facilitated over 70 clinical trials or pilot studies across 12 US states and supported high-level transatlantic health system engagements.

Several NHS Trusts, including Cambridge University Hospitals, Oxford University Hospitals, and University Hospitals, Birmingham have taken part in and benefited from the programme, leading to advancements in healthcare innovation through more formalised institutional relationships. The ABHI US Accelerator has also promoted inward investment, bringing over 15 US-based companies to the UK to engage with NHS hospitals.

While this model has proven successful, it requires significant investment of time and resources to build and maintain. Duplication of these efforts by creating parallel initiatives could dilute impact and confuse the industry. Instead, the Government could amplify the success of existing programmes by signposting businesses to them and providing financial and logistical support. Industry associations, such as ABHI, tend to offer a level of continuity in relationships that is typically difficult for Embassy staff to maintain given the rotations needed to develop individuals and create a strong Diplomatic Service. As such, Associations are well placed to lead these initiatives, drawing on the expertise within Embassies as part of a genuine partnership. The role of Embassies in promoting the UK is very well recognised and is very helpful to companies.

An additional step would be the development of a global directory of trusted partners. This resource, created in collaboration with industry and stakeholders, could serve as a one-stop shop for UK businesses seeking reliable partners in target markets. The

directory would provide validated information on key organisations, mentors, and resources, helping companies identify opportunities and build productive relationships across the globe.

Asks:

- a. Support and signpost existing programmes like ABHI's US Accelerator Programme, ensuring resources are directed to proven initiatives rather than duplicating efforts.
- b. Develop a global directory of trusted partners, including anchor organisations, in-market mentors, and sector experts, to facilitate connections for UK HealthTech companies.
- c. Encourage collaboration between industry and Government to expand the reach and impact of established export programmes, ensuring alignment with the needs of HealthTech businesses.
- d. Promote centralised sector initiatives to foreign counterparts and overseas sectors via Embassy staff.
- e. Support high profile diplomatic missions for leading sector companies in key markets, noting the huge value reported by the sector when key government figures attend selective visits.

International Policy

Harmonised standards and policies are essential to unlocking the full potential of HealthTech exports. For UK companies, navigating the regulatory requirements of multiple jurisdictions is one of the most significant barriers to international growth. Aligning policies and streamlining processes with trusted global partners can reduce duplication, lower costs, and accelerate market access, enabling companies to scale internationally more efficiently.

A critical priority for the HealthTech sector is the development of a framework that recognises approvals from other trusted jurisdictions. In a recent ABHI member survey, this was identified as the most impactful measure for improving the UK's attractiveness as a market, with four times as many respondents prioritising it over any other initiative.

Such a system would deliver dual benefits. Firstly, the recognition of international approvals would enhance the competitiveness of the UK as a market for innovation, allowing companies to introduce products faster and at lower cost. Secondly, by establishing a domestic regulatory route that prioritises innovation and early access, UK companies would be better positioned to succeed locally and use the UK as a launchpad for global expansion.

This approach would also send a clear message that the UK is committed to supporting growth in the HealthTech sector, ensuring companies are not disadvantaged compared to international competitors.

Asks:

- a. Implement, at pace, a regulatory system that recognises approvals from trusted jurisdictions, reducing duplication and facilitating faster market access for UK HealthTech companies.
- b. Establish a domestic regulatory pathway synonymous with innovation and early access, ensuring the UK is seen as a hub for cutting-edge HealthTech development.
- c. Advocate for international harmonisation of regulatory standards, working with wider UK Government and bodies, like the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), and global partners. to streamline processes and reduce barriers to trade.

About ABHI

ABHI is the UK's leading industry association for health technology (HealthTech).

ABHI supports the HealthTech community to save and enhance lives. Members, including both multinationals and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), supply products from syringes and wound dressings to surgical robots, diagnostics and digitally enhanced technologies. We represent the industry to stakeholders, such as the government, NHS and regulators. HealthTech plays a key role in supporting delivery of healthcare and is a significant contributor to the UK's economic growth. HealthTech is the largest employer in the broader Life Sciences sector, employing 154,000 people in 4,465 companies, with a combined turnover of £34.3bn. The industry has enjoyed growth of around 5% in recent years. ABHI's 400 members account for approximately 80% of the sector by value.