

Entering the British coffee market

The United Kingdom has a very diverse coffee market, with importers and roasters of various sizes and profiles. The growing importance of the specialty market brings interesting opportunities for exporters of high-quality coffees, particularly single origin. Given the importance of sustainability in the British coffee market and the widespread availability of certified coffees, certification may be a key entry requirement for coffee exporters in most market segments.

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1. What are the requirements for coffee to enter the British market?

The United Kingdom left the European Union on 31 January 2020. The exact implications for import regulations are still being negotiated. From 1 January 2021, [certain directly applicable EU legislation will be converted into UK law](#). As such, coffee exported to the United Kingdom must still comply with strict European Union requirements until this date. For a complete overview of these standards, refer to [our study on buyer requirements for coffee](#) or consult the specific requirements for coffee in the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#).

Buyer requirements can be divided into:

1. Musts: legal and non-legal requirements you must meet to enter the market;
2. Additional requirements: those you need to comply with to stay relevant in the market;
3. Niche requirements: these apply to specific niche markets.

The highlights for these requirements are given below, specified for the British market where relevant.

Legal and non-legal requirements you must comply with

Legal requirements

You must follow the European Union legal requirements applicable to coffee. These rules mainly deal with food safety, where traceability and hygiene are the most important themes. Special attention should be given to specific sources of contamination, namely:

- Pesticides — consult the [EU pesticide database](#) for an overview of the maximum residue levels (MRLs) for each pesticide;
- Mycotoxins/mould;
- Salmonella (although coffee is considered low-risk).

Quality requirements

Green coffee is graded and classified for quality before export. There is no universal grading and classification system for coffee. The Specialty Coffee Association's [standards for green coffee grading](#) are often used as a point of reference. However, most producing countries have and use their own [grading systems](#).

According to the International Trade Centre, grading is usually based on the following criteria:

- Altitude and region;
- Botanical variety;

- Preparation — wet or dry process, washed or natural;
- Bean size or screen size, sometimes also bean shape and colour;
- Number of defects or imperfections;
- Roast appearance and cup quality in relation to flavour, characteristics and cleanliness;
- Bean density.

Specialty coffee is graded according to its cupping profile. Fragrance, flavour, aftertaste, balance, acidity, sweetness, uniformity and cleanliness are important factors in the grading process. If you sell specialty coffee, it is important for buyers to know the cupping score of your coffee. Although not mandatory, it could be relevant to add this information to the documentation of the coffee you are exporting.

Note that there is no exact definition of specialty coffee within the coffee industry. The [Coffee Quality Institute](#) and the cupping protocols of the [Specialty Coffee Association \(SCA\)](#) consider that coffees graded and cupped with scores below 80 are considered standard quality and not specialty. Nevertheless, the exact minimum scores defining specialty coffee differ per country and per buyer. Some buyers consider 80 too low and demand a cupping score of 85 or higher.

Labelling requirements

Labels of green coffee exported to the United Kingdom should be written in English and should include the following information to ensure traceability of individual batches:

- Product name;
- [International Coffee Organisation \(ICO\) identification code](#);
- Country of origin;
- Grade;
- Net weight in kilogrammes;
- For certified coffee: name and code of the inspection body and the certification number.

Figure 1: Examples of green coffee labelling



Source: commodity.com

Packaging requirements

Green coffee beans are traditionally shipped in woven bags made from jute or hessian natural fibre. Jute bags are strong and robust. Other materials, such as [Grainpro](#) or other innovative materials like [Videplast](#) liners, are often used to pack specialty coffees inside jute bags.

Most green coffee beans of standard quality imported into the United Kingdom are packed in container-sized bulk flexi-bags that hold roughly 20 tonnes of green coffee beans each. The rest of the green coffee is transported in traditional 60 kg or 70 kg jute sacks, each with a net volume of 17 tonnes to 19 tonnes of coffee.

Other packaging used in transporting coffee includes polypropylene super sacks for 1 tonne of coffee, polyethylene liners for 21.6 tonnes and vacuum-packed coffee. These techniques provide two advantages in the coffee trade, namely increasing efficiency and maintaining or preserving quality.

Figure 2: Examples of coffee packaging: jute bag, container-sized flexi bag, GrainPro and Videplast liner



Sources: raadtradingco.com, bls-bulk.com and GrainPro

Tips:

For the full buyer requirements, read the CBI study on [buyer requirements](#) for coffee in Europe.

Check the website of the [Food Standards Agency of the United Kingdom](#) for more information about British import regulations.

Check [EUR-Lex](#) for more information on limits for different contaminants and read more about contaminants in coffee on the [EU Trade Helpdesk](#). For specific information on the prevention and reduction of ochratoxin A contamination, refer to the [Codex Alimentarius CXC 69-2009](#).

For information on safe storage and transport of coffee, refer to [the website of the Transport Information Service](#).

Read more about quality requirements for coffee on [the website of the Coffee Quality Institute](#).

Read our [study on how to organise your coffee export to Europe](#). This study contains several tips on how to adequately export your coffee to buyers on the European market.

Additional requirements

Additional food safety requirements

Expect buyers in the United Kingdom to request extra food safety guarantees from you. Regarding production and handling processes, you should consider:

- Implementation of good agricultural practices (GAPs): the main standard for good agricultural practices is [GLOBALG.A.P.](#), a voluntary standard for certification of agricultural production processes that provide safe and traceable products. Certification organisations, such as the Rainforest Alliance/UTZ, often incorporate GAPs in their standards;
- Implementation of regular checking of residue levels: ochratoxin A (OTA), polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and glyphosate contamination should be prevented and monitored. It is recommended to proactively and periodically obtain certificates of analysis (CoAs) for the coffee you produce and export, preferably from an EU-accredited laboratory such as [Eurofins](#) or [Tüv](#);
- Implementation of a quality management system (QMS): a system based on [Hazard Analysis and Critical](#)

Control Points (HACCP) is increasingly required by buyers as a minimum standard for green coffee production, storage and handling. The implementation of checking residue levels described above would be part of this system.

- For roasted coffee, HACCP is the minimum standard that an exporter must comply with, preferably complemented by a global food safety initiative (GFSI) such as [BRC Global Standard Food Safety](#), [FSSC 22000](#), [IFS Food](#) or [SQF](#).

Additional sustainability requirements

Corporate responsibility and sustainability practices are growing in the coffee sector. Adopting codes of conduct or sustainability policies related to the environment and to producing communities will give you a competitive advantage. The leading companies in the British coffee market, such as trader [ED&F Man](#), have sustainability policies highlighting their relationship with farmers, the transparency of their operations, as well as their social and environmental impact at origin.

Certification standards like [Rainforest Alliance/UTZ](#) are important on the mainstream coffee market and are usually part of the sustainability strategy of traders, roasters and retailers.

British players along the coffee supply chain handle a wide range of certified coffees. Examples include trader [Complete Coffee](#), roaster [Lincoln & York](#) and retailer [Tesco](#), which all handle at least three of the four main certification schemes for coffee (Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance/UTZ, organic and 4C) as part of their sustainability policy.

Tips:

Refer to the [International Trade Centre Standards Map](#) or the [Global Food Safety Initiative website](#) to learn about the different food safety management systems, hygiene standards and certification schemes.

Learn more about organic farming and European organic guidelines on the [European Commission website](#) and the [Organic Export Info website](#).

Find out which standards or certifications potential buyers in your target segment prefer. Buyers may have preferences for a certain food safety management system or sustainability label depending on their end clients and distribution channels.

Try to combine audits if you have more than one certification, to save time and money. Also, investigate the possibilities for group certification with other producers and exporters in your region.

Learn which coffee actors are licensed to buy your certified coffee. See the [list of Rainforest Alliance/UTZ-registered coffee actors in the United Kingdom](#), or find [importers that specialise in organic products](#) or find a specialised British buyer that is familiar with fair trade products, for instance via the [FLOCERT customer database](#).

Try to visit trade fairs for organic products, like [Biofach](#) in Germany. Check out their website for a list of exhibitors, seminars and other events at this trade fair.

See our [study on sustainable coffee](#) for more information about the demand on the European market, trends and specific trade channels.

Niche requirements

Organic and Fairtrade

The United Kingdom fully implements [the regulations of the European Union for organic production and](#)

labelling. Additionally, the national [Organic Products Regulations 2009](#) apply, which cover rules for the implementation of EU legislation in the United Kingdom. Note that the EU organic regulation will apply some changes as of 1 January 2021; [the website of IFOAM](#) describes these changes in detail and highlights the implications for exporters.

An important change, already implemented as of February 2020, is that [Certificates of Inspection \(COIs\)](#) must be issued by control authorities prior to the departure of a shipment. If this is not done, your product cannot be sold as organic in the European Union and will be sold as a conventional product. COIs can be completed by using the European Commission's electronic [Trade Control and Expert System](#) (TRACES).

Note that, on the British market, private labels such as [Soil Association](#) are often considered more important than the EU Organic logo. The [standards of the Soil Association](#) have a wider scope than EU legislation on organic farming.

Fair trade-certified coffee also finds a large market in the United Kingdom, of which the most common standard is [Fairtrade](#).

Before you can market your coffee beans as Fairtrade or organic, an accredited certifier must audit your growing and processing facilities. Examples of accredited certifiers are [Control Union](#), [Ecocert](#), [FLOCERT](#) and [SGS](#).

Direct Trade

High quality, direct trade relations, high transparency and traceability from source to consumer characterise the high-end specialty coffee segment. This means that buyers of these types of coffees ask for requirements that go beyond certification. Besides high quality, these buyers are interested in your stories from origin. This implies that you should know the specifics of your coffee and be willing to honestly share this information, including polished texts and high-resolution pictures. Other than that, direct trade may result in more frequent coffee farm visits and product assessments by your buyers, as well as long-term business relations.

Tips:

Promote the sustainable and ethical aspects of your company and support these claims with certification. Examples of coffee-exporting companies that provide information on their sustainable practices and certifications include [InConexus](#) (Colombia), [O'Coffee](#) (Brazil), [Capricornio Coffees](#) (Brazil), [SOPACDI](#) (DR Congo) and [Daye Bensa Coffee](#) (Ethiopia).

Refer to [this list of recognised organic control bodies and control authorities](#) issued by the EU, to ensure that you always work with an accredited certifier.

See [our study on doing business with European coffee buyers](#) for more tips on marketing and promoting coffee.

2. What competition do you face on the British coffee market?

In general, competition is higher for mainstream coffee with low added value. This segment is mainly dominated by major suppliers and cooperatives which are able to deliver large quantities so they can compete on price. It is difficult for small and medium-sized companies to compete in this segment.

The level of competition is generally lower in the specialty coffee market, where volumes are smaller and there is a stronger focus on quality, origin and sustainability. However, the entry point into this segment is much

higher and may require larger investments.

New entrants to the market may face some extra competition from coffee exporters that are already successful, especially due to their already-established long-term relationships with buyers. Entering the market as a newcomer requires you to have extensive knowledge of your product assortment, stable quality and volumes and good communication skills to start building your own new relationships with buyers.

Vietnam is the largest coffee supplier to the United Kingdom

As the United Kingdom is still a large consumer of instant coffee, Robusta exporter Vietnam is the country's largest supplier. Vietnam is the world's second-largest coffee producer and exporter. With 63 thousand tonnes, about 4.3% of total Vietnamese exports were destined for the United Kingdom in 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, Vietnamese export volumes to the United Kingdom increased at an average annual rate of 25%.

Vietnam's coffee production is strongly focused on creating large volumes of standard-quality coffees, mostly directed to the instant coffee market. However, as of 2018, [government efforts](#) have been more and more directed towards improving the quality of coffee beans. As interest in high-quality Robusta is increasing in consumer markets, [Vietnam's specialty coffee industry is slowly developing](#).

[Sustainability issues are a major concern in Vietnam](#). Climate change poses a serious threat to the country's coffee sector, while poor farming practices cause environmental degradation. [Sustainable coffee makes up an estimated 9% of Vietnam's coffee exports](#).

Indonesia supplies Robusta and specialty Arabica to the British market

Another large supplier of Robusta to the United Kingdom is Indonesia, which supplied 8.7 thousand tonnes of green coffee in 2019. About [90%](#) of Indonesian exports are Robusta, making Indonesia the world's second-largest exporter of Robusta, only after Vietnam. However, Indonesia only [exports an estimated 46% of its green coffee production](#), as domestic consumption is growing rapidly. An estimated [15% of Indonesia's coffee exports are certified or verified as sustainably produced](#).

In general, when compared to Vietnam, it has been more difficult for [Indonesia to safeguard stable production volumes and a consistent quality](#). This is because coffee in Indonesia is almost entirely grown by smallholder farmers, whereas Vietnam also has large coffee plantations which can more easily guarantee consistency.

Indonesia is a large and diverse country, with many islands and microclimates. This brings opportunities, such as [coffees with distinctive flavour profiles](#). Indonesia also taps into this opportunity and produces and exports highly-valued specialty Arabicas, such as Kopi Luwak, Gayo 1 and Toraja coffee. The size and diversity, however, also pose their [challenges throughout the industry, mainly when it comes to logistics and communication](#) (about 750 different languages are spoken in the country). The value chain in the country itself is very complex, and in general there are up to four different intermediaries between farmer and exporter.

The United Kingdom sources most of its Arabica coffees from Latin America

Latin America accounted for about half of all British coffee imports in 2019. Brazil supplied the largest amount of green coffee to the United Kingdom, amounting to nearly 49 thousand tonnes in 2019. Brazilian supplies registered an average annual decrease of 8.4% since 2015.

Brazil is the world's largest coffee producer, producing both Arabica (75%) and Robusta (25%), though [95% of exports consist of Arabica](#). Brazil's coffee-producing areas are relatively flat, which has [intensified the use of mechanical pickers](#). This had led to reduced labour costs in Brazil's coffee production, lower coffee quality (as machines do not distinguish between ripe and unripe cherries) and lower coffee prices, especially in relation to other coffee-producing countries. Low-grade Brazilian Arabica is mostly used in blends.

Other large Arabica suppliers from Latin America to the United Kingdom are Colombia, Honduras and Peru. Colombia supplied over 15 thousand tonnes of green coffee to the United Kingdom in 2019. Colombia is the world's largest producer of washed Arabica. The [Colombian Coffee Growers Federation](#) strategically promotes and markets Colombian coffee, solidifying the country's established image and brand for high-quality coffees. The Café de Colombia trademark is a [registered protected geographical indication \(PGI\)](#) in Europe, which is unique among coffee-producing countries.

Honduras exported about 14 thousand tonnes of Arabica to the United Kingdom in 2019, registering an average annual increase of 26% between 2015 and 2019. The introduction of more disease-resistant varieties in Honduras, after a severe coffee rust outbreak, [is perceived to have lowered the cup quality](#), but production volumes have increased. Honduras is Central America's largest coffee producer, and an estimated [4.7%](#) of its coffee area in 2018 was dedicated to organic production. [Approximately 28% of total Honduran coffee exports](#) consist of [sustainably produced coffee](#).

Supplies from Peru to the United Kingdom reached 7.1 thousand tonnes in 2019. A large share of Peruvian coffee is organically produced; in 2018, [Peru had the world's second-largest organic area dedicated to coffee production](#). The Andean country took the [fourth place for coffee production with sustainable certification](#), which gives Peru a competitive advantage to promote its specialty coffees. In 2018, Peru introduced the national coffee brand [Cafés del Peru](#) to the international market, with which Peru actively promotes its unique origin and high-quality coffees.

Tips:

Identify your potential competitors. To be successful as an exporter, it is important to learn from them too. Look into their marketing strategies, the product characteristics they highlight and their value addition approaches. Successful larger and smaller companies that already export to international markets and from which you can learn include [DAKMAN](#) (Vietnam), [Aicasa](#) (Peru), [Unitrade Coffee](#) (Guatemala), [Arisarina](#) (Indonesia), [Cocafelol](#) (Honduras), [Bourbon Specialty Coffees](#) (Brazil) and [Cedro Alto](#) (Colombia). Another interesting exporting company to learn from is [Caravela Coffee](#), which has a wide portfolio of specialty coffees from Latin America and has representative offices in destination markets, such as London.

Identify and promote your unique selling points. Give detailed information about your coffee growing region or origin and the varieties, qualities, post-harvesting techniques and certification of the coffee you offer. You can also share information about the history of your organisation, your coffee growing farm and the passion and dedication of the people working there. These are all elements that make your company unique.

Actively promote your company on your website and at trade fairs. Flavour quality competitions also provide good opportunities to share your story. See [this list of competitions and awards](#) provided by the SCA.

Are you interested in exporting high-quality coffee? Learn more about cupping scores on [the website of the Specialty Coffee Association](#) (SCA). You can also consider getting a [Q Arabica or Q Robusta Grader certificate](#) to be able to cup and score your coffee through smell and taste according to international standards.

Work with other coffee producers and exporters in your region if your company size or product volume is too small. As a group, you can promote good-quality coffee from your region and be more attractive and more competitive in the European market.

Develop long-term partnerships with your buyers, which implies that you must comply with agreed-upon requirements. This will give you a competitive advantage, more knowledge and stability in the British market. See our [tips for doing business with European coffee](#) buyers for more information.

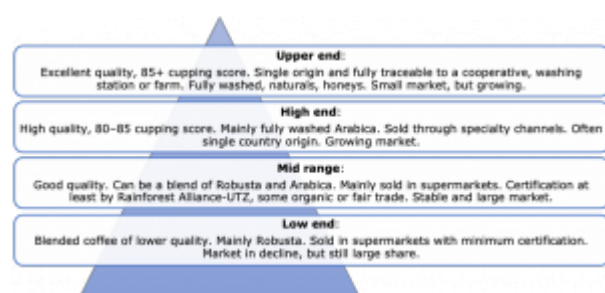
3. Through what channels can you get coffee on the British market?

The British end market for coffee can be segmented by quality and based on in-home or out-of-home consumption. The high-end segment represents a growing niche market in both the in-home and out-of-home segments, as consumers increasingly demand specialty coffees. Suppliers in producing countries mainly enter the British market through an importer, but there has been an increase in direct trade between coffee roasters and producers.

How is the end market segmented?

The British end market for coffee can be segmented by quality, as shown in the figure below:

Figure 4: Coffee end market segmentation by quality



Low end: these are mainstream low-quality and mainly blended coffees. These blends are characterised by high shares of Robusta coffees. Most coffee pads and instant coffee belong to this low-end segment, which also includes lower-quality private label products from supermarkets. Product and price examples in the low-end segment, based on [Tesco's retail prices](#) in 2020, include:

	Product	Retail price (€/kg)
Low end	Stockwell & Co (Instant coffee, 100 g package)	8.03
	Tchibo (Family roasted ground coffee, 250 g package)	9.18
	Tesco (Classic instant coffee, 100 g package)	17.20

Coffees in the low end of the market are mainly sold in supermarkets and through service channels, such as offices and universities. In 2019, the market share of private labels in the United Kingdom was about **47%** of the entire market, but not all supermarket brands are considered to be low quality. In 2019, the [largest retailers by sales value in the United Kingdom](#) were:

- [Tesco](#)
- [Sainsbury's](#)
- [Asda](#)
- [Morrisons](#)
- [Aldi](#)

- [Marks and Spencer](#).

Mid range: mid-range coffees are commercial coffees with a good and consistent quality profile, such as quality espresso. This segment typically consists of blends with a higher proportion of Arabica compared to the low-end segment. The mid-range segment represents a stable coffee market, in which sustainability certifications are important. Mid-range coffees are often sold in supermarkets and by the food service industry. Examples of products and prices in this segment, based on Tesco's retail prices in 2020, include:

	Product	Retail price (€/kg)
Mid range	Tesco (Fairtrade Colombian, whole beans, 227 g package)	16.64
	Lavazza (Qualita Rossa, whole beans, 250 g package)	16.97
	Starbucks (Blonde Espresso, whole beans, 200 g package)	20.07

High and upper ends: high-quality coffee mainly consists of washed Arabicas. These coffees are often single origin and coffees with a special story. The upper end of this segment consists of specialty coffees of excellent quality, often from micro or nano lots that go through innovative processing such as naturals and honeys. These are mainly fully traceable and single-origin Arabica beans with a cupping score of 85 and above. The high and upper-end segments are a small but growing market.

Sustainability certifications are less common in this segment. This is because sustainability practices are often commonplace among buyers. Long-term contracts between suppliers and buyers characterise the high and upper-end segments, as do higher prices. Also, buyer and supplier usually agree on projects for communities and distribution of money to farmers, a common characteristic of certifications aimed at social impact. The high and upper-end segments do see, however, a growth in organic-certified coffees.

Coffees from this segment are mainly sold directly by specialty roasters, at their physical and web shops as well as at coffee events. Coffee events in the United Kingdom include the coffee festivals of [Manchester](#), [Edinburgh](#), [Glasgow](#), [Birmingham](#), [Kent](#) and [London](#). There is also a nation-wide coffee festival: the [UK Coffee Week](#). For examples of British specialty roasters and cafés, see the website of the [European Coffee Trip](#) or check out [this list of specialty coffee roasters](#) throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Examples of coffees in the high and upper-end market segments include:

	Product	Retail price (€/kg)
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High and upper end	Red Honey processed Tekisic Arabica beans from Dipilto, Nueva Segovia, Nicaragua, roasted by Maude Coffee , 350 g package	33.59
	Natural processed Bourbon Arabica beans from Kayanza, Northern Burundi, roasted by North Star Coffee Roasters , 250 g package	39.00
	Washed Arusha, Mondo Nova Arabica beans from Tairora, Papua New Guinea, roasted by Craft House Coffee , 250 g package	44.73
	Organic, washed Caturra/Bourbon Arabica beans from Cajamarca, Peru, roasted by Beanberry Coffee Company , 250 g package	49.80

Value distribution: as per the above examples, end-market prices for coffee vary depending on the targeted market segment. Green coffee export prices typically amount to only 5% to 25% of the end-market prices, depending on the coffee quality, the size of the lot and the supplier's relationship with the buyer. Figure 5 below shows the value distribution of wholesale coffee. Roasters end up taking more than 80% of the wholesale coffee price. A coffee farmer takes about 10%.

In addition to the market segmentation by quality, the British coffee market can also be segmented into in-home and out-of-home consumption:

- In-home consumption: most coffee in the United Kingdom is consumed at home. In 2018, retail sales in the United Kingdom accounted for approximately [68%](#) of the country's total coffee volume sales. Up to [80%](#) of British households buy instant coffee for in-home consumption, mainly the older generations. Younger generations drive up the sales of coffee pods and high-quality ground coffee and coffee beans. Home consumption is therefore becoming increasingly diverse. The market share of coffee pods accounts for 13% of the total coffee volume in the United Kingdom, with strong growth potential.
- Out-of-home consumption: the British out-of-home consumption volume amounted to over 45 thousand tonnes of roasted and instant coffee in 2018, accounting for [32%](#) of all British coffee volume sales. Coffee consumption at the office represents the largest share of out-of-home-consumption, at [44%](#) of all out-of-home consumption. Coffee shops are also widely popular in the United Kingdom, as [80%](#) of coffee consumers visit coffee houses at least once a week, and 16% of consumers do so every day.

Figure 6: Coffee market segmentation by in-home and out-of-home consumption



Tips:

Learn more about the promotion of standard-quality and specialty coffees by British supermarkets, such as [Tesco](#), [Sainsbury's](#) and [Asda](#). Compare their product assortment and price levels with specialised roasters, such as the ones listed here on [this map of Irish and British coffee roasters](#).

Refer to our study on [trends in the coffee market](#) to learn more about developments within different market segments.

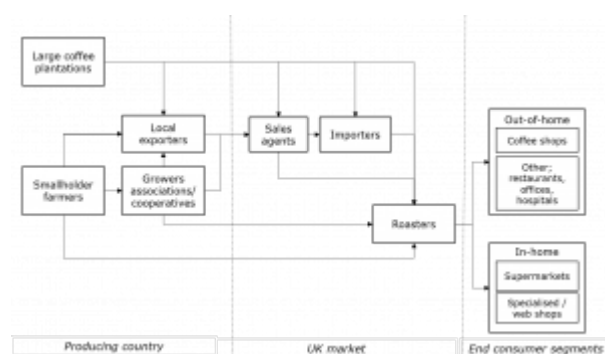
Check [the website of the Specialty Coffee Association \(SCA\)](#) to learn more about the high-end coffee segment, market trends and main players.

Through what channels does coffee reach the end market?

As an exporter, you can use different channels to bring your coffee to the British market, depending on the quality of your coffee and your supplying capacity. Bear in mind that shortened supply chains are a general trend in Europe. This means that retailers and coffee roasting companies are increasingly sourcing their green coffee directly from origin.

In the United Kingdom, approximately **60%** of end-market consumption consisted of roasted coffee in 2018, while the remaining 40% related to instant coffee and extracts. Hence, the trade channels discussed here mainly relate to roasted coffee, particularly specialty coffee. Figure 7 below shows the most important market entry channels for your green coffee into the United Kingdom.

Figure 7: Market channels for green coffee in the United Kingdom



Importers

Importers play a vital role in the coffee market, functioning as supply chain managers. They maintain wide portfolios from various origins, pre-finance operations, perform quality control, manage price fluctuations and currency exchanges and establish contact between producers and end buyers, such as roasters. In most cases, importers have long-standing relationships with their suppliers and customers. In general, importers sell their green beans to roasting companies in the United Kingdom.

Green coffee beans mainly enter the United Kingdom via the [Port of Tilbury](#) and the [Port of Liverpool](#). Large-scale importers usually have minimum quantity requirements of a few containers, covering a wide range of qualities, varieties and certifications. At the same time, they provide strong support with logistics, marketing and financial operations. Examples of large-scale importers in the United Kingdom include [CTCS: Green Coffee](#), [ED&F Man Volcafe](#), [OLAM](#) and [ECOM](#).

Specialised importers usually buy smaller volumes of high-quality and single-origin coffees. Quite a number of specialised importers are active on the British market, examples of which are [Mercanta The Coffee Hunters](#), [Olam Specialty Coffee](#) (Schluter), [DR Wakefield](#), [Coffee Bird](#), [Falcon Coffees](#) and [Freeman Trading](#). All these companies focus on the import of fine specialty coffee and mainly sell their coffees to specialty coffee roasters. [Equal Exchange](#) is an example of a specialised importer focused on ethically produced coffees.

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? The most interesting channel for you will depend on the quality of

your coffee and your supply capacity in terms of volume. If you are an exporter of green coffee beans and you can offer high volumes (10 containers or more), you should look into entering the British market through large importing companies. These companies usually have agents or representative offices in producing countries, which can be your first point of contact.

Specialised traders can be interesting if you have evidence of high cupping scores of at least 80 or higher, although some buyers may require scores higher than 85. Specialised traders may have a special interest in single-origin coffees as well as coffees with sustainability certification, such as organic or fair trade. Keep in mind that many specialised importers prefer to work directly with producers or cooperatives and not through middlemen.

Large roasters and private labels

Most large roasters buy their own coffee beans at the country of origin, although they might also source through importers. Roasters usually perform an analysis and cup testing to check the evenness of the roast and to identify any defects that can occur in post-harvest processes, such as fermentation, drying and storage. Large roasters usually blend different qualities of green coffees to safeguard quality consistency. The final product is distributed to retailers and the food service industry.

Roasters can operate under their own brands or private labels. An example of a roaster operating under its own brands in the United Kingdom is multinational [Jacobs Douwe Egberts](#). Examples of private label roasters on the British market include [UCC Coffee](#), [Masteroast](#) and [Lincoln & York](#).

Examples of medium-sized roasters focused on specialty coffees in the United Kingdom are [Taylors of Harrogate](#) and [Union Hand-Roasted Coffee](#).

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? Supplying to large-scale roasters is only interesting if you are able to supply large volumes at a consistent quality. If you work with bulk coffees, discuss minimum quality and other requirements, such as certification, with your potential buyer.

Small-scale roasters

There is also a growing number of small-scale roasters that import green coffee directly from origin. However, many small-scale roasters continue to buy their coffee via importers, because not everyone can take on the additional responsibilities necessary to import directly from source. Importers help roasters with financial services, quality control and logistics. Small-scale roasters mostly maintain a direct connection with their producers. Small roasters are often specialised in single origins and the finest specialty coffees.

Examples of small-scale roasters in the United Kingdom that import coffee directly from origin include [Cafédirect](#), [Hasbean](#), [Capital Coffee](#), [Rounton Coffee Roasters](#) and [Artisan Roast](#). There are many more small-scale coffee roasters in the United Kingdom; for more examples, refer to this list of roasters by [Good at Coffee](#) and this list of [Coffee Roasters](#).

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? Supplying to small roasters is interesting for producers and exporters that have high-quality coffees, micro lots and sustainability certification and are willing to engage in long-term partnerships. If you have very high-quality coffees and are currently working through an importer, for example, it would be interesting to explore direct trade possibilities to see whether you could connect directly with roasters. This requires you to have the financial means and technical know-how to organise export activities.

Intermediaries/agents

Agents act as intermediaries between you, coffee importers and roasters. They are actors with vast market knowledge and can help you assess and select interesting buyers. Some agents are independent, while others

are hired to make purchases on behalf of a company. Examples of agents in the United Kingdom include [Marex Spectron](#) and [Coffee AG](#).

For whom is this an interesting entry channel? If you have limited experience exporting to European countries, agents can play a very important role. Agents can evaluate and facilitate connections with buyers and finance institutions. Working with an agent is also useful if you need a trusted and reputable partner within the coffee sector. Be prepared to pay an extra commission for their work.

Tips:

Find buyers that match your business philosophy and export capacities in terms of quality, volume and certifications. For more tips on finding the right buyer for you, see our study on [finding buyers in Europe](#).

Attend trade fairs to meet potential British buyers. Interesting trade fairs in Europe include SCA's [World of Coffee](#) (every year in a different European city), [Biofach](#) (organic) and [COTECA](#) (both in Germany), and the several coffee festivals around the United Kingdom (including [Manchester](#), [Edinburgh](#), [Glasgow](#), [Birmingham](#), [Kent](#), [London](#) and the [UK Coffee Week](#)). Attending such events can provide you with additional insight into the preferences of British buyers with regard to origin, flavour and sustainability certification.

Use industry associations to find potential buyers in the United Kingdom, such as the member list of the [British Coffee Association](#). Also check the lists of [Coffee Roasters](#) and [Good at Coffee](#), which highlight several coffee roasters in the United Kingdom. Besides helping you find potential partners, these websites can help you learn more about the British coffee market.

Invest in long-term relationships. Whether you are working through importers or roasters, it is important to establish strategic and sustainable relationships with them. This will help you manage market risks, improve the quality of your product and reach a fair quality-price balance.


See our study on [buyer requirements for coffee](#) to learn about which European market standards and requirements you need to comply with when supplying to Europe.


See our study on [how to do business with European buyers](#) for more information about complying with buyer requirements, how to send samples and how to draw up contracts.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [ProFound – Advisers In Development](#).

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