

FM at the Heart of the UK's Data Centre Boom

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The Tech Prosperity Deal between the UK and the US promises to drive billions into new data centre infrastructure; supporting Kier Starmer's vision of turning the UK into an 'AI Superpower.' For facilities management (FM), this expansion represents both a vast opportunity and a complex challenge.

At ABM, we already service more than 4.5 million square feet of data centre space across the UK and Ireland annually, supporting over 600 large-scale client facilities. With more than 30 years of experience in critical environments, our teams know how crucial FM is to maintaining uptime and safeguarding growth.

Opportunity and Risk: A Critical Balancing Act

One of the biggest challenges — coordinating multiple suppliers and systems while scaling rapidly— also marks the greatest opportunity. The providers who succeed will be those with deep understanding of critical spaces who can provide multiple service lines while offering support from construction phase through to business-as-usual operations and predictive maintenance.

But the challenges don't stop there. Skills shortages in engineering are intensifying, while scrutiny of energy use and carbon impact cannot be ignored. Providers who are unable to deliver measurable gains in efficiency and sustainability will quickly be left behind.

Data centres are notoriously energy-intensive. Cooling systems alone represent a major share of power use. Strong ESG credentials will be essential for FM providers looking to take advantage of the boom. Clients will expect partners who can enhance their own reporting and demonstrate measurable progress

on sustainability goals. Operating in a space under a sustainability magnifying glass, it's possible that cost and efficiency will be secondary to how actively suppliers can minimise the environmental impact of digital expansion. Those who can prove they are embedding ESG into every aspect of service delivery will be the ones who stand out.

The Unseen Importance of Post-Construction Cleaning Air contamination is the enemy of data storage — only spaces that are technically cleaned can be cleared for use. With 30 years of experience, our Critical Solutions team know the risk which invisible particles pose to the uptime of digital infrastructure. Even 30 minutes of unscheduled downtime can cost businesses dearly.

With the Tech Prosperity Deal promising to fund significant numbers of new data centres; involvement during the construction phase is vital. If the builders' clean is done thoroughly, it significantly decreases the work needed later. Dust, debris, and microscopic particles left behind during construction can infiltrate sensitive equipment.

Industry specific qualifications are essential, but so too is specialist knowledge of the unique environment data centres present. Cleaning teams must balance rigorous safety standards with precision techniques designed to protect high-value assets. The process goes beyond the visible — targeting subfloors, overhead voids, and the smallest of particulates that could compromise air quality.

Ultimately, effective builder and post-construction cleaning lays the foundation for operational resilience. By ensuring a facility is contamination-free from day one, FM providers reduce the risk of

disruption and give clients the confidence that their investment in digital infrastructure will deliver at full capacity from the outset.

Skills for an AI Superpower

As the UK positions itself as an "AI superpower," expectations on supporting infrastructure are immense. FM must adapt fast.

Technical depth in high-voltage systems, advanced cooling, and critical environments remains non-negotiable. But digital skills are equally essential: data analytics, cyber-aware maintenance, and compliance monitoring.

The ability to maintain power redundancy — backup and fail-safe systems that ensure no single point of failure — is also critical. In data centres, even a momentary lapse can cause massive disruption.

Building these capabilities requires investment in apprenticeships, reskilling, and partnerships with technical institutions today — not tomorrow.

Preparing for Variable Demand

Some are already warning that the AI boom could be overhyped, with infrastructure investment outpacing demand. If history has taught us anything it's that staying adaptable is key. Plan for growth, yes, but be prepared to evolve the plan in meeting that growth. Even if AI adoption slows, digital infrastructure demand will keep rising. The key is building scalable, efficient, and sustainable models that add value in any scenario. The skills needed for data centres are transferable across a number of sectors such as life

sciences and healthcare and increasingly relevant to the built environment in general. FM providers cannot predict cycles, but they can design for resilience.

A Defining Inflection for FM

The Tech Prosperity Deal is a catalyst, but the long-term test is whether FM evolves into a true strategic enabler of the digital economy. Uptime, sustainability, and cost efficiency are converging — and FM sits at the intersection.

The opportunity is enormous, but it will only be realised by providers who combine technical depth with adaptability, innovation, and sustainability leadership.