# Britain’s surge in unicorns masks fragile valuations and a fight to keep listings at home



Britain today hosts an unusually dense cluster of highly valued private companies, a list that places it second only to the United States in the global unicorn stakes. According to a recent survey, there are 65 UK businesses worth $1 billion or more and a further 29 “emerging unicorns” valued at $500 million or more, with the group’s combined worth approaching £205 billion — roughly five times the market value of all firms on London’s junior AIM market. Industry guides and datasets underline that this concentration reflects a nation‑wide technology ecosystem that punches well above most European peers.

The headline names underscore the point. Revolut and Checkout.com sit among the country’s largest private tech companies, although reported valuations vary by transaction and timing. One market account values Revolut in sterling terms at around £33 billion, while a secondary share sale in August 2024 was reported to have priced the company at $45 billion, reflecting investor appetite and fresh liquidity for staff shareholders. Checkout.com’s blockbuster Series D in January 2022 was pegged at about $40 billion, a high‑water mark cited at the time as the payments group accelerated international expansion. Such swings illustrate how private valuations move with new rounds, secondary trades and differing exchange‑rate snapshots.

Fintech remains the single most visible cluster, with challenger banks, payments platforms and wealth‑tech names prominent — Monzo, Starling, Moneybox and PrimaryBid are examples frequently cited. But the UK’s unicorn roster is not solely “new‑age” finance: consumer and direct‑to‑consumer brands also feature, from Gymshark and BrewDog to meal‑kit Gousto and plant‑based food group Huel, while the pet‑care market has spawned fast‑growing businesses such as ManyPets and Butternut Box. Independent data and guides on the UK ecosystem highlight fintech, AI and deeptech as recurring themes driving both fundraising and valuations across the country.

Not all billion‑pound private companies have a straight upward trajectory. The pet‑insurance group ManyPets, which raised a large capital round in 2021 that at the time implied a multi‑billion dollar valuation, has since undertaken restructuring: the company has cut staff, sold or scaled back certain geographic operations and focused on reducing losses as it seeks a sustainable path to profitability. By contrast, fresh‑food pet subscription business Butternut Box secured substantial growth capital in 2023 — a £280 million investment led by General Atlantic intended to fund manufacturing capacity and further European expansion — underscoring how investor appetite for strong recurring‑revenue consumer models remains robust.

Global capital has been a significant driver. Recent market data cited sizeable US investor inflows into London between December and May, even as American funds rotated out of some continental European shares. The London Stock Exchange has made retaining high‑growth companies a strategic priority: Charlie Walker, the exchange’s deputy chief executive, has said the LSE is “relentlessly focused” on working with industry, government and regulators to improve competitiveness and ensure firms can start, scale and stay in the UK. In a separate interview he urged a “win‑win mentality” between companies and capital markets to encourage more homegrown listings.

That emphasis reflects a broader policy challenge: historically, some of Britain’s most successful tech companies have chosen to list or domicile in the United States to access deeper pools of public capital. Industry and exchange officials argue that targeted reform, closer regulator‑industry collaboration and deeper domestic liquidity are needed to make London an equally attractive destination for IPOs. Data‑led reports on the UK ecosystem routinely point to London as Europe’s foremost tech city, but they also note that continued gains will depend on tangible improvements in market access and the availability of long‑term capital at scale.

For now, the headline figures and high‑profile names provide a useful snapshot of an ecosystem that combines world‑class universities, experienced founders and international investors. As Panmure Liberum’s Shonil Chande — author of a recent report into British unicorns — put it, “This is something to celebrate.” Yet the divergent fortunes of individual firms, the sensitivity of private valuations to market events and the policy push to keep high‑growth companies at home all signal that Britain’s unicorn story remains a work in progress, one that will be shaped by funding flows, regulatory choices and the hard business of turning paper valuations into durable, profitable enterprises.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://dealroom.co/guides/united-kingdom)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.cnbc.com/2024/08/16/british-fintech-revolut-valued-at-45-billion-in-secondary-share-sale.html), [[4]](https://techcrunch.com/2022/01/12/checkout-com-raises-1b-round-at-40b-valuation/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://dealroom.co/guides/united-kingdom), [[6]](https://tech.eu/2023/09/05/butternut-box-ps280m-investment/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://sifted.eu/articles/manypets-losses-fall-layoffs-market-exits-news), [[6]](https://tech.eu/2023/09/05/butternut-box-ps280m-investment/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://dealroom.co/guides/united-kingdom), [[7]](https://thefintechtimes.com/time-to-go-public-london-stock-exchange-says-fintechs-need-a-win-win-mentality/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://dealroom.co/guides/united-kingdom), [[7]](https://thefintechtimes.com/time-to-go-public-london-stock-exchange-says-fintechs-need-a-win-win-mentality/), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://sifted.eu/articles/manypets-losses-fall-layoffs-market-exits-news), [[7]](https://thefintechtimes.com/time-to-go-public-london-stock-exchange-says-fintechs-need-a-win-win-mentality/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/money/markets/article-15006733/Britains-world-beating-unicorn-firms-worth-staggering-200bn.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://dealroom.co/guides/united-kingdom> - Dealroom’s United Kingdom guide outlines the strength of the UK startup ecosystem, reporting that the country is one of the world’s leading technology hubs. It summarises venture capital activity, sector trends and international comparisons, noting the UK has produced well over a hundred unicorns and hosts more venture-funded companies than most European peers. The guide places London as Europe’s top tech city, highlights fintech, AI and deeptech clusters, and provides data on fundraising, investor activity and unicorn valuations. It is a data-led resource for policymakers and investors seeking granular metrics on unicorn counts, aggregate startup valuations and growth trajectories. Nationwide.
3. <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/08/16/british-fintech-revolut-valued-at-45-billion-in-secondary-share-sale.html> - CNBC reports Revolut was valued at $45 billion in a secondary share sale in August 2024, confirming the company’s status as one of Europe’s most valuable private fintechs. The article explains the transaction provided liquidity for employees and was led by investors including Coatue and D1 Capital Partners alongside Tiger Global. It notes the valuation represented a substantial increase on Revolut’s 2021 $33 billion mark and followed the firm securing a UK banking licence. The piece places the secondary sale in context of Revolut’s revenue growth, regulatory progress and ongoing discussions about a possible future public listing in London markets.
4. <https://techcrunch.com/2022/01/12/checkout-com-raises-1b-round-at-40b-valuation/> - TechCrunch covered Checkout.com’s January 2022 Series D fundraising which valued the payments firm at about $40 billion, placing it among Europe’s most valuable startups. The article describes the $1 billion raise led by investors such as Altimeter and Dragoneer and highlights Checkout.com’s global merchant base and full-stack payment platform. It explains the company’s rapid rise from earlier rounds and positions the 2022 valuation as a high-water mark before later valuation adjustments. TechCrunch contextualises Checkout.com within the broader payments sector, comparing it to peers and noting its ambitions for US expansion and eventual public market consideration and product development strategy ahead.
5. <https://sifted.eu/articles/manypets-losses-fall-layoffs-market-exits-news> - Sifted’s profile of ManyPets covers the UK insurtech’s recent performance, restructuring and past funding that led to unicorn status. The piece reports ManyPets raised a $350 million Series D in 2021 that at the time gave a valuation around $2.4 billion, and describes subsequent operational challenges including market exits, layoffs and narrowed revenues. Sifted examines changes in leadership, the sale of the US arm and the company’s efforts to reduce losses and return to profitability. The article situates ManyPets within pressures facing insurance startups, particularly rising claims costs, vet bills and inflationary headwinds that have affected pricing and margins. Outlook.
6. <https://tech.eu/2023/09/05/butternut-box-ps280m-investment/> - Tech.eu reported on Butternut Box’s sizeable £280 million funding round in 2023 led by General Atlantic, noting the direct-to-consumer dog food brand’s rapid European expansion. The article explains the capital will fund manufacturing capacity and international growth after the acquisition of Polish firm PsiBufet, and highlights Butternut Box’s revenue growth and improving margins. Tech.eu characterises the company as a leading fresh pet-food subscription service nearing unicorn status at the time, with investors attracted by strong subscriber growth and recurring revenues. The piece places the deal in context of consumer-focused investment and growing interest in pet-care technology companies across Europe ahead.
7. <https://thefintechtimes.com/time-to-go-public-london-stock-exchange-says-fintechs-need-a-win-win-mentality/> - The Fintech Times interview with Charlie Walker of the London Stock Exchange discusses the UK capital markets’ role in supporting high‑growth firms and lists steps needed to encourage companies to start, scale and remain in Britain. Walker stresses London’s strengths as Europe’s fintech hub, highlights the need to address barriers to growth and emphasises collaboration between the exchange, government and regulators to improve competitiveness. The article cites unicorn creation statistics and the importance of deeper domestic investment and liquidity, reflecting the LSE’s engagement with policymakers to reform markets so startups better see London as a place to list and grow.