



OPINION PIECE

UK manufacturing rises to eighth in world but can climb higher with automation

By Tom Bouchier, Managing Director, FANUC UK

Data just released by Make UK¹ reveals that UK manufacturing has overtaken France to claim eighth place in the world rankings, one position higher than last year. While this news has been welcomed by industry leaders and media alike, increased use of automation could propel us even further up the international manufacturing league table.

It's long been known that there's a direct correlation between the most automated countries and their success in manufacturing. According to the IFR, the five major markets for industrial robots are China, Japan, the US, the Republic of Korea and Germany, which combined account for 78% of all global robot installations. It's no surprise, therefore, that those same five countries also make up the top five manufacturing nations in Make UK's latest report, albeit in a slightly different order (China, the US, Japan, Germany and Korea).

Punching above our weight

In fact, it could be argued that considering how far the UK lags behind its international counterparts in our uptake of automation, we are overperforming as a manufacturing nation. We are the only G7 country to sit outside the top 20 in terms of robot density, languishing in 24th position with just 111 robots for every 10,000 employees. Compare this to Germany (the only European country with a top five manufacturing place), which boasts more than three times this figure at 397.

In this context, our eighth place position as a manufacturing nation is certainly positive. But it also highlights just what a greater impact we could be making on the world stage if we were to increase our levels of automation.

Government and industry responsibility

The benefits of automation to manufacturers are widespread – from higher productivity increased efficiency and improved product quality to waste reduction, sustainability benefits and alleviating labour shortages.

So, what needs to happen next to accelerate the UK's automation revolution? Certainly, a modern industrial strategy, as rolled out by many of our international counterparts, would be welcome. But there is also an onus on automation providers, such as FANUC, to play our part, too. Ensuring a future talent pipeline of British engineers with skills fit for the fourth industrial age will certainly help to boost our productivity as a nation and consequently, our manufacturing output. To this end, FANUC UK is at the forefront of a number of educational initiatives, including a partnership with WorldSkills which sees us host the final of the Industrial Robotics competition at our Open House event in Coventry this November; our first ever Work Experience Week, held this summer to give young people aged 14-16 a practical insight into the world of automation; and our Training Academy based at our

¹ <https://www.makeuk.org/insights/reports/manufacturing-fact-card-report-2023>

Coventry HQ, which has recently achieved independent validation, allowing us to offer accredited courses that can feed into mainstream education with a particular focus on the new T-Levels.

Striving for change

But of course, there is also a responsibility on UK manufacturers to keep pace with current trends and educate themselves around the benefits of automation to their business. Knowledge sharing events, such as our forthcoming free-to-attend Open House (14-16 Nov 2023) can play an important role in this by disseminating real-life case studies, demonstrating the latest easy-to-use robotic solutions, and showcasing the tangible benefits that automation can bring to manufacturers across all sectors. By talking to and learning from industry leaders and peers alike, many of the barriers to greater automation uptake can be broken down, revealing it as a clear solution to some of the major challenges facing manufacturers today, such as the labour crisis and ever-increasing sustainability targets.

So, while we bask in the current glory of our eighth place ranking, let's make sure we also have one eye on the future. By continuing to work together and increasing access to and uptake of automation, we can each play our part in helping UK manufacturing to reach its true potential.

Join the UK automation community and leading manufacturers at FANUC's upcoming Open House event, taking place in Coventry on 14-16 November 2023. Register your attendance for free at <https://ukopenhouse.fanuc.eu/>

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Images/Captions

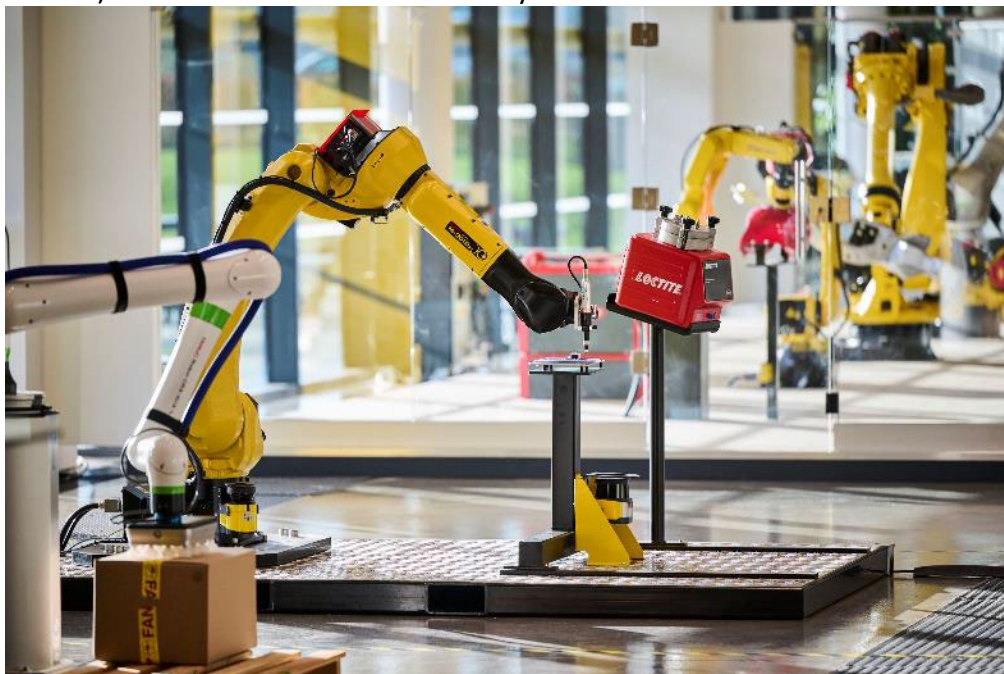
Image 1

Tom Bouchier, Managing Director, FANUC UK



Image 2

FANUC UK's free-to-attend Open House taking place at their headquarters in Coventry (14-16 Nov) will demonstrate the latest easy-to-use robotic solutions.



About FANUC

The FANUC Corporation is one of the worldwide leaders in factory automation for CNC control systems, robots and production machinery (ROBODRILL, ROBOCUT and ROBOSHOT). Since 1956, FANUC is the pioneer in the development of numerically controlled machines in the automation industry. With 271 FANUC locations worldwide and more than 8,000 employees, FANUC offers a dense network in sales, technical support, research & development, logistics and customer service.

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